

Materials for the Study of the Tripiṭaka Volume 5

ข้อมูลพระไตรปิฎกศึกษา เล่ม ๕

Peter Skilling

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Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara-nikāya
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris)
BhB	Bhūmibalo Foundation edition
BHSD	Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary (Edgerton [1953] 1972)
BSR	Buddhist Studies Review (London)
ChS	Chaiṭṭha Saṅgīti edition
DN	Dīgha-nikāya
ed.	edition; edited
EFEO	École française d'Extrême-Orient
IMA	Inscriptions modernes d'Angkor
IPMC1	Inventaire provisoire des manuscrits du Cambodge. Première Partie (de Bernon 2004)
IsIAO	Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (Rome)
IsMEO	Istituto per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (Rome)
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JIASB	Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Text Society
JSPS	Journal of the Office of the Supreme Patriarch's Secretary = Warasanchotmaikhao samnak-lekhanukan Somdetphrasangkharat (Bangkok)
JSS	Journal of Siam Society (Bangkok)
LSPÉB	Linh-Son—Publication d'études bouddhologiques (Paris)
Mm	Mahāmakūṭarājavidyālaya edition
MN	Majjhima-nikāya
MST	Materials for the Study of the Tripiṭaka (see IPMC1, PLCS, PVL)
P	Peking edition of the Kanjur (Otani Reprint)
PÉFEO	Publication de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient (Paris)
PLCS	Pāli Literature Transmitted in Central Siam (Skilling and Santi Pakdeekham 2002).
PTS	Pali Text Society edition
PVL	Pāli and Vernacular Literature Transmitted in Central and Northern Siam (Skilling and Santi Pekdeekham 2004)
SN	Saṃyutta-nikāya
v.	verse
Vin	Vinaya
VOHD	Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland

WFB Review
WZKS

World Fellowship of Buddhists Review (Bangkok)
Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens
(Vienna)

The advent of Theravāda Buddhism to mainland South-East Asia

IN THE PRESENT PAPER I EXAMINE EVIDENCE FOR THE SCHOOL-affiliation of the early Buddhism of mainland South-East Asia, in the first millenium of the Christian Era.¹ Is the evidence sufficient to establish that this school was the Theravāda, and, if so, when and from where did it arrive in the region?

For the Theravāda of Ceylon – or more precisely, for the Mahāvihāra school of the Theravāda – we have the history as presented in the two famous chronicles, the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*. Information may also be gleaned from references to historical events embedded in the commentaries of Buddhaghosa and others, from inscriptions in Old Sinhala and Sanskrit, from archæological and iconographical evidence, and from Chinese sources – in some cases first hand, such as that supplied by the redoubtable pilgrim Fāxiān. Altogether, we have at least in broad outline a continuous history of Theravāda/Mahāvihāra in Ceylon from its inception up to the present day.

¹ That is, I do not discuss the Buddhism of peninsular and insular South-East Asia, or that of Campā (the coastal regions of present-day central and southern Vietnam). In none of these areas is there any early evidence for Theravāda Buddhism.

Outside of Ceylon, the history of Theravāda is obscure. For mainland India we have almost no information at all. There are some – but not many – references to Theravādin doctrines in the works of other schools,² but the historical information – such as that provided by inscriptions or by the Chinese pilgrims Xuánzàng and Yìjìng – is at best sketchy.

For the South-East Asia of the early period we do not have any historical records comparable to those of Ceylon: no indigenous chronicles, whether in Pāli, Sanskrit, or in vernaculars survive. The few extant historical inscriptions do not give us any continuous history, and Chinese reports tell us little about the type of Buddhism practised on the mainland.

Pāli inscriptions from Burma and Siam

The main evidence for the school-affiliation of early Buddhism in South-East Asia comes from Pāli inscriptions. These are known from two main areas: the Pyu kingdom of Śrīkṣetra in the vicinity of Prome in the lower Irrawaddy valley of Burma, and the Mon kingdom of Dvāravatī in the Chao Phraya basin of Siam.³ The inscriptions from Burma are engraved on gold plates (fashioned in imitation of palm-leaf manuscripts), a silver reliquary (*stūpa*), terracotta tablets, and stone slabs. The inscriptions from Siam are engraved on stone *dhammacakkas*, octagonal pillars, stone slabs, and clay tablets

² See the following works by Peter Skilling: 'The Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛta-viniścaya of Daśabalaśrimitra', *Buddhist Studies Review* 4.1 (1987), pp. 3–23; 'A Citation from the **Buddhavaṃsa* of the Abhayagiri School', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XVIII (1993), pp. 165–175; 'Theravādin Literature in Tibetan Translation', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XIX (1993), pp. 69–201; for some examples from Tibetan sources see also 'Vimuttimaggā and Abhayagiri: the form-aggregate according to the *Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtaviniścaya*', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XX (1994), pp. 171–210.

³ In this paper I set aside the historical questions (of, for example, chronology and geographical extent) attached to the names of these two kingdoms, and (with not a little reluctance) use the names as a conventional shorthand. For Dvāravatī see Peter Skilling, 'Dvāravatī: Recent Revelations and Research', in *Dedications to Her Royal Highness Princess Galyani Vadhana Krom Luang Naradhiwas Rajanagarindra on her 80th birthday* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2003), pp. 87–112.

and reliquaries. The script used in both cases is similar, and may be described as a variety of the South Indian Pallava script.⁴ The Śrīkṣetra inscriptions are dated to the fifth to seventh centuries CE, the Siamese inscriptions to the sixth to eighth centuries: that is, they are broadly contemporary.⁵

(1) Inscriptions from the region of Śrīkṣetra:⁶

- the *ye dhammā hetuppabhavā* verse;⁷
- the *iti pi so bhagavā* formula;⁸
- the *svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo* formula;⁹
- the formula of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*);¹⁰

⁴ The script of the Pyu inscriptions has in the past been variously described as Kadamba, Telegu-Canara, or Grantha: for a welcome reappraisal see Janice Stargardt, 'The Oldest Known Pali Texts, 5th-6th century: Results of the Cambridge Symposium on the Pyu Golden Pali Text from Śrī Kṣetra, 18-19 April 1995', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXI (1995), p. 204.

⁵ For the dating of the former see Stargardt, 'The Oldest Known Pali Texts', pp. 199-213, for the latter e.g. Christian Bauer, 'Notes on Mon Epigraphy', *JSS* 79.1 (1991), pp. 31-83, and Peter Skilling, 'New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia', *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXIII (1997), pp. 123-157, section II ('Pāli Inscriptions on a Stone *Dhammacakka* and an Octagonal Pillar from Chai Nat'), pp. 133-151. It should be stressed that the inscriptions do not bear any dates, and that those assigned to them are tentative and approximate. A comprehensive comparative palaeographical analysis of the 'Śrīkṣetra' with the 'Dvāravati' corpus remains a desideratum.

⁶ For details see Nihar-Ranjan Ray, 'Early Traces of Buddhism in Burma', *Journal of the Greater India Society* VI.1 (Jan., 1939), pp. 41-52; G.H. Luce, 'The Advent of Buddhism to Burma', in L. Cousins et al. (ed.), *Buddhist Studies in Honour of I.B. Horner* (Dordrecht and Boston: 1974), pp. 125-127; and Stargardt, 'The Oldest Known Pali Texts', pp. 199-213. Most of the texts are brought together in U Tha Myat, *Pyu Reader* (Rangoon: 1963). Note that several of the passages are known from more than one inscription.

⁷ *Mahāvagga, Vinaya*, PTS I 40.28-29.

⁸ Cf. *Dhajagga-sutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya*, PTS I 219.31-33.

⁹ Cf. *Dhajagga-sutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya*, PTS I 220.1-2.

¹⁰ Cf. *Mahāvagga, Vinaya*, PTS I 1.10-2.1. In addition to the *paṭiccasamuppāda* inscribed on gold plates from Śrīkṣetra, the *Vinaya Mahāvagga* version is known from a stone slab from Kunzeik, Shwegyin township, Pegu: see Aung Thaw, *Historical Sites in Burma* (Rangoon: 1972), pp. 110-111. As far as I know this handsome and well-preserved inscription has not been published, but

- stanzas sung by Sakka, Lord of the Gods, in praise of the Buddha entering Rājagaha;¹¹
- the *maggaṇ’atthaṅgiko seṭṭho* verse;¹²
- verses from three popular *parittas*: the *Maṅgala-*, *Ratana-*, and *Mora-suttas*;¹³
- the four confidences (*vesāraja*) of a Buddha;¹⁴
- the thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya-dhammā*);
- a list of miscellaneous numerically grouped items, in ascending order;
- a list of the fourteen *nāṇas* of a Buddha;¹⁵
- a fragment of a commentary on dependent arising;¹⁶

fortunately most of it can be described from the photograph. It opens (the readings here are preliminary) with the introductory [1] *t(e)na samayena buddho bhaga(vā) uruvelāyaṃ viharati na(j)j(ā) (neraṅjarāya? unclear)* [2] *tīre* (or *tire?*) *bodhirukkhamūle pathamābhisambuddho atha kho bhagavā...*, followed by the full *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, both *anuloma* (lines 5–9) and *paṭiloma* (lines 9–14). The latter opens with the phrase *avijjāya tv eva asesavirāganirodhā*, characteristic of the Mahāvihārin (Pāli) version only, and not known in versions of other schools, such as the (Mūla-)Sārvāstivādins or Lokottaravādins, or from the Prakrit inscriptions from Devnimorī and Ratnagiri, all of which open with equivalents of *avijjā-nirodhā*. The *paṭiloma* is followed by the *yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā* verse (lines 15–18), known also from inscriptions from Siam. The last two lines continue with the prose text of the *Mahāvagga* – *atha kho (bhaga)vā r(attiyā) maj(jh)imaṃ (yā) maṃ paṭicca* – suggesting that the slab is part of a longer inscription. For the Devnimorī and Ratnagiri inscriptions see Oskar von Hinüber, ‘Epigraphical Varieties of Continental Pāli from Devnimorī and Ratnagiri’, in *Buddhism and its Relation to Other Religions: Essays in Honour of Dr. Shozen Kumoi on his Seventieth Birthday* (Kyoto: 1985), pp. 185–200; for a suggestion that the former might be Vātsīputrīya or Sāmmaṭṭiya, see P. Skilling, ‘On the School-affiliation of the “Patna Dhammapada”’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society XXIII* (1997), pp. 83–122.

¹¹ *Mahāvagga, Vinaya*, PTS I 38.15–23, 29–30.

¹² *Dhammapada* 273.

¹³ For these see Peter Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society XXIII* (1997), pp. 123–157, section III (‘A Paritta Inscription from Śrīkṣetra in Burma’), pp. 152–157.

¹⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* 12, PTS I 71.32; *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, PTS II 8, penult.

¹⁵ Cf. *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, PTS I 133.19–30.

¹⁶ Cf. *Vibhaṅga*, PTS 144–45.

- the opening of the *mātikā*: *kusalā [dhammā aku]salā dhammā abyāka[tā] dhammā*,¹⁷
- a fragment giving two of the twenty-four conditions: [*adhi*] *patipaccayo anantarapaccayo*;
- a list of seven of the eight *vipassanā ñāṇas*.¹⁸

(2) Inscriptions from the Chao Phraya basin:¹⁹

- the *ye dhammā hetuppabhavā* verse;
- the formula of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*);
- an enumeration of the four truths of the noble (*ariya-sacca*), the twelve links of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), and the thirty-seven factors conducive to awakening (*bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*), inscribed together on a rectangular stone bar from Nakhon Pathom;²⁰
- extracts from the prose *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, the ‘first sermon’ spoken by the Buddha in the Deer Park at Sarnath, found on stone *dhammacakkas*;²¹
- the three *yadā have pātubhavanti dhammā* verses;²²
- the *anekajāṭisaṃsāraṃ* verses;²³
- the *dukkhaṃ dukkhasamuppādaṃ* verse;²⁴
- the *abhiññeyyaṃ abhiññātaṃ* verse;²⁵

¹⁷ Cf. *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, PTS 1.4.

¹⁸ Cf. *Visuddhimagga* XXI.1.

¹⁹ Most of the inscriptions may be found in Supaphan na Bangchang, *Wiwathanakan ngan khian phasa bali nai prathet thai: charuk tamnan phongsawadan san prakat* (Bangkok: 2529 [1986], pp. 15–40). As in the case of the Śrīkṣetra inscriptions, several of the passages are known from more than one inscription.

²⁰ See Peter Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXIII (1997), pp. 123–157, section I (‘A Recently Discovered Pāli Inscription From Nakhon Pathom’), pp. 123–133.

²¹ See above, n. 5.

²² *Mahāvagga*, *Vinaya*, PTS I 2.3–26.

²³ *Dhammapada* 153–54.

²⁴ *Dhammapada* 191. See Peter Skilling, ‘A Buddhist Verse Inscription from Andhra Pradesh’, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 34 (1991), pp. 239–246, and Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, section I, pp. 123–133.

²⁵ *Suttanipāta* 558.

- fragments of the sixteen senses (*aṭṭha*) of the four truths;²⁶
- *nābādhakaṃ yato dukkhaṃ...*, non-canonical verses on the four truths;²⁷
- *sacca-kicca-kata-nāṇaṃ...*, a non-canonical verse on the twelve aspects (*dvādasākāra*) of the four truths;²⁸
- three verses from the *Telakaṭāha-gātha*.²⁹

The evidence of the inscriptions may be examined from two aspects: language and contents. The language of both the Śrīkṣetra and Dvāravatī palaeographs is Pāli. Is the use of Pāli sufficient to establish the presence of the Theravāda? Or could another Buddhist school have also transmitted its sacred writ in Pāli, and have been responsible for the inscriptions? From an early date, Buddhist tradition recognized dialect as one of the key distinguishing features of the different schools (*nikāya*). In the second half of the first millenium of the Christian Era, tradition spoke of four main schools, each transmitting its canon in a different Indic dialect: (Mūla)Sarvāstivādins, who used Sanskrit; Mahāsāmghikas, who used an intermediate language; Sāmmatīyas, who used Apabhraṃśa; and Sthāvīras (that is, Theras), who used Paśācī.³⁰ The tradition is confirmed by the distinctive and consistent linguistic features of available texts of the schools. On this evidence I conclude that it is unlikely that another school would have used Pāli, and that the use of that language in the inscriptions is a strong indication of Theravādin activity in the region.

²⁶ Cf. *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, PTS I 19.31–20.6. See Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, section II, for this and the two following passages.

²⁷ Cited at *Visuddhimagga* XVI.25.

²⁸ Cited in *Paṭhamasambodhi (phasa bali) chabap khatlok chak khamphi bailan aksonkhom* (Bangkok: Wat Phra Chetuphon [Wat Pho]/Borisat Sahathammik Chamkat, 2537 [1994], p. 127.6), and *Sāratthasamuccaya (Sāratthasamuccaya atthakathā bhāṇavāra*, vol. 4 [Bangkok: Rongphim Krung Thep, 2532 (1989)]).

²⁹ See references below. The inscription is from Prachin Buri, and thus outside of the Chao Phraya valley proper.

³⁰ See Skilling, ‘On the School-affiliation of the “Patna Dhammapada”’, *Journal of the Pali Text Society* XXIII (1997), pp. 83–122, for references. The Theravādins traditionally describe the language of their texts as Māgadhī, ‘the language of Magadha’: see Oskar von Hinüber, ‘On the History of the Name of the Pāli Language’, in *Selected Papers on Pāli Studies* (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1994), pp. 76–90.

What about the contents of the inscriptions? It is true that the canonical extracts – such as the various formulas, the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, and the verses – belong to the common heritage of Buddhism: but our epigraphs give them in their Theravādin recensions, and they agree very closely indeed with the received transmission that we know today.³¹ The ‘extracts’ from the *Abhidhamma* and *Paṭisambhidāmagga* are rather more indicative. As far as is known, the seven books of the Theravādin *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* are unique to that school, and employ a unique system and technical vocabulary. The Śrīkṣetra inscriptions preserve fragments with counterparts in the *Mātikā*, the *Vibhaṅga*, and the list of twenty-four conditions (*paccaya*), all of which may be described as specifically Theravādin. Inscriptions from both Śrīkṣetra and Siam employ technical categories known from the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* (whether or not they are actual extracts is not clear), an ancient commentary transmitted in the *Khuddaka-nikāya* of the Pāli Canon, and unique to the Theravādin school.

The non-canonical inscriptions provide further convincing evidence for a Theravādin presence. The Śrīkṣetra list of seven *vipassanā ñānas* has a parallel in the *Visuddhimagga*, and an inscribed octagonal pillar from U Tapao gives a set of verses on the four truths that is cited in the *Visuddhimagga* and in other works of the school.³² The *Visuddhimagga* is, of course, one of the most representative and most authoritative texts of the Mahāvihāra Theravāda. An inscription found in association with a giant pair of *Buddhapāda* at Si Maha Phot district in Prachin Buri province gives three Pāli stanzas in homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. The stanzas, in the *vasantatilaka* metre, are from the *Telakaṭāha-gāthā*, a work of unknown authorship believed to have been composed in Ceylon. According to the opening Khmer portion, the epigraph was set up by one Buddhāsiri in CE 761.³³

³¹ There are a very few orthographic variants, for which see e.g. Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, section I, pp. 128–129 – with reference to the work of von Hinüber – and section II, pp. 133–151.

³² See for references Skilling, ‘New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia’, section II, pp. 133–151.

³³ See *Charuk nai prathet thai* (Bangkok: The Fine Arts Department 2529 [1986]) Vol. I, pp. 179–186 and Mendis Rohanadeera, ‘The Noen Sa Bua Inscription of Dong Si Maha Bo, Prachinburi’, *Journal of Siam Society* 76 (1988), pp. 89–99. The *Telakaṭāha-gāthā* was edited by Edmund R. Goonaratne in *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (1884), pp. 49–68.

The *sacca-kicca-kata-nāṇaṃ* verse is known only from late Mahāvihāra texts: it is noteworthy that the Siamese inscriptions (the verse occurs several times) are much earlier than the known texts that give the verse.³⁴

From the point of view of both language and contents, I conclude that the Pāli inscriptions of Burma and Siam give firm evidence for a Theravādin presence in the Irrawaddy and Chao Phraya basins, from about the fifth century CE onwards.³⁵ From the extent and richness of the evidence it seems that the Theravāda was the predominant school, and that it enjoyed the patronage of ruling and economic elites.³⁶ But I do not mean to suggest that religious society was monolithic: other schools may well have been present, or have come and gone, and there is ample evidence for the practice of Mahāyāna and Brahmanism in the region.³⁷

³⁴ See Skilling 'New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia', section II, pp. 133–151 for references.

³⁵ We must wait for a comprehensive study of Indic loan-words in early Mon inscriptions from Siam before we can determine the degree to which they use Sanskrit or Pāli. An example of the former is the word *punya*, ubiquitous in the epigraphs. A possible example of the latter is the term *upājhāy*, derived more probably from Pāli *upajjhāya* (also *upajjha* and *upajjhā*) than Sanskrit *upādhyāya*, in an inscription from Lopburi: see George Coëdès, *Recueil des Inscriptions du Siam, Deuxième Partie: Inscriptions de Dvāravatī, de Çrīvijaya et de Lavo* (Bangkok: 1961), p. 8, II (1). Another form, from two *circa* ninth century 'votive tablets' is *pajhāy*: *Charuk nai prathet thai*, Vol. II, pp. 85–89, 90–94 (note that the word occurs side by side with *ācāryya*).

³⁶ Regarding the 'Khin Ba mound' relic chamber, from which a twenty-leaf golden Pāli text was unearthed, Janice Stargardt remarks that 'although many other relic chambers were discovered at Śrī Kṣetra, this was the only one to survive intact, and its contents exceeded – in number, quality of workmanship, and concentration of precious metals and stones – even the relic chamber of the Bhaṭṭiprolu stūpa in Andhra' (Stargardt, 'The Oldest Known Pali Texts', p. 200).

³⁷ The practice of Mahāyāna is compatible with any of the Vinaya schools, including the Theravāda, and brahmins played (and continue to play) an active role in South-East Asian 'Buddhist' societies, both court and common. The schools or religious groups should be regarded as interactive and complementary rather than mutually exclusive. For Avalokiteśvara in South-East Asia see Nandana Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia* (Leiden: 1984) (especially Chap. 3 on Burma and Chap. 4 on Central Thailand) and Nandana Chutiwongs and Denise Patry

The question of origins

The Theravādin *saṅgha* of Ceylon was divided into two main rival branches, the Mahāvihāravāsins and Abhayagirivāsins.³⁸ After more than a thousand years of contention for legitimacy and patronage, the former won out, and absorbed the monks and monasteries of the latter. Most regrettably for our purposes, the literature of the Abhayagiri, which included at least one chronicle of the school, was allowed (or perhaps encouraged) to disappear, with the result that no undisputed Pāli text of the school survives.³⁹ The Theravāda that we know today is the Mahāvihāra tradition, as settled by the time of the prolific commentator Buddhaghosa in the fifth century. The later Pāli literature of the sub-commentaries (*ṭīkā*s) and manuals, although subject to further development and a variety of influences, also belongs to the Mahāvihāravāsin lineage.

Both the Abhayagiri and Mahāvihāra schools maintained contacts with India: with Kāñcīpuram, Andhradeśa, and Magadha. Is there any evidence for the presence of either school in early South-East Asia? The canonical inscriptions – including the *Abhidhamma* ‘extracts’ – could belong to either the Abhayagirivāsins or the Mahāvihāravāsins, since both are believed to have transmitted a similar canon in Pāli, and both held broadly similar tenets and used a similar technical vocabulary.⁴⁰ It seems that the Abhayagiri also transmitted the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, or at least a similar text, since passages cited in the *Vimuttimaggā* (for which see below) have parallels in that work. The *nābādhakam yato dukkham* verses, known

Leidy, *Buddha of the Future* (New York and Singapore: 1994); for brahmanism in the region see Daweewarn Dawee, *Brāhmaṇism in South-East Asia (From the earliest time to 1445 A.D.)* (New Delhi: 1982)

³⁸ Other branches, such as the Sāgaliyas, Dhammarucikas, or Jetavanīyas also existed, but seem to have been less enduring or influential.

³⁹ See Skilling ‘A Citation from the **Buddhavaṃsa* of the Abhayagiri School’, pp. 165–175.

⁴⁰ The canons of the two schools were not identical – and is it not historically and humanly improbable (or even impossible) that two collections transmitted at separate monastic centres for centuries from an early date – the Abhayagiri was founded in the first century BCE – should be so? See the important references in Oskar von Hinüber, ‘Buddhist Law According to the Theravāda-Vinaya: A Survey of Theory and Practice’, *JIAS* 18.1 (1995), pp. 36–38.

at present only from Mahāvihāra texts such as the *Visuddhimagga*, are given in citation, and are not original to the works in question: that is, they originate from an earlier text that may have been accepted by both schools.

The *Vimuttimagga*, a treatise associated with the Abhayagiri, was well-known outside of Ceylon (whether it was composed in that country or in India remains under debate). A comprehensive manual of practice and theory, composed by Upatissa (Skt. Upaṭiṣya) perhaps by the second century CE, it was translated into Chinese in 515. Interestingly, the translator, *Saṃghabhara, was a *bhikṣu* of Funan (an early South-East Asian polity known from Chinese sources, and located by the *savants* in the deltaic regions of Cambodia).⁴¹ The manuscript of the *Vimuttimagga*, along with the other texts translated by *Saṃghabhara, was brought to China in 503 by another monk of Funan, *Mandrasena.⁴² Since none of the other texts brought from Funan are Theravādin, and some belong to the Mahāyāna,⁴³ the fact that the *Vimuttimagga* was among them attests only to the availability of that text in Funan: it cannot be interpreted as evidence for a (non-Mahāvihāra) Theravādin presence.⁴⁴ Since *Saṃghabhara did some

⁴¹ For the school-affiliation (and name of the translator and date of translation, about which there has been some confusion) see Skilling, 'Vimuttimagga and Abhayagiri', pp. 171–210.

⁴² *Lidai sanbao ji*, Taishō 2034, Vol. 49, 98c, 6–7; *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, Taishō 2154, Vol. 55, 537c, 18–19. The *Annals of the Liang Dynasty* confirm that Funan was one of the countries that sent tribute in 503. I am grateful to Dr. Bhikṣuṇī Vinīta Tseng for checking the Chinese sources.

⁴³ The works are listed in Bunyiu Nanjio, *A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka, the Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan* ([Oxford: 1883] San Francisco: 1975), II §§ 101, 102; Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, *Le canon bouddhique en Chine: Les traducteurs et les traductions*, Tome I (Paris: 1927), pp. 414–418; *Répertoire du canon bouddhique sino-japonais* (Fascicule annexe du Hōbōgin) (Paris-Tōkyō: 1978), pp. 267 (s.v. Mandarāsen), 281 (s.v. Sōgyabara).

⁴⁴ The *Vimuttimagga* was also known in North India: the chapter on the *dhutaṅgas* was translated into Tibetan under the title *Dhutaṅganirdeśa* around CE 800, and long sections were cited by Daśabalaśrīmitra, a North Indian scholar, probably in the twelfth century, in a work preserved only in Tibetan translation: see Skilling, 'The Saṃskṛtāsāṃskṛta-viniścaya of Daśabalaśrīmitra', pp. 3–23, Skilling, 'Theravādin Literature in Tibetan Translation', pp. 69–201, and Skilling, 'Vimuttimagga and Abhayagiri', pp. 171–210 for references.

of his translation work in the 'Funanese Pavilion',⁴⁵ and enjoyed the patronage of the Emperor, it seems that Funanese Buddhism was accorded some esteem.

(For insular South-East Asia, we have one clear piece of evidence: the inscription from Ratu Baka in central Java, dated CE 792, which refers to an 'Abhayagiri-*vihāra* built for the Sinhalese *saṅgha*'. On the mainland, but outside of our period, there is mention of an 'Abhayagiri' in the concluding Khmer portion of a Vajrayānist Sanskrit palæograph, dated CE 1066, from the vicinity of Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat) in Central Siam.⁴⁶ The precise location of this Abhayagiri is unknown, and it is by no means certain that the toponym should be related to the Abhayagiri school: the inscription names only an 'Abhaya Mountain' [*giri*: without the word *vihāra*], where images of 'Buddhalokeśvara' and others were installed and later renovated.)

All told, there is no conclusive local evidence that the early Theravāda of South-East Asia was affiliated with either the Mahāvihāra or the Abhayagiri. We may also note the absence of references to South-East Asia of the period in the chronicles of Ceylon,⁴⁷ and reflect that in the great period of reform that swept the region in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the new ordination lineage was distinguished by the name *Sihala-sāsana*. Might this not suggest that the old tradition did not associate itself with Ceylon?

It is therefore probably futile to try to trace the Theravāda of the period to either of the Ceylon schools. It is likely that Buddhism arrived in the area at an early date – perhaps even from the time of Soṇa and Uttara's mission to Suvannabhūmi during the reign of King Aśoka, as traditionally held. Whether this Buddhism belonged to the Theravādin lineage from the start, or whether that lineage asserted itself later, cannot be said (and what did the term Theravādin mean

⁴⁵ Bagchi, *Le canon bouddhique en Chine*, Tome I, p. 416.

⁴⁶ See Chirapat Prapandvidya, 'The Sab Bāk Inscription: Evidence of an Early Vajrayāna Buddhist Presence in Thailand', *JSS* 78.2 (1990), p. 12 (text line 32), p. 13 (tr.).

⁴⁷ See here Ray, 'Early Traces of Buddhism in Burma', p. 52. Sirisena remarks that 'Sri Lanka's close religious contacts with Burma started only from the eleventh century': W.M. Sirisena, *Sri Lanka and South-east Asia: Political, Religious and Cultural Relations from A.D. c. 1000 to c. 1500* (Leiden: 1978), p. 58. His work offers a wealth of information – from chronicles, inscriptions – on the relations between Ceylon and South-East Asia but, as the title indicates, all from the later period.

in the pre-Buddhaghosa period, and outside of Ceylon?) – but there is no doubt that it evolved independently of the Ceylon schools. Over the centuries it would have undergone multiple influences, as monks (and perhaps nuns) from different regions of India criss-crossed the region, and as local monks travelled throughout the region and to different parts of India.⁴⁸ There is evidence suggestive of connections with Andhradeśa and the South, for example in the style of Buddha images and, possibly, layout of early Pyu *stūpas* and *vihāras*, such as those from Beikthano.⁴⁹ There is also evidence for contacts with North India: the use of Gupta idioms in Dvāravati Buddha images, and the practice of enshrining the *ye dhammā* verse or the *paṭicasamuppāda* formula in *stūpas*, which was widespread throughout the North, but rare in the South⁵⁰ and

⁴⁸ If anything is clear from the time of our earliest records – the *Tripitaka* itself (e.g. the *Puṇṇovāda-sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 145) – up to the present, it is that monks travelled, even in the face of adversity or danger. The subject is addressed by Vasubandhu, who in his *Vyākhyāyukti* gives in verse seven reasons why the Buddha travelled (note the technical term, known from the canon, *cārikāṃ carati*) and fifteen reasons why auditors (*śrāvaka*) did so: see Prapod Assavavirulhakarn and Peter Skilling, 'Vasubandhu on Travel and Seclusion', *Manusya Journal of Humanities* 2/1 (1999), pp. 13–24.

⁴⁹ It is intriguing that the *dukkhaṃ dukkhasamuppādaṃ* verse, inscribed at least twice in Siam, is also known (but in a lightly Sanskritic form) from an inscription from Andhra: see, for details, Skilling, 'A Buddhist Verse Inscription from Andhra Pradesh', pp. 239–46, and Skilling, 'New Pāli Inscriptions from South-east Asia', section I, pp. 123–133. The use of the Pallava script cannot in itself be cited as evidence, since that script was employed from an early date throughout insular, peninsular, and mainland South-East Asia, for secular and religious (both Brahmanical and Buddhist) records.

⁵⁰ For some southern examples in the Pallava script see A. Rea, 'A Buddhist Monastery on the Śāṅkaram Hills, Vizagapatam District', *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1907–8* (repr. Delhi: 1990), pp. 149–180 and Pls. LI–LXIV (and also Debala Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments* [Calcutta: 1980, first published December 1971], pp. 218–220). The inscriptions that I am able to decipher from the Stygian reproduction of the plates give the *ye dhammā* verse in Sanskrit. Rea describes the site as 'one of the most remarkable groups of Buddhist remains in the Presidency' (then in Madras, the site is now in District Visakhapatnam of Andhra Pradesh). Further south, at Gummidurru (District Krishna) were found '127 clay tablets of the size of an eight-anna piece and bearing the Buddhist creed in Nagari characters of the late mediæval period' (*Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report, 1926–27* [repr. Delhi: 1990], pp. 155–156; see also Mitra, *Buddhist Monuments*, p. 212).

Ceylon.⁵¹ The *Telakaṭāha* verses suggest contacts with the latter country, as does, perhaps, a short and enigmatic Old Mon inscription from the Narai or Khao Wong cave in Saraburi province, dated to *circa* twelfth century BE (CE 550–650), which refers to an Anurādhapura.⁵² Whether the reference is to the ancient capital of Ceylon or to a local site cannot be said, although the latter seems more likely: the important point is that the toponym seems to be otherwise known only from Ceylon.⁵³

We should not regard the establishment and development of Buddhism in the region as a mere mechanical process. Rather, it was a human, and hence unpredictable, progress in which decisions were made and acted upon by individuals and communities. A single charismatic monk could attract followers and sponsors of status to his school; a single ruler could, whether for political, economic, or purely religious reasons, decide to favour a particular

⁵¹ That the practice was not unknown to the late Ceylon Theravāda may be seen from the *Sāratthadīpanī* (a text some centuries younger than our examples from the field), which defines a *dharmma-cetiya* as '[a *cetiya*] built after depositing a book inscribed with conditioned arising, etc.': Mahāmakuṭa edition, Vol. I (Bangkok: 2511 [1968]), p. 263, ult *paṭiccasamuppādādilikhita potthakaṃ nidahitvā kataṃ pana dhammacetiyaṃ nāma*. (I am grateful to the late U Bo Kay of Pagan for the reference.) We may compare the definition with Candragomin (sixth–seventh century CE?) as cited by Haribhadra (late eighth century) in his *Āloka* (U. Wogihara [ed.], *Abhisamayālamkāra'ālokā prajñāpāramitāvyaḥyā* [Tokyo: The Toyo Bunko, 1933], fascicle 2, p. 207, ll. 20–22): *yatra hi nāma puḍgalanairātmya-dyotikayā ye dharmā hetuprabhavā ity ādigāthayā adhiṣṭhito bhūbhāgaḥ stūpo mataḥ*. For some of the few *ye dharmā* inscriptions known from Ceylon, see Nandasena Mudiyanse, *Mahayana Monuments in Ceylon* (Colombo: 1967) pp. 29–30 (in Nāgarī, on images that Mudiyanse, with good reason, deems imported), 92–95 (in Sinhalese characters, possibly in Pāli), and 97. Ceylon is rich in deposited texts, but mostly in Sanskrit, and of *mantra*, *dhāraṇī*, or *Prajñāpāramitā*, rather than extracts from the Pāli canon: see Mudiyanse, *Mahayana Monuments in Ceylon*, Gregory Schopen, 'The Text on the "Dhāraṇī Stones from Abhayagiriya": A Minor Contribution to the Study of Mahāyāna Literature in Ceylon', *JIAS* 5.1 (1982), pp. 100–108, and Oskar von Hinüber, *Sieben Goldblätter einer Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā aus Anurādhapura* (Göttingen: 1984).

⁵² *Charuk nai prathet thai* (Bangkok: 2529 [1986]) Vol. II, pp. 42–47.

⁵³ That is, no other references are given in Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, ([Oxford: 1899] Delhi: 1976), p. 37c or in G.P. Malalasekera, *Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names*, Vol. I, ([1937] New Delhi: 1983), pp. 83–85.

saṅgha.⁵⁴ Changing trade routes or political alliances could bring new patterns of patronage.

Perhaps because of the absence of indigenous information – of contemporary chronicles or histories – the Buddhism of early South-East Asia is all too often portrayed as an inanimate cultural package that was passively received from abroad. All the evidence, however, is against this. The Buddhism of the Chao Phraya plain was not a simple copy from Ceylon or India. From the time of the very first evidence, it already has a unique face, implying an earlier evolution for which no records remain. The surviving artefacts are expressions of a mature and refined culture, with special features like the large and ornate stone *dharmacakkas*; the plan of the *stūpas* or *caityas*, and the style of their stucco art; the style of the Buddha images; the rich terracotta art (the so-called votive tablets); and motifs that remain to be explained, such as the so-called Banaspati image. From this evidence we can only deduce that the Buddhism of the Chao Phraya valley is the flowering of a 'local genius'. The same may be said of the Buddhism of the Pyu, which had its own architecture and terracotta art, and local practices such as the urn-burial of people of status. The two realms were flourishing centres of Buddhist culture in their own right, on an equal footing with contemporary centres like Anurādhapura.⁵⁵

To conclude, we may turn to Laos and Cambodia. Is there any evidence of early Theravādin activity in these countries? Very little information is available for Laos. In 1968 a standing stone Buddha in Dvāravatī style, 190 centimetres in height, was found at Ban Thalāt in Vientiane province. The image and the accompanying Mon inscription have been dated to the seventh–eighth centuries.⁵⁶ The finds suggest that the Mon Buddhism of the right bank of the Mekhong River (the Mun and Chi

⁵⁴ That a single monastic could make enormous and enduring contributions to a culture – in manifold aspects – may be seen from countries for which we have records. Atiśa and Bu ston spring to mind for Tibet, and Kūkai (Kōbō Daishi) for Japan.

⁵⁵ The situation was perhaps not much different from that of today, when the *Buddhisms* of the Mon, Burmese, Central Thai, Shan, Lanna Tai, Lao, and Khmer are each quite distinctive. We might also bear in mind that – from the point of view of Madhyadeśa – Ceylon, Andhra, and South-East Asia were equally foreign cultures, and that there is no valid reason to relegate the last-named to a lower rank. In a sense 'local' and 'foreign' are modern constructs: the South-East Asian cultures that adopted Indian cosmology did not hesitate to place themselves within Jambudīpa.

⁵⁶ Thao Boun Souk, *L'image du Buddha dans l'art lao* (Vientiane: 1971) p. 14 (with photograph); Vothu Tinh, *Les origines du Laos* (Paris: 1983), pp. 42–43.

valleys) also spread to the left bank, but much more research needs to be done into the nature of the Buddhism of the middle Mekhong valley before anything more can be said.

In Cambodia – which is rich in structural remains and lithographs – no ancient Pāli inscriptions have been found, and scriptural extracts of the type discussed above are unknown, with one exception. This is an epigraph of two lines, engraved in small ‘pre-Angkorian’ letters on the back of a standing Buddha image (90 cm. in height) from Tuol Preah Theat in Kompong Speu province (now in the Musée Guimet).⁵⁷ The text reads:⁵⁸

*ye dhammā hetuprabhavā tesaṃ hetuṃ tathāgato avaca
tesaṃ ca yo nirodho evaṃvādī mahāsamano.*

The verse differs from the Pāli of the *Mahāvagga* (*Vinaya* I 40) in giving *hetuprabhavā* for *hetuppabhavā* and *avaca* for *āha*, and cannot be cited as evidence for a Theravādin presence.⁵⁹ Otherwise, the earliest Pāli inscription dates from CE 1308 – and thus belongs to the heyday of

⁵⁷ It is not without interest that the *ye dhammā* verse is also inscribed (in Pāli) on the back of a standing Dvāravatī-style Buddha image (196 centimetres in height) from Ratchaburi, dated to circa twelfth century BE (CE 550–650): see *Charuk nai prathet thai* (Bangkok: 2529 [1986]) I 72–74. Another Dvāravatī Buddha image with a Pāli *ye dhammā* inscription ‘en caractères préangkorien peu soignés’ is in the Korat Museum: ‘Inscription sur une statue de Buddha du Musée de Korat’, in George Coëdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. VII (Paris: 1964), p. 162. See also Peter Skilling, ‘Traces of the Dharma: Preliminary reports on some *ye dhammā* and *ye dharmā* inscriptions from Mainland South-East Asia’, *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 90–91 (2003/2004), pp. 273–287.

⁵⁸ George Coëdès, *Inscriptions du Cambodge*, Vol. VII (Paris: 1964), p. 108. The image is illustrated in Pierre Dupont, *La statuaire préangkorienne* (Ascona: 1955), Pls. XLV B and XLVI C. See also Peter Skilling, ‘Some citation inscriptions from South-East Asia’, *JPTS* XXVII (2002), pp. 159–175.

⁵⁹ Note that there are many examples of the *ye dharmā* verse in a mixed or Sanskritic Pāli from India, and that they have yet to be subjected to sustained linguistic and palæographic analysis. See Peter Skilling, ‘A Buddhist inscription from Go Xoai, Southern Vietnam and notes towards a classification of *ye dharmā* inscriptions’, in *80 pi śāstrācārya dr. prahsert na nagara: ruam pada khwam vijākāra dan charūk lae ekasāraporāṇa* (Bangkok: 21 March 2542 [1999]), pp. 171–187.

the 'Theravādin renaissance' in Rāmaññadesa, Burma, Central Siam, the Lanna Kingdom, and other northern principalities.⁶⁰

There is certainly evidence of the presence of Buddhism in the early period: stone, metal, and wooden images of the Buddha,⁶¹ of Maitreya,⁶² and of Avalokiteśvara,⁶³ as well as occasional mention in Sanskrit or Khmer dedicatory inscriptions. Chinese sources record that monks travelled back and forth between Funan and the Middle Kingdom, but say nothing about their school-affiliation. The *Vimuttimaggā* and other Buddhist texts, including some of the Mahāyāna, were sent to China from Funan in the early sixth century. The opening verses of the *Telakaṭāha-gāthā* are known from an eighth century inscription from Prachin Buri, which may be said to belong to the Khmer cultural sphere. Furthermore, some of the early Buddha images of Cambodia are stylistically affiliated to those of Dvāravati. On the other hand, it is remarkable that in Cambodia there are no ruins of monumental brick *stūpas*, so common in Pyu and Mon areas, or even of smaller complexes of votive *stūpas*. Boisselier has noted that none of the ancient epigraphs refer to *stūpas*, and that none of the known *stūpa* remains are earlier than the twelfth century.⁶⁴ Nor is there any evidence of a practice shared by Pyu and Mon Buddhists: the mass-production from moulds of clay 'votive tablets'. Here too Boisselier remarks that these *prah patima* are not well-attested until the twelfth century.⁶⁵ In sum, while Buddhists were certainly active in Cambodia during the early period, it seems that the dominant ideology remained that of the brahmans, and that Buddhism or Buddhist culture did not flourish among the Khmer to the degree that it did among the Pyu and the Mon.

⁶⁰ George Coëdès, 'La plus ancienne inscription en pâli du Cambodge', in *Articles sur le pays khmer* (Paris: 1989), pp. 282–289 (= Études cambodgiennes XXXII, originally published in BEFEO XXXVI). The inscription is a royal record of a religious foundation, and not a scriptural extract.

⁶¹ See Dupont, *La statuaire préangkorienne*, pp. 189–210.

⁶² See the examples in Chutiwongs and Leidy, *Buddha of the Future*, pls. XXIX A and XXX A.

⁶³ For examples see Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia*, Chap. 5, Chutiwongs and Leidy, *Buddha of the Future*, and Dupont, *La statuaire préangkorienne*, pls. XII B, XXII AB, XXVIII A, XXIX B, XXX B, and XXXI A.

⁶⁴ J. Boisselier, *Le Cambodge* (Paris: 1966, Manuel d'archéologie d'Extrême-Orient, Première Partie, Asie du Sud-Est, Tome I), p. 97.

⁶⁵ Boisselier, *Le Cambodge*, p. 300. For 'Saintes Empreintes' in Cambodia, see Boisselier, *Le Cambodge*, §§ 219, 256–57, 303, and Fig. 70.

Eras

BE	Buddhist Era (BE - 543 = CE)
CE	Christian Era (CE + 543 = BE)
BCE	Before Christian Era (543 - BCE = BE)
CS	Lesser Śaka Era (Culaśakarāja) (CS + 638 = CE)
RE	Ratanakosin Era

Periods of Thai history

Sukhothai	1239?-1438
Ayutthaya	1351-1767
Thonburi	1767-1782
Ratanakosin (Bangkok)	1782-present

Kings of the Early Bangkok Period

Rama I (Phra Phutthayotfa Chulalok Chaoyuhua)	1782-1809
Rama II (Phra Phutthaløetla Naphalai Chaoyuhua)	1809-1824
Rama III (Phra Nangklaø Chaoyuhua)	1824-1851
Rama IV (Phra Chomklaø Chaoyuhua)	1851-1868
(commonly known in the West as King Mongkut)	
Rama V (Phra Chulachomklaø Chaoyuhua)	1868-1910
(commonly known in the West as King Chulalongkorn)	
Rama VI (Phra Mongkutklaø Chaoyuhua)	1910-1925
(commonly known in the West as King Vajiravudh)	

Note on spelling and usage

Thai words are spelt according to the Royal Institute system of [1968] 1982 (with some exceptions for proper names). In the titles of texts and in certain formal terms, words of Indian origin are spelt according to standard Indic usage: *Paññasa-jataka*, for example, rather than, as pronounced in Thai, *Panyatsa-chadok*.