

Relying on the Dharma and not the Person: Reflection on Authority and Transmission in Buddhism and Buddhist Studies, by Paul M. Harrison

Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Vol. 26, No. 1 2003

RELYING ON THE DHARMA AND NOT THE PERSON:
REFLECTIONS ON AUTHORITY AND TRANSMISSION
IN BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST STUDIES¹

PAUL HARRISON

Your Royal Highness, venerable members of the Saṅgha, colleagues, friends. Grandmothers are often fonts of folk wisdom, and one of the things my grandmother used to say was: Sin in haste, repent at leisure. I always think of this when I sit down at last to write a conference paper, take out the abstract sent off six or eight months previously, and see what I promised in a rash and unguarded moment to do. In this case, I undertook to reflect on the current state and future prospects of Buddhist Studies, on the relations — past, present and future — between the Buddhist Order and the Western university, and on issues of authority and transmission in Buddhism and Buddhist Studies, linking these reflections to the *Mahāpadeśasūtra* and the *Catuḥpratisaraṇasūtra*. So much for what the abstract commits me to, but of course while doing all this I should also avoid the temptation—which increases with age — to pontificate or lay down the law for everybody else, and finally, I might consider myself obliged to satisfy the expectations of those of you who have heard me speak before that I might occasionally say something amusing. I clearly have much to repent, but no more leisure in which to do so.

It is customary on such occasions as these to assess what is called “the state of the field.” Attempts to review the special character and problems of Buddhist Studies as a discipline (or congeries of disciplines) have already been made at previous meetings of our organisation, especially the one held in Mexico City in 1994, and a whole issue of our journal was

¹ This is the lightly edited text of the plenary address presented at the opening session of the XIIIth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, on 9 December 2002, in the presence of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, representatives of the Saṅgha, and members of the Association.

subsequently devoted to publishing the relevant addresses by Professors David Seyfort Ruegg, Luis Gómez, José Cabezón and others.² Things would be moving very fast indeed if the field itself had changed to any significant degree since these colleagues surveyed it. However, nobody has been shifting the boundary pegs at night while we all slept, no impious local spirits — to advert to the story of the building of Samye — have been dismantling the entire structure in the dark so that I have to start all over again. There have, of course, been a few interesting developments since 1994 — and I will come to them in due course — but on the occasion of this conference, the first in the new millennium by the Western calendar, and given this particular audience, I want to take a different tack altogether, and reflect on the institutional context of our work, and the ways in which that context influences what we do. For it is true that these previous reflections, useful as they are, generally pay only passing attention to the environment in which we operate, and the ways in which it affects our work.³ It is after all not only what we do that is important, but how and particularly where we do it. This is perhaps an unwelcome gambit: we come to conferences like this partly because they enable us temporarily to get away from, even to forget, the contexts in which we work. And even when we are at home, we may not care to spend too much time reflecting on the material circumstances of our lives as scholars. Yet such reflection is entirely appropriate, especially for those of us here who are academics. After all, many of us have taken to emphasising the need to study the physical, material, economic circumstances of Buddhists past and present, the everyday realities of their lives, in contrast to investigating such things as the doctrine, philosophy, logic and other more abstract and theoretical products of élite Buddhist culture, which is partly why, for example, we have seen an efflorescence of Vinaya

² See especially D. Seyfort Ruegg, “Some Reflections on the Place of Philosophy in the Study of Buddhism,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies (JIABS)*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1995), pp. 145-181; Luis O. Gómez, “Unspoken Paradigms: Meanderings through the Metaphors of a Field,” *ibid.*, pp. 183-230; and José Ignacio Cabezón, “Buddhist Studies as a Discipline and the Role of Theory,” *ibid.*, pp. 231-268. See also an earlier presidential address by Ruegg, “Some Observations on the Present and Future of Buddhist Studies,” *JIABS*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1992), pp. 104-117.

³ Seyfort Ruegg’s 1992 article is an exception.

Studies in our field of late. It is only fair then to turn the same spotlight on ourselves, and examine our lives rather than our texts.

Of course, we are not all inhabitants of academia, university teachers and graduate students. There are in fact two principal groups of people gathered here today, the second being members of the Buddhist Saṅgha. Thus two great institutions are represented in this room, one, the Saṅgha, being now almost two and a half thousand years old, the other, the Western university, which began life in Europe around the 12th century, being a comparative novelty, historically speaking. This week, then, we gather together from monastery and campus, united by a common interest in the study of Buddhism, even if we may be divided by our ideas about what Buddhism is. To put it like this involves considerable oversimplification, I admit. Not all Buddhist scholars are academics, nor do all members of the Saṅgha, in its broadest sense, live in monasteries. Furthermore, there are many who possess dual citizenship, who are both Saṅgha-members and academics. But you will permit me, I trust, to distinguish the two institutions and their members for the purposes of this lecture. What I want to address today is the way in which they have come together in the field we know as Buddhist Studies. For it is certainly not the case that the Saṅgha simply provides academia with its object of study, that being the only connection between them. Far from it.

Earlier this year I spent a term visiting an American university well known for its contributions to Buddhist Studies. In the Department of Asian Languages and Literature at that university, on the door of the photocopying room, next to the mailboxes, where it would have to be seen many times each day, was a large poster from the Office of Student Affairs proclaiming the message: "Honouring and respecting our differences and similarities." This is a small example of the fatuous nonsense circulating in our institutions of higher learning. In this case the entirely reasonable summons to respect other people's differences has been engulfed by such a pious concern for inclusiveness that even their similarities cannot go unhonoured and unrespected. Nobody must be left out, nobody is unworthy of honour and respect, and all must answer the call to provide them, even if it is now meaningless.

Well, although there are many differences between them, the Saṅgha and academia also share many similarities. Some of these similarities are

what you might call generic. Recently in the context of another (as yet unpublished) paper I had occasion to reflect on the 18 ways in which Buddhaghosa in his *Visuddhimagga* says a monastery can be unfavourable to meditation practice, to the development of concentration.⁴ The 18 features include — to paraphrase Buddhaghosa lightly — too many administrative tasks, frequent distractions from students, constant official meetings (*saṅgha-kamma*), too much construction activity, too many people coming and going for their own purposes or wanting things from you (worse, he says, when the place is famous), and the need to deal with fractious or incompatible colleagues. I am not the first person to observe that Buddhaghosa's comments about the monastery apply just as well to the modern university,⁵ indeed I doubt that anybody in this room could read the passage and fail to see the likeness. One could say that all institutions in which people gather to live and work together naturally display certain family resemblances, but I think there is more to it than this, that there are ways in which, because of their special orientation, the monastery and the university campus share particular features not so evident in other institutions, that there is, in short, some kind of deeper connection between their respective enterprises. Given the pedigree of the Western university and its relations with the Church, and the traditional role of the Buddhist monastery in Asia as a major centre of higher learning, this is perhaps hardly surprising.

In the past, these two institutions developed along their separate lines, but more recently, for a century or so, the Saṅgha has in many ways also been appropriating some of the structural and attitudinal features of Western academia, a process which is seen most clearly in the emergence of Buddhist universities. This is nothing new: it began in Japan about a century ago, and in that country the number of Buddhist universities and colleges is now quite considerable. Many of them have a long history, others have only recently arrived on the scene, so the process is clearly

⁴ See Ven. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, trans., *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 1999), pp. 118-121.

⁵ See, e.g., Florin Deleanu, "A Preliminary Study on Meditation and the Beginnings of Mahāyāna Buddhism," *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology*, Vol. 3 (1999), p. 84.

ongoing. Sri Lanka saw similar developments about 50 years ago, as did other parts of the Buddhist world. Now the Chinese Saṅgha — or to be more precise, the Taiwanese Saṅgha — is entering this phase with especial vigour. Some months ago, for example, Hsi Lai University in Los Angeles announced in the newspapers that its progress towards official accreditation had proceeded to the point where it could offer doctoral degrees.⁶ This is one example among many. Everywhere the educational operations of the Saṅgha are appropriating the modes of discourse of the Western university. At the same time, growing numbers of Buddhist monks and nuns have been taking degrees at Western universities in Buddhist Studies, and in this way a convergence of approaches has continued to unfold. This is not without its occasional problems, because of different cultural presuppositions and ways of doing things, or divergent understandings of what education and scholarship are about, as any Western academic who has supervised Asian Saṅgha-members as graduate students can testify. All relationships involve conflict and compromise, these are no different, and in most cases the problems can be worked through.

However, behind all these more day-to-day difficulties looms a bigger systemic problem. The system into which the Saṅgha has been busily integrating itself is arguably in a state of collapse. The Western university is, if not actually in ruins, to advert to the title of the relevant study by Bill Readings,⁷ at least in a critical structural condition, to the extent that all of us should now be warning our graduate students that they enter it at their own risk. The problems of the system differ from country to country, but many trends are universal, they are simply mixed in varying proportions. The list includes sinking government funding, rising costs, burgeoning administrative superstructures, rampant managerialism, the

⁶ Hsi Lai University, located at Hsi Lai Temple in Hacienda Heights, Los Angeles, is part of the educational arm of the Buddha Light International movement, whose base is Foguangshan in Taiwan.

⁷ *The University in Ruins* (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1996). For a more readable and less theoretically overburdened treatment of the same issues, see Cary Nelson & Stephen Watt, *Academic Keywords: A Devil's Dictionary for Higher Education* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999). The latter work restricts itself largely to the North American situation, but much of the ground it covers will be familiar to those elsewhere.

growth of an all-pervasive accounting mentality, increasingly intrusive surveillance and record-gathering, more intense competition for resources, increasing insistence on “relevance” (however that is defined), and a decline in the morale of the academic profession and of its status in society. The university as we knew it — if we ever really knew it — is disappearing, and scholars as disinterested seekers after truth, motivated only by intellectual curiosity, leading the life of the mind at a leisurely pace with all material needs taken care of, have long since left the building, to be replaced by corporation workers like any other, members of “cost centres” rather than departments or disciplines, monitored and reported on by people ever alert to the ratio of outputs to inputs, and thus continually worried lest the satisfaction ratings provided by their “customers” or “clients” (who used to be called students) drop below 3.5 (or whatever the magic figure is) on the scale, and chronically apprehensive about their continuity of employment. Tenure is an island whose surface area is shrinking as the tide of casualisation rises, and at the lower levels tenured academics with a long-term commitment to their institutions are increasingly replaced by mobile staff on fixed-term contracts or by underpaid graduate students whose exploitation is one of the major scandals of higher education. We are all familiar with the general picture. There may be some who have risen so high into the Brahmaloka of academia that they believe the destruction of the system will not affect them, but even though the view from the upper stories can still be quite good, most of us are faced with the effects of all these changes on a daily basis. All this has been well said by other people, so there is no need for me to dwell on it further, even if I can warm to this topic to the point of meltdown. I am not here to give you a tirade on the decline of the university, composed in equal parts of romantic nostalgia and peevish frustration. Such a mixture tastes extremely sour; you would not want to imbibe it. But I do want to reflect on how all this impacts on what we do.

One of the most obvious consequences is that we now have less time for scholarship, to say nothing of the serene and untroubled state of mind necessary for the prolonged periods of intense concentration which certain work requires — as Buddhaghosa was no doubt aware. But since the pressure to raise publication rates grows ever stronger, the result is an increase in quantity accompanied by a decline in quality, and I am sorry

to say that this is as apparent in our field as it is in others.⁸ Among the many new activities diverting us from what are now known as our “core business operations” of teaching and research, at the upper levels the professor has added fund-raising to the list of tasks needing to be performed. It is no longer a case of protecting disciplinary territory within the institution, as the pie is cut up and shared out: now there is often no pie at all, and professors must forage outside the walls to maintain their disciplines⁹. Here, in the matter of fund-raising, the linkages between academia and the Saṅgha and between Buddhist scholars and Buddhist believers become ever more important, for it is in donations from believers and institutional links with Asian Buddhist groups that Buddhist Studies is finding some of the means to survive in this more competitive environment. The global network of visiting chairs in Buddhist Studies funded by the generosity of Mr Yehan Numata is the most prominent example, but there are many others, including the endowment of positions, the provision of scholarships, the funding of conferences, the subvention of publications, and the underwriting of various projects to digitise the canons, where the generosity of Buddhist donors has been instrumental to the progress of Buddhist Studies in the academic environment. It is perhaps an irony that Buddhist scholars should be required to turn for funding to those whom they study, and, like members of the Saṅgha, take to mendicancy. But here one can easily overstate the analogy, since there is no spiritual value ascribed to the process, begging is not embraced as a means to greater humility or to the conquest of pride and egotism, but seen merely as a necessary evil. And we will be seeing a lot more of fund-raising, along with all the other allegedly necessary

⁸ This decline in quality is also a reflection of specific work practices. Pressure to publish in the world of academia conspires with cost-cutting by publishing houses to produce, courtesy of the use of word-processing technology, books which frequently add little or nothing to our knowledge and understanding of Buddhism. These same books, having been printed from camera-ready copy (yet another burden transferred to the shoulders of academics), betray no sign of an editor’s hand, and are therefore often longer than they need to be, and riddled with mistakes.

⁹ One telling indication of this trend is the announcement by the American Academy of Religion of a summer workshop entitled “The Entrepreneurial Chair: Building and Managing your Department in an Era of Shrinking Resources and Increasing Demands,” to be held at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 19-21 June 2003.

evils of maintaining high teaching loads, writing reports, generating plans and mission statements, engaging in research assessment exercises, and so on.

We all know that these things are only means to an end, and most of us have a pretty clear idea what that end is, even though, caught up in the interminable planning and the tedious reviewing now deemed necessary for quality assurance (or quality management) in our universities, we might be forgiven sometimes for losing sight of it. What is that end? It is the preservation, generation and transmission of knowledge, in our case about the Buddhist religion, and it is something more than that as well, it is a kind of practice to do with that knowledge. And this is analogous, I would contend, to the purpose of the Saṅgha, the institutional core of the religion we study, a purpose the Saṅgha has been pursuing now for almost two and a half millennia: the transmission and realisation of the dharma. Its members too have had occasion to reflect on the problems that sometimes arise in pursuing that purpose, and some of these reflections have crystallised into sacred writ. One example of this is the well-known *Catuḥpratisaraṇasūtra*, the Sūtra of the Four Refuges or Four Reliances, as studied in an important paper by Étienne Lamotte.¹⁰ Many of you will be familiar with this short text, which presents guidelines for the interpretation of tradition. It maintains that when assessing teachings which have been passed down, one should rely on four things: on the dharma itself rather than the person (*pudgala*) teaching it, on the meaning (*artha*) rather than the letter (*vyañjana*), on the sutras of explicit or definite meaning (*nītārtha*) rather than those which require further interpretation (*neyārtha*), and on direct knowledge (*jñāna*) rather than discursive sensory consciousness (*vijñāna*).¹¹ Some of these terms are far from

¹⁰ See Étienne Lamotte, "La critique d'interprétation dans le bouddhisme," in *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, Vol. 9 (Brussels, 1949), pp. 341-361. This has been translated into English by Sara Boin-Webb as "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism," in Donald S. Lopez, ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), pp. 11-27. The same material is usefully recapitulated in the more comprehensive survey by Ronald M. Davidson, "An Introduction to the Standards of Scriptural Authenticity in Indian Buddhism," in Robert E. Buswell, ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 291-325.

¹¹ The core of the sutra text, as cited by Yaśomitra in his *Sphuṭārthā Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (ed. Wogihara Unrai, Tokyo, 1932-1936), p. 704, runs as follows:

straightforward, and I have skated over the difficulties with these renditions of them, but in attempting to assess the applicability of these guidelines to the work of academia I will try to pick some of the problems up. First, however, there is a general principle here worth noting, applicable to all the *pratisaraṇas*, which is this: in each pair, one term does not completely cancel out the other, but is accorded priority over it.¹²

For example, in “the dharma and not the person,” it is not that persons are unimportant in teaching, just that they are and should be ultimately secondary to what is taught. Indeed our greatest successes as teachers come from inspiring students to want to emulate us, and in more than just our scholarship, but our primary aim should be to cultivate in them a relationship not with ourselves, but with knowledge, and a passion for it so intense that eventually they surpass us in its pursuit. Our supreme achievement as teachers is to be eclipsed rather than replicated by our students, even though our personal example is hardly unimportant to the process. Yet any standards or values we pass on should lie outside our own persons.

The second *pratisaraṇa*, the primacy of *artha* over *vyañjana*, appears to be the easiest to assimilate, used as we are to the distinction between the letter and the spirit, and so may appear to need no further comment. But we should reflect on the importance of the letter before we rush to accord priority to the spirit. One of our hardest tasks as academics is to act as custodians of language, to inculcate in our students a concern for clarity of formulation and elegance of expression. In an increasingly visual culture this becomes ever more difficult, and so the Saṅgha is not alone in preserving, as it often does, a language which is not the common tongue of the day. I am not here to lament declining standards of spelling, but to observe that if the *vyañjana* is confused and unclear, the *artha* is likely to be so as well.¹³ Yet there is no doubt that the meaning, the spirit is primary, and we should be teaching our students — and attempting ourselves

catvārimāni bhikṣavaḥ pratisaraṇāni | katamāni catvāri | dharmāḥ pratisaraṇaṃ na pudgalaḥ | arthaḥ pratisaraṇaṃ na vyañjanaṃ | nītārthasūtraṃ pratisaraṇaṃ na neyārthaṃ | jñānaṃ pratisaraṇaṃ na vijñānaṃ |

¹² The point is made in Lamotte, “Textual Interpretation,” p. 12.

¹³ So too Lamotte, “Textual Interpretation,” p. 14, in noting that though the letter is to be subordinated to the spirit, it is still important.

— always to go beyond the letter of whatever language we are dealing with, in order to arrive at what is truly meaningful, or what has purpose. *Artha* in Sanskrit has many senses, and the sense of purpose, or benefit, is surely in play here (as it is in the treatment of the four reliances in certain Mahāyāna texts).¹⁴

The distinction between sutras of definite or explicit meaning (*nītārtha*), and those whose meaning is implicit, or needs to be drawn out or interpreted (*neyārtha*) is perhaps the most difficult to apply to the academic operation, given its specific and technical reference in Buddhist hermeneutics,¹⁵ but at the same time we are familiar enough with the need to read evidence in more than one way and the dangers of an excessive literalism to see how it might be applied to our own work, if only loosely, by analogy. We all need to know what to take seriously, or *au pied de la lettre*, and what not. Thus while the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction may appear at first sight to be relevant only to a closed system which maintains an orthodox position and therefore needs to come to terms with pronouncements from authoritative sources ostensibly at odds with that position, it can at the same time be read more generally as a summons to employ a certain degree of hermeneutical sophistication when dealing with so-called authorities. Yet academia supposedly thrives on open-ended interpretation, questioning and doubt, and ought never to privilege clear, unambiguous and definitive statements of truth, since it does not see that there is one truth, or one way of expressing it, to which everything else has somehow to be made to conform. On this point, it seems, the Saṅgha and academia must part company, or at least agree to differ.

Finally, as for the primacy of direct knowledge over discursive sensory consciousness, *jñāna* over *viññāna*, one thing it does do is point up the inadequacy of “consciousness” as a translation for *viññāna*. I take it

¹⁴ Indeed, in the restatements of the four *pratisaraṇas* in Mahāyāna terms found in the *Bodhisattvapiṭakasūtra* and the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra*, the formulations of the *vyāñjanārtha* distinction often make no sense unless one understands *artha* as “purpose” or “intent.”

¹⁵ See for example David Seyfort Ruegg, “Allusiveness and obliqueness in Buddhist texts: *Samdhā*, *saṃdhi*, *saṃdhyā* and *abhisamdhī*,” in Colette Caillat, ed., *Dialectes dans les littératures indo-aryennes* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut de Civilisation Indienne, 1989), pp. 295-328.

to mean that it is better to have direct knowledge of something, or direct understanding of it, than merely to know **about** it. For the academic study of Buddhism I think this *pratisaraṇa* is of the essence, in that it reminds us that information about Buddhism, no matter how much we accumulate of it, is no substitute for understanding, for cognition in its strongest sense. This raises a number of thorny questions, not least the contentious insider-outsider issue, which are of general relevance to the entire academic enterprise. Information, after all, can be accessed these days so much more easily, and in vast quantities, through the internet, but what is important is the ability to know what to do with it, which no amount of surfing the web can ever impart. That ability, the ability to think critically, weigh evidence, evaluate arguments, exercise judgement and so on can only be acquired through the kind of training which universities impart, at least when they are doing their job properly. As valuable as they are, we can pile up editions of manuscripts, translations of texts, and ethnographic studies until they reach the height of Mt Sumeru, yet we may still be no closer to understanding Buddhism. For that to happen, scholars need to leave the campus and enter the monastery, in one way or another, they need to look real Buddhists in the eye, otherwise we run the risk of the Buddhology of idealisation, or the Buddhology of contempt, of admiring or deploring an abstraction of our own making.

You see how hard it is after all to avoid the temptation to be prescriptive, but in fact I have merely been taking my cue from the *Catuḥpratisaraṇasūtra*, which is unashamedly so. Its guidelines bear on the transmission and interpretation of a tradition of knowledge, in this case of the dharma, but that dharma, as is well known, is both teaching in the form of text and practical realisation (*deśanā* and *adhigama*). This is equally true of Western academia, at least in its ideal form, in which what is supposed to be transmitted is not information — that is in a sense merely the carrier for something else — but the critical spirit of free inquiry and rigorous intellectual honesty, a species of practice, in short, which needs to be realised in actual experience.

All very well, I hear you thinking, a fine piece of exegetical whimsy, but what about the real world in which this practice unfolds, with all the

stresses and challenges which I mentioned before. Even granted that this is our purpose, how is its pursuit affected by the environment in which we are situated? Well, there's no doubt that this environment is having effects on current trends in our field. I've already mentioned some of the less fortunate ones, now it's time to turn to the positive side of the ledger.

Consider, if you will, the smallness of our field. To give you an illustration: by way of experiment, I went through the list of 190 participants posted on the website for this conference and counted 71 people I knew personally, over one third of the total (this doesn't include the people I know who haven't come, who would easily push the figure over the hundred mark). I am sure many of you would arrive at a similar result. We are comparatively few, and scattered all over the globe, even in the most unlikely places, like New Zealand, and it is therefore not surprising that we seek each other out, cultivate relationships with each other, and maintain them assiduously. In this matter of global linkages we are of course encouraged by our institutions, each one of which vaunts its international excellence, excellence being one of the most popular and most meaningless buzzwords of the modern university. In fact, we may not all be excellent, but we are all international, and becoming more so. This can be seen very clearly in the current tendency in our field towards collaborative or group work, with the collaborations or groups in question often spanning national boundaries. There are many reasons for this. One is the fact that it is becoming less likely that a single scholar possesses all the necessary skills and abilities, especially linguistic, required for the kind of work we do, and this is especially true of the philological side of our field, where this trend is most noticeable. Here the death of Jan Willem de Jong in January 2000, shortly after our last conference, marks the passing of an era in the field, since he was in many ways an exemplary figure. To the best of my knowledge, he never collaborated with anyone on anything.¹⁶ Despite his wide influence, he was sufficient to himself. The multilingual erudition he commanded, however, is increasingly rare, not because of any diminution in natural talent, but because the social and institutional conditions that fostered it and permitted its operation no longer

¹⁶ That is to say, in the bibliographies of his writings for the years 1949-1997 published in the *Hokke bunka kenkyū* not a single co-authored piece is listed.

obtain. So we pool our resources, with two, three, or more scholars doing the work that previously one might have done alone. We come as yet nowhere near the sciences in multi-authored pieces of work, where the list of contributors sometimes seems as long as the paper itself, but we are making a modest start. This is not at all a bad thing, since it enables different perspectives to be brought to bear on the material. Indeed, there is also something very fitting about it, since, as far as Buddhist philology is concerned, the texts we work on were often generated in this way, as group projects. It thus seems appropriate, for example, that the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, which were produced by teams, should now be studied, edited and translated by teams. In both cases the teams were and are international, providing yet another example of how we mimic the supposed object of our study. We might take a positive view of this trend, emphasising its undoubted benefits, but at the same time it also reflects the globalisation of knowledge and its production, in which scholars are becoming detached from their home bases, able to be deployed anywhere and everywhere. In a casualised academic workforce, this is not always a cause for self-congratulation, nor is the fact that we now move about so much more, as our graduate students often find to their cost.

I expect we will see more such international co-operation, and expect too that increasingly it will bring the Saṅgha and academia closer together in collaborative undertakings. In a way it provides a solution to the problem of authority in our field, insofar as the agreement by **groups** of scholars as to what is worthwhile to work on, to devote time and resources to, helps to determine the directions which our work and our field as a whole take. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to derive a lesson from the *Mahāpadeśasūtra* here, that for any tradition to continue, in the absence of a single personal source of authority, it must ideally be sanctioned by a “formally constituted community” and should at the same time be consistent with what has gone before.¹⁷ Like the *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra*, this

¹⁷ The *Mahāpadeśasūtra*, versions of which are found in the *Dīghanikāya*, the *Aṅguttaranikāya* and in various other sources, holds that members of the Saṅgha should accept teachings as authentic if they receive them from one of four great authorities (*mahāpadeśa*), namely (1) the Buddha himself, (2) a Saṅgha of elders, (3) a group of elder monks specialising in the transmission of Dharma (i.e. Sūtra), Vinaya or Māṭṛkā (interpreted either as proto-Abhidharma lists or as the Prātimokṣa), or (4) a single elder specialising in the

set of prescriptions is designed for a situation where authority is in dispute, and where there may be serious disagreements about what the dharma actually is. We all know there have been plenty of these in the history of Buddhism. As the *Mahāpadesāsūtra* suggests, the values of the tradition cannot be dispensed with, no matter who says so: another way of stressing the primacy of the dharma over the person.¹⁸ But that of course is to set up a standard that may well shift over time. Certainly, what counts as authoritative transmission in Buddhist Studies is now rather more vigorously contested than it used to be. It was much easier to determine in former times, when the philological approach was dominant, and editions and translations of texts could be judged with relative ease as accurate or flawed, good or bad, on the grounds of a scholar's knowledge of the relevant languages and mastery of the canons of textual criticism. In such circumstances a polymath like de Jong could set himself up as gatekeeper, and with his reviews determine who was worthy of admission and who was not, like a Buddhological equivalent of Cerberus. Nobody could take his place in that capacity these days, not because of any lack of erudition, but because there are now simply too many gates to guard. The dominance of philology is a thing of the past.

Philology itself, however, is certainly not dead, although reports of its demise regularly come to our ears. Indeed, there is a continuing need for it, and it is flourishing quite strongly at the moment, stimulated by the discovery during the last decade of large quantities of Buddhist manuscripts in Afghanistan and elsewhere. The interest these finds generate, judging by the panels at our last conference in Lausanne in 1999 and no doubt at this one, and the capacity audiences they draw, show that research into

transmission of these texts. But teachings heard from any of these authorities should only be accepted if they are also in agreement with the Sūtra and Vinaya, i.e., with existing scriptural tradition. For a detailed discussion and references see Étienne Lamotte, "La critique d'authenticité dans le bouddhisme," in *India Antiqua* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1947), pp. 213-222. An English version, again by Sara Boin-Webb, appears as "The Assessment of Textual Authenticity in Buddhism," in *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1984), pp. 4-15.

¹⁸ This is accentuated in certain Sanskrit formulations of the text, which add the proviso that received teachings should also be consistent with the way things are (*dharmatām ca na vilomayati*). Clearly an understanding of the way things are is determined to a large extent by existing tradition.

Buddhist texts has hardly become a marginal activity. I for one certainly hope that this is not the swansong of Buddhist philology, for even without the newly discovered manuscripts, there is still a great need for this kind of work. So much literature remains unexplored, and so many editions and translations made a century or more ago are still being heavily used, even though they now show clear signs of being seriously deficient and in need of replacement.

But that said, our field is increasingly diverse. Many of us approach our work with methods and theoretical tools drawn from anthropology, sociology, feminist studies, cultural studies, literary theory and so on. And we work in different areas, as can be seen in many of the panels offered at this and previous conferences: Buddhism in the West, environmental issues, gender, ethics (particularly as applied to the tougher moral problems of our age, like euthanasia, abortion, violence and conflict). Such diversity, in a field as small as ours, is admirable. But, as diverse as our methods and areas of interest may be, we should ideally continue to be able to talk to each other, to pool our resources, and make common cause in a much harsher and more materialistic environment where the study of Buddhism, however it is defined or pursued, may be questioned as an unaffordable luxury, and in which it may well become much more difficult to produce scholarship of quality. It will certainly be harder to do so if we do not all help each other to work with the needs of the subject and not the enhancement of our own CVs in mind (*dharma*, not *pudgala*), to make meaningful contributions rather than simply swelling the word-count (*artha*, not *vyañjana*), and to foster useful understanding rather than merely amplifying the buzz of information (*jñāna*, not *vijñāna*). Try as I might, I am unable to work the *nītārtha/neyārtha* distinction in here, but since the Western academic system thrives on drawing things out, on meanings which require interpretation, this is hardly surprising.

In many respects, as I've attempted to show, the world of Buddhist Studies is rather similar to the world it takes as its object of enquiry, and these similarities are far from superficial or accidental. Both the Saṅgha and academia are decentralised institutions engaged in passing down a tradition and a practice of knowledge, and both are no strangers to internal disagreement about what that knowledge should be (as is indicated in the Saṅgha's case by the very existence of the texts I've referred to). Both

the Saṅgha and academia are also institutions sustained by the economic surpluses of society, in which people are afforded the leisure and the means to pursue objectives which many outside simply do not understand or see the point of. Monks and nuns, like academics, have throughout the history of Buddhism been regularly denounced as parasites, and have just as enthusiastically been supported by the societies in which they lived. This support could never be guaranteed, it had to be continually renegotiated and carefully cultivated. And yet, despite the unreliable and at times even hostile nature of its social matrix, the Saṅgha is now halfway through its third millennium, and it is still very much alive. It has changed a great deal during its history, but it remains recognisable. Whether the Western university, faced as it is with similar challenges to its existence, will last as long or as well is not so clear. Its demise is predicted by many, but similar predictions have been made in the past about the decline and disappearance of the Saṅgha. Somehow we are always in *mappō*, the *paścimakāla* or last days of the Dharma, but somehow the institutions survive, and they survive of course precisely by changing.

Our field too is part of that process of change. As we look forward to the next thousand years, the next century, even the next decade, the opportunities and challenges are unpredictable, and it would be foolish of me to attempt a forecast. It is clear enough, however, that we are engaged in an ongoing relationship and an ongoing conversation, both of which are centred on something which is itself in perpetual flux, Buddhism. But lack of identity does not mean lack of continuity, and hopefully we can continue to negotiate the increasingly closer relationship between academia and the Saṅgha, and the increasingly diverse conversation about Buddhism, to our mutual benefit, with a sense of the two long traditions which stretch back into the past behind us. In doing so it may not be possible, or even necessary, to honour and respect all our differences and similarities, but it certainly may pay us to know what they are, and even occasionally to rise above them, and look each other in the eye, in mutual recognition.