

**FILIAL PIETY AND THE MONK IN THE PRACTICE
OF INDIAN BUDDHISM: A QUESTION OF 'SINICIZATION'
VIEWED FROM THE OTHER SIDE**

BY

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In Memory of my Father-in-Law, V.L. Thorpe

Shizutani Masao in his catalog of Indian Buddhist epigraphical material, the final version of which was published in Kyoto in 1979, lists more than two thousand separate inscriptions.¹ These inscriptions come, of course, from all periods and virtually every part of India and have been thoroughly mined by historians, but not—unfortunately—by Buddhist scholars. Buddhist scholars, in fact, have shown very little interest in this material, especially those scholars writing on the development of Buddhist doctrine—this, in spite of the fact that this material contains considerable information in regard to such important matters as the conception of the Buddha or Buddhas, the conception or conceptions of merit and religious acts, and the nature of the actual, as opposed to the ideal 'goal' of religious activity among practicing Indian Buddhists. In fact this epigraphical material has—as I have said elsewhere—at least two distinct advantages. First of all, much of it predates by several centuries our earliest *actually datable* literary sources. Secondly, it tells us what a fairly large number of Indian Buddhists actually did, as opposed to what—according to our literary sources—they might or should have done.² But in addition to these two advantages there is a third: this material, in a considerable number of cases, tells us what the individuals themselves—whether laymen or monks—hoped to accomplish by those religious acts which they chose to record.

The failure of Buddhist scholars to take this epigraphical material into account has generated a number of distortions both within the realm of Indian studies and beyond. One particular example will concern us here.

¹ Shizutani Masao 静谷正雄, *Indo bukkyō himei mokuroku* インド佛教碑銘目録 (Kyoto: 1979)

² G. Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit", *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984), in press.

Kenneth Ch'en in his deservedly well known book on Buddhism in China says, in reference to the Lung-men inscriptions which date from the very end of the 5th and the beginning of the 6th Century, that

"... the frequent references to filial piety in the inscriptions testify to the change that had taken place in Buddhism after its introduction into China. Buddhism started as a religion renouncing all family and social ties; yet in the inscriptions one meets again and again with prayers for the well-being of deceased ancestors, uttered even by monks and nuns. These expressions of piety indicate that although the monks and nuns had joined the monastic order, their ties to family and ancestors still remained strong and enduring. *This is a specific example of how Buddhism had adapted itself to contemporary social conditions in China.*"³

It should be noted here that I have not cited Professor Ch'en's remarks because they are in any way unique. Quite the contrary. I cite them because they are a particularly clear formulation of a very widely held notion concerning the "transformation" of Indian Buddhism in China,⁴ and because they so clearly reflect the conception of the Indian Buddhist monk which is presented by even our best modern authorities. The implications of Professor Ch'en's remarks are clear: there is not supposed to be in Indian Buddhism anything like the kind of 'filial piety' he finds expressed in the Lung-men inscriptions; and even if there were, Indian Buddhist monks most certainly would not be involved in it. This second point, of course, accords very well with the accepted view of the Indian Buddhist monk. The Indian monk is rather consistently presented as a radical ascetic who had severed all ties with his family and who was not involved in cult activity, and especially not in religious giving. This, according to the accepted view, was the province of the laity.⁵ The

³ K.K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey* (Princeton: 1964) 179, my emphasis (cf. K.K.S. Ch'en, "Filial Piety in Chinese Buddhism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968) 81-97; *The Chinese Transformation of Buddhism* (Princeton: 1973) 14ff; these last two works deal with filial piety in Chinese Buddhism on the basis of literary sources and it is from the second of these (p. 5) that I have borrowed the term "sinicization" which occurs in my title. It is perhaps worth pointing out that in the appendix on *yü-lan-p'en* in the same volume (pp. 61-4) Professor Ch'en has overlooked at least two important papers: J. Przyluski, "Les rites d'avalambana," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1931-32) 221-25; J. Jaworski, "L'avalambana sutra de la terre pure," *Monumenta Serica* 1 (1935-36) 82-107). For the inscriptions from Lung-men see E. Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale*, t. I, deuxième partie (Paris: 1915) 320-561; Mizuno Seiichi & Nagahiro Toshio, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: 1941).

⁴ Cf. P. Demiéville, "Le bouddhisme chinois," *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade, Histoire des Religions*, t.I (Paris: 1970) 1273 (repr. in *Choix d'études bouddhiques* (Leiden: 1973) 389); A.F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History* (New York: 1969) 59; etc.

⁵ Ét. Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien des origines à l'ère śāka* (Louvain: 1958)

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question remains, however, whether Professor Ch'en's interpretation of his material is acceptable, whether there is not comparable material in India, and whether the current conception of the practicing Indian Buddhist monk accurately reflects what we can actually know about him. We want to know then two things: first do our sources for Indian Buddhism give any indication of a concern similar to that expressed at Lung-men for the "well-being of departed ancestors", or for deceased or living parents; and second, if such a concern is in fact attested, is there any indication that this was an active concern of Indian monks and nuns. If we look at Indian epigraphical material the answer to both our questions is, I think, quite clear.

Most of our very earliest Buddhist donative inscriptions do not indicate the intentions of the donor. They say, for example, only *ghosāye dānaṃ*, 'the gift of Ghosa' (Bhārhut),⁶ or *vajigutasa dānaṃ*, 'the gift of Vajiguta' (Sāñci).⁷ There are, however, exceptions, two of which are of particular interest. The first of these exceptions comes from Ceylon. I cite it here as Indian evidence because it is in effect an Indian inscription: it is written in early Brāhmī script and dates from a period in which an indigenous Ceylonese Buddhism could not have developed. It is, in fact, one of "the earliest inscriptions in Ceylon that can be definitely attributed to a particular ruler" and dates, according to S. Paranavitana, "to the period between 210 and 200 B.C."⁸ The inscription concerns the gift of a cave and reads: *Gamaṇi-Uti-maharajhaha [jhita Abi-Ti] śaya leṇe dasa-diśāsa sagaye dīne mata-pitāsa aṭaya*, "The cave of princess (Abi) Tissā, daughter of the great king Gāmaṇi-Uttiya, is given to the Saṅgha of the ten directions, for the benefit of (her) mother and father."⁹ The second exception comes from Bhārhut and is probably to be

59; 68; 81; 698f. (cf. more recently, J. Holt, "Assisting the Dead by Venerating the Living, Merit Transfer in the Early Buddhist Tradition," *Numen* 28 (1981) 1-28. Unfortunately, even apart from the fact that he ignores the epigraphical material, Holt's analysis is rather badly distorted since he unaccountably chose to ignore the fact that the *Petavatthu*—the text on which his paper is supposed to be based—contains a number of stories in which it is not a layman who gives a gift to release his deceased kinsmen, but a monk. The most striking instance of the monk-donor occurs in the story of Sāriputta's mother (N.A. Jayawickrama, *Vimānavatthu and Petavatthu*, London: 1977) II. 2 (14), but there are several others.

⁶ B. Barua & K.G. Sinha, *Barhut Inscriptions* (Calcutta: 1926) 31 (no. 56).

⁷ G. Bühler, "Further Inscriptions from Sāñchi," *Epigraphia Indica* 2 (1892) 370 (no. 25).

⁸ S. Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Vol. I Containing Cave Inscriptions from 3rd Century B.C. to 1st Century A.C. and Other Inscriptions in the Early Brāhmī Script* (Ceylon: 197) lii-liii.

⁹ Paranavitana, *Inscriptions of Ceylon, Vol. I, no. 34.*

dated about a hundred years later than the Ceylonese inscription. Here on a *suci* we read: *sagharakhitasa mātapituna aṭhāyā dānaṃ*: "The gift of Sagharakhita, for the benefit of (his) mother and father."¹⁰

Here already then in very early Buddhist Ceylon and at Bhārhut we have inscriptions in which the donors themselves say that they performed acts of religious giving for the 'benefit' or 'profit' of their parents. We do not know in either case whether the parents are deceased, although we do know that these inscriptions are six and seven hundred years earlier than those found at Lung-men. We also know that something very like that which we find in our Ceylonese and Bhārhut inscriptions is also frequently found in the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions.

Our Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions come predominantly from North-West India. The earliest of them may date from around the middle of the 1st century B.C., but most appear to fall in the first few centuries of the Christian Era. Of the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions edited by Konow—and this is our single most important collection—twenty-nine contain statements in which the individual donors express the intentions for which they undertook the religious act recorded in the inscription.¹¹ Of these twenty-nine fourteen, or almost exactly half, indicate that the religious act was in whole or in part undertaken on behalf of the donor's parents.¹² Similar statements are also found in at least five additional Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions published after Konow's collection.¹³ The donor's intention may be expressed in as

¹⁰ Barua & Sinha, *Barhut Inscriptions*, 22 (no. 28); for several different views of the significance of this inscription see Lamotte, *Histoire du bouddhisme indien*, 456; Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984); J.-M. Agasse, "Le transfert de mérite dans le bouddhisme pāli classique," *Journal asiatique* (1978) 312-13 (on Agasse, and the question of the 'transfer of merit' generally, see the important paper by J. Filliozat, "Sur le domaine sémantique de puṇya," *Indianisme et bouddhisme, Mélanges offerts à Mgr Étienne Lamotte* (Louvain-La-Neuve: 1980) 101-16).

¹¹ S. Konow, *Kharoṣṭhi Inscriptions with the Exception of Those of Aśoka* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. II, Part I) (Calcutta: 1929) I, II, XIII, XV, XX, XXIII, XXIV, XXVI, XXVII, XXXI, XXXV.2, XXXVII.6, XLVI, LV.c, LVII, LVIII, LX, LXIII, LXXII, LXXIV, LXXV, LXXVI, LXXX, LXXXI, LXXXII, LXXXV, LXXXVI, LXXXVII, XCII.

¹² Konow, *Kharoṣṭhi Inscriptions*, II, XIII, XX, XXIII, XXVII, XXXI, XXXV.2, XXXVII.6, LV.c, LXXV, LXXVI, LXXXV, LXXXVI, XCII.

¹³ I. S. Konow, "Charsadda Kharoṣṭhi Inscription of the Year 303," *Acta Orientalia* 20 (1947) 107-19; 2. G. Fussman, "Documents épigraphiques kou-chans," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient (= BEFEO)* 61 (1974) 54-58 (the same inscription read and translated by J. Brough was published in J.C. Harle, "A Hitherto Unknown Dated Sculpture from Gandhara: A Preliminary Report," in J.E. van Lohuizen-De Leeuw & J.M.M. Ubahgs, *South Asian Archaeology 1973* (Leiden: 1974) 128-36); 3. G. Fussman, "Documents épigraphiques

simple a form as . . . *matapitu puyae*: '(this is done) as an act of *pūjā* for my parents' (XXXVII. 6);¹⁴ or he might add in addition to reference to his parents any number of other elements. He might say: . . . *kue karite matapitae puyae sarvasatvaṇa hidasuhae*: '. . . this well was made as an act of *pūjā* for my parents (and) for the advantage and happiness of all beings' (XXIII); or: . . . *par[i]vara [sha]dhadana . . . mira boyanasa erjhuna kapasa puyae madu pidu puya[e]*: '(this) chapel is the religious gift of . . . (name) . . . as an act of *pūjā* for Mira, the Saviour [a royal title] (and) Prince Kapa, as an act of *pūjā* for my mother and father' (XX). We can note here, however, that although these and other additional elements occur in the donor's expressions of their intentions, reference to benefiting one's parents is the single most frequent element. We can also note at least one more additional fact. In one of our Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions it is specifically said that the gift recorded was made for the donor's deceased parents (. . . *danamukhe madapidarana adhvadidana puyaya bhavatu*).¹⁵

It is clear then that 'benefiting' one's parents, both living and dead, was, in the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions, the most frequently mentioned purpose for religious giving. It was, it seems, a major preoccupation of those who engaged in such activities. But this means that this preoccupation occurs already in inscriptions which predate those found at Lung-men by several centuries. Again in regard to China we might also note that already more than twenty years ago John Brough published a Kharoṣṭhi inscription—which he would date "with some reservations" "towards the end of the second century A.D."—that was found at or around Lo-yang. This might suggest that we are dealing here with a case of direct contact between two widely separated bodies of Buddhist inscriptions.¹⁶

This same 'preoccupation' also appears elsewhere in Indian inscriptions which predate Lung-men. In the Mathurā inscriptions

kouchans (II)," *BEFEO* 67 (1980) 55; 4. G. Fussman, "Nouvelles inscriptions śaka: ère d'Eucratide, ère d'Azès, ère Vikrama, ère de Kaniska," *BEFEO* 67 (1980) 6; 5. H.W. Bailey, "Two Kharoṣṭhi Casket Inscriptions from Avaca," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1978) 3 (this same inscription has also been published in B.N. Mukherjee, "An Interesting Kharoṣṭhi Inscription," *Journal of Ancient Indian History* 11 (1977-78) 93-114; G. Fussman, *BEFEO* 67 (1980) 3-4; R. Salomon, "The 'Avaca' Inscription and the Origin of the Vikrama Era," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 102 (1982) 59-68).

¹⁴ All bracketed roman numerals refer to the inscription numbers in Konow, *Kharoṣṭhi Inscriptions*.

¹⁵ Fussman, *BEFEO* 61 (1974) 54; Brough in Harle, *South Asian Archaeology 1973*, p. 129 & n. 1.

¹⁶ J. Brough, "A Kharoṣṭhi Inscription from China," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24 (1961) 517-30.

published by Lüders there are thirty-nine Buddhist inscriptions in which the donor's intentions are expressed. Of these thirty-nine at least a fourth (9) indicate that the donation was made in whole or in part for the sake of the donor's parents;¹⁷ and in at least two other inscriptions not included in Lüders' collection the donor's parents are, again, the intended beneficiaries of the religious act.¹⁸ Here again the intentions of the donors can be expressed in a number of ways. The donor may say that the gift was made "as an act of *pūjā* for his mother and father and all living beings" (*māt[a]pit[r]in-[a] pūjāye savasav[ā]n[a] ca §90*);¹⁹ or he may conclude his inscription by declaring that "what here is the merit [of my act] may that be for my parents" (*yad atra puṇyaṃ mātāpi[t]tra sya §78*). And here again, although in the majority of cases we do not know if the donor's parents were living or dead, in at least one of our Mathurā inscriptions the donor explicitly says that he intends his act as an act of *pūjā* for his deceased parents (*[mātāp]i[t]ra [abhyat]itakalaga[tā]nām pūjāye bhavatu §44*). And another fragmentary Mathurā inscription also appears to make explicit reference to deceased parents (*mātāpitraṇa abhatitana[m] . . .*)²⁰

Like the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions, the inscriptions from Mathurā also predate those found at Lung-men by several centuries. Although Lüders classifies a few as belonging to the Śuṅga Period, the majority belong to the Kṣatrapa, the Kuṣāṇa, and—to a lesser extent—the Gupta Periods.²¹ But we also find a considerable number of inscriptions that fall into these same periods elsewhere in India in which an act of religious giving is expressly stated to have been undertaken for the sake of benefiting one's parents. This is the case for example at Bodh-Gayā where a donor ends the record of his gift by saying "by this root of merit may it be as an act of *pūjā* for my mother and

¹⁷ H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. K.L. Janert (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, Nr. 47) (Göttingen: 1961) 1, 2, 3, 8, 24, 29*, 31, 35, 41, 44*, 46, 50, 60, 61, 62, 67*, 73, 76, 78*, 80, 81, 86, 87, 89, 90*, 125*, 126, 128, 135; 136, 153, 154, 157, 179*, 180*, 184*, 185, 186, 187; those inscriptions in which the donation was made for the sake of the donor's parents are marked with an asterisk.

¹⁸ D.C. Sircar, "Mathura Image Inscription of Vasudeva," *Epigraphia Indica* 30 (1953-54) 181-84 (cf. n. 20 below); Sircar, "Brahmi Inscriptions from Mathura," *Epigraphia Indica* 34 (1961-62) 9-13 (no. 1).

¹⁹ All numbers refer to the inscription numbers in Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*.

²⁰ Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica* 30 (1953-54) 184 reads *mātāpitreṇa abha[s]i[ta]nām*; the reading cited above, however, is that proposed by Th. Damsteegt, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit, Its Rise, Spread, Characteristics and Relationship to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit* (Leiden: 1978) 164 & n. 50; cf. 119.

²¹ Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, 22-3.

father (*imenā kuśala-mūlena mātāpitṛnā[m] pūjāye bhavatu.*);²² or again at *Bodh-Gayā*, but in a record more nearly contemporaneous with Lung-men: "Whatever merit may have been acquired by me by all this, may this be for the benefit of my parents at first . . ." (*tad etat sarvvaṃ yan mayā puṇyopacitasambhāraṃ tan mātāpitroḥ p(ūrvam-gamaṃ kṛtvā . . .)*).²³ This is also the case at Nāgārjunikoṇḍa where the donors frequently state that they made their gift so that, first of all, they could "transfer" their act of giving to their mother, or to both sides of their family. In several instances it is specifically said that the "transfer" is made to past, present and future members of both sides of the donor's family. We find, for example, "... this stone pillar was set up in order to transfer (it, i.e. the act and the fruit of the act) to her mother and for procuring the attainment of nirvāṇa for herself" (... *apano mātaram hammasiriṇikaṃ parinatatuna atane ca nivāṇasampatisampādake imaṃ selathambhaṃ patithapitaṃ . . . C2*; cf. C4);²⁴ or, more elaborately, "... this pillar was set up in order to transfer (it) to past, future and present members of both her families for the attainment of benefits and ease in both worlds, and for the procuring of the attainment of nirvāṇa for herself, and for the attainment of benefits and ease by all the world" (... *apano ubhayakulasa aticchitam-anāgata-vaṭamānakānaṃ parināmetunaṃ ubhayalokahitasukhāvahathanāya atano ca nivāṇasampatisampādake savalokahitasukhāvahathanāya ca imaṃ khambhaṃ patithapitaṃ ti, C3*; cf. B2, B4, E.).

We also have a comparatively large number of inscriptions from Sārnāth and Ajaṅṭā which either predate or are nearly contemporaneous with the Lung-men inscriptions. And here again the donors frequently state that their intention in making their religious gift was—in whole or in part—to benefit their parents. Among the inscriptions from Sārnāth which have been taken as belonging either to "the Gupta Period" or, more specifically, to the 4th, 5th, or 6th century, I have noticed at least ten inscriptions in which the donor's parents are specifically listed among the intended beneficiaries.²⁵

²² B.M. Barua, "A Bodh-Gayā Image Inscription," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (1933) 419.

²³ B.M. Barua, "Old Buddhist Shrines at Bodh-Gayā," *The Indian Historical Quarterly* 6 (1930) 27-8; the translation here is Barua's; the end of the line is missing and he has supplied a *bhavatu*, although it is possible that more than just a *bhavatu* has been lost.

²⁴ All the letter and number references refer to J.Ph. Vogel, "Prakrit Inscriptions from a Buddhist Site at Nagarjunikonda," *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929-30) 1-37.

²⁵ D.R. Sahnī, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath* (Calcutta: 1914) 53(B(b)60)*, 85(B(b)292), 85(B(b)293)*, 239(D(f)1)*; H. Hargreaves, "Excavations at Sārnāth," *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey of India 1914-15* (Calcutta: 1920) XIV*, XV*, XVI*, XVII*, XVIII*, XIX.

We find donors saying: "What here is the merit acquired by me after having had this image made, may that be for the obtainment of cessation for my parents and gurus and the world (*yad atra puṇyaṃ pratimāṃ kārayitvā mayā bhṛtam/mātāpitror gurūṇāṃ ca lokasya ca samāptaye |*);²⁶ or, perhaps more typically, "What here is (my) merit may that be for the obtaining of supreme knowledge by my mother and father and all living beings (*yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bha[va]tu mātāpi[troḥ] sarvva[sattvā]nāṃ ca anuttarajñānāvāptaye*).²⁷ This second formula is, in fact, also very common at Ajaṅṭā.

The inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā, the last group of inscriptions we shall look at here, are of particular interest. If Walter Spink is right—and the chances for this seem to be very good—most, if not all, activity ceased at Ajaṅṭā in the last quarter of the 5th century.²⁸ This would mean that the inscriptions at Ajaṅṭā are close in time to those at Lung-men and yet clearly predate them. Moreover Ajaṅṭā and Lung-men are not only close in time, they are also sites of essentially the same kind. Both are complexes of excavated "cave shrines"; both received royal patronage, and yet a large number of individual, non-royal donative inscriptions have been found at both sites.

I have been able to find twenty-one inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā which have a donative formula. Of these more than 90%, or nineteen inscriptions, declare that the intended beneficiaries of the gift recorded are—in whole or in part—the donor's parents.²⁹ In eleven, or slightly more than half of these, the donor's intentions are expressed by means of variants of a single basic formula. This formula is essentially the same as that cited above as our second example

²⁶ Hargreaves, *Annual Report of the Archaeological Survey 1914-15*, XVI, XVII.

²⁷ Sahnī, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*, 85(B(b)292).

²⁸ W. Spink, "Ajanta: A Brief History," *Aspects of Indian Art* (Leiden: 1972) 49-58 (esp. 56-9); Spink, "The Splendours of Indra's Crown: A Study of Mahāyāna Developments at Ajaṅṭā," *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce* (1974) 743-67; cf. J.G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India, Empire and Province* (Princeton: 1982) 181ff.

²⁹ J. Allan, "A Note on the Inscriptions of Cave II," Appendix to G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Part II: Text (Oxford: 1933) Cave II. 11 (fragmentary, note . . . *pitṛm*); N.P. Chakravarti, "A Note on the Painted Inscriptions in Caves VI-XVII," Appendix to G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Part III: Text (Oxford: 1946) Cave VI; Cave IX.1*, IX.6*; Cave X.2, X.10*, X.11*, X.12, X.17, X.21*; Cave XVI.1*, XVI.2*, XVI.3*; N.P. Chakravarti & B.CH. Chhabra, "Notes on the Painted and Incised Inscriptions of Caves XX-XXVI," Appendix to G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Part IV: Text (Oxford: 1955) Cave XXII(P) n.4*; Cave XX(Inc.) n.3*; Cave XXVI.1*, XXVI.2*; D.C. Sircar, "Inscription in Cave IV at Ajanta," *Epigraphia Indica* 33 (1960) 262; M.K. Dhavalikar, "New Inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā," *Ars Orientalis* 7 (1968) no.3, 4*, 5*. The two inscriptions which do not make reference to the donor's parents are Cave VI, and X.2.

from Sārnāth. In its simplest form at Ajañtā it occurs as "... what here is his merit, may that be for the obtaining of supreme knowledge by his mother and father and all living beings" (*yad atra [pu]nyam tad bhavatu mātāpitro[h] sarvva[sa]tvānān cānuttarajñānāvāp[ti]aye*).³⁰ This, of course, is almost exactly the same version of the formula as is found at Sārnāth, and this or some other variant of the basic formula occurs, as I have said, in eleven of the nineteen inscriptions from Ajañtā in which the donor gives his parents as beneficiaries. But other donors at Ajañtā express their intentions without having recourse to this particular formula. We find, for example, the donor saying simply: "This is the religious gift of... Śilabhadra (made) in the name of his father and mother" (*deyaddharmmo yam ... śilabhadrasya mātāpitaram udi[śya]*).³¹ The expression *mātāpitaram uddiśya*, "in the name of his mother and father," used here is of particular interest and occurs in at least four other inscriptions from Ajañtā.³² In fact the use of the term *uddiśya* seems to imply—as Senart appears to have suggested some time ago, and as its occurrence in a variety of literary sources also would suggest—that the individuals concerned are deceased.³³ This would seem to be more clearly the case in 'The Praśasti of Buddhahadra' in Cave XXVI. Here Buddhahadra says his gift was made "in the name of Bhavvirāja and also his (Buddhabhadra's) mother and father" (*taṃ bhavvirājam uddiśya mātāpitaram eva ca*), and then a little later he says "what merit is here, may that be for them (i.e. Bhavvirāja and his parents) and for the world for the attainment of the fruit of great awakening and the accumulation of all pure qualities" (*yad atra puṇyam tat teṣā[m] jagatāṃ ca bhavatu idaṃ sarvāmalaḡuṇavyāta-[read-urāta-] mahābodhiphalāptaye*). But Buddhahadra has already specifically indicated right before the *uddiśya* passage that Bhavvirāja, at least, was dead (*... pitariyy uparate*).³⁴

We are now in a position to answer our first question. Indian epigraphical sources prove beyond any doubt that the basic elements of the inscriptions from Lung-men which Professor Ch'en interpreted as indications of 'filial piety' occur already in Indian Buddhist

³⁰ Yazdani, *Ajanta III*, Cave XVI.3; on this formula see G. Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 21 (1979) 1-19 and corrections to this in the second half of Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984).

³¹ Yazdani, *Ajanta III*, Cave X.21.

³² Yazdani, *Ajanta III*, Cave X.10, 11, 12; Yazdani, *Ajanta IV*, Cave XXVI.1.

³³ E. Senart, "The Inscriptions in the Caves at Nasik," *Epigraphia Indica* 8 (1905) 64; L. de La Vallée Poussin, "Staupikam," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 2 (1935) 283; H. Kern & B. Nanjio, *Saddharmapuṇḍarika* (St. Petersburg: 1908-12) 50.9, 241.6, 340.6; C. Bendall, *Sikṣāsamuccaya* (St. Petersburg: 1897-1902) 309.6.

³⁴ Yazdani, *Ajanta IV*, Cave XXVI. 1.

inscriptions which predate those from Lung-men by as much as seven centuries. They prove that concern for the "well being" of both deceased and living parents was a major preoccupation of Buddhist donors in India; that one of the most frequently stated reasons for undertaking acts of religious giving was to benefit the donor's parents, both living and dead; and that this concern was both very old and very widespread in India.³⁵ But if we have answered our first question, we still must discover whether there are any indications that this concern for the well being of one's parents was an active concern of Indian Buddhist monks. This, perhaps, is an even more interesting question and once again I think our answer can be unequivocal.

Our two earliest donative inscriptions which refer to benefiting one's parents both record the gifts of laymen. We know, however, that the Bhārhut inscription is only one of a large number from that site which record similar gifts, and that in almost 40% of these inscriptions the donor was a monk or a nun (36 cases). In several

³⁵ It should be noted here that there are a considerable number of other Indian inscriptions in which we find reference to parents, but the interpretation of these inscriptions is uncertain. They almost always contain a formula the key element of which is *sahā*. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions* §126 is a typical example: ... *bh[i]-khuṇiye budhadevāye bodhisatvo pratihāpito sahā mātāpitihi sarvasat[va]hitasukh[a]ye*. Lüders translates: "... the Bodhisattva was set up by the nun Budhadevā (Budhadevā), ... together with her parents for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings." But there are at least three possible interpretations here. First, the inscription may record a donation that was actually made jointly by the nun and her parents. Secondly, it may be that the nun-donor simply used the *sahā* formula as a way of sharing the merit of her act with her parents by associating them with that act. That is to say, she shares or 'transfers' the act rather than the merit, although the end result is the same. Thirdly, it is possible that the syntax of the formula has not been properly understood and that we should translate: "... the Bodhisattva was set up by the nun Budhadevā for the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings together with her parents" (cf. *yad atra puṇyam tad bhavatu mātāpit[pu]rvaḡamaṃ kṛtvā sarvasatvānāṃ anuttarajñānāvāptaye* or *yad atra puṇyam tad bhavatu mātāpitro[h] sarvasatvānāṃ cānuttarajñānāvāptaye*; Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984) There are a number of cases where the first interpretation is almost certainly impossible. This is the case, for example, at Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sarnath*, 35 (B(a)1), where if we adopted the first interpretation we would have a single image that was the actual gift of a monk named Bala, his parents, his preceptors, teachers, fellow monks, pupils, a nun, the satrap Vanaspara, and the fourfold Buddhist community (i.e. all monks, nuns, lay men and women). This appears rather unlikely, and we must adopt either the second or third interpretation. But adopting either of these last two interpretations would mean that all such inscriptions would then have to be added to our list of inscriptions which record an act undertaken—in whole or in part—for the benefit of the donor's parents. This, of course, would only further and more fully confirm the observations we have already made.

instances the individual monks involved are specifically said to be "reciters" (*bhānakas*); one is called a *sutaṃtika*, "one who knows the sutta", another a *peṭakin*, "one who knows the Piṭaka", and yet another is referred to as a *pacanekāyika*, "one who is versed in the canonical doctrine as a whole,"³⁶

We also know that perhaps as many as a fourth of the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions which refer to benefiting one's parents record the gifts of monks.³⁷ One of these inscriptions, interestingly enough, is also the one Kharoṣṭhi inscription in which there is specific reference to deceased parents. The whole inscription reads:

"Year 5, on the fifth day of the month Phalguṇa. This is the gift of Buddhānanda who is one who knows the *Tripitaka*. May it be an act of *pūjā* for his deceased parents."

(*saṃ 4 1 phagunasa masasa di paṃcami budhanadasa trepiṭakasa danamukhe madapi-darana adhvadidana pūyaya bhavatu*)³⁸

Here, then, not only is a gift given by an individual for the benefit of his deceased parents, but this individual, to judge by his title, is not a simple, 'uneducated' village monk. He appears to have been—like many of the monk-donors at Bhārhut—a religious specialist. He is 'one who knows the *Tripitaka*', one who has mastered the Buddhist literature of his time.

Our Mathurā inscriptions present us with a similar—if perhaps even more definite—set of facts. There are eight inscriptions from Mathurā which record a gift made for the benefit of one's parents in which the donor's name or title has been preserved. In 75% of these inscriptions the donor was a monk (6).³⁹ In the one instance in which reference is specifically made to deceased parents the donor is again a monk:

"(This is) the gift of the monk . . . mitra, the *Voḷyavaśika* (?). May it be an act of *pūjā* for his deceased parents. May it (also) be for the granting of health to his companion Dharmadeva.

([d]ā[na]ṃ bh[ik]ṣu[s]a b . . . m[i]trasya v[o]jya[vaśi]kasya [māta]p[i]t[ṛ]ṇa [abhyat]itakalaga[tā]nām pūjāy[e] bhavatu sa[dh]yiviharisyā dharmā[d]ev[a]s[ya] ar[o]g[a]dākṣiṇ[a]y[e][bha]vat[u].)⁴⁰

And again, at least one of the monk-donors at Mathurā who intends

³⁶ Cf. Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984) and the sources cited there in notes 40 and 41.

³⁷ Konow, *Kharoṣṭhi Inscriptions*, XXIII (cf. p. 64), LV.c, XCII; Fussman, *BEFEO* 61 (1974) III.

³⁸ Fussman, *BEFEO* 61 (1974) III.

³⁹ Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, §§29, 44, 67, 90, 179; Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica* 34 (1961-62) no.1.

⁴⁰ Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, §44.

his gift for the benefit of his parents is given a title which appears to indicate that he was a 'learned' monk, a religious specialist: he is referred to as a *dha[r]mma[kathi]ka*, "a preacher of the Dharma".⁴¹

In one of the two inscriptions I have cited above from Bodh-Gayā the donor is, again, a monk. Here the donor who declares that his act was intended to benefit his parents describes himself as either "a monk who preserves the Vinaya" (*vinayadhara*) or the "companion" or "co-resident" of such a monk (*sadhevihārī*), and as a "preacher of the Dharma" (*dharmakathika*).⁴²

If the evidence in all these inscriptions is clear, it is equally, if not more so in those Indian inscriptions from the Gupta Period, especially from the 4th and 5th centuries, or in those inscriptions which are in date near to, though somewhat earlier than, the inscriptions found at Lung-men. At Sārnāth, for example, in the ten inscriptions which record gifts made for the sake of benefiting one's parents four fifths, or 8, of the donors are monks.⁴³ In the nineteen inscriptions from Ajaṅṭā which express a similar intention thirteen of the donors are certainly monks, two more were probably monks, and in one case it is impossible to say. In only three of the nineteen inscriptions was the donor certainly a layman.⁴⁴

We have looked so far at the Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions, at inscriptions from Mathurā, Bodh-Gayā, Sārnāth and Ajaṅṭā, and we have found a recurring pattern. Before, however, we can summarize our findings we must deal briefly with an apparent exception: in none of the fairly numerous inscriptions from Nāgārjunikoṇḍa in which the merit of the act is transferred to the donor's parents or family is the donor a monk. This, at first sight, could be significant. But seen in a larger context it is probably only another indication of the atypical character of all the Nāgārjunikoṇḍa inscriptions connected with the Ikṣvaku Dynasty. There is first of all the atypical character of the vocabulary of these inscriptions. There are several set expressions and terms found in these inscriptions which are not found anywhere else in Indian inscriptions. This is the case with *ubhayakula*, with the expression *dhātuvaparigahita* used to describe a stūpa, with the verb *parināmetuna* which is always used to express the intended 'transfer'. This is also the case with the formula *ubhayalokahitasukha* and the formula *atano ca nivānasampatisampādake*. All of these things are found again and again in inscriptions of this period at

⁴¹ Sircar, *Epigraphia Indica* 34 (1961-62) no.1.

⁴² Barua, *Indian Historical Quarterly* 9 (1933) 419.

⁴³ I.e. those inscription numbers marked with an asterisk in n. 25 above.

⁴⁴ In those inscriptions marked with an asterisk in n.29 above the donors are definitely monks.

Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, but nowhere else at any period in India.⁴⁵ An equally atypical characteristic of the Ikṣvaku inscriptions from Nāgārjunikoṇḍa is the fact that monastic donors are extremely rare.⁴⁶ This is in marked contrast with what—as I have said elsewhere—we find everywhere else in India. From Bhārhut and Sāñci on monks and nuns everywhere constituted a considerable portion of the active donors at religious sites: almost 40% of the donors at both Bhārhut and Sāñci were monks or nuns; well over 50% of the donors in the Mathurā inscriptions were also monks or nuns; 40% of the donors in the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, 65% of the donors in the inscriptions of the Western Cave Shrines, and 70% of the donors in those inscriptions which I have argued belong to the Mahāyāna, were members of the monastic community.⁴⁷ Even at Amarāvati—also in the South—24 of the 65 individual donors were either monks or nuns.⁴⁸ Clearly then Ikṣvaku Nāgārjunikoṇḍa is atypical and should be treated as such. It represents an isolated, very narrowly localized aberration both in terms of geography and in terms of time: all three of the Sanskrit inscriptions from this area published by Ramachandran date from the 5th century and record the gifts of monks.⁴⁹

Having established the purely local and markedly atypical character of the material from Ikṣvaku Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, we can now summarize our findings. Indian epigraphical material establishes not only that one of the most frequently stated reasons for undertaking acts of religious giving in Buddhist India was to 'benefit' the donor's parents, both living and dead, and that this was a major preoccupation of Buddhist donors in India, it also clearly establishes that this concern for the well being of one's deceased and living parents was an active concern and major preoccupation of Indian Buddhist monks. In the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions as many as a fourth of the donors who indicate that their act was undertaken to benefit their parents are monks; at both Mathurā and Ajaṅṭā 75% of such donors were monks. At Sārnāth the percentage is even higher: there

⁴⁵ For occurrences of these terms and formulae see the glossary in Vogel, *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929-30) 26-35.

⁴⁶ cf. Vogel, *Epigraphia Indica* 20 (1929-30) C1 (p. 17).

⁴⁷ Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984).

⁴⁸ G. Sivaramamurti, *Amarāvati Sculptures in the Madras Government Museum* (Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, New Series, Vol. IV) (Madras: 1956) 271-304. There are 126 inscriptions collected here, but 6 are non-donative, in 11 the donor has no title, and 40 are too fragmentary to be intelligible. In 4 a *nigama* is given as a collective donor.

⁴⁹ T.N. Ramachandran, *Nāgārjunakoṇḍa 1938* (Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, No.71) (Calcutta: 1953) 28-9.

in eight out of the ten inscriptions in which the donor indicates that his act was undertaken to benefit his parents, that donor is a monk. In fact if we take the total number of inscriptions in our sample, it would appear that not only was the concern for one's parents—both living and dead—a major preoccupation among our monk-donors, *but it was perhaps a special concern of this group*: in more than 60% of all the Indian inscriptions in our sample in which an act was undertaken to benefit the donor's parents the donors were monks, and the percentage of monk-donors is considerably higher, as we have seen, at Mathurā, Ajaṅṭā and Sārnāth. It is also worth noting again that at least three of the monk-donors who made religious gifts for the benefit of their parents, or their deceased parents, were not average, uneducated 'village' monks: one is called a *Trepiḍaka*, one is called a *Dharmakathika*, and a third was either a *Vinayadhara*, or the 'co-resident' of a *Vinayadhara*, and a *Dharmakathika*. These monks appear to have been the teachers and transmitters of 'official' Buddhist literature.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The fairly massive participation of monks in cult activity and religious giving which our inscriptions document raises a number of interesting points. In this regard it is well to note—as Bühler noted many years ago—that the role of the monk in Jaina inscriptions differs very markedly from the role of the monk in Buddhist inscriptions. Bühler says, in specific reference to Sāñci: "Proceeding to the inscriptions which mention donations made by monks and nuns, the first point, which must strike every reader, is their great number . . . But it is interesting to note the different proceedings of the Jaina ascetics, who, according to the Mathurā and other inscriptions, as a rule, were content to exhort the laymen to make donations and to take care that this fact was mentioned in the votive inscriptions." (G. Bühler, "Votive Inscriptions from the Sāñchi Stūpas," *Epigraphia Indica* 2 (1892) 93. For examples of the kind of thing Bühler is referring to in Jaina inscriptions see Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, §§13, 14, 93, 140, where the key term is *nirvartana*- (on which see Damsteegt, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit*, 75, 171, 173, 252). Other Jaina inscriptions express the same thing with a different vocabulary (cf. D.C. Sircar, "Indological Notes 7, Vidiśa Jain Image Inscriptions of the Time of Rāmagupta," *Journal of Ancient Indian History* 3 (1969-70) 150-51). It is also worth quoting a wise old art historian here. Walter Spink says: "A number of inscriptions at Ajanta also prove that some of the caves, and numerous separate images, were donated by the monks themselves. This is an interesting commentary on the changing of Buddhism in India, for it suggests that monks, far from having renounced all worldly goods, were sometimes men of considerable wealth. It is doubtful that Buddhahadra, the chief donor of the elaborate Cave 26—a man who proclaims himself the friend of kings—spent very much time humbly wandering from village to village with his begging bowl as his predecessors in the early days of Buddhism certainly did" (Spink, "Ajanta: A Brief History," *Aspects of Indian Art*, 51). The question, of course, is whether the facts from Ajaṅṭā which Professor Spink refers to reflect any change at all. In fact we simply do not know what Buddhahadra's "predecessors in the early days of Buddhism" *actually* did. We do know, however, that from the very beginning of our actual epigraphical

In light of what we have found in Indian epigraphical material, and in light of the fact that all of the material we have looked at predates—in some cases by five or more centuries—the inscriptions from Lung-men, it hardly seems necessary to emphasize the fact that Professor Ch'en's interpretation of his Lung-men data is unacceptable. Clearly, "the frequent references to filial piety in the inscriptions from Lung-men" do not testify to any "change that had taken place in Buddhism after its introduction into China", nor is the fact that monks make up a considerable number of the donors at Lung-men who are concerned with deceased or living parents "a specific example of how Buddhism had adapted itself to contemporary social conditions in China." But the merit of Professor Ch'en's interpretation of the Lung-men data is that it forces us to focus on an aspect of the practice of Indian Buddhism which has been almost completely ignored by Buddhist scholars: in answering the questions raised by Professor Ch'en's remarks we have come to see that 'filial piety' was an old, an integral and pervasive part of the practice of Indian Buddhism from the earliest periods of which we have any definite knowledge, and that in actual practice the idea of benefiting one's parents, whether living or dead, by making religious gifts on their behalf was a major, if not a specific preoccupation of Indian Buddhist monks. Once again the actual monk of the 1st to the 5th century A.D. in India turns out to be—when we can catch a glimpse of him—something quite different from the picture of the monk that has been abstracted from our textual sources.⁵¹ This is in fact the second point of merit in Professor Ch'en's interpretation: it makes clear the very real dangers involved in making historical statements on the basis of textual sources alone, of treating literary elaborations of doctrine as if they were records of actual description. We have just seen that it is clear from Buddhist inscriptions beginning from the time of Bhārhuṭ that the giving of religious gifts was as much a part of the monk's religious life as it was of the layman's. And although this is contrary to what virtually all our modern authorities want us to believe, and although it receives no very definite support from 'early' textual sources, it is nevertheless a demonstrable fact. But there are also at least two curious things found in the inscriptions which reveal this fact, both of which bear on how we are to understand this type of religious giving in an

evidence (Bhārhuṭ, Sāñci, etc.) a large number of monks were doing exactly what the data indicates they were doing at Ajañṭā (cf. Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984)). What we do not know is what else they were doing.

⁵¹ Cf. Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1984).

Indian Buddhist context. We must, in concluding, look briefly at these.

First of all, although our inscriptions constantly refer to the objects made or presented as "gifts" (*dāna*, *deyadharmā*), there is at least one essential component of the 'classical' definition of the "gift" which is missing: although there is always a 'giver' and an object given, there is in the vast majority of cases no recipient. Moreover, in the great majority of the inscriptions we have looked at here the thing given is economically of no value: it is not land, housing, clothing or food. On the contrary, the gifts recorded are almost all relics or stūpas or images or paintings. We have then a giver and things of no economic value given to no specific recipient. Clearly there seems to be little here which even approaches the classical pattern of the "gift" as a 'transaction': there is no 'exchange'; no conception of incurred debt; no idea of reciprocity. This in itself might seem somewhat odd, but the situation appears even stranger when we add to this the fact that the inscriptions which record these gifts were in a considerable number of cases—as Lüders and Konow pointed out long ago—never meant to be read by anyone.⁵² Why, for example, if our inscriptions were never meant to be read did the individual donors take such care in recording not only their names, titles, and their places of residence, but also the exact date on which the donation was made?

The answer to at least some of these puzzles may be found, I think, in a fuller understanding of what our donors were giving, and in the conceptions of merit which they held. It is true that on one level the laymen and monks who made these gifts were giving objects, but because these objects were of a specific kind they were actually giving more than mere objects. They were giving objects of worship, objects which in fact made worship possible. They were, then, really giving to any of their fellow beings who ritually approached those objects both the means and the opportunity to make merit, they were providing for all both the opportunity and the means to further their religious life. But this would also seem to suggest that the initial gift of the actual object only marked the first moment in the donors act of giving. Each time the object was approached he—or the persons to whom he transferred his act of giving—was to be credited with having provided an additional opportunity for someone else to make merit. Each opportunity was a separate act of giving. The donor's act of giving and its consequent

⁵² H. Lüders, "The Manikiala Inscription," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1909) 660 (repr. H. Lüders, *Kleine Schriften*, hrsg. O. von Hinüber (Wiesbaden: 1973) 335); Konow, *Kharoshthi Inscriptions*, 31.

merit, then, were continually repeated over time with every act of worship which was directed towards the object he had provided.⁵³ It was his initial act which in a very concrete sense made each consecutive act of worship possible. It was because the donor's act was continually repeated over time, because it took place again and again long after the donor himself had disappeared, that it was necessary to clearly record the donor's name, the moment of the initial act, and—most importantly—the donor's intentions. And it was no small matter to transfer such an act to one's parents. By doing so the donor denied to himself, but provided for his parents a source of merit which would continue and be maintained long after the donor himself was dead. This, it would seem, is true filial piety.

⁵³ cf. the eighth verse of the prasasti of the monk Buddhahadra from C.ve XXVI at Ajañtā: *yāvat kirttir lloke tāvat svarggeṣu madati ca dehi / candrarkkakalakāḷpa kāryā kirttir mahidhresu //*: "And as long as the shrine (he built) remains in the world, so long does that man enjoy the heavens. So a shrine equal in duration to the sun and moon should be built on the mountains." (Text cited from Yazdani, *Ajanta* IV, 115.)