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Review Article



Origins of the Mahāyāna

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Abstract

A new volume, *Setting Out on the Great Way: Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism* (2018), collects essays on questions related to the origins of the Mahāyāna Buddhist movement. This review article considers the contributions, and offers a few observations on the state of the field.

Keywords

Mahāyāna origins – Abhidharma – sūtras – Buddhism

Paul Harrison, ed., *Setting Out on the Great Way: Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism*. Sheffield: Equinox, 2018. 310pp., 35 plates. ISBN-13 (Hardback) 9781781790960; (Paperback) 9781781798539; (eBook) 9781781796856. Hardback £75.00 / \$100.00; Paperback £26.99 / \$34.00; eBook £26.99 / \$34.00.

Some time ago, the subject of the origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism was, at least among a small group of scholars, a hot topic. In recent years, however, the heat seems to have diminished significantly. Nevertheless, as the editor of the volume here under consideration, Paul Harrison, says in his introductory essay, “Early Mahāyāna: Laying out the Field,” there may be more to say on

the question, especially now that we are in possession of a number of new sources, and of course old ideas can be fruitfully reconsidered as well. Based on papers presented at a 2012 conference, eight scholars here offer contributions on topics related to the emergence of the Mahāyāna movement(s). I will discuss the chapters in their order of appearance in the volume. After a consideration of the volume, I offer a few observations on the state of the field.

The volume opens with a brief appreciation by Russell Webb, “Sara Boin-Webb: Translator of Buddhist Texts,” in which it is mentioned that, in addition to numerous publications in English of various works by Étienne Lamotte, monographic and otherwise, Ms. Boin-Webb also prepared a complete English translation of Lamotte’s classic translation of the *Da zhidu lun*. It is highly unfortunate, and indeed not understandable, that this remains unpublished by Peeters in Belgium. All those interested in Buddhist Studies as a broad discipline cannot help but share in Russell Webb’s extreme consternation at this fact.¹ What is more, I know from conversations years ago that the late Hubert Durt had revised the translation, paying special attention to the narrative sections which, he told me, attracted Prof. Lamotte’s attention less than did the philosophical portions of the text. As if that were not enough, we learn from a recent paper that a sixth volume of supplements and corrections was also prepared by Durt (or perhaps this overlaps with the revisions just mentioned?), but it likewise has not yet seen the light of day, even in French.² It is hard to understand this lamentable circumstance. Thanks to the years-long efforts of Sara Boin-Webb, readers who cannot manage French have been able to access many of the riches of Lamotte’s tremendously valuable scholarship in English, and the publication of his master work as a capstone to these efforts would be an extremely welcome gift.

As mentioned above, Paul Harrison’s introductory essay opens the volume proper, and there he sets out in brief the current state of affairs. He writes (p. 9) of “a more complex and nuanced picture of Mahāyāna as pluralistic, as a loose set of interrelated doctrinal ideas, ritual practices and literary forms rather than as a single bounded entity, as spanning all the *nikāyas* and not institutionally separate from them (at least in India), as a movement or set of movements for

1 There does exist an English version freely available on the web, produced by Gelongma Karma Migme Chodron. At present (March 2020), it can be found here: <https://archive.org/details/MahaPrajnaparamitaSastrFullByNagarjuna/page/n14/mode/2up>. However, unfortunately this translation suffers from a rather large number of mistakes and typos.

2 Midori Nishino, “Étienne Lamotte: Translator of the *Da zhidu lun*.” *Foguang xuebao* 佛光學報 (Fo Guang Journal of Buddhist Studies) 6.1 (2020): 73–121. See p. 85.

renunciants, and not just for the laity (or not *even* for the laity), and as entailing different—and possibly more demanding—forms of self-engagement and asceticism, rather than a wholesale turn to devotion.” Concerning the subject, Harrison (pp. 9–10) is content to say that “It may well be fair enough to say that the defining characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism is a concern with the pursuit of the bodhisattva path, but that does not get us very far, since we are not sure what that meant in concrete terms, apart from the fact that Mahāyāna sutras have a lot to say about bodhisattvas.” In engaging with the so-called forest hypothesis, and anticipating the critique of it by David Drewes (see below), Harrison (p. 11) makes the crucial point that “early Mahāyāna was not a single movement.” He also questions the translation “forest” for *araṇya* and the problem of associations, but he does not enter into consideration of the fact that generally in the premodern world, wilderness, jungle and the like were not positive places. While we moderns are prone to positive associations with “nature,” often going out of our way to venture into wild spaces, in the premodern view, such places were regions of danger and potential death. As long as we are considering how to render concepts and words, we need to take such notions into account.³

Following a brief and inconclusive consideration of the “role of the laity,” Harrison turns to Mahāyāna sūtras and their periodization, and makes the important point that their dating is a highly fraught issue, a point noted in different ways by several of the contributors to the volume. The utility of Chinese translations in this regard is complex, and the use of other sources likewise requires careful thought. Harrison asserts (p. 15) that “what we need to do is develop a systematic and detailed internal chronology of Mahāyāna sutras using not simply the *śāstras* which cite those sutras but also those Mahāyāna sutras themselves which cite or allude to other Mahāyāna sutras before them—in effect a comprehensive mapping project which charts every nexus and link there is to be found.” After discussing several cases in which he sees intertextuality, he finds (p. 16) that “The map of that intertextuality, once drawn, can then be compared with the information we have about the Chinese translations to see if any significant correlations are to be found” I wholeheartedly agree

3 In this regard, we should probably start with research such as that of Joachim Friedrich Sprockhoff, “Āraṇyaka und Vānaprastha in der Vedischen Literatur: Neue Erwägungen zu einer alten Legende und ihren Problemen.” *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens* 25 (1981): 19–90; 28 (1984): 5–43, and Patrick Olivelle, “Village vs. Wilderness: Ascetic Ideals and the Hindu World.” In Austin B. Creel and Vasudha Narayanan, eds. *Monastic Life in the Christian and Hindu Traditions. Studies in Comparative Religion* 3 (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990): 125–160.

with this project, which is in fact one of the goals of the Open Philology project I now lead (www.openphilology.eu). It is a long-term goal, but one which can at least in part be addressed by technical means including text mining and similar techniques. More details are to be found in the resources on the site just given, and see below.

Harrison continues his survey by rejecting the idea of a special relation between the Mahāyāna and the Mahāsāṃghika (a particular fascination most recently of the late and much missed Seishi Karashima), stating (p. 17) “we assume that the Mahāyāna ran across *nikāya* boundaries right from the start, and was no respecter of such organisational distinctions, which pertained to a different level of involvement in Buddhism.” Mahāyāna, in this view, is a category which sits on a different logical (and different institutional) level than *nikāya* association. Harrison also makes the highly important point that we should not assume a chronological sequence from so-called Mainstream or Śrāvakayāna Buddhism to the Mahāyāna, and that consequently to seek influences from the former to the latter can be a misguided project. This is a point not taken up by any of the contributors, but several do address the relationship between Abhidharma and the birth, or at least the early situation, of the Mahāyāna, and here too we need not imagine a unidirectional relation.

A next consideration is the ongoing utility of the ground-breaking ideas of Gregory Schopen. While lauding much of this work, Harrison also questions, for instance, Schopen's identification of *paramopāsaka* as a Mahāyāna label. After touching on inscriptional and art-historical evidence, Harrison turns to recent manuscript discoveries from the Gandhāra region, offering (p. 22) the astute observation that “the fact that we are turning up Gāndhārī fragments of previously unknown texts, with no parallels in the Chinese and Tibetan canons, suggests an iceberg phenomenon: these manuscripts are indicating that below the waterline, as it were, there is an enormous quantity of Mahāyāna literature which must have existed during this early period and has now been lost.” I think that this is true, but not surprising. Part of the reason for my lack of surprise is that we already knew that there also exists an unpredictable volume of previously unknown sūtra material in the libraries of Tibet (and increasingly, it seems, in private collections in China), one small example of which was published several years ago.⁴ It is not, therefore, only the new Gāndhārī sources which should motivate our awareness of the limited access we have to what

4 See Bhikṣuṇī Vinītā, *A unique collection of twenty sūtras in a Sanskrit manuscript from the Potala: Editions and translation* [Sanskrit texts from the Tibetan Autonomous Region 7] (Beijing: China Tibetology Publishing House / Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2010), and my review “Buddhist Sūtras in Sanskrit from the Potala.” *Indo Iranian Journal* 56 (2013): 61–87.

was once a much broader literary corpus (and I expect that Harrison would also agree with this slight expansion of his point).

Harrison concludes (p. 23) with the idea that while the field of Mahāyāna studies is not moribund, “this form of religion can only be understood in terms of the matrix in which it developed, and indeed in terms of the matrix of Indian culture more generally, still woefully neglected by Buddhist scholars early Mahāyāna is not a single, sudden turn in a new direction at one particular stage on the road taken by Buddhism, but a nexus of multiple impulses combining and unfolding in a long historical trajectory which began before the Common Era and continued well into the first millennium.” It would have been superb if this broad vision could have informed the volume as a whole, but at least to my mind, this is a promise which is not fulfilled by the papers themselves, at least taken as a whole. This suggests that, far from this volume being unnecessary, it too should be the tip of an iceberg of careful, historically and culturally broad studies of the early Mahāyāna, which we might look forward to in the future.

The first research paper of the volume is Peter Skilling’s “How the Unborn was Born: The Riddle of Mahāyāna Origins.” Skilling is one of the most widely read scholars working on Indian (and Southeast Asian) Buddhism today, and his broad familiarity with the primary sources in Pāli, Sanskrit and Tibetan translation is legendary. His studies always present considerable evidence, often from a range of sources rarely noticed by others, and his accumulations of this evidence are very valuable. His theme here he articulates as follows: “It strikes me that Mahāyāna ideology departs from the early Āgamas on (at least) two major points. First, Mahāyāna advocates the way to buddhahood, the bodhisattva path Second, Mahāyāna metaphysics assert that all dharmas are unborn and unceasing.” This provides the structure for his presentation, and he offers many examples of textual expressions of the importance of his two themes, namely: not cutting off the lineage of the buddhas, and reference to *anutpattikadharmakṣānti*. Indeed, these themes are very often referred to in Mahāyāna scriptures, and while the impressions and intuitions of experienced readers, such as Skilling, are very precious guides, it is now possible to approach this question also in a different way. It is now technically possible, that is, to test and expand the impressions gained from broad—but, of course, always limited—human reading by deploying tools of Digital Humanities to, for example, produce a topic model of, in this case, even the entire Kanjur. Topic models are statistical models produced by text-mining, and help locate (perhaps otherwise invisible) patterns and structures in a set of texts, based on frequencies and occurrences of terms and their distributions. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of the details of this type of approach, but it should suffice to say that if deployed on a corpus such as the Tibetan Kanjur (or the Chinese

canon), it should allow us to map (and hence to visualize) topics which occur in this corpus, and it can do so on a scale impossible for a human being (at least within any reasonable amount of time). That is to say, while a single individual can, with good knowledge and much time, read widely, the vastness of even the partially preserved library of Indian Buddhist literature (see above) is too great for a human to keep in mind (or on note cards). This is not true for machines. An approach such as that of topic modeling can produce, through appropriate algorithms, network visualizations in which texts, or portions of texts, are connected to topics, and these indicate at least the most commonly discussed themes, for example. This type of treatment of the corpus is bound to be more scientific—in the sense that it would be less prone to personal interpretation and more reproducible—than the impressions even of an extremely well-read scholar working alone.⁵ We can be fully justified in expecting that such technical approaches will become more common, and allow us to confirm impressions that we already have, perhaps challenge them, and reveal trends which we simply did not notice heretofore.

After citing examples from several texts, Skilling (p. 45) concludes “It is justifiable to conclude that the notion of the continuity or non-disruption of the three jewels was widely used, even pervasive, in Mahāyāna literature, and was a significant motive for the aspiration towards awakening and the bodhisattva path.” It seems to me that the point of the expressions noticed by Skilling is that there will be buddhas into the future, and these buddhas will come from bodhisattvas. The bodhisattva path is meaningful because of the assurance that bodhisattvas become buddhas, thus assuring the continuity of Buddhism as the teaching of buddhas, beyond our present situation, namely, a world in which there is no buddha, since the Buddha Śākyamuni is no more. I may have misunderstood Skilling here, however, but while vitally important, this does not seem like a new or surprising result, and I am not sure it required a paper to establish this. In any event, as always, Skilling has brought important materials to our attention.

A final small point is Skilling’s use of several expressions I do not understand. Skilling mentions (p. 35) “the lineage of omniscience (*sarvajñatā-vaṃśa*; I take the last named as equivalent to *Buddha-vaṃśa*).” He refers in a note to a remark of Jan Nattier, but nowhere does Nattier mention the word *sarvajñatā-vaṃśa*,

5 Such an investigation has been undertaken as a pilot project by Gregory Forgues in a Tibetan context, and presented as a paper at the 2019 International Association of Tibetan Studies meeting in Paris: “Seeing the Forest for the Trees: Text Mining Strategies to analyze the Rimed Network of Discourses: ‘Ju Mi pham rnam rgyal rgya mtsho’s Collected Works as a Case Study.” Forgues is now preparing this for publication.

which I have been unable to locate. On p. 41 Skilling refers to *sarvajñācitta*, which he translates as “thought of omniscience,” and his quotation shows that the basis of his Sanskrit reconstruction (not marked as such) is *thams cad mkhyen pa'i sems*. At least the Sanskrit should mean “the thought/mind of the Omniscient One,” namely the Buddha.⁶ Finally, in the bibliography something has gone wrong after the citation of Dehejia and Rockwell's 2015 *The Unfinished*. This is followed by three entries for which the author is ———, indicating Dehejia and Rockwell, but the author of which is rather Bhikshu Dharmamitra. All three cited entries being without name suggests that a first entry with the name may have disappeared, but if so I am not sure what it would have been (or perhaps the order has been disturbed).

As mentioned above, David Drewes addresses “The Forest Hypothesis.” Here he sets out his objections to the idea that, as he quotes Paul Harrison, “the Mahāyāna ... was the work of hard-core ascetics, members of the forest-dwelling (*araṇyavāsin*) wing of the Buddhist Order.” Despite framing his discussion around Harrison's formulation, a great deal of his attention here is dedicated to the rhetoric of Gregory Schopen, arguing that Schopen has hugely overstated his case. To be sure, Schopen's rhetorical approach is often to exaggerate and, what is more, he rarely gives consideration to weaknesses in his own arguments. That said, provided that one is sufficiently familiar with the source material, it is sometimes possible to take good advantage of the evidence arrayed by Schopen, to extract from his contributions his intriguing hypotheses, and then to fill in for oneself what Schopen himself may have omitted to say, particularly with regard to possible counter-evidence. Drewes himself has quite sufficient familiarity with the material to make this possible and profitable.

Given that his project involves investigating the origins of the Mahāyāna movement (I will return to the singular “the” in a moment), Drewes is quite right to point out that perhaps none of the scriptures we have now can possibly go back to the formative period of the movement in the form in which we have them. Given that, it is unfortunate that Drewes, for reasons he does not elucidate, states (p. 84) that, of the passages cited by Reginald Ray in his well known *Buddhist Saints in India* (1994), “Of these, only the *Ratna-guṇa*[-

6 However, the Sanskrit reconstruction might not be correct. In the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* § X.17, we find *sarvajñātācitta* (MS 63b1) as equivalent to *thams cad mkhyen pa'i sems*. On the other hand, it is interesting that the Tibetan terminology appears in a text discussed several times in this volume, the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha*, for which see Satō Naomi 佐藤直美, “*Ashukubukkoku kyō* Chibettogoyaku shiryō ni tsuite” 『阿閼仏国経』チベット語訳資料について. *Nihon Bukkyō gakkai nenpō* 日本仏教学会年報 66 (2001): 35–47, on p. 36, where she correctly translates *thams cad mkhyen pa'i sems* as “一切智者の心.”

sañcaya-gāthā], a version of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in verse, seems likely to be early” On the contrary, there is very good evidence that the *Ratnaḡaṇasañcaya-gāthā*, far from being early, is especially late, perhaps dating to the 6th or 7th century CE. This is not the place to elaborate my reasons for believing this, which consider not only (the lack of) attestations but also the language and metre of the text, which I consider highly likely to be artificially archaic.⁷ The point however only reinforces the idea that we have little or no access to the earlier strata of the Mahāyāna. However, since Drewes’s dating of the *Ratnaḡaṇasañcayagāthā* does not appear to affect his argument in any fundamental way, it need not be further considered here. Drewes wants, however, to argue that there is only slim evidence for a concern with forest dwelling in the earliest texts, and thus his concern with dating as such is not irrelevant. He finds that in the texts cited by scholars whose works he criticizes, chiefly Harrison, Schopen and Ray, only two of which (p. 85) “we know were composed in the second century or before, the *Pratyutpanna[-buddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhī]* and *Ugra-paripṛcchā*, can plausibly be said to advocate forest dwelling or ascetic practice, and they do so only indifferently or inconsistently.” He further asserts that the claims for the forest hypothesis do not rest on evidence but are rather derived from theories such as “the old decline-and-revival model of Buddhist history.” At the end of his contribution (p. 87), Drewes tells us where this all leads: “The buddhahood Mahāyānists sought was not the thin, this-worldly, religious experience of modern apologists, but a state of omniscience and nearly infinite power and glory to be attained in another world after death. Though they remain largely unexplored, the primary methods that Mahāyāna sutras recommend for pursuing this goal are magical or supernatural means of generating merit (*puṇya*) that would be difficult to construe as having any special value in secular discourse.” While not wishing to deny that there are ample Mahāyāna scriptural sources concerned with power and glory, I believe that the assertion here is subject to the same basic problem as (at least the one-dimensional version of) the above-mentioned forest hypothesis, namely that if we think of one Mahāyāna and one cause or causal nexus of “the” movement, we will always be able to find evidence which contradicts that hypothesis. And that is because different communities produced different scriptures at different times with different agendas, different rhetorics, replying to different situations, none of which we know independently and therefore all of which we must imagine from the responses of these very scriptures themselves. As soon

7 For one attempt to offer some considerations about perhaps intentionally archaized metrical texts, see J.A. Silk, “The Nature of the Verses of the *Kāśyapaparivarta*.” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 23 (Evo şuyadi: Essays in Honor of Richard Salomon’s 65th Birthday, 2013): 181–190.

as we are willing to accept both that we do not have evidence for the earliest formative periods of the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, and that the evidence we do have (most of which, of course, as preserved in Tibetan and Chinese translation has as yet been very little studied, some not at all) is multivocal, we will be able to do away with quarrels as to “the” real origins of the movement(s). I suspect that Drewes himself would not object to this conclusion.

One final point I wish to mention about Drewes’s essay concerns a note (p. 88n6) which reads “While taking the *Vimalakīrti* as evidence for the lay-origin theory [of the Mahāyāna–JAS] is surely no longer tenable, Jonathan Silk’s recent suggestion that the text represents an ‘extremely conservative, even reactionary, work’ seems baseless.” Of course, my idea may be wrong and even misguided, but my paper was (I think) a closely reasoned attempt precisely to provide bases for this claim, and it is not fair of Drewes to ignore the reasoning which stood behind the claim, nor the bases which I tried to offer. David Drewes has contributed and continues to contribute to our field by challenging orthodoxies, and this can be only welcomed, but I would hope that in future he might show somewhat more respect for the arguments and evidence that other scholars have actually presented. If Drewes feels that my suggestions are baseless, that is fine, but he should explain *why* he rejects the bases I did offer.

Daniel Boucher begins his contribution “Recruitment and Retention in Early Bodhisattva Sodalities” with the following: “Perhaps the most fundamental question to wrestle with in thinking about the origins of the Mahāyāna is why some new fissure erupted in the Buddhist tradition that became the cluster of movements lumped together under this label. It is not at all obvious that such a set of movements was inevitable in the history of Buddhism” I am puzzled here by two things: what evidence is there for any “fissure”? And given that it is entirely teleological to claim that anything in history is “inevitable,” what does it contribute to our understanding to reject inevitability in this case? Perhaps this is only Boucher’s rhetorical way of saying that the rise of the Mahāyāna is a landmark in the history of Buddhism, and this is certainly true, but if this is what he meant, I find it an odd expression. There are, in addition, other examples of assertions in Boucher’s essay which I find problematic. He goes on (p. 96). for instance, in discussing the forest hypothesis to state that it “accounts for how monks could produce a massive new literature independently of *śrāvaka*-dominated monasteries,” following this with the assertion that meditation is “a practice that frequently drew monks of all stripes to the periphery of the civilised world.” His next sentence speaks of “the critique of monastic culture so common in much of Mahāyāna literature.” I

do not think that there is evidence for any of these assumptions, namely that Mahāyāna scriptural literature was produced independently of monasteries, that anyone went to the periphery of the civilized world (how, in this exile, did they manage to eat, if they were not located in regions which could provide material support?), or that Mahāyāna literature has any pervasive critique of monastic culture. On the contrary, there is ample reason to assume the polar opposites of each of these assumptions. Boucher makes clear how he understands the dichotomy when he asks (p. 97) “Whether the authors of these texts [= Mahāyāna sūtras] were housed in sedentary monasteries or chose a life apart in the forest.” However, these assumptions are crucial for Boucher, because the topic he wishes to address is (p. 97) “some kind of theory of recruitment and retention that will help us understand two problems that confront us in many early Mahāyāna sutras: first, what would draw some monks from the *śrāvaka* orientation to a minority sect on the fringe of prosperity, prestige and respectability? Second, how did bodhisattva fraternities manage to shore up member commitment against the temptation to revert to the Mainstream?” Boucher attempts to answer these questions by deploying the notion of New Religious Movements. I also believe that this could be a fruitful theoretical approach.

Boucher examines two Mahāyāna scriptures, the **Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha* and the **Kāśyapaparivarta*.⁸ Of the former, he states that his interest stems from (pp. 100–101) “the way it appears to actively recruit from the *śrāvaka* ranks.” He concludes that chapter 3 of the text (p. 103) “could only have been intended to be read or heard by monks still committed to the *śrāvaka* orientation.” I do not necessarily disagree with this, but I do find notable the broad absence of reference to previous scholarship. Boucher, for instance, translates a portion of the sūtra (p. 101), without notice that this (in fact chapters 1–3) had already been translated in a work actually listed in his bibliography, namely the partial (though lavishly annotated) translation of Jean Dantinne.⁹ What is more, Satō Naomi studied chapter 3 in a paper of 2002 in which she already considered the questions asked here again by Boucher, and one year later she translated the text in its entirety in her thesis (see n. 8).¹⁰

8 Concerning the title of the former, see Satō Naomi 佐藤直実: *Zōkanyaku Ashukubukko-kukyō hikaku kenkyū* 藏漢訳『阿閼佉国経』比較研究, PhD thesis, Kyoto University, 2003: 6–8; the title **Kāśyapaparivarta* is only conventional for what surely originally was *Ratnakūṭa*.

9 *La Splendeur de l'Inébranlable (Akṣobhyavyūha)*. Publications de l'Institut Orientaliste de Louvain 29 (Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 1983). The passage in question is translated by Dantinne on p. 181 f.

10 Satō Naomi 佐藤直実. “*Zōkanyaku Ashukubukkōkukyō no hikaku kenkyū* (san): daisan-

Boucher next turns to the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, which in contrast to the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha* he considers to be directed to insiders. He writes (p. 104) “[W]e can assume, I think, that the author expected this to circulate only internally within one or more bodhisattva sodalities, since criticism of one’s fellow bodhisattvas is specifically proscribed and dangerous to advertise to those outside the fold, who may very well be critical of such a group already.” I do not know exactly to what Boucher might be referring here, though it is true that in § 3 of the *Kāśyapaparivarta* it is stated to be a fault to disparage those set out in the Mahāyāna. Be that as it may, Boucher goes on to mention that the text is extremely strict toward “those who assume the appearance of a rigorous ascetic but who do so deceptively, without the discipline proper to the lifestyle, so as to attract undeserved honour and patronage. In so far as the fortunes of Mahāyāna communities were tied to maintaining stricter expectations so as to control membership and reinforce a stronger religious identity, such deception within the fold could not be tolerated.” If I understand this correctly, I do not follow the reasoning here; it seems to me in the first place—and this is implied in Boucher’s own words, but then seemingly not followed up—to be an economic question: if patrons find monks unworthy of devotion, they will not donate, and this will signal the end of the community. I do not see how religious identity enters into the picture here, unless the point were to be that the Mahāyāna communities had separate institutional loci than did the non-Mahāyāna communities. Is this is what Boucher is suggesting?

Boucher concludes from his considerations (p. 111) “that the author of the [*Kāśyapaparivarta*], in all likelihood, confronted a much more hostile environment, such that his clearer delimitation of the boundaries between *śrāvakas* and bodhisattvas also required much more attention to member attrition, since new recruits will always be under the most temptation to reduce tension with their environment. In contrast, the author of the [*Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha*] would seem to have been more comfortable that bodhisattvas aligned with this text could interact freely with Buddhists of all stripes and vocations. In fact, this interaction seems to have been a central strategy to expand the social network through which recruitment to his bodhisattva sodality could be made to appear more attractive to outsiders.” What Boucher seems not to consider here is how this scenario might be linked to origins of the early Mahāyāna. He wants to situate the authors of the two texts in social circumstances (his “social milieu” on p. 111 should evidently therefore be “social milieux”), but he offers no method by

shō o chūshin ni shite” 藏漢訳『阿閼佉国経』比較研究 (3). 第三章を中心にして.
Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū 印度學仏教學研究 50.2 (2002): 915–912 (122–125).

which we might make the leap between the rhetoric of a text and a social reality of its author, other than his own imagination. But this is obviously a circular logic, since his sense is created by the very literature he hopes to interpret.

Finally, Boucher shows an odd neglect of previous scholarship. It is not only absence of reference to Satō's work on the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha*, which incidentally is mentioned explicitly by Sasaki's paper in this same volume (see below), or his omission of reference to Dantinne. In his reference to the *Kāśya-paparivarta*, Boucher seems unaware of the existence of another Chinese translation, not known to Staël-Holstein but in the scholarship since 1954,¹¹ and mentioned by a number of scholars since that time, namely the *Dasheng baoyun jing* 大乘寶雲經, *juan* 7, the *Baoji pin* 寶積品, T. 659 (XVI) 241b5–283b16. These examples speak of a curious disengagement from the field.

In his chapter “Abhidharma in Early Mahāyāna,” Johannes Bronkhorst takes up the question of the relation between northwestern India, or what is generally called Greater Gandhāra, its Abhidharma traditions and the origins of the Mahāyāna movements (which Bronkhorst considers to be multiple). Following up on his earlier discussions of the relation between grammatical traditions and the Abhidharma, in terms of ways of thinking and analysis, here Bronkhorst connects these same patterns with, most directly, the Prajñāpāramitā traditions. The basic thrust here is that the *Vibhāṣā* compendia (of which the principal work is preserved only in Chinese, the so-called **Abhidharma Mahāvibhāṣā*) belong to this region, and if a connection can be shown between the development of this tradition and the Mahāyāna, this would contribute to a localization of the development of the latter. It is true that what are now our earliest textual sources for the Mahāyāna likewise come from this region, the Gāndhārī manuscripts (see below), but Bronkhorst is careful to note that this may be only due to the climatic conditions which preserve ancient birch bark, although he seems not quite sure how important this really is. Furthermore, we unfortunately find here a tendency seen in other examples of Bronkhorst's scholarship, namely that possibilities have magically become within a few pages established facts.¹² What began as a hypothesis by p. 129 has become “the fact that most of the Mahāyāna texts have been profoundly influenced by Gandhāran Abhidharma, whether directly or indirectly.” Put bluntly, and to raise only one problem here, as broadly knowledgeable an Indologist as

11 Ōno Hōdō, *Daijō Kaikyō no Kenkyū* 大乘戒經の研究 (Tokyo: Sankibō busshorin, 1954): 98–104.

12 For an earlier appraisal of this aspect of Bronkhorst's scholarly method, see my review of *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Brill, 2011) in *Indo-Iranian Journal* 58 (2015): 163–169.

Bronkhorst is, to my knowledge he is not able to read Tibetan or Chinese, the languages in which “most of the Mahāyāna texts” have been preserved, and therefore he is simply not in a position to offer an informed opinion on this topic. Such issues are important. As always in reading Bronkhorst’s work, there is much to stimulate one’s imagination, but also, and more often than one would wish, things to shake one’s confidence. And speaking of the latter, a rather grand failure in proofreading is evident from the fact that on pp. 124–125, precisely the same comments about the grammarian Patañjali and the Abhidharma, with precisely the same set of references to Bronkhorst’s own publications, are repeated—within the space of one page.

The next contribution is that of Shizuka Sasaki, one of the most imaginative Japanese scholars of Indian Buddhism, although little of his work is available in English. Here he writes on “The Concept of ‘Remodelling the World,’” a consideration of the source of the idea of “Pure Lands” which he attempts to trace by exploring Abhidharmic notions of world creation linked to karma. In other words, he investigates the question of the doctrinal antecedents of the notion of “Pure Lands” (rather than, for instance, looking toward Iranian ideas for sources of Amitābha-related notions, or the like). The approach is promising, and the bulk of the paper is taken up with a survey of Abhidharma sources. However, despite its fascination, the paper is hard to read, perhaps for several reasons. First, the paper is evidently a translation, although this does not appear to be noted anywhere. One might question in some cases whether the translator quite understood the author’s idea. Furthermore, perhaps because its originally intended audience could have been conceived of as including many scholars familiar with Abhidharma traditions, the treatment is both too detailed for its purpose of offering links with Mahāyāna Pure Land concepts, and not detailed enough to provide a fair presentation of the quite complex Abhidharma scholastic tradition.

Sasaki gives consideration to the above-mentioned *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha* and, as noted above, he does acknowledge the work of Satō (although strangely, when he quotes the text he does not refer to her critical edition). One important point for Sasaki is that rebirth in Abhirati, the land of the buddha Akṣobhya, allows one to (p. 143) “achieve supreme and perfect awakening easily and in an extremely short period of time.” Sasaki considers the differences between this possibility and practice here in the world of Śākyamuni. But it is the land which holds Sasaki’s main interest. Sometimes, however, perhaps because, as noted above, of translation issues, things are not quite clear. As an example, Sasaki summarizes a passage (p. 145) which discusses how, after Akṣobhya dies (and this is important: the buddha Akṣobhya himself dies), his dharma will continue for “one billion *mahākālpas*, after which the extinction

of the Dharma will occur. The extinction of the Dharma will be because the people there lose the desire to listen to or pass on the teachings of the Buddha. This is because the Evil One (Māra) is unable to influence Akṣobhya's buddha-field, making it impossible for the Evil One to destroy the Dharma." The text of the passage in Satō's edition (§ 5.67) reads:

*sha ra dwa ti'i bu bcom ldan 'das de bzhin gshegs pa dgra bcom pa yang dag
par rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas mi 'khrugs pa de'i dam pa'i chos ni bdud dang
bdud kyi ris kyi lha rnams kyis nub par byed par mi 'gyur | de'i dam pa'i chos
ni bcom ldan 'das kyi nyan thos rnams kyis kyang nub par byed par mi 'gyur
gyi | sha ra dwa ti'i bu gzhan du na de'i mi rnams dam pa'i chos nyan pa'i
'dun pa chung bar 'gyur te | de dag 'dun pa chung bas na chos smra ba'i dge
slong rnams kyi drung du 'gro bar mi 'gyur ro || de dag der mi 'gro bas na
dam pa'i chos thos par mi 'gyur ro || dam pa'i chos ma thos pas na sgrub par
mi 'gyur ro || mi sgrub pas na gong ma'i khyad par 'thob par mi 'gyur zhing |
chos smra ba'i dge slong rnams kyis kyang mi de dag 'dun pa chung bar rig
nas chos ston par mi 'gyur te |*

Śāriputra, the True Teaching of the World-honored One, Tathāgata, Arhat, Perfect Buddha Akṣobhya will not be destroyed by Māra and his followers, neither will that True Teaching will be destroyed by Disciples (*śrāvaka*), but, Śāriputra, in contrast, his [=Akṣobhya's] people will have little desire to hear the True Teaching. Because they have little desire, they will not draw near to those monks who preach the teaching (**dharmabhāṇaka?*). Because they do not draw [close] to them, they will not listen to the True Teaching. Because they do not listen to the Teaching, they will not become realized. Because they do not become realized, they will not reach the supreme excellence. The monks who preach the teaching, for their part knowing that those persons have little desire [to hear them], will not preach the teachings.

It appears to me that the tenor of the sūtra passage is somewhat different from what one would understand from Sasaki's paraphrase. It is not correct—or at least the sūtra does not say here—as Sasaki claims (p. 146) that “the Evil One will be unable to cause obstructions in this buddha-field.” I do not think that in the end this has any impact on Sasaki's main points, but it could lead readers astray.

It is worth pointing out once again that Sasaki several times mentions that the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha* is among the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras. This question of dating is a persistent issue in the volume, but it is never engaged as

such. In his conclusion to the first part of his paper, Sasaki casually refers to the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha* as an “early Pure Land Buddhist sutra.” I find this also problematic, since I believe that there was no such concept as “Pure Land” as a distinct tradition in India. Rather, it seems to me clear that the grouping of certain texts as “Pure Land” is an East Asian development, and in a hard sense a medieval Japanese one, and thus reading backwards as Sasaki seems to do here has at least a tinge of the teleological about it. Sasaki claims (p. 152) that “original Pure Land Buddhism can be seen as a result of searching for a way to become buddhas without destroying the traditional cause-and-effect rules of karma by using the power of the great buddhas.” I agree that it is likely that the idea of obtaining rebirth in a realm unobtainable through ordinary karmic fruition must be connected with the power of special buddhas, but I do not think this is controversial. How, or indeed if, this might connect with Abhidharmic karma theory is, however, a different question, and Sasaki devotes a considerable amount of space to the question of the relation between world formation and karma as articulated in Abhidharma sources.

This section of the paper is difficult to understand, and requires some prior knowledge of the Abhidharma tradition, particularly of the Sarvāstivāda sources as preserved in Chinese. In the course of this discussion, probably as a result of its original orientation toward a Japanese audience, the paper makes little reference to the scholarly literature in Western languages (but also, at least in this English version, almost no reference to the extensive Japanese literature). For example, the first cited Abhidharma text is the *Śaṅgītiparyāya*, but one finds no reference to the classic and extremely detailed study of this text and its commentary by Valentina Stache-Rosen.¹³ Throughout the discussion, references are often hard to follow, and require some work to track down. On p. 155, the references to “close dominant fruition” and “far dominant fruition” are to T. 1546 (XXVII) 106c29–107a1, where we find that the terms are 近增上果 and 遠增上果; at the very end of the paragraph on the top of p. 156, the notation “T XXVII 106c26” should include “–107a9.” On the same page, reference to “the eighty-fifth *gāthā* of the fourth chapter of the *Abhidharma-kośa*” appears to be, rather, exclusively to the *bhāṣya* on IV.85. On p. 158, the reference to the second chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is to the commentary on II.57c, the citation from Pradhan’s edition to 95.16–18, and it is puzzling why for a Japanese translation Sasaki does not refer to the excellent trans-

13 *Dogmatische Begriffsreihen im älteren Begriffsreihen im älteren Buddhismus. 11. Das Śaṅgī-tisūtra und sein Kommentar Śaṅgītisūtraparyāya. 1–2.* Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin Institut für Orientforschung Veröffentlichung 65/1–2. Sanskrittexte aus Turfanfunden 9. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968.

lation of Sakurabe Hajime 桜部建.¹⁴ When Sasaki turns to what he calls the “Theravāda tradition,” he refers to what he calls the *Vimukti-mārga*. This text is preserved (aside from the section, chapter 3, on the *dhūtagaṇas*, which is preserved in Tibetan) only in Chinese. It might indeed be closely related to the *Visuddhimagga*, as several scholars have observed.¹⁵ However, given that this text is entirely unknown in Sri Lanka (or Southeast Asia), historically, it is hard to understand how it could represent a “Theravāda tradition” in any meaningful sense of the expression.

Apparently by way of conclusion, Sasaki states (p. 163) “Unmistakably, a pattern of thought considering humans separately from the outer world did spring to life in Buddhism, but the pattern did not become a fundamental element of Buddhist doctrine. Particularly in its appearance in the Consciousness-Only Doctrine (Vijñānavāda), the oppositional worldview of humans versus nature is encompassed when humans and the outer world are once again unified through *ālaya-vijñāna*.” It is difficult to disagree with this, if only because I cannot understand it (and Sasaki offers only the sparsest comments on the *ālayavijñāna* in the body of the article). I fear that perhaps the translator has let the author down here again.

At the end of his paper, as a appendix, Sasaki considers two papers by Hayashi Takatsugu. Evidently, being based on a Japanese paper published some time ago, Sasaki wished to respond to subsequently published Japanese work, but the density here and assumptions of previous background make this also very tough going.

Finally, to remark on a few things found in the endnotes to this paper, in note 10, Sasaki writes “Fujita also indicates that the *Ārya-Akṣobhya-tathāgatasya-vyūha* contains no idea of *raigō*.” Few readers not familiar with Japanese Buddhist terminology will know what is meant here—the term *raigō* (來迎; the characters not being given by Sasaki, even Chinese readers will be at a loss presented with just the Japanese romanization) refers to the fact that the Buddha

14 *Kusharon no kenkyū: Kai, konhon* 俱舍論の研究: 界・根品. Kyoto: Hōzōkan 法蔵館, 1969: 385.

15 See Anālayo, “The Treatise on the Path to Liberation (解脫道論) and the *Visuddhimagga*,” *Fuyan Foxue yanjiu* 福嚴佛學研究 4 (2009): 1–15; Hayashi Takatsugu 林隆嗣, “Jōzabu Daijiha to abayagiri-ha ni okeru zudashi no kaishaku: *Gedatsudōron* no shozoku buha ni kanren shite” 上座部大寺派とアバヤギリ派における頭陀支の解釈: 『解脫道論』の所属部派に関連して. *Pārigaku Bukkyō bunkagaku* パーリ学仏教文化学 31 (2017): 31–50. Both of these scholars see a strong link of the text to the Abhayagirivihār-avāsins. It seems to go without saying (and Sasaki does not say it) that the title of the text is a pure reconstruction, and I see no good reason to support either *Vimuktimārga* or *Vimuttimaggā*.

Amitābha and his retinue will come to meet a believer on his or her deathbed, and guide him/her to the Pure Land. Since the term *raigō* refers typically, if not exclusively, to Amitābha, Fujita (and Sasaki) must have been extending its meaning. Note 20 refers to a Chinese version of what in Pāli is the *Aggañña-sutta*, and speaks of “the idea that good taste in the world disappeared because of people’s evil actions.” Again, the translator has slipped: the reference is of course to the idea that early on in the development of the world people ate the earth, which tasted sweet, and sadly (although Sasaki is famous for his sense of humor) not that they developed the idea to wear fluorescent green golf pants or to pour cherry cola into good whiskey. In note 21, speaking of the Abhidharma text *Dharmaskandha*, Sasaki says that “the passage is missing in the Sanskrit manuscript.” Without making reference to the available editions,¹⁶ which Sasaki does not cite, it is hard to tell what he intended to say, but when one consults the editions one quickly sees that what he meant is rather that the passage is *not preserved* in the available Sanskrit manuscript fragments; this again is obviously an error of the translator. Further, in the context of reference to published scholarship, when the above-mentioned **Vimuktimārga* is discussed, nowhere is it mentioned that a complete English translation has been available for almost sixty years.¹⁷ Finally, in regard to the notes, I do not know what to make of notes 47–49, each of which reads identically and in full: “*Līnatthappakāsini: Papañcasūdanī (Majjhimanikāya-aṭṭhakathā)-purāṇa-ṭīkā*.” This is the whole note, repeated three times. The next six notes are similar, listing the names of other Pāli subcommentaries, without any further information. It is baffling.

Next, Douglas Osto presents a paper with the title “Altered States and the Origins of the Mahāyāna.” In speaking of visions described in Mahāyāna scriptures, he begins with a disclaimer: “I am not claiming that the literary accounts of visions are direct and unproblematic transcriptions of actual experiential events that real actors underwent. What I am arguing is that literary accounts of visions in some Mahāyāna sources possess characteristics that are strikingly similar to reports of actual visionary experiences that individuals have undergone while their psychologies and physiologies were profoundly altered

16 Sieglinde Dietz, *Fragmente des Dharmaskandha: ein Abhidharma-Text in Sanskrit aus Gilgit*. Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse 3. Folge 142. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984; Kazunobu Matsuda, *Newly identified Sanskrit fragments of the Dharmaskandha in the Gilgit manuscripts. (1), Sanskrit fragments transliterated*. Kyoto: Bun’ei-do, 1986.

17 N.R.M. Ebara, Soma Thera and Kheminda Thera, *The Path of Freedom, By the Arahant Upatissa* (Colombo, 1961. Reprinted: Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1977). The passage in Sasaki’s note 37 is translated on p. 143.

in some way.” In fact, what Osto actually seems to want to show is that those who composed Mahāyāna scriptures were reporting their “trips,” not at all dissimilar to visions experienced by those on drugs or in some altered mental state. Perhaps needless to say, it is very difficult to find evidence for this. In the course of his discussion, Osto brings up the subject of experience itself, referring to two essays of Robert Sharf.¹⁸ This is of course a very central issue, but it is surprising that he does not refer to one fundamental context, namely a discussion chiefly between Lambert Schmithausen, Sharf and Eli Franco on the relationship between doctrine and experience.¹⁹ The sophisticated and serious considerations offered by these scholars should form the basis for further considerations along these lines.

I confess to having experienced some trouble following Osto’s essay, which moreover seems, at some moments, in its turn to have misunderstood some things. For instance, on p. 185 Osto writes “While early Buddhist sources seem to see imagination as more of a problem to overcome in the single-pointed state of *samādhi*, Mahāyāna sutras are filled with such fantastic visionary material and often valorise such accounts as *samādhis*.” Since there is no further reference here, I can only presume that Osto thinks of the widespread rejection of *vikalpa* and related ideas. Now, while *vikalpa* may be rendered in English as “imagination,” it means of course “wrong mental imaginings,” and thus not imagination in the sense that Osto seems here to imagine. Another example of a misunderstanding may come from the fact that rather than refer to the work of Nobuyoshi Yamabe directly, Osto relies on a discussion of David Gordon White, which he characterizes as follows (p. 189): “White points out Nobuyoshi Yamabe’s suggestion that the buddha images found in inner [*sic*] Asian caves such as Chinese Turkestan dating from the fifth to the seventh centuries may

18 “Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience,” *Numen* 42 (1995): 228–283; “Experience,” in M.C. Taylor, eds. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998: 94–116.

19 Some of the key contributions: Lambert Schmithausen, “On the Problem of the Relation of Spiritual Practice and Philosophical Theory in Buddhism,” in *German Scholars on India* 11 (Bombay: Nachiketa Publications, 1976): 235–250; *The Genesis of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda. Responses and Reflections*. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2014; Eli Franco, “Meditation and Metaphysics. On their mutual relationship in South Asian Buddhism,” in E. Franco, ed., *Yogic Perception, Meditation and Altered States of Consciousness*. Beiträge zur Kultur- und Geistesgeschichte Asiens 65. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2009: 93–132; “On the Arising of Philosophical Theories from Spiritual Practice,” in Oliver van Criegern, et al., eds., *Saddharmamūrtam: Festschrift für Jens-Uwe Hartmann zum 65. Geburtstag*. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 93. Vienna: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2018: 113–126. Other relevant contributions could be cited.

have acted as the ‘practical background’ for Buddhist meditation texts from this period.” Again, leaving aside that “caves such as Chinese Turkestan” makes no sense, which is probably due to an editing error, Yamabe’s point is that images painted on cave walls may have served as an inspiration for texts composed in Inner Asia, rather than texts having influenced the visual depictions. However, that said, it is clear that Yamabe, in another context, does hold there to have been a direct relationship between meditative experience and doctrinal formulations; it is not possible to enter into a discussion of this topic here.²⁰

An illustration of the central notion behind Osto’s thought appears (p. 192) in a discussion of depictions of the Buddha entering *samādhi* and causing others to do so. “While no doubt stylised literary accounts, the descriptions of these visions—the infinitely vast jewelled lands filled with countless buddhas in all directions—not only indicate an interest in material wealth, but are also highly suggestive of iconic hallucinations generated from entoptic phenomena.” Does the same apply, one wonders, to the very early idea that the Buddha rose into the air and flames appeared from his shoulders and water from the lower part of his body, then vice versa (the *yamakaprātihārya*)? Are such depictions also based on hallucinations? But Osto does not stop here. He goes on to suggest that some things Sudhana is depicted as experiencing in the *Gaṇḍavyūha* refer to hypnosis (p. 193): “highly suggestive of hypnosis are Bhīṣmottaranirghoṣa’s asking Sudhana if he ‘remembers’ (spontaneous post-hypnotic amnesia sometimes occurs following trance); Maitreya telling Sudhana to ‘Arise!’ (hypnosis is often understood as a sleep-like state requiring one to ‘awake’ from it); and the motif of light-induced *samādhis* (light has been known to produce hypnotic trance for some time).” I frankly think that while more could be said about this essay, readers will have by this point gained an impression of whether it might be of interest to them.

Coming down to earth, as it were, in his valuable contribution to the volume, Ingo Strauch addresses “Early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra: New Evidence from the Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra.” Focused on the newly discovered materials in the Gāndhārī language, and especially one sūtra which, for lack of a better name, is now called the “Bajaur Mahāyāna Sūtra,” Strauch explores what are unquestionably among our earliest actual sources for the Mahāyāna

20 See Nobuyoshi Yamabe, “Ālayavijñāna from a Practical Point of View,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 46.2 (2018): 283–319. Although not perhaps directly relevant to Osto’s thesis, in relation to questions of image and meditation in Central Asian cave complexes seen from the perspective of one Art Historian, see Angela F. Howard, “On ‘Art in the Dark’ and Meditation in Central Asian Buddhist Caves,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 46.2 (2015): 19–39, centrally engaging the ideas of Robert Sharf and Eric Greene.

movement. Strauch guides the readers through some of the themes of the sūtra, including the initial aspiration to awakening (*bodhicittotpāda*), notions (*saṃjñā*), acceptance of the non-arisal of dharmas (here called *dharmakṣānti*), non-retrogression on the bodhisattva path (*avaivartya*), and prediction to buddhahood (*vyākaraṇa*). Strauch finds the sūtra as a whole to be (p. 235) “strongly influenced by the concept of emptiness,” the notions just mentioned, the aspiration to awakening and so on, and the desire to prevent the disappearance of the Buddha’s lineage, as discussed by Skilling (and cross-referenced by Strauch). Finally, Strauch discusses “the idea that our present buddha-field is not the only one, but coexists with the contemporary buddha-fields of other buddhas, in which a bodhisattva can be reborn.” Especially given the fragmentary nature of this text and of Gandhāran Buddhist literature in general, I find Strauch’s references to what is *not* found in this text—no reference to forest monks, *dharmabhāṇakas*, the cult of the book or explicit reference to *prajñāpāramitā*—of uncertain significance. As I have noted above, there surely were different concerns of different communities and different literary compositions, and so the absence of any particular notion can hardly be held—at least in this point of our studies—to indicate much of anything.

Although this is a strong article, a few small points must be noted. First, it was a very poor choice to cite the English translations of Edward Conze for the quoted passages from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. These are often closer to paraphrases, and very often hardly English. Given that Strauch is first and foremost a Sanskrit scholar, he would have better served himself and his readers by translating anew. That said, while it is understandable in the present state of our knowledge, his own translations from Gāndhārī sometimes appear so literal as to almost fail to convey meaning (but we must remember that with *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, this is often the fault of the text as much as of the translator), as in the passage quoted and translated on p. 226. (Note that the text, a translation, and most helpfully a Sanskrit *chāyā*, are freely available at <http://130.223.29.184/readviewer/BCo2.html>.) Finally, I find his treatment of the buddha-field idea (p. 234) rather teleological, especially the acceptance that we encounter here “a transitional phase in the development of Pure Land Buddhism,” a notion to which I have referred above. It should be remarked that, contrary to what one might expect, or at least hope for, Strauch is the only one of the contributors here (aside from the editor Harrison) to have taken account of the other contributions in the volume, although for some reason none of his cross-references is provided with a page number.

The final paper of the volume is Juhung Rhi’s “Looking for Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas: A Reflection on Visual Evidence in Early Indian Buddhism.” In this art-historical investigation, amply illustrated with 35 black and white plates,

Rhi undertakes to (p. 245) treat “bodhisattva images from early Indian Buddhism in their possible association with early Mahāyāna with a greater emphasis on Gandhāra.” One might first think, well, aren’t bodhisattva images always Mahāyāna images? But of course the point is that the bodhisattva *par excellence* is not a Mahāyāna bodhisattva but rather Śākyamuni himself, and one of the crucial questions whenever confronted with an image of uncertain identity is whether the intention might have been to depict Śākyamuni. The other bodhisattva widely acknowledged even early on is naturally Maitreya, the buddha to come.

It is difficult for a non-specialist to evaluate the treatment of art historical evidence, so I can do little more than cite some of the conclusions of Rhi, tentative as they are. As he says, for instance (p. 251), speaking of a certain tendency to identify images with Avalokiteśvara, and after rejecting a necessary tie between lotuses and this bodhisattva, “To equate bodhisattvas holding a wreath with those holding a lotus and thus with Avalokiteśvara is even more dubious—perhaps even utterly groundless.” On the other hand (p. 253), “a bodhisattva seated in meditation may not have been restricted to Prince Siddhārtha but was possibly used for any bodhisattvas going through the same stage on a path towards enlightenment.” He concludes these considerations with great caution (p. 255): “I cannot tell whether any of the wreath-bearers, lotus-bearers, or book-bearers was ever made to depict Avalokiteśvara or Mañjuśrī. But I can say for sure that there is no evidence that these types were ever exclusively used for any of the bodhisattvas. Considering the enormous importance of Avalokiteśvara to later Buddhist devotional practices, our temptation to search for Avalokiteśvara among bodhisattva images from early Indian Buddhism may be justifiable. However, we should also keep in mind the question whether images dedicated to Gandhāran monasteries carried substantial cultic importance. I believe that in Gandhāran monasteries the main purpose of dedicating images was for donors to accrue merit Among the numerous buddhas and bodhisattvas thus dedicated, all the buddhas essentially look alike, usually bearing no inscribed labels, and the identity of the buddhas seems not to have mattered; bodhisattvas probably functioned in the same way.”

I would like to close my considerations focused on this book with several general observations. A number of the contributors make use of the “editions” of Sanskrit sūtras and śāstras published by P.L. Vaidya. Although sometimes genuinely reliable editions are cited, such as Skilling does in citing the *Lalitavistara* in the edition of Hokazono (mistaking the date, however, which is 1994, not 1993), this covers only the beginning of the text, and for the rest Skilling preferred Vaidya to the (admittedly problematic, but at least better)

edition of Lefmann, for reasons I cannot guess.²¹ However, in no case is a publication of Vaidya superior to the earlier editions upon which his works were based (“based” meaning copied from, and introducing additional errors). They were, I believe, published to make texts available to an Indian market in which European editions were simply not to be found, but in the present state of scholarship, they should simply not be used. Further, from the point of view of the volume as a whole, that aside from Strauch no other contributors refer to the contributions of any other, even when this would have been obvious (for instance, Boucher and Sasaki), is odd. From the point of view of editing, the bibliographies are handled in various ways (Japanese names given in characters or not, in Rhi’s case even titles not being given in characters), which could have been helpfully unified, and while it is not more than annoying and a waste of space, that Sasaki, every time he mentions a text, repeats the pinyin, Chinese characters and reconstructed Sanskrit title could also have been avoided. Finally, it would have been helpful to somewhere mention that the references to Pāli in Sasaki’s piece follow the *Critical Pāli Dictionary*, and to fix some errors in the romanization of Japanese in Sasaki’s bibliography (e.g., *shujyusō*).

I would like to turn now, more generally, to what was promised at the outset, namely a brief survey of suggestions of directions that might prove profitable as we move forward. I have sketched above, inter alia, some ideas of areas which deserve attention. The following are not intended, then, as corrections so much as a sort of laundry list of areas which might be given more attention.

To begin, it would be a boon for the entire field of Buddhist studies were there to be some reliable repository of information about past scholarship. This must include work in all languages; it need hardly be mentioned that the wealth of information on Indian Buddhism published in Japanese simply should not be ignored by any serious scholar. In the first place, this repository of information should concentrate on Mahāyāna literature, listing by text the resources available for each work and the scholarship that has been produced. For some texts this is obviously going to be a monumental task (some years ago I saw a

21 Hokazono has now published the remainder of the text in a series of articles in Kagoshima kokusai daigaku's 鹿児島国際大学 *Kokusai bunka gakubu ronshū* 国際文化学部論集 and in two volumes which conclude the studies he began with the 1994 book: Hokazono Kōichi 外蘭幸一, *Raritavisutara no kenkyū chūkan* ラリタヴィスタラの研究中巻, Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha 大東出版社, 2019 (ISBN 978-4-500-00771-4); *Raritavisutara no kenkyū gekan* ラリタヴィスタラの研究下巻, Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha 大東出版社, 2019 (ISBN 978-4-500-00772-1). I plan to review these volumes in this journal in the near future.

draft bibliography of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which was over 750 printed pages²²). Our above-mentioned Open Philology project is in the course of putting online a bibliography of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* collection, but even then, we have so far not included the *Sukhāvātīvyūha* or *Śrīmālādevīsīmhanāda*, simply because the amount of scholarship is so great. Therefore, the proposed repository of information must begin as very much a work in progress. At the very least, however, the availability of information about existing scholarship should help future researchers avoid duplication, on the one hand, and assist them in approaching questions which have earlier been addressed by others. Furthermore, such a repository would also make clear which areas or which works have received attention, and which remain unexplored. This would have the added benefit of providing for future scholars a map of uncharted territory. I should expect that this might also temper the verve of some scholars who might otherwise be inclined to make sweeping judgements on the basis of a few selected sources, since it would be easier to notice those many which remain unexamined. Toward that end, such a bibliographical repository would also have to take into account what might be deemed semi-scholarly works, such as the translations published by the 84000 project. These are of uneven quality, and rarely present comparative contexts (that is, even when Sanskrit sources are available, they are little utilized, and Chinese translations even less so). Nevertheless, the availability of these translations will make it substantially easier for scholars to familiarize themselves with a broader array of texts. (Mention might be made here also of the translations from Chinese published by the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, the BDK, but the quality of these is even more uneven than that of those produced by 84000.) These translations will be useful in the way all translations should be used, namely as a kind of very detailed index or table of contents, through which one can more economically locate and read passages in a primary language. In any event, future studies of the earlier phases of the Mahāyāna must expand their textual basis beyond the usual suspects, as important and interesting as those texts may in fact be.

In this regard as well, we require a better understanding of the relationships between Mahāyāna scriptures and the Āgama/Nikāya literature, the Abhidharma (as suggested above already), and the Vinayas. With regard to the first, although some research especially of late (in particular that produced by

22 As I was reading the proofs of this review article, the printed version of this list arrived in the post: Kaie Mochizuki and Byungkon Kim, eds., *Bibliography of the Studies on the Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* (1844–2020). Lotus Sutra Studies 1 (Minobu: International Institute for Nichiren Buddhism, Minobusan University, 2020). ISBN 9784905331124. iv + 342 pp.

Anālayo) seeks to remedy the situation, for far too long we have assumed that the Pāli literature (and almost none of that, it must be said, is yet critically edited) represents pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism. The highly fragmentary Sanskrit materials have remained largely the domain of philologists (in the narrowest sense of the term), and it is in fact quite difficult even to locate available parallel versions of any given discourse or passage. Likewise, the traditions preserved in Chinese have been comparatively little studied. Finally, the assumption that these materials are chronologically prior to the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism I find problematic (and note Harrison's comment, cited above), and the question requires careful study. We are for the time being better off thinking of intertextuality than of influences from Āgamas to Mahāyāna sūtras. With regard to the Abhidharma, and in different ways the Vinaya, both of these corpora are so technical that it is difficult to make use of them without full-scale immersions in their (respective) worlds. Cooperative studies are therefore a must.

A further domain in which scholarship on Indian Buddhism might be improved is mentioned by Harrison, and cited above, namely in the direction of situating Indian Buddhism more broadly within India. Just as studies of early Buddhism will be greatly enriched by taking into account Jaina materials, so studies of the earlier Mahāyāna and its literature will profit, I suspect, if scholars were to familiarize themselves with contemporary non-Buddhist materials. As one example, in terms of genre, although there are of course tremendous differences, the literature of the Purāṇas does have some similarities with Mahāyāna sūtra literature, though this has not been explored as yet. An even more obvious link concerns the narrative literature, which is embedded in Buddhist texts of many types, including sūtra and vinaya. Here careful study of non-Buddhist narrative, Jaina and "Hindu," will surely bear fruit.

This wish list could be continued; I could speak of the necessity to take careful account of art historical and archaeological evidence, of the potential value of commentaries to Mahāyāna sūtras, so far almost entirely unstudied, and so on. But for the moment, this may be a convenient place to stop, with the hope that more energetic scholars will join us in exploring this fascinating topic.

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