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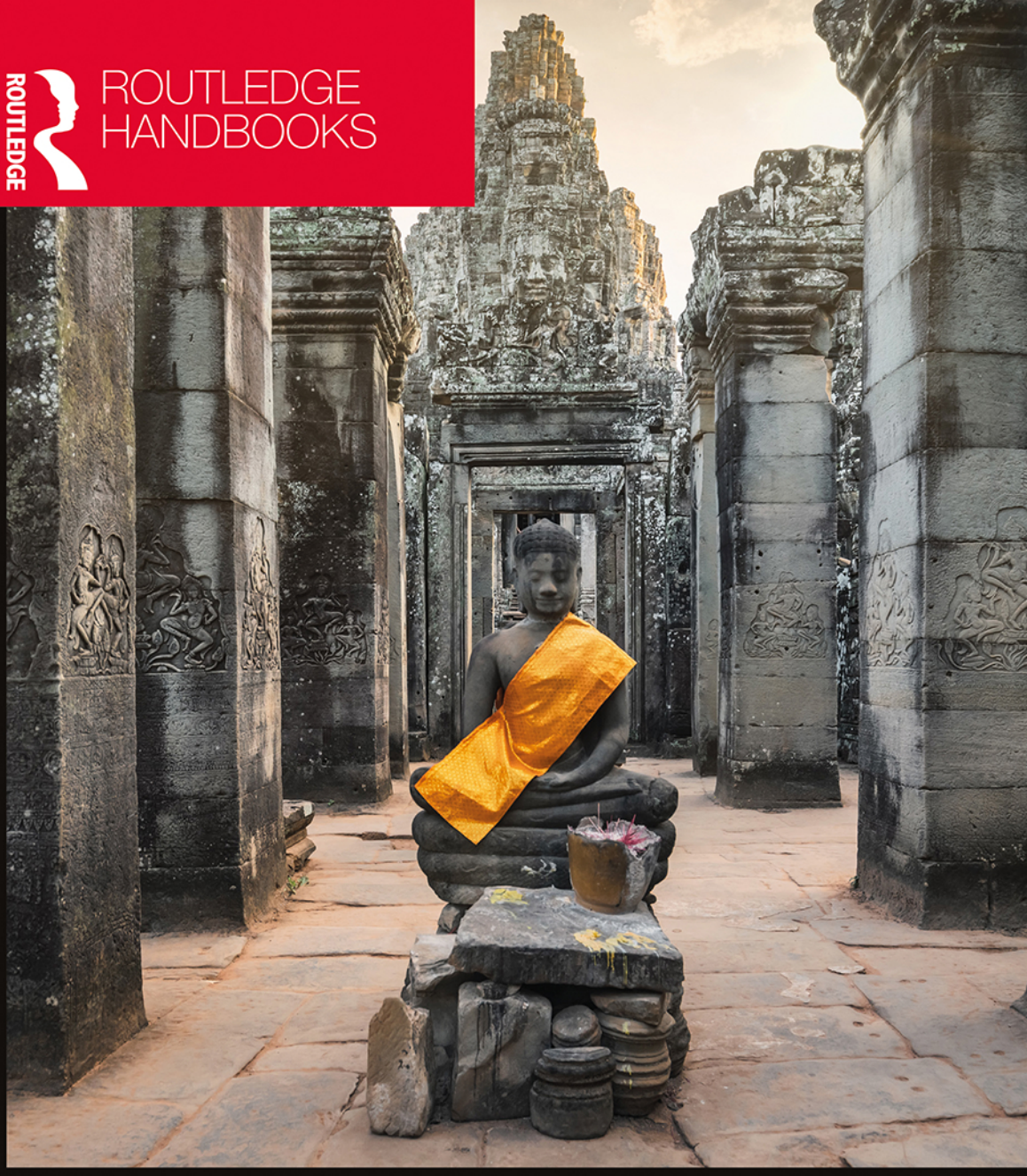

Routledge Handbook of Theravāda Buddhism

Edited by Stephen C. Berkwitz and Ashley Thompson

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abh-ṭ	*Abhidhānappadīpikā-tīkā*
Abhidh-av	*Abhidhammāvatāra*
Abhidh-av-nṭ	*Abhidhammavikāsinī*
Abhidh-k-bh	*Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*
Abhidh-k-vy	*Abhidharmakośavyākhya*
Abhidh-s	*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*
Abhidh-s-mhṭ	*Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-mahāṭīkā*
Abhidh-s-ṭ	*Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī-ṭīkā*
AN	*Aṅguttara-Nikāya*
Ap	*Apadāna*
As	*Atthasālinī*
B	Burmese
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇī*
Dhs-a	*Dhammasaṅganī-aṭṭhakathā* (= As. *Atthasālinī*)
Dīp	*Dīpavaṃsa*
DN	*Dīgha-Nikāya*
DN-a	*Dīgha-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā* (= Sv. *Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*)
DP	*A Dictionary of Pāli* by Margaret Cone
EB	*Epigraphia Birmanica*
EFEO	École française d'Extrême-Orient
EHS	*Epigraphic and Historical Studies*
EPD	*English–Pali Dictionary*
EZ	*Epigraphia Zeylanica*
FEMC	*Fonds pour Édition des Manuscrits du Cambodge*
It	*Itivuttaka*
It-a	*Itivuttaka-aṭṭhakathā (*= Pd. *Paramatthadīpanī)*
Ja	*Jātaka*
Jinak	*Jinakālamālī*
Kacc	*Kaccāyana and Kaccāyanavutti*

Kh	Khmer
Khp	*Khuddakapāṭha*
KŚēkh	*Kāvyaśēkhara*
Kv	*Kathāvatthu*
L	Lao
Maṅg-d	*Maṅgalatthadīpanī*
Mil	*Milindapañha*
MN	*Majjhima-Nikāya*
Mogg	*Moggallāna-vyākaraṇa*
Moh	*Mohavicchedanī*
Nikāya-s	Nikāyasaṅgraha
P	Pāli
Paṭis	*Paṭisambhidāmagga*
Paṭis-a	*Saddhammappakāsinī*
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī*
PTS	Pali Text Society
Pv	*Petavatthu*
Pv-a	*Petavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*
Rūp	*Rūpasiddhi*
Saddh	*Saddhammopāyana*
Sinh	Sinhala
Sk	Sanskrit
Sn	*Suttanipāta*
SN	*Saṃyutta-Nikāya*
Sp	*Samantapāsādikā*
Spk	*Sāratthappakāsinī*
Sp-ṭ B^{e}	*Sāratthadīpanī-ṭīkā* (Burmese edition)
Ss	*Sārasaṅgaha*
Subodh	*Subodhālaṅkāra*
Sv	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī*
Sv-nṭ B^{e}	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-navaṭīkā* (Burmese edition)
Sv-ṭ	*Sumaṅgalavilāsinī-ṭīkā*
T	Taishō Shinshu Daizōkyō
Th	Thai
TPMA	*Tipiṭaka pāḷi mranmā abhidhān*
UK	*Upasampadā-Kammavācā* (in context)
Upās	*Upāsakajanālaṅkāra*
Vibh	*Vibhaṅga*
Vibh-a	*Vibhaṅga-aṭṭhakathā* (= *Sammohavinodanī*)
Vin	*Vinayapiṭaka*
Visn	*Visuddhimagga*
Visn-mhṭ	*Visuddhimagga-mahāṭīkā*
Vmv B^{e}	*Vimativinodanī-ṭīkā* (Burmese edition)
Vv	*Vimānavatthu*
Vv-a	*Vimānavatthu-aṭṭhakathā*

2

PĀLI

Its place in the Theravāda Buddhist tradition

Alastair Gornall

The use of Pāli as a sacred language is often identified as a defining feature of the Theravāda Buddhist tradition. Steven Collins (2017: 17) recently remarked that "if Pāli is present, in any form, then one can, retrospectively and a priori, speak of 'Theravāda Buddhism.'" If this is the case, as I think it is, then the question arises as to how we can define Pāli's presence in the Theravāda tradition in a way that encompasses the diverse array of cultural forms and practices that draw on Pāli and its literature. This chapter offers an analytical framework for thinking about these various aspects of Pāli that goes beyond blanket definitions about the language's sacred status, which often conceal more than they reveal. I offer a threefold typology of Pāli's presence in Theravāda Buddhism: (1) as a language of authoritative tradition, (2) as a language of organization and reform, and (3) as a language of indexical power. While these aspects are interdependent, distinguishing between them offers us analytical flexibility in describing how Pāli defines Theravāda Buddhism in its full diversity.

Authoritative tradition

When encountering the work of the first European Orientalists and philologists in the early nineteenth century, some scholar-monks in Sri Lanka resisted their attempts to describe Pāli alongside Sanskrit and the Prakrits as simply one of South Asia's "classical" languages. George Turnour in the introduction to his 1837 edition and translation of the *Mahāvaṃsa* (*Great History*) noted the monastic opposition to the ideas of philologists and recalled that, in conversation about the relative age of Pāli and Sanskrit, scholar-monks would quote the following Pāli verse "with an air of triumph" at every opportunity (Turnour 1837: xxii–iii):

> sā māgadhī mūlabhāsā narā yāyādikappikā
> brahmāno c' assutālāpā sambuddhā cāpi bhāsare.
>
> (It is Magadhan that is the root language spoken by people of the first eon,
> by Brahmas, by those who have never heard speech, and by the perfectly enlightened.)

We first find this verse quoted in a twelfth-century Pāli grammatical handbook, Buddhappiya's *Rūpasiddhi* (*Construction of Word Forms*, Rūp on Kacc 2013: 52), and throughout the second

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millennium variations on it became the go-to definition for scholar-monks seeking to explain the qualities of their sacred language. The verse usefully encapsulates the three main aspects of Pāli's status as a prestigious and authoritative textual language. Pāli is above all the only language buddhas speak; it is the root language of the cosmos spoken by gods, the first men, and those raised without language; and it is also a literary language, the language of Magadha.

The language of Buddhas

Theravāda Buddhist textual history begins with the formation of the *Tipiṭaka*, the three baskets, a collection of the Buddha's discourses as well as those of some of his immediate followers (Skilling, this volume). This Theravāda "canon" is composed entirely in the middle Indic language of Pāli and the earliest commentators on the *Tipiṭaka* were the first to claim that the historical Buddha—and all previous buddhas—only taught in Pāli. It was the Pāli language that primarily distinguished the Theravāda canon from those of others in South Asia, and since they believed that this was the Buddha's language, scholar-monks of the tradition could claim that only they possessed the definitive account of the Buddha's teachings (Collins 1990). In fact, the early commentaries often define the Buddha's Dhamma or doctrine as a whole principally as Pāli scripture (*pariyatti*) or scriptural texts (*pāḷi*, *tanti*; Carter 1976).

And yet, later scholar-monks still debated about *how* Pāli scripture can be identified with the Dhamma. Some argued that it was primarily scripture as a mental language—the Buddha's thoughts rather than words—that defined the Dhamma whereas others claimed that the Dhamma was actually the Pāli sounds of the Buddha's discourses (Sp-ṭ B^{e} i 77; Sv-ṭ i 37–8; Vmv B^{e} i 21; Gornall 2020: 106–10). What was at stake here is the question of whether the authority of Pāli scripture stems primarily from its physical aspect—its literal wording—or from its ideal form as a conceptual object. The eighteenth-century Burmese scholar-monk Ñāṇābhivaṃsa summarises this debate in the following verse (Sv-nṭ B^{e} i 104):

> saddo dhammo desanā ca icc āhu apare garū dhammo paṇṇatti saddo tu desanā vā ti cāpare.

Some teachers say that scriptural wording is both the Dhamma and the teaching. Others say though that the Dhamma is a concept and that scriptural wording is only the teaching.

The root language

The claim about the status of Pāli as the Buddha's only language was accompanied in the early commentaries by the belief that Pāli was the unchanging, root language (*mūlabhāsā*) of the cosmos (Vibh-a 387–8, Vsm XIV 25). It is said that Pāli is spoken throughout the cosmos by animals, ghosts, humans, and gods alike and that it would be the default language of a child brought up without human contact. It is the only language through which one can gain an analytical insight (*paṭisambhidā*) into the Buddha's teachings and, for the adept, its meaning magically manifests "in a thousand ways" upon being heard. Unlike other languages of the world which vary over time, the Pāli language was thought to be fixed and unchanging. Pāli is referred to also as the *sabhāvanirutti* or "essence language" due to its intrinsic and natural connection with the cosmos or, as a later scholar-monk explains, because of its capacity to capture the essence of dhammas, the ultimate entities of reality (Gornall 2020: 56n19). Elsewhere, the Abhidhamma commentaries remark that the Pāli names of some dhammas as well as of other major natural phenomena are said to arise spontaneously in each age (As 390–2, Paṭis-a 306–7;

Collins 1998: 49; Visigalli, forthcoming). From this perspective, Pāli is separated from historical contingency and becomes an exclusive object of soteriological power for those virtuoso scholar-monks who had mastered it.

The language of Magadha

The discourses or Suttas of the Pāli canon rarely reflect on the language of their composition, and it is only in the early commentaries that the language was given a name, "the language of Magadha" or *magadhabhāsā* (e.g., Sp 255; Sp 1214; Vibh-a 387–8; von Hinüber 1994a; Crosby 2004). The formal labeling of the canon's idiom as an independent language, notionally associated with the Buddha's homeland of Magadha, accompanied the decision in Sri Lanka by the fourth- or fifth-century exegete Buddhaghosa to compose Pāli commentaries on the Suttapiṭaka in what he refers to in his opening preamble as the "delightful language" (*manoramaṃ bhāsaṃ*) of the canon (Sv 1; Ps 1; Spk 1, etc.).

Buddhaghosa states that in writing his works he was translating older Sinhala commentaries and explains that these works were themselves translations from a lost Pāli original that was recited at Aśoka's monastic council and brought to Sri Lanka by his son Mahinda. He claims then that by translating these Sinhala works back into Pāli he is restoring the exegetical tradition to its original, pristine state. This early commentarial use of Pāli allowed scholar-monks to bolster their authority by claiming that only they had inherited and recovered the lost exegetical tradition of the early Saṅgha. Some later scholars even refer to Pāli commentaries as the Buddha's "miscellaneous teachings" (*pakiṇṇakadesanā*) in that it was supposedly the Buddha who first established the meaning of his discourses (Sp-ṭ B^{e} i 21; Ss 26).

The preamble to the commentary on the Vinaya introduces another reason for writing in Pāli, namely, that the Sinhala language was not intelligible to all members of the Saṅgha in other lands. The commentator states that he decided to write in Pāli to make his exegetical tradition accessible to this transregional Buddhist community (Sp 1). Scholar-monks writing in later centuries continue to cite Pāli's status as a transregional medium as one of the reasons for composing or translating works into the language. Pāli commentaries then, rather than vernacular exegesis, afforded a frame of reference within which scholar-monks could think of themselves as a transregional monastic circle bound by a common scriptural language.

The cultivation of Pāli into a literary language of exegesis further involved differentiating it from the other literary languages of the region, most notably Sanskrit. While the early commentators occasionally distinguish Pāli usage from Sanskrit (e.g., Sp 1214) it was in the hands of the late medieval grammarians and literary theorists that Pāli's relationship with Sanskrit was fully systematized (Gornall 2020: 63–87; 145–67). These scholar-monks take pains to show that Pāli possessed the same literariness and linguistic capabilities as the other literary languages of classical India but that unlike these languages, it was not dependent on or derived from Sanskrit. It was Pāli's status as a perfect language independent of Sanskrit that led one scholar-monk to refer to it as "pure Magadhan" (*suddha-māgadha*; Subodh 2000: 2) and another twelfth- or thirteenth-century commentator even goes as far as to say that all languages, including Sanskrit, actually derive from Pāli (Moh 1961: 186).

A classical language

This late medieval reflection on Pāli's relationship with Sanskrit and the other literary languages of classical India provided a foundation for the first Western orientalists and philologists to categorize Pāli as one of South Asia's classical languages. Nineteenth-century orientalists

compared Pāli with Sanskrit in India and Latin and Greek in Europe and were preoccupied with creating a "natural history" for the language (cf. Ollett 2017, 18–22), in particular by determining Pāli's relative age to Sanskrit. By the late nineteenth century, Western scholars had reached a consensus that Pāli was a "younger sister" of Sanskrit, and this opened the way for later linguists to classify the language more precisely as an amalgamation of various dialects of "Middle Indic" (Oberlies 2019: 9–52). Writing in the preface to the first Pāli dictionary, R. C. Childers (1875: xiii) remarked that "if the proud boast that the Magadhese is the one primeval language fades in the light of comparative philology, Buddhists may console themselves with the thought that the teaching of Gautama confers upon it a greater lustre than it can derive from any fancied antiquity."

The nineteenth-century Sri Lankan monk Vaskaḍuvē Subhūti did not entirely reject the opinions of the orientalists and, in the introduction to his new Pāli grammar, accepts the genealogical model of the philologists but argues rather that Pāli, Sanskrit, and the Prakrits are like "three sons born of the same father who only differ slightly in colour" (Gornall and Gunasena 2018: 6). Subhūti perhaps echoes orientalist rhetoric in arguing at the beginning of his work that as his society had a tradition of grammatical thought it was not uncivilized (*mlecchakama*) or of low intelligence. There was sometimes an elective affinity between the colonial promotion of studying "classical languages" like Pāli and monastic education reforms where scholar-monks sought to revive Pāli studies as a means of protecting Buddhism (Turner 2018). Today, Pāli's status as a classical language can be an important factor in governmental funding for its academic study. Recently in India, for reasons that are opaque, Pāli was stripped of its official status as a classical language, limiting support for research (Singh 2013).

The Pāli imaginaire and the idea of a canon

Steven Collins in *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* argued that the Theravāda tradition's views about Pāli, as described earlier, gave texts in the language an authority that distinguished them as a unified and privileged body of thought. Collins argued that this world of Pāli literature, which he referred to as the "Pāli imaginaire," has served traditional Southern Asian societies that have supported Theravāda monastic communities as a "cultural system," that is, as their structuring thought and ideology.[1] Collins saw this ideological formation as unified not only by language but also by the imaginaire's stable conceptual coherence, which he argues remained essentially unchanged over much of the Theravāda tradition's premodern history. He thus analytically separated the world of Pāli texts from the sociocultural life of any particular time and place and analyses it as a "cultural system" that has structured the beliefs and practices of Buddhists for millennia (Collins 1998: 72–89; 563–74).

In later works, Collins added some granularity to the necessarily macroscopic theories of *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* and acknowledged that, while Pāli texts do form an integral part of the Theravāda cultural system, they did not do so in isolation from texts in other languages that the tradition has also treated as authorities (Collins 2017: 17). In fact, the emphasis placed on Pāli's unique sacred status presupposes the existence of other complementary and sometimes competing languages. Texts written in other languages have often formed an important part of the monastic community's authoritative textual tradition. Before Buddhaghosa, Sinhala was the most authoritative exegetical language in Sri Lanka. The Pāli commentators of the first millennium relied on Sanskrit sciences, in particular, grammar, etymology, and lexicography, to write their works. And throughout the second millennium in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia scholar-monks embraced a wider range of Sanskrit texts, even other Buddhist literature, and began to write independent works in vernacular languages too. From about the sixteenth

century, the composition of new Pāli works declined considerably, and modern scholarship has mainly been conducted in vernaculars and sometimes in English.

It is worthwhile rethinking Collins's conception of the Pāli imaginaire in light of the debate that Collins himself began on the idea of a "canon" in Theravāda Buddhism (Collins 1990), for there is a large degree of overlap between textual "canons" and "cultural systems" insofar as both terms encompass an authoritative body of traditional thought. Therein Collins argues that in practice, the *Tipiṭaka* has served more as an authoritative idea and that what we find in Theravāda communities are "ritual canons," which he describes as "the texts, canonical or otherwise, which are in actual use in ritual life in the area concerned" (1990: 104). Anne Blackburn has similarly distinguished between the ideal formal canon, the *Tipiṭaka*, as "the ultimate locus of interpretative authority" and the practical canon, the "units of text actually employed in the practices of collecting manuscripts, copying them, reading them, commenting on them, listening to them, and preaching sermons based upon them that are understood by their users as part of a tipiṭaka-based tradition'" (1999a: 284). These practical canons include parts of the *Tipiṭaka* and its commentaries alongside Pāli, Sanskrit, and vernacular compositions that may or may not relate to texts classified as part of the formal canon.

And yet, as we critically rethink the nature of authoritative textual traditions in Theravāda Buddhism, it is important we do not lose the utility of the analytical dualism inherent in Collins's Pāli imaginaire, which distinguishes between a cultural system, that is, structuring tradition, and sociocultural life. For we should not ascribe canonicity to *every* text found in each locality if the idea of a textual "canon," that is, an authoritative textual tradition, is to continue to have analytical worth. Rather, we should determine which religious texts were authoritative in a particular time and place and which ones were not (or not yet) so that we can be attentive to historical change within local textual traditions and recognize those literary expressions that are actually *responding* to their local canon, whether by expanding, revising, or challenging it. This distinction is important since all texts when they are composed are not part of tradition and are rather engaged in socio-cultural acts of persuasion and argumentation that later may or may not become canonical (cf. Archer 1988: 227–73). Similarly, it should not be taken for granted either that simply because a work is in Pāli that it is still or has ever been authoritative. There are Pāli works, such as the *Peṭaka* and *Sumatāvatāra* (von Hinüber 1996: 206–7), that have not been handed down by the tradition, for instance, and other texts that we might find in local textual traditions may have fallen out of use or exist solely due to the ritual copying of manuscripts rather than their continued relevance to the local thought world.[2]

Organization and reform

Thinking about religious authority as only a potential outcome of writing in Pāli shifts the analytical focus away from seeing Pāli texts as a priori components of an inherited cultural context and rather directs our attention toward Pāli's often neglected sociocultural role as an important language for responding to the Theravāda imaginaire. That is to say, monks wrote new works in Pāli to reshape their textual tradition, to add new ideas, and to stress different points of emphasis. In fact, rather than seeing Pāli texts as inherently authoritative (cf. Collins 1998: 80), we can view all Pāli literature as first responding to tradition before sometimes becoming part of it in a process of cultural development. In this regard, Pāli was as much a language of organization and reform as it was a language of authoritative tradition. In what follows, I distinguish two sides to this activity: (1) a process of "elaboration," in which new texts are developed from within an authoritative tradition, and (2) a process of "encompassment," in which knowledge is brought in from outside of tradition and refigured hierarchically within it.[3]

Elaboration

Theravāda scholar-monks often thought of scriptural texts not as passive objects but rather as things engaged in an ongoing activity. Some grammarians, in particular, liked to explain that scriptural texts were called *pāḷi* as they were "protecting the meaning" (*atthaṃ pāti*; Mogg 7.228; Abh-ṭ on v. 539–40). The idea that scripture's meaning required constant care and attention underpinned the tradition's continuous production of exegetical works. This process of cultural elaboration was carried out mainly in vernacular languages but in Pāli too, and over time, these works introduced confusion and competing ideas, which were also often manifestations of social divisions in the monastic community. At certain points, when frictions in the tradition were perceived to be too much, scholar-monks would initiate a reorganization or reform that involved the composition of Pāli texts that synthesized the various strands of thought or adjudicated between differences. Pāli, in particular, was the language used to reset these cycles of cultural elaboration, although scholar-monks were not always successful and were often themselves competing with rival attempts to reshape the imaginaire.

The most striking examples of this process are the monastic reforms that took place in Sri Lanka between 1157 and 1270, in particular in the aftermath of Parākramabāhu I's reform council of 1165. The 1165 reforms united the Saṅgha in Sri Lanka, which had previously been split into three fraternities, and scholar-monks composed numerous Pāli works to standardize the doctrine and discipline that had become disordered due to the accumulated exegetical activities of the Saṅgha's diverse and rival factions. The reorganization of the imaginaire was not only restricted to systematic thought but also involved the composition of narratives and poems that reworked traditional histories and Buddha biographies in new aesthetic forms (Gornall 2020). One of the leading scholars of the reform, Sāriputta, explained in the opening of his work the need for him to write a new Pāli sub-commentary on the Vinaya as follows:

> I will compose an exposition of the concealed, essential meaning of the Vinaya's commentary that is easy to understand, is complete, and unconfused. Though predecessors explained the hidden meaning, they did not convey that meaning in its entirety to monks in all cases. Among the many glossaries, for instance, some in some places are written in the Sinhala language, which, by nature, is difficult to understand. Someone also wrote a certain glossary mixed with other languages too, even though it was undertaken in the Magadhan language. Precisely there, the burden of unessential learning is often apparent, and confusion is created even when it (the Vinaya commentary) is actually easy to understand. How then can those who live in various regions understand its meaning in its entirety with this kind of incomplete glossary? I will compose an unconfused, complete exegesis by removing the other languages from it and by extracting the essence throughout.
>
> (Gornall 2020: 92)

Sāriputta's opening is typical of the scholarly rhetoric of this era of reform in Sri Lanka. He explains that the proliferation of diverse exegetical thought has led to confusion (*ākula*) about the meaning of the Vinaya. He questions the selective exegesis of his predecessors, the use of vernaculars such as Sinhala that are less precise, and the reliance on other languages and their texts in composing Pāli commentaries. Concerning the latter, it seems Sāriputta had in mind a tenth-century sub-commentary on the Vinaya, the *Vajirabuddhiṭīkā* (*Diamond-Mind Subcommentary*), which sometimes adopts a Sanskritic style and cites a few Sanskrit works in its exegesis, albeit in Pāli translation (Kieffer-Pülz 2013: 57–70; 129–31). Sāriputta claims that by

writing in a pure Pāli his commentary above all others is the most complete, clear, and accessible. It is noteworthy that Sāriputta's attempt to reset the cycle of cultural elaboration and redefine his imaginaire was not entirely successful, and soon after, a monk residing in South India, Coḷa Kassapa, composed another Vinaya sub-commentary competing with his work.

Pāli was viewed and used as a language of organization in second-millennium Southeast Asia too, although never to the same programmatic extent as it was in reform-era Sri Lanka. D. C. Lammerts has recently described the rich history of Buddhist law or *dhammasattha* in Burma between the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries. What is interesting is that before the mid-seventeenth century this sphere of authoritative knowledge was likely only written in the vernacular. This changed in 1651/2 when a scholar-monk Taungbhila Sayadaw Tipiṭakālaṅkāra and lay judge Kaingza Manurāja composed a *dhammasattha* work in Pāli verse, the *Manusāra dhammasattha* to "purify" their legal tradition. From then, on scholar-monks occasionally composed works in Pāli specifically because they viewed the language as "precise, durable and efficient" when compared with the vernacular tradition that was regarded as obscure and more susceptible to corruption and degeneration (Lammerts 2018: 90–4).

These interventions in tradition were not always written on palm-leaf texts, and in Southeast Asia, in particular, we find many epigraphs in Pāli. As discussed in the following, Pāli epigraphy in the region for much of the first millennium largely consists of citation inscriptions from the *Tipiṭaka*. From the early second millennium, we find longer, sometimes bilingual, inscriptions, such as the 1479 Kalyāṇī inscription of King Dhammaceti (Frasch 2018; Griffiths and Lammerts 2015; Thompson 2016: 161–8). These lithic works respond to their local imaginaire in several ways. Sometimes Pāli is used in the opening of an inscription as a form of aesthetic power (cf. Pollock 2006) to eulogize the Buddha and royal lineages. Pāli may also have a documentary function and record donations, assert economic rights, or intervene in the monastic discipline. In all these inscriptions, Pāli serves as an authoritative voice that is universal in practice in that it can speak to a cosmopolitan, transregional audience and rhetorically so in that writing in Pāli makes a claim on universal truth and power.

Encompassment

It was not only through cultural elaboration—responding to the imaginaire and working out its internal contestations and contradictions—that Pāli served as a force of cultural change. Throughout history, scholar-monks have continually incorporated new cultural material from outside the tradition too as a result of historical developments in the monastic community's social and political environment. These works in other languages and from other traditions could enter authoritative tradition directly. The rich tradition of Buddhist law in Burma, as we have seen, was largely a vernacular enterprise and, for the most part, sat side by side with Pāli scripture in the local imaginaire. At other times, works and disciplines entering the imaginaire had to be refigured and made more congruous with the previous tradition before they could claim authority. Pāli was an important medium for refiguring and potentially absorbing and lending authority to these new intellectual forms in a process of cultural encompassment.

New knowledge disciplines have long entered into the monastic curriculum through Pāli adaptations. From about the seventh century, scholar-monks first in Sri Lanka and then in Burma became particularly interested in Sanskrit grammar and poetics. While early commentators such as Buddhaghosa had directly used Sanskrit grammars to interpret their scriptures (Pind 1989), scholar-monks now began to compose Pāli grammatical works based on Sanskrit models. Many of these works, such as the *Kaccāyana* and *Moggallāna* grammars, closely followed and translated their Sanskrit sources (Dimitrov 2016: 557–706; Gornall 2020: 63–87; Ruiz-Falqués

2017). This process of rendering Sanskrit philological texts into Pāli often involved a conscious effort to make these works more Buddhist and aligned with the values of the tradition. Sanskrit grammatical examples from Hindu literature, for instance, are swapped for Buddhist versions (Gornall 2013: 89–100). The first work of Pāli poetics produced in Sri Lanka, the *Subodhālaṅkāra* (*Lucid Poetics*), similarly eschews the erotic Sanskrit poetry of its sources and instead replaces it exclusively with devotional verses in praise of the Buddha (Gornall 2020: 145–67). Compare, for instance, the following verse in the *Subodhālaṅkāra* with its Sanskrit source in which a carefully introduced vocative (O Buddha!) turns the description of a lover's face into a verse praising the Buddha's complexion:

> na jātu śaktir indos te mukhena pratigarjitum.kalaṅkino jaḍasyeti pratiṣedhopamaiva sā.
> (*Kāvyādarśa* 2.34)
>
> The frigid, mottled moon does not have the power to ever rival your face. This is a simile through negation.
>
> asamattho mukhen' indu jina te paṭigaj̈jituṃ jaḷo kalaṅkī ti ayaṃ paṭisedhopamā siyā.
> (*Subodhālaṅkāra* 193)
>
> The frigid, mottled moon, O Buddha, is incapable of rivalling your face. This is a simile through negation.

In what is now northern Thailand, Laos, and Burma a process of cultural encompassment took place from the twelfth century onwards in connection specifically with cosmological thought. For the first time in Buddhist history, scholar-monks composed several Pāli manuals dedicated to the topic of cosmology and also astronomy. Some of these Pāli texts have been identified as adaptations and refigurations of Sanskrit cosmological works. The earliest Pāli cosmological work, the twelfth-century *Lokapaññatti* (*Description of the World*), for instance, closely follows the Sanskrit *Lokaprajñāpti* as preserved in its Chinese translation (Denis 1977 I: xix–xxviii). Pāli manuals on the realms of rebirth, such as the *Chagatidīpanī* (*Light on the Six Destinies*) and *Pañcagatidīpanī* (*Light on the Five Destinies*), were similarly composed as close translations and adaptations of works originally in Sanskrit (Mus 1939). Other cosmological works combine material from the Pāli canon and its commentaries with other Sanskrit source material from outside of the tradition. The author of the *Candasuriyagatidīpanī* (*Light on the Movements of the Moon and Sun*), for instance, states he brought together works from the Pāli canon, the commentaries, and other astrological/astronomical texts (*jotisattha*, Sk. *jyotiśāstra*; UPT538.3F, *fol.* 214a).

With a few notable exceptions, it is generally true that in Theravāda Buddhist intellectual history Pāli has served as the main vehicle by which knowledge from the Sanskrit tradition was subsumed and creatively refigured within the imaginaire.[4] In the case of the poetics and grammatical traditions, it is clear that Pāli was viewed as the only language that possessed the same transcendent capacity for literary and linguistic expression as Sanskrit, stemming ultimately from its role as the root language of the cosmos. These works in their openings also often praise the omniscience of the Buddha and, in effect, treat the new knowledge they are translating as something the Buddha already knew.[5] There may be some connection in this regard between describing a "new" aspect of the Buddha's omniscience and the decision to do so in his own language and the language of ultimate truth. This is certainly the case for some of the cosmological material, such as the *Lokapaññatti* and the *Mahākappa-lokasaṇṭhāna-paññatti*

(*Description of the Great Ages and the State of the World*), which present themselves in form and style as Suttas spoken by the Buddha.

The two complementary processes of elaboration and encompassment can be hard to distinguish when it comes to Pāli compendia and literary adaptations due to the diversity of their source material, which may or may not have formed a part of the authoritative tradition prior to composition. In Pāli historiographical or *vaṃsa* literature, we find several works, such as the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa* (*History of the Tooth*), *Hatthavanagallavihāra-vaṃsa* (*History of Hatthavanagalla Monastery*), and *Thūpavaṃsa* (*History of the Relic Shrine*), that rework lost vernacular histories, older Pāli sources and even Sanskrit material (Berkwitz 2004: 83–107; Godakumbura 1956: ix–xvii). The author of the *Dāṭhāvaṃsa*, which was composed for a South Indian prince, states in his opening that he has translated an old Sinhala history into Pāli so that the history could be understood by those from India. The work is composed in an ornate and poetic Pāli modeled on Sanskrit forms deeply associated with political power and court literature. This style of Pāli was perhaps preferred to articulate the monastic community's own brand of aesthetic, devotional politics, particularly to a continental audience (Gornall 2020: 168–89). Many of these Pāli *vaṃsa*s were later treated as the definitive histories of these relics, and the fact they were composed in Pāli must have played a role in the authority they garnered.

Indexical power

In the previous two sections, we have discussed the relationship between Pāli and Theravāda Buddhism exclusively in terms of Pāli as a privileged vehicle of Buddhist thought, whether in transmitting Buddhist intellectual tradition or in responding to and reshaping it. Pāli's role in ordering the ideas of the Theravāda Buddhist imagination was supported by a complex web of cultural associations. We have seen how the use of Pāli has carried with it notions of sacred authority, cosmic truth, literary perfection, political power, social and intellectual order, and universality, for instance. So far, we have only discussed these associations in terms of Pāli's privileged communicative role within the tradition. And yet, in practice, scholar-monks and ritual specialists have often wielded Pāli texts primarily due to their indexical power rather than the information they carried.[6] In such contexts, it is this power of a Pāli expression—the cultural associations manifested by its words and viewed as intrinsic properties of them—that primarily determines its transformational force and not the expression's content.[7]

From rhetoric to magic

The indexical power of a language and its information-carrying function are rarely independent of each other. If we take the Pāli-vernacular bitexts that formed an integral part of Theravāda literary culture from the tenth century onwards (Walker, this volume), for instance, the Pāli text served both literally as the object to be translated and indexically as a bestower of authority to vernacular elaborations that were often exegetically innovative. Note though that this indexical use of Pāli is not derivative of vernacularization or a later development. It has been a constant feature of Pāli textuality and could even be the dominant mode of Pāli usage prior to the development of a scholarly tradition of Pāli composition, as in the case of first-millennium Burma and Thailand. This indexical power can manifest in a variety of ways, whether in the purely rhetorical use of Pāli expressions to assert authority or in a more magical guise in which Pāli forms are treated as having the creative capacity to bring things into existence.

In the case of the tradition of some vernacular commentaries on Pāli texts, such as the *nissaya*, *vohāra*, and *nāmasadda* from Thailand and Laos, for instance, often the vernacular exposition may

only invoke the Pāli source text through partial quotations of words and expressions. These Pāli fragments that stand in for the source text may not be entirely meaningful in and of themselves and serve as triggers reminding the audience of the original Pāli text being explicated as well as markers of "reverence, prestige, wisdom, and beauty" (McDaniel 2008: 127). Even vernacular narratives based on Pāli works, such as the fourteenth-century Sinhala *Saddharmālaṅkāraya* and the *Daḷadāpūjāvaliya*, intermittently include parts of the Pāli original work, especially its verse material. Since the sense of the Pāli is often already present and creatively expanded on in the vernacular elaboration (cf. Berkwitz 2004: 121–34), these interjections serve to invoke the prestige, authority, and power of their source and of the Pāli language in general.

This indexical use of Pāli takes on a more magical dimension in the case of benedictory formulas and invocations. Nearly all printed works and manuscripts will at least include a homage to the Buddha in the form of the Pāli formula, *namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā sambuddhassa*, for instance. Similar practices are reflected in Southeast Asian vernacular inscriptions in which Pāli is used in blessings and other invocations (Frasch 2018). It is common, too, for vernacular commentaries on Pāli texts, especially Sinhala *sannaya* and Burmese *nissaya*, to still begin with a homage to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha in Pāli rather than the vernacular. While these formulas may sometimes be informational (providing the name and author of a work, for instance), they primarily serve to generate merit and ward off evil. The fact that they must be in Pāli shows that it is not simply the content of the benediction that provides this merit and protection but rather also the indexical power of the Pāli language. This function is not specific to the role Pāli plays in vernacular works but it is simply that Pāli's ever-present indexical dimension is often clearer to see in such contexts. To different degrees, then, both the rhetorical and magical uses of Pāli share this indexical creativity in that both conjure up something, whether the authority of a source text or a form of protection.

A related magical dimension informs the traditional, ritual use of Pāli citations as devotional objects and as sources of merit. From about the fifth century, for instance, in what is now Burma and Thailand, we find many inscriptions of Pāli texts paralleling those in the *Tipiṭaka* on stone, brick, clay, and even gold plates (Griffiths and Lammerts 2015). These were likely copied and deposited as part of the ritual veneration of the Dhamma. There is evidence from the twelfth- and thirteenth-century Sri Lankan tradition that such objects were treated and enshrined as relics of the historical Buddha (Gornall 2020: 132–7). In these practices, Pāli fragments have a metonymic connection with the Dhamma as a whole—manifesting its meritorious power—and the Dhamma, in turn, serves as a surviving trace of the Buddha's omniscience. This kind of reasoning also underpins the ritual preservation of scripture in which single Pāli texts may be copied to produce merit as a way of caring for and attaining the wisdom of the entire Dhamma (Veidlinger 2007: 164–203).

Performative rituals

There is no clear boundary of separation between the indexical power of Pāli in written language and its performative role in other rituals in the tradition. Whether in monastic legal rites, the recitation of protective texts or *paritta*, or the intonement of Pāli words in meditation, the ritual recitation of Pāli similarly produces transformations based primarily on its indexical power (rather than on its capacity to carry information, which still may persist). It is the case, however, that in many ritual contexts, the very recitation of Pāli may also constitute the performance of a social act (Austin 1962; Tambiah 1973), such as turning someone from a layman into a monk, for instance, whereas this may not always be the case in other instances in which

Pāli is employed for its indexical power, such as in its rhetorical use (although, of course, there are ways of seeing even rhetoric as a form of action; cf. Burke 1966).

The Pāli formulas used in monastic legal rituals are known in the tradition as *kammavācā* (action speech). These formulas enact in their recitation various transformations, such as ordinations and the fixing of monastery boundaries, as long as they are performed in the right ritual environment in the presence of the necessary quorum of monks (Kieffer-Pülz 2000: 360–1). While these formulas are meaningful and may be translated, the monks involved in the rituals make a great effort to ensure the formal accuracy of the Pāli recited (von Hinüber 1994b; Gornall 2014). The incorrect recitation of Pāli formulas, even if the meaning is understood, can invalidate a ritual act. In 1420 some monks of Wat Suandok in Chiang Mai went on pilgrimage to Sri Lanka, and the monks there rejected the validity of their ordination on the basis that their Pāli pronunciation was incorrect (Bizot 1988: 60–1; Premchit and Swearer 1977). Concern for correct Pāli ritual speech led to the production in the wider Lanna region of manuals of Pāli ritual pronunciation. At the end of one manual, monks are warned that an incorrectly pronounced syllable can send them to hell (Bizot 1988: 63–4).

The recitation of Pāli *paritta* texts for protection, merit generation and other worldly benefits, such as warding off illness or ensuring safe childbirth, represents another form of performative ritual (Crosby 2014: 125–9). These protective works meaningfully teach key aspects of the Buddha's doctrine or describe the Buddha's position and power in the wider cosmos (Blackburn 1999b; Shulman 2019), and monks have long studied them as a fundamental part of their education. In practice, however, the ultimate efficacy of *paritta* recitation in its performative role does not depend on whether participants in the ritual understand what is being said. Pāli serves as a language that is intelligible to the gods and spirits that are being propitiated and the recitation of these Pāli texts also indexically manifests the transformative power of the truths that these works were thought to contain (Crosby 2014: 128–9). The recitation of *paritta* and other liturgical texts may also have an affective power since merit is also produced by the feelings of joy (*pīti*, *pasāda*) of those who participate (Cook 2010: 98).

Pāli has an important performative role in traditional meditation practices too. Pāli words can serve as an object of meditation or as a support for concentration. In the forest traditions of Thailand, in particular, it is common also for meditators to recite certain epithets of the Buddha, such as "Buddho" or "Arahaṃ," as the main focus of their practice (Tiyavanich 1997). The Pāli language also plays an integral role in certain meditation traditions developed in Cambodia and Thailand in which Pāli syllables are recited to manifest different aspects of the Dhamma. The meditator uses the cosmogonic power of the Pāli language to construct "the body of the Dhamma" within themselves and to cultivate their own enlightenment (Crosby 2013: 82–4; Bizot and von Hinüber 1994). An understanding of the creative agency of Pāli syllables likely also informs the tradition of Pāli yantras or magical diagrams in which Pāli letters (often from protective formulas or *paritta*) are arranged in images, such as that of the Buddha, usually for protection or to achieve other worldly ends (McDaniel 2011: 77–85).

Conclusion

There are other examples of Pāli usage in the Theravāda tradition that could be described here, and I hope this chapter serves as a starting point for further detailed reflections. I have suggested that Pāli's use in the tradition can be analyzed through three interrelated but distinct modes, namely, as a language of authoritative tradition, organization and reform, and indexical power. These three modes are nearly always interdependent and do not necessarily relate to each other in a form of hierarchy. Theravāda cultures in which one mode of Pāli predominates

are not more Theravāda than others. And yet, scholarship on Pāli textual cultures, whether by philologists, historians, or anthropologists, has tended to emphasize one mode or the other as the authentic expression of the Theravāda tradition. Bringing together these different uses of Pāli, which are often dealt with in different disciplinary domains, into a single framework affords us greater analytical flexibility when describing the diverse local forms of Theravāda Buddhism and when thinking critically about how Pāli defines the tradition.

Notes

1 While Collins borrowed the term *imaginaire* from Jacques Le Goff (1988), his analytical model in fact owes much more to the sociology of Margaret Archer (1988).
2 There are, in fact, many more lost Pali works than those listed in von Hinüber 1996, especially philological works (cf. Pind 2012).
3 I use the term *elaboration* here in a similar sense to Archer (1988). On my use of the Dumontian term *encompassment* in this context, cf. Schontal (2018: 194) and Strathern (2019: 77).
4 In Sri Lanka, for instance, we first find a Sinhala adaption of Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa* (*Mirror of Literature*), the *Siyabaslakara* (*Ornaments for Our Own Language*), prior to the creation of the first Pāli manual of poetics, the *Subodhālaṅkāra* (Hallisey 2003).
5 In one passage in the *Saddanīti*, Aggavaṃsa even claims that the Buddha had mastered the literary sciences in previous births but that he had sometimes decided to teach using language that did not conform to these rules (Gornall and Henry 2017: 84).
6 I prefer to use the term *indexical* here rather than symbolic since, unlike a symbol which is purely representational, an index signals the "contextual 'existence' of another entity" and can manifest or present that entity. In the case of pure indexes that have little referential meaning, the thing signaled and manifested can be fairly abstract, such as a powerful value ("truth") or function ("protection"). See Silverstein (1976); also, McDaniel (2011: 103).
7 I have been inspired to think about the transformative function of the Pāli language in this context by Kate Crosby's recent reflections on "transformation" in the Theravāda tradition and the role of meditation as a "technology of transformation" (Crosby 2014: 7–8).

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