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VOLUME I Seminar Papers 1987–1988

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AJCL</i>	<i>American Journal of Comparative Law</i>
<i>BBACS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the British Association for Chinese Studies.</i>
<i>BARL</i>	<i>Bulletin des Amis du Royaume Lao</i>
<i>BEFEO</i>	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
<i>BLIJ</i>	<i>Burma Law Institute Journal</i>
<i>IJ</i>	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
<i>JA</i>	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JIAEA</i>	<i>Journal of the Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia</i>
<i>JPTS</i>	<i>Journal of the Pali Text Society</i>
<i>JSEAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southeast Asian Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of the Siam Society</i>
<i>MJT</i>	<i>Mikkyō Jiten</i>
<i>PTS</i>	<i>Pali Text Society</i>
<i>ROB</i>	Than Tun, <i>The Royal Orders of Burma A.D. 1598–1885</i> , Tokyo, vols. 1–7, 1984–1987.
<i>SBB</i>	Sacred Books of the Buddhists
<i>SBE</i>	Sacred Books of the East
<i>T</i>	Taishō Tripiṭaka

INTRODUCTION

The Buddhist Forum is a seminar series held at SOAS on various aspects of Buddhism: its history, philosophy, religion, philology, art and architecture. The seminars were initiated in 1987 and it is hoped that they will continue to be held in the future; they are usually convened on the second Wednesday of every month during term time and they remain open to anyone who has an interest in Buddhism. The primary intention of these seminars is to bring together people who are interested in different aspects of Buddhism in order to provide a forum for the presentation of new research and for the exchange of opinions and ideas. Individuals are invited to present papers in their particular field of interest, to be discussed by the seminar participants. Contributors are especially encouraged to offer papers on subjects which they are currently studying and which may yield new information, or an original approach or interpretation.

The present volume represents a collection of papers delivered at the Buddhist Forum during the academic year 1987–88. Certain adjustments for publication have had to be made, because some papers were not delivered in written form, and also because in the first instance, there was no clearly conceived intention to produce them in published form.

The two contributions by Professor Gombrich were presented at one seminar. Their topics are different but they do have a common theme, which focuses on the original message of the Buddha and the function of the Saṅgha. The paper on the primitive message of the founder of Buddhism attempts to demonstrate the need to take into consideration a number of important factors which are essential for the understanding and interpretation of the Buddha's message. One such factor, which is dealt with in some detail, is the need to place the Buddha's discourses in the context of the intellectual and cultural milieu within which he taught. It is evident from Professor Gombrich's persuasive arguments that in order to understand fully some of the intricate nuances and subtleties of the Buddha's teachings, one must take into consideration the doctrinal and social elements of the Brahmanic tradition with which Buddhism co-existed and interacted in the sphere of philosophical and religious ideas.

The paper on the origin of the Mahāyāna puts forward an intriguing hypothesis that the beginnings of Mahāyāna were largely owed to the advent of writing. One of the main arguments in favour of this hypothesis is that once the Buddha's discourses were recorded in written form, it became fairly difficult to exercise close control over the content of Buddhist scriptures which till then had been passed on as an oral tradition entrusted to the members of the Saṅgha, who used to recite

them in chorus. From the time writing began to be employed, it became relatively easy for individuals or a group of people to produce written works and to deposit or circulate them without seeking the Saṅgha's consent with regard to their canonicity or doctrinal content.

The paper on Pāli philology and the study of Buddhism by K.R. Norman deals with some essential issues which are of crucial importance in order to produce satisfactory critical editions of Pāli texts. After many years of working in the field of Pāli studies, Mr Norman's past and present experience enables him to evaluate the state of the already edited Pāli texts and to point out salient factors which must be taken into consideration in order to advance our knowledge of Pāli literature along correct lines, and, in particular, to produce critical editions of texts which are often, perhaps mistakenly, taken as having been properly edited and translated.

The paper presented by Andrew Huxley surveys the legal literature of the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia. Sri Lanka is not included, one of the reasons being that the Sinhalese tradition did not produce legal literature on a scale comparable to other countries that follow Theravāda Buddhism. This is an extensive and quite detailed piece of research which attempts to outline the gradual formation of legal literature and to establish to what extent its inner flavour was inspired or influenced by Buddhist concepts of society and ethics. The survey includes all the countries of mainland Southeast Asia except Vietnam, which is not dealt with because it possesses a unique and separate legal system developed through protracted contacts with China.

The two papers by Professor Barrett deal with two different aspects of Buddhist tradition in China. The first, on the patriarchs, addresses the question of who the patriarchs were and why they were held in such a great esteem. The question is answered within the cultural and intellectual context of Chinese thought at the time when the lineage of the patriarchs came into existence. The second paper, on the weeping pilgrims, deals with some emotional and spiritual experiences and the intellectual attitudes of certain famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrims. This paper, like the first, examines some of the characteristics peculiar to Chinese spiritual perceptions.

In the spring of 1987 Ian Astley-Kristensen completed a doctoral thesis under the general patronage of the University of Leeds. The title of his dissertation was "The Rishukyō: A Translation and Commentary in the Light of Modern Japanese (Post-Meiji) Scholarship." The material presented in his seminar paper is based on his long research into the tantric tradition established in Japan. The central focus is on teachings related to Vajrasattva as found in one of the subsidiary *maṇḍalas* called the Naya Assembly belonging to the Vajradhātumaṇḍala. His presentation is rooted in the scriptural sources and it unveils some important aspects of Vajrasattva.

Taken together, these papers might not at first appear to have much in common. They range from Mr. Norman's observations derived from many years of scholarly editing and translation to Professor Barrett's much more narrowly conceived

treatments of specific points; from Professor Gombrich's masterly reinterpretations of sources already familiar to Mr Huxley's preliminary explorations of a literature still not widely known. But, despite the iconographic overtones of Dr Astley's contribution, all the papers are dealing primarily with textual materials rather than iconography; nor is Buddhism being observed here as a living religion in action—at least not in any way familiar to the anthropologist. It is perhaps a fair criticism of Buddhist studies as carried out in the West that they have in the past tended to reduce Buddhism to a mere textual object, but the papers collected here show equally that the role of texts within the Buddhist tradition is both inescapable and problematic in ways which all students of Buddhism must acknowledge.

Thus Professor Gombrich's opening paper suggests that if one reads early Buddhist texts without the proper background knowledge one is liable to misread them: they often cannot 'make sense' unless understood as reflections of a far wider intellectual and literary environment than that encompassed by the specifically Buddhist heritage. His second paper, by contrast, might almost be taken to argue the converse for early Mahāyāna Buddhist literature: that the texts represent no more than themselves. In fact recent scholarship has brought into question the existence of early Mahāyāna 'schools' as large scale divisions within the Buddhist community; Gombrich explains the illusion of 'schools' from the very real existence of texts which, with the onset of literacy, allowed ways of thinking which had no means of perpetuating themselves in organized traditions of adherents to persist, and with time perhaps to make converts scarcely present at the start. Taken together these two papers, from their very different perspectives, show just how misleading a narrow approach to Buddhist literature can be.

On the other hand, Mr Norman's remarks show equally forcefully that no reading of Buddhist texts can be too careful over matters of philological detail. It is not simply that the available texts are far less correct than many would like to assume because very little of the editorial work which must always be applied to works of antiquity transmitted by a variety of paths to our own times has in fact been carried out on Buddhist sources. There has been a tendency to assume that behind the evidence we have before us there stood for each Buddhist text a lost original. Yet there is in the case of Buddhism no reason why the same body of discourse should not have circulated from the very beginning in different dialects or languages. At the very least in the materials available today we can find plenty of traces of earlier shifts from one linguistic medium to another, with inevitable consequences, such as the non-transferability of puns, and its affect on the meaning of the texts.

If these papers pose quite bluntly some of the many problems raised for modern scholars by the early Indian literature of Buddhism, the remainder show that the textual manifestations of the Buddhist tradition gave rise to problems of different sorts throughout Asia during the intervening centuries. Mr Huxley's investigations of the legal literature of Buddhist Southeast Asia, for example, shows how an empirical attempt at surveying this area raises theoretical problems as to the way in which the Buddhist tradition may be taken as defining these much later textual products.

In bibliographic terms, the emergence of texts on law appears to be the result of highly regionalized developments. In what sense are they all Buddhist?

But if the Southeast Asian case raises questions about the influence of the example of the Buddhist canon in an area without pre-existing indigenous written traditions, the papers on East Asia demonstrate clearly some of the ramifications of the introduction of Buddhist texts into a world already furnished with a highly distinctive literary culture of long standing. Professor Barrett's first contribution shows that the translation of ever-increasing amounts of Buddhist literature were even felt from the Chinese point of view to exacerbate their own problems of understanding, and how it was only by postulating a non-literary form of tradition that the Chinese were able to ameliorate their situation. His second paper suggests that Chinese Buddhists were sometimes so much at the mercy of an indigenous conception of the function of literature as a legacy of the past that it affected their descriptions of even purely Buddhist experiences, further underlining the importance of the wider Chinese cultural context to an appreciation of Chinese Buddhist sources.

Dr Astley's paper presents us with a portion of an important text of East Asian Buddhism, as it is interpreted in Japan today. His intimate knowledge of the living tradition of Japanese Buddhist scholarship allows us to judge how the text he studied is read there today, and how this differs from the type of approach current among Western scholars. We should remember that most important Buddhist scriptures circulating in East Asia were, and still remain, the focus of vigorous and elaborate traditions of interpretation scarcely touched by Western translators.

In short, then, although none of the participants in the Buddhist Forum was asked to address a common theme, or even to produce material designed for publication, this collection does provide a broad cross-section of British scholarship in Buddhist Studies today and, in particular, shows that Buddhism is not for us simply a textual object. Many of us work with textual materials, it is true, but we are in our different ways alive to the problems involved in this approach. Indeed, anyone wishing to explore the interaction of text and tradition in Buddhism will surely find much to stimulate their thinking in the collection of papers gathered here.

Finally, words of acknowledgment and gratitude are due to the School of Oriental and African Studies for accepting responsibility for the cost and distribution of the present publication; in particular to the Publication Committee for accepting the papers for publication, and to Mr M. Daly and Miss D. Matias for their professional help in administrative and editorial matters.