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“Bald-headed Destroyers of Living Things”: Buddhist Identity in the Silk Cultures of Medieval China

ABSTRACT:

This article examines a Buddhist vinaya (or, monastic code) precept against the use of silk; it includes the broader contexts of Chinese Buddhist silk culture and Chinese applications of Indian monastic codes. Medieval Chinese commentators appropriated this precept to ban silk from the monastic uniform – echoing earlier lay Buddhist anti-silk drives – on the grounds of the Mahāyāna ethic of universal compassion. This was similar to broad efforts by Chinese Buddhists to reconcile the social agendas of vinaya codes with the lofty moral ambitions of the bodhisattva path. But with the Chinese saṅgha (monastic establishment) immersed in the ubiquitous sericulture industry, this call to ban silk monastic uniforms appears more socioeconomic than ethical. Elite clerics took a stand against silkworm killing only as it concerned the cassocks, while silk cloth otherwise flowed throughout monastic precincts; their motive chiefly was to fortify lay–monastic distinctions by creating a conspicuous absence of silk. This case illustrates how Indian sources of authority were both indispensable and fungible in medieval China: here they were deployed to demonstrate accordance between Buddhist ethical, social, and commercial interests and culturally embedded traditions of material production.

KEYWORDS:

Chinese Buddhism, silk culture, Daoxuan, vinaya

INTRODUCTION

What did it mean to be a Buddhist monk in medieval China? Certainly the identity had multiple dimensions, but one was that of being partly non-Chinese. Buddhist monastics in China laid claim to the religious heritage of ancient India, and in so doing they assumed a uniquely hybrid identity that demanded negotiations of boundaries sociocultural and spatiotemporal. Chinese Buddhists were challenged

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to develop paradigms of doctrine and practice that would be both rooted in ancient India and suited to the ideals and aspirations of contemporary China. Several aspects of this negotiation have been well charted in modern scholarship, from competing Chinese and Indian cosmologies and soteriologies to kinship structures, state–saṅgha relations, and lay–monastic distinctions.¹ On this last count much progress has been made in our understanding of how Buddhist monastic roles have developed within Chinese society, rather than apart from it, providing salutary correctives to modern Romanticist ideals of monastic “otherworldly asceticism.”² But one crucial aspect of monastic and lay Buddhist identities in medieval China that has yet to receive sustained scholarly attention is how they shaped and were shaped by the ubiquitous Chinese silk industry. Sericulture has always been a central defining feature of Chinese civilization, and silk a cornerstone of Chinese Buddhist material culture. In many ways silk was the fabric of monasticism throughout premodern China, woven into the daily lives, monastery environs, ritual practices, economic activities, social relations, and juridical and soteriological discourses of Chinese Buddhists. Against the backdrop of normative Indian Buddhist pronouncements concerning material production, commercial engagement, attachment to luxury goods, and especially killing living beings – including silkworms specifically – the topic of Chinese Buddhist silk culture offers novel insights into monastic identity as a negotiation between avowedly foreign religious paradigms and widespread, culturally embedded, traditions of material production.³

¹ Scholars of Chinese Buddhism have always been preoccupied with the question of how Indian and Chinese forms of Buddhism related to one another. Recent representative examples include John Kieschnick and Meir Shahar, eds., *India in the Chinese Imagination: Myth, Religion, and Thought* (Philadelphia: U. Pennsylvania P., 2013); Chen-kuo Lin and Michael Radich, eds., *A Distant Mirror: Articulating Indic Ideas in Sixth and Seventh Century Chinese Buddhism* (Hamburg: Hamburg U.P., 2014); C. Pierce Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China* (Philadelphia: U. Pennsylvania P., 2014); and Stuart H. Young, *Conceiving the Indian Buddhist Patriarchs in China* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2015).

² See esp. Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia U.P., 1995); Hao Chunwen 郝春文, *Tang houqi Wudai Songchu Dunhuang sengni de shehui shenghuo* 唐後期五代宋初敦煌僧尼的社會生活 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1998); and the overview of scholarship on the topic by James Robson, “Introduction: ‘Neither Too Far, nor Too Near’: The Historical and Cultural Contexts of Buddhist Monasteries in Medieval China and Japan,” in James A. Benn, Lori Meeks, and James Robson, eds., *Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia: Places of Practice* (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 1–17.

³ John Kieschnick’s *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2003) remains the landmark study of this topic, but it largely overlooks the central roles of silk in Chinese Buddhism.

Perhaps no civilization is more deeply enmeshed with a specific material commodity than China is with silk. The English word “silk” may ultimately derive from the Old Chinese pronunciation *sie* for the modern *si* 絲, and ancient Greek and Latin terms for “China” translate as something like “the land of silk.”⁴ Silk was produced in China for at least five millennia before the Common Era,⁵ and traders along networks of “silk roads” spread this prized Chinese textile commodity throughout Eurasia. Silk was a standard medium of exchange not only in trans-regional trade and diplomacy, but also within the domestic economies of most Chinese dynasties. Chinese states often taxed their citizenry in silk cloth and yarn, and the cultivation of silkworms and mulberry trees (to feed them) was mandated throughout the empire. Silk was in enormous demand across all social strata, whether for use in clothing, as medium for writing and painting, trade or commerce, or for paying taxes. As a result, sericulture spread to every corner of the Chinese imperium, and it would be little exaggeration to say that nearly every Chinese subject had some association with silk.⁶

This is the context in which the Chinese saṅgha came to be. Chinese monks, nuns, and lay followers worked to define their vocations within and through this omnipresent textile industry – in all of its socioeconomic, cultural, as well as religious dimensions. Indeed, Chinese sericulture was always a religious as well as commercial enterprise, with popular pantheons of associated deities, seasonal schedules of ritual sacrifice, and elaborate mythic and cosmological underpinnings.⁷ Given

⁴ See Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 3d rev. edn. (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard U.P., 2013), p. 194.

⁵ Recent study of soil samples from tombs in Jiahu 賈湖 (Henan province) may push this date back considerably; see Gong Yuxuan et al., “Biomolecular Evidence of Silk from 8,500 Years Ago,” *PLoS ONE* 11/12 (2016): e0168042. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0168042.

⁶ Important studies of Chinese silk history – including its functions as medium for social distinction, commercial exchange, writing, painting, and decorative arts – include Dieter Kuhn, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 5, *Chemistry and Chemical Technology*, pt. 9, *Textile Technology: Spinning and Reeling* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988); Dieter Kuhn et al., ed., *Chinese Silks* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 2012); Tsuen-Hsuei Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk: The Beginnings of Chinese Books and Inscriptions*, 2d edn. (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2008); Shelagh Vainker, *Chinese Silk: A Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers U.P., 2004); and Zhao Feng 趙豐, ed., *Zhongguo sichou tongshi* 中國絲綢通史 (Suzhou: Suzhou daxue chubanshe, 2005).

⁷ See Julie Broadwin, “Intertwining Threads: Silkworm Goddesses, Sericulture Workers and Reformers in Jiangnan, 1880s-1930s,” unpub. Ph.D. diss. (University of California, San Diego, 1999); Michael Como, *Weaving and Binding: Immigrant Gods and Female Immortals in Ancient Japan* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2009); Dieter Kuhn, “Tracing a Chinese Legend: In Search of the Identity of the ‘First Sericulturalist,’” *TP* 70 (1984), pp. 213–45; Stuart H. Young, “For a Compassionate Killing: Chinese Buddhism, Sericulture, and the Silkworm God Aśvaghōṣa,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 41.1 (2013), pp. 25–58; and Zhengxie Xipingxian weiyuanhui 政協西平縣委員會, ed., *Canshen Leizu: Xiping wenshi ziliao di qi ji*, *Zhongguo*

how widespread and deeply ingrained this religio-material culture was in premodern China, there can be no complete account of Chinese Buddhism without a firm understanding of its relationships with silk. And in fact, preliminary investigations reveal an intricate interweaving of Chinese Buddhist and sericulture practices, ideals, and institutions, despite the deeply fraught relationship that some Buddhists had with silk. Sericulture was an especially problematic industry for Buddhists because it involved the killing of countless silkworms: pupae were boiled or stifled inside their cocoons before they could transform into moths, which would break through and destroy the silk filaments. Viewed in light of the Buddha's frequent admonitions against harming living beings, silk and sericulture would therefore seem quite contrary to Buddhist law, and a number of sources expressed this perspective forcefully.

But Buddhist attitudes toward silkworms, silk, and sericulture were far more diverse than this straightforward argument for prohibition might suggest. In traditional monastic regulations (*vinayas*), for example, silk was always among the materials permitted by the Buddha for use in monastic attire, and Indian Buddhist scriptures often expressly implored lay devotees to donate silk to the *saṅgha*.⁸ In China, similarly, Buddhists treated silk in many ways other than just by shunning and outlawing it, although a number of prominent monks, nuns, and lay followers did argue against it and personally abstained from using it. In fact, the growing body of evidence for close Buddhist involvement in the Chinese silk trade far outweighs the few instances of devotees decrying sericulture as a murderous enterprise and silk as a superfluous luxury. Throughout premodern times the Chinese monastic community traded, stocked, and received in offering enormous quantities of silk. The earliest Chinese references to both Buddhist monks and monasteries include mention of silk adornments.⁹ Silks were often used in Chinese monastic settings as media for manuscript copying; *sūtra*

Henan Xiping Leizu wenhua yantaohui zhuanti 蠶神嫫祖: 西平文史資料第七輯, 中國河南西平嫫祖文化研討會專輯 (Zhumadian: Diqu Zhongguo renmin Zhengzhi Xieshang Huiyi Henan-sheng Xipingxian weiyuanhui, 2007).

⁸ See Liu Xinru, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600-1200* (Delhi: Oxford U.P., 1996), p. 13; Suwa Gijun 諏訪義純, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi kenkyū* 中國中世仏教史研究 (Tokyo: Daitō shuppansha, 1988), p. 92; and Mohan Wijayaratna, *Buddhist Monastic Life According to the Texts of the Theravāda Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1990), p. 38. A similar example is leather, which was also permitted for monastic use despite its potential association with killing; see Thānissaro Bhikkhu, *The Buddhist Monastic Code II: The Khandhaka Rules Translated & Explained by Thānissaro Bhikkhu* (Geoffrey DeGraff), 3d rev. edn. (Valley Center, Cal.: Metta Forest Monastery, 2013), pp. 39-40, 43-44. See n. 93, below.

⁹ John Kieschnick, "Buddhist Monasticism," in John Lagerwey and Lü Pengzhi, eds., *Early Chinese Religion, Part Two: The Period of Division* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 550, 552.

wrappers, casings, and bindings; hanging banners and tapestries; altar valences; carpeting for ritual arenas; and most prominently the uniforms of monks and nuns.¹⁰ Members of the Chinese clergy were sometimes paid in silk by the state – as was the norm for government officials – and they sold silk for cash in markets adjoining monastery grounds.¹¹ In some instances, Chinese monastics themselves produced silken goods that were prized across the land as the highest quality available.¹² Not only were silk and sericulture implicitly sanctioned by Chinese Buddhist institutions – despite the explicit denuncements that sometimes marked Buddhist canonical and commentarial literature – but it also appears that monastics sought to meet the empire-wide demand for silk deities and ritual techniques.¹³

What does all of this indicate about the relationships between Buddhism and silk culture in premodern China? How did Chinese Buddhists thereby represent their traditions within Chinese society more broadly – both in terms of their observable activities and their discourses about them? What did it mean that Chinese monks could freely engage in ritual and commercial activities that Indian Buddhist writings often condemned as murderous and ideally confined to lay society? And how were Chinese monastic and lay Buddhist identities shaped in terms of their relationships with this ubiquitous material culture? A key part of

¹⁰ These various Buddhist uses of silk are documented, e.g., in Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society*, pp. 82–83, 89–92; Huang Minzhi 黃敏枝, *Tangdai siyuan jingji de yanjiu* 唐代寺院經濟的研究 (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue wenxueyuan, 1971), pp. 84–98; Lee Chor Lin, “Buddhist Textiles in the Chris Hall Collection,” in Wong Hwei Lian and Szan Tan, eds., *Power Dressing: Textiles for Rulers and Priests from the Chris Hall Collection* (Singapore: Asian Civilisations Museum, 2006), pp. 62–74; Liu, *Silk and Religion*, pp. 62, 68–72; Edwin O. Reischauer, trans., *Ennin’s Diary: The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1955); Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: U. Hawai’i P., 2003), pp. 44, 74, 116, 184, 205, 217; Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 119–28; Kathryn Ann Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns: Biographies of Chinese Buddhist Nuns from the Fourth to Sixth Centuries* (Honolulu: U. Hawai’i P., 1994), pp. 21, 22; D. C. Twitchett, “The Monasteries and China’s Economy in Medieval Times,” *BSOAS* 19.3 (1957), p. 531; and Zhao Feng, ed., *Textiles from Dunhuang in UK Collections* (Shanghai: Donghua U.P., 2007).

¹¹ Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary*, p. 80; Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, p. 217.

¹² See Huang Minzhi, *Songdai fojiao shehui jingji shi lunji* 宋代佛教社會經濟史論集 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju 1989), pp. 214–16; Lin, “Buddhist Textiles,” p. 62; Quan Hansheng 全漢昇, “Songdai siyuan suo jingying zhi gongshangye” 宋代寺院所經營之工商業, in Zhang Mantao 張曼濤, ed., *Fojiao jingji yanjiu lunji* 佛教經濟研究論集 (Taipei: Dacheng wenhua chubanshe 1977), pp. 154–55; Shiba Yoshinobu, *Commerce and Society in Sung China*, trans. Mark Elvin (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1970), pp. 113–14; and Michael J. Walsh, *Sacred Economies: Buddhist Monasticism and Territoriality in Medieval China* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2010), pp. 63–64. Preliminary research indicates that most silk-producing monastic establishments were convents. In future articles I will explore the gendered dimensions of Chinese Buddhist silk culture.

¹³ See Young, “For a Compassionate Killing.”

the answer is that Chinese objections to Buddhist involvement in the silk trade were relatively few and far between. This fact suggests that silk culture was one arena in which Indian Buddhist identities were readily accorded with traditional Chinese ideals and practices. Silk was so deeply ingrained in Chinese civilization that few found its use in Buddhist settings even worthy of mention, much less deep debate. But there were some Chinese commentators for whom silk production and consumption did require thorough consideration, particularly in light of Indian Buddhist vinaya codes and doctrinal ideals. In these commentarial writings the Indian heritage of Chinese Buddhists, sometimes inimical to sericulture, was both adduced and muted in ways that would ultimately reconcile Buddhist ethical and ritual systems – and commercial interests – with the all-important Chinese silk trade.

This article examines one such case in which medieval Chinese exegetes debated the propriety of sericulture and concluded, quite against the grain for their time, that silk was contrary to Buddhist law, both moral and juridical. The fact that their Indian sources nonetheless clearly permitted silk suggests, firstly, that Indian norms were invoked precisely in order to be reinvented, at least when it came to Buddhist views on silk. Further, this case evinces a perspective observed in other Chinese contexts according to which Indian monastic jurisprudence lacked proper ethical consideration.¹⁴ Chinese Buddhist exegetes tended to view the whole of their religion through the lens of Mahāyāna soteriology. Thus they worked to supplement traditional vinaya ordinations with so-called bodhisattva precepts from scriptures like the *Brāhma Net Sūtra* (*Fanwang jing* 梵網經, T no. 1484), which focused on grounding monastic behavioral stipulations in Mahāyāna moral principles.¹⁵ This was not necessarily an innovation – Indian monks probably did something similar¹⁶ – but it was also not the only way that Chinese Buddhists worked to weave ethical considerations into

¹⁴ On Chinese views of vinayas as narrowly Hīnayāna and requiring Mahāyāna ethical supplementation, see William M. Bodiford, “Introduction,” in William M. Bodiford, ed., *Going Forth: Visions of Buddhist Vinaya* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2005), pp. 4–7; Ann Heirman, “Vinaya: From India to China,” in Ann Heirman and Stephen Peter Bumbacher, eds., *The Spread of Buddhism* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 175n51; Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 126–27; and Yifa, *The Origins of Buddhist Monastic Codes in China: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Chanyuan Qinggui* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2002), pp. 23–24, 54.

¹⁵ Funayama Tōru, “The Acceptance of Buddhist Precepts by the Chinese in the Fifth Century,” *Journal of Asian History* 38.2 (2004), pp. 97–120; Paul Groner, “The *Fan-wang ching* and Monastic Discipline in Japanese Tendai: A Study of Annen’s *Futsū jubosatsukai kōshaku*,” in Robert E. Buswell, Jr., ed., *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 1990), pp. 251–90.

¹⁶ Yamabe Nobuyoshi, “Visionary Repentance and Visionary Ordination in the Brahmā Net Sūtra,” in Bodiford, ed., *Going Forth*, pp. 26–27.

monastic regulations. Chinese commentators on Indian vinaya texts also directly inserted Mahāyāna scriptural references into exegetical discussions of what should be deemed the (“Hīnayāna”) precepts’ true intent: to regulate the moral inclinations of individual practitioners.

Medieval Chinese Buddhists thus waded into territory later explored by modern scholars of Indian vinaya writings, concerning the relationships between comportment, social identity, and juridical law on the one hand, and morality, psychology, and karmic law on the other.¹⁷ If, from a medieval Chinese perspective, Indian vinayas were insufficiently ethical, then what important functions did they otherwise fulfill? Modern scholars concur that vinaya texts were written solely for monastic consumption and that they were centrally concerned with how their charges might be seen by the public.¹⁸ From this perspective, vinayas were less interested (than sūtras or śāstras) in the mental worlds or moral aptitudes of individual practitioners; they were not primarily phenomenological or psychological in orientation. Vinayas were juridical documents, social contracts, focused on defining and policing the boundaries of monastic identities as against many others, including especially Buddhist lay followers. Medieval Chinese monastics apparently interpreted Indian vinaya texts in a similar fashion, as focused primarily on social dynamics and thus functioning to govern communal operations and the comportment and public perception of saṅgha members. As eminent vinaya master Huaisu 懷素 (624–697) emphasized, “If good bhikṣus (monks) follow the vinaya, their comportment will be perfect; the faithless will see them and give rise to faith.”¹⁹

This perspective is evident in medieval Chinese commentaries written concerning a brief vinaya story, which is examined in the following. The story is about monks who go begging for silk to make up their bedding, watch silkworms be killed in order to meet this request, and are condemned by the Buddha for thus earning the rebuke of lay followers. The moral problem of killing is a secondary concern throughout this story; its climactic scene highlights the dismay of silk donors, who question the validity of “monks” who seek to consume the prod-

¹⁷ See, e.g., Janet Gyatso, “Sex,” in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Critical Terms for the Study of Buddhism* (Chicago: U. Chicago P., 2005), pp. 271–90.

¹⁸ On the social agendas of the vinaya, see, most recently, Shayne Clarke, *Family Matters in Indian Buddhist Monasticisms* (Honolulu: U. Hawai‘i P., 2014), and Ann Heirman and Matthieu Torck, *A Pure Mind in a Clean Body: Bodily Care in the Buddhist Monasteries of Ancient India and China* (Gent: Academia Press, 2012).

¹⁹ *Sifenlü kaizong ji* 四分律開宗記, X no. 735, 42:366b: 若善比丘, 隨順戒律, 威儀具足; 未信見之, 即生信心。 Cf. *Shanjian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙 (**Samantapāsādikā*), T no. 1462, 24:715A.

ucts of death. These vinayas thus acknowledged that sericulture was a murderous enterprise and they sought to curb monastic involvement with it. But this was not done for strictly moral reasons – that is, concerning unwholesome states of mind or karmic consequences attending the act of killing, much less the ultimate fates of silkworms themselves; rather, this involvement was problematic because it created a confused and otherwise negative image of the saṅgha in lay society. Perhaps both cause and effect of this ultimate lack of moral compunction over silkworm killing was the fact that in other contexts vinaya sources expressly permitted monastic uses of silk. In different versions of this story, and in other, later, commentaries on it, there were some circumstances in which begged silk was deemed a non-violation, and other sections of the vinayas uniformly allowed this avowedly murderous textile for use in monastic attire. As these vinaya discourses would apparently have it, monks could be draped in the entrails of insects so long as the monastic distinction remained intact – with silken robes ostensibly serving as a salutary marker of Buddhist identity.

According to this vinaya story, after condemning the monks for their wrongdoing, the Buddha established a new precept: one of the minor rules of forfeiture and expiation, typically thirty in number, which concerned material goods wrongfully obtained or possessed. But it was not entirely clear what was done wrong here, or what exactly was banned: was it about begging for silk, about entering sericulture households (sometimes likened to butchers' shops) and observing silkworm killing, about possessing silk, making things with it, or using it in certain ways? This ambiguity is evident in both Indian vinaya sources and medieval Chinese vinaya commentaries that attempted to define monastic codes for local communities. Confusion reigned over the details of cocoons, insects, fabrics, weaving processes, cloth forms and uses, and so forth, and how all this pertained to what precisely was banned, censured, or permitted. But at least one point was relatively clear: this precept was fundamentally concerned with legislating comportment rather than morality – that is, what cloth to carry or wear on the body and how to properly behave in public – as a means of maintaining boundaries between lay and monastic identities.

The apparent disjuncture between Buddhist ethics and the social, juridical agendas of vinaya discourses seems to have struck some medieval Chinese authors as deeply problematic. From the time of the eminent vinaya master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), especially, and other well-known Chinese vinaya commentators who followed in his wake,

this precept was rewritten to incorporate Mahāyāna ideals of universal compassion for all living beings, including silkworms especially. By thus making inwardly held psychological states the *sine qua non* of legally permissible monastic behavior – in other words, compassion for living beings – these commentaries interpolated a phenomenological soteriology into otherwise juridical frameworks and ideally bridged the gap between ethics and comportment, between proper performance of social roles and the maintenance of abstract moral values. However, this maneuver would also contribute to blurring the boundaries of monastic identity that vinaya discourses otherwise functioned to police. With outward appearance, comportment, and institutional affiliation rendered subservient to the individual’s inward moral stance, the role of the saṅgha was diminished. Why would monks or nuns be any better or truer to the Buddhist path than lay followers – regardless of appearance and public behavior – if only those with virtuous hearts and minds were truly acting in accordance with the Dharma?

Perhaps these tensions led Chinese vinaya commentators to finally negate their promises of silkworm clemency by dwelling on exceptions to the rules against silk – making their stance on universal compassion appear somewhat less doctrinal than rhetorical. Indeed, those voices in opposition to monastic uses of silk were all but drowned out in the cacophony of sociocultural, political, economic, and material forces conjoining Chinese Buddhist and sericulture institutions. Silk was ultimately and enthusiastically endorsed by Buddhist monastic communities because it was the fabric of Chinese society. To mark monastic identity with abstinence from silk was to render the saṅgha decidedly un-Chinese. Instead, Buddhist monastics deeply engaged in all aspects of Chinese silk culture, adorning their monasteries, altars, icons, and bodies with myriad silken goods and appropriating the cultural cachet accorded this singular textile finery. Buddhist monks were thus the ones to be marked in China holy by silk, in express accordance with both Indian Buddhist and traditional Chinese values: incorporating lofty ideals of bodhisattva compassion, formal behavioral stipulations from Indian vinaya codes, and infusing this most esteemed symbol of hallowed Chinese civilization into the material cultures of Chinese Buddhism.²⁰

²⁰ A similar dynamic is apparent in medieval discourses on Daoist robes and accoutrements, in which silk was used in ways that would represent Daoist masters as both grandiose and austere. In some cases elaborate silk adornments were advocated; in other contexts luxurious silk garments were shunned. On Daoist ritual robes (*fafu* 法服) in the medieval period, see especially Tanaka Fumio 田中文雄, “Dōkyō hōfuku kō” 道教法服考, in Fukui Fumimasa Hakushi koki taishoku kinen ronshū kankōkai 福井文雅博士古稀退職記念論集刊行会, ed., *Fu-*

CHINESE AND BUDDHIST ATTITUDES TOWARD SERICULTURE

Buddhist adepts in medieval China were exposed to a wide variety of conflicting images of silkworms, silk, and sericulture, stemming both from traditional Chinese sources and from the imported Buddhist literature of India. In broad strokes, the sericulture industry as a whole was accorded very positive valuation from pre-Buddhist times in China: silkworms symbolized the mysterious powers of natural metamorphoses; silk represented abundance, prosperity, and social status; and sericulture was the heritage of the ancient Chinese sages bequeathed for the benefit of civilization. Indian Buddhist sources transmitted to China from medieval times, however, painted a rather different picture. Silkworms illustrated self-delusion and the bonds of *samsāra*; the symbolism of silk was ambivalent, revolving at once around the glorification of the Three Jewels and the soteriological perils of material luxury; and sericulture was largely depicted as a murderous enterprise, though some sources spoke in more neutral terms about the use of cocoons from wild silkworms. Buddhist texts certainly did not praise and encourage the silk industry like Chinese sources did, even if they did not necessarily condemn it outright. And on the whole, this divergence between conceptions of the propriety of sericulture offers a first step toward explaining the broad disjuncture between Chinese Buddhist normative prescriptions regarding silk and what Chinese monks and nuns actually did. For although some Chinese Buddhist authors railed against silk and sericulture, echoing and manipulating certain strands of normative Indian Buddhist discourse, the vast majority of Chinese monastics held fast to their local roots in participating actively in every aspect of the silk trade.

One of the most prominent ancient Chinese images of the silkworm itself was provided by the Confucian philosopher Xunzi 荀子 (340–245 BC), who wrote in his “Rhapsody on Silkworms” (“Can fu” 蠶賦),

Here is a thing: how naked and bare its external form, yet it continually undergoes transformation like a spirit. Its achievement covers the backs of the world, for it has created decorations for a myriad generations. Ritual ceremonies and musical performances are completed through it; noble and humble are assigned their proper lots with it. It cares for the old and nurtures the young, for

kui Fumimasa Hakushi koki kinen ronshū: Ajia bunka no shisō to girei 福井文雅博士古稀記念論集, アジア文化の思想と儀礼 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2005), pp. 351–70; Tanaka Fumio, “Chūsei Dōkyō no hōfuku to hōgu” 中世道教の法服と法具, in Saitō Ryūichi 齋藤龍一, Suzuki Takeo 鈴木健郎, and Tsuchiya Masaaki 土屋昌明, eds., *Dōkyō bijutsu no kanōsei* 道教美術の可能性 (Tokyo: Bensei shuppan, 2010), pp. 95–106.

with it alone can one survive... Does it not continually undergo transformation and never grow old? 有物於此，儼儼兮其狀，屢化如神。功被天下，爲萬世文。禮樂以成，貴賤以分。養老長幼，待之而後存... 屢化而不壽者與?²¹

Manifesting divine transformations and transcendent longevity – through its uncanny metamorphoses from caterpillar to chrysalis to moth – clothing human kind with silk-spun cocoons and thereby marking natural and necessary boundaries, cosmic and social: these were the wondrous merits accorded the silkworm. In essence, according to Xunzi, this marvelous insect was no less than a fundamental building block of all human civilization. In this regard, silkworms were associated in numerous ancient Chinese myths with a host of revered culture-bearers and innovators of human kind's life-sustaining technologies – including Lady Yuanyu 苑窳, Princess Yu 禺, the legendary Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝) and his principal wife Lady Xiling 西陵, who were all at various times worshipped as the “first sericulturist 先蠶” and forebear of this semi-divine textile technology.²²

Then there is the “Record of the Silkworm-Horse from High Antiquity” (*Taigu canma ji* 太古蠶馬記), a story that is preserved in the fourth-century AD *Record of the Search for the Supernormal* (*Soushen ji* 搜神記). It tells of a young girl who promised to marry a horse if it could bring back her long-lost father. The horse did as asked but the girl reneged on her promise, and when the father learned of the arrangement he slew the horse, skinning it and hanging its hide in the courtyard to dry. The horsehide later rose up, wrapped itself around the young girl and flew into the limbs of a nearby tree. The lost girl and horse were finally found in the tree, where together they had transformed into a giant silkworm spinning itself a cocoon. “Therefore everyone rushed to plant from [that tree], which is the same as [the mulberry trees] cultivated today. It is said that [today's] mulberry silkworms are descended from that ancient silkworm.”²³ The young girl then became the famous Horse-head Maiden (Matou niang 馬頭娘), a mainstay in

²¹ Chinese text and trans. John Knoblock, *Xunzi: A Translation and Study of the Complete Works* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1994) 3, pp. 199–200.

²² Kuhn, “Tracing a Chinese Legend.”

²³ Yang Jialuo 楊家駱, ed., *Xinjiao Soushen ji* 新校搜神記 (Taipei: Shijie shuju, 1962), p. 104: 由斯百姓競種之，今世所養是也。言桑蠶者，是古蠶之餘類也。 Cf. trans. Como, *Weaving and Binding*, pp. 186–87; and Kenneth DeWoskin and J. I. Crump, Jr., trans., *In Search of the Supernatural: The Written Record* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1996), p. 166. See also Alan Miller, “The Woman Who Married a Horse: Five Ways of Looking at a Chinese Folktale,” *Asian Folklore Studies* 54 (1995), pp. 275–305.

the Chinese pantheon of deities who aided in the rearing of silkworms and production of silk.

While the entomic ancestry of this goddess again signals the divine symbolism of the silkworm in ancient Chinese thought, the sericulture etiology offered here also reflects the fundamental importance of silk production to the welfare of the Chinese people. Indeed, a flourishing silk industry was often seen as signaling a prosperous kingdom led by a righteous ruler, as Mencius (4th c. BC) famously remonstrated: “Let mulberry trees be planted around households of five *mu* (about 0.83 acres), and people of fifty will be able to be clothed in silk.... It has never happened that people of seventy have worn silk and eaten meat, and the black-haired people been neither hungry nor cold, without the ruler having been a true king.”²⁴ Examples of this sort are readily multiplied, and of course disparate images could also be adduced to provide a more nuanced portrait, but in broad outline these sources represent the general Chinese approbation of the time-honored sericulture industry.

Some of the most influential Indian Buddhist scriptures transmitted to China, however, offered a jarring alternative to this broadly laudatory portrait of silkworms and the commodity culture surrounding their cocoons. Perhaps the most prominent trope attending the silkworm itself in these early sources related to the central problem of Buddhist soteriology: self-wrought suffering. Here the emphasis was not on divine transformation and longevity – mirroring the sublime mysteries of the gods and sages – but rather on the propensity of sentient beings to bind themselves in webs of self-delusion. The most famous Buddhist sūtra to propagate this symbolism was the *Mahāyāna Scripture on the Great Departure*, or *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, translated into Chinese in the early-fifth century:

眾苦輪無際流轉無休息	The wheel of the myriad sufferings is limitless; unceasingly it turns and turns.
三界皆無常諸有無有樂	The entire Triple World is impermanent; there is no happiness in existence.
有道本性相一切皆空無	Emptiness is the essential nature of all paths of existence.

²⁴ Trans. Irene Bloom, in Wm. Theodore deBary and Irene Bloom, eds., *Sources of Chinese Tradition: Volume 1, From Earliest Times to 1600*, 2d edn. (New York: Columbia U.P., 1999), pp. 118–19. Chinese text and alternate trans. in James Legge, *The Works of Mencius* (1895; rpt. New York: Dover Publications, 1970), pp. 131–32: *Mengzi* 孟子, pt. 1, chap. 3: 五畝之宅, 樹之以桑, 五十者可以衣帛矣... 七十者衣帛食肉, 黎民不飢不寒, 然而不王者, 未之有也.

可壞法流轉常有憂患等	What is destructible comes and goes, forever marked by apprehensions and vexation.
恐怖諸過惡老病死衰惱	The fears of all the wrongs and evils done, ageing, sickness, death and distress
是諸無有邊易壞怨所侵	All these have no bounds; one is easily destroyed, invaded by enmity.
煩惱所纏裹猶如蠶處繭	Seized and fettered by afflictions, just like the silkworm wrapped in its own cocoon.
何有智慧者而當樂是處	None who has wisdom can find joy in a state like this. ²⁵

Such is the juxtaposition of the silkworm life cycle with the bonds of suffering and delusion in this impermanent world – wrapped in its cocoon like all beings are bound by their afflictions. Elsewhere the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* employed a similar analogy, explaining that “sentient beings constantly cycle through births and deaths, binding themselves like silkworms or dung-beetles,”²⁶ and “just as the silkworm spins its cocoon, where it engenders its own birth and death, such is the case with all sentient beings.”²⁷ Here the silkworm weaves around itself not a shield to protect it from predators or the elements during its vulnerable transformative stages, nor does it provide a valuable commodity for the benefit of human civilization, but rather it constructs its own tomb for the perpetuation of the dark, horrible suffering of sentient existence. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* made a similar point as well, expounding on the deluded perceptions of continuity and duality in the phenomenal world, to which sentient beings stupidly cling:

In this way the foolish worldlings, with all their various thoughts, distinguish continuity [in phenomena]. Then on the basis of this [perceived] continuity they foolishly discriminate [between things]. They are like silkworms spinning their own cocoons. Based on their own [limited] views they distinguish threads of continuity, and then happy in this [perceived] unity they bind themselves and bind others. 如是愚癡凡夫，無量異心，分別相續。依此相續，愚癡分別，如蠶作繭。依自心見，分別縊相續，樂於和合，自纏纏他。²⁸

²⁵ *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T no. 374, 12:373B. Cf. trans. Mark L. Blum, *The Nirvana Sutra (Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra), Volume 1* (Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, 2013), p. 39. Parallel passage at *Da banniepan jing* 大般涅槃經, T no. 375, 12:613A.

²⁶ T no. 374, 12:413C: 眾生流轉生死，纏裹如蠶蜩蟬。 Cf. trans. Blum, *Nirvana Sutra*, p. 258. Parallel passage at T no. 375, 12:654C.

²⁷ T no. 374, 12:524A: 如蠶作繭，自生自死，一切眾生，亦復如是。 Parallel passage at T no. 375, 12:768C.

²⁸ *Ru lengqie jing* 入楞伽經, T no. 671, 16:545A.

The *Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise* expanded this same metaphor to illustrate the fate of those hapless silkworms in the sericulture process:

Entering all the various paths [of rebirth, beings] thus receive all kinds of physical bodies. Receiving all kinds of bodies [beings] thus receive all manner of suffering and happiness. They are like silkworms making silk and binding themselves for no reason, before enduring the torments of roasting. 入種種道故, 受種種身. 受種種身故, 受種種苦樂. 如蠶出絲無所因, 自從已出而自纏裹, 受燒煮苦.²⁹

And further,

Sentient beings engender various afflictions due to the causes and conditions of their delusions. They commit evil crimes and cycle through the five paths [of rebirth], enduring the sufferings of birth and death. It is like the silkworm that makes silk and binds itself before entering the scalding water to be boiled over fire. Ordinary sentient beings are also like this. 眾生顛倒因緣故, 起諸煩惱. 作惡罪業, 輪轉五道, 受生死苦. 譬如蠶出絲自裹縛, 入沸湯火炙, 凡夫眾生亦如是.³⁰

What, then, did early Buddhist sources make of those who did this boiling and thereby made their living as sericulturists? The *Scripture on the True Dharma Foundations of Mindfulness*, for one, warned of the horrible karmic retributions in store for those who might take up such an occupation:

Further, bhikṣus, know the consequences of karma. Observe the various kinds of animal rebirths; what are the karmic causes for them to have attained rebirth in these bodies? Now by the wisdom obtained through hearing, know that in previous lives these beings, for the sake of obtaining silk, raised silkworms and killed them in their cocoons – soaking them in water, some steaming them and some boiling them. [These sericulturists] are reborn as countless insects called “fiery topknot” insects. There is a group of heretics who practice perverse rituals in which they take these tiny insects and throw them into the fire as an offering to the various gods, in order to obtain blessings. When the bodies [of these insects] are destroyed and their lives come to an end, they then fall into the hells where they will endure all manner of torments. 復次比丘, 知

²⁹ *Dazhuhu lun* 大智度論, T no. 1509, 25:294B; cf. trans. Étienne Lamotte, *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)* (Louvain-La-Neuve: Institut Orientaliste, Université de Louvain, 1976) 4, p. 2130.

³⁰ T no. 1509, 25:697A.

業果報。觀諸畜生，以何業故，受化生身。即以聞慧，知此眾生，於前世時，爲求絲絹，養蠶殺繭，或蒸或煮，以水漬之。生無量虫，名火髻虫，有諸外道，受邪齋法，取此細虫，置於火中，供養諸天，以求福德。身壞命終，墮於地獄，具受眾苦。³¹

And if this warning proved insufficient to deter sericulturists, the *Digest of the Four Āgamas* would elaborate on the hellish retributions for those who murdered silkworms:

In this [hell] realm people who have committed heavy sins are roasted. It looks like a (pointed roof) bathhouse with a floor of molten copper filings. [Beings] are led in to be boiled and cooked. After being cooked they are led out, and wicked dogs are fed the flesh of their giant bodies. After their flesh is eaten completely, a wind then blows to regenerate their bodies and they are driven back inside. It is the fate of sericulturists to exist in this realm where they are boiled and roasted. 此間人爲重事被炙者，像如浴室(尖頭屋)熾然銅屑地。驅使入熬使熟。熟已驅出，彼大身惡狗食其肉。食肉盡風隨吹肉，復生尋驅使入。此間養蠶命存者炙。³²

While these early Buddhist texts apparently aimed to discourage sericulture by instilling in their readers the fear of dreadful karmic recompense, other sources offered somewhat less dramatic moralizing prescriptions. The *Universal Dharāṇī (Incantation) Scripture*, for example, admonished followers to protect the integrity of the precepts by not frequenting five kinds of industry households, including those of silk producers.³³ The *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary*, furthermore, likened sericulture to injurious occupations such as hunting, thieving, butchering animals, raising livestock, and litigating.³⁴ And while these sources failed to specify whether their proscriptions were intended for monastics or laity, the *Scripture on Lay Precepts* clearly stipulated that sericulture was a sin for lay Buddhists in particular.³⁵

Along similar lines, commentaries on the *Scripture of Benevolent Kings* (*Renwang jing* 仁王經, T no. 245) by Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) and

³¹ *Zhengfa nianchu jing* 正法念處經 ([*Saddharma*]smṛtyupasthānasūtra), T no. 721, 17:104A.

³² *Si ahan muchao jie* 四阿含暮抄解, T no. 1505, 25:13B.

³³ *Dafangdeng tuoluoni jing* 大方等陀羅尼經 (**Mahāvaiṣṭhānīyāsūtra*), T no. 1339, 21:657C.

³⁴ *Sapoduo pini piposha* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙 (**Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Vibhāṣā*), T no. 1440, 23:510A.

³⁵ *Youposai jie jing* 優婆塞戒經 (**Upāsakaśīlasūtra*), T no. 1488, 24:1050B; trans. Shih Heng-ching, *The Sutra on Upāsaka Precepts* (Berkeley: The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994), p. 83.

Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) both included sericulture in a list of twenty-eight offenses committed by Buddhist laypersons – alongside such transgressions as consuming alcohol, neglecting one’s parents, teachers or elders, and intentionally giving rotten food to mendicants³⁶ – and Yijing 義淨 (635–713) famously argued that it was improper for Buddhist lay followers to even witness silkworm killing, much less take part in it.³⁷ Below, I return to this issue of Buddhist precepts for lay devotees, but for now we can clearly see how Buddhist texts that were widely available in medieval China depicted the propriety of sericulture. These and other sūtras and commentaries were largely unanimous in their condemnation of the silk industry – at least to the extent that it involved killing silkworms – and as such they would seem to have presented a clear prescription for how the Chinese saṅgha should situate itself in relation to this omnipresent commodity culture.

BEGGING FOR SILK IN THE VINAYA

Indian vinaya sources translated into Chinese from the early-fifth century told a somewhat different story. In official monastic regulations it was not so obvious whether, why, or to what extent monastics should shun silk. The most prominent points of contact between society and the saṅgha were of course the bodies of its representatives, which were thus the primary fields of conflict over monastic uses of silk. What kinds of garments were monastics allowed to wear? All of the vinayas circulating in medieval China unanimously agreed that silk was an acceptable material for use in the monastic uniform, the *kāṣāya* (*jiasha* 袈裟), or, cassocks. This fact would often be overlooked by medieval Chinese authors, monastic and lay, who invoked Indian precedent in arguing against the use of silkworm products for Chinese Buddhists. But in all these vinayas there was also a precept against silk, not necessarily for monastic clothing but for cloth possessions more generally. For medieval Chinese authors this precept would further muddle the Indian Buddhist stance on sericulture, an industry which was otherwise a primary staple of the Chinese saṅgha’s financial solvency and social integrity. In the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, which by the early-eighth century had become the main source for Chinese discourses on monastic

³⁶ *Renwang huguo bore jingshu* 仁王護國般若經疏, T no. 1705, 33:282c; *Renwang bore jingshu* 仁王般若經疏, T no. 1707, 33:349b.

³⁷ For Yijing’s views on silk, which often directly contradicted Daoxuan’s, see Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 98–99; Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 119–24; and J. Takakusu, trans., *A Record of the Buddhist Religion as Practised in India and the Malay Archipelago (A.D. 671–695)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), pp. 58–60.

discipline, this precept appears as item number eleven of the faults requiring forfeiture of goods and expiation through confession:

At one time the Buddha was in the Wilderness realm when the Group-of-Six bhikṣus were making new bedding mixed with silk from wild silkworms.³⁸ Some looked for finished silk; others looked for unfinished silk. Some looked for dyed, some undyed. Some looked for new, some for old. They went to a sericulture household and asked for silk. [The sericulturist] replied, “Wait for the silkworms to boil.” The Group-of-Six bhikṣus stood aside to wait and watched as the cocoons burst open and the silkworm pupae cried out. The laymen who observed this all disparaged [the monks], saying, “Do the śramaṇa (renouncer) disciples of Śākyamuni have no shame for murdering living beings? Outwardly they claim to practice the true Dharma, but how is this true Dharma – begging for silkworm cocoons to make new bedding?” 爾時佛在曠野國界。時六群比丘，作新雜野蠶綿臥具。彼索未成綿，或索已成綿；或索已染未染；或索新者，或索故者。至養蠶家語言，“我等須綿。”彼報言，“小待，須蠶熟時來。”彼六群比丘在邊住待看，彼暴繭時蠶蛹作聲。諸居士見盡共譏嫌言，“沙門釋子無有慚愧害眾生命？外自稱言，我修正法。如是何有正法，求索蠶繭作新臥具？”

Among the bhikṣus who heard this criticism was one who practiced *dhūta[guṇa]* (austerities), was contented with few desires, enjoyed studying the precepts, and knew contrition. He upbraided the Group-of-Six bhikṣus, saying, “How could you beg for silkworm cocoons to make new bedding?” After thus criticizing them he went to the World Honored One, bowed his head before his feet, sat to his side, and told him the whole story. On account of this matter the World Honored One gathered all the bhikṣus. He rebuked the Group-of-Six bhikṣus, saying, “You have committed an offense – an offense against proper deportment; an offense against śramaṇa Dharma; an offense against pure practice; an offense against accordant practice. None of this should be done. How can this Group-of-Six bhikṣus beg for silkworm cocoons to make new bedding?” 以如上事呵責諸比丘聞。其中有少欲知足行頭陀樂學戒知慚愧者，嫌責六群比丘，“云何求索蠶繭作新臥具？”如上呵責已，往世尊所頭面禮足在一面坐。以此因緣具白世尊。世尊以此因緣集諸比丘，呵責六群比丘言，“汝所為非，非威儀非沙門法非淨行非隨順行。所不應為。云何六群比丘求索蠶繭作新臥具？”

³⁸ See Clarke, *Family Matters*, p. 199n22, for sources on these “Group-of-Six” monks, who are said to have caused the Buddha to institute many of the precepts.

After rebuking them he told all of the bhikṣus, “These foolish men; of the various sources of defilement the first is breaking precepts. From now on bhikṣus shall be bound to this precept, based upon the ten principles (underlying the establishment of the saṅgha), up unto the preservation of the True Dharma.”³⁹ 呵責已告諸比丘, “此癡人, 多種有漏處最初犯戒。自今已去與比丘結戒, 集十句義乃至正法久住。”

Wishing to elaborate this precept, it is said that if a bhikṣu makes new bedding mixed with silk from wild silkworms, this is *naihsargika-prāyaścittika* (a fault requiring forfeiture and expiation). The meaning of “bhikṣu” is as above. Here “mixed” means including wool, *karpāsa* (cotton), *kokila* (feathers), milk-leaf grass, *kṣaumā* (flax), or hemp.⁴⁰ If a bhikṣu himself mixes in silk from wild silkworms to make new bedding, and he finishes it, this is *naihsargika-prāyaścittika*. If he does this but does not finish it, it is *duṣkṛta* (a minor transgression requiring confession). If he tells another person to make it, and it is finished, this is *naihsargika-prāyaścittika*. If this is done but not finished, it is *duṣkṛta*. Having another do it, whether finished or not, is *duṣkṛta*. This [material] should be forfeited. Here forfeit means to chop it up finely with an axe, mix it with mud, and smear it on the walls or floor [as plaster]. For bhikṣuṇī (nuns) this is *duṣkṛta*; for *sikṣamāṇā* (probationers, between novice and full ordination), *śrāmaṇera* (novice monks), and *śrāmaṇerī* (novice nuns) it is *duṣkṛta*. This is termed a violation. 欲說戒者當如是說, 若比丘雜野蠶綿作新臥具, 尼薩耆波逸提。比丘義如上。雜者: 若毳, 若劫貝, 拘遮羅, 乳葉草, 若芻摩, 若麻。若比丘自用雜野蠶綿作新臥具, 成者, 尼薩耆波逸提。作而不成, 突吉羅。若語他人作, 成者, 尼薩耆波逸提。作而不成, 突吉羅。爲他作, 成不成, 突吉羅。此應捨。是中捨者, 若以斧, 若以斤細, 剉斬和泥, 若塗壁若塗埵。比丘尼, 突吉羅, 式叉摩那, 沙彌, 沙彌尼, 突吉羅, 是謂爲犯。

It is a non-violation if, the finished [bedding] having been obtained, one chops it up with an axe, mixes it with mud, and smears it upon the walls or floor. It was not a violation when first done and not yet regulated by precepts. Being in a state of mental delusion and tormented by afflictions, [the Group-of-Six monks cannot be held responsible] (item 11). 不犯者: 若得已成者, 若以斧

³⁹ On these ten principles 十句義 see Ciyi 慈怡, ed., *Foguang dacidian* 佛光大辭典 (Taipei: Foguang wenhua shiye youxian gongsi, 1988–1989) 1, p. 409B.

⁴⁰ I take *juzheluo* 拘遮羅 to be a variant of *juqiluo* 拘耆羅 as transliteration for *kokila*, which is a black cuckoo. See Ciyi, *Foguang dacidian* 7, p. 6579B–C.

斤剝斬和泥，若塗壁若塗堦，無犯。無犯者，最初未制戒，癡狂心亂痛惱所纏（十一竟）。⁴¹

The narrative portion of this precept begins by situating its audience in the so-called Wilderness Realm, which was a Chinese translation of Ālavī, the name of a kingdom up the Ganges River from Vāraṇasī and south of Śrāvastī.⁴² The identity of this location is confirmed by the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, but the *Mahāsāṃghika*, *Mūlasarvāstivāda*, and *Sarvāstivāda* vinayas instead set the scene in Vaiśālī, Śrāvastī, and Kauśāmbī, respectively. Taken together, these vinayas would indicate to their Chinese readers that silk was a mainstay of textile production across the Ganges River basin, since before the time of the Buddha – including some of the most sacred stations of original Indian Buddhism.⁴³ The *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* notes from the start that these bad-apple Group-of-Six monks were making bedding mixed with silk from wild cocoons.⁴⁴ This means that they were using cocoons scavenged from the forest, rather than raised domestically, and then mixing the cocoon filaments with other materials such as wool, hemp, or cotton. However, lest one conclude that Buddhist monks were thus innocent of silkworm murder, and that Indians produced silk only from broken cocoons discarded by their silkworm-moths – as claimed by both medieval Chinese exegetes and modern scholars⁴⁵ – all five of these Indian vinayas then go on to describe how the monks sought to satisfy their silken desires by frequenting local sericulture households.

⁴¹ *Sifen lü* 四分律, T no. 1428, 22:613C-14A.

⁴² See Ciyi, *Foguang dacidian* 4, pp. 3691B-92A.

⁴³ A similar point is made by Hirakawa Akira 平川彰, *Nihyaku-gojukkai no kenkyū* 二百五十戒の研究 (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1993), pp. 224-25. Some assert that sericulture did not reach India until the early centuries of the Common Era (e.g., Heleanor B. Feltham, “Justinian and the International Silk Trade,” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 194 [2009], p. 12). This may be true for the domestication of the *Bombyx mori* silkworm species, but other parts of the sericulture process were practiced on the subcontinent long before then. Techniques for stifling silkworm larvae inside their cocoons and reeling silk whole therefrom were known in the ancient Indus Valley Civilization, as seen in Harappan bronze artifacts dating to ca. 2600-2200 BC that reveal intact silk fibers – not spun together from broken filaments – reeled from cocoons of the wild *Antheraea* silkworm species. See I. L. Good, J. M. Kenoyer, and R. H. Meadow, “New Evidence for Early Silk in the Indus Civilization,” *Archaeometry* 51.3 (2009), pp. 457-66.

⁴⁴ Only the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* concurs; the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* says that the monks were “making *kauseya* (silk) bedding” and the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* says they were “making new *kauseya* bedding,” while the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* says they were making felt with wool before other monks alerted them to the superiority of silk felt.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Liu, *Silk and Religion*, pp. 50-52, which is followed by Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 98-99. As noted above, archaeological evidence indicates that silk production around northern India did involve silkworm killing, from at least the third millennium BC, even if cocoons were harvested from undomesticated species. Textual evidence examined in the present article concurs.

Within these households silkworms suffered gruesome deaths, being boiled alive to still their metamorphoses and dissolve the sericine congealing their cocoon filaments. The monks personally witnessed this silkworm murder – pointedly with both eyes and ears, as all but the (Mūla)sarvāstivāda versions graphically detail the bursting of cocoons and the wriggling and squealing of poached silkworms.⁴⁶ The *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* has the monks personally sticking their fingers in the cauldron to make sure its heat sufficed; and in the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* the monks not only instructed sericulturists to further submerge the squealing silkworms and ensure their boiling drowns, but some monks did the dirty job of cocoon boiling themselves. In Ālavī, Vaiśālī, and Śrāvastī one might thus have expected to find murderous sericulture industries, sometimes with Buddhist monks personally involved, but according to the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, Kauśāmbī in particular was the place where “many silkworms were killed” for want of “valuable silk, yarn, clothing, and cocoons.”⁴⁷ This vinaya explains that monks often went begging for silk in Kauśāmbī, telling the local laymen that all the hard work of unwinding cocoons and weaving silk distracted bhikṣus from doing their jobs of scriptural study and meditation. But rather than give up silk to spend time pursuing their monastic vocations, these monks chose to demand silk as alms from households that killed silkworms.

This choice at once occasioned the heated rebuke of observing lay followers, who in the Sarvāstivāda version began by accusing the monks of not living up to their word:

The śramaṇa disciples of Śākyamuni say that they are good and virtuous, but they make new *kaūṣeya* (silk) bedding.... Here we lose the benefit of making offerings [to them]. These men are insatiable, hard to support. 諸沙門釋子，自言善好有德，而作新襦施耶敷具... 是中我等，失利供養，是難滿難養，無厭足人。⁴⁸

The Dharmaguptaka version translated above also emphasizes lay concern with congruency between the outward claims and actual practices of Śākyamuni’s disciples, but the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* in par-

⁴⁶ This description of bursting cocoons is seemingly at odds with the purpose of boiling them, which was usually to prevent their resident silkworm moths from breaking through them. As James Benn suggests (personal communication), this raises the question of whether the authors and audiences of this tale ever actually witnessed sericulture, or whether this tale might represent some sort of Indian *imaginaire* of domestic silk production. That the worms were thought to vocalize is more clearly indicated in other versions of this vinaya story, which use the term *jiu* 啾 (animal sound). See n. 66, below.

⁴⁷ *Shisong lü* 十誦律, T no. 1435, 23:47c: 此國綿貴縷貴衣貴繭貴，多殺蠶故。

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

particular focuses on the perception of monastic hypocrisy harbored by lay followers:

You [monks] always preach the Dharma of not killing living beings, but now you're instructing people to kill living beings. This is not śramaṇa practice; it violates the śramaṇa Dharma... [Monks] always talk of compassion and forbearance toward living beings, but now they personally boil silkworm cocoons. This is not śramaṇa practice; it violates the śramaṇa Dharma. 汝常說不殺生法，而今教人殺生。無沙門行，破沙門法... 此等常說慈忍眾生，而今親自煮繭。無沙門行，破沙門法。⁴⁹

In these terms, the problem with monks killing silkworms seems to have been that monks otherwise claimed to abstain from killing. As the laymen of the Mahāsāṃghika version put it,

I have heard that the śramaṇa Gautama through countless skillful means extols not killing and disparages murderers. How can you be a śramaṇa disciple of Śākyamuni? Because you kill living beings you have lost the śramaṇa Dharma. 我聞沙門瞿曇，無數方便，讚歎不殺，毀訾殺者。云何沙門釋子？故殺眾生，失沙門法。⁵⁰

Monks were defined as those who refrained from killing living beings; if one killed even insects he could not be properly deemed a monk. The main point here would therefore seem to be the shaping of social identities – how to demarcate the boundaries between Buddhist monks, other śramaṇa groups, and especially lay devotees:

We [householders] boil cocoons and bhikṣus do the same. What is the difference between us and the śramaṇa disciples of Śākyamuni? 我等煮繭，比丘亦爾。沙門釋子，與我何異？⁵¹

With these distinctions thus breached and monastic identity blurred, the laymen of Kauśāmbī (in the Sarvāstivāda version) lamented the absence of merit for giving alms to monks. Similarly, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* stresses the failure of lay-monastic symbiosis thereby:

People should know that the śramaṇa disciples of Śākyamuni are killers. They do not reject harmful occupations, personally making or having others make bedding from new silk of wild silkworms. By doing so they are killing many sentient beings. Why should we offer fine clothing and food as alms to these bald-headed de-

⁴⁹ *Wufen lü* 五分律, T no. 1421, 22:34C.

⁵⁰ *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, T no. 1425, 22:308A.

⁵¹ *Wufen lü*, T no. 1421, 22:34C.

stroyers of living things? 諸人當知, 此沙門釋子, 是殺生者. 不捨害業, 自作使人用新野蠶絲作臥具. 若用此者, 殺多有情. 如何以好衣食, 施彼禿人斷物命者?⁵²

While the laymen in all these vinaya accounts disparaged the monks as wanton murderers for their roles in silk production, the matter was brought before the Buddha not because the monks were killing silkworms, but because the laity reviled them for it. And again, these lay rebukes seem to be less about the fact that monks were killing – which was apparently kosher for sericulturists, whom the vinayas never similarly targeted⁵³ – than the fact that monks were supposed to be defined as non-killing types. Further, the *Dharmaguptaka* and *Sarvāstivāda* accounts both note that the monk who tattled on the silk-mongering monks was a master of austerities free from desires, thus foregrounding concern with luxury indulgence rather than killing – as with the complaint in the *Sarvāstivāda* and *Mūlasarvāstivāda* versions that monks were therefore “hard to support,” and with the stipulation in the latter that the use of old, worn out *kaūṣeya* was *not* a violation. Indeed, the monks’ failure to maintain proper deportment 威儀 was the first concern raised by the Buddha in the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, before he gathered the assembly to promulgate this new regulation.

What regulation did he institute, exactly? The five vinayas are fairly uniform at the start of the formal juridical discourse that follows: if a monk makes bedding mixed with silk, it is *naiḥsargika-prāyaścittika*, a fault requiring surrender of the offending goods and expiation of wrongdoing through public confession and repentance. Otherwise, the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* specifies “mixed silk from wild cocoons” and the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* includes silk mixed with black wool. But from there the precept becomes a free-for-all across its different vinaya delineations, with qualifications introduced on the basis of whether the silk is new or old, pure or mixed with other materials; whether the bedding is completed or not; whether it is made by pressing or weaving; whether the monk makes it himself or has another make it for him; whether the offender is a monk, nun, or other class of monastic; and so on. The

⁵² *Genbenshuo yiqieyoubu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶, T no. 1442, 23:735c. The fact that this version, like the *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya*, stresses the use of uncultivated silkworms while still claiming that sericulture was murderous, further suggests that wild cocoons were harvested with pupae still inside.

⁵³ Here one might recall Benavides’ remark (following Tambiah) that “in order for monks to live in the proper manner, laypeople have to break the precepts—for example, they must kill in order to feed the monks’ meat” (Gustavo Benavides, “Economy,” in Lopez, Jr., ed., *Critical Terms*, p. 87). From this perspective, monks should not make silk because this usurps the lay donor’s proper role (i.e., killing silkworms), and thus reduces that donor’s chance at earning merit.

Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya especially provides the kind of juridical nitpicking for which vinaya texts are well known, detailing all the permutations of silk use that might otherwise have provided loopholes through the rule.⁵⁴ This version of the precept is unique in requiring forfeiture and atonement for all uses of silk, whereas other vinayas provide circumstances in which the offense is only *duṣkṛta*, a minor transgression requiring confession. It is also unusual in proscribing silk for monks' cassocks, specifically the set of three garments (*sanyi* 三衣) – *saṃghāṭī* (*sengqieli* 僧伽梨; outer robes), *uttarāsaṅga* (*yuduoluoseng* 鬱多羅僧; upper garments), and *antarvāsa* (*antuohui* 安陀會; undergarments) – even though it elsewhere follows all other vinayas in permitting silk for the *kāśāya*.⁵⁵ In this precept the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* uses the term *fuju* 敷具, which also appears in other vinayas that do not specify types of clothing, and in this case would seem most logically to reference cloth items that could serve as both bedding and body covering. As I discuss below, the question of whether or not this precept governed cassocks in particular would become an issue of some contention in medieval China, especially by Daoxuan's time when imperially gifted silk robes were becoming *de rigueur*.

The *Mahāsāṃghika* account also differs from others in providing no direct exceptions to the rule, or “non-violations.” The Sarvāstivāda version, for example, stipulates that “it is a non-violation if one obtains already finished bedding,”⁵⁶ which accords with the monks' complaints at the outset of this version that making silk takes too much time and distracts them from studying and meditating. So here, the problem is not that monks indulged in luxury, killed living beings, or even used silk at all, but that they wasted their time making bedding. The *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* adjures similarly, but also allows recycled materials so seems more concerned with monks possessing shiny new silk:

If [a monk] obtains materials that are already finished or are old and used, or if he works with, receives, and uses old materials that have been recycled, this is a non-violation. 若得先已成, 或舊用物, 或是舊物, 更新料理而受用者, 並皆無犯.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Mohe sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22:308A–B.

⁵⁵ The “three garments” are described in John Kieschnick, “The Symbolism of the Monk's Robe in China,” *AM* 3d ser. 12.1 (1999), pp. 12–14, and idem, *Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 87–93. The term *kāśāya* (literally meaning “ochre,” the color of traditional Indian cassocks) can refer to outer robes or monastic robes in general.

⁵⁶ *Shisong lü*, T no. 1435, 23:48A: 若得已成敷具, 不犯.

⁵⁷ *Genbenshuo yiqieyoubu pinaiye*, T no. 1442, 23:736A.

The Dharmaguptaka version translated above also makes allowance for a non-violation ruling, if the silk is chopped up and used in plaster (presumably) for monastery cells. And by specifying *new* silk bedding it leaves open the possibility that used silk is permissible – even if does not say so directly like the (Mūla)Sarvāstivāda versions. The Mahāsāṃghika precept also specifies new silk, but differs from the Dharmaguptaka in stipulating that the offending silk cloth be surrendered to the saṅgha as a whole, after which it can be used freely for carpeting or curtains.⁵⁸ Likewise, the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya* states:

It should be surrendered to the saṅgha, not to other people. The saṅgha can use it to spread over the ground, whether as a hammock or upon a bed. With the exception of the bhikṣu who surrenders his bedding, the rest of the saṅgha can sit or lie on it in proper order [of seniority]. 應捨與僧，不得捨與餘人。僧以敷地，若敷繩床及臥床上。除捨褥比丘，餘一切僧，隨次坐臥。⁵⁹

With all of these mitigating circumstances, conditions of non-violation, and otherwise fully permissible monastic uses of silk, it becomes difficult to determine what exactly this precept was against and why.⁶⁰ The *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* would seem the most clearly opposed to silk, even mixed with other materials, whether made by oneself or another, as it demands that the cloth be pulverized as reparation. But then it leaves an opening for use of recycled silk – seemingly regardless of whether silkworms died in its making. The other vinayas also appear to forget the problem of killing by the end: the Mahāsāṃghika and Mahīśāsaka versions allow ill-gotten silk for the saṅgha’s use after its surrender, while the Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda specifically permit monks to beg for and possess silk bedding that is ready-made – just so long as they don’t curtail their more properly monkish endeavors to become sericulturists themselves – even while the latter vinaya also shows concern for new silk.

One might surmise, on the whole, that this precept accords with vinaya treatments of meat, which they prohibit only when a monk sees,

⁵⁸ *Mohe sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22:308B.

⁵⁹ *Wufen lü*, T no. 1421, 22:35A.

⁶⁰ Hirakawa, *Nihyaku-gojukkai* 2, pp. 223–45, similarly highlights the inconsistencies between the different versions of this precept (especially in comparison with the Pāli), but argues that it was ultimately against monks having silk made for the express purpose of mixing into their bedding/carpeting (*fūju* 敷具) – i.e., the precept was not about *kāṣāya* (contra Daoxuan), and it was not intended to ban monastic use of silk entirely. He also takes these unresolved discrepancies to indicate that later generations of Indian monks did not make *fūju* with silk, so had no need for further clarification. This was certainly not the case in medieval China, as discussed below.

hears, or suspects slaughter committed on his behalf,⁶¹ since almost all its versions (except the [Mūla]sarvāstivāda) recount the vivid scene of monks standing by to watch squealing silkworms boil. But these “three pure conditions” are not directly invoked in any version of the precept and they are not employed in its expressly juridical sections to determine the propriety of silk. These purity conditions are also belied by versions that render ready-made silk bedding a non-violation, which would seemingly allow visitation rights for monks at sericulture households (where all could be seen, heard, or suspected). Fortunately, however, a few clear points emerge from all this muddle: according to all the vinaya translations circulating in medieval China, sericulture was widespread in India at the time of the Buddha, both the murderous kind and otherwise, but either way silk was not deemed categorically improper for monastic use, certainly not immoral per se, and concerns with luxury indulgence and (inciting and observing) silkworm killing were largely subsumed under the issue of how lay donors would recognize and relate to Śākyamuni’s śramaṇas.

CHINESE BUDDHIST SILK PRECEPTS AND
THE RHETORIC OF MAHĀYĀNA COMPASSION

This concern with the social integrity of the saṅgha was carried over into vinaya commentaries written by eminent Chinese scholar-monks who sought to stake their monastic identities on the contention that silk production was a morally bankrupt enterprise. These authors aimed to ban the use of silk by members of the Chinese saṅgha, especially for monastic robes, and toward this end they enlisted the Indian vinaya precept against making silk bedding. On the one hand, Chinese commentaries on this precept gloss over its marked ambiguity by citing it to ban the use of silk; but on the other hand they also reproduce its mitigating conditions and non-violations, and on its basis introduce further allowances for silk use in the saṅgha – like setting up monastic cocoon markets. To strengthen their case that banning silk robes was the true intent of this precept, Chinese commentators adduced Indian sūtras as authority in asserting that sericulture was inherently immoral, thus interpolating Mahāyāna ideals of universal compassion into otherwise juridical discourses governing social comportment. Delineating monastic identity remained the point for these Chinese authors, but they would have their monks and nuns defined by abstinence from silk, which would thus ideally demonstrate perfect inner compassion.

⁶¹ Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 92–93, raises this possibility.

At the same time, however, these Chinese vinaya commentaries also follow their Indian sources in backing off claims to total abstinence from silk products. Against the backdrop of the Chinese saṅgha's deep immersion in local silk cultures and economies, this discrepancy perhaps suggests rhetorical dimensions to the application of Mahāyāna morality in Chinese prohibitions against silk garments. If silk could be used anywhere but the monastic robes – which were monks' primary public signifiers – then the problem with silk was not really its murderous origin, but rather what it represented when draped across human bodies. This perspective is evinced by the Indian vinaya precept discussed above; the difference in Chinese commentaries on this precept is that they claim a stance of moral perfection underlying its establishment, while at the same time carving out space for continued monastic involvement in the Chinese silk trade.

The most prominent example of this dynamic is provided by the eminent vinaya master Daoxuan, who wrote several detailed commentaries on monastic precepts in which he expounded his views on the impropriety of silk.⁶² Daoxuan's main concern was with the monastic uniform, and the specific materials that monks should or should not be permitted to wear. Several issues came to the fore in Daoxuan's discourses about silk robes: the basic fact that sericulture involved killing living beings; the ascetic impulse toward renouncing sensual desires and social entanglements; and widespread Chinese associations between silk and material luxury. Based on the Indian vinaya precept discussed above, together with more properly moral admonitions from influential Mahāyāna sūtras, he classified the possession of such robes as an offense requiring expiation and forfeiture. Daoxuan's most oft-cited arguments along these lines appear in his *Notes on [Monastic] Practice Based on the Four Part Vinaya, Abridged and Supplemented* (*Sifenlü shanfan*

⁶² Daoxuan's disapproval of silk cassocks is expressed throughout his vinaya writings, including his two main discourses on the monastic uniform: the "Two Categories of Cassocks" ("Eryi zongbie" 二衣總別) chapter of his *Notes on [Monastic] Practice* (*Xingshi chao* 行事鈔, T no. 1804, 40:104c–17c), and his *Monastic Clothing Regulations* (*Shimen zhangfu yi* 釋門章服儀, T no. 1804), composed some thirty years later, in 657. On the former source, see Kawano Satoshi 河野訓 et al., "Sō-i shiryō kenkyū: *Shibunritsu gyōjishō ni-i sōbetsu-hen hombun* (shō) *narabi ni yakkai*" 僧衣資料研究, 四分律行事鈔二衣總別篇, 本文(抄)並びに譯解, *Bukkyō bunka* 佛教文化 18 (1987), pp. 85–114, and 19 (1988), pp. 74–86; and Koichi Shinohara, "The Kasāya Robe of the Past Buddha Kāśyapa in the Miraculous Instruction Given to the Vinaya Master Daoxuan (596–667)," *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 13.2 (2000), pp. 314–21. The *Monastic Clothing Regulations* includes detailed discussion of silk; see Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 112–18, 129–82. The tenor of these writings is accordant with that of Daoxuan's *Xingshi chao* silk precept, presently under consideration, although the *Monastic Clothing Regulations* justifies its position more on Mahāyāna scriptural grounds than on the basis of vinaya stipulations. Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 103–12, also includes a useful examination of Daoxuan's *Xingshi chao* silk precept, to which the present discussion is indebted.

buque xingshi chao 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔), compiled between 626 and 630, which was one of the most influential vinaya primers in medieval China.⁶³ Among the text's enumerations of the Indian vinaya prohibitions regarding monastic properties, Daoxuan gave his authoritative pronouncement on the precept against silk:

Begging for silkworm silk to make *kāṣāya*, precept eleven. 乞蠶綿作袈裟戒十一。

The *Sarvāstivāda [Vinaya] Commentary* gives four reasons [for this precept]: one, to prevent slander [of monks]; two, to increase faith and reverence in them; three, to allow them to practice the path in peace; and four, to prevent harming living beings.⁶⁴ 多論四意: 一爲止誹謗故, 二長信敬故, 三爲行道得安樂故, 四不害眾生命故。

In the *Four Part [Vinaya]*, because bhikṣus went to a sericulturist and begged for finished and unfinished silk to make bedding, then stood by and watched while the cocoons burst and [silkworms] cried out, they were rebuked and this precept was established. Whether made from pure [silk] or mixed with wool, *karpāsa*, hemp, or other kinds of thread to complete it, [the material should be] cut up finely with an axe, mixed with mud, and smeared on the walls and floor [as plaster]. 四分因比丘, 至養蠶家, 乞未成綿已成綿, 作臥具, 便待看暴繭作聲, 因訶制之。若純作, 若雜以毳劫具, 若麻及餘縷, 雜作成者, 若斤斧細剝斬, 和泥塗壁及埵。

[According to] the *Sarvāstivāda [Vinaya] Commentary*, silk is termed *kaūṣeya*. [It is produced] as with the sericulture method in the land of Qin (China).⁶⁵ If one begs for cocoons, silk, or thread that is woven into cloth to make clothing, it is [a fault requiring] forfeiture. (“Bedding” [elsewhere in this *Commentary*] refers to the three [monastic] garments. Bedding is a general term for these three garments; they are similar to coverlets that are laid on the ground, so they are called the same thing.) Two kinds of clothing

⁶³ For more on this text and the sizeable commentarial tradition that it spawned, see Fujii-yoshi Masumi 藤善真澄, *Dōsen den no kenkyū* 道宣傳の研究 (Kyoto: Kyōto Daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2002), pp. 112–16, and Satō Tatsugen 佐藤達文, *Chūgoku Bukkyō ni okeru kairitsu no kenkyū* 中国仏教における戒律の研究 (Tokyo: Mokujisha, 1986), p. 23off.

⁶⁴ *Sapoduo pini piposha*, T no. 1440, 23:533A.

⁶⁵ In this extract, parentheses indicate Daoxuan's comments, and square brackets, as with the other translation extracts in this paper, are the author's insertions. As seen here, the text includes material written from a Chinese perspective, so is not all translated from Indic sources. It was probably composed early-5th c. See Funayama Tōru, “Masquerading as Translation: Examples of Chinese Lectures by Indian Scholar-Monks in the Six Dynasties Period,” *AM* 3d ser. 19.1–2 (2006), pp. 44–45. *Kaūṣeya* is defined as “originating from cocoon” in a Sanskrit dictionary of the 4th c. BC; see Marta Zuchowska, “From China to Palmyra: The Value of Silk,” *Śvāitowit* 11.52/A (2013), p. 143.

are made in the kingdom [of Kauśāmbī]. For the first, they split the filaments and spread them out in layers, like how felt is made.⁶⁶ For the second they make the silk into thread and weave it into clothing. Both are used to make clothing that can be received and worn [in accordance with proper decorum] because they are obtained as alms; making them [oneself] is a fault requiring forfeiture and atonement.⁶⁷ 多論中: 僑奢耶者, 此是綿名。如秦地養蠶法。若乞爾乞綿乞縷, 織布成衣者墮。言臥具者, 是三衣也。(即三衣總名臥具。猶如此方被之相, 故取通號。) 外國作衣, 凡有二種。一細擘布貯, 如作氈法。二綿作縷, 織成衣也。亦得作三衣。受持以乞得故, 作成捨墮。

The *Well-perceived* [*Vinaya Commentary*] says that mixing with just a single fiber [of silk] is still a violation. *Kauśeya* means silk filament.⁶⁸ What first comes out of the silkworm's mouth is called *hu*.⁶⁹ 善見云: 乃至雜一毛便犯。僑奢耶者, 絲中微者, 蠶口初出名忽。

The *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* says, whether fasteners,⁷⁰ warp or woof are laced [with silk], all constitute a fault requiring forfeiture and atonement; receiving it is a transgression.⁷¹ 僧祇云: 紐揲經緯穿雜者, 一切捨墮。受用得越。

[According to] the *Angulimāla Sūtra*, if silk or leather goods should come indirectly, one who has forsaken killing, receives alms, and upholds the precepts should not accept them. This is the bhikṣu Dharma. To accept these shows lack of compassion, even if one is not breaking the precepts. 央掘經: 繒綿皮物, 若展轉來, 離殺者手施持戒人, 不應受者, 是比丘法。若受者非悲, 不破戒。

[According to] the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, leather shoes and *kauśeya* clothing should not be possessed. This is the true Buddhist teaching. Nowadays there is a dhyāna (meditation) group that wears

⁶⁶ Perhaps this explains why cocoons were boiled to bursting in the vinaya precept accounts (see n. 46) – with the split filaments being matted as described here. Or, perhaps more likely, this could imply the use of wild, discarded cocoons, which would have been broken already.

⁶⁷ *Sapoduo pini piposha*, T no. 1440, 23:533A–B.

⁶⁸ *Shanjian lü piposha*, T no. 1462, 24:776C.

⁶⁹ Cf. Dajue's 大覺 (fl. 712) *Sifen lü chaopi* 四分律鈔批, X no. 736, 42:843B: 蠶口初出名忽。十忽爲一絲; 十絲爲一毫; 十毫曰釐; 十釐曰分; 十分曰寸; 十寸曰尺; 十尺曰丈; 十丈曰引; 四十尺曰匹; 五十尺曰端也。What first comes out of the silkworm's mouth is called *hu*. Ten *hu* is one *si*; ten *si* is one *hao*; ten *hao* is called *li*; ten *li* is *fen*; ten *fen* is *cun*; ten *cun* is *chi*; ten *chi* is *zhang*; ten *zhang* is *jin*; forty *chi* is *pi*; fifty *chi* is *duan*.

⁷⁰ “Fasteners” translates Daoxuan's *niudie* 紐揲, which Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 105–6, takes to be an error for *niudie* 紐揲 in the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*. *Niu* is the string or ribbon used to secure the outer robe, while *die* would be the small square patches sewn onto each of the four corners of the outer robe to fortify its seams. See Kawano, “Sō-i shiryō kenkyū,” *Bukkyō bunka* 18 (1987), p. 88; and Kieschnick, “Symbolism of the Monk's Robe,” pp. 20–21. Cf. Qu Dacheng 屈大成, trans., *Sifen jieben Daoxuan lüshi shuchao yizhu* 四分戒本道宣律師疏鈔譯注 (Taipei: Fotuo jiaoyu jijinhui, 2013), p. 190.

⁷¹ *Mohe sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22:308A–B.

mugwort cloth; how could this not accord with the teaching?⁷² 涅槃中：皮革履屣，僑奢耶衣，如是衣服，悉皆不畜，是正經律。今有一方禪眾，皆著艾布者，豈不順教。

The *Five Part [Vinaya]* says that after receiving silk as alms from a silkworm household, a monk should not enter [the household] himself.⁷³ 五分云：蠶家施綿，受已施僧，不得自入。

From this comparison of [vinayas from] the various [Indian] schools, we see the strict intention of this regulation. Even [using silk from] wild silkworms is a violation; how much more so that from silk households? Even mixing with a *hu* [of silk] is a violation; how much more so making [clothing from] pure [silk]? Many people beg for [silk] to make the three garments. It is fitting that these be cut up and discarded; it is not proper to keep and wear them. Wearing [silk] is a crime, as the vinayas clearly indicate, just like all the vinayas say it is a violation to visit a butcher or dairy to beg for flesh, blood, or milk. 以此諸部相對故，知所制意重。野蠶尚犯，何況家蠶。雜忽尚犯，何況純作。多有人乞覓而作三衣。此合斬捨，不合受持著。著得罪，如律明示，如諸律所明，不得往屠家乞肉血，及作蘇乳家乞乳並犯。

Thus [according to] the *Sarvāstivāda [Vinaya] Commentary* it is a non-violation to make silk oneself with cocoons begged from households without silkworms.⁷⁴ [If they are begged] in order to sell, and they have insects in them, it is *duṣkṛta* (a minor transgression requiring confession). Begging for quilted clothing of finished silk is a non-violation. If insect-damaged [cocoons] are used to make the bedding, it is a non-violation.⁷⁵ Making inappropriate amounts of clothing or bedding is *duṣkṛta*.⁷⁶ 故多論：若無蠶家乞繭自作綿，無罪。爲出賣故有蟲者，吉羅。若乞成綿貯衣，不犯。若蟲壞者作敷具，無犯。作不應量衣一切敷具，吉羅。

⁷² Reference to Nanyue Huisi's 南嶽慧思 (515-577) disciples; see Qu, *Sifen jieben*, p. 191n720.

⁷³ *Wufen lü*, T no. 1421, 22:34C-35A.

⁷⁴ I.e., a place that collected used and discarded cocoons from the forest, rather than one that cultivated silkworms and/or killed them; see Qu, *Sifen jieben*, p. 192n723. However, it is unclear why Daoxuan and/or the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary* would here permit monks to make silk personally. Even if only discarded cocoons were used, this does not resolve the contradiction with the prohibition elsewhere in the *Commentary* and in the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* against monks making bedding themselves – seemingly regardless of the material employed.

⁷⁵ I.e., silk made from cocoons that the silkworm moths had already broken open and vacated.

⁷⁶ *Sapoduo pini piposha*, T no. 1440, 23:533A-B.

In the [Four Part] *Vinaya*, whether making [silk bedding] oneself or instructing another to make it, if completed it is a fault requiring forfeiture; if not completed it is *duṣkṛta*. Having all [kinds of silk bedding] made by another is *duṣkṛta*. It is a non-violation if [a monk] receives already complete [bedding], cuts it up with an axe, mixes it with mud, and smears it on the floor. 律中: 自作教他作成者, 犯墮, 不成, 吉羅. 若爲他作, 一切吉羅. 不犯者, 若得已成者, 斧斬和泥塗埵.⁷⁷

The first point to note here is that Daoxuan gives this precept his own, new title – “begging for silkworm silk to make *kāṣāya*” – which indicates from the start his liberal interpretation of the *vinaya* sources at his disposal. All the translated versions of this precept refer to the offending silk goods as either *fuju* 敷具 or *woju* 臥具, both of which mean textile materials that were spread out on the ground as matting or bedding.⁷⁸ Only the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* also uses the term *zhanyi* 氈衣 (felt clothing), after its enumeration of monastic robes that should not be made with silk. But, curiously, Daoxuan fails to note this strict and clear ban on silk cassocks. Instead, he cites the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary* as evidence that *woju* means *kāṣāya*, even though this text never actually equates the two. Suwa Gijun 諏訪義純 argues that Daoxuan was especially concerned with cassocks in his commentary because of the growing trend during his time of eminent monks receiving symbols of imperial favor in the form of silken robes, which Daoxuan thought were ill-suited to the *saṅgha*’s proper public image.⁷⁹ For like-minded *vinaya* masters in the following generations, this problem would become all the more acute, as imperially gifted silk robes became increasingly coveted commodities. For example, some forty-five years after Daoxuan’s death, his subcommentator Dajue 大覺 (fl. 712) felt strongly compelled to explain in detail why Daoxuan was right about this precept governing *kāṣāya* in particular:

[Daoxuan’s] *Commentary* says “general term ‘bedding’ (*woju*),” etc. On this precept the masters are divided. [Dao]xuan says it means *kāṣāya*. [Fa]li says it is difficult to discern. The *Four Part [Vinaya]* uses the term *woju* and [the *vinayas*] of other sects have *fuju* or *bei* 被 (quilt).⁸⁰ [Ding]bin says that in the *Vinayapīṭaka* it is *woru* 臥蓐

⁷⁷ *Sifenlü shanfan buque xingshi chao*, T no. 1804, 40:68c–69a.

⁷⁸ Hirakawa, *Nihyaku-gojukkai* 2, pp. 226–31 and Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 107–12 provide characteristically thorough accounts of this terminological discrepancy.

⁷⁹ Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 127–28.

⁸⁰ See Fali’s 法礪 (560–635) *Sifenlü shu* 四分律疏, X no. 731, 41:626c; completed in 626. See Ono Gemmyō 小野玄妙, ed., *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten* 佛書解説大辭典 (Tokyo: Daitō shup-

(mat to lie on). There are two kinds; one is woven and the other is pressed. The woven is for wool carpets. Pressing is the way of making wool cushions. When [the texts] speak of begging for *kauseya*, this means *fuju* woven with silk. For some, *kauseya* means that silk is used to stitch the pouching and the inner layer is wool and cotton. This is taken to be *fuju*; originally it is *woju*, not the three garments.⁸¹ 注云, “總名臥具等者。”此戒諸師, 多判不同。宣云, “是袈裟。”礪云, “相亦難識。四分名臥具, 諸部或稱敷具, 或稱被也。”賓云, “淨三藏云, 是臥籌也。有其二別: 一是織成, 二是衲作。織成即是氈氈之類。衲作乃是氈褥之流。謂取高世耶, 絲織爲敷具也。或高世耶耶, 用絹縫之作袋, 內貯羊毛及樹華絮, 以爲敷具。本是臥具, 不是三衣。”

Now there is dispute over what the Threefold Canon says, and it is difficult to determine. Concerning *fuju*, in the next precept concerning black wool the vinaya texts explain how to make carpeting and say that making wool bedding is a non-violation. The texts are contradictory, but if we try to reconcile them by following Nanshan [Daoxuan] and taking them to mean *kāṣāya*, this also contradicts the texts. For example, precept [fourteen discussed] below, about [replacing] *woju* in fewer than six years, says it is not a crime to discard and replace [*woju*] in less than six years [with saṅgha approval].⁸² How could the three garments be thus discarded and replaced? According to the “full moon garments” precept, it is a crime not to surrender [any such replacements].⁸³ Therefore, we know that this [*woju*] precept is not referring to the three garments. 今諍三藏言, 亦難准。若是敷具者, 下黑毛戒, 律文乃言, 作蓐作臥氈不犯。文既相違, 若爲通會, 若依南山, 是袈裟者, 亦有違文之失。故下減六年臥具戒云, 減六年捨故, 更作新者, 不犯。豈可三衣捨而更作? 月望衣戒, 既不捨故, 即應是犯。故知此戒, 非三衣也。

Back and forth in a rut it goes,⁸⁴ which is why [Fa]li judged it difficult to discern. To clarify, Nanshan [Daoxuan] said that it

pansha, 1933-1936) 4, p. 229A-C.

⁸¹ See Dingbin's 定賓 (fl. 733) *Sifenlüshu shizong yiji* 四分律疏師宗義記 (X no. 733, 42:147A), which uses the term *woru* 臥褥 (mattress). I follow the *Zokuzōkyō* editors in reading *ru* 蓐 for *chou* 籌 (counter or tally), which appears here in the extant recension of Dajue's text. Cf. Dingbin's *Sifen biqu jieben shu* 四分比丘戒本疏 (T no. 1807, 40:479A), where *zhanru* 氈蓐 (felt carpet) is used.

⁸² *Sifen lü*, T no. 1428, 22:616B.

⁸³ *Xingshi chao*, T no. 1804, 40:67B; modern Chinese trans. Qu, *Sifen jieben*, pp. 168-70. This precept states that donated cassock cloth kept beyond a moon past robe-making season must be confessed and surrendered.

⁸⁴ The expression *jintui weigu* 進退唯谷 is drawn, appropriately, from the poem “Mulberry Sapling” (“Sangrou” 桑柔) in the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經). See James Legge, *The Chinese Classics* (London: Henry Frowde, 1871) 4.2, p. 524.

means *kāṣāya* and that earlier people confused it such that it remains misunderstood until now. The Eastern lands originally had no idea of the three garments, so to translate it they took the measurements [indicated in the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary*?]⁸⁵ to be the same as the three-to-five cubit carpets (*woru* 臥褥) of this land, and given that the *Four Part* and *Five Part* vinayas both translate it as *woju*, later scholars were led to call it *woru*. But now if we seek the true meaning of it, it is definitely *kāṣāya*. 進退唯谷, 故礪判云, 相亦難識. 亮敘南山云, 此是袈裟, 昔人迷之, 至今未識. 但以三衣名相, 東土本無, 知何以翻, 但取量同此方臥褥, 三肘五肘故, 使四分五分同翻臥具, 教令後習謂爲臥蓐. 今以義求, 定是袈裟.⁸⁶

Here Dajue shows concern for delineating the purview of this precept. He highlights the contradictions among its different versions, and the varying opinions of his co-commentators Fali 法礪 (569–635) and Dingbin 定賓 (fl. 733), before finally agreeing with Daoxuan that the precept governs *kāṣāya*. What stakes might monks like Dajue have had in insisting on such a contention? Already from the Northern Qi 北齊 (550–577) period and increasingly during the Sui 隋 (581–618), prominent monks serving as retainers to imperial courts were gifted fine silk robes to mark their official standing. This may have been the impetus behind Daoxuan’s arguments – often against his Indian sources – that Buddhist monks should not wear silk. But it was roughly two decades after Daoxuan’s death, and two decades before Dajue’s subcommentary, that empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690–705) inaugurated the practice of gifting silk-embroidered cassocks of imperial purple to select Buddhist clerics. Later Tang emperors established an official system for bequeathing these purple *kāṣāya*, which by virtue of their regal color and fine silk fabric were imbued with “a lengthy tradition of formal, official recognition of imperial favor.”⁸⁷ With the Chinese monastic uniform thus becoming ever more symbolic of lavish patronage and state sanction (control?), rather than austere renunciation of secular status and sensual attachment, one may see why Dajue, even more than Daoxuan and Fali before him, would have endeavored to define this precept as governing cassocks in particular.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Sapoduo pini piposha*, T no. 1440, 23:533B.

⁸⁶ *Sifen lü chaopi* 四分律鈔批, X no. 736, 42:863A. This text is dated to 712; see Ono, *Bushho kaisetsu daijiten* 4, pp. 224D–25A.

⁸⁷ Kieschnick, *Impact of Buddhism*, p. 102.

⁸⁸ See especially Huang, *Songdai Fojiao*, pp. 443–510, on the practice of rulers granting purple garments to Buddhist and Daoist masters, including but not exclusively *kāṣāya*, from Wu Zetian’s time through the Song. Cf. Torimoto Yukiyo 鳥居本幸代, “Nanzan Dōsen no kasha kan ni tsuite” 南山道宣の袈裟觀について, *Tendai gakuho* 天台學報 25 (1983), p. 187.

But this is not the only way that Daoxuan and his subcommentators tried to reconcile ambiguities in their Indian source texts with their own interests in defining monastic identity in China. At the same time that they strained to interpret the Indian vinaya precept as banning silk *kāśāya*, they also purposively read into it a central concern with the ethical problem of killing. As discussed above, the different vinaya versions of this precept emphasized social perception more than moral compunction. They illustrated vividly how silkworms were killed in the sericulture process but then banned silk bedding only because lay followers disparaged monks for it. And in some respects this precept had little to do with killing at all, especially in those versions that focused on the problem of monks wasting time making cloth. But Chinese Buddhist exegetes appear more interested than their Indian sources in augmenting the ethical dimension of this precept. Fali concluded his commentary by claiming that monks should forgo silk possessions so as to prevent sentient beings from being harmed.⁸⁹ Dajue similarly explained how this precept was instituted because monks should not injure living things.⁹⁰ And Daoxuan also emphasized that silk cassocks were improper for Buddhist monks because they were products of killing so demonstrated lack of compassion. However, Daoxuan made his case not only on the basis of this vinaya precept, but also on moral admonitions drawn from Indian Buddhist sūtra literature. Daoxuan's vinaya commentaries are often distinguished by such a move – though later subcommentators would sometimes follow suit – interspersing excerpts from Mahāyāna scriptures and “Hīnayāna” vinaya regulations, together with his own moralizing voice, to advance notions of monastic identity as encompassing both traditional behavioral precepts and Mahāyāna moral principles. In this case, in order to explain why silk robes were ethically wrong, Daoxuan adduced the *Angulimāla Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, both well known (among other things) for advocating vegetarianism as an expression of ultimate compassion.⁹¹ According to the former scripture:

Mañjuśrī said to the Buddha, “World Honored One, are not conch shells, wax, honey, leather, and silk the flesh of one's own kin, [so should not be consumed]?” 文殊師利白佛言, “世尊, 珂貝蠟蜜皮革繒綿, 非自界肉耶?”

who cites Yuanzhao's 元照 (1048–1116) critique of monks with purple robes who “flaunt outward adornments 誇外飾.”

⁸⁹ *Sifenlü shu*, X no. 731, 41:626c.

⁹⁰ *Sifen lü chaopi*, X no. 736, 42:862c.

⁹¹ See, e.g., John Kieschnick, “Buddhist Vegetarianism in China,” in Roel Sterckx, ed.,

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, “Do not say this. The Tathāgata is forever detached from all things worldly. The Tathāgata does not eat. It is not possible that he should employ such worldly things. If he does use them, it is only the Dharma of expedient means. If such things come indirectly, they can be used. They should not be used at their place of origin. But if they come indirectly, from a hand removed from killing, they can be used.” 佛告文殊師利, “勿作是語. 如來遠離一切世間. 如來不食. 若言習近世間物者, 無有是處. 若習近者, 是方便法. 若物展轉來者, 則可習近. 若物所出處, 不可習近. 若展轉來, 離殺者手, 則可習近.”

Mañjuśrī said to the Buddha, “Now, this city has a cobbler who makes shoes from leather. If a person buys these to donate as alms, have they come indirectly and should the Buddha accept them? Furthermore, World Honored One, if a cow dies of natural causes and the owner of the cow has it skinned by a *caṇḍāla* (butcher) and gives the skin to the cobbler to make leather shoes, and these are then given as alms to one who upholds the precepts, are these considered to have come indirectly and thus permitted for use?” 文殊師利白佛言, “今此城中有一皮師能作革屣. 有人買施, 是展轉來, 佛當受不? 復次世尊, 若自死牛, 牛主從旃陀羅取皮, 持付皮師使作革屣, 施持戒人, 此展轉來可習近不?”

The Buddha told Mañjuśrī, “If the cow has died of natural causes and the owner of the cow takes its skin to use for leather shoes and gives these as alms to one who upholds the precepts, should he accept them or not? If he does not accept them, it is the bhikṣu Dharma. If he does accept them, it is not compassionate but does not break the precepts.” 佛告文殊師利, “若自死牛, 牛主持皮用作革屣, 施持戒人, 爲應受不? 若不受者, 是比丘法. 若受者非悲, 然不破戒.”⁹²

Here the sūtra states that using silk and other animal products is not of the same order as eating meat, which should be shunned because animal flesh is ultimately no different than that of one’s own kin. Nevertheless, Daoxuan interpreted this passage as likening silk to leather, which, though not technically against the vinaya, should not be accepted by those with truly compassionate hearts.⁹³ Similarly, in quot-

Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 186–212.

⁹² *Yangjuemoluo jing* 央掘魔羅經, T no. 120, 2:540C–41A.

⁹³ Dongbin makes the same point; see *Sifenlüshu shizong yiji*, X no. 733, 42:147A (discussed in Ono, *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten* 4, pp. 229C–30A). As noted above, n. 8, Indian monastic codes typically allowed leather for monastic attire, footwear in particular, but here and elsewhere

ing the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* as forsaking silk garments, Daoxuan adopted its moral reasoning behind banning meat, even though the sūtra itself directly stipulates that silk is permissible.⁹⁴ And elsewhere in his *Notes on [Monastic] Practice*, Daoxuan adduced a passage from *Maudgalyāyana's Five Hundred Questions on Light and Heavy Matters in the Vinaya*, which asks, “Can raw silk be used in the three garments? Answer: any silk garments that properly conceal the body can be worn.”⁹⁵ However, while this passage permitted silk that was not see-through, Daoxuan read it to mean that silk is too revealing for monastic use: “raw silk is not allowed because [garments] in accordance with the Dharma must properly conceal the body.”⁹⁶ Daoxuan thus went to some lengths to make his sources say that silk cassocks are against the Dharma, despite the fact that all of these sources are ambivalent on the matter, if not outright contradictory. He claimed that his analysis shows “the strict intention of this regulation”: “the vinayas clearly indicate” that “wearing [silk] is a crime” – “just like all the vinayas say it is a violation to visit a butcher or dairy to beg for flesh, blood, or milk.” But none of his sources is anywhere near this straightforward, and neither is his arrangement of excerpts from them. Daoxuan did quote several vinaya translations that directly evidence his assertions about silk – if not necessarily cassocks in particular – but he also purposively selected passages from these same texts that clearly belie this ostensive concern for killing and compassion and leave large openings for silk to be used in the saṅgha.

Daoxuan began his commentary on this precept by citing four reasons for its institution, as stated in the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary*. The first two reasons – to prevent monks from being slandered and to increase faith and reverence in them – have only to do with social rela-

Daoxuan argued against both leather and silk on the grounds of these same vinaya sources; see, e.g., *Xingshi chao*, T no. 1804, 40:105B: 若細薄生疏, 綾羅, 錦綺, 紗縠, 細絹等, 並非法物。律云文繡衣, 不成受持故。僧祇: 一切生疏, 毛髮, 樹皮衣, 草衣, 皮衣, 並不成。Thin, light, or raw materials like twill damasks, fine gauzes, simple gauzes, brocades, crêpes, or tabbies, are all against the Dharma. This is why the vinaya prohibits receiving or keeping fine embroidered garments. In the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* all raw materials like hair, bark, grass, or leather are prohibited. See *Mohe sengqi lu*, T no. 1425, 22:454C; Kawano, “Sō-i shiryō kenkyū,” pp. 91, 95-96; and Torimoto, “Nanzan Dōsen no kasha kan,” p. 186.

⁹⁴ *Da banniepan jing*, T no. 374, 12:386A; trans. Blum, *Nirvana Sutra*, p. 112. Here Kāśyapa asks whether monks may possess leather and silk, and the Buddha answers yes. See Kieschnick, “Buddhist Vegetarianism,” p. 190; Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, p. 110.

⁹⁵ *Foshuo mulian wen jielü zhong wubai jingzhong shi* 佛說目連問戒律中五百輕重事, T no. 1483A, 24:978B: 問: 三衣得用生絹作不? 答: 一切絹衣不見身者得著。

⁹⁶ *Xingshi chao*, T no. 1804, 40:105B: 五百問云: 生絹不得作, 必不現身者得, 以作成如法故。I follow Kawano, “Sō-i shiryō kenkyū,” pp. 96, 105n72, in reading Daoxuan’s *xian* 現 as *jian* 見, which appears in the *Five Hundred Questions* passage.

tions with lay donors, while killing is last on the cited list of problems with silk. Further, Daoxuan repeated this commentary's stipulation that silk garments "can be received and worn [in accordance with proper decorum] because they are obtained as alms," as well as the *Five Part Vinaya's* tacit acceptance of monks "receiving silk as alms from a silkworm household," and he again cited the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary* in stipulating that "it is a nonviolation to make silk oneself with cocoons begged from a household without silkworms (that is, households that used only cocoons that silkworm moths had vacated)." Although Daoxuan read this commentary as permitting silk made from wild cocoons only, inclusion of these references would still seem to muddle the equation; could monks or lay donors tell the difference between silk robes made from wild or cultivated silkworms? And if they could, presumably on the basis of the silk's fine quality, then wouldn't the main problem be monastic indulgence in luxury – as with the emphasis in some texts on monks using shiny new silk? In addition, Daoxuan repeated the striking claim from the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary* that it was permissible for monastics to beg and sell silkworm cocoons, provided that the cocoons had already been vacated by their resident moths – and if they still contained pupae it was only *duṣkṛta*. Once again, Dajue provided a more detailed explanation:

Concerning wild silkworms: it is established that foreign kingdoms are pure in collecting wild silkworms. None kill living beings; they wait until the insect has departed before collecting and using [the cocoons]. To the west of Khotan this practice is widespread. The *Vinayapiṭaka* says that *kaūṣeya* is a term for wild silkworms. These insects are not cultivated; they appear naturally in mountains and marshes. The western kingdoms do not have mulberry trees so [the silkworms] eat the leaves of sour-fruit trees. Their bodies are pure white and coarse like thumbs, two or three inches in length. At the last of the moon they grow old, wrap themselves in leaves and therein form cocoons that are like big toes, quite hard and strong. Butchers collect these and extract silk threads from them to make silk. This silk is very hard; its texture is not fine or soft. If the insects are not collected, after one month moths will emerge from the cocoons and spread their wings like large open hands. They have bright and beautiful colored patterns like red brocades. Every evening at dusk the males and females meet together, return to eating tree leaves, and once again produce their eggs. The general term for this insect is *kaūṣeya*. 野蚕者，立謂外國，純取野蚕。全不殺命，皆待虫出已，方取用也。于闐已西，多有此事。淨三藏云，高世耶

者，即是野蠶之名。此虫不養，自生山澤。西國無桑，多於醋果樹上，而食其葉。其形皓白，羸如拇指，長二三寸。月餘便老，以葉自裹，內成其蠶，大如足指，極為堅硬。屠人揀之，取絲成絹。其絹極牢，體不細滑。若此虫不彼收者，經一月餘，蠶中出蛾，其翅兩開，如大張手。文璋燦爛，如紅錦色。每至宵中，雄雌相遇，還於食樹，復生其卵。總名此虫，為高世耶也。

In the western kingdoms noble persons of high lineage regard this butcher occupation as most polluted. The Buddha prohibited monks and nuns from visiting such establishments on their begging rounds.... 西國屠兒，方為此業，勝人上姓，極汙其流。乞食僧尼，佛遮至宅....

Concerning *duṣkṛta* for selling [cocoons] that have insects in them, this is established as a light [offense] because they are being sold. If used to make clothing oneself it is *prāyaścittika* (offense requiring expiation). When they are said to have insects, this means that even if following regulation by begging at households that do not cultivate silkworms, if the cocoons appear to have silkworms inside them, a *bhikṣu* is guilty of *duṣkṛta*. 為賣故有虫吉者，立謂將賣故輕。若自作衣則提。言有虫者，謂雖非養蠶家，聽從乞，若蠶中猶有蠶者，比丘犯吉也。⁹⁷

According to Dajue, people west of China did not cultivate silkworms, but instead made their silk from the discarded cocoons of wild silkworms – called *kauseya* in the *vinayas* – and so did not kill living beings in the process. But there were “butchers” who harvested the wild cocoons when the insects were still inside them and thus made silk of notably poor quality – which would seem to belie the equation implied by Daoxuan between silkworm killing and luxury silk. Also, like Daoxuan before him, Dajue read this precept as allowing monks to beg for cocoons from sericulture households under two conditions: 1. that these households were not “butchers,” they did not cultivate silkworms or use wild cocoons with insects still inside them; and 2. that the monks begged for cocoons to sell, not to make their own silk robes (following the *Sarvāstivādin* emphasis on monks wasting time weaving). If the second condition was not met, according to Dajue, then the monks had to surrender their ill-gotten goods; Daoxuan interpreted the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Commentary* as stipulating a non-violation on this count. But should monks go begging for cocoons to sell and then find that the cocoons still had insects, according to all accounts, the monks could go right on selling those ill-fated silkworms to the steamy slaughter – just so long as the monks confessed it later. Another *vinaya*

⁹⁷ *Sifen lü chaopi*, X no. 736, 42:863B.

commentary preserved at Dunhuang concurred on this seemingly un-seemly stipulation:

[Begging for cocoons] to sell, which have insects in them: if the cocoons have living insects in them, selling them is *duṣkṛta*. It is not a crime to sell cocoons that have no insects in them. 爲賣故有虫者, 如繭中有生虫, 賣者, 吉羅. 若賣無虫之繭者, 不罪.⁹⁸

The image fostered here of monastic cocoon markets – with monks selling begged cocoons and apologizing occasionally for silkworms killed in the process – stands in marked contrast to the stipulations advanced by Daoxuan and his ilk that silk robes should be banned from the saṅgha because they demonstrate lack of compassion for sentient beings. If silk was potentially so immoral, so soteriologically defeating, then why would these commentators allow monks to trade in silkworm cocoons, receive silk as alms directly from sericulture households, and make their own silk from begged cocoons? Even if this was supposedly limited to wild, discarded cocoons, why permit such practices at all if they could so easily lead to involvement with sericulture of the killing kind? And if, according to Daoxuan, et alia, this vinaya precept only governed cassocks specifically, then monks would seemingly be permitted to use all other kinds of silk cloth and yarn – for bedding, matting, carpeting, netting, banners, manuscripts, and so on – regardless of whether they involved silkworm killing or not. The upshot of all this would appear to be that, for medieval Chinese exegetes as much as for the Indian vinaya sources upon which they commented, the problem with silk was not really silkworm killing per se, but rather the fact that it potentially confounded the public image that monks sought to cultivate as compassionate advocates of abstention from killing. This primary concern with social distinction was also likely the impetus behind Daoxuan’s concerted focus on the *kāśāya* in particular. The robes were the most prominent markers of monastic identity in the eyes of Chinese lay communities, and thus the most visible symbols through which monks could shape their public image.⁹⁹ Therefore, it made sense for Daoxuan and his subcommentators to ban silk robes on the grounds of Mahāyāna ethics, even if they otherwise exhibited little concern with silkworm killing. In their refusal to wear the type of silk clothes worn by all higher classes in Chinese

⁹⁸ *Lüchao di san juan shoujue* 律抄第三卷手決, T no. 2796, 85:723B; Huang Yongwu 黃永武, ed., *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌寶藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1981–1986) 25, p. 190.

⁹⁹ This point is also emphasized in Huang, *Songdai Fojiao*, p. 443; and Kieschnick, “Symbolism of the Monk’s Robe” and *Impact of Buddhism*, pp. 86–93.

society, monks would be proven the most compassionate of all – and thus most worthy of patronage and prestige – even while they were fully and freely immersed in the ubiquitous silk cultures of medieval China.

THE MORALITY OF SILK AND
THE LAY-MONASTIC DISTINCTION

There is one last, and key, piece to the puzzle of why Daoxuan and his co-commentators would have agitated against silk robes for Buddhist monks living in the land of silk. This piece further supplements the picture of Mahāyāna compassion functioning as a rhetorical device used to define the boundaries between monastic and lay Buddhist identities. As Suwa pointed out some time ago, the call to abstain from silk clothing appears to have begun not within the ranks of the monastic establishment, but rather with the lay Buddhist elite.¹⁰⁰ The prime example is the famous poet and statesman Shen Yue 沈約 (441–513), who in his “Treatise on Ultimate Compassion” (“Jiujing cibei lun” 究竟慈悲論) argued forcefully for the rejection of silk garments at a time when Chinese Buddhists, both monastic and lay, frequently wore silk. Shen based these arguments in part on the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, as Daoxuan would a century later, which as previously noted was one important Indian scripture that highlighted the silkworm life cycle as metaphor for self-wrought suffering. However, while this sūtra upheld silkworms as exemplars of sentient suffering, it did not extend to them the same promise of universal compassion that it otherwise granted food animals. But in applying this sūtra’s logic of Mahāyāna ethics to silkworm moths as well, Daoxuan followed the example of Shen Yue, who similarly asserted that “the principle of doing away with silk fabrics is unmistakably inferred (from the sūtra) 黜繪之義, 斷可知矣.” Shen continued:

The reason why raw silk garments and dressed silk robes have never been suspected of being unsuitable is doubtless because people’s thinking has been exhausted by the profundity of the words of the text and their minds confused by its vast meaning. Those who understand its prescriptions and have deep faith in them will, it is hoped, gain insight into this truth. Once they have awakened to the truth, the delusion of their behavior can be overcome and reversed. Then, if they have put an end to the karmic conditioning of silk-wearing and meat-eating and strengthened the karmic conditioning of vegetarianism and the wearing of linen, all those

¹⁰⁰ Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 95–103, 117, 125.

living creatures may perhaps escape alive. 而繭衣纈服曾不惟疑, 此蓋慮窮於文字, 思迷於弘旨. 通方深信之客, 庶有鑒於斯理. 斯理一悟行迷克反. 斷蠶肉之因, 固蔬臬之業, 然則含生之類幾於免矣.¹⁰¹

Here Shen argued that his contemporaries misunderstood the Buddha's profound meaning in the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, which was surely that *all* living beings must be spared the slaughter committed by human industry. Shen was apparently not the only lay Buddhist who felt this way, since Daoxuan's *Continued Traditions of Eminent Monks* (*Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳) and Baochang's 寶唱 (464–514+) *Traditions of Bhikṣuṇīs* (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳) both include several examples of lay devotees from around Shen's time who refused to wear silk.¹⁰² Given that these biographical collections were edited and compiled by elite monks, they should be understood as monastic prescriptions for the laity – much like the aforementioned *Scripture on Lay Precepts* and commentaries by Guanding, Jizang, and Yijing, which all stipulated that lay followers should abandon silkworm killing. But in the case of Shen Yue we can perhaps discern a polemical agenda underlying his call for Buddhist devotees to renounce silk. Here Shen expressly usurped the authority of the saṅgha in proscribing silk clothing for all truly compassionate Buddhists. His argument implied that the vast majority of monks at the time were less than morally upstanding – given that they often saw fit to violate the central tenets of Buddhist ethics, as Shen defined them – so he claimed the authority to define true Buddhist identity as having *nothing to do with monasticism*. Rather, the path of lay devotion, which Shen himself represented, was potentially the most exalted, the most worthy of prestige, support, and authority, as long as its adherents cleaved to the loftiest ideals of ultimate compassion that for Shen ultimately transcended the lay-monastic divide.

If, for Shen Yue, a true Buddhist adept was defined by inner compassion for all living beings, regardless of whether he had “left home” to become a monk, for Daoxuan this kind of ultimate compassion was reserved for members of the Buddhist monastic institution. While Shen advocated the shunning of silk robes for everyone in Chinese society, Daoxuan focused on prohibiting silk in the monastic uniform – that one textile commodity that served first and foremost to define monastic

¹⁰¹ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集, T no. 2103, 52:293A; trans. Richard B. Mather, *The Poet Shen Yüeh (441–513): The Reticent Marquis* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1988), p. 165.

¹⁰² For *Xu gaoseng zhuan* examples, see Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, pp. 97, 99–103. For examples in the *Biqiuni zhuan* of women refusing to wear silk before becoming nuns, see Tsai, *Lives of the Nuns*, pp. 62, 87, 104; and for instances of nuns eschewing silk, pp. 27, 35, 36, 43.

identity. This argument of Daoxuan's perhaps mirrors his interpretation of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*, according to which the Buddha only permitted silk as a kind of expedient device for weak beings of lesser capacity, who would be discouraged from following the path if all of life's niceties were summarily stripped from them.¹⁰³ For Daoxuan the use of silk reflected a gradation of moral capacity, with beginning practitioners wearing silk because it was not officially proscribed and advanced adepts shunning silk because it was ultimately morally wrong. And given that he sought to ban silk *kāśāya* in particular, it would seem that he understood monastics as representing this advanced class, above and against lay Buddhists. Monks should refrain from wearing silk, in Daoxuan's estimation, because they were the cream of the religious crop, ideally the most exalted group in Chinese society, which would be best demonstrated by the kinds of fabrics that they refused to wear on their bodies.

CONCLUSION

Given that Chinese Buddhists advocated abstention from meat and silk, both on the grounds of universal compassion for sentient beings, why did they ultimately adopt a vegetarian diet but not a silk-free wardrobe? Why have Buddhist monks in China always been adorned with silk, from their earliest textual images to present-day practice communities, while calls to ban meat were heeded early on and vegetarianism soon became the Chinese Buddhist norm?¹⁰⁴ The short answer is that Chinese Buddhist institutions could not possibly divest themselves of silk. Silk was a major basis of Chinese monastic economies, both financial and karmic, as a most popular and lucrative form of *dāna* (lay offerings) and merit production. In premodern China silk was money, status, patronage, and institutional ascendancy, all of which for Buddhist adepts potentially meant universal salvation. So, silk was needed to save the world. But this line of reasoning was problematic because sericulture was widely known to involve silkworm killing and Buddhists were not supposed to kill living beings. The best way to show that monks were indeed against killing was to don (ostentatiously) austere cassocks, even while currents of silk cloth flowed through monastery precincts. This does not mean that Daoxuan and his ilk were being disingenuous in their calls to save the silkworm, or that their austere

¹⁰³ Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ See, most recently, Eric M. Greene, "A Reassessment of the Early History of Chinese Buddhist Vegetarianism," *AM* 3d ser. 29.1 (2016), pp. 1-43.

outfits were worn in bad faith, but that the more important consideration for them was how cassocks would represent the saṅgha in Chinese society. That was where the statement against silkworm killing had to be made – and through a vinaya precept that likewise emphasized social concern with monastic silk use. So while Daoxuan is typically understood as having advanced a very anti-silk agenda in his treatments of monastic properties, here we can see that he adopted a somewhat more measured approach. Silk was a product of killing and that had to be acknowledged, but banning silk outright would be like banning rice – impossible logistically and ideologically. So in the same writings where Daoxuan argued against silk robes, he also made allowance for many other uses of silk in the monastery. In this way monastics could prosper in Chinese society through active participation in the silk trade while at the same time donning the mantle of ultimate compassion and further improving their standing in the eyes of lay patrons. And of course, being concerned with appearing compassionate and actually being compassionate are not necessarily incommensurate. One need not adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion.

While the rhetoric of Mahāyāna compassion was applied only selectively to monastic uses of silk – particularly in the *kāśāya*, the saṅgha's most prominent social signifier – this rhetoric also potentially undercut the monastic distinction, otherwise manifest in cassocks, which vinaya stipulations functioned to enforce. Lay devotees were apparently the first on record to call for abstention from silk garments, on the grounds that real Buddhists compassionately protected all living beings. But if the key defining characteristic of an ideal Buddhist adept thus became an inward mental state, regardless of institutional affiliation, then monastics would lose purchase as bastions of Śākyamuni's True Dharma in China. This perspective may therefore seem quite contrary to the interests of monastic vinaya commentators like Daoxuan. As William Bodiford put it, "In contrast to the vinaya's concern with distinguishing members of the order from the laity... Mahāyāna scriptures present universal precepts to be observed by all sentient beings, whether they are male or female, monastics or laypeople."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, it was precisely within the juridical sphere of vinaya discourse that monastic authors could emphasize universal compassion without thereby threatening lay-monastic divisions – even while vinaya writings otherwise typically emphasized outward comportment and social identity rather than inner morality (to the extent that these were dichotomized). In

¹⁰⁵ Bodiford, "Introduction," p. 5. Funayama, "Acceptance of Buddhist Precepts," pp. 105, 112, makes the same point.

arguing that the cassocks could not be made of silk because sericulture was murderous, and in adducing an Indian vinaya precept in which lay donors derided silk-mongering monks, Chinese monastic commentators expressly reappropriated the anti-monastic sentiments of their lay compatriots,¹⁰⁶ but here in order to *strengthen* the monastic distinction. Now it would be monks who demonstrated their ultimate compassion through their choice in wardrobe, but this wardrobe would be defined precisely by the Buddha's own rulebooks and would otherwise comprise the full range of symbolic associations accorded the *kāśāya* in medieval China.

But of course, Daoxuan aimed not just to appropriate local associations in his vision of the silk-free *kāśāya*, but also to alter them indelibly. Over the centuries since their arrival to China on the backs of South and Central Asian monks, the *kāśāya* had undergone a great deal of symbolic and material transformation. These changes in the *kāśāya* had much to do with local cultural understandings of the significance of textile fabrics, particularly silk. Throughout premodern China, silk clothes represented many things to many people, but most typically they were associated with luxury, wealth, official status, and perhaps most importantly, traditional Chinese heritage. Such associations would thus imbue the image of the silk-clad Chinese monk. This infusion of Chinese silk associations within the *kāśāya* could be both salutary and deleterious, depending on one's perspective. In some quarters it incited criticism and attempts at reform, as we have seen in this article. But overall it explains why agitators against silk culture could never win the battle: in medieval China, for the most part, silk cloth stood for all things grand. In their struggle to ban silk robes, then, Chinese vinaya commentators adopted a back-to-origins approach, marshalling Indian textual authority to argue that Śākyamuni originally proscribed silk and so they were reclaiming the true, pure, *Indian* meaning of the *kāśāya*. But in fact, none of their Indian sources actually banned silk. Indian norms were thus invoked in name only, as an expedient device employed to best situate the Buddhist saṅgha in China. And for the Chinese monastic majority, against whom Daoxuan and his followers contended, silk cassocks would offer a most propitious symbol of the fundamental accordance between Indian Buddhist and traditional Chinese values, practices, and material cultures.

¹⁰⁶ Suwa, *Chūgoku chūsei Bukkyōshi*, p. 125.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經, ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎, Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al. (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924-1932). Rpt., Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association 中華電子佛典協會, *CBETA Electronic Tripiṭaka Collection* 電子佛典集成 (Taipei: 1998-2017). Passages are cited by text number, followed by volume, page, and register (A, B, or C).
- X *Xu zangjing* 續藏經, CBETA rpt. of *Shinsan Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* 新纂大日本續藏經 (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1975-1989), rpt. of *Dai Nihon zokuzōkyō* 大日本讀藏經 (Kyoto: Zōkyō shoin, 1905-1912). Passages cited as above.