



Susan Andrews / Jinhua Chen / Cuilan Liu (eds.)
Rules of Engagement
Medieval Traditions of Buddhist
Monastic Regulation



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Monastic Regulation**

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

ISSN 2190-6769

ISBN 978-3-89733-458-8 (E-book)

ISBN 978-3-89733-428-1 (printed version)

© 2017 projekt verlag, Bochum/Freiburg

www.projektverlag.de

Cover: punkt KOMMA Strich GmbH, Freiburg

www.punkt-komma-strich.de

Cover original design by Benjamin Guzinski; Julia Wrage, Hamburg

Figure on Cover: Image from the Dunhuang cave 323 that depicts the observance of Vinaya rules. Copyright: Dunhuang Academy

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Atonement of *Pārājika* Transgressions in Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhism¹

Eric M. Greene

Introduction

All forms of Buddhism have a deep and abiding concern with the problem of transgressions and their purification. Such matters indeed lie at the heart of the various Buddhist monastic law-codes, the *vinayas*. Although many of the rules for monks and nuns listed in such codes can be seen as promoting general Buddhist ethical principles, taken as a whole the *vinayas* are arguable most concerned not with ethics as such, but with defining transgression and stipulating its legal and ritual consequences. The rules of the *prātimokṣa*—the basic obligations of monks and nuns—are thus grouped into different categories according to the ritual methods needed to purify their violation and restore the transgressor to his or her full institutional rank and status (as opposed to, for example, according to the quantity of evil karma that a given transgression produces). The question of atonement—doing something such that it becomes in at least some respects as if the transgression had never taken place—is thus fundamental to the structure and purpose of the *vinaya*.

In this paper I will examine certain rituals that seem to have developed in China during the fifth century for overcoming the most serious of all *prātimokṣa* transgressions, the so-called *pārājikas* (for monks, having sexual relations, stealing, killing a human being, and falsely claiming spiritual attainment, with nuns subject to four additional rules also classified as *pārājika*). In Western scholarship on Buddhism, the *pārājikas* have often been described as transgressions that lead to permanent and irrevocable expulsion from the monastic order. This, however, is an oversimplification.

¹ I would like to thank Shayne Clarke and the Venerable Anālayo for their helpful comments and corrections to earlier versions of this essay.

Most surviving Indian *vinaya* traditions do in fact provide methods allowing those who violate at least some of the *pārājikas* to atone and thereby remain within the clerical fold, albeit in a position of permanently reduced status usually called a *śikṣādattaka* (or *śikṣādattā-śrāmaṇerī* in the case of a nun).²

The procedures for atoning for transgressions of the *pārājikas* are discussed in all of the complete Indian *vinayas* that were translated into Chinese, and for this reason they have long been known to Chinese and Japanese scholars.³ Western scholars, in contrast, have often overlooked this element of Buddhist monastic law, no doubt in part because it is absent from the more widely studied Pāli *vinaya*.⁴ Only with Shayne Clarke's recent studies have the procedures associated with the *śikṣādattaka* as they were known and understood in Indian Buddhism begun to attract significant attention in Western-language publications.⁵

Building on Clarke's work, and drawing further from some additional Chinese sources that he did not investigate, in this chapter I will look specifically at the rituals for becoming a *śikṣādattaka* that became known in China beginning from the late fourth century CE, when the major *vinaya* texts first began to be translated into Chinese. I will then examine what appear to be new rituals that were created in China as Chinese Buddhists tried to overcome certain perceived shortcomings of the methods found in the *vinaya*. This was done, in part, by integrating key elements of the rituals of atonement found in *vinaya* texts into the broader tradition of so-called Mahāyāna repentance rites, which had long been widely practiced among Chinese Buddhists.

The new rituals that appear in fifth-century Chinese Buddhist sources demonstrate that *vinaya*-based rites of atonement exerted a certain amount

² The *śikṣādattā-śrāmaṇerī* is known only from the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (Clarke 2000).

³ Hirakawa 1964: 246–254; Satō 1986: 146–152; Kuo 1994: 30–31.

⁴ The *śikṣādattaka* was discussed briefly by Louis de La Vallée Poussin in the early part of the twentieth century, but seems to have been subsequently ignored (La Vallée Poussin 1927: 208). As concerns the matter of clerical celibacy, there are several well-known examples of (officially) non-celibate Buddhist clerics, both in modern times (Japan and Nepal), as well as in Central Asia during the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era (on the Central Asian cases, see Agrawala 1954; Ichikawa 1999; Hansen 2004: 293–296). While it thus has been known that, in practice, violations of the first *pārājika* do not always result in a return to the life of a layperson, it has usually been assumed that any such system operated in tacit contradiction with the *vinaya*.

⁵ Clarke 1999; 2000; 2009a; and 2009b. See also now Anālayo 2016, who disputes some of Clarke's conclusions. Anālayo's new study appeared just as this book was going to press, and I have not had time to incorporate all of its insights.

of influence on medieval Chinese Buddhist practice, at least for a time. Modern studies of repentance in Chinese Buddhism have generally discussed *vinaya* atonement rituals only in passing.⁶ This silence is at first glance understandable, as there has been little evidence to suggest that these practices were ever of much interest in China. Even medieval Chinese Buddhists themselves often frankly admitted that, in China, *vinaya* atonements were usually ignored in favour of purely Mahāyāna repentance (*chan hui* 懺悔).⁷ Nevertheless as we will see, *vinaya* ritual traditions for the atonement of transgressions were not always as entirely neglected by Chinese Buddhists as has often been supposed.

The *Śikṣādattaka* Penance

Five of the six extant complete *vinayas*—the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*, the *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya*, and the *Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya*—allow for one who transgresses the first *pārājika* (at least)⁸ to become what is called a *śikṣādattaka*.⁹ These

⁶ This is true of the major book-length studies of repentance in Chinese Buddhism such as Kuo 1994 and Shengkai 2004.

⁷ The famous *vinaya* scholar Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) thus commented that the Chinese monks of his day generally ignored the stipulations of the *vinaya* concerning atonement, and instead relied repentance liturgies based on Mahāyāna scriptures (*Si fen liu shan fan bu que xing shi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, T.1804, 40:99b12–17).

⁸ Within extant Indian *vinaya* texts or their translations, the possibility of becoming a *śikṣādattaka* is mentioned explicitly only in connection with violations of the first *pārājika* (celibacy). Chinese commentators sometimes came to the conclusion that it is permitted for all *pārājika* transgressions (see note 34 below). Precisely how these provisions were interpreted in different times and places is not always clear (see also Clarke 2000: 145–157; 2009a: 22).

⁹ Though absent from the Pāli *vinaya*, ethnographic data from modern Theravāda countries reveals a similar system of partial restitution for those who transgress the *pārājikas*, or at least, the first *pārājika* (Clarke 2009a: 31–35). Such a system may have a long history. The *Samantapāsādikā* (Buddhaghosa's commentary to the Pāli *vinaya*) thus allows those who violate a *pārājika* to avoid returning to lay life by becoming a “novice-stage dweller” (*sāmaṇerabhūmi*), a position that seems functionally and conceptually similar to the *śikṣādattaka* (Yamagiwa 1996). Though its true antiquity is unclear, the Pāli commentaries do manage to find canonical support for this idea. According to a passage from the *Aṅguttara-nikāya*: “Of him [who has fear of transgressions] the following is expected—that, not guilty of a *pārājika* he will not transgress one, and that guilty of a *pārājika* he will atone for it in accord with the Dharma.” *tass' etaṃ pāṭikaṅkham — anāpanno vā pārājikaṃ dhammaṃ na āpajjissati, āpanno vā pārājikaṃ dhammaṃ yathādhammaṃ paṭikarissati* (AN, 2.241). The word translated here as “atone” is *paṭikaroti*, the term that in *vinaya*

provisions are introduced through the story of a monk, usually named Nandika (sometimes called “Nandika the Meditator”),¹⁰ who breaks his celibacy having been seduced by a goddess while meditating in the forest.¹¹ Fearful that he has committed a *pārājika*, Nandika immediately confesses. The Buddha then declares that since Nandika did not conceal his transgression even for a moment, he is eligible to avoid returning to lay life if he undertakes a life-long “penance”¹² as a *śikṣādattaka*.

A *śikṣādattaka*, we are told, occupies a special rank within the monastic hierarchy, below the fully ordained monks but above the novices. While thus potentially remaining within the monastery, in keeping with this rank the *śikṣādattaka* is denied access to the ritual functions characteristic of the fully ordained—he cannot, for example, participate in the *poṣadha* (the fortnightly recitation of the monastic rules listed in the *prātimokṣa*), and he is barred from positions of administrative or ecclesiastical responsibility.¹³ In what is perhaps the most symbolically potent element of these rules, the *śikṣādattaka* is also not allowed to sleep in the same building as the other monks for more than three nights in a row. By not permanently sharing a roof with them, the *śikṣādattaka* remains officially “not in communion” (*asaṃvāsa*) with the other fully ordained monks.

literature refers to the “remedies” (a more literal translation of the word) necessary to purify transgressions (see note 24 and p. 403 below; cf. Anālayo 2016: 5–6). And, indeed, the commentary to the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* explains *paṭikaroti*, in this sentence, to mean becoming a “novice-stage dweller” (*sāmaṇerabhūmi*; see Mp, 3.216). Whether or not we can infer from this passage that some means of atonement for *pārājika* violations was recognized even by the authors/compiler of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* is unclear (unfortunately, there does not seem to be any known parallel to this passage in the Chinese translations or Sanskrit fragments of the Āgamas). But at the least it would seem that from the time of the Pāli commentaries, those who violated the *pārājikas*—or perhaps just some of the *pārājikas*—had the option to remain with the Sangha in the rank of a novice.

¹⁰ *Chan Nanti* 禪難提 in Chinese translations. As far as I know, no Indic language version of this title has survived.

¹¹ The details of the story vary somewhat between the versions. For a complete analysis of the different versions of the story, see Clarke 1999 (see in particular pp. 206–208).

¹² Yaśomitra’s *Abhidharmakośa-vyākhyā* uses the term *daṇḍakarman*, which Clarke translates as “act of punishment,” to describe what the *śikṣādattaka* must undertake (Clarke 2009a: 7). I follow Clarke in using the general term “penance” to describe this situation.

¹³ As with the stories of Nandika, the precise provisions that the *śikṣādattaka* must follow vary somewhat between the different *vinayas*. For a description of the daily schedule of a *śikṣādattaka* as given in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, see Schopen 1998: 157–80. For a comparative table of the differences between the extant *vinayas* in this regard, see Clarke 1999: 212–215.

The expression “not in communion,” used in the *vinaya* to describe what necessarily happens to those who violate a *pārājika*, has often been interpreted by modern scholars to mean that any such transgression results in being literally expelled from the monastery and returned to life as a layperson.¹⁴ Nevertheless as Shayne Clarke points out, the regulations for the *śikṣādattaka* clearly show that to be “not in communion” did not necessarily have this meaning. The *śikṣādattaka* was “not in communion” simply by virtue of living in a separate building from the other monks.¹⁵ The *śikṣādattaka* is thus “expelled” from the Sangha, but we must understand this expulsion to be of a *legal* (and hence ritual) nature, not a physical expulsion. The *śikṣādattaka* loses certain privileges of rank, and is legally no longer considered a fully ordained monk, but he nonetheless does not become a layperson, and also remains ritually superior to the novices.

Soteriological Consequences of *Pārājika* Transgression

The *vinaya* accounts thus make clear that transgression of the *pārājika* precepts (or at the very least, violations of celibacy) did not always mean a total and irrevocable expulsion from the monastic order broadly defined. Still, it is also clear that the *śikṣādattaka* occupies a liminal space—he is not made a lay person, but he is also no longer a full monk, and we might well wonder what other negative consequences were believed to go along with this. One point that Shayne Clarke has made in his recent studies is that *śikṣādattakas* were *not* deemed complete religious failures. In the account found in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, after becoming a *śikṣādattaka* Nandika continues to practice meditation and eventually achieves final liberation from rebirth by becoming an arhat. From this Clarke concludes that *śikṣādattakas* were generally thought to suffer no lasting harm to their spiritual potential. The story of Nandika, Clarke suggests, is in the end “not a story of monastic failure, but of religious success.”¹⁶

However this understanding of the soteriological potential of *śikṣādattakas* was probably not as widely shared as Clarke implies. At the very least, it would appear that in the Indian *vinaya* traditions made known in China during the fifth century, violation of the *pārājika* precepts was held

¹⁴ Gyatso 2005: 273.

¹⁵ Clarke 1999: 117.

¹⁶ Clarke 2009a: 30.

to have a permanently (that is to say, life-long) detrimental effect on one's spiritual potential, regardless of any institutional restitution afforded by the *sikṣādattaka* penance. This understanding is seen, first of all, within a somewhat unlikely source: meditation manuals. In the opening passages of the *Meditation Scripture* (*Zuo chan sanmei jing* 坐禪三昧經), an influential treatise translated into Chinese (and perhaps partly composed) by Kumārajīva in the early fifth century, we thus read that:

When a person desiring to practice *dhyāna* first goes to a master [for instruction], the master must ask: “Have you maintained the precepts purely? Do you have any heavy sins or evil perversions?” If [the practitioner] says that he is pure in regard to the five classes of precepts [of the *prātimokṣa*]¹⁷ and has no heavy sins or evil perversions, [the master] may next instruct him in the practice. If, however, he says that he has violated the precepts, [the master] must ask further: “What precepts have you violated?” If he says he has violated any of the grave [*pārājika*] precepts,¹⁸ the master must say: “A person with a mutilated face should not look in the mirror! Go! Chant scriptures, proselytize, or do good deeds, and in this way you may plant the conditions for attaining the path in a future life. For the present life you must give up [any practice of *dhyāna*]. [You are now] like a withered tree that will no more sprout flowers, leaves, or fruits however much it is watered.” If [the practitioner] has violated any of the other [less serious] precepts, [the master] should instruct him to atone using the appropriate method.¹⁹

¹⁷ The “five classes of precepts” (五眾戒) are the five major divisions of the precepts of the *prātimokṣa*, the first of which is the *pārājika* (there also exists a division of the *prātimokṣa* into seven categories). The term *wu zhong jie* 五眾戒 is quite rare in this meaning (the more usual term in Chinese is *wu pian jie* 五篇戒), though we also find it in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Treatise on Great Wisdom* (*Da zhi du lun* 大智度論, T.1509, 25:226a2–3). Both the *Meditation Scripture* and the *Treatise on Great Wisdom* were translated before the introduction of standardized *vinaya* terminology beginning with Kumārajīva's translation of the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (*Shi song lü* 十誦律), so it makes sense that these two works would contain shared but also nonstandard translations of technical *vinaya* terminology.

¹⁸ Given the earlier reference to the “five classes of precepts” of the *prātimokṣa*, it is almost certain that “grave precepts” (重戒) here means the *pārājikas*. This interpretation is strengthened by the similar passage in the *Vimuttimaggā* (see note 21 below), where the *pārājikas* are explicitly mentioned, as well as by the use of this same term *zhong jie* (“grave precepts”), otherwise rare in technical *vinaya* literature in Chinese, in this meaning in the *Treatise on Great Wisdom*, a text that as discussed above (note 17) shares certain non-standard technical *vinaya* terms with the *Meditation Scripture* (*Da zhi du lun* 大智度論, T.1509, 25:226a2–3).

¹⁹ 學禪之人、初至師所、師應問言。汝持戒淨不。非重罪惡邪不。若言五眾戒淨、無重罪惡邪、次教道法。若言破戒、應重問言。汝破何戒。若言重戒、師言。如人被截耳鼻、不須照鏡。汝且還去。精懃誦經、勸化、作福、可種後世道法因緣。此生永棄。譬如枯樹、雖加溉灌、不生華葉及其果實。若破餘戒、是時應教如法懺悔。 (*Zuo chan*

Another meditation text translated by Kumārajīva around this same time, the *Explanations of Meditation* (*Chan fa yao jie* 禪法要解), contains a similar statement about the impossibility of successfully practicing meditation after transgressing a *pārājika*.²⁰ Further afield, this same idea is also mentioned in the *Vimuttimagga*, the Pāli treatise that served as a main source for the more famous *Visuddhimagga*.²¹ That violations of the *pārājika* create life-long obstructions to the successful practice of meditation thus seems to have been a reasonably common understanding in Indian Buddhism during the first centuries of the Common Era.

It is significant that these meditation texts seem to presuppose that there might be, within the Sangha, those who have indeed violated one or more of the *pārājikas*. The *Vimuttimagga* here even explicitly uses the word “monk” (*bi qiu* 比丘) when it describes such a person. In other words these passages implicitly acknowledge that it would not have been unheard of to encounter someone who had violated one of the *pārājika* precepts but who could still be described as a “monk.” This may, perhaps, be a small indication that the *śikṣādattaka* penance, or something equivalent to it, was indeed used within at least some Indian Buddhist communities at this time.²²

But given my present purposes what is even more important about these passages is that they imply that despite the existence of the *śikṣādattaka* penance or its equivalent, violation of the *pārājika* precepts still carried with

sanmei jing 坐禪三昧經, T.614, 15:270c28–271a5).

²⁰ *Chan fa yao jie* 禪法要解, T.616, 15:287a27–b3.

²¹ *Jie tuo dao lun* 解脫道論, T.1648, 32:404a10–14 (note that the translation of this passage given by Ehara et. al. 1961: 24, is not accurate). The *Vimuttimagga* is generally held to be a direct precursor to the *Visuddhimagga*. The full text survives only in a sixth-century Chinese translation, though some portions are also extant in Tibetan. Despite their shared structure and content, there do appear to be some doctrinal differences between the *Vimuttimagga* and the *Visuddhimagga*, and some scholars have postulated that the *Vimuttimagga* derives from the Abhayagiri lineage (as opposed to the Mahāvihāra lineage, from which comes the majority of extant Pāli literature). Further uncertainties concern whether the text was originally written in Sanskrit or Pāli, and whether it was composed in Sri Lāṅka or imported from North India. See Crosby 1999.

²² That reference to such matters appears in texts associated with Kumārajīva is especially interesting in light of Clarke’s observation that Kumārajīva himself might have eventually become a *śikṣādattaka* (Clarke 1999a: 34n117). According to his biography, Kumārajīva was at one point “forced” by a local ruler to accept ten concubines so that he might father a son. After this point Kumārajīva continued his work as a translator and teacher, and is never said to have become a layman, but is also said to have no longer lived in the monks’ quarters (*Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳, T.2059, 50:332c1). Clarke wonders whether this might refer to the stipulation that *śikṣādattakas* not share quarters with fully ordained monks.

it life-long soteriological consequences. The logic here seems to be based on the traditional understanding that meditative attainment (*dhyāna*) depends on purity with respect to the precepts (*śīla*). In these meditation texts, this fundamental but potentially abstract relationship between meditation and morality is given a precise explanation: that successful meditation requires one to first atone for any transgressions in the appropriate manner stipulated in the *vinaya*.²³ Technically, however, the *pārājika* transgressions “cannot be atoned for,”²⁴ and their violation thus makes meditative attainment impossible during one’s present lifetime.

This understanding of the soteriological consequences of *pārājika* violations is explicitly presented in many of the Indian *vinaya* texts that would have been known to Chinese Buddhists in the early fifth century. The **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā* (*Sapoduo pini piposha* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙), a commentary to the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* most likely translated into Chinese in the early fifth century,²⁵ thus says of one who violates the first *pārājika*:

²³ This more concrete, ritually-based understanding of the dependence of *dhyāna* on *śīla* should be contrasted with how this relationship is often presented by modern scholars, where it is usually phrased in primarily psychological terms (King 1980: 28; Gethin 1998: 170). Read psychologically, refraining from unethical actions is a kind of preliminary meditation practice, the restraint of the mental tendencies that lead to unwholesome actions of body and speech. Although it is absolutely true that *śīla* is frequently discussed within Buddhist texts in such a manner, to focus on this aspect alone risks ignoring the connection between having pure *śīla* and publically verifiable, legally valid rituals of receiving the precepts and atoning for their transgression.

²⁴ *Bu ke chan* 不可懺 (*Chan fa yao jie* 禪法要解, T.616, 15:287a27). This expression likely translates what in Pāli *vinaya* texts and commentaries is called *appaṭikamma*, “[transgressions] for which there is no atonement,” in contrast to *sappaṭikamma*, “for which there is atonement” (Mp, 1.94). For a comprehensive analysis of the verb *prati+√kr* (“to atone”), usually translated in Chinese *vinaya* texts as *chan hui* 懺悔, see Mori 1999. Principally referring to the *pārājikas*, other violations of the *prātimokṣa* could become “without atonement” in certain cases. The *Pini mu jing* 毘尼母經 (**Vinaya-māṭṛkā-sūtra*), a text I will discuss in more detail below, thus classifies as “without atonement” (不可懺) shedding the blood of a buddha, merely wishing to kill a buddha, or the offense of a novice monk violating a *pārājika* (*Pini mu jing* 毘尼母經, T.1463, 24:813b22–28). These transgressions, none of which are technically a *pārājika*, are said to be similar to the *pārājikas* in that one who violates them will be unable to obtain any soteriological fruits in the present life.

²⁵ On this text, see Hiraoka 1960: 259–260. Funayama Tōru has raised some important questions about the status of this text. He points to a number of passages suggesting that it is not a straightforward translation of an Indic text, and argues that it may be a commentary on the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* delivered or written in China by an Indian *vinaya* master (Funayama 1998: 280–282).

When crops are crushed by hail they do not then yield fruit. In the same way one who violates this [first *pārājika*] precept will not obtain any of the four fruits of the *śramaṇa* [the four attainments from stream-enterer to arhat]. For when a seed has been burnt, though one might plant it in fertile soil, provide it with fertilizer, and irrigate it, it will neither sprout nor fruit. Similarly one who violates this precept, even while striving diligently will never [in this lifetime] be able to produce the sprouts and fruits [consisting in] the fruits of the path. [... In short] one who violates this precept, *even while remaining a member of the pure clerical assembly*, will not be able to achieve the four fruits of a *śramaṇa*.²⁶

In its earlier discussion of the first *pārājika*, the **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā* did not explicitly mention the provisions for the *śikṣādattaka*. Clearly, however, this procedure was known and accepted by the authors of this text, for it is allowed that one who so transgresses might somehow still remain “a member of the pure clerical assembly.”²⁷ But it is also stated, in no uncertain terms, that despite remaining “pure” in some sense, and despite remaining within the “clerical assembly,” violation of this precept prevents the attainment, in the present lifetime, of any of traditional four levels of awakening (the “four fruits of a *śramaṇa*”).

The views expressed here by the **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā* appear to have been widely shared, and similar statements are found in the **Vinaya-mātrkā-sūtra* (*Pini mu jing* 毘尼母經), an Indian *vinaya* text of uncertain lineage that also appeared in China in the early fifth century.²⁸ Unlike the **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā*, the **Vinaya-mātrkā-sūtra* includes the full story of Nandika’s atonement of his *pārājika* violation. It also provides the legal utterances (*karmavācānā*) to accompany the ecclesiastical act (*karman*) that officially removes or purifies the *pārājika* transgression:

²⁶ 復次如好田苗、若被霜雹摧折墮落、不得果實。犯此戒亦爾。燒滅道苗、不得沙門四果。復次如焦穀種、雖種良田、糞治、溉灌、不生苗實。犯此戒亦爾、雖復數加精進、終不能生道果苗實。如斷多羅樹、不生不廣。犯此戒亦爾、不得增廣四沙門果。復次如斷樹根、樹則枯朽。若犯此戒、道樹枯損 [...] 若犯此戒、雖在出家清淨眾中、不能成就四沙門果。(Sapoduo pini piposha 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙, T.1440, 23:515b4–15).

²⁷ I translate 出家清淨眾 as “pure clerical assembly” because *chu jia* 出家 (“those who have left the household,” often a translation of *pravrajaka*) usually refers to all those who have ordained into the monastic institution, including novice monks. The **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā* is thus not necessarily claiming that one who transgresses a *pārājika* could retain the status of a full monk or nun, merely that he or she will not have to return to lay life.

²⁸ As with the **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā*, we have no reliable information about the translator(s) of the **Vinaya-mātrkā-sūtra*. For a survey of the opinions concerning its origin, nature and possible school affiliation, see Hirakawa 1960: 263–264.

This monk, from today forth, having performed this legal act (*karman*), is to be known as one who holds the precepts purely. Despite this, in this lifetime he will not be able to transcend birth and death through the attainment of [any of the] four fruits. Nor will he be able to attain any undefiled merit [of meditative attainments].²⁹ It is merely that his obstruction [of having violated a *pārājika*] will not cause him to fall into hell. That is all. Just as a leaf fallen from a tree does not grow again, so too is it utterly impossible for someone who has violated a *pārājika* precept to attain the four fruits [or] accumulate any undefiled merit [in this lifetime].³⁰

As in the **Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā*, it is clear that here the transgressor of a *pārājika* is returned to some kind of monastic status, as he will once again be counted as “one who holds the precepts purely,” but also that, despite such restitution, higher meditative and soteriological attainments are deemed henceforth inaccessible.

Finally, although the discussion is much briefer, a passage in the *Bi'naiye* 鼻奈耶, another Indian *vinaya* text of uncertain provenance translated into Chinese in the late fourth or early fifth century, similarly suggests that *pārājika* violators are disqualified from higher attainments even though they may remain part of the monastic order.³¹

Precisely how these passages might nuance our picture of which understanding of the spiritual potential of the *śiṅṣādattaka* was most common in Indian Buddhism is a larger question that cannot be addressed in the present context. In any case, we must remember that the four complete *vinayas* translated into Chinese in the early fifth century (the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*, the *Mahīśāsaka-vinaya*, and the *Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya*) do not themselves say anything one way or another about whether a *śiṅṣādattaka* might go on to attain awakening or other higher soteriological fruits. The only extant and complete *vinaya* text to explicitly discuss this question is one that was not translated into Chinese until the seventh century: the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, in whose account, as

²⁹ “Undefiled merit” (*wu lou gong de* 無漏功德) may refer to a concept such as *anāsrava-kuśala*, “undefiled good deeds,” which is to say wholesome actions or states of mind that lead towards liberation (rather than merely towards better rebirth). Loosely, we may understand such things to refer to something like “soteriologically relevant meditative attainments.”

³⁰ 此比丘從今、得羯磨已、名為清淨持戒者、但此一身不得超生離死、證於四果。亦不得無漏功德。然障不入地獄耳。喻如樹葉落已、還生樹上、無有是處。若犯初篇、得證四果、獲無漏功德、亦無是處。(Pini mu jing 毘尼母經, T.1463, 24:813b12–17).

³¹ *Bi'naiye* 鼻奈耶, T.1464, 24:860b6–12.

Clarke has noted, Nandika eventually becomes an arhat even as a *śikṣā-dattaka*.

Nevertheless any fifth-century Chinese Buddhists who searched the then-available (and almost entirely newly translated) *vinaya* literature for an answer to this question would not have found mere silence. They would have found, rather, various other *vinaya* texts and commentaries, such as those discussed above, that explicitly denied future spiritual potential to the *śikṣādattaka*. This understanding would have been confirmed in the meditation texts translated by Kumārajīva, where even the attainment of advanced meditative states (*dhyāna*) is declared impossible for such a person. In short, as it would have appeared to someone in China during the fifth century, the methods given in the *vinaya* permit the atonement of *pārājika* transgressions only in the sense that one can remain a monk or nun (of sorts) and can avoid other negative fruits such as rebirth in hell. What someone in such a situation cannot do, it would have seemed, is reach any of the higher stages along the path to liberation in their present lifetime.

Vinaya-Style Rituals of Atonement: The Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness

The mere fact that Buddhist texts *translated* into Chinese in the early fifth century discuss the spiritual potential of the *śikṣādattaka* (in negative terms, as we have seen) does not necessarily mean that Chinese Buddhists themselves were interested in this question, or that, even if they were, they would have been concerned with what these Indian texts had to say. Indeed much within the sprawling corpus of Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts went unnoticed, unremarked, or simply ignored by later Chinese Buddhists. But questions about the nature and scope of atonement in the case of violations of the *pārājikas* did not share this fate. Soon after the texts examined above were translated into Chinese, there appeared in China a number of new methods for the atonement of these otherwise intractably grave transgressions. These methods were, on the one hand, deeply indebted to the traditions of Mahāyāna confession and repentance that had been widely practiced in China for centuries. But they were also in part modelled on, and were seemingly responding to, the traditional *śikṣādattaka* penance known from Indian *vinaya* texts. Compared with what was allowed for within the Indian *vinaya* literature known in fifth-century China, these new rituals promised something more—a *complete* purification that included not

only total restoration of monastic status, but also the recovery of soteriological potential (indeed these two things seem to have been seen as intrinsically connected). These rituals also seem, more broadly, to have attempted to extend the benefits of certain *vinaya*-style atonements—which in their original context were, by definition, relevant only to monks or nuns—to wider audiences.

One example of these new rituals appears in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* (*Zhi chan bing mi yao fa* 治禪病秘要法), a text most likely at least in part composed in China. Though the precise origins of this text are unclear, it seems to have first begun to circulate widely in or near the Southern capital of Jiankang 建康 during the middle of the Song dynasty (420–479).³²

The *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* presents a number of different methods for dealing with impediments to meditation practice, including, in the case at hand, the impediment caused by violation of the precepts. Notably, in addition to dealing with the effects of more mundane transgressions, the method here explicitly claims to be capable of destroying the otherwise indestructible soteriological impediments that, according to the *vinaya*, will necessarily accompany *pārājika* violations. At the same time, it also promises to restore those who violate such precepts to their original status of fully-ordained monks or nuns.

The ritual here bears a simple title: “method for healing violations of the precepts” (治犯戒法).³³ Despite its generic name, what stands out about this ritual is that it offers a powerful way of dealing with *pārājika* transgressions, and it was indeed in this context in particular that the text was often invoked by later Chinese Buddhists. The prolific *vinaya* commentator Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), in his discussion of the *sikṣādattaka* penance, thus specifically cites it as the most effective method in such cases.³⁴

³² For a detailed analysis of this text, see Greene 2012: 92–100; 109–136. See also Yamabe 1999: 108–111.

³³ The full passage is *Zhi chan bing mi yao fa* 治禪病秘要法, T.15, 620:336c16–337c17.

³⁴ *Si fen li shan fan bu que xing shi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, T.1804, 40:97a7–26. In this passage, Daoxuan also argues that atonement is possible for all four *pārājikas*, not just for breaches of celibacy. Daoxuan first cites the *karmavācānā* for the *sikṣādattaka* penance from the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* (*Si fen li* 四分律, T.1428, 22:972c2–15), which specifically indicates that it applies only for violations of the first *pārājika*. But he then explains that the *sikṣādattaka* penance is actually applicable for all four *pārājikas*, and that one should not follow the interpretation of “men of old” (昔人) who claimed otherwise. The identity of these “men of old” is not clear. It does seem clear, however, that Daoxuan recognized that the *vinayas* themselves only explicitly allow atonement of the first *pārājika*. His

As I will show, elements of the ritual from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* are clearly modelled on *vinaya* atonements. This is signalled already in its introduction, which presents what follows specifically as a means of healing violations of the *prātimokṣa*. This invocation of the *prātimokṣa* contrasts with the claims typically found in Mahāyāna repentance rites, which I will discuss in more detail below, where the object of attention is usually evil karma in general. In this way, the ritual in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* is framed from its beginning as what we could call a “*vinaya*-style” rite.

Interestingly, however, despite invoking the rules of the monastic *prātimokṣa*, the text also explains that this ritual can and should be used by anyone, including laypersons:

There may be monks, nuns, probationary nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, laymen, or laywomen who have received the Buddhist precepts and who [...] violate Buddhist precepts ranging from *duṣkṛta* offenses up to *pārājika* offenses. Like a drunken elephant who, paying no attention to the good or evil of what it does and unable to realize where it is going, tramples and destroys all manners of good things, so too does this practitioner trample and destroy the blue lotus pond of the pure precepts, thereby becoming a most abject precept-breaker.³⁵

The main consequence of violating the precepts—here presented as the precepts of the *prātimokṣa*, ranging from the lowest grade (*duṣkṛta*) up to the highest (*pārājika*)—is then said to be that the transgressor will be unable to attain advanced states of meditation. The ensuing method for removing these transgressions is thus explicitly introduced as a means of restoring the precept-breaker’s meditative potential, one of the things that, as we have

reference here to the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* thus seems to be an attempt to provide canonical (as Daoxuan would have seen it) support for a different interpretation. We should note, however, that other Chinese commentators sometimes read this text differently. Zhiyi 智顓 (538–597), for example, explicitly states that the procedure from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* applies only for violations of celibacy (*Jin guang ming jing wen ju* 金光明經文句, T.1785, 39:60c4–5). (Note, however, that Zhiyi elsewhere points to other sources that, he claims, provide *vinaya*-style methods for atoning any and all *pārājika* transgressions; see *Shi chan boluomi ci di fa men* 釋禪波羅蜜次第法門, T.1916, 46:485c13–17.)

³⁵ 若比丘、比丘尼、式叉摩尼、沙彌、沙彌尼、優婆塞、優婆夷、受佛禁戒 [...] 犯突吉羅乃至波羅夷。猶如醉象、不避好惡、不識諸方、踏壞一切諸善好物。四 [read 七] 眾亦爾、踏破淨戒青蓮花池、破戒猛盛。(Zhi chan bing mi yao fa 治禪病秘要法, T.15, 620:336 c17–23).

seen, are denied to the *śikṣādattaka* in both the *vinaya* texts and key Indian meditation texts available at this time in China.

In order to destroy his transgression and restore his meditative abilities, the practitioner must first confess to his preceptor. He must then “bring to mind” (*nian* 念) a litany of deities and other objects of worship: Śākyamuni Buddha and the other six buddhas of the past, the thirty-five buddhas, the “various bodhisattvas” (諸菩薩), and the “Great Vehicle” (大乘). He then “contemplates emptiness” (觀於空法), and imagines each of these buddhas and bodhisattvas pouring water over his head. He then further imagines that he has fallen into the Avīci hell, whereupon he again brings to mind the Buddha and prays to be rescued.

These practices—which even in the mere kinds of deities they invoke, such as the thirty-five buddhas, show the influence of Mahāyāna ritual traditions—are deemed successful when the practitioner has an auspicious dream: “The various buddhas [he has invoked will appear] in his dreams, emitting light from the white tuft of hair between their eyebrows that relieves his hellish suffering.”³⁶ Full of shame, the practitioner then removes his outer monks robe, and going before the other monks:

Like the crumbling of a great mountain he casts his body to the ground. His heart filled with shame, he repents all his sins, and [as a means of atonement] for eight hundred days he performs various menial duties for the other monks [such as] cleaning and emptying the toilets. At the conclusion of the eight hundred days he should bathe, put on his *saṅghāti* [outer robe], enter the sanctuary, concentrate his mind, place his palms together, and for between one and seven days carefully contemplate the light of the white tuft of hair between the Buddha’s eyebrows, one of the marks of a great man. He then goes back to see his preceptor and [again] seeks to repent.³⁷

His preceptor then assigns various meditation practices, in particular the contemplation of bodily impurity (不淨觀), and when these meditation practices are successful (success that is marked by the occurrence of a vision) the practitioner can make a formal request to the other monks to rejoin the order. Here, the text provides the words the practitioner should

³⁶ 諸佛如來、於其夢中、放白毫光、救地獄苦。(Zhi chan bing mi yao fa 治禪病秘要法, T.15, 620:337a23–24).

³⁷ 五體投地、如大山崩。心懷慚愧、懺悔諸罪、為僧執事、作諸苦役、掃廁擔糞。經八百日、然後復當澡浴身體、還著僧伽梨、入於塔中、一心合掌、諦觀如來眉間白毫大人相光。一日至七日、還至智者所、求索懺悔。(Zhi chan bing mi yao fa 治禪病秘要法, T.15, 620:337a26–b2).

speak, in a style closely modelled on the *karmavācanā* scripts used in the monastic legal rituals of the *vinaya*:

I, the monk so-and-so (or, the nun so-and-so), have finished eight hundred days of menial labour. I have contemplated the white tuft of hair between the Buddha's eyebrows for seven days. I have performed the contemplation of the poisonous snakes, have completed the meditation on hell, and have further contemplated a single buddha and recited the repentance text. In the contemplation of impurity I have again reached the stage of the non-existence of self and other, where I have had a vision of the Buddha pouring a pitcher of water over my head. And in my dreams a god has appeared to me and said that I am pure. That I am now fully humble is something that I know for certain. Thus may you please accept this.³⁸

The penitent must then recite the *prātimokṣa* eight hundred times, corresponding perhaps to the eight hundred days of penance, at which point: “it is allowed that he has regained the state of being no different than a pure monk” (如淨比丘得無有異) and that he may again “recite the precepts together with the community of [fully-ordained] monks” (可與僧中說戒).

Although the method here claims to be effective (and indeed necessary) for any transgression of the *prātimokṣa*, a particular debt to the *vinaya* procedures for *śikṣādattakas* is evident in the second section of the ritual, which structurally seems to be where the practitioner's monastic status is restored.³⁹ Here, the practitioner “removes his outer robe (*saṅghāṭi*) and wears his under-robe (*antarvāsa*)” (脫僧伽梨著安多會), and in this condition goes before the “pure monks” (清淨僧) to confess. The point is clear—by removing his outer robe the penitent monk symbolically renounces his monastic status. Indeed this is likely an allusion to the *vinaya* stories

³⁸ 欲說戒時、應唱是語：某甲比丘、某甲比丘尼、已八百日、行於苦役。七日觀佛眉間白毫、作毒蛇觀、地獄想成、復觀一佛、說懺悔法、不淨觀門無我人鏡 [read 境]、還復通達。境界中、佛以澡罐水、灌比丘頂、天神現夢、說已清淨。今已慚愧。我所證知。唯願聽許。(Zhi chan bing mi yao fa 治禪病秘要法, T.15, 620:337b15–20).

³⁹ The ritual as a whole seems to comprise three parts, each addressing a different negative consequence of violation of the precepts: rebirth in hell, loss of monastic status, and inability to reach meditative attainment. These sections are marked by three different times when the practitioner “repents” (懺悔): first privately to his preceptor, then to the congregation of “pure monks,” and finally again to his preceptor. In the first section, the practitioner imagines his own rebirth in hell, and then experiences a vision of being rescued by the Buddha's light. In the second sequence, the practitioner goes before the other monks and performs tasks modelled on the *śikṣādattaka* penance (as discussed below), and which hence seem to relate primarily to monastic status. In the final sequence the practitioner must succeed in a series of meditation practices, and this section thus demonstrates that the practitioner has fully regained his meditative potential.

introducing the *śikṣādattaka* penance, where Nandika, upon committing his misdeeds, declares himself unfit to wear his formal outer robe (*saṅghāti*), a symbol of monkhood, and confesses before the other monks wearing only his under-robe (*antarvāsa*).⁴⁰

Further parallels with the *vinaya* accounts of the *śikṣādattaka* penance occur in what follows. Having confessed to the other monks, for eight hundred days the penitent must “serve the other monks” (為僧執事) by “performing menial duties” (作諸苦役). Most notably, he “cleans and empties the toilets” (掃廁擔糞). These tasks seem to correspond to, or at the very least to allude to, the *vinaya* penance of *parivāsa*, “separate dwelling” (*bie zhu* 別住), a punishment assigned for the six-day probation required of those who transgress the second most serious class of rules after the *pārājikas* (the so-called *saṅghavaśeṣa* offenses).⁴¹ And it is the restrictions and duties assigned during *parivāsa* (translated henceforth as “probation”) that form the basis of the *śikṣādattaka* penance, where they are maintained on a permanent, rather than temporary basis.

As discussed above, according to the *vinayas*, *śikṣādattakas* and others undergoing temporary periods of probation are denied the status of full members of the monastic community—they cannot accept food served by other monks, they cannot have their feet washed by other monks, they cannot preach, and so forth. According to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the most complete description of these rules in a surviving Indic-language text:

Then, after all those who are fully ordained (*upasampannānām*) but before those who are not fully ordained, he, with a pliant demeanour and keeping firmly in mind the awareness that he is not a monk (*abhikṣusaṃjñām upas-thāpya*), must eat.⁴²

⁴⁰ This is how the matter is described in the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (*Shi song lü* 十誦律, T.1435, 23:3a12). In the *Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya*, Nandika actually removes *all* his robes and goes before the other monks naked, “covering his genitals with his left hand” (*Mohesengqi lü* 1 摩訶僧祇律, T.1425, 22:232b6).

⁴¹ The basic six-day punishment in such cases is known as *mānatva* (Pāli, *mānatta*), with the title *parivāsa* being used when the period of punishment is extended in those cases where the initial offense was concealed (the precise usage of these terms varies somewhat between the different *vinayas*). On these provisions, see Nolot 1996: 116–36; Satō 1963: 411–32; Hirakawa 1964: 246–54.

⁴² Schopen 1998: 158. I have changed Schopen’s translation of *upasampanna* from “ordained” to “fully ordained,” since what is being specified here is that the *śikṣādattaka* is ritually ranked below the fully ordained *bhikṣus* but above the novice monks. Schopen here translates the rules for *parivāsa* from the *Parivāsika-vastu*; he reports that the chores of the *śikṣādattaka*, given in the *Kṣudraka-vastu*, are identical.

On a practical and symbolic level the probationer thus occupies an intermediary space between the fully ordained monks and the “not fully ordained,” which is to say the novice monks (*śrāmaṇeras*), who have received only a preliminary set of precepts.⁴³ In keeping with his reduced rank, the probationer must furthermore perform the same menial duties that, in other sources, are discussed as the typical tasks of novice monks.⁴⁴ Again following the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*:

Having risen at the very break of day, the door must be opened. The lamp-pot must be removed. The *vihāra* must be watered down, swept, and a coat of fresh cow dung applied [for cleaning and purification]. The privy must be cleaned. Earth and leaves [for cleaning after using the toilet] must be set out, or cool water, depending on the season.⁴⁵

In the sources that would have been known in fifth-century China, the main tasks associated with the probationer seem to have been cleaning the monastery and emptying the toilets. According to the **Vinaya-mātrkā-sūtra* (*Pini mu jing* 毘尼母經):

[The probationer] must sit in a lower position than all other fully ordained monks, and when eating, his mat must not touch theirs. Moreover he is to perform all kinds of menial chores (苦役) for the other monks, such as sweeping the stupa and the monks’ quarters, and he must thoroughly clean the toilets. Further when he goes among the other monks, they must not talk with him. If someone asks him a question, he must not answer.⁴⁶

In fifth-century China it would thus have been well known that the major task of the probationer, and by extension the *śikṣādattaka*, was cleaning,

⁴³ That the *śikṣādattaka* is to be ranked “below the monks but above the novices” is also mentioned in the *Sarvāstivāda-* and *Mahāsāṅghika-vinayas* (Clarke 1999: 212).

⁴⁴ That the *śikṣādattaka*, consigned to life-long probation, was indeed considered a kind of novice is seen in that the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* actually terms such a person a *śikṣādattaka-śrāmaṇera* (學梅沙彌; Clarke 1999: 70). And while the other known *vinayas* do not use this term, the menial tasks assigned to probationers and *śikṣādattakas* do seem to form part of the standard duties of novices and junior monks (*Sapoduo pini piposha* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙, T.1440, 23:514b28–c1; *Si fen lu* 四分律, T.1428, 22:801c5–6). In his commentaries, Daoxuan also explicitly makes the connection between how the probationer must serve the other monks and the way that a *śrāmaṇera* serves his preceptor (*upadhyāya*). See *Si fen lu shan fan bu que xing shi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, T.1804, 40:98c27–99a4.

⁴⁵ Schopen 1998: 158, with some added explanations.

⁴⁶ 一切大僧下坐不得連草食。又復一切眾僧苦役、掃塔及僧房、乃至僧大小行來處、皆料理之。又復雖入僧中、不得與僧談論。若有問者、亦不得答。(Pini mu jing 毘尼母經, T.1463, 24:811a29–b6).

specifically cleaning the toilets, the stupa, and the monks quarters.⁴⁷ It is precisely these tasks that are mentioned in the ritual from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* as the “menial chores” (苦役)—the same word used in the **Vinaya-māṭṛkā-sūtra*—that the penitent must perform.

The eight hundred days of humbling service mandated by the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* can thus be seen as a middle ground between the lifelong sentence of a traditional *śikṣādattaka*, and the relatively short “probation” (*parivāsa*) that, according to the *vinaya*, is sufficient for transgressions less serious than the *pārājikas*. At the same time, the benefits promised by the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* go beyond anything that would have been found in the *vinaya* texts available in China at this time, where *śikṣādattakas*, despite remaining monastics of a sort, are permanently hobbled, unable to succeed in meditation or reach higher attainments along the path to liberation. Restoration of meditative potential indeed seems to be central to the ritual from *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*. It is stipulated explicitly that success in the contemplation of impurity is needed in order to verify that the practitioner has been fully purified, and when formally asking the community for re-admittance, the practitioner must publicly declare his successful meditative attainment.

This restoration of meditative ability goes hand in hand with the penitent’s *complete* restoration of monastic status. Unlike the *śikṣādattaka* as described in the *vinaya*, who is denied access to symbolically important aspects of monastic life such as the bi-monthly recitation of the *prātimokṣa*, one who completes the penance of the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* is explicitly allowed to once again recite the *prātimokṣa* with the other monks, an act that ritually affirms the restoration of the practitioner’s status as a fully ordained monk or nun.

⁴⁷ In China, the **Vinaya-māṭṛkā-sūtra* seems to have become the *locus classicus* for the description of these duties, and in his *vinaya* commentaries Daoxuan draws almost exclusively from this text when discussing *vinaya* methods for the atonement of *saṅghāvaśeṣa* offenses (*Si fen lü shan fan bu que xing shi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, T.1804, 40:97a27–b1).

Expanding Audiences: The *Oceanic Scripture on the Samādhi of the Contemplation of the Buddha*

As we have seen, the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* promises to transgressors of the *pārājikas* benefits that the Indian *vinaya* texts known in fifth-century China explicitly declared impossible. This text also seems to represent a conscious effort to make *vinaya* rituals of atonement, which in their original context are by definition intended for monks or nuns, relevant to a broader audience, and as seen above the introduction to the ritual states clearly that it can and should be used by all Buddhists, monastic or lay. Curiously, despite this seeming universalism, within the ritual itself the actor is presumed to be a monk or nun with a *saṅghāti* robe which must be removed at a key moment of the ritual. The formal declarations that conclude the rite also mention only monks or nuns. If the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* is attempting to apply the “technology” of *vinaya* atonement to a broader audience, this effort seems to be comparatively immature, as this broader audience is mentioned only in the frame, not the ritual itself. In other fifth-century Chinese texts, however, we see evidence that further efforts were eventually made to more coherently present non-monastic versions of these rituals.

One such example occurs in the *Oceanic Scripture on the Samādhi of the Contemplation of the Buddha* (*Guan fo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經; *Ocean Scripture* hereafter),⁴⁸ a text closely related to the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* and one that seems to have been composed in a similar time and place.⁴⁹ Although the *Ocean Scripture* mentions these rituals only in passing (as if with the expectation that more complete methods

⁴⁸ The title *Guan fo sanmei hai jing* can be interpreted in different ways. I suspect, however, that within the title of this text the words *hai*, “ocean,” and *jing*, “scripture,” both refer to the text itself. Indeed the Sanskrit word *sāgara* (“ocean”) is frequently used in the titles of texts to mean something like “comprehensive collection.” The earliest bibliographic records pertaining to this text also seem to use these two words interchangeably. The *Chu san zang ji ji* thus records the title of the text as *Guan fo sanmei jing* (T.2145:55.11c11), while the *Gao seng zhuan* lists it simply as *Guan fo sanmei hai* (T.2059:50.335c11).

⁴⁹ On the close linguistic connections between the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* and the *Ocean Scripture*, see Tsukinowa 1971: 102–109. On the *Ocean Scripture*, see Yamabe 1999.

for carrying them out were either known to its readers or available elsewhere), even from the brief descriptions we can note a connection with the ritual from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*.

The first passage to mention these matters begins by explaining that there exists a special method of “contemplating” (*guan* 觀) the Buddha’s *ūrṇa*, the “white tuft of hair between the eyebrows” (眉間白毫) as the Chinese translations here give it. This method will, we are told, eliminate all grave transgressions, including the four *pārājikas*.⁵⁰ It will be recalled that the first section of the ritual from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, which seemed to address the karmic consequences of the practitioner’s transgressions, similarly involved various “contemplations” and ended with a vision of light emerging from the Buddha’s *ūrṇa*. The *Ocean Scripture* continues by noting that: “following this [contemplation of the *ūrṇa*] there is a formal ritual procedure (*karman*) which is given in another scripture” (然後羯磨，事在他經). It is not implausible to interpret this as a reference to either the ritual in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* itself, or something very similar.

In a later passage we find a more explicit description of the necessary ritual procedures. These procedures are indeed similar to those in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*. Yet compared to that text, they also appear to have been tailored to specifically include the possibility of laypersons performing the rite. The complete passage runs as follows:

First, [the practitioner] must enter the sanctuary and clean the floor using fragrant mud and earth. To the extent that he is able [to afford it], he must burn incense and scatter flowers in offering to the image of the Buddha. Having then confessed his evil deeds, he must bow before the Buddha and repent. Humbling his mind in this manner for between one and seven days, he must next return to the assembly [of monks], clean and sweep the floor of the monks’ quarters, empty the toilets, and repent (懺悔) before the monks, bowing to their feet. He must serve [the monks] like this for seven days without slacking. If he is a monk, he must then recite the *vinaya* with utmost fluency. If he is a householder, he must serve his parents with filial devotion and honour his teachers. [...Then], dwelling in a pure place, he must burn various kinds of precious incense, bow to Śākyamuni Buddha, and say the following: “Homage to the great worthy one, my preceptor, of right and universal knowledge, the greatly compassionate World-honoured One! May you cover and protect your disciple with your cloud-like compassion.”

⁵⁰ *Guan fo sanmei hai jing* 觀佛三昧海經, T.643, 15:655.b6–24.

Having spoken these words, he must cry forth tears and throw himself to the ground before the image [of the Buddha].⁵¹

As in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, the heart of the ritual is a period of humbling servitude in which the practitioner performs menial chores for the other monks. Yet we also see here some important differences. Firstly, in the *Ocean Scripture* the role of the preceptor is filled by the Buddha, not the practitioner's human teacher, and it is to the Buddha (in the form of an icon) that the practitioner confesses his transgressions (though confession to the community of monks is also mentioned). More importantly, perhaps, we see that some elements from the ritual in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* that could only apply to monks or nuns—such as the removing of the *saṅghātī* robe—are absent. Finally, in some cases there are specific references to alternative procedures for laypersons—in place of reciting the *vinaya*, laypersons should instead “serve their parents with filial devotion.”⁵²

Mahāyāna Repentance and *Vinaya* Atonement: The *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*

The rituals discussed above seem to have been composed in response to, or at least in conscious dialog with, *vinaya* rituals for probation (*parivāsa*) and the *śikṣādattaka* penance, both in terms of their specific procedures, but also in terms of the benefits they claim to offer. But we can also see in them influence from Mahāyāna ritual traditions.⁵³ The ritual from the *Secret*

⁵¹ 先入佛塔、以好香泥及諸瓦土、塗地令淨。隨其力能、燒香散華、供養佛像。說已過惡、禮佛懺悔。如是伏心、經一七日、復至眾中、塗掃僧地、除諸糞穢、向僧懺悔、禮眾僧足。復經七日、如是供養、心不疲厭。若出家人、應誦毘尼、極令通利。若在家人、孝養父母、恭敬師長 [...] 住於靖處、燒眾名香、禮釋迦文而作是言。南無大德我大和上、應正遍知、大悲世尊、願以慈雲、覆護弟子。作是語已、五體投地、泣淚像前。(《Guan fo sanmei hai jing 觀佛三昧海經》, T.643, 15:690c2–14).

⁵² There is at least one other relevant passages in this text where we also find ritual procedures similar to those in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, along with slight additions that might be interpreted as attempts to make the ritual more appropriate for laypersons (《Guan fo sanmei hai jing 觀佛三昧海經》, T.643, 15:691a7–10).

⁵³ In contrasting *vinaya* rituals with Mahāyāna ones, I of course do *not* intend to imply that the Mahāyāna is something that should be defined, in general, in opposition to the *vinaya*. I am merely signaling the distinction between the kinds of rituals that are described in Mahāyāna scriptures and those found in *vinaya* texts.

Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness thus began by instructing the practitioner to invoke the thirty-five buddhas, various bodhisattvas, and the “Great Vehicle.” Reference to the “thirty-five buddhas” here is particularly significant because this set of deities is closely associated with the so-called *Triskandha* ritual, an ancient liturgical sequence known from many different Mahāyāna scriptures and one that forms the basis for the vast majority of medieval Chinese repentance (*chan hui* 懺悔) rites.⁵⁴ The practitioner of the ritual from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* must also “contemplate the truth of emptiness” (觀於空法), something that would appear to invoke, at least implicitly, the common Mahāyāna idea that by contemplating their ultimate emptiness one can potentially destroy even the gravest transgressions.⁵⁵ And, finally, we may note that in the *Ocean Scripture*, the practitioner addresses his confession not only to the community of monks and nuns, the Sangha, but also to the Buddha. The contrast between confession to the Sangha and confession to the Buddha is generally seen as a key conceptual and structural difference between *vinaya* rituals of atonement and Mahāyāna repentance rites respectively, and it is significant that in this text both of these are found together.⁵⁶

Thus despite certain roots in *vinaya* procedures for atonement of grave transgression of the *prātimokṣa*, the rituals seen in texts such as the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* and the *Ocean Scripture* evidently took form in an environment where Mahāyāna rituals of repentance were also known and practiced.

⁵⁴ On the *Triskandha* ritual as the foundation of Mahāyāna liturgical practice, see Shizutani 1974: 133–47; Barnes 1993 and 1999; Williams 2002; Nattier 2003: 117–21. The influence of this ritual form on medieval Chinese repentance liturgies (and indeed medieval Chinese Buddhist ritual more broadly) has been studied extensively by Daniel Stevenson (1987).

⁵⁵ Perhaps the most famous early example of this is the *Ajātaśatru-kaukṛtya-ṅṅodanā*, which judging from the existence of a second-century Chinese translation of it (*T.626*) must be among the earliest of Mahāyāna sutras (early Sanskrit fragments of this text have also now been found; see Hartmann and Harrison 1998). This text is a reimagining of the famous episode from the early sutras in which the king Ajātaśatru confesses his crime of patricide to the Buddha. In the Nikāya/Āgama version of this story, the Buddha accepts this confession but declares to his monks that Ajātaśatru will still be reborn in hell after death, since killing one’s father is a so-called *ānantarya* transgression, an evil deed that necessarily leads to hell in one’s immediately subsequent rebirth. In the Mahāyāna version, however, Ajātaśatru escapes this fate through the contemplation of the ultimate emptiness of karma (more precisely, it is said that he will enter hell but not suffer, and will then immediately escape from it). For more on the various versions of this story, see Radich 2011; Wu 2014.

⁵⁶ On the contrast between confession to the Buddha and confession to the Sangha, see Williams 2002: 25–27.

That *vinaya*-style atonements would have been practiced in such environments is not, in itself, unexpected. Indeed the *vinaya*, or more specifically the *prātimokṣa*, was always the core of Buddhist monastic institutional identity, and neither in India nor in medieval China was it simply abandoned or ignored by those who followed the Mahāyāna path.⁵⁷

What may be more notable, however, is the way that the rituals we have examined seem to be attempting to actively integrate these two nominally distinct traditions—*vinaya* rituals that offer institutional restitution for transgressions of the *prātimokṣa*, and Mahāyāna repentance rituals whose principal benefit is usually the elimination of evil karma, not restoration of monastic status. In the examples discussed above it is not clear whether this attempt to join *vinaya* rituals of atonement with Mahāyāna repentance was a self-conscious one, or whether the rituals in question were simply created in a context where both sets of practices were common. However there is at least one further example that does seem to show that the question of how one might integrate these two traditions was an active topic of concern, and which furthermore proposes itself as a solution to the potential conflict between the differing treatment of *pārājika* violations found in *vinaya* atonements on the one hand, and Mahāyāna repentance rituals on the other.

This example is the ritual for the elimination of transgressions found in the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* (*Guan Xukongzang Pusa jing* 觀虛空藏菩薩經), another of the so-called “Contemplation Scriptures” which, like the *Ocean Scripture*, were all most likely composed or compiled in China in the early fifth century. The repentance ritual from this text enjoyed considerable popularity in fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-century China.⁵⁸ Its close connection to the ritual described in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* in particular can be seen in

⁵⁷ As recent scholarship now routinely points out, in Indian Buddhism the Mahāyāna never formed a new *nikāya* (ordination lineage) distinct from the traditional *vinayas*. This did occur in later Japanese Buddhism, however, where the precepts of the *vinaya* were often rejected in favour of the so-called bodhisattva precepts (Groner 1984).

⁵⁸ A variety of sources attest to the popularity of the ritual from the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* in medieval China. One key early source is an essay (which may have originally been a liturgical text) composed by Emperor Wen 文 (r.559–566) of the Chen 陳 dynasty on the occasion of a repentance rite devoted to Ākāśagarbha (*Guang hong ming ji* 廣弘明集, T.2013, 52:333c29–334a21). Excerpts from the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* also figure prominently in medieval encyclopedias in reference to the practice of repentance (see, e.g., *Fa yuan zhu lin* 法苑珠林, T.2122, 53:913b13–c26).

that its heart consists in an eight-hundred-day penance of toilet-cleaning, the same distinctive procedure seen in that text.⁵⁹

Given its importance in medieval China, it is no surprise that the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* has been well studied by modern scholars.⁶⁰ Nevertheless previous studies of this text and its associated ritual have not addressed what may be its most significant feature: its direct engagement with the potential conflict between how *pārājika* transgressions are handled in *vinaya* rites of atonement on the one hand, and Mahāyāna repentance rituals on the other.

That this is the principal concern of the text is evident from its opening passages. Upāli, the disciple of the Buddha foremost in knowledge of the *vinaya*, here questions the Buddha about a contradiction he perceives between the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra*, which, as is common in Mahāyāna sutras, promises remission from the very gravest of sins, and “the *vinaya*,” which, as Upāli says, demands that those who transgress the grave (*zhong* 重) precepts be “expelled” or at the very least lose some of the privileges of their monastic status:⁶¹

[Upāli said to the Buddha:] Previously, in a holy scripture [the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra*], you said that [chanting] the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha can remove all evil karma and can cure outcaste kings and outcaste monks of their evil conduct.⁶² How should those who wish to be cured of such evils go about contemplating the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha? Supposing that they do eventually see him [as the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* says they will],⁶³ how should they [resume their former status in which

⁵⁹ Medieval commentators too sometimes noted the close connection between these two texts (Kuo 1994: 69).

⁶⁰ de Visser 1931; Kuo 1994: 136–138; Yamabe 2005: 32–33. For a comparison of the various repentance texts featuring worship of the 35 buddhas, including the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*, see Shioiri 2007: 281–288.

⁶¹ For a different translation of this passage see Yamabe 2005: 32–33.

⁶² Here the text seems to explicitly reference *T.405 (Xukongzang Pusa jing 虛空藏菩薩經)*, a late fourth- or early fifth-century translation of the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra*. In that text, those who have committed “grave” transgressions are likened to *caṇḍalas*, the “outcastes” of Brahmanical religion who have lost their caste status as a result of grievous sin (*Xukongzang Pusa jing*, *T.405*, 13:653c11–23). A large portion of this text is devoted to listing what constitutes a “grave” transgression in the cases of kings, ministers, monks, and “beginning bodhisattvas” (*ibid.*, 651c9–654a5). Various ritual procedures are then prescribed for worshiping the bodhisattva so as to destroy one’s transgressions. Among the methods given, “chanting [Ākāśagarbha’s] name” (稱名) figures prominently, and this seems to be what Upāli is referring to here.

⁶³ The *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* states that the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will appear

they were allowed to] dwell together [with the other monks], [perform the] *poṣadha*, [and take on] monastic responsibilities?

In the *vinaya* the Buddha has said that the following people must definitely be expelled, like broken rocks [that cannot be made whole again]:⁶⁴ laymen who have broken the five precepts or transgressed the eight fast-day precepts, monks, nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, and nuns-in-training who have transgressed the four grave injunctions [*pārājikas*], lay bodhisattvas who have violated the six grave rules, and monastic bodhisattvas who have transgressed the eight grave injunctions. But, [in contradiction to this,] in that scripture [the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra*] you have said that the merciful bodhisattva *Ākāśagarbha* can relieve all suffering, and you have further provided a spell that can remove [all] sins.⁶⁵ If there really is someone [who manages to purify their sins in this manner], how can this be known [to others]? How can it be confirmed?⁶⁶

As we can see from the second paragraph above, the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* is concerned not only with violations of the *pārājikas* by monks and nuns, but with a number of other kinds of transgressions as well, including transgressions of the so-called

before those who have sinned and instruct them in the purification of their sins (see, e.g., T.405, 13:654bc9–654a5). It is interesting to note that in the passage here from the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*, what it is that practitioners need do is “contemplate” (*guan* 觀) the bodhisattva *Ākāśagarbha*. This word “contemplate,” a key term in all the Contemplation Scriptures, is not used in this manner in the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* itself, and its presence here seems to reflect the new cultic milieu in which the Contemplation Scriptures were written, one in which the verb *guan* 觀 came to be used to refer to the entire procedure for worshiping and invoking certain deities such as *Ākāśagarbha* in the hopes of obtaining a vision of them (see Mai 2009).

⁶⁴ The image of the broken rock is often used in the *vinaya* to describe the manner in which transgressions of the *pārājikas* permanently destroy one’s status as a full monk or nun. The specific phrasing here may be indebted to the Chinese translation of the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*, wherein, as part of the ritual script used for conferring the full precepts during an ordination ceremony, it is stated that: “Just as when a rock breaks it splits into two parts and cannot be made whole again, so too a monk who violates a *pārājika* can never again accomplish the practice of a monk” (譬如大石破為二分、終不可還合、比丘亦如是、犯波羅夷法、不可還成比丘行; *Si fen li* 四分律, T.1428, 22:815c15–16).

⁶⁵ This presumably refers to one of the *dhāraṇī* given in the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra*, the recitation of which is said to purify all sins.

⁶⁶ 先於功德經中、說虛空藏菩薩摩訶薩名、能除一切惡不善業、治王旃陀羅乃至沙門旃陀羅諸惡律儀。如此惡事若欲治、當云何觀虛空藏菩薩。設得見者、云何共住、布薩、僧事。若優婆塞破五戒、犯八戒齋、出家比丘、比丘尼、沙彌、沙彌尼、式叉摩尼犯四重禁、在家菩薩毀六重法、出家菩薩犯八重禁、如是過人、世尊先於毘尼中說決定驅償 [read 擯]、如大石破。今於此經說大悲虛空藏能救諸苦、及說呪以除罪咎。設有此人、云何知之、以何為證。(Guan Xukongzang Pusa jing 觀虛空藏菩薩經, T.409:13. 677b10–19).

bodhisattva precepts.⁶⁷ Indeed, the particulars of the worship of the 35 buddhas—the method that the text ultimately proposes for eliminating the stain of these transgressions—are drawn from the version of the *Triskandha* ritual found in the *Vinaya-viniścaya-upāli-paripṛcchā*, a text that from at least the early fifth century had begun to be used in conjunction with rituals for receiving the bodhisattva precepts.⁶⁸

Previous scholars have noted this connection between the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* and the then-nascent bodhisattva-precept tradition. What seems to have hitherto escaped attention, however, is the way that this text also seems to take as a principal concern the relationship between *vinaya* atonement practices and Mahāyāna ritual.

Thus Upāli, noting that the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* promises remission from even the worst of sins, wonders how those who avail themselves of such methods can “dwell together, [perform the] *poṣadha*, [and take on] monastic responsibilities.” To understand the meaning of this question we must remember that “not dwelling together” (*bu gong zhu* 不共住) is a technical term from the *vinaya*, where it translates *asaṃvāsa*, “not in communion,” the state acquired by a monk or nun who violates a *pārājika* (or more broadly, by anyone who has lost, temporarily or permanently, his or her status as a fully ordained monk or nun). And as discussed above, according to the procedures found in the *vinaya* texts known in fifth-century China, those who become *śikṣādattakas*, even while remaining members of the monastic community in some sense, are nonetheless forever “not in communion” (meaning both that they lack the status of fully ordained monks or nuns, and also, more concretely, that they are not allowed to share

⁶⁷ The *bodhisattva* precepts developed in India sometime in the late fourth century, and beginning from this time we find a number of texts translated into Chinese that contain outlines for different systems of such precepts, and different methods for receiving them. Their relative novelty at this time can be seen in that, for example, they do not appear in any of Kumārajīva’s translations, but they are mentioned prominently in the works of numerous translators who arrived in China in the subsequent decades. In China, these various lists and rituals would, in the late fifth century, eventually coalesce in the (Chinese-authored) *Brahma Net Scripture* (*Fan wan jing* 梵網經). On the spread of rituals for receiving the bodhisattva precepts in fifth- and sixth-century China, see Funayama 1995.

⁶⁸ As noted by Yamabe (2005: 28–34), the earliest versions of the *Vinaya-viniścaya-upāli-paripṛcchā* (as attested in Chinese translations) do not contain a ritual for receiving the bodhisattva precepts. Nevertheless in the early fifth century, we find this text combined with a bodhisattva-precept ordination ritual (derived from the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*) in Guṇavarman’s Chinese translation of the *Pusa shan jie jing* 菩薩善戒經 (T.1582).

sleeping quarters with the rest of the Sangha). The other two activities mentioned by Upāli in his questions to the Buddha—performing the *poṣadha* and taking on monastic office—are also privileges that the *vinayas* known in China at this time permanently deny to *śikṣādattakas*.

The *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* is thus here posing a very specific question: does the complete purification of sins promised by the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* (and perhaps, by extension, other Mahāyāna sutras and rituals as well) include the restoration of institutional monastic status?⁶⁹

This question is indeed worth asking. For while the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* promises that monks and nuns who violate what it calls the “*pārājika*”⁷⁰ can be freed of their sins by worshipping Ākāśagarbha, this purification is discussed solely in terms of avoiding rebirth in hell and preserving their “roots of good” (*shan gen* 善根), that is to say, their spiritual potential.⁷¹ As is the norm in Mahāyāna discussions of repentance, though the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* claims its methods will destroy even the most heinous sins, it fails to directly address the *institutional* consequences of such transgressions.

Nor are clear answers to such questions provided in the other main source for the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*, the *Vinaya-viniścaya-upāli-pariprcchā*, which in fact disclaims any connection between the kind of purification it offers, through the worship

⁶⁹ Medieval Chinese commentators also noticed the specificity of what the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* ultimately promises. Daoxuan, for example, mentions it as one of the only Mahāyāna repentance rituals that can undo the institutional consequences of *pārājika* transgressions (*Si fen bi qiu ni chao* 四分比丘尼鈔, X.724, 40:762a9–12). In other words Daoxuan not only recognized that the text is here making explicit reference to the question of monastic status, but also that this question is one that other Mahāyāna texts and rituals do not address.

⁷⁰ Although they are called “*pārājikas*,” the transgressions listed here —killing, theft, violation of celibacy, lying, and shedding the blood of a buddha (*Xukongzang Pusa jing* 虛空藏菩薩經, T.405, 13:652b21)—add to the traditional four *pārājikas* the sin of shedding the blood of a Buddha, a crime normally included only among the so-called *ānantarya* sins, acts of evil karma so heinous they inevitably produce their negative retribution in the immediately following lifetime (Silk 2007). We thus find here a slightly extended meaning of the word *pārājika*. It is worth noting that this is something also frequently seen in other texts that discuss the bodhisattva precepts (of which the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* is one of the earliest examples), where the word *pārājika* is often deployed to describes the most serious bodhisattva precepts, a list that often overlaps with, but usually goes considerably beyond, the traditional *pārājikas* of the *vinaya*.

⁷¹ *Xukongzang Pusa jing* 虛空藏菩薩經, T.405, 13:652b19–c4.

of the 35 buddhas, and the concerns of the *vinaya*. Thus when, in that text, Upāli asks about the relationship between the bodhisattva precepts and the traditional monastic precepts of the *vinaya*, the Buddha replies that they are entirely different things. Upholding the precepts of the *vinaya* (here called the “*śrāvaka-prātimokṣa*”), the Buddha says, might mean breaking the bodhisattva precepts and vice versa, and in general being pure with respect to the bodhisattva precepts does not mean being pure with respect to the precepts of the *vinaya*.⁷²

Given this background, Upāli’s questions at the beginning of the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* can be seen as framing the ritual that follows as a method that is better and more powerful than those otherwise available precisely because it provides not only the karmic purification offered by the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* and other Mahāyāna texts and rituals, but also the kind of institutional purification more usually associated with *vinaya* atonements. The structure of the ritual itself also reflects this dual purpose in that it combines the 35-buddha repentance derived from the *Triskandha* ritual, worship of Ākāśagarbha bodhisattva derived loosely from the fourth-century Chinese translation of the *Ākāśagarbha-bodhisattva-sūtra* (T.405), and an eight-hundred-day penance of menial chores that, like the one in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, derives from, or at least invokes the concerns of, *vinaya* regulations for probationers and *śikṣādattakas*.

Let us now look at each of these parts in turn. The Buddha begins his exposition of the ritual by instructing Upāli to preach for those who wish to be “upholders of the *vinaya*” (善持毘尼者) a special method for “curing sins” (治罪) known as the “determination of the *vinaya*” (決定毘尼).⁷³ This method involves worshiping the thirty-five buddhas, chanting their names for seven days, and at the same time chanting the name of the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha. Then, “either in a dream or when in meditation” (若於夢中若坐禪時), the bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha will appear before the practitioner, and using a “*maṇi-jewel seal*” (摩尼珠印) will stamp the practitioner’s arm with the words “sin removed” (除罪).⁷⁴ One who has been branded with

⁷² *Pusa shan jie jing* 菩薩善戒經, T.1582, 30:961c14–24; *Jue ding pini jing* 決定毗尼經, T.325, 12:39c2–40c11.

⁷³ The full presentation of the ritual can be found at *Guan Xukongzang pusa jing* 觀虛空藏菩薩經, T.13, 409: 677b20–c23.

⁷⁴ The therapeutic use of seals applied to the body has been studied extensively by Michel Strickmann, in texts nominally both Buddhist and Daoist dating from the late fifth and early sixth centuries (Strickmann 2002: 123–193). Strickmann traces the Chinese notion

these characters may then “return among the monks and recite the precepts as before” (還入僧中如本說戒), while in the case of a layman he will not be hindered from ordaining” (不障出家). A monk or nun who carries out these purifications will thus once again be allowed to participate in the communal recitation of the *prātimokṣa*, which demonstrates that full monastic status has been regained.

However if the practitioner does not receive this vision of the bodhisattva and the corresponding sign of the seal stamped on his arm, he must continue to perform repentance rituals for another forty-nine days. His sins will thereby be “weakened” (輕微), at which point:⁷⁵

His preceptor must instruct him to clean the toilets for eight hundred days. Each day [the preceptor] should announce: “You have done an impure thing. You must now wholeheartedly clean all the toilets without letting anyone else know about it.” After he has cleaned the toilets [for 800 days], he should bathe, and then venerate the thirty-five buddhas, chant the name of Ākāśagarbha, throw himself to the ground before the twelve-fold collection of scriptures and confess his past sins. He should for twenty-one days repent in this manner. Then his preceptor should assemble his friends and intimates, and standing before a statue of the Buddha they should chant the names of the thirty-five buddhas and Ākāśagarbha, and call on Mañjuśrī and all the bodhisattvas of the present eon⁷⁶ to be witnesses. [The penitent] must then again speak the same formal utterance (*jie mo* 羯磨; *karmavācānā*) that was used when he originally received the precepts.

of the apotropaic powers of seals back to the Han dynasty, with more detailed examples first appearing in the early fourth century in Ge Hong’s 葛洪 (283–343) *Bao pu zi* 抱朴子. The early non-Buddhist examples given by Strickmann do not involve seals applied to the body, and the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* may be the earliest known Chinese text, Buddhist or otherwise, where we find this idea. Yet it also differs from the slightly later Buddhist-Daoist examples studied by Strickmann in emphasizing not the power of the seal to drive away illness, but the visible trace left by the seal on the body, which serves as a sign of purification. This use of visible bodily marks to indicate purity, or in their absence, impurity, is reminiscent (in an inverse way) of the ancient Chinese use of tattoos as a judicial punishment (Hulsewé 1955: 124–125).

⁷⁵ There are thus two possibilities. Either the practitioner has a vision of Ākāśagarbha that attests to the destruction of his sins or, through the performance of repentance rituals, his sins are weakened, following which he must perform the “ascetic practice” (苦行) of cleaning the toilets for eight hundred days.

⁷⁶ Literally, “the auspicious eon” (*xian jie* 賢劫; *bhadra-kalpa*). This term is a proper name for the present eon of the universe, named so because during it there will supposedly appear a particularly large number of buddhas.

[Having done the above,] this person, by the power of his ascetic practice (苦行), has now entirely and forever removed his sin, and he will not be obstructed in his pursuit of any of the three kinds of awakening.⁷⁷

In the method for curing violations of the precepts from the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, we observed that while the frame of the ritual spoke of both monastics and lay persons, only monks and nuns were mentioned explicitly within the ritual, and that furthermore certain elements of the ritual (such as the removing of one's outer robe) were inapplicable in the case of a lay practitioner. This suggested that the ritual in question was perhaps one originally intended for monks and nuns that had been recently adapted, without much alteration, for use by the laity as well. Although it is quite difficult (and perhaps ultimately fruitless) to speculate on the precise evolution of these rituals, it is interesting to note that the ritual outlined above in the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* shows evidence of a similar history. Upāli's initial questions were aimed at reconciling statements made in Mahāyāna sutras and repentance texts with *vinaya* restrictions that limit the level of purification available in the case of *pārājika* transgressions. This is a problem that, by definition, could be of concern only for monks and nuns. Yet the intended audience of the *Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha Contemplation* is clearly broader than this, and in this case within the ritual itself there are alternative options depending on whether the practitioner is monastic or lay.

Indeed compared with those in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness*, the procedures in the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* seem even further removed from the world of *vinaya* ritual. Thus while in the *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* the penitent must eventually confess his sins before a gathering of monks (here we are reminded of the *vinaya* rules which mandate twenty fully-ordained witnesses to certify the atonement of serious transgressions, the largest gathering required for any formal act of the Sangha), in the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha* the penitent merely gathers a group of "friends and intimates" (親厚) to help pray to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and it is these deities that "act as witnesses" (作證).⁷⁸ This

⁷⁷ 知法者復教令塗治廁、經八百日、日日告言。汝作不淨事、汝今一心塗一切廁莫令人知。塗已澡浴、禮三十五佛、稱虛空藏、向十二部經五體投地、說汝過惡。如是懺悔復經三七日。爾時智者應集親厚、於佛像前、稱三十五佛名、稱虛空藏名、稱文殊師利、稱賢劫菩薩、為其作證。更白羯磨如前受戒法。此人因苦行力故、罪業永除、不障三種菩提業。(Guan Xukongzang Pusa jing 觀虛空藏菩薩經, T.409, 13:677c16–23).

⁷⁸ This understanding is in keeping with the ritual traditions for receiving the bodhisattva

kind of procedure would certainly have been at least theoretically relevant and applicable to anyone.

Conclusions

In the early fifth century Chinese Buddhists were witness to a massive increase in the availability of Indian Buddhist monastic rules. Prior to Kumārajīva's translation of the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* (*Shi song lü* 十誦律) between 404 and 409 CE, only few Indian *vinaya* texts existed in Chinese.⁷⁹ Yet by the middle of the fifth century, there were Chinese translations of hundreds of fascicles of canonical *vinaya* texts and their commentaries, representing at least four distinct Indian schools of *vinaya* practice and interpretation.

It is difficult to judge the extent to which these newly available documents directly influenced basic monastic life for Chinese monks and nuns. What is clear, however, is that among many Chinese Buddhists there was a growing sense, perhaps even an anxiety, that the rules and regulations these texts contained should ideally be taken into account in some manner or another.

This seems to have been especially true among the Buddhist groups based near the southern Chinese capital of Jiankang 建康, where many of the new *vinaya* texts were translated, and where there was a comparatively large population of foreign-born monks. It is known, for example, that during the early years of the Song (420–479) dynasty the famous Zhihuan 祇洹 (Jetavana) monastery, a temple with close connections to the emperor

precepts, which similarly replace the human witnesses (monks and nuns) that the *vinaya* declares necessary for monastic ordinations with buddhas and bodhisattvas, present either in spirit on in the form of icons. That the bodhisattva precepts were ultimately conferred by the buddhas, rather than by a human assembly of monks or nuns, meant that one could, if necessary, receive them on one's own, without the assistance of other human beings. This notion of "self-ordination" was an important part of the early manuals for receiving the bodhisattva precepts (Funayama 1995: 23–24).

⁷⁹ Hirakawa (1960: 155–162) notes that only two surviving Chinese *vinaya* texts can be firmly dated to before this time, the *Bī'naiye* 鼻奈耶 (T1464), seemingly translated in 383, and a version of the *prātimokṣa* of the Sarvāstivādins found at Dunhuang whose colophon indicates it was copied in January of 406 (Stein no. 797; Giles 1935: 810). Because Kumārajīva's translation of the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* introduced standardized terminology that was followed by most subsequent translators of *vinaya* literature, it is relatively easy to determine when a Chinese *vinaya* text dates from before or after this time, even in the absence of reliable historical bibliographic information.

and home to many foreign monks, attempted to conform to all of the regulations found in the newly translated *Mahāsāṅghika-vinaya*. This proved no easy task, and controversy even ensued when Chinese monks, including some with ties to the imperial family, wanted to take on certain practices stipulated in the *vinaya* that offended both Chinese sensibilities and long-established Chinese clerical precedents, such as eating with the hands in what was perceived as an ungainly squatting posture.⁸⁰ Although this effort to make Chinese Buddhism precisely tally with monastic life as described in the Indian *vinayas* was not successful in the long run, this episode shows that, at least on the ideological level, in the early fifth century the authority of the new Indian *vinaya* texts loomed large in the minds of the Chinese clergy, and that some people had begun to notice areas where established Chinese precedents were potentially in conflict with what was seen as the authoritative Indian tradition.

Compared with the question of eating posture and utensils or their absence, proper ordination procedures for monks and nuns had the potential to be a far more important area where Chinese Buddhist customs might have been found wanting relative to the newly apparent demands of *vinaya* law. Traces of such concern can be discerned, among other places, in the records of an early fifth-century controversy concerning the status of Chinese Buddhist nuns.

Although communities of Chinese Buddhist nuns had existed since the early fourth century, in the early fifth century doubts about the validity of the initial ordination of nuns in China seem to have emerged. Historical sources attribute the initial concerns to the nun Huiguo 慧果 (364–433), already the abbess of a large convent. Huiguo's biography in the early sixth-century *Lives of the Nuns* (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳) reports that she had become troubled after reading, in the “texts on the monastic rules” (律文), that a preceptor would commit a fault by ordaining a woman without the attendance, as witnesses, of the required number of fully ordained nuns, as had apparently been the case when the first Chinese nuns were ordained.⁸¹ Huiguo is reported to have raised her concerns with the foreign missionary and ritual specialist Guṇavarman who, according to the biographies of both Huiguo and Guṇavarman himself, offered his reassurances that the original ordination was valid because the *vinaya* rules make an

⁸⁰ Kamata 1982: 3: 97–100.

⁸¹ *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳, T.2063: 50:937b27–28.

exception when an ordination takes place in a “distant land” such as China.⁸² Despite these assurances, in the end Huiguo and other nuns still wanted to receive the full precepts again, and for this purpose a contingent of nuns were invited from Sri Lanka.

Though this story is crafted so as to reassure readers that there had never really been any problem with nuns’ original ordinations, it is implausible that the time and expense of bringing a large group of foreign nuns to China would have been undertaken had there not been, at the time, serious doubts and concerns. But what is most important given our present topic is simply that in the early fifth century at least some Chinese Buddhists had apparently begun re-evaluating Chinese Buddhist ordination practices in light of the formal legal requirements spelled out in the newly available *vinaya* texts.

Such matters indeed touch upon core issues of identity—failing to properly follow the nuances of the regulations found in Indian *vinaya* texts could mean that some people who thought they were monks and nuns were in fact nothing of the sort. Other stories from medieval hagiographies depict Chinese Buddhists troubling over precisely this worry and going to great lengths to resolve it, and it would seem to have been, during this time at least, a reasonably common anxiety.⁸³

It is here that we can get some sense of why *vinaya* rituals of atonement might have been a topic of some concern. Like most other aspects of formal Indian monastic law, these rituals had been previously largely unknown in China (or at least, there had not existed an authoritative collection of texts describing such rituals and their scope). Yet the consequences for failing to properly purify violations of the *prātimokṣa* were potentially just as catastrophic as failing to follow proper procedures for ordination. Such, I would suggest, is the context that may explain why, during the early- to mid-fifth century, we find within Chinese Buddhism the emergence of new rituals that drew inspiration from *vinaya* penance literature, both formally in terms of incorporating acts and punishments modelled on *vinaya* provisions for probationers and *śikṣādattakas*, and conceptually in terms of being explicitly framed as methods to help transgressors regain both monastic status and the soteriological potential linked to such status.

⁸² *Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳, T.2059, 50:341a28–b7.

⁸³ See, for example, the story of the Chinese monk Zhiyan 智嚴, who in order to verify that he actually “had” (*de* 得) the precepts (and hence was truly a monk) eventually travelled to India (for the second time in his life) to seek the counsel of an arhat (*Gao seng zhuan* 高僧傳, T.2059, 50:339c5–12).

Although it is difficult to speculate why Chinese Buddhists felt the need to make new rituals, rather than simply using the procedures found in the freshly translated *vinaya* texts (and they may, of course, have also done that), we cannot avoid noticing that the rituals of atonement found in the then-available translated Indian *vinaya* texts did not offer a complete solution in the case of the very gravest violations, the *pārājikas*. Whatever else they accomplished, the fifth-century Chinese rituals examined above stand out in granting a level of purification for violations of the *pārājikas* far greater than what was allowed by the available Indian *vinaya* literature. Although necessarily something of an oversimplification, this greater potential power in the case of extremely serious transgressions seems to represent the influence of “Mahāyāna” ritual practice, in which it was routine to declare that, from a karmic point of view, it was possible to destroy nearly any conceivable sin.

We must, of course, be careful when speaking about such “influence” to avoid hypostatizing, as discreet institutions or even ideologies, “Mahāyāna” practices on the one hand and “*vinaya*” practices on the other. Indeed, neither in Indian nor Chinese Buddhism did the Mahāyāna ever constitute a separate institution. The rules of the *vinaya* applied, in theory if not in practice, to all monks and nuns, those with Mahāyāna inclinations or otherwise. Yet it is nonetheless true that Indian *vinaya* texts are, to the best of my knowledge, entirely devoid of overt references to the Mahāyāna (either its doctrines, texts, or deities), and Indian Mahāyāna texts similarly do not usually address the question of how Mahāyāna notions of transgression and repentance might relate to the legal concerns of the *vinaya*. In other words, while we must imagine that those Indian Buddhist monks and nuns who wrote, read, or used Mahāyāna scriptures were also fully conversant with, and immersed in, the concerns of the *vinaya*, the relationship between *vinaya* atonement and Mahāyāna repentance seems to have been rarely, if ever, explicitly discussed or seen as problematic.

Yet in fifth-century China this issue was being raised. This is most explicit in the ritual from the *Scripture on the Contemplation of the Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha*, which as we have seen presents itself as a reconciling of the total karmic purification promised in certain Mahāyāna sutras with the *vinaya* understanding that those who violate the *pārājikas* will irrevocably lose at least a portion of their monastic status. And in order to accomplish this, the text draws material from both sides, integrating key features of the *śikṣādattaka* penance from the *vinaya* into the 35-buddha repentance

of the *Triskandha* ritual that formed the core of the Mahāyāna repentance liturgies then popular in China. Meanwhile the ritual from *Secret Methods for Curing Meditation Sickness* seems to represent a slightly different joining of these same parts—making passing reference to the 35-buddha repentance, on the whole it retains most of the features of a *vinaya* atonement and, perhaps equally significantly, is incorporated into a text that betrays few Mahāyāna elements or language.⁸⁴ In both cases, however, in terms of the history and evolution of Buddhist literature more generally and *vinaya* literature in particular, these texts and the rituals they propose are similarly notable in that they transgress, as it were, the conventions of well-established genres.

It might further be worth considering the way that Chinese translation practices may have made these two potentially distinct realms seem closer than they would have otherwise. For while the *confession* (Skt. *pratideśanā*) of transgressions was a key component of Mahāyāna liturgies, *vinaya* texts use the technical term *pratīkaroti*—literally to “counteract” or “remedy”—to refer to the rituals that allow formal re-entry into the Sangha after violations of the *prātimokṣa*.⁸⁵ These measures for “counteracting” transgressions of the *prātimokṣa* do often, or even usually, include confession as one element (and in some cases, confession is the only element). But as we have seen, in the case of the elaborate requirements for probationers and *śikṣādattakas*, what it took to “atone” (as I think it is best to translate *pratīkaroti* so as to capture its wider range of meanings) potentially involved much more than mere confession.

Interestingly, however, this verb *pratīkaroti* was, in Chinese *vinaya* texts, generally translated using the same word that in Mahāyāna liturgies translated the expression “confession of sins” (*āpatti-pratideśanā*), namely *chan hui* 懺悔, a Chinese term that has been most often rendered into English as “repentance.”⁸⁶ Multiple slightly different Indian ideas pertaining to confession, atonement, or the destruction of evil karma were, in this way, often seen in China under the catch-all category of “repentance” (*chan*

⁸⁴ Later Chinese commentators also recognized that these two texts mix the genres of Mahāyāna scripture and *vinaya* text in an unusual way (see Zhiyi’s comments in his *Jin guang ming jing wen ju* 金光明經文句, T.1785, 39:60b28–c7).

⁸⁵ This same verb is used in Jain texts in a similar meaning (Derrett 1997: 60).

⁸⁶ Japanese scholars have long noted that the Chinese word *chan hui* was used to translate multiple Indic terms, and hence that the Chinese Buddhist concept of “repentance” does not necessarily correspond to a single Indian Buddhist concept (Hirakawa 1990; Mori 1998 and 1999).

hui). It is possible—though at present this can be no more than speculation—that this helped prompt Chinese Buddhists to ask questions about how these different ideas fit together, questions that were perhaps less prone to occur to their Indian contemporaries.

But in the end it is difficult to know for certain whether the rituals examined above were distinctly Chinese attempts to come to terms with the new *vinaya* literature of the early fifth century in a context where Mahāyāna repentance rituals had previously held sway, or if, alternatively, similarly rituals also existed in Indian Buddhist texts that no longer survive (or if not in texts, then perhaps in the living traditions of practice to which Chinese Buddhists were exposed). Nevertheless, that the examples we do have all come from texts that most scholars suspect were composed or compiled in China suggests the possibility that these rituals were indeed a Chinese attempt to resolve a perceived conflict between two rather different genres of literature that, in India, may have rarely been put into mutual dialog.

Abbreviations

- AN R. Morris and E. Hardy eds., *Āṅguttara-nikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1885–1900)
- Mp M. Walleser and H. Kopp, eds., *Manorathapūraṇī* (London: Pali Text Society, 1924–1957)
- X *Xu zang jing* 續藏經 (CBETA edition), cited by text number (X) followed by page, register, and line number(s).
- T CBETA electronic edition (version 5.2, 5/28/2014) of (with corrections) *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, edited by Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1932). Passages are cited by text number, followed by volume, page, register, and line number(s).

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ISBN 978-3-89733-428-1



ISSN 2190-6769

ISBN 978-3-89733-428-1

EUR [D] 26,60