Prof.dr. J.A. Silk

Lies, Slander and the Study of Buddhism
Lies, Slander and the Study of Buddhism

Oration delivered by

Prof. dr. J.A. Silk

bíj de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar
op het gebied van het Boeddhisme
aan de Universiteit Leiden
op dinsdag 1 april 2008
Honored colleagues, family, students, friends and guests,

The Pāli Jātaka, a collection of tales narrating the more than 500 previous lives of the Buddha, tells the story of an ascetic who had engaged in long years of extreme deprivation. At a certain point, he wanders down from his abode in the Himalayas to the city of Benares, where he takes up residence as a guest of the king. Putting the ascetic, who is the future Buddha, in the care of the queen, the king leaves to deal with a border disturbance. One day, flying through the air with his supernatural powers, the ascetic comes to the queen’s chamber. Encountering him suddenly, in her surprise she drops her robe. When he sees her naked, the text says, “the sexual passion dwelling within the ascetic for uncountable hundreds of thousands of millions of years sprang up like a sleeping poisonous snake in a box, erasing his meditative absorption”. What happens next you may well imagine, and the two continue in a like manner day after day. This becomes well known throughout the town, and the king is informed of it, but he does not believe the story. When he returns, he asks his wife about the matter, and she tells him the truth. But still he does not believe it. He next asks the ascetic. The future Buddha then reflects that, although if he were to deny the story the king would believe him, “in this world there is no foundation like the truth. Those”, he thinks, “who have forsaken the truth may sit beneath the Bodhi tree, but they will not be able to attain awakening”. The text then offers a remarkable judgment: “While one in pursuit of buddhahood may, under certain circumstances, take life, steal, engage in sexual activity, or take intoxicants, he does not tell a deceptive lie that injures anyone”.

Sex and lies - all that’s missing is the videotape.

I would like to spend my few moments with you today thinking about lies. In particular, I would like us to ponder a couple of questions: Is Buddhism, which is so very concerned with Truth with an upper-case T, correspondingly equally concerned with lies? And what might thinking about this question teach us about the study of Buddhism more broadly?

Let us begin at the beginning. The earliest datable reference to Buddhist literature - in fact, the very earliest reference to Buddhism at all - is found in a mid third-century BCE stone inscription of the emperor Aśoka. This records the emperor’s commendation of seven scriptures to the Buddhist monastic community. Six are cited merely by title, but the seventh is identified as the “Instruction to Rāhula referring to lying”. There has been much discussion over the identity of Aśoka’s seven texts, some of which may have been lost to us, more than 2000 years later. But the identity of this seventh text is clear; its Pāli version was noticed as early as 1879, and a corresponding Chinese text identified seventeen years later. In this sermon titled “Rāhula-sūtra”, the Buddha emphatically denies the authenticity of the ascetic who is not ashamed of an intentional lie. Moreover, he proclaims: “When one is not ashamed of an intentional lie, there is no evil he will not commit”. The ascetic is thus enjoined to think: “I will speak no lie, not even as a joke”, a sentiment repeated in later Buddhist literature. The “Rāhula-sūtra” continues by arguing that every action of body, speech and mind should be done only after reflection, after consideration of whether such an action will harm either self or others. And here we meet a fundamental Buddhist idea, namely that there are three types of action, those of body, speech and mind.

Given my topic today, I should perhaps be cautious about
making truth claims. But I do dare to say that the Buddhist analysis of action is essentially true - true in the sense that it is possible to act with one's body, with one's speech and with one's mind, and no other possibilities exist. Through this three-fold category, Buddhist philosophical - or, more cautiously put, doctrinal - literature of all periods preserves some focus on the importance of truthful speech.

So the only Buddhist text specified by more than a mere title, in the earliest reference to Buddhist literature, is a scripture concerned with lying. Of course, this need not mean that this was the most important of Aśoka's seven recommended sermons. One could equally well argue that the other six were so well-known that no further specification of their theme was necessary, and it was only the lesser-known sermon on lying that required further identification. Or it may be that the specification was meant to disambiguate this sermon to Rāhula from some other. It is impossible to decide the matter, and we must leave it that one among the seven earliest references to the teachings of the Buddha dealt with the avoidance of lying.

This concern with lying continues to resonate down through the ages, something that it is not possible to demonstrate today at length, but that can be outlined through a brief enumeration of several other ‘firsts.’

About 400 years after the time of Aśoka appears what is commonly thought of as the first Buddhist scripture in China, the Sūtra in Forty-two Sections. The exact date of this text is unknown, but it existed at least in part by the year 166, as discussed by, among others, the late Leiden professor Erik Zürcher. Near the beginning of this relatively short text, a compilation of what we might term ‘sermonettes,’ we read the following: “The Buddha said: ‘All beings consider ten things as evil. Three concern the body, four the mouth, and three the mind. The three of the body are killing, stealing, and sexual aberrance. The four of the mouth are duplicity, slander, lying, and lewd speech. The three of the mind are envy, hatred, and delusion’.” So here in the earliest Chinese Buddhism we already see evidence of an awareness of lying as one of the fundamental negative acts. This does not close our catalogue of ‘firsts’, however. For in 1756 appears the first published translation of a complete Buddhist scripture into a European language, a French rendering of precisely this Chinese Sūtra in Forty-two Sections.

The Jātaka tale with which I began contained what I called a remarkable judgement, that one seeking to become a buddha may kill, steal, have sex, or take intoxicants, but he must never tell a harmful lie. The allusion here is to the category of the Five Precepts, through which one vows to refrain from those five actions. These are generally considered to embody the most basic Buddhist ethical stance. Fundamental Buddhist identity is paradigmatically ritually affirmed through taking refuge in the Buddha, in his teaching or dharma, and in his community or saṁgha. But vowing to undertake the Five Precepts is also considered a basic marker of Buddhist identity, and is required of anyone who declares him- or herself a Buddhist layperson.

Our listing of ‘firsts’ continues by noticing that a discussion of these five precepts prominently appeared in the first Western work to include a partial translation of a Buddhist text, a work published in French in Paris and in Amsterdam in 1691, reprinted in Amsterdam in 1700, 1713 and 1714. So this Buddhist denunciation of lying as one of the fundamental
forms of improper behavior was, interestingly, known even here in the Netherlands more than 300 years ago. It was, indeed, one of the first facts to be reliably known about Buddhism in the West.

Now, while it is obvious that killing and stealing are, shall we say, anti-social, and that sexual misconduct and intoxication lead one away from spiritual cultivation, what is so bad about the fifth of the five restricted acts, lying? And in particular, is it worse than slander, another of the ten evils and, as we shall see, according to some the ultimate bad action? When the Indian scholar Vasubandhu composed his great compendium of Buddhist doctrinal systematics, the *Abhidharmakośa*, in the fourth or fifth century of our era, he had an answer. In the context of the five-fold abstention expected of the lay Buddhist, Vasubandhu posed the following question: “Why is only the abstention from lying speech listed as a rule of behavior of the layman’s vows, not the abstention from slander and the rest?” His answer is most interesting: “Because”, Vasubandhu says, “if he violated all the other rules of behavior, he would necessarily lie about it”. And he goes on to say: “For whenever one has violated a rule of behavior, when questioned about it he would respond: ‘I didn’t act like that!’ thus inevitably resulting in lying speech”. The connections to earlier sources come full circle a short time later in a similar doctrinal treatise, the *Abhidharmadīpa*. Its author follows Vasubandhu’s argument closely, then goes on to quote the “Rāhula sūtra” passage I cited earlier: “When one is not ashamed of an intentional lie, there is no evil he will not commit”. For these authors, lying is a fundamental violation, not only intrinsically, but also since it serves to conceal any other transgressions.

Would it be fair, then, to say that Buddhism rejects lying as inherently harmful, or even that it condemns it categorically? Not all texts are so single-minded. A scripture, with the probably unintentionally ironic title “Chapter on the Truth-teller”, relates an episode in which the protagonist, having frankly stated to a king the faults of many others, then equally frankly expounds on the king’s own faults, most particularly that he is quick to anger. The king, not unexpectedly, quickly becomes angry, summarily sentencing the truth-speaker to death. Begging to be allowed to speak once again, he confesses his own fault, namely that he is extremely outspoken. The truth-speaker then goes on to say: “Your majesty, a wise person does not always say things exactly as they are. A wise person understands the appropriate time and place to speak. One who speaks correctly does not please or satisfy anyone, because noble people will not praise him and stupid people will hate him”.

What is to be considered a lie is, of course, a basic problem, one much debated by moral philosophers. Among Buddhist thinkers, one relevant issue was how to account for seemingly inconsistent teachings appearing in Buddhist texts. If the Buddha indeed preached all the sermons attributed to him, as the tradition maintains, how could he say one thing in one place and another in another? Is not one of the contradictory statements a lie? The modern scholar is content to speculate that the authorship of the conflicting texts may differ, that there may be strata of authorship within a given text, and so on. But a traditional, system-internal and hermeneutically creative answer is that the Buddha employed skillful means, *upāya*, a technique whereby he suited each presentation to its audience. There is more than one way to make a truth palatable. If one tells a young child whose mother has died, “Mommy went on a long trip”, is it a lie?” Accordingly, some
to whom the Buddha preached were, in terms of their spiritual maturity, like children, and the Buddha explained his Truth to them appropriately. This idea finds its echo in modern colloquial Japanese, in the expression 嘘も方便 (uso mo hōben), literally “even a lie can be a skillful means”, or more loosely, “circumstances may justify a white lie”. In this rather watered down fashion, Buddhist hermeneutics finds its way even into everyday thinking and speech.

There is a final aspect to this question of Buddhist attitudes toward lies - and implicitly, of the status of truth - I should like to mention, before moving on to consider things from a different angle. As is well known, all Indian traditions, including Buddhism, believe in the magically potent force of true speech as a virtually physical agent. Spoken truth can have the power to cause supernatural prodigies, to cause rivers to flow backwards, for instance. This is what scholars speak of as the “Act of Truth”. The logic behind this has little to do with truth in opposition to lies. Rather, it involves a sort of magical oath-taking, whereby the power of one’s verbal commitment is given physical force. The most common word for ‘truth’ in Sanskrit is satya, and this is used in most expressions of the “Act of Truth”. But alongside it and in the same sense we sometimes see another word that is likely to be familiar to you. This is dharma, the most usual term for the teaching of the Buddha. The teaching of the Buddha is dharma as Truth, since what the Buddha preaches is precisely his expression of the upper-case T “Truth” to which he awoke. The Buddha’s dharma is an expression of the way things are, so speech in accord with dharma is true speech in this fundamental sense, both ontologically and soteriologically, so to speak.

In Buddhist doctrine, therefore, the opposite of truth is not, commonly, lies, but rather ignorance. To see the truth is to perceive the dharma, to see reality as it is or - to use an expression favored by my first professor of the philosophy of religion - to know the really real. The most basic focus of the Buddhist tradition is the quest to attain perfection understood, yes, certainly also in moral terms. But this morality flows from, and is fundamentally motivated by, a perfect appreciation of the true nature of reality. In other words, one perfects oneself in order to understand the nature of reality, and correspondingly it is only that correct understanding of the nature of reality that makes perfect behavior possible. Fundamentally, therefore, the most basic relationship is that between oneself and reality, not that between self and others. Interpersonal ethics in a Buddhist context are subordinate to self-cultivation - an element of this cultivation, to be sure, but subordinate to it.

I have spoken about some of what Indian Buddhist sources have to say about lies. And I have argued, at least implicitly, that this is a significant theme in these sources, although few modern studies of Buddhism, and even of Buddhist ethics, devote any serious attention to the topic. My own attention was drawn to the issue in the first place by the remarkable statement in the Jātaka story I recounted to you earlier. While a much more detailed and comprehensive investigation of the theme is obviously a desideratum, even at this stage the topic provides an opportunity to think about larger issues in the study of Buddhism. Let me explore just a few of these with you now.

I would preface what I am about to say by confessing that, in general, I have reservations about much comparative work, primarily because I think that it tends to extract objects of comparison from their organic context, thereby ending up
not really comparing at all. That said, certain kinds of comparisons can be helpful. On the grandest scale, if we recognize religions as fundamentally human constructs, comparative studies may be expected to help us discern common human features as they appear cross-culturally and transhistorically. From another point of view, comparisons can focus our attention on overlooked aspects of a given tradition, as it were spotlighting them from the outside. In this spirit, I have become particularly interested over the past few years in investigating how Jewish sources, particularly biblical and rabbinic sources, may allow us to deepen our appreciation of Buddhist traditions.

Jewish sources do give attention to questions of correct speech, although this attention seems often to focus more on slander and injurious speech - understood in general terms as gossip - than on lying per se. Biblical literature in particular contains examples of famous lies, or apparent lies, such as Abraham’s claim to Abimelech that Sarah was his sister, and there is a long tradition of apologetics attached to such stories. But there are also more abstract considerations of the issue. Naturally, even if sometimes seemingly artificially, Jewish attitudes are always ultimately grounded, at least formally, in biblical statements. Common proof texts referring to lying and slander include Leviticus 19:11, which states: “You shall not dissemble and you shall not lie to one another”, meaning that one should neither deny a truth, nor affirm a non-truth. The instruction in Exodus 23:1 that: “You shall not bear a false rumor” is understood by the influential medieval commentator Rashi to mean that one should not even listen to gossip, much less pass it on oneself, while the Talmud cites the view that “Anyone who shames his fellow in public is as if he sheds blood”. Elsewhere the Talmud stresses that gossip is worse even than the three fundamental sins of idolatry, sexual immorality and murder. For these crimes, it says, one will receive eternal punishment in the World-to-Come, a view further developed by the great twelfth century rabbi-philosopher Maimonides. It is interesting that this view contrasts with the Buddhist assertion that lying is the fundamental transgression, as I mentioned earlier. This is a point worthy of further investigation, though on another occasion. The key word in such Jewish discussions is lashon hara, which Maimonides defines as: “Anything which, if it would be publicized, would cause the subject physical or monetary damage, or would cause him anguish or fear”. Importantly, this is a classification of harmful, but in fact true, speech; when the speech is false, it belongs to an even more serious category. What is one to do about this? Possible responses are both theoretical and practical. Here, I simply refer to one ritual response, although it has a psychological dimension as well: Three times a day, and four on the Shabbat, observant Jews pray, partially quoting Psalm 34:14: “Lord, guard my tongue from evil, my lips from speaking lies. Help me ignore those who would slander me”.

Folk wisdom can convey a moral memorably, and a story sometimes attributed to the Chasidic tradition vividly illustrates the danger of gossip. Although its relevance to my theme is not direct, I cannot resist sharing it with you. A man who was given to gossip one day realized that he was spreading rumors, and sought the rabbi’s advice on how to atone for this transgression. “Is there, perhaps”, he asked, “some ritual I could perform?” “Indeed,” the rabbi responded, “there is such a ritual. Have you a feather pillow at home?” The man assured him that, certainly, he possessed such a pillow. “And has your home an upper floor, with a window?” Again, the man answered that yes, it did. “Go then,” the rabbi said, “and take your feather
pillow, along with a knife, to the window of your upper floor, slit open the pillow, and scatter the feathers in the wind. When you have done that, come back to me.” The man assumed that this was some sort of magical ritual. He did as he was told, and having done so, returned to the rabbi. “Now,” said the rabbi, “go home and pick up every last one of the feathers, and return it to the pillow.” And just as the man was about to open his mouth to exclaim the total impossibility of this task, it hit him: there was no more way for him to return the feathers to the pillow than there was for him to retrieve the rumors and gossip he had spread.

This is a beautiful and touching story. Might it, or any of the Jewish materials to which I have referred, help us to understand Buddhism? Well, if the answer were “no”, I probably wouldn’t be up here talking about them. So that may be our first lesson: sometimes we know what must be going on simply because of context.

My presentations of both Buddhist and Jewish materials on lying and slander have been selective and necessarily superficial. My conclusions may be as well, but I would certainly like to insist in the first place that these materials demand to be taken seriously, not only religiously, but also from a scholarly standpoint. Unfortunately, however, the study of Buddhism remains something of a poor cousin in the academy. I think I know why this has been so in the past, but I admit to finding the reasons it continues hard to understand.

To ignore or underemphasize Buddhism in the study of Asia is akin to ignoring Christianity in the history of the West. As I stress to my students every term, Buddhism is the only cultural force which permits us to speak of Asia as a unity at all. And to ignore or underemphasize Asia in a study of the world, which is to say, in any examination of human history and culture, or to treat Asia only in its relation to Europe, as colonial studies has tended to do, is to engage in the worst sort of parochialism. It follows that the study of Buddhism should be absolutely central to any study of humanity in general. Heretofore, however, it clearly has not held such a position. In part, this is a legacy of colonialism and of a cultural myopia. I shall have nothing more to say about this. But a part of the fault - though only a part - surely lies with those of us who work in this field of the Study of Buddhism. We have not done enough to consider what general lessons may be learned from careful and scientific studies. We have not thought intelligently enough about questions such as those concerning the dynamic relation between Church and State in Buddhist frameworks. We have not done our job to insure that Buddhist scripture is treated as an essential object in general reflections on sacred literature. We have not demonstrated how and why philosophical studies must take account of Buddhist philosophy - and the list goes on and on. In fact, we have not done nearly enough even to integrate ourselves and our work into broader studies of Religion, and perhaps even into Asian Studies, much less into the humanities as a whole.

Let me give you just one example of an arena in which there is much room for mutual learning. I have been reading lately in biblical and rabbinic text criticism, with something of the proverbial mixture of fascination and horror. I am fascinated by the prospect of what Buddhist scholars might learn from the centuries of research carried out on the relation between the Septuagint and its Hebrew basis, and optimistic that this might help us make more critical use of Chinese or Tibetan translations of originally Indic scriptural texts. But I am also
horrified - well, I'm exaggerating; let's say I am disappointed - to learn how contested and vexatious is the study of rabbinic text criticism in particular. I had hoped, truth be told, that many of the problems which plague the study of Buddhist literature would have already found solutions there. But interestingly, our situations seem to be rather close. Let me read you a short passage:

For many of the classics of rabbinic literature, no proper edition of their entire texts, nor even lists of their *variae lectiones*, exist. A comparison to the New Testament or to classical literature indicates how embarrassing the situation is. Instead of the sanguine possibility of various editors arguing about the correct reading, as is the case with the New Testament and many works of classical literature, scholars of rabbinics consider themselves fortunate when manuscript material has been made available, even if the citations are haphazard and the method non-critical.

Mutatis mutandis, this perfectly characterizes the situation of Buddhist Studies. In fact, I would go so far as to say that almost no Indian Buddhist scripture has yet received a truly scientific treatment. Even the most basic task of simply collecting and classifying manuscripts remains almost entirely undone. This is often dry work, unsexy and of a kind that funding agencies, demanding “relevance” above all, can find hard to understand. But without it, the rest is a mere house of cards.

And this leads me back, in a way, to truth and to lies. I believe that we are obliged as scholars - set aside now, as human beings - to tell the truth, and not to gossip. One thing this means is that, rather than criticize the work of others, if prior work is not reliable, let’s quietly sit down and do it right.

While understanding in scholarship comes about through give and take, through sometimes fierce disagreement, the first requirement is to honestly confess what it is that we know, and what we don’t. And this requires an acknowledgment also of the theoretical limits of our knowledge. We can be quite sure, for instance, that a great deal of Indian Buddhist literature has not survived. Moreover, most of what has survived exists only in translation, primarily, as I said earlier, in Chinese and Tibetan. Consequently, we know from the outset that when we study this literature we cannot reconstruct a complete picture of Indian Buddhism. The most we can do is take a scattered jigsaw puzzle, many of whose pieces have long been lost, and fashion some sort of coherent and, one would hope, compelling image out of what remains. The question is: How can we go about making the most of the evidence that we do have?

We must start at the beginning. If we would like to be able to understand what Buddhist authors meant, we need to know what these authors actually said. There is a word for the one and only valid approach to this task, a term mysteriously in disfavor in some quarters these days, being seen perhaps as old-fashioned, stodgy or insufficiently theoretical. This word is philology, the scientific study of texts.

I confess to you that I am a positivist. I believe that there is right and wrong, that not every reading of a text is a valid reading, that some evidence is better and some worse. I consequently insist on basing textual scholarship on sources which have been forged in the crucible of the philological furnace. Let me be less poetic. We must establish a text before we imagine we can know what its author meant. To establish a text we need to consider all sources; we need to collect and collate and compare and to judge. We cannot simply take any
printed book off our shelves - or heaven forbid, from some website! - and naively accept it as “the text”. And we must consider too what the tradition itself says about this text and its meaning. While it is not a matter of all or nothing, but rather of gradual and incremental progress, in this respect, scholars of Indian Buddhism are centuries behind critical biblical scholars. Yet, challenges are opportunities. Simply as one almost random example, I cannot help but feel some envy when I read the pages that Emanuel Tov devotes to bilingual concordances in his *Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research* since few comparable works exist for us in Buddhist Studies. But I also feel giddy with excitement, for to a very great extent, the field of the comparative study of Buddhist Sanskrit literature and its Tibetan or Chinese translations is unplowed ground. The very immaturity of our field guarantees a bountiful harvest to those who would tend it well. And this is not to mention the likelihood that our experience and results will in turn prove to be of interest and value to our colleagues in biblical studies, all the more so if we consciously think of our task also in these terms.

These opportunities present themselves in many dimensions. As I was preparing these remarks on lying in Buddhist thought, I was struck by Kant’s observation in his *Metaphysics of Morals* that “telling an untruth intentionally, even though merely frivolously, is usually called a lie, because it can also harm someone.” While Kant goes on, for his own reasons, to offer a different definition of a lie, the similarity of what he terms the common definition to the Buddhist formulation I cited earlier is interesting. An enormous amount has been written about Kant’s views on lies, as on all else, but none of this, to my knowledge, so much as tangentially refers to Buddhist ideas. I hasten to insist that I have no wish to return to the bad old days when Buddhist philosophical texts were read through a Kantian lens. Buddhism must be understood in the first place on Buddhist terms, and Buddhist scholars must do their part to bring Buddhist materials into wider discussions. I do not wish in this or any other context to judge what Buddhist authors have to say, neither to criticize them, nor to praise them for their anticipation of modern so-called discoveries. I only wish to have their ideas take their rightful place in the larger conversation.

And this brings me to the next point: Buddhism surely exists as much in the present as it does in the past, it changes and evolves, and we can ignore neither the past nor the present if we hope for an organic appreciation of the tradition. Contemporary Buddhists can and should be both our colleagues and our resources in our scholarly endeavors. In his own Oratie delivered here - on this very podium - over 50 years ago, the first incumbent of the chair I am now honored to occupy, Jan Willem de Jong, lamented that in the past non-Japanese scholars had not sufficiently appreciated the work of their Japanese colleagues. He went on to observe, however, what he called a “noticeable change” in this regard. I am afraid that Prof. de Jong was being somewhat over-optimistic. To be sure, scholars of East Asian Buddhism are keenly aware of the importance of Japanese work, but even now quite few of those who focus on India, Tibet, Sri Lanka or Southeast Asia take the trouble to study the Japanese language. On the other hand, Prof. de Jong was right in observing even 50 years ago “a growing tendency” among Japanese scholars to make their work more accessible by publishing in English. Most of these scholars, moreover, are themselves Buddhist priests. Our interaction with these colleagues cannot and should not ignore this. Buddhism is an object of study from one viewpoint, simultaneously a foundation of life from another.
In this regard, it continues to puzzle me that I quite often encounter an unwillingness to acknowledge Buddhism as a religion. This is related, I think, to a refusal to take Buddhism seriously. I would be a happy man had I a nickel - that’s a small denomination American coin - for every time I have been told that Buddhism is not a religion, but rather a philosophy, a way of life. This is more than a rhetorical strategy by which an interested Westerner allows himself to explore Buddhism without feeling an apostate for doing so. For it derives its validity only by denying Buddhist traditions their intrinsic identity, and Buddhists - traditional, Asian Buddhists - their autonomy. Once one denies that Buddhism is a religion, it ceases to be an integral part of anyone’s life. Buddhism becomes something optional, adventitious, incidental even to the people whose lives it structures. For Westerners disaffected with religion, this may be a happy solution. But at least for the scholar, it is an impossibility, for it constitutes a refusal to acknowledge the tradition in its multiplicity and complexity, or even in its most intrinsic nature. At the same moment, why and how Buddhism, even if transformed, is gaining ground in the West is also an important topic of inquiry in its own right.

The study of Buddhism in the university will therefore involve both an appreciation for its past and for its present. It will communicate with contemporary Buddhists, and it will engage the literature of those who lived centuries and even millennia ago. The fundamental requirements for such a study include solid linguistic competences, historical and cultural awareness, unbridled curiosity and imagination, and, of course, plenty of sitzfleisch. It also requires an environment in which such study and research are supported and actively encouraged.

Recent circumstances prompt me to be direct. The only way to attract and - dare I say it? - to retain qualified staff is to acknowledge - with deeds, and not just with words - the rightful place of the study of Buddhism in any humanistic curriculum, for precisely the reasons I have outlined a few moments ago. If one wants to acknowledge the study of Buddhism as a field worthy of a Chair, as my appointment suggests is indeed the case, one cannot expect it to act merely as a handmaiden to other studies. To be sure, teaching in Buddhism can and should support wider agendas in a Faculty of Arts, in East-Asian Studies, in Religion, in Art History, and so on. But without concrete support, encouragement and appreciation of the study in its own right, it will wither and die. The promise of dynamic synergies with other fields will be possible only if the Buddhist Studies program is itself vital and vibrant.

My own main field of research is Indian Buddhism. For my research and advanced teaching to be possible, Indian Studies must prosper. Concrete support for the Chair consequently means that sufficient staff must be available to teach the languages and other skills requisite to the study of India, that students, and particularly graduate students, must be supported and funded, and that research must be enabled. To make this possible, we - staff and administrators together - will need to look beyond conventional funding models for creative means to ensure that Buddhist Studies flourish. It is precisely the unique nature of my chair in this country, the centrality of it in Leiden’s research foci on Asia and World Religions, and the fact that potential strong partners abound in the Buddhist world that make me confident of the creation of an environment conducive to the flourishing of the field. I therefore look forward to leading an invigorated and invigorating program in the Study of Buddhism at Leiden.
University, one in which undergraduate studies, focused graduate work and world-class research symbiotically sustain our learning, forge new alliances with colleagues near and far, and lead us toward new insights, toward an ever-deepening understanding, not only of the tradition we study, but also between those of us in the academy and those living in the world we seek to comprehend.

I would like to - I must - in the very first place thank my beloved Mother and Father. Mere words can in no way express my infinite debt to them, one which I could not repay even were I, following a Buddhist image, to carry them about on my shoulders for a hundred years. They have supported and encouraged me even, or especially, when it was unclear that there would be much reward at the end of the trek.

To my wife and partner Yoko, you’ve stuck by me through thick and thin - and far too much thin, I’m afraid. You’ve sacrificed your own career for my sake and for the sake of our sons, twice over becoming a stranger in a strange land. I cannot express sufficiently my gratitude for your love and support: 誠に有り難う.

To our boys Benjamin and Oliver. You’ve been very good today - you see, I wrote that in my speech because I knew you would be good. You guys make every day a delight. When I’m with you, I can’t get any work done - and I thank you for that too. Goed gedaan!

Colleagues and coworkers in the Kern Institute, Professors Vetter and Griffiths, and all those in the department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, the Faculty of Arts, and beyond who worked to make my appointment possible, to welcome me and make me feel I belong, thank you. I deeply appreciate the environment you have created, and your dedication and passion to making the study and teaching of Buddhism in Leiden a success. To the deans and former deans who have supported this position, Deans Booij, Drees and van den Doel, I thank you for your backing, guidance, and friendship. I must also certainly and emphatically mention with profound gratitude the Gonda Foundation, and the members of its board of directors, whose financial contribution insured the continuation of the chair.

A special thank you too to those whom I have met since coming to Leiden, colleagues, students and neighbors, who have helped us begin to feel at home here.

Institutions are people, and also more than people. I would like, therefore, to take this opportunity to emphasize how very essential to my work, both my research and my teaching, are the resources of the world-renowned Kern Institute Library. Its splendid holdings, and the liberal manner in which it makes them available in an open-stack system, should be models for other similar specialist libraries. Its professional and highly qualified staff makes every visit a profitable pleasure. In fact, since truth is the order of the day, I should confess that I was familiar with the Kern Institute long before I had any awareness of Leiden University as a whole. To be able to work down the hall from such a library, which I use on an almost daily basis, is indeed a privilege.

Finally, I cannot fail to remember on this occasion my revered teacher Gadjin M. Nagao, whose scholarship and humanity is always before me as a beacon, although he is no more in this world.
It is thanks to these and many, many other wonderful people
that I feel as if I am indeed, though a dwarf, standing on the
shoulders of giants - and that’s no lie.

_Ik heb gezegd_
Notes


7. For instance in the Mahāyāna scripture *Kāśyapaṇaparivarta* §4.


12 In Chapter 4 of the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya; see Prahlad Pradhan, Abhidharmakośabhāṣya of Vasubandhu, Tibetan Sanskrit Works 8 (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975): 218-9-15: atha kasmāt mṛṣāvādād viratir evopāsakasairvarāśikāpadaṃ na paśunyāddivirātāḥ | ebhir eva ca tribhīḥ kāraṇāīḥ | mṛṣāvādātigārhyatvatāt saukyāyād akrīyāptītaḥ | mṛṣāvādāprapāngac ca sarvaśiśāyavatikrame | (34ab) sarvatra hi śiśāyavatam samanuyujyamānasopapasthitam idam bhavati nāham evam akārṣam* iti mṛṣāvādāya prasango bhavaty ato mṛṣāvādād viratir vidhīyate |

* Pradhan prints ahāṛṣam, which is corrected here with Funahashi Issai 舟橋一哉, Kasharon no Genten Kaimei Gobon 仏舎論の原典解明 業品 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan 法蔵館, 1987): 192 n. 1, who refers to Tib. ma byas so and Chinese 不作. Without access to the manuscript, I do not know whether ahāṛṣam is a genuine reading or a misprint in Pradhan’s edition.


14 Ārya-bodhisattvavacara-upayavişayavikurvānirdēsa = Ārya-satyakaparivarta, sTog Kanjur 246, mdo sde, la 5433-1a; Derge Kanjur 146, mdo sde, pa 117b7-118a4: rgyal po chen po khyod de ltar gtum pa | de ltar kho ba | de ltar zhe sdang ba | de ltar gzu lums’ can gyi spyan sngar bdag ‘di ltar yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du smra ba ni | bdag kyang ha cang ngor ro bar smra ba lags te | bdag ni de khon smra bar gyur to | rgyal po chen po ṃkhas pas ni dus thams cad du yang dag pa ji lta ba bzhin du’i smra ma bgyi’o | rgyal po chen po ṃkhas pas ni dus dang dus ma lags pa dang | yul dang yul ma lags pa tshal par bgyi’o | de ci’i slad du zhe na | rgyal po chen po yang dag smra ba ni jig rten yid mi bde zhing mi dga’ bar ‘gyur te | des pa ṃams kyi ṃi bsgags shing | gle ṃi’i skye bo ṃams zhe sdang bar ’gyur ba’i slad du’o | gang zhi yang dag smra bgyid cing | smra dus dus min ma tshal ba | de ni ṃkhas pas smad ‘gyur na | jig rten gzhan lta ci zhih smos | de bas bden pa’i tshig lags kyang | blo ldan kun tu smra mi bgyi’ | bdag kyang ’dir ṃi’i ltar bur | bden smas rang la gnod par gyur | 1) S lum 2) D o | 3) S o du 4) S bgyid The Chinese translation in T. 272 (IX) 341c13-342a9 (juan 5) differs slightly.


17 Surveys of Buddhist ethics, for instance, generally offer merely a few pages in a discussion of the Five Precepts. A somewhat more detailed examination, although with an emphasis on lying about one’s spiritual attainments, is given by Sugimoto Takushō 杉本卓洲, “Mōgokai to shōninhō” 妄語戒と上人法 [The rule against lying and the attainments of a sage], Naritasan Bukkyō Kenkyūjo Kiyō 成田山仏教研究所紀要 11 (Bukkyō Shisōshi Ronshū 仏教研究所叢書).

The translation is that of Jacob Milgrom, Leviticus 17-22. Anchor Bible 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000): 1298; see also p. 1631.


Babylonian Talmud, Arachin 15b.


I do not know that there exists any “original source” for this tale, which I retell here based on the renditions I have seen.


In deze reeks verschijnen teksten van oraties en afscheidscolleges.

Meer informatie over Leidse hoogleraren:
Leidsewetenschappers.Leidenuniv.nl
Jonathan Silk comes to Leiden University having taught at Grinnell College, Western Michigan University, Yale University and UCLA. He studied at Oberlin College (BA 1983 in East Asian Studies), Doshisha University (Kyoto, Japan), The University of Michigan (MA 1988, Ph.D. 1994, both in Buddhist Studies), Kyoto University and Ryukoku University (both Kyoto, Japan). He is the author of a number of studies, including two books in the press: *Riven by Lust: Incest and Schism in Indian Buddhist Legend and Historiography* (University of Hawaii Press) and *Managing Monks: Administrators and Administrative Roles in Indian Buddhist Monasticism* (Oxford University Press). His primary research focus is the Buddhist literature of India, especially earlier scriptures of the Mahayana movement, and the culture and environment of the world in which these scriptures were produced.