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Reciters and Chanters: Monastic Musicians in Buddhist Law Texts

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As I have discussed elsewhere,¹ Vinaya, the Buddhist canon law, prohibits ordained Buddhists—monks, nuns, probationary nuns, and novices—from performing, teaching, or watching song, dance, and instrumental music. Law texts in all six surviving Vinaya traditions attest this prohibition with commentaries that elaborate on it to varying degrees. Yet, as in other religious traditions, a gap between discipline and practice also exists in East Asian Buddhism.

Despite explicit rules prohibiting ordained Buddhists from practicing or consuming music, the development of Buddhist musical traditions dates back to the third century in China and the eleventh century in Tibet. In China, the monk-scholar Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554) glorified chanting experts in his *Biographies of Eminent Monks* 高僧傳 written in 519,² and the practice of chanting continues to flourish to the present day. Besides many individual monastic musicians hailing from various East Asian Buddhist traditions, one important contemporary example is the Dharma Drum Mountain Buddhist Choir, founded under the vision of Master Shengyen 聖嚴 (1931–2009) to spread Buddhist doctrinal teachings through music, which has already engaged countless audiences, lay and monastic. Music also had a strong influence on Tibetan Buddhism. A tradition of spiritual songs grew up in medieval India and was imported to Tibet no later than the eleventh century. This tradition is alive and still in practice, with songs written by such famous masters as Mi la ras pa (1052–1135), Shar Skal Idan rgya mtsho (1607–1677), and Zhabs dkar ba Tshogs drug rang grol (1781–1851).³ Together with other lesser-known singers and composers, these masters have created large collections of spiritual songs whose

¹ My forthcoming dissertation discusses Buddhist monastic rule concerning music for both ordained Buddhists and Buddhist householders. See Liu (forthcoming).

² See Ji (2009:33–35) for discussion on the date of the *Biographies of Eminent monks*.

³ For study on the life and work of Zhabs dkar ba, see Pang (2011). For English translations of his songs and autobiography, see Sujata (2012) and Ricard (2001).

influence on the dissemination of Buddhist doctrine in Tibet has been quite significant.

These Chinese and Tibetan instances may lead us to wonder whether there are also records of musical activities performed by Buddhists in India—and I think there are. As one phase of a serial study on how East Asian Buddhists interpreted and practiced the Vinaya rule concerning music, this article aims to provide a brief overview of four renowned reciters and chanters depicted in the Buddhist law texts preserved in Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan.

Monk Shanhe

Monk Shanhe 善和 (Tib. *Snyan pa bzang ldan*) is said to have been born in the city of Koṣala to an elderly Dashan 大善 (Tib. *Bzang ldan*).⁴ Before his birth, his father Dashan takes lay Buddhist vows from the venerable Śāriputra and becomes his acquaintance.⁵ Thereafter, the venerable Śāriputra regularly visits Dashan. Once, he comes alone, and Dashan asks why he is traveling without an attendant. “Will my attendant emerge from the kuṣa grass?” the venerable Śāriputra replies. “Only virtuous people like you would be my attendant.” Hearing this, Dashan immediately promises that if his wife gives birth to a boy, he will give the boy as his attendant. Before his departure, the venerable Śāriputra says a prayer to bless the health of the child. When the newborn is delivered, it is indeed a boy, but an extremely ugly-looking boy with a very pleasant voice. At the celebration party on the twenty-first day after his birth, the boy receives the name *Shanhe*.

As promised, Dashan gives his son to the venerable Śāriputra, who then ordains Shanhe. Monk Shanhe is very diligent in his religious practice and eventually obtains arhatship. In the monastic community, he is known as an exceptional reciter. When he recites Buddhist scriptures (*chos smras pa*, 讚誦經法) with musical intonation (*skyad kyi gtang rag*, 吟諷聲),⁶ it is said that his voice penetrated the

⁴ It is worth noting that the story of Shanhe is only found in chapter one of the fifth section in the Chinese and Tibetan translation of the *Mūlasarvāstivādinayaḥśūdrakavastu*, where it occurs right after the story of the monks in the band of six who intervened the contests between a group of merchants and a group of Brahmans in the city of Śrāvastī. See *Mūlasarvāstivādinayaḥśūdrakavastu* (T1451: 221b29 - 223a28) and 'Dul ba 'phran tshogs kyi gzhi, in *Bka' 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, vol.10, 101–111. For further discussion on the monks in the band of six, see Liu (2013). For detailed analysis of the story concerning their intervention between the two groups in my dissertation thesis, see Liu (forthcoming).

⁵ The Chinese text says Dashan takes ordination, and the Tibetan text describes Dashan taking refuge and the foundation of discipline being placed upon him. Given that Dashan remains a layman afterwards, he must have received vows for Buddhist householders from Śāriputra.

⁶ In the main text, Yijing translates his recitation style as “reciting scriptures with magnificent beautiful voice” (美妙音聲諷誦經典).

entire world. Upon hearing his recitation, many sentient beings, human and nonhuman, cultivate seeds of virtuous deeds. After listening to Shanhe's recitation, his fellow monks become free from attachment. The Buddha even openly praises monk Shanhe as the supreme reciter among his disciples.

Despite his enchanting reciting skills, Shanhe is still troubled by his unpleasant looks. One source of his concern is Prasenajit (Ch. 影勝; Tib. *Gsal rgyal*), king of Koṣala. One day while exiting the city, king Prasenajit rides an elephant named White Lotus. At that time, Shanhe is reciting in the monastery. The elephant is fond of music, so it stops to listen to Shanhe's recitation from afar. The king is anxious to go, but White Lotus remains there and refuses to move any further. Eventually, King Prasenajit asks his attendants to unleash the elephant and see what it will do. They do so, and the elephant goes directly to the monastery where Shanhe is reciting, stops at the fence of the monastery, and listens attentively. When Shanhe finishes reciting, the elephant walks back to King Prasenajit and behaves obediently, just as before. Eventually, the king learns that the elephant had gone to listen to a monk's recitation. He is curious and decides to visit the monk. Knowing that the king will not be delighted to see an ugly-looking monk, his queen tries unsuccessfully to intervene in his plan to visit. The king departs for the monastery with fine cloth as gift for the monk he is going to meet. When the king arrives at the monastery, the venerable Ānanda is also worried about the meeting and tries to intervene, but, like the queen, he does not succeed. Finally, King Prasenajit sees Shanhe sitting under a tree with his legs crossed. As everybody has expected, King Prasenajit is extremely disappointed to see Shanhe, who looks utterly different from the king's expectations. The royal immediately loses respect and faith for Shanhe and leaves.

The story spreads quickly among the monastic community. Many monks are puzzled by the same set of questions: Why was Shanhe born with such a pleasant voice but such unpleasant looks? What had he done to have such a vocal gift? And what made him the supreme reciter among the Buddha's disciples? They pose these questions to the Buddha, who answers them in connection with the karmic consequences resulting from what Shanhe had done in his previous lives. In particular, in one previous life, Shanhe was someone who made disrespectful remarks about a newly erected stūpa where the Buddha's relics were deposited and consecrated. Yet later he regretted his words and hung a small golden bell on the stūpa as an offering. Shanhe was born ugly for his disrespectful remarks in that previous life but was blessed with pleasant voice for the bell he offered. In another

life, he was a bird that used to greet the Buddha daily by issuing a pleasant sound on the Buddha's way to obtain alms. For the reverence the bird paid to the Buddha, he was reborn in this life as monk Shanhe, who had a voice that could penetrate the heaven. Therefore, Shanhe's success as the supreme reciter among the Buddha's disciples in this life is the result of a prior prophecy by the Kāśyapa Buddha, among whose disciples Shanhe had been the best.

Monk Bhadra

The second reciter is Bhadra 跋提, of whose life we know very little. His name is mentioned in the *Sarvāstivādinaya* section on miscellaneous issues (T1435). In this text, he is described as a monk who is the best chanting (*bei* 唄) specialist. The story of Bhadra contains an important discussion on the role of chanting in Buddhist practices. It starts with him requesting the Buddha's approval to chant. The Buddha approves and goes on to elaborate on the five-fold benefit of chanting. The following passage from the Chinese translation of *Sarvāstivādinaya*, accompanied by its French translation by Lévi, describes this conversation between Bhadra and the Buddha.

有比丘名跋提。於唄中第一。是比丘聲好。白佛言。世尊。願聽我作聲唄。佛言。聽汝作聲唄。唄有五利益。身體不疲不忘。所憶。心不疲勞。聲音不壞。語言易解。復有五利。身不疲極。不忘所憶。心不懈倦。聲音不壞。諸天聞唄聲心則歡喜。⁷

Il y avait un moine nommé Poti; il était le premier pour la psalmodie. Ce moine avait des intonations charmantes. Il fit un rapport au Bouddha: Bhagavat! Je desire que tu me permettes de psalmodier avec des intonations. Le Bouddha dit: Je te permets de psalmodier avec des intonations. La psalmodie a cinq avantages: le corps n'a pas de fatigue; la mémoire n'a pas de perte; l'esprit ne se fatigue pas; les intonations ne se gâtent pas; la prononciation est facile à comprendre. Et il y a encore cinq avantages: le corps n'a pas d'épuisement; la mémoire n'a pas de perte;

⁷ *Sarvāstivādinaya* (T1435: 269c15–269c21).

l'esprit n'a pas de relâchement; les intonations ne se gâtent pas; les dieux, en entendant les accents de la psalmodie, ont la joie au cœur.⁸

According to this passage, chanting has five benefits: it keeps one from getting physically fatigued, mental fatigue, and forgetfulness; it keeps one's voice from collapsing; and it makes the pronunciation of the chanted texts easy to understand. The text continues to elaborate on its five additional benefits, most of which repeat what is already enumerated: preventing physical tiredness, retaining what has already been memorized, staving off mental fatigue, increasing vocal endurance, and pleasing the deities who hear it.

Interestingly, before introducing Bhadra, *Sarvāstivādinaya* discusses the five-fold harms of singing. The story begins with the monks in the band of six who sung songs. Lay people criticize them for “singing like the white-robed laymen” and report these unacceptable behaviors to the Buddha. Having convened all the monks, the Buddha prohibits them from singing in the future because that action will bring the following five negative consequences:

1. Attachment to one's own voice
2. Others' attachment to that voice
3. Disturbance of those meditating alone
4. Desirous feelings
5. Vulnerability to critiques of monastics as behaving no differently from the lay population.⁹

In a similar fashion, *Pinimu jing* (T1463) also discusses the potential harm to Buddhist practices posed by the application of musical recitation. In particular, five harms are attached to musical recitation of the Buddhist monastic rules or Buddhist text. Praising the Buddha's virtues or preaching dharma with a singing voice incur the same harms, which are as follows:

1. Attachment to one's own voice
2. Arousal of the same attachment among the audience
3. Upsetting the divine

⁸ Lévi (1915:430).

⁹ *Sarvāstivādinaya* (T1435: 269c10–269c13).

4. Inaccurate pronunciations
5. Unclear meaning of content¹⁰

The harms of reciting monastic rules in this way are slightly different from those listed above but are similar to the harms of singing or chanting to preach dharma, as outlined in more detail by *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T1428). Additionally, *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T1421) prohibits monks from adopting a singing voice to preach dharma or recite the monastic rules.¹¹ In the following, I will focus on the discussion from *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, where it says:

若過差歌詠聲說法。有五過失。何等五。若比丘過差歌詠聲說法。便自生貪著愛樂音聲。是謂第一過失。復次若比丘過差歌詠聲說法。其有聞者生貪著愛樂其聲。是謂比丘第二過失復次若比丘過差歌詠聲說法。其有聞者令其習學。是謂比丘第三過失。復次比丘過差歌詠聲說法。諸長者。聞皆共譏嫌言。我等所習歌詠聲。比丘亦如是說法。便生慢心不恭敬。是謂比丘第四過失。復次若比丘過差歌詠聲說法。若在寂靜之處思惟。緣憶音聲以亂禪定。是謂比丘第五過失。¹²

If [a monk] preaches dharma with an extremely high singing voice, there are five faults. What are they? If a monk preaches dharma with an extremely high singing voice, he becomes attached to his own singing voice. This is the first fault. Moreover, if a monk preaches dharma with an extremely high singing voice, it makes those who heard it become attached to his voice. This is the second fault of that monk. Moreover, if a monk preaches dharma with an extremely high voice, it causes those who heard it to imitate him. This is the third fault of the monk. Moreover, if a monk preaches dharma with an extremely high singing voice, all the elderly will criticize and say: “The technique we practiced to sing was employed by monks to preach dharma.” Thus, they would disrespect [the saṃgha]. This is the fourth fault of the monk. Furthermore, if a monk preaches with an extremely high singing voice, it would disturb the

¹⁰ *Pinimu jing* (T1463: 828b4–828b7; 833a22–833a26).

¹¹ *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T1421: 121c3–121c4; 128b28–128b29).

¹² *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T1428: 817a19–817b1). Compare it with *Pinimu jing* (T1463: 809a18–809a21): 歌音誦戒有五事過。一心染著此音。二為世人所嫌。三與世人無異。四妨廢行道。五妨入定。是名五事過也。

meditation of those concentrating in quiet places. This is the fifth fault of the monk.

Conflicting interpretations of music's role in Buddhist practices raise the question of why the employment of musical technique is sometimes beneficial and other times harmful. *Pinimu jing* and *Dharmaguptakavinaya* treat this issue consistently and only discuss the harmfulness of adopting a singing style to recite Buddhist texts, to praise the Buddha's virtues, or to recite Buddhist monastic rules. The major inconsistency lies internally within the *Sarvāstivādavīnaya*.

To arrive at a balanced understanding of this contradiction, it is necessary to place the sole positive assessment of music in its original context. The *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* story of Bhadra appears in a passage preceded by two stories involving the monks in the band of six. The story immediately proceeds it involves the above-mentioned six monks who sing songs. Before singing, the six monks are also involved in another case in which they go to watch singing, dancing, and instrumental music. Lay people criticize them for attending such performances, and some modest monks report the matter to the Buddha, who then lay down a rule prohibiting monks from attending such performances. The text's positive comments on the merit of chanting appear immediately after an enumeration of the five harms of singing, clearly demonstrating that *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* distinguishes chanting from singing—and, in the context of Buddhist practices, the former is positive and the latter negative. In other words, *Pinimu jing*, *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, and *Mahīśāsakavinaya* all maintain that when ordained Buddhists adopt a singing voice to recite canonical texts, preach dharma, or recite monastic rules, there are negative consequences. But *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* only agrees with these texts on the practice of singing; chanting, in its interpretation, benefits the chanters in their Buddhist practices.

The question then forces itself upon us: how does chanting in *Sarvāstivādavīnaya* differ from reciting in *Pinimu jing*, *Dharmaguptakavinaya*, and *Mahīśāsakavinaya*? These two terms are used differently, but the difference is moderate. Lévi distinguishes the Chinese verb *bei* 唄 from the typical verb for recitation, *song* 誦, which he translates as “psalmodier.” Although deeper understanding of these verbs depends on further investigation on how were they used in Chinese translations of Vinaya texts, *bei* probably corresponds to the chanting of the *Sāma Veda* with more embellished intonations, while *song* corresponds to the

recitation of other Vedic texts with minimum musical intonation.¹³ For the convenience of discussion, I have used “chanting” and “reciting” for these two verbs and have reserved “singing” for *ge* 歌.

The ways in which these similar sets of five benefits or harms of music are contextualized also raise doubts about the identity of Bhadra as a historical reciter. In the *Sarvāstivādinaya*, the story of Bhadra is preceded by the story of the monks in the band of six who watch musical performances and sing. In combination with the passage from *Pinimu jing*, where the same six monks are prohibited from praising the Buddha in a singing style, the identities of the protagonists in the introductory stories where the Buddha discusses the similar issue of applying musical technique seem to be uncertain. Such uncertainty makes it highly possible that the name *Bhadra* was randomly inserted to make the following content more convincing. Bhadra, like the monks in the band of six, was probably used as a literary device to facilitate the composition and dissemination of these Vinaya stories.¹⁴

Monk Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa

Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa (P. *Soṇa Koṭikaṇṇa*; Ch. 億耳; Tib. *Gro bzhin skyes rna ba byed pa*) was originally a caravan leader who had encountered “people from his hometown who have been reborn as hungry ghosts” and had seen them “experiencing the results of their karma.”¹⁵ He receives ordination from the venerable Mahākātyāyana and becomes a monk. One day, Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa decides to visit the Buddha. Before his departure, Mahākātyāyana tells him to ask the Buddha five questions on his behalf.¹⁶ This story of Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa is found to varying degrees of detail¹⁷ in the *Divyāvadāna*,¹⁸ the Pāli Vinaya,¹⁹ the *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*,²⁰

¹³ I have discussed reciting and chanting in detail in my dissertation on their practice in Jain and Vedic traditions. See Liu (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Gregory Schopen initially proposes the literary device theory. For more discussion on the six monks as a literary device in the Buddhist law texts, see Schopen (2004) and Liu (2013).

¹⁵ For the convenience of reference, I will use his Sanskrit name unless otherwise stated.

¹⁶ For details of the five questions, see Rotman (2008:62–63).

¹⁷ Lévi (1915) discusses the story of Śroṇakoṭikarṇa with a focus on the section on recitation.

¹⁸ This text contains thirty-eight stories about the Buddha's life, the first of which is dedicated to Koṭikarṇa. This text survives in Sanskrit and Pāli. The Sanskrit original was published by Cowell (1886). Both Strong (1983) and Rotman (2008) have produced English translations of this text. For the story on Koṭikarṇa, see Cowell and Neil (1886: 1–24). Rotman (2008:31) briefly summarized the story of Śroṇa Koṭikarṇa.

¹⁹ For the original Pāli, see Oldenberg (1879), vol. 1, 179–198. For English translation, see Horner (1951:236–268). In the Pāli text, his name is Soṇa Koṭivisa.

Dharmaguptakavinaya,²¹ *Sarvāstivādivinaya*,²² *Mahīśāsakavinaya*,²³ and *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*.²⁴ In all these versions, the story appears in the section explaining rules on the use of leather and fur (*carmavastu*).

The event to be discussed below happens on the night when Śroṇa Koṭīkarṇa arrives in Śrāvastī, where the Buddha is staying. On that night, the Buddha invites Śroṇa Koṭīkarṇa to share his room. For the first half of the night, they sit in silence. During the second half of the night, the Buddha asks Śroṇa Koṭīkarṇa to recite. My discussion of the scene below is based on relevant passage on Koṭīkarṇa from the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna*.²⁵ To facilitate the discussion, I present below the Sanskrit passage and its English translation by Rotman.

*tām khalu rātriṃ bhagavān āyusmāṃś ca śroṇaḥ koṭīkarṇa āryeṇa
tūṣṇībhāvenādadhivāsītavān | atha bhagavān rātryāḥ pratyūśasamaye
āyusmantaṃ śroṇaṃ koṭīkarṇaṃ āmantrayete sma | pratibhātu te śroṇa
dharmo yo mayā svayam abhijñāyābhisambudhyākhyātaḥ | athāyusmāñ
chroṇo bhagavatā kṛitāvakaśaḥ asmāt parāntikayā guptikayā udānāt
pārāyaṇāt satyadṛiṣiṭaḥ śailagāthā munigāthā arthavargīyāṇi ca sūtraṇi
vistareṇa svareṇa svādhyāyaṃ karoti | atha bhagavāñ chroṇasya
koṭīkarṇasya kathāparyavasānaṃ viditvā āyusmantaṃ chroṇaṃ
koṭīkarṇaṃ idam avocet | sādhu sādhu chroṇa madhuras te dharmo
bhāṣiṭaḥ prañiṭaś cay o mayā svayam abhijñāyābhisambudhyākhyātaḥ |
athāyusmataḥ chroṇasya koṭīkarṇasyaitad abhavat|²⁶*

The Blessed one and the venerable Śroṇa Koṭīkarṇa passed that night together in noble silence. Then, when that night turned into dawn, the Blessed One Addressed the venerable Śroṇa Koṭīkarṇa: “Śroṇa, may the dharma that I myself have fully known, understood, and expressed inspire you to recite.” Given the opportunity by the blessed one, the

²⁰ *Mūlasarvāstivādivinayacarmavastu* (T1447: 1048c7–1053c5) has an extensive account of the family of Śroṇakoṭīkarṇa. For the Tibetan translation, see '*Dul ba'i gzhi* (ko l'pags kyi gzhi), in *Bka' 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Ka, vol.1, 585–622.

²¹ *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T1428: 845b7–846a14).

²² *Sarvāstivādivinaya* (T1435: 178a20–182a26) has an extensive account of the family of Śroṇakoṭīkarṇa.

²³ *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T1421: 144a13–144c4).

²⁴ *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425: 415c15–416a25).

²⁵ See also *Mūlasarvāstivādivinayacarmavastu* (T1447: 1052b27–1052c6); '*Dul ba'i gzhi*, in *Bka' 'gyur*, dpe bsdur ma, Ka, vol.1, 616.

²⁶ Cowell and Neil (1886: 20).

venerable Śroṇa, following the Aśmāparāntaka intonation,²⁷ recited passages at length and out loud from *The Inspired Utterances (Udāna)*, *The Father Shore (Pārāyaṇa)*, and *Discerning the Truth (Satyadrś)*, as well as *The Verses of Śaila (Śailagāthā)*, the *Sage's Verses (Munigāthā)*, and *Discourse Concerning the Goal (Arthavargīya Sūtras)*. When the Blessed One was sure that Śroṇa Koṭīkaṇa had finished his recitation, he said this to the venerable Śroṇa Koṭīkaṇa: “Excellent! Excellent. Śroṇa, Sweet is the dharma that you have spoken and presented! It is that which I myself have fully known, understood, and expressed.” Then it occurred to the venerable Śroṇa Koṭīkaṇa. “This is the appropriate time to address the Blessed One with the words of my instructor.”²⁸

If we compare the Sanskrit passages with corresponding passages in Pāli and translations in Chinese and Tibetan, we will notice an inter-textual variation: the titles Śroṇa Koṭīkaṇa recited differ. The table below summarizes these titles in all available records.

Table 1 Recited Texts

Divyāvadāna	MSV _T	SV	MV	DV	MIV	PV
Udāna	ched du brjod pa		八跋祇經	十六句義	十六義品經	aṭṭhakava ggika
Pārāyaṇa	pha rol 'gro byed	波羅延	Aṣṭavarga			
Satyadrś	bden pa mthong ba	薩遮陀				
Śailagāthā	ri gnas kyi tshigs su bcaḍ pa	舍修妬路				
Munigāthā	thub pa'i tshigs su bcaḍ pa					
	gnas rtan gyi tshigs su bcaḍ pa					
	gnas rtan ma'i tshigs su bcaḍ pa					
Arthavargīya Sūtra	don gyi tshoms kyi mdo sde					

*MSV_T *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya*; *SV *Sarvāstivādinaya*; *MV *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*; *DV *Dharmaguptakavinaya*; *MIV *Mahīśasakavinaya*; *PV Pāli Vinaya

²⁷ For discussion on this tone, see Rotman (2008: 399, n.179).

²⁸ Rotman (2008: 64).

This table reveals that the titles in the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* and the Chinese *Sarvāstivādinaya* correspond to those in the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna*. Lévi reconstructs the two texts that appear solely in the Tibetan *Mūlasarvāstivādinaya* as *Sthaviragāthā* and *Sthavirigāthā*.²⁹

Nun Śuklā

Before joining the saṃgha, Śuklā is a girl of the Karmāra family³⁰ married to a man named Karmāraputra in the city of Rājagṛha. Her story occurs in the section on the sixth *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule for nuns, and it survives in the Chinese translation of the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425) and the Sanskrit manuscript on the *Bhikṣuṇīvinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda. Compared with the Chinese text, the Sanskrit version is much prolonged by the insertion of a story about the seven daughters of King Kṛkī and therefore differs from the Chinese translation. A detailed account of the seven daughters is also available in *Foshuo qinü jing* 佛說七女經 (T556). The Chinese *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425) only mentions the title of this text in passing.

The Chinese translation describes Śuklā as a nun with a pleasing and pure voice, and skillful at singing hymns of praise.³¹ The Sanskrit version does not contain description of her pleasing voice; instead, it simply describes her as one who speaks sweetly (*madhura-bhāṣiṇī*).³² Renowned for her chanting skills, Śuklā receives an invitation to chant at the house of a Buddhist householder. In the description of the service nun Śuklā provides, the Chinese and Sanskrit passages presented above differ slightly. While the Chinese version explicitly says she “sung hymns of praise” with her pleasant voice, the Sanskrit version simply says that she

²⁹ See Lévi (1915:418).

³⁰ In Chinese, her name is translated as *Jienu nü* 鞞女. See *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425: 518b26).

The story of Śuklā occurs in the section on the sixth *saṃghāvaśeṣa* rule for nuns, and it survives in the Chinese translation of the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425) and the Sanskrit manuscript on the *Bhikṣuṇīvinaya* of the Mahāsāṃghika Lokottaravāda. Compared with the Chinese text, the Sanskrit version is much longer and slightly different from the Chinese translation. The Sanskrit version says she is a girl of the Karmāra family and her real name is Śuklā. See Roth (1970:111) and Nolot (1991:95). Hirakawa (1982:145) refers to her as “a girl of the Karmāra family” (*Karmāradhūā*).

³¹ *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425: 518c17–518c18): 此比丘尼有好清聲。善能讚唄。有優婆塞請去。唄已心大歡喜。即施與大張好氈。Hirakawa (1982:147) translates the passage as follows: “The nun had a pleasing and pure voice, and was skillful at singing hymns of praise; so that a lay Buddhist invited her to make song for him. When she had finished the song, he was greatly moved and pleased, and thus offered her beautiful and large cotton spread.”

³² Roth (1970: 112): *Sā madhura-bhāṣiṇī gṛheṇa gṛham nīyate | apareṇa dāni upāsakena mahārheṇa paṭeṇa chaditā* | Nolot (1991:97) translates the passage thus: *On invita d'une maison à la [nonne] au doux parler; un fidèle laïque la vêtit d'une étoffe coûteuse.*

was invited to lay households to do “pleasant speech.” Earlier in the text, the Sanskrit text does not mention a single word that is an equivalent to “reciting.” Rather, it only uses general terms such as “one who speaks pleasantly” (*madhura-bhāṣiṇī*) and “to speak” (*bhāṣaṇāya*).

When she finishes chanting, the patron is very delighted and offers her a beautiful and large cotton spread. These offerings that Śuklā receives from these invitations later bring her to the monastic court for an interrogation by the Buddha. As she becomes popular, more lay households invite her to chant. In return, she receives many offerings, which brings her trouble. Some jealous nuns make groundless accusations about her. Given its importance, I attach the passage concerning Śuklā’s monastic life as a chanter in Sanskrit original, its French translation by Nolot, the Chinese version, and its English translation by Hirakawa:

*sā dāni grheṇa grhaṃ bhāṣaṇāya nīyati | tāye dāni lābha-satkāra-śloka
'bhyudgataḥ | tāye dāni bhikṣuṇīyo irṣyāpattiḥ | lābha-satkāram
asahamānā tā dān āhamṣuH | bhañ janam etāya kṛtam | tato 'syāḥ
sarvo janakāyo śrotavyam śraddhātavyam manyati | tāyo dāni
Bhagavato allīnā | etāya Bhagavan jambhanam sādhitam | Bhagavān
āha | satyam Śukle evam nāma tvayā jambhanam śā(sā)dhitam | ten ate
jano śrotavyam manyati | āha | aham Bagavān jambhanam na jānāmi |
kuto jambhanam sādhayi syāmi | Bhagavān āha | na etāya
jambhanam sādhitam | api tu asyāḥ praṇidhānam idam|*³³

Et d’une maison à l’autre on l’invita à venir parler; elle obtint des dons, la considération, la célébrité, et les [autres] nonnes la jalouèrent. Ne pouvant avoir ni dons, ni considération, elles dirent: “Elle bouleverse [les gens]: tout le monde croit donc devoir l’écouter et ajouter foi!” Elles allèrent voir le Bienheureux: “Bienheureux, elle met en œuvre un sortilège!” Le Bienheureux dit: “Est-il vrai, Śuklā, que tu mets en œuvre un sortilège. À cause duquel les gens croient devoir t’écouter?” “Bienheureux, je ne connais pas de sortilège,” dit elle, “d’où viendrait

³³ Roth(1970:113).

que je mette en œuvre un sortilege?” Le Bienheureux dit: “Elle ne met pas en œuvre un sortilege. Mais elle a fait le vœu que voice...”³⁴

是時諸人家請唄。聞歡喜已大得利養。諸比丘尼各生嫉心。便作是言。此妖艷歌頌惑亂衆心。諸比丘尼以是因緣往白世尊。佛言。喚是比丘尼來。來已問言。汝實作世間歌頌耶。答言。我不知世間歌頌。佛言。是比丘尼非世間歌頌。³⁵

Now People would ask her to come and sing for them in their houses, and were greatly pleased when they heard her verses. Thus the bhikṣuṇī received many favors and benefits. But a jealousy rose up in each of the other bhikṣuṇī, who then said: “These songs and verses of charm and fascination will bewitch and bewilder the mind of the people.” Thereupon the other bhikṣuṇīs went to inform the Blessed One of this event. He said: “Coil forth that bhikṣuṇī.” When she had come, he asked her: “Have you really sung worldly songs and verses?” She answered: “I do not know any worldly songs and verses.” The Buddha said: “The songs and verses of that bhikṣuṇī are not worldly.”³⁶

In the Chinese version, they accuse the nun Śuklā of bewitching the public with her enchanted songs. Similarly, in the Sanskrit version, the jealous nuns accuse Śuklā—who had received enormous profit, reverence, and fame—of enchanting people to make them listen to and trust her. In particular, they report to the Buddha that she “casts spells to enchant people.” Therefore, Śuklā is summoned before the Buddha for investigation. The investigation is brief and simple, with the Buddha asking the nun only one question. In the Chinese version, he asks, “Have you really sung worldly songs and verses?” The Sanskrit version phrases the question slightly differently: “Śuklā, is it true that you cast spells to make all the people believe that they should listen to you?” She denies both questions, leading to closure of her case and the Buddha declaring her innocence.

³⁴ Nolot (1991: 98). From here, the Buddha started to tell the story of this nun who was in her previous life one of the seven daughters of King Kṛkī.

³⁵ *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya* (T1425: 518c26–518a2).

³⁶ Hirakawa (1982:147).

Concluding Remarks

While the stories discussed in the present article prohibit Buddhist monastics from reciting and chanting with musical embellishment, modification of this prohibition does appear in the same collections of Buddhist law texts. As I have discussed elsewhere,³⁷ recitation was further divided into the categories of (a) ordinary recitation appropriate for reciting Buddhist scriptures and (b) musical recitation used to recite verses in praise of the Buddha or as part of the *Tridaṇḍaka* ritual.³⁸ In fact, all monks and nuns must learn musical recitation well because they are expected to use it when reciting verses in praise of the Buddha's virtues or reciting the *Tridaṇḍaka* at stūpa worshiping rituals, funerals, and tree-cutting rituals, as well as in rituals to consecrate temporary lodging sites while traveling. Except on these occasions, Buddhists should not employ musical intonation in recitation of Buddhist texts of the monastic rules or in dharma preaching. Only those who are confined by linguistic limitations from their native dialect are exempted. Moreover, those who have not learned the musical recitation skills must practice in a solitary place to master them.

Indeed, such recitation embellished with musical intonation is not perceived as song in the eyes of Buddhists. A conversation between a captain and five hundred merchants in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayabhāṣajyavastu* clearly illustrates this perception.³⁹ While sailing in the ocean, the five hundred merchants diligently recite the *Udāna*, *Sthaviragāthā*, *Śailagāthā*, and *Arthavargīya Sūtra* day and night. In the Tibetan version, they also recite *Pārāyaṇa* and *Satyadrś*. The captain thinks that they are singing, so he compliments them: “You are good at singing.” In the Tibetan translation, the captain expresses his praise by requesting that the merchants sing one more song. In reply, the merchants say to the captain: “Captain, these are not songs. They are words of the Buddha.”

The stories of the four reciters and chanters also reveal that Buddhists consider reciting Buddhist texts as different from singing. This view is clearly demonstrated

³⁷ For detailed discussion, see the chapter on musical recitation in Buddhism in Liu (forthcoming). With the exception of the *Dharmaguptakavāṇya* (T1428) and the *Vinayasūtra*, other Buddhist law texts—including the Pāli Vinaya, the *Anguttara Nikāya*, *Pinimujing* (T1463), and *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T1421)—unanimously prohibit musical recitation on other occasions ranging from recitation of ordinary Buddhist scriptures to the recitation of the Buddhist monastic rules and the preaching of Buddhist doctrinal teachings.

³⁸ The content of *Tridaṇḍaka*, as described by Yijing, comprises three sessions: ten śloka of verses in praise of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṃgha; a selection of Buddhist scriptures; and additional verses of prayers expressing the wish to transfer the merits.

³⁹ *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayabhāṣajyavastu* (T1448: 11b5–11b14). See also 'Dul ba'i gzhi (*smān gyi gzhi*), in *Bka'* 'gyur, dpe bsdur ma, Ka, vol.1, 703.

in the way in which the Buddha phrases his question when interrogating Śuklā. The implication of his questions is obvious: reciting and chanting are legitimate, and singing is not a violation of the monastic rule concerning music if the verses are sung to express Buddhist thoughts.

Last but not least, although these reciters and chanters may not be historical figures, as in the case of Bhadra, there is ample reason to believe that before or shortly after Buddhism arrives in East Asia, Buddhists in India had already applied musical intonation to recite Buddhist texts. The employment of musical intonation in Buddhist practices, therefore, is hardly an East Asian invention.

Abbreviations

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