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BUDDHISM ACROSS ASIA

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BUDDHISM ACROSS ASIA

Networks of Material,
Intellectual and Cultural Exchange

VOLUME 1

Edited by

TANSEN SEN



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
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For
John R. McRae

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Introduction

Buddhism in Asian History

Tansen Sen

The papers published in this volume were first presented at a conference entitled “Buddhism Across Asia: Networks of Material, Intellectual and Cultural Exchange,” held in Singapore over the four days 2-5 February 2009. Organised by the Nalanda-Sriwijaya Centre at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and funded by the Singapore Buddhist Lodge, the conference drew over fifty participants. The primary aim of the conference was to examine the connections that were established between Asian societies and polities as a result of the transmission and adaptation of Buddhist doctrines. Papers exploring this process mainly through the analysis of textual sources are brought together in this volume. Essays that deal with the archaeological and art historical evidence will appear in Volume Two.

The essays in this volume are not intended to outline the initial stages of the spread of Buddhist doctrines to various parts of Asia. Nor are they meant to be introductory narratives of Buddhism in different regions of Asia.¹ Rather, the essays deal with complex issues related to Buddhism, in the process by which the doctrines, in their varied forms and manifestations, became an integral part of Asian societies and history. Many of the essays are detailed exposition of these evolving phases of Buddhist history in Asia, from the early Common Era to the twentieth century. Together, they demonstrate the long history of Buddhism and highlight the intricate processes through which the circulation of Buddhist doctrines fostered intra-Asian interactions. The aim of the introductory chapter, in addition to the usual practice of briefly summarising individual chapters, is to underscore and provide a basic framework for the important phases of Buddhist interactions within which the chapters in this volume are organised.

BUDDHISM AND INTRA-ASIAN INTERACTIONS

The transmission of Buddhism is often described as a linear process, spreading through several centuries from ancient India to other parts of Asia. This is illustrated in maps with arrows from the Buddhist heartland in South Asia to Central and Southeast Asia and then onward to East Asia. In reality, the process was more complex and the transmission was certainly not unidirectional. Buddhist monks from South Asia, for example, went to China not only to transmit the doctrine, but also to pay homage to Buddhist divinities purportedly living on Chinese mountains. Similarly, ideas formulated by Japanese monks seem to have influenced Buddhist schools in China, considered to be the main source of Buddhism in Japan. In some cases, Buddhist doctrines evolved locally without any stimuli from foreign regions or monks. Indeed, the transmission of Buddhism was a multifaceted process, with ideas sometimes filtering back to places that were the original transmission centres.²

It should also be noted that the spread of Buddhism was not simply the transmission of religious doctrines. It included the spread of art forms, literary genres, ritual items, geographical knowledge, technologies and scientific ideas. The cultural, political, and social lives of numerous people living right across Asia were transformed through these transmissions. The world-views, belief systems, and even self-perceptions of settled societies, nomadic tribes and island dwellers were fundamentally challenged and changed as they encountered and accepted Buddhist teachings. At the same time, however, each of these regions contributed to the modification of Buddhist ideas and teachings based on local needs and values. Indeed, the pan-Asiatic nature of Buddhism was remarkable not only because of its geographical spread, but also due to the input from each of these regions in transforming and giving unique shape to the teachings of the Buddha.

Initial Transmissions

Many local Buddhist legends ascribe the initial transmission of Buddhist doctrine to their regions to King Aśoka (*c.* 268-32 BCE), who ruled the Mauryan Empire (324/321-187 BCE) a few centuries after the death of the Buddha. The legends of King Aśoka are also associated with the dispersal of the sacred remains and images of the Buddha. Often these legends serve to legitimise the spread of Buddhist doctrine and authenticate the associated paraphernalia in foreign lands. In Sri Lanka (Ceylon), for example, the Mauryan ruler is said to have sent his son Mahinda with a sapling of the Bodhi tree, the sacred fig tree under which the Buddha is said to have received enlightenment. This was presented to the Sri Lankan ruler Devānaṃpiya Tissa who, shortly after receiving the gift, is reported to have established the first Buddhist monastic institution in his kingdom. For his contributions, Aśoka was portrayed in

Buddhist literature as the ideal king with the laudatory title *chakravartin* or “Universal Ruler,” which was frequently used by rulers in East and Southeast Asia trying to propagate the doctrine in their own lands.

The spread of Buddhism along the trading networks within South Asia continued after the death of Aśoka. The two succeeding empires, the Śātavāhanas (c. first century BCE–c. third century CE) in the Deccan region of India and the Kuṣāṇas (c. 30 CE–c. 230) ruling parts of northern India, were also instrumental in this regard. The Śātavāhana court emerged as one of the leading supporters of Buddhism in India, although the rulers themselves may not have converted to the religion. Their patronage of Buddhism can be discerned from local inscriptional sources that report sponsorship of monasteries and rock-cut temple complexes, as well as donations made to Buddhist institutions in the Deccan region.³

The spread of Buddhism, however, was more complex than simply state-sponsored propagation. By the third century BCE, an intimate relationship between the monastic communities, trading networks and urban centres had developed in South Asia.⁴ These networks connected the Gangetic area, where the Buddha had dwelled and preached, to the regions in central and southern India. The early Buddhist sites were mostly located near urban centres along the trade routes. Thus the northwestern town of Taxila (in present-day Pakistan), the Gangetic cities of Śrāvastī (near present-day Benares) and Pāṭaliputra (modern-day Patna), and the central and southern urban centres of Sāñcī (in present-day Madhya Pradesh) and Amarāvati (in present-day Andhra Pradesh) became closely connected through the intertwined networks of trade and Buddhism. Epigraphical records from the western and eastern regions of the Deccan suggest a thriving relationship between traders and Buddhist institutions. Archaeological evidence from places such as Amarāvati, Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and elsewhere in the eastern part of the Deccan suggests intimate connection not only between Buddhism and the local trading communities, but also with merchant guilds engaged in overseas maritime commerce.⁵

Trade routes connecting the oasis states of Central Asia and the maritime world of the Bay of Bengal became more extensive and integrated during the Kuṣāṇa period. As a result, communities of itinerant merchants from Central Asia expanded their maritime and overland trading networks into Southeast and East Asia. Some of these merchants, the Sogdians in particular, played an active role in introducing Buddhist teachings and images to Han China, which also was witnessing a period of urbanisation and commercial expansion. Indeed, by the first century CE, primarily due to the expansion of mercantile networks, Buddhist ideas and images started reaching distant lands. For the first time in Asian history, religious ideas transmitted over long distances were connecting far-flung towns and cities in Asia. These linkages resulted in the

vigorous circulation of people, ideas, texts and images across Asia during the next several centuries.

The Buddhist Integration of Asia (First-Seventh Centuries CE)

The impact of the spread of Buddhism on Asian history is evident from the significant changes it brought about in societies throughout most of the Asian continent. The period between the first and the seventh centuries of the Common Era was crucial in this respect, not only because various forms of the doctrine started penetrating key regions of Asia, but also because some of these receptive regions themselves emerged as important staging centres for the further spread of Buddhism. In addition, the transmission of Buddhism influenced political ideologies and notions of rulership in Asian polities, and the doctrines started playing an important role in legitimising new regimes. By the time Islam started making inroads into South and Southeast Asia in the eighth century, Buddhism had already integrated various regions of Asia through its networks.

It is clear that there was some presence of Buddhist ideas and followers in the Han capital Luoyang around the year 65 CE.⁶ Evidence also indicates the existence of foreign merchants who adhered to Buddhist doctrines in the eastern coastal regions of Han China and in the Hanoi region of present-day Vietnam during the second and third centuries CE. The pan-Asian endeavour of introducing Buddhism to Han and post-Han China is apparent from the fact that some of the earliest transmitters of the doctrine to China included Indo-Scythians, Parthians, Sogdians and those from the Jibin 罽賓 polity (present-day Afghanistan-Pakistan region, sometimes also rendered as “Kaśmīr”). The establishment of the Kuṣāṇa empire, which incorporated parts of Central and South Asia, seems to have facilitated the movement of these Buddhist missionaries and merchant supporters.

Between the fall of the Han Dynasty in 220 CE and the establishment of the Sui Dynasty in 589 CE, Buddhism developed rapidly in a politically fragmented China. The process of translating, interpreting and cataloguing Buddhist texts from South Asia also advanced during this period. Monastic institutions, temples and cave complexes associated with Buddhism spread throughout the northern and southern regions of China. The Chinese monk Falin 法琳 (572-640) reports that in northern China during the Northern Wei 北魏 period (386-534) there were 47 “great state monasteries,” 839 monasteries built by the royalty and the elites, and more than 30,000 Buddhist temples constructed by commoners.⁷ In the south, on the other hand, there were 2,846 monasteries and 82,700 monks.⁸

It was also during this period that Chinese monks started making pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites in South Asia. Artefacts used in Buddhist rituals,

images of Buddhist divinities and literary genres imbedded in Buddhist texts began having discernable impact on Chinese traditions and lifestyles. Various regions of Central Asia, including the oasis towns of Miran, Khotan and Kocho, became integrated into networks of Buddhist exchange across the Taklamakan desert. Similarly, the maritime polities of Southeast Asia encountered streams of Buddhist missionaries and ideas as they transitted through local ports and towns on their way to China.

While the earliest evidence associated with Buddhism in the maritime regions of Southeast Asia dates from the fifth-sixth century, in the mainland area of Southeast Asia, especially Burma (Myanmar) and Thailand, Buddhist ideas may have spread prior to the fourth century. Scholars have pointed to the architectural influences of Nāgārjunakoṇḍa and Amarāvātī on stupa designs in the Pyu (in present-day Burma) and Mon (in present-day Thailand) areas, as well as the discovery of Mauryan-style Buddhist inscriptions (known as *dharmacakra* and *ye dharma*) in these regions, to suggest that the transmission of Buddhism to Southeast Asia took place by the second century CE.⁹ Additionally, the Pyu site of Śrīkṣetra (in the lower Irrawaddy River) and the Mon Dvāravatī sites (in the Chao Phraya basin) have revealed the earliest Pāli inscriptions in mainland Southeast Asia that date from the fifth to seventh centuries and sixth to eighth centuries respectively. The existence of these Pāli inscriptions indicates the presence of Theravāda doctrines in the region earlier than previously believed.¹⁰

The use of Buddhist ideology and paraphernalia to legitimise political power emerged as another important factor that stimulated cross-cultural interactions in Asia. This is evident, for example, from the activities of Emperor Wu 梁武帝 (r. 502-49) of the Liang Dynasty (502-57). Emperor Wu not only propagated Buddhist doctrines and rituals within his state, but also established connections with Buddhist centres in South Asia. Additionally, he is reported to have sent envoys to the Funan polity in Southeast Asia to fetch Buddhist relics, and promoted Buddhist exchanges between the Liang court and Korean polities by dispatching Buddhist delegations and offering relics as gifts to Korean rulers. In 527, the ruler of Paekche 百濟 (18 BCE-660 CE) built a Buddhist temple called Taet'ong-sa 大通寺 (Ch. Datong si) in honour of Emperor Wu's contribution to the spread of the doctrine in his land.¹¹

Indeed, the development of Buddhism in the Korean peninsula was closely associated with diplomatic, commercial, and religious interactions between various East Asian polities. According to a twelfth-century Korean work called *Samguk sagi* 三國史記 (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms), Buddhism was introduced to Korea during the Three Kingdoms period, to the kingdom of Koguryō in 372, the kingdom of Paekche in 384, and the kingdom of Silla 新羅 (37 BCE-668 CE) in 528.¹² While contacts with Chinese kingdoms are credited with the transmission of the doctrine to the former two kingdoms, monks from Koguryō are said to have brought Buddhist teachings to Silla.¹³

The *Samguk sagi* and other sources suggest that the transmission of Buddhism to the Korean peninsula was also intimately linked to the larger networks of Buddhist interactions across Asia. In both Paekche and Silla, for example, the two earliest monks, named Maranant'a 摩羅難陀 (Mālānanda?) and Mukhoja 墨胡子 respectively, seem to have come from Central Asia.¹⁴ Furthermore, monks from Korea travelled to South Asia in the sixth century to study and to procure Buddhist texts. One of the earliest monks to make this journey was Kyōmik 謙益 from Paekche who is reported to have travelled to India by the sea route in 526.¹⁵

It was also through the maritime networks that monks from Paekche introduced Buddhist doctrines to Japan. After the initial transmission of the doctrine in 552 by a monk named Norisach'igye 奴利斯致契,¹⁶ several other Buddhist missions were sent from Paekche to Japan. Monks from Koguryō 高句麗 (37 BCE-668 CE) were also active in Japan during the sixth century and are known to have established the first order of nuns in the islands. In 594, Koguryō and Paekche monks, Hyeja 慧慈 and Hyech'ong 慧聰 respectively, were instrumental in explaining the Buddhist doctrines to Prince Shōtoku 聖德太子 (572-622), who became one of the first members of the royalty in Japan to promote Buddhism.¹⁷ Aware of the importance of China as a centre of Buddhism, Shōtoku sent an envoy to the Sui court in 607 to bring back, among other things, Buddhist texts. By the time of Prince Shōtoku's death in 622, Buddhist doctrines had penetrated the easternmost region of Asia.

The Emergence of Multiple Buddhist Centres (Seventh-Fifteenth Centuries CE)

In the spread of religious ideas through Asia, the seventh century was a watershed because of the subsequent dominance of Islam along the major trans-regional routes. While during the previous periods, other religious ideas, such as Brahmanism and Manichaeism, had also spread alongside Buddhism, none of them significantly challenged or impacted Buddhist institutions. However, from the eleventh century, the use of violence by some of the militant Islamic groups and polities controlling the overland routes that connected the Middle East to Central and South Asia had considerable effect on Buddhist exchanges and monastic institutions in these areas. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in the fourteenth century reports that in the maritime regions of Southeast Asia there were also episodes of violent encounters between Muslim rulers and those practicing other religions.¹⁸ A recent study on the reasons for the decline of Buddhism in India has also indicated hostilities and violent clashes between the followers of Buddhism and Brahmanism.¹⁹ Overall, the spread and popularity of Islam and episodes of conflict or suppression during the first half of the second

millennium had wide-ranging impact on Buddhism in several regions of Asia.

Due to both internal and external factors, the period between the seventh and fifteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of multiple centres of Buddhist discourse and transmission across Asia. The popularity of localised forms of Buddhism, the creation of “sacred” Buddhist sites outside South Asia and the eventual decline of Buddhism in South Asia were some of the reasons contributing to this development. This did not mean, however, that the Buddhist links across Asia were totally severed. In fact, through to the fifteenth century there are notices of long-distance exchanges associated with Buddhism, and more intensive Buddhist interactions started taking place within the spheres of new Buddhist centres. By the eleventh century, three such distinct spheres or “worlds” of Buddhism had emerged in Asia: the India-Tibet world, centred on the monastic institutions in the Bihar-Bengal region; the East Asian world, with multiple centres in China, Korea and Japan; and the Sri Lanka-Southeast Asia world, connected through the Theravāda/Pāli Buddhist networks.

Before the emergence of these three distinct worlds of Buddhism, South Asian monastic institutions and the sacred pilgrimage sites associated with the life and teachings of the Buddha were regarded as the centre of the Buddhist realm. During the seventh century, the Nālandā Mahāvihāra (in the present-day state of Bihar in India), which had been established sometime in the mid-fifth century, developed into the leading site for Buddhist learning. It not only attracted students from across Asia, but also actively sent monks to propagate the Buddhist doctrine. Indeed, Nālandā seems to have had significant impact on cross-regional Buddhist exchanges during the second half of the first millennium. Chinese monks, such as Xuanzang 玄奘 (602?-64) and Yijing 義淨 (635-713), and several Koreans, including Hyech'o 慧超 (704-87), studied at the monastery during the seventh century. The monastery is also known to have received donations from local and foreign rulers, some located as far away as Sumatra. Later, starting from the ninth-tenth century, two other nearby Buddhist monasteries, Vikramaśīla and Odantapurī, began playing a crucial role in the spread of Buddhism, especially Tantric ideas, to Tibet. These three monasteries continued to actively propagate Buddhist doctrines until their destruction in the twelfth-thirteenth century by the pillaging Turco-Mongol armies based in the area of present-day Afghanistan.

Along with the earlier Theravāda and Mahāyāna doctrines, the Tantric or Vajrayāna ideas also spread across most of Asia. In fact, in many places these three traditions co-existed with varying degrees of influence on the common people and the ruling elites. Sri Lanka, which is usually perceived as the major transmitter of Theravāda doctrines, also contributed to the spread of Tantric teachings, to Southeast Asia and Tang China during the eighth century, in

particular through the Abhayagiri Monastery. After the eleventh century, networks associated with Theravāda Buddhism drew Sri Lanka and various mainland and maritime polities of Southeast Asia more closely together than had been the case in earlier periods. The Pagan polity in Burma and the Sukhothai (1238-1438) kingdom in Thailand pursued close diplomatic and Buddhist interactions with rulers and monastic institutions in Sri Lanka. Similarly, rulers in the Chiang Mai region developed their own links with Sri Lanka, leading to the transmission of Sinhala Theravāda Buddhism to almost all areas of present-day Thailand.²⁰

In East Asia, significant transformations took place in the practice of Buddhism as new teachings that emerged or evolved locally became popular between the eighth and twelfth centuries. During the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) periods in China, teachings associated with Tiantai and Chan Buddhism, for example, became ingrained among the people and also spread to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. At the same time, ruling elites in Tang China, Japan, and in the polities established by the Khitans, Tanguts and Jurchens, known respectively as Liao 遼 (907-1125), Xixia 西夏 (1038-1227) and Jin 金 (1115-1234), used Tantric rituals and ceremonies for political purposes and benefits.

One of the key developments during this period of Buddhist history in East Asia was the creation of unique pilgrimage sites that sought to replace (or at least provide an alternative to) the holy sites in South Asia. Thus, Mount Wutai 五臺山 in China and Mount Odae 五臺山／오대산 in Korea were promoted by local clergies as sacred sites in what were once considered “borderland” or “peripheral” regions of the Buddhist world. In fact, by the ninth century, China had emerged as one of the central realms of Buddhism, with sacred sites that attracted pilgrims even from South Asia and monastic institutions that trained monks from Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Java and Central Asia. The Huichang 會昌 persecution of Buddhism in 845, which is often considered as a trigger for the decline of the doctrine in China, was a temporary setback. China’s importance as transmitter of Buddhism was evident again during the Song period, when it became the leading supplier of printed sets of the Chinese Buddhist canon to monastic institutions and imperial courts elsewhere in East Asia. It continued to be a site of pilgrimage activity for devotees from the Buddhist worlds and a place for discourse on Buddhist doctrines for Korean and Japanese monks.

By the Mongol Yuan 元 period (1279-1364), when the leading monastic institutions in South Asia saw decline, Tibet became an integral part of the East Asian Buddhist world. Mount Wutai developed into one of the important sites for interactions between Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist communities. Additionally, while Chinese Buddhist texts were taken to Tibet and translated, Tibetan lamas often visited imperial courts in China, a practice which extended

through to the Qing 清 period (1644-1911). The Ming ruler Yongle 永樂 (r. 1402-24), for example, is known to have invited several lamas from Tibet to perform ceremonies at his court.²¹

Also noteworthy are the attempts to acquire Buddhist relics and other artefacts during the first half of the second millennium. The Song court, with the intention of printing and distributing new copies of the Buddhist canon, procured a large number of Buddhist texts from South Asia. Rulers and courts across Asia also tried to obtain the tooth and other sacred remains of the Buddha preserved in Sri Lanka. A ruler of Tāmbraḷiṅga in Southeast Asia named Candrabhānu, for instance, is said to have attacked Sri Lanka on two occasions, in 1247 and 1262, aiming to forcibly procure these Buddhist relics.²² The popularity of relic cults may have even proved enticing to Qubilai Khan 忽必烈 (r. 1260-94) in China, who, in 1284, sent a special envoy to South Asia, to procure the Buddha's alms bowl. It is also possible, furthermore, that the conflict between the Ming admiral Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1433) and a Sri Lankan in 1410-11, which led to the arrest and abduction of the latter to China, took place over the sacred remains of the Buddha preserved on the island.²³

Thus, while the period between the seventh and fifteenth centuries witnessed the emergence of multiple Buddhist centres, with their own spheres of influences and intensive exchanges, the long-distance interaction across Asia continued until the arrival of European colonial powers. Even with the spread of Islam during this period, Buddhism seems to have contributed considerably to stimulating cross-cultural contacts and exchanges. More importantly, perhaps, Buddhist doctrines had deeply penetrated the local societies, so much so that it had shed its "foreign" identity and become an integral part of the lives of people living in diverse regions of Asia.

The Period of European Expansion and Beyond

The presence of European colonial powers in Asia, especially the British in South Asia and the French in Southeast Asia, had tremendous impact on Buddhist communities. These colonialists tried to regulate the functioning of Buddhist monastic institutions or manage the movement of monks across borders. They were also involved in excavating Buddhist artefacts and removing them to museums in the West. In some instances they destroyed sacred artefacts that served to legitimise local authorities or empower monastic communities. In 1561, for instance, it was reported that the Tooth Relic from Sri Lanka, nominally the same one mentioned above, was taken to Goa by the Portuguese and destroyed in a public ceremony.²⁴

Also during the colonial period, Buddhism gradually ceased to be the dominant religion in Asia. In some places the decline was not necessarily due

to direct actions by the Europeans. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Buddhism confronted criticisms and denunciations from within various Asian societies that were, influenced by the West, confronting the issues of modernity and nationalism. In Japan, for example, the Meiji Restoration of 1868 led to severe criticism of Buddhism and the destruction of Buddhist institutions.²⁵ Similarly, in China, the role of Buddhism in a modern society was questioned and several monastic institutions were converted to government offices during the late Qing and the Republican periods.²⁶

It should be noted, however, that not all encounters between Buddhist practitioners in Asia and Europeans were adversarial. There were dialogues, interactions and engagement with several European (and American) intellectuals who attempted to revive Buddhism in Asia. Some of these Europeans were also engaged in the study of Buddhist history and philosophy based both on textual sources and archaeological materials. Indeed, the period not only witnessed the appearance of various movements to revive and reform the doctrine and the monastic institutions, but also the development of scholarship on Buddhism that ranged from the translations of Buddhist texts to the identification of ancient Buddhist sites. These two aspects contributed significantly to the transformation of Buddhism from a pan-Asian religion to a global tradition in the twentieth century.

The two leading figures involved in these attempts to revive Buddhism and place it on a global platform were Anagarika Dharmapala (1864-1933) and the monk Taixu 太虛 (1890-1947). Early in his life, Dharmapala, a native of Sri Lanka, was influenced by the Theosophists Madame Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-91) from Ukraine and the American Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907). Dharmapala spent most of his adult life in British India trying to revive and reform Buddhism, rejuvenate sacred Buddhist sites and wrest control of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgayā from local Brahmin priests. One of his major contributions was the establishment of the Mahabodhi Society in 1891, initially located in Colombo but moved to Kolkata the following year. Branches of the Society were subsequently established in other Indian cities as well as in foreign countries. The Society's headquarters in Kolkata became a key site for Buddhist activities that involved monks and lay Buddhists from around the world.²⁷

In many ways the Chinese monk Taixu was associated with this revitalised and reconnected world of Buddhism that Dharmapala was trying to create, even though the two never met. Taixu was a strong advocate for reform of monks and monastic institutions, attempting to make them relevant to the contemporary needs of the Chinese people. He was also a member of the Mahabodhi Society and visited its Kolkata and Sarnath branches during his Goodwill Mission to South Asia in 1940. Like Dharmapala, Taixu was a well-travelled monk, making several trips not only within Asia, but also to Europe and America. Taixu is credited as one of the founders of the "Humanistic

Buddhism” (*renjian fojiao* 人間佛教) that sought to make Buddhism more engaged with the society and its needs.²⁸ Many of the ideas of Taixu relating to Humanistic Buddhism were later propagated by monks Yin Shun 印順 (1906-2005) and Sheng-yen 聖嚴 (1930-2009) in Taiwan.

The networks of Buddhist exchanges during the colonial period were also sustained by various diasporic communities. The Chinese migrants, who settled in Southeast and South Asia, for example, brought with them various localised forms of Buddhist practices. The most prominent of these was the veneration of Guanyin 觀音, the Buddhist divinity of mercy, which spread from southern coastal regions of China to Southeast and South Asia. In these places the Chinese immigrants established several temples and shrines dedicated to Guanyin and other Buddhist divinities that were often found only in the regions of China from where they migrated. More importantly, these Buddhist networks of the Chinese migrants triggered a flow of ritual goods, artefacts, and sacred relics. Similar to the earlier periods, these networks included the participation of traders, artisans and missionaries.

During the second half of the twentieth century, two other personalities from Asia, while controversial in their own ways, contributed to revitalising Buddhism and turning it into a global tradition. The Vietnamese monk Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926-) and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama (1935-), both living outside their native countries, played important roles in promoting the cause of Buddhism within Asia and in Europe and North America. While Thích Nhất Hạnh was active in the United States and Europe, the Dalai Lama has lived in India for over five decades. The two, through their writings, speeches and sermons, have tried to carry on the work of Dharmapala and Taixu by making people aware of the core teachings of Buddhism and their applications in the modern world.

In sum, for over two thousand years, Buddhism, with its ebbs and flows and various forms and manifestations, has linked distant regions of Asia through several overlapping, inter-connected and often inter-dependent networks. These have included the overland and maritime networks of merchant communities, which facilitated the movement of monks and religious artefacts. Itinerant merchants similarly benefited from the presence of monastic institutions at key halting places across deserts and seas. The networks of Buddhist missionaries, in addition to disseminating religious ideas, also contributed to the circulation of scientific, cosmological, literary, and artistic traditions. Diplomatic exchanges between polities in Asia sometimes also involved Buddhist monks and networks. Furthermore, Buddhism was part of the immigration networks, particularly those of the Chinese, through which it continued to connect various regions of Asia in the twentieth century.

Similar to Brahmanism and Islam, Buddhism had tremendous impact on the societies that accepted the doctrines. All three religions influenced the daily lives of the common people, court politics and fostered trans-regional

contacts in Asia. The spread of Buddhism was unique perhaps because of the ways in which its doctrines were adapted, modified and re-envisioned by the people living in different cultural zones. The languages, artistic representations, philosophical arguments, and even the basic methods through which followers practiced and lived the religion, varied tremendously. This diversity of Buddhism across Asia is reflected in the essays included in this volume.

COMING TO TERMS WITH BUDDHISM ACROSS ASIA

The first seven chapters of this volume deal with the transmissions and adaptations of Buddhism from about the beginning of the first millennium CE to the seventh century. Jason Neelis' essay focuses on the networks and routes through which Buddhist exchanges between the Indian subcontinent and Central Asia took place in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Using archaeological evidence, manuscript and inscriptional sources and topographical features of the transit zones, Neelis argues that the Buddhist exchanges between the two regions were dynamic and multidimensional instead of "a unidirectional movement." Erik Schickelanz and Zhang Xing, later in the volume and examining different networks and time periods, also validate Neelis' critique of a unidirectional flow. Indeed, this is one of the key points about the spread of Buddhism across Asia made in this volume.

The second chapter by Stefan Baums examines some of the earliest Buddhist manuscript fragments found in the regions of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan that date from the first-second century CE. Baums provides a detailed analysis of the Gāndhāri commentaries within these manuscripts and compares them with contemporaneous Pāli material. The analysis by Baums strongly suggests close connections between the Gāndhāri and Pāli commentaries especially with regard to the exegetical aspects. These shared aspects, Baums notes, might go back to a very early period of Buddhist exegesis. On the other hand, the method of categorical reduction found in these commentaries, Baums argues, might have been the original sources for the Pāli versions.

The next four chapters (i.e., Chapters 3-6) explore several topics related to Buddhism in China between the second and sixth centuries CE. Jan Nattier's essay discusses the ways in which the opening formula of Buddhist sūtras, *evam mayā śrutam* (Ch. *rushi wo wen* 如是我聞, "like this I hear[d]"), was rendered into Chinese prior to the fifth century. The essay vividly shows how the translators in China on the one hand attempted to come to terms with the desire to preserve the Indic antecedent and on the other hand had to address the needs of local audiences and conform to the structure of the Chinese language. The complexities of early translation activity is also the focus of Elsa Legittimo's chapter, which examines the transmission and translation processes of the Āgama literature, a collection of discourses by the

Buddha. The possibility of oral transmission, the likelihood of western Central Asia as the source of some of these texts, the complex roles of the translators and the socio-historical situation in China during the period in which the Āgama literature was first translated are explained in detail in Legittimo's chapter.

In Chapter 5, Daniel Boucher outlines the polemics and the issue of patronage associated with the transmission of Buddhist doctrines to China by examining the records about a Mainstream/Hinayāna monk from Jibin named Zhu Fadu 竺法度. Born in China during the [Liu] Song 劉宋 period (424-53 CE), Fadu was the son of a foreign merchant. Boucher shows that Fadu, along with his teacher Dharmayaśas, was roundly criticised for his advocacy of Mainstream doctrines in the leading bibliographical literature produced by monks adhering to the Mahāyāna tradition. These tensions and frictions between monks advocating different streams of Buddhism in China, Boucher argues, need to be examined and understood in the context of court patronage, which played an important role in determining the success or failure of specific Buddhist doctrines.

The next chapter by Chen Jinhua also addresses the issue of patronage and the presence of non-Mahāyāna traditions in China. Chen demonstrates that meditative practices brought to China in the fifth century by the Jibin ("Kaśmīri") monk Buddhahadra played a significant role in the development of meditation traditions during the subsequent periods. Similar to Boucher, Chen cautions us about simplifying the spread of Buddhism into China and uncritically placing everything associated with it under the "general rubric of 'Mahāyāna.'"

Giuliana Martini in the final chapter of Part I examines the spread of Buddhism to the famous Central Asian region of Khotan. Her analysis focuses on one of the chapters of the key Khotanese text known as the *Book of Zambasta*. The earliest versions of the text date from the fifth or sixth century, although the work itself was completed only in the eighth century. Martini's analysis of Chapter Five of the text helps us understand some of the intricate ways in which the transmitters of Buddhist doctrines, especially the promoters of Mahāyāna teachings, composed and propagated certain texts in foreign lands.

Part II of the volume covers the period from roughly the seventh to the fifteenth century and deals with Buddhism in East and Southeast Asia. In Chapter 8, Teng Weijen challenges the notion that in-depth knowledge of Sanskrit was limited to a few Chinese monks, especially those who studied in South Asia. By examining Kuiji's 窺基 (632-82) understanding of Sanskrit compounds and their rendition into Chinese, Teng argues that the conventional view about the inadequate knowledge of Sanskrit language among Chinese monks needs to be revisited.

In the next essay, Ann Heirman studies the adaptation of Buddhist monastic or disciplinary codes (Vinaya) in China. Heirman's chapter demonstrates the dilemma of the Chinese monks as they encountered several, sometimes contradictory, versions of the Vinaya codes transmitted from South Asia. The focus of the essay is on the seventh-century Chinese monk Yijing's attempts to not only address the issue of the confusion caused by the differences in the Vinaya literature, but also to deal with the application of the codes in a very distinct socio-cultural context. Heirman examines how Yijing tried to accomplish these tasks through an abridgment method known as *lüe jiao* 略教. Heirman argues that Yijing's reasoning eventually provided the flexibility needed to implement the disciplinary codes in China.

Yijing's views about the flexibility in implementing disciplinary codes stemmed from his experiences in South Asia when studying at the Nālandā Mahāvihāra, which is famously reported to have had a unique multi-storey library. In Chapter 10, Wang Xiang looks at how the tradition of monastic libraries spread from South Asia to China, especially to the Tang capital Chang'an. Based on case studies of several monastic libraries in Chang'an, Wang contends that these libraries made a significant contribution to the accessibility to Buddhist texts and literature by monks, scholars as well as the general public.

Chen Huaiyu's chapter shifts to the ritualistic aspect of Buddhism, focusing on the practice of lantern-lighting as described in several Dunhuang manuscripts. These rituals that combined local folklore traditions and Buddhist practices, as Chen points out, were performed during the Chinese lunar New Year ceremonies. Chen analyses the structure of the prayers associated with lighting lamps and argues that they not only indicate the incorporation of multiple forms of Buddhist traditions, but also suggest local variations. These variations, according to Chen, developed due to the multicultural context of and the political changes taking place in the Dunhuang region.

In Chapter 12, Fabio Rambelli examines the evolution of Japanese perception of Tenjiku 天竺 (India) from the seventh to the nineteenth century. Much of this perception, as Rambelli explains, was mediated through translated Buddhist literature since few, if any, Japanese monks seem to have visited India prior to the sixteenth century. Despite the lack of first-hand encounter with the Buddhist holy land, the Japanese believed that they were the "ultimate stalwart" of Buddhism, the "real" India. For Rambelli, this phenomenon could very well be termed the "Indianisation" of Japan. By the seventeenth century, several maps of India were circulating in Japan, reinforcing the idealised image of the imagined Indic world known as Jambudvīpa among the Japanese. During the Edo period, however, geographical knowledge about India was transmitted by the Europeans, which not only led to changes in the Japanese perception of India, but also the eventual disappearance of the fantasised

views of the Indic realm that had for centuries stimulated the Japanese imagination.

The subsequent chapter by James Robson discusses the mystifying practice of placing objects inside Buddhist (and non-Buddhist) statues in China and other places in East Asia. Found inside these statues were objects such as medicinal packets, coins, pieces of jewellery, and talismans. The practice seems to have gained popularity during the Song period in China and subsequently spread to Korea and Japan. Robson suggests that the practice may have been associated with the belief in consecrating religious objects, such as stūpas, in South Asia that most likely filtered into China through the reports of Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang and Yijing.

The study of Abhidharma literature in Tibet by Jowita Kramer in Chapter 14 underscores the intimate relationship between the monastic institutions and philosophical traditions of India and Tibet. It also demonstrates that not every tradition, no matter how important, was evenly adopted during the course of Buddhist transmissions. Kramer's essay includes a detailed analysis of a thirteenth-century Sanskrit manuscript of *Pañcaskandhakavibhāṣā* that is currently preserved at the Tibetology Research Center in Beijing, China. Although the text, a sixth-century Yogācāra commentary on Vasubandhu's *Pañcaskandhaka*, never assumed the same importance as some of the other Abhidharma works, Kramer argues that the philosophical discourse with regard to the nature of matter and mind included in the *Pañcaskandhakavibhāṣā* manuscript indicates that the Tibetans encountered several diverse traditions.

The last two chapters of this Part (Chapters 15 and 16) deal with Buddhism in Southeast Asia. While the chapter by Hermann Kulke focuses on Angkor (present-day Cambodia), Tilman Frasch's essay covers Southeast Asia in general, paying particularly attention to regions influenced by the Theravāda tradition. Both chapters highlight the connections between Southeast Asia and South Asia with regard to Buddhist ideologies and beliefs. Kulke examines the relationship between Buddhism and the state by analysing how kings Aśoka in South Asia and Jayavarman VII (1182-1220?) in Angkor used and propagated Buddhism. Kulke argues that one of the main reasons the grand visions of the two rulers of a "genuine Buddhist state ideology" failed to outlive them has to be found in their quest for a universal mission. The "social unbearableness" and their "ideological overstretch," according to Kulke, caused this decline. Frasch, for his part, studies the impact of the belief in the inevitable decline of Buddhism and the ways the Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia dealt with this widespread notion. The steps taken, as Frasch shows from various parts of the Theravāda world of the fifteenth century, included the attempts to "purify" the saṅgha/saṃgha, the rapid copying and dissemination of manuscripts, the search for the original sites associated with Buddhism in

India and Sri Lanka, the recording of the history of the religion and the efforts to transfer Buddhist art and architecture from one region to another for preservation purposes. For Frasch, the shared concerns and the coordinated steps taken to address the issue of the decline of Buddhism demonstrate the creation of a Buddhist “ecumene” across the Bay of Bengal in the middle of the fifteenth century.

The four chapters in Part III of the volume (Chapters 17-20) relate to Buddhism and Buddhist connections that primarily took place during the colonial period. The chapter by Anne M. Blackburn demonstrates the continuation of intra-Asian Buddhist exchanges during the colonial period, when the Tooth Relic at Kandy (re)emerged as a key catalyst for Buddhist interactions between Sri Lanka, Burma and Cambodia. These exchanges persisted despite the British occupation of the island. The geographical-cum-institutional space of the “*Buddha-sāsana*” or the teachings of the Buddha, Blackburn argues, served as an important alternative to the spaces of imperial diplomacy and colonial rule. The power of the Tooth Relic, and the translocal Buddhist ties that Tooth Relic traffic facilitated, became, she notes, increasingly appealing as colonial power and presence in Southeast Asia intensified.

The sacred life of another Buddhist object, the Shwedagon pagoda in Burma, as Elizabeth Howard-Moore shows in her chapter, also flourished during the colonial period. In fact, Howard-Moore contends that the importance of the Buddhist site in Burma strengthened in part due to the interest of several British colonial officers in preserving, archiving and opening up the Shwedagon pagoda to pilgrims and other visitors. As a result, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these pilgrims mixed with Mon, Burmese, Thai, Chinese and European traders who set up businesses at the Shwedagon. The evolving architectural structure, with new influences from Thai and Shan styles, also demonstrates the multi-ethnic, multi-regional and multidimensional interactions that took place at this Burmese Buddhist site during the colonial period.

The final two chapters of the volume reveal the reverse transmissions of Buddhist ideas that took place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. While Erik Schicketanz’s essay focuses on the attempts to transmit Japanese esoteric Buddhist ideas to China, Zhang Xing’s chapter examines how the Chinese diasporic community in Kolkata brought their unique Buddhist practices to India. Schicketanz examines the role of the lay Buddhist Wang Hongyuan 王弘願 (1876-1937) in introducing esoteric Buddhist teachings from Japan to China, which, as Schicketanz shows, brought Wang into conflict with prominent Chinese monks such as Taixu. Despite this, because of Wang’s efforts, Japanese vocabulary and concepts entered Chinese Buddhist discourse and this has had, according to Schicketanz, a lasting impact on the Chinese understanding of esoteric Buddhism.

Zhang Xing closes out the volume with an in-depth study of the multifaceted and complex nature of Buddhist ideas among a Chinese migrant community. The Chinese in Kolkata built several temples and shrines dedicated to Buddhist divinities unique to Buddhist traditions in China. These included the temples for various manifestations of Guanyin and the two Chinese “buddhas” from Sihui County in Guangdong Province. According to Zhang, these practices were connected to the attempts by Chinese immigrants and their descendants to preserve their “Chinese” as well as sub-ethnic identities. There was, however, no attempt by the members of the community to propagate these beliefs and practices among the other residents of the Indian city. Only recently, Zhang’s study indicates, Buddhist activities among the Chinese, especially those initiated by the Foguang shan 佛光山 group based in Taiwan, seems to be attracting non-Chinese residents of Kolkata. Zhang believes these interactions might one day help re-establish the Buddhist nexus between India and China.

Although the essays in this volume do not focus on any single aspect of Buddhist transmission, doctrine, or history, together they highlight several important contributions and roles of Buddhism in intra-Asian exchanges. First, the essays demonstrate the multidimensional and multidirectional flow of Buddhist ideas. Along with other recent scholarship on the subject, they challenge the oft-repeated textbook description of a unidirectional spread of Buddhism from South Asia to the rest of Asia. Second, they indicate the diverse responses people living in different parts of Asia had when they engaged with Buddhist doctrines as they were transmitted through the translations of texts, the writing of commentaries and through selection and adaptive processes. Third, the impact of Buddhism on local cultural norms, linguistics, political ideologies, and world-views can also be discerned from these essays. Finally, the essays show that Buddhist interactions across Asia have been an enduring process, which continues to connect (or re-connect) far-flung societies even in recent times. The volume, it is hoped, will contribute not only to the understanding of the history of Buddhism in Asia, but also to the analysis of the multifaceted nature of intra-Asian interactions and the circulation of ideas.

NOTES

1. For such overviews, see Bechert and Gombrich, ed., *The World of Buddhism* and Kitagawa and Cummings ed., *Buddhism and Asian History*.
2. Parts of this section will appear in expanded form in Sen, “The Spread of Buddhism.”
3. Chakrabarti, “Buddhist Sites,” p. 199.
4. Heitzman, “Early Buddhism,” p. 124.
5. See Ray, *Monastery and Guild*.
6. On this and other similar stories, see Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest*, pp. 19-23.
7. Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, p. 4.

8. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, p. 136.
9. Prapod Assavavirulhakarn, *The Ascendancy*, p. 68.
10. Skilling, "The Advent," pp. 93-107.
11. Best, *A History*, pp. 135-36.
12. On the spread of Buddhism to Korea, see Lancaster and Yu, ed., *Introduction of Buddhism*.
13. Some sources credited the transmission of the doctrine to Silla to an official mission from the Liang court in China.
14. Ahn, "A Short History."
15. On the early Korean monks who reportedly travelled to South Asia, see Best, "Tales."
16. Ahn, "A Short History," p. 13.
17. On the transmission of Buddhism from the Korean peninsula to Japan, see Kamata Shigeo, "The Transmission."
18. For details, see Wade, "Early Muslim Expansion," p. 385.
19. Verardi, *Hardships and Downfall*.
20. Swearer, "Buddhism in Southeast Asia," pp. 116-18.
21. On the role of Wutai shan in Tibet's interactions with courts in China, see the special issue of the *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, vol. 6. The issue is available at: <http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/>
22. Sirisena, *Sri Lanka and South-East Asia*, pp. 36-57.
23. Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, pp. 116-17. See also, Sen, "Changing Regimes."
24. Strong, *The Relics*, 195-97.
25. See, among other works, Ketelaar's *Of Heretics and Martyrs*.
26. The place of Buddhism in China during these periods is discussed in detail in Welch's *The Buddhist Revival in China*.
27. On Anagarika Dharmapala and his role in the revival movement, and especially his contribution towards establishing Buddhist control over the Mahabodhi Temple, see Trevithick, *The Revival*.
28. For a detailed study of Taixu and his reforms, see Pittman's *Toward a Modern Chinese Buddhism*.

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