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On Method

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Buddhist Studies as a Discipline and the Role of Theory

Is Buddhist Studies a discipline, or is it still in a proto-disciplinary phase in its evolution? Or is it rather a super-disciplinary entity that serves as a home for disciplines? What is the relationship of Buddhist Studies to the (sub)disciplines from which it draws? Does Buddhist Studies require homogeneity for its coherence and perpetuation as a field of academic inquiry? Does it in fact have such homogeneity? The last decade has been witness to the rise of a body of theoretical literature whose purpose it is to explore the notion of disciplinarity.[1] How do disciplines arise? What social, institutional and rhetorical practices are employed in the construction of their sense of coherence and unity? What are their natural subdivisions? How do disciplines change, and how do they respond to changes in the intellectual climate? How do they interact with one another? These are just some of the questions raised in the field that has come to be known as "disciplinary studies," and the first goal of this

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1. The most recent study, with an extensive bibliography of previous work in the field, is Ellen Messer-Davidow, David R. Shumway and David J. Sylvan, eds., *Knowledges: Historical and Critical Studies in Disciplinarity* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1993).

essay is to reflect on Buddhist Studies in light of this recent body of literature.

The second goal derives from the first and is in a sense more urgent. If, as I think is clear, divergent methodological approaches to the study of Buddhism are emerging, then the time has come for us to seriously consider these alternative methodologies and to ask what role methodological reflection should play in the field today. For the past several years different approaches to the study of Buddhism have emerged that challenge what they take to be the classical paradigm. How the latter is characterized, of course, determines the nature of the critique. In some instances classical Buddhology is portrayed as overly concerned with a specific geographical area (usually India). The domination of the field by the given area is said to have two consequences: (1) by equating the study of Buddhism with its study in the specific geographically hegemonic area, classical Buddhology has been charged with impairing the development of areas of research—Chinese, Tibetan and Southeast Asian Buddhist Studies, for example—as subdisciplines in their own right, and (2) it makes of the study of the languages and civilizations of these other areas mere tools to the study of the dominant cultural region.[2] But the critique of the classical paradigm in Buddhist Studies can take other

2. That the study of Indian Buddhism is hegemonic in this regard—that scholars of the latter consider the study of Chinese texts as worthwhile only to the extent that it serves to elucidate Indian Buddhism—is a point made most recently by T. Griffith Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies: An Extended Review of *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 16.1 (1993): 93-180. The point is also made by Lancaster; see note 18. It is not difficult to see why in reading Nagao Gadjin, for example, a scholar of Tibetan Buddhism should share Foulk's view concerning the dominance of Indian / Sanskritic based scholarship in the field. In Nagao's "Reflections on Tibetan Studies in Japan," *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* 29 (1975): 107-128, he states that "Tibetan is no more than a complement to Sanskrit Buddhist studies, though a very important complement" (p. 112). See also de Jong's remarks concerning the centrality of Indian Buddhist texts in Buddhist Studies in his "Recent Buddhist Studies in Europe and America: 1973-1983," *Eastern Buddhist* 17.1 (1981): 82. On the relationship of the study of Indian and Tibetan Buddhism in Japan, and the methodological shifts that have taken place in recent years see Matsumoto Shiro, *Tibetan Studies in Japan: 1973-1983*, Asian Studies in Japan, 1973-1983, Part II-18 (Tokyo: The Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1986).

forms as well. There are those who claim, for example, that the field focuses almost exclusively on written, doctrinal texts to the exclusion of other semiotic (that is, meaning-producing) forms (e. g., oral texts, epigraphical and archaeological data, rituals, institutions, art and social practices).[3] In some instances the critique goes further, not only bemoan-

3. Many scholars in the history of the field have stressed the importance of considering more than written textual data. This has traditionally taken the form of advocating the study of epigraphy, art, ritual, culture, "Buddhist mentality," etc., alongside, or as supplements to, textual material. E. Burnouf, arguably the father of Buddhist Studies, himself used epigraphical material to shed light on the meaning of words and phrases in the texts he studied; see his extensive tenth appendix to *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* (Paris: Maissoneuve, 1825). On other studies of Buddhist inscriptions see J. W. de Jong, "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America," *Eastern Buddhist* 8.1: 88; and, by the same author, "Recent Buddhist Studies" p. 98. The most recent literature, however, dissatisfied with this more moderate stance, criticizes the hegemony of the written text over other semiotic forms and attempts to show how a serious engagement with the latter undermines many of the traditional—written-text-based—presuppositions of the field. Paradigmatic of this approach is the work of Gregory Schopen. See especially his "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman / Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985); "The Stupa Cult and the Extant Pali Vinaya," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 13 (1989); and "Burial '*ad Sanctos*' and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," *Religion* 17 (1987): 193-225. Of course, as Schopen himself acknowledges, there are earlier instances of such a critique, most notably Paul Mus's classic study *Barabuḍur: esquisse d'une histoire du Bouddhisme fondée sur la critique archéologique des textes* (Hanoi: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1935; New York: Arno Press, 1978; Paris: Arma Artis, 1990). Schopen's critique is not limited, however, to the use of epigraphical and archaeological data, as can be seen from his "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibānnasutta*: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism," Koichi Shinohara and Gregory Schopen, eds., *From Beijing to Benares: Essays on Buddhism and Chinese Religion* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1991) 187-201, where he utilizes written texts themselves to undermine the received wisdom of classical Buddhology. Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), considers social practices, that is, "the actual thought and practice of most Buddhists," to be indispensable to the understanding of "intellectual Buddhism": "I have tried to show that the most abstract forms of its (Buddhism's) imaginative representations—what we call its 'ideas'—are intimately connected with, and inextricable from, the presuppositions and institutional framework of Buddhist culture

ing the narrowness of the data traditionally considered (a critique of content) but also attacking the traditional means of studying the data that *is* considered (a critique of method). The latter often takes the form of a repudiation of classical Buddhist philology, seen by its detractors as a naive and scientistic approach to the study of written texts.[4] In other instances, traditional Buddhology is seen as overly narrow in its scope—in its hyperspecialization, unconcerned with broader, comparative questions and unable to enter into dialogue with the wider intellectual community.[5]

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and society" (p. 265-266).

4. Examples include C. W. Huntington with Geshe Namgyal Wangchen, *The Emptiness of Emptiness: An Introduction to Early Indian Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), and Andrew P. Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). For a brief critique of specific methodological principles used in the philological analysis of Buddhist texts see Paul Griffiths' review of Lambert Schmithausen's *Alayavijñāna*, in the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 12.1 (1989): 170-177. See also John C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) viii.

5. See, for example, Paul J. Griffiths, "Buddhist Hybrid English: Some Notes on Philology and Hermeneutics for Buddhologists," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4.2 (1981): 18, for example, where he states that "there is absolutely no reason why Buddhology should become an hermetic tradition, sealed off from the uninitiate and passed down from master to pupil by mystical *abhiṣeka*; in that way lies extinction, or at least a self-banishment from the wider academic community." Griffiths goes on to assert that the understanding of Buddhism "goes far beyond philology" (p. 18), involving as it does the hermeneutical task, which requires that scholars restate the meaning of texts in words other than those of the texts themselves. This he perceives as leading to "some very positive results in the area of inter-disciplinary and inter-cultural thinking" (p. 21). Consider also Steven Collins' remarks in *Selfless Persons* p. 1, "I think that a great deal of contemporary philosophy, particularly in the English-language tradition, suffers from a lack of historical and social self-awareness. I want to argue that philosophical reflection should not proceed in abstraction from intellectual history and anthropology, from the investigation and comparison of cultures." David Seyfort Ruegg, "Some Observations on the Present and Future of Buddhist Studies," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15.1 (1992): 105, encourages not only interdisciplinarity, "the need to foster contacts with specialists from other disciplines," but also "a closing of the ancient and entrenched divide between 'town' and 'gown' by attracting and holding

Reaction to this challenge has varied. In some cases, it has been ignored: a North American,[6] postmodern ripple on the otherwise calm sea, one that will dissipate with time. In others, it has brought scorn and fear: what will become of "serious" scholarship in light of these recent developments? The second goal of this essay is to explore these methodological differences and to suggest not a means of achieving reconciliation (none, I think, is forthcoming), but a way of living with these differences that averts an impending—and possibly irreparable—rift within the field.

It may be inappropriate to call Buddhist Studies a discipline, especially if we take disciplines to be exemplified by such fields as history, anthropology, art history and so forth. Analogous to the Buddhist argument concerning the self and the aggregates, it might be contended that Buddhist Studies is not a discipline because it contains disciplines as parts.[7] This, however, could simply be a question of historical evolution, for there was a time when even the classical disciplines did not seem particularly disciplinary-like. The fact that Buddhist Studies today seems a

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the educated attention, interest and support of persons who are not full-time professional academics"; see also the latter's remarks concerning specialization and interdisciplinarity in "A propos of a recent contribution to Tibetan and Buddhist Studies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82 (1962): 322, n. 4.

6. That the critique emerges primarily out of North America can be gleaned from the sources cited in the previous four notes. Increasingly, many buddhologists based in North American institutions of higher education see themselves as having a distinctive style—a method of scholarship that is different from that which is represented by the parent discipline. Increasingly, North American scholars seek to create a self-identity by contrasting their work with that of their European and Asian colleagues. If there has yet to emerge a distinctive North American school of Buddhist Studies, it is because geographically bounded areas of specialty have yet to engage in serious conversation, so that subfields the likes of South Asian, East Asian, Southeast Asian and Himalayan Buddhist Studies remain for the most part relatively isolated, self-enclosed subunits.

7. See the distinctions made by Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" p. 112, who reserves the term *disciplinary* for fields like "anthropology, history of religions, etc." Seyfort Ruegg, "Some Observations" p. 104, sees in the fact that Buddhist Studies draws on "philology, history, archaeology, architecture, epigraphy, numismatics, philosophy, cultural and social anthropology, and the histories of religion and art" not evidence of the fact that Buddhist Studies is not disciplinary, but an indication "that our enterprise is at the same time a disciplinary and a multi-disciplinary one."

strange, almost artificial and heterogeneous discipline may simply be an artifact of its relative youth. Although the academic study of Buddhism is much older than the International Association of Buddhist Studies and the journal to which it gave rise,[8] the founding of the latter, which represents a significant—perhaps pivotal—step in the institutionalization of the field, is something that occurred less than twenty years ago. Nonetheless, whether a true discipline or not—whether or not Buddhist Studies has already achieved disciplinary status, whether it is proto-disciplinary or superdisciplinary—there is an apparent integrity to Buddhist Studies that at the very least calls for an analysis of the field in holistic terms.[9] After all, we gather at meetings and international congresses in the name of that whole, however differently we may conceive of it.

Still, it must be granted that, whether due to its relative youth or not, Buddhist Studies today seems particularly hodge podge. This is due in part to the international composition of the Buddhist Studies community, and in part to the heterogeneous nature of the object of our study, Buddhism itself (on the latter, more in a moment).[10] But there are other factors—institutional ones—that also contribute to the diversity that exists within the field. It is often the case that a common pattern of insti-

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8. No comprehensive history of Buddhist Studies as a discipline exists. J. W. de Jong's essay, "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America," published in two parts, *Eastern Buddhist* 7.1: 55-106, and 7.2: 49-82, which is principally a history of Buddhist philology focused primarily on India, is an excellent, though by his own admission partial, overview of the history of the field. It contains substantial bibliographical references to other relevant studies, making it unnecessary to cite these here. See also his follow-up article, "Recent Buddhist Studies in Europe and America: 1973-1983," *Eastern Buddhist* 17.1 (1984): 79-107.

9. Not only the existence of chairs in Buddhist Studies at major universities worldwide and the fact that doctorates in the field are possible, but also the existence of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, and the fact that the latter publishes a scholarly journal, all point to the fact that buddhology is, at the very least, quasi-disciplinary in nature.

10. On the question of heterogeneity see Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" pp. 102-103. Foulk discusses the hitherto most natural subdivisions of Buddhist Studies based on geographical and linguistic subspecialties, but it is clear that there are other ways of envisioning the subdivisions of the discipline, e. g., on methodological lines. Hence, there are textual-philological, anthropological, sociological, literary-critical, and art historical approaches to the study of Buddhism, all of which form part of the broader field.

tutional support provides a discipline with homogeneity. This is lacking in Buddhist Studies. True, in many Asian countries Buddhist Studies finds consistent institutional support from religious circles, but here sectarianism leads to heterogeneity of a different kind. Outside of Asia, moreover, a department of Buddhist Studies is rare.[11] Instead, buddhologists find themselves with homes in area studies centers (South Asian, East Asian, Uralic-Altaic); in centers and institutes for the study of languages, cultures, history or a combination of these (Asian, South Asian, Indian, Sanskrit, in order of ascending specificity, just to take one series of actually instantiated examples); in departments of religious studies, and even in schools of theology.[12] Unlike other disciplines—even ones that are structurally homologous to our own, like Judaic Studies—Buddhist Studies has few secular institutional homes that it can call its own.

This means that Buddhist Studies, though not unique in this regard, is in an institutionally symbiotic relationship with—perhaps even parasitic upon—other more established fields. We often still have to justify our existence by arguing for the fact that the study of Buddhism is essential to a full understanding of a phenomenon whose epistemological value (for historical, political or economic reasons) goes unquestioned. For example, we make the case that understanding Buddhism is essential to an understanding of Asia or some portion thereof[13] (in the United States the "Pacific Rim" has for some years now been the buzz-word), or that it is an essential part of the study of religion, or perhaps that it is a *sine qua non* to fathoming what is probably the most inclusive and least epistemi-

11. See Seyfort Ruegg, "Some Observations" p. 104.

12. Seyfort Ruegg, "Some Observations" pp. 106-107, discusses what he sees as some of the advantages and dangers of the varying institutional bases of support for the discipline. For example, he sees in the fact that scholars of Buddhist Studies find homes in departments of religion, philosophy and history, a possible danger: that Buddhist Studies may become "distanced if not totally divorced from the historical and philological disciplines—Indology, Sinology, etc.," that Buddhism "might find itself being organized without due regard being accorded to its historical matrix and cultural context."

13 David Seyfort Ruegg, *The Study of Indian and Tibetan Thought: Some Problems and Perspectives*, Inaugural Lecture as Professor of Indian Philosophy, Buddhist Studies and Tibetan at the University of Leiden (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967) 4, cites J. Ph. Vogel on the importance of Buddhist Studies to the understanding of India. This goes to show that this rhetorical move is neither uncommon nor particularly new. In a similar vein, Seyfort Ruegg justifies and legitimates the study of Tibetan texts on the basis of their importance to the study of Indian Buddhism (p. 43).

cally questionable category, "humanity." But whatever the "host," Buddhist Studies remains the parasite, having in only the rarest of cases the status of unquestionable episteme. This means, of course, that many (perhaps most) of us have dual allegiances. Not only does *the discipline* become increasingly diverse as it cultivates a variety of institutional relationships for its survival, but heterogeneity in the form of multiple allegiances is something that we inherit *as scholars of Buddhism*. Part of the process of our becoming socialized as Buddhologists entails negotiating institutional homes for ourselves, and this means in part learning to wear hats other than the buddhological one.

The heterogeneity of Buddhist Studies is evident not only at the institutional level but in other respects as well. Especially today we seem to share less and less by way of method, or even subject matter. As we have seen, in recent years the textual and philological ground upon which the discipline was implicitly based[14] has been the subject of increasing critical scrutiny, and the perception exists—at least on the part of the challengers—that this has left the apparently once firm foundations of the discipline, if not teetering, at least in question.[15] Anthropologists, sociol-

14. That the discipline was (and perhaps still is) based on the philological study of Buddhist texts is a principle that we find repeatedly enunciated in the literature. To take just one example, see Jacques May's remarks in "Études Bouddhiques: Domaine, Disciplines, Perspectives," *Études de Lettres* (Lausanne), Serie III, Tome 6, no. 4 (1973): 10.

15. It might be argued that the depiction of classical Buddhist philology by its detractors is an inaccurate caricature which fails to come to terms with the way actual philological-historical work is done. This may be so, but it will have to be shown to be so by the proponents of the philological method. For example, critics of classical Buddhist philology often portray the latter as a unified and monothetic whole, something that is clearly not the case historically. On different styles of Buddhist philology see Lambert Schmithausen, preface to Part I: Earliest Buddhism, in David Seyfort Ruegg and Lambert Schmithausen, eds., *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, Panels of the VIIth World Sanskrit Conference, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990); many of the articles in the volume also touch, though at times only implicitly, on issues related to method. (For details regarding Schmithausen's own approach to the study of Buddhist texts [at least those of Early Buddhism], see his "On Some Aspects of Descriptions or Theories of 'Liberating Insight' and 'Enlightenment' in Early Buddhism," eds. K. Bruhn and A. Wezler, *Studien zum Jainismus und Buddhismus*, Gedenkschrift für Ludwig Alsdorf, Alt- und Neu Indische Studien 23 [Hamburg] 200-202.) In addition, diversity in Buddhist philology is seen in the fact that philological controversies have existed, and continue to exist, in the field. On one such controversy, that begins seriously

ogists, art historians and a new breed of textual critics, all of whom existed (or perhaps, better, subsisted) on the margins of the discipline a generation ago, are challenging the chirographic-textual-philological paradigm, and in doing so acquiring a voice that, now more central, can no longer be ignored.

In addition to the critique of philology that has emerged from within the discipline, there exists also a more general critique of editorial practices and methods of textual criticism from De Man to the present day that is virtually unknown to Buddhist Studies.[16] The literature of this

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in the 1930's—the issue of whether or not there exists a precanonical Buddhism—see Seyfort Ruegg, *The Study of Indian and Tibetan Thought* pp. 10-11. Other controversies, e. g., regarding the antiquity of the Pali canon, the use of Pali and Sanskrit materials in understanding the meaning of the Buddha as a religious figure, the relationship between Buddhism and Brahmanism, the characteristics of a Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (if any), whether or not the Vinayas of the different schools derive from the *Skandhaka*—debates that are in large part philological in character—have been discussed by de Jong, "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies," pts. I and II. Whether or not the critics of classical Buddhist philology have accurately portrayed their opponents in this debate, and whether or not their arguments hit their mark, are questions that can only be decided within the methodological debate itself. At the very least, there does exist a widespread perception (at least on the part of challengers) that a gauntlet has been thrown.

16. To cite just a few of the more important sources (some critical of classical philology, some writing in its defense): Paul De Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness," *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Paul Bove, "Variations on Authority: Some Deconstructive Transformations of the New Criticism," *The Yale Critics: Deconstruction in America*, eds. Jonathan Arac, Wlad Godzich and Wallace Martin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editing of Historical Documents," *Selected Studies in Bibliography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979); and by the same author, *A Rationale of Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989); Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and by the same author, *The Textual Condition*, Princeton Studies in Culture / Power / History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Recent literature on the philological method not actually part of the aforementioned debate includes William Proctor Williams and Craig S. Abbott, *An Introduction to Bibliographical and Textual Studies* (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1985); Peter L. Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); *Textual Criticism Since Greg: A Chronicle 1950-1985* (Charlottesville: University of

broader critique, at once more extensive and subtler, is in many ways more devastating to classical Buddhist philology than that which arises from within the field itself. But this is not the place to rehearse these arguments. Suffice it to say that there is a growing perception that the critique of the chirographic-textual-philological paradigm upon which classical Buddhist Studies is based has meant that in the eyes of many scholars the discipline no longer has a common methodological base.

Given the lack of consensus in regard to method—in its general form a fairly recent phenomenon—it might seem natural to seek commonalty not in "how" we do what we do, but in "what" we do, that is, in the object of our study. Is not *Buddhism* our common concern, and does this fact not give the field its coherence? This is nominally true, but Buddhism is itself an artificial construct whose apparent unity and solidity begins to crumble almost immediately upon analysis. Is Buddhism text-based doctrine or behavior-based praxis? Is it what the clergy does or what lay people do? What was done then or what is done now? What happens in Tibet or in Japan? Of course, it is all of these things, but that is tantamount to admitting the multivalent character of our subject matter. To say that we all work on Buddhism is not to point the finger at similarity but at difference.

Now it might be thought that I will be arguing here for the reconstitution of Buddhist Studies around some new and as yet unperceived common core.[17] But this is not my intention. The coherence of Buddhist Studies as a field of inquiry does not require consensus as to method or subject matter—just the opposite. Now that the cat of difference is out of the bag, what will guarantee the stability and longevity of the discipline is not the *insistence on homogeneity*, which in any case can now only be achieved through force, but instead by *embracing heterogeneity*. To embrace difference, moreover, implies more than the passive and irenic acceptance of the polarities that exist within the field. The superfi-

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Virginia Press, 1987); and E. J. Kenney, *The Classical Text: Aspects of Editing in the Age of the Printed Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

17. The heterogeneous and artificial nature of Buddhist Studies as a discipline is not something new. If it appears to be so, it is because of the new forms of criticism that have recently emerged. That there exists "a singular lack of coordination" and "seriously divergent attitudes" in the field of Tibetan Studies is a point that was made by D. Seyfort Ruegg more than thirty years ago; see his "A propos of a Recent Contribution to Tibetan and Buddhist Studies," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82 (1962): 320.

cial tolerance of other methods or areas of specialty is no longer sufficient. The embracing of difference that I see as being necessary entails more than the organization and promotion of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural panels at conferences like those of the International Association of Buddhist Studies. The investigation of specific Buddhist themes from different disciplinary, geographical and historical perspectives is a desideratum, to be sure, and even this much has yet to be fully realized in the field.[18] More, however, is called for. Embracing difference involves as well a new mode of discourse within Buddhist Studies that focuses on method: a conversation that is critical, dialogical, and at times unabashedly polemical. For this to occur, however, two preconditions must be met: we must acknowledge (a) that the discipline has indeed changed, that it is no longer what it used to be,[19] and (b) that what is different about it is something that is worth exploring, taking the challenges seriously enough to make them the subject of conversation. This, of course, implies eschewing the kind of conservatism that considers

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18. This is true despite a call for greater cross-cultural and interdisciplinary work in the field throughout the decades. Seyfort Ruegg, again more than thirty years ago, bemoaned the arbitrary compartmentalization of Tibetan Studies into "a 'philosopher's Tibetology'—or a historian's, a sociologist's etc."; see "A propos of a Recent Contribution" pp. 320-321. The issue is taken up by him once again in his *The Study of Indian and Tibetan Thought*, p. 5, where he argues against the distinction between the philosophical, religious and sociological in Buddhism. In that same essay (p. 21) he stresses the importance of psychology, semiology, sociology and religious studies for a full understanding of Tantra. Michel Strickmann, "A Survey of Tibetan Buddhist Studies," *Eastern Buddhist* 10.1 (May, 1977): 141, argues, analogously, that it is impossible to fully understand the Buddhist Tantras in India "without considering the abundant Chinese sources and the work of Japanese scholars who know them well." Lewis Lancaster, "The Editing of Buddhist Texts," *Buddhist Thought and Asian Civilization: Essays in Honor of Herbert V. Guenther on His Sixtieth Birthday* (Emeryville, N.Y.: Dharma Publishing, 1977) 145-151, argues for the value of Chinese translations in the editing of Sanskrit texts. Examples of such calls for greater cross-cultural and interdsiciplinary work are, of course, plentiful in the literature, despite the fact that they have in large part gone unheeded.

19. In this regard, what Clifford Geertz has said of anthropology rings just as true of Buddhist Studies: "Something new having emerged both 'in the field' and 'in the academy,' something new must appear on the page . . . if it [the discipline] is now to prosper, with that confidence shaken, it must become aware" (*Works and Lives: The Anthropologist as Author* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988] 148-149).

ignoring methodological differences to be the most effective strategy for dealing with them. In its most insidious manifestation this ignorance of difference takes the form of a paternalism that simply refuses, through the sheer force of will or the exercise of power, to acknowledge the existence of viable alternative methodological perspectives and styles of scholarship. A more palatable form, which nonetheless brings an end to the conversation just as effectively, we might term "isolationism." Here the existence of different theoretical perspectives is acknowledged but considered trivial, in that these views are seen as having little if any impact on one another. This latter solution to the problem of methodological heterogeneity consists simply of continuing to do what one has always done, while paying lip service to the fact that others may be doing things differently. A third obstacle to the emergence of a critical dialogue on method is skepticism in regard to theory generally. From this perspective second-order reflection on theoretical and methodological issues is considered to fall outside of the purview of the field: a distraction to the "real" work of the buddhologist. "When time[20] is so precious, why waste it on speculation of this sort?" Each of these responses fails to take the challenge and implications of difference seriously. We exist today in an atmosphere where the methodological direction(s) of the field

20. The issue of "time" is quite central to the entire discussion of method. Many of the issues dealt with below can be reformulated in temporal terms, that is, as problems related to time (or lack of it). For example, lack of time is an often-cited justification for hyper-specialization (geographical, linguistic, methodological): "There is simply not enough time to gain expertise in more than one cultural area or historical period: to learn all of the necessary languages, to be both a good philologist and a good anthropologist." Time (for training students, for doing research) is always limited, and this means that choices must always be made. Choosing one option excludes pursuing others. What this means, then, is that the rhetoric of time limitation is ultimately translatable into language concerning priorities. To say that there is insufficient time to specialize in more than a single geographical area is tantamount to saying "I will give priority to India over China" (or vice versa); or to saying "It is more important to have greater knowledge of one geographical area than lesser knowledge of two (or more)." Likewise, using the rhetoric of time limitation as justification for avoiding methodological questions reduces to giving priority to nonmethodological, first-order discourse. Hence, the fact that there is not enough time for *x* translates into the fact that *y* must take priority. In another, as yet unfinished, essay related to this issue I use Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of "chronotopes" as a way of periodizing the development of Buddhist Studies.

are in contention. Not to speak to these issues by retreating in reactionary, isolationist or skeptical ways is in effect to give up one's vote: to forsake the opportunity of allowing one's voice to be heard.

The alternative, as I have mentioned, is to enter the methodological debate in a way that is both critical and dialogical. To do so is not only to accept the fact of methodological heterogeneity but also its implications. The different theoretical approaches to the study of Buddhism challenge each other and demand not only mutual respect but mutual response.

Of course, such a dialogue must begin with an identification of the different perspectives. One of the best entrees into the identification of the variant styles of scholarship is not through their sympathetic depiction, but through their caricature in stereotypes. These stereotypes are often constructed in such a way that specific styles of scholarship are associated with specific racial/ethnic, national, religious and gender characteristics. Like all stereotypes, they are falsehoods: racist, sexist and generally exhibiting the type of intolerance to which we as human beings are unfortunately heir. But exist they do. My purpose in listing some of these now is not so much to directly criticize them, though this needs to be done, but to utilize them as a venue for identifying the different methodological perspectives on which they, in their grotesque way, are based. For better or for worse, let us proceed.

1. Critical distance from the object of intellectual analysis is necessary. Buddhists, by virtue of their religious commitment, lack such critical distance from Buddhism. Hence, Buddhists are *never* good buddhologists.[21] Or, alternatively, those who take any aspect of Buddhist doctrine seriously (whether pro or con) are scientifically suspect by virtue of allowing their individual beliefs to affect their scholarship. Good scholarship is neutral as regards questions of truth. Hence, evaluative / normative scholarship falls outside of the purview of Buddhist Studies.
2. Interesting and / or serious Buddhist Studies only takes place in the northern hemisphere (and substitute for "northern hemisphere" any one of a number of geographical areas: Europe, North America, Japan and so forth).
3. North Americans are poor philologists; when they rely on primary

21. For the opposite view, see May, "Etudes Bouddhiques" p. 18: "As for the practice of the religion itself, it can certainly be combined with academic erudition. This is frequently the case in Japan . . ." (my trans.)

textual material at all, they do so in an uninformed, extravagant and frivolous way as a means of substantiating overly broad hypotheses that are, in any case, of dubious scientific interest. Their philological naïveté makes them turn to questions of theory rather than substance, and this in turn makes them prone to the dogmatic acceptance of the latest methodological fad.

4. German and earlier French scholarship is so obsessed with the minu tiae of textual criticism that it is incapable of achieving any kind of broad overview of the meaning of individual texts, much less an understanding of Buddhist doctrine / praxis in broad terms. Scholars from these traditions often lack knowledge of *modern* Asian languages; their scholarship is usually of the arm-chair variety, devoid of any contact with living traditions. This leads them to dogmatically dismiss the value of oral traditions of textual transmission and to disregard the popular and nonliterary aspects of Buddhism. In their superficial treatment of texts they are uninterested in—and in any case incapable of—critically assessing the philosophical validity and broader implications of Buddhist doctrine.

5. Continuing east, Indian scholarship, encumbered by years of neo-Vedantist influence, is incapable of perceiving Buddhism as a distinct entity; and even in the rare instances when it does, it is neither systematic, critical nor historical.

6. Chinese scholarship is, in its Taiwanese variety, pietistic, sectarian, at most *only* historical, and in any case consists primarily of the careless republishing of out-of-print editions. On the mainland, it is hostage to the imprimatur of Marxist-Maoist ideologues.

7. Japanese scholarship consists entirely of philological work of insignificant worth, or, alternatively, of cataloguing, indexing and lexicography; in no instance do we find anything "creative" or "innovative" in Japanese scholarship.

8. Anthropologists, archaeologists, epigraphers and art historians are textually, and often historically, uninformed. If they were not, they would be doing what the rest of us are doing.

9. And finally, feminist criticism (and some would say the scholarship of women generally) must be tolerated but, consisting chiefly of subjective evaluations and emotional appeals with no basis in rigorous scientific principles, is not to be taken seriously.

Now there are various ways of gleaning from these caricatures the different perspectives on methodological issues that today divide the field. One such way consists of identifying the perspectives or vantage points

from which the above stereotypes emerge by identifying the voices that speak them. Broadly, we encounter two schools of thought operative here. One we can call *positivist*, the other *interpretivist*.

Positivists conceive of texts—whether linguistic (written or oral), or cultural (behavioral, artistic, etc.)—as the beginning and end of the scholarly enterprise.[22] In its philological variety, positivism sees a written text as complete and whole. It maintains that the purpose of scholarly textual investigation—and the use of science as a model for humanistic research here is always implied[23]—is to reconstruct the original[24] text (there is *only one* best reconstruction): to restore it and to contextualize it historically to the point where the author's original intention can be gleaned.[25] The principles of textual criticism represent an established,

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22. That the notion of text can be more broadly construed, as I have done here, to include oral material, religious behavior (e. g., ritual, pilgrimage, etc.) and art, should by now be a fairly familiar move. Critics often overlook the fact that written texts are not the only objects of the positivist enterprise. Positivist anthropology, for example, uses "texts" of a different sort (cultural artifacts such as rituals or kinship patterns) to similar ends as philological positivism. If our focus is on the latter in this essay, it is only because it is the positivism of the philological variety that has become the object of recent critical scrutiny, and not because philological positivism is the only form to be found in the academy, even in Buddhist Studies.

23. Seyfort Ruegg, "A propos" p. 320, is careful to use the word "science" in quotation marks when referring to work "guided by principles derived from the study of Tibetan sources." Others, however, continue to operate under the assumption that philology is *wissenschatlich* in very much of a positivist sense of the term.

24. The relationship between philology and the quest for origins goes beyond the search for the original ur-text, the autograph. In some instances philology has been seen as the key to recovering primitive or original Buddhism as a whole. E. Burnouf, for instance, believed that the latter could be reconstructed based on an analysis of the commonalties between Pali and Sanskrit texts; see his *Introduction a l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien, Tome* I (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1844) p. 11; and also de Jong, "A Brief History," pt. I, p. 73.

25. One of the clearest brief statements regarding the "methods of philology" to be found in the Buddhist Studies literature is Seyfort Ruegg's in "A propos of a Recent Contribution" p. 322. See also, J. W. de Jong, "De Studie van het Boeddhisme, Problemen an Perspectieven" (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1956); in English translation, "The Study of Buddhism: Problems and Perspectives," *Buddhist Studies by J. W. de Jong,* ed. Gregory Schopen (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979) 15-28. The difference between the approach of Seyfort Ruegg and the extremist position being characterized here

fixed and finely tuned scientific method; hence, there is no need for further methodological reflection.[26] To reconstitute the text in this way is to make it available in a neutral, untampered-with and pristine fashion. This is not only sufficient and worthwhile, it is in any case all that is achievable, even in principle. Once the text has been reconstituted in this way, its meaning unfolds from within itself, without any need for interpretation. The goal of scholarship is to allow texts to speak for themselves. Scholars are not multifaceted prisms through which texts pass and refract. They are mirrors on which texts reflect and congeal into wholes. It is the text and at most its historical context that should be the sole concern of the scholar: the end-point of the scholarly enterprise. To

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is that the former acknowledges the validity and worth of other forms of analysis not philological. It is, however, true that Seyfort Ruegg in that same essay (p. 322) excludes "comparative and general studies" from Tibetology and Buddhology proper. The latter disciplines—"whose methods and 'programme' . . . can in the last analysis be determined only by intrinsic criteria" (p. 321)—he perceives as "necessary prerequisites" for, but distinct from, the former type of work. Moreover, Seyfort Ruegg sees philology as providing "a vital nucleus in this diversified field" (that is, in Tibetology). From this it can be surmised that for Seyfort Ruegg—at least for the Seyfort Ruegg of 1962—Tibetology and Buddhology proper are philological disciplines, and that these philological disciplines form the basis and core for other methodological approaches to Tibetan civilization and Buddhism, respectively. A similar position is held by de Jong, "The Study of Buddhism" p. 16, where he sees philology, that is, the study of Buddhist literature, as being fundamental and

> the most important source of knowledge of Buddhism. Buddhist art, inscriptions and coins have supplied us with useful data, but generally they cannot be fully understood without the support given by the texts. Consequently, the study of Buddhism needs first of all to be concentrated on the texts which have been transmitted, and, indeed, it [Buddhist Studies] only made good progress after Buddhist philology had been established on a sound basis.

De Jong, too, is more moderate than the extremist position being characterized here in that he sees other research strategies, e. g., direct contact with Buddhist cultures, as being necessary to an understanding of Buddhism.

26. Consider as an example of the rhetoric of the finality of method the following words of Nagao Gadjin, "Reflections on Tibetan Studies in Japan" p. 112: "Since approximately fifty years ago, when Yamaguchi Susumu and others returned to Japan from study in Europe, the method of studying the combined Sanskrit-Tibetan-Chinese versions has been established, and is now generally accepted by scholars."

go beyond them—and in most instances this means even considering the opinion of what later interpreters in the tradition have to say—is to go beyond the author's intention. It is to pollute scholarship with personal bias, either one's own or those of others.[27] In the words of Clifford Geertz, the role of the *text positivist* "dissolves into that of an honest broker passing on the substance of things with only the most trivial of transaction costs."[28]

Interpretivists believe that texts, though the starting point of scholarship, are not ends in themselves. They maintain that interpretation infuses every part of humanistic scholarship, even apparently "neutral" tasks such as textual criticism and lexicography. There is, for the interpretivist, no escape from subjective contamination, no preinterpretive moment.[29] Interpretivists eschew the notion that there is a single achiev-

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27. What I am characterizing here as philological positivism is of course closely linked to the nineteenth century hermeneutical tradition as represented by Schleiermacher and Dilthey (what Gadamer calls "romantic hermeneutics"). See Andrew P. Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy and the Philosophy of Scholarship: On the Western Interpretation of Nāgārjuna* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); and also Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, 2nd rev. edition (New York: Continuum, 1993) pt. 2.

28. Geertz, *Works and Lives* p. 145.

29. An interesting analysis of the way in which scholars' subjective methodological and theoretical presuppositions have affected their results is to be found in de Jong's historiographical discussion of the Western scholarly study of the Buddha "legend." In his "The Study of Buddhism," and more extensively in "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies," he shows how the interpretive strategies of figures like Senart, Kern and Oldenburg molded their conception of the Buddha as a mythical / historical figure. Not content simply to point out the variation in the perceptions concerning the Buddha, de Jong himself proposes a method for its resolution, namely greater reliance on the methods of historical criticism; in particular, he believes that comparison to non-Buddhist sources can yield the historical truths in the traditional accounts of the life of the Buddha. As in the former cases, it is likely that this method, rather than yielding new "facts" concerning the Buddha's life, is simply reflective of de Jong's own scholarly style and presuppositions. See his "The Study of Buddhism" pp. 25-26. Enigmatically, he ends this latter essay by claiming that no historical approach to the study of Buddhism is possible, "because in the spiritual life of India the historical dimension is of much less importance than it is in Western civilization" (p. 26). Implicit here is the presupposition that Western scholarly methods employed in the study of Buddhism must correspond to the world view in which Buddhism existed and evolved—an

able text that represents an author's original intention.[30] Every move in the philological process represents an instance of personal choice, and these choices have their consequences.[31] Given the intensely subjective character of humanistic scholarship, we have no choice but to reflect methodologically on what we do, indicating to readers our theoretical presuppositions and providing them with reasons for why we have chosen certain methodological options over others. A scholar's signature must appear not only on the title page, but throughout the entire work through the manifest exposition of his or her subjectivity.[32]

Interpretivists are usually not content simply to engage in a negative critique of what they perceive to be the scientistic dogmas of positivists. They want to go further and to propose certain positive theses of their own. For example, interpretivists often wish to assert that texts, far from being the end-point of scholarly praxis, are the starting points for further

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almost theological stance. Leading de Jong beyond pure philology as the sole method, he comes to the conclusion that "the most important task for the student of Buddhism is the study of Buddhist mentality. That is why contact with present-day Buddhism is so important, for this will guard us against seeing the texts purely as philological material and forgetting that for the Buddhist they are sacred texts which proclaim a message of salvation" (p. 26). Though never rejecting the importance of philology, it is clear from this passage that de Jong sees philology as incomplete and in need of being supplemented by other methods. How easy—and how inaccurate—it would be, on the basis of his other writings, to characterize de Jong, the consummate philologist, as a positivist. If there is one lesson to be learned from this discussion it is that the positivist / interpretivist distinction I am drawing here is only heuristically useful, and that methodological affiliation in the real life of practicing scholars is a more complex phenomenon than we have access to using such a simplified model.

30. For a devastating critique of the notion that the only goal of textual criticism is achieving a text that represents the author's intention, see McGann, *The Textual Condition*, ch. 3.

31. For an actual example of the choices that confront the editor of a text, and of the consequences of those choices on how the text is understood, see McGann, *The Textual Condition*, ch. 1. Although McGann would probably not want to be considered an interpretivist in some senses of the term, it is clear from his writings that he opposes the "editor-as-technical-functionary" model of textual scholarship that is paradigmatic of positivism, or what he calls "empiricism."

32. As an interesting counterpoint to this view, see David Macey's characterization of Foucault's view of authorial subjectivity in *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993) xiv-xvi.

reflection. The fact that a written text, a ritual or a work of art is (or was) meaningful is an indication of the fact that it can teach us broader lessons beyond itself: that it can, for example, be a source for developing more general principles, theories or laws that concern what people believe or how they behave.[33] Some interpretivists would go so far as to claim that texts can even serve as sources of normative insight about the world by serving as sources for the evaluative assessment of claims concerning truth, beauty and human well-being.[34] Given that all scholarship is "refractory," asks the interpretivist, why not admit to the creative role of the investigator and celebrate, as it were, this creativity and freedom in scholarship itself?

It should be clear from the way in which I have characterized these two paradigms—the positivist and interpretivist—that they are themselves caricatures. They are, to borrow a phrase from Max Weber, "ideal types" that are rarely, if ever, instantiated in real life. For example, few philologists today consider their work to be completely objective[35]; and few scholars with interpretivist leanings are willing to abandon philological standards of accuracy and rigor. Hence, pure positivists and interpre-

33. Collins, *Selfless Persons*, sees the comparative project in which he is engaged, for example, as capable of illuminating our own "inherent concerns and presuppositions, and perhaps the general nature of human thought (if such exists)" by "acting as a mirror to our own thinking" (pp. 2-3). And John C. Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteśvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), suggests that the process of the transformation of religious symbols might be found in religious traditions other than Buddhism, so that he sees his work as uncovering "principles of religious assimilation generally." I myself make an analogous claim about scholasticism in *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

34. Seyfort Ruegg, "Some Observations" p. 105, for example, sees the Buddhist world view as making normative contributions to ethics; see his n. 1 for relevant bibliography concerning this issue.

35. Consider Lambert Schmithausen's remarks in *Buddhism and Nature*, Studia Philologica Buddhica Occasional Papers Series VII (Tokyo: The International Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1991) p. 2, sec. 2: "As a scholar I am expected to deal with my subject-matter in an objective way. If this were to mean without emotional concern, and without a personal standpoint, I have to admit failure in advance." Nonetheless, Schmithausen makes it clear that having a personal standpoint and being emotionally concerned does not prevent scholars from engaging in their task "as objectively as possible" (p. 2, sec. 3.1).

tivists are fictions, but though fictions there are some heuristic advantages in considering them. Their most important function for our purposes is to serve as reagents that distill the attitudes of the previously mentioned stereotypes, bringing them down to their most basic forms. In addition—if I may be allowed to extend the chemical analogy a little further—they serve as foci around which to crystallize the fundamental methodological issues over which buddhologists today tend to differ. What are these issues?

The necessity of methodological reflection[36]

This has already been dealt with above to a large extent. That there are fundamental issues in the discipline that have yet to be fully explored is, in any case, what much of this essay is about. The need for methodological debate in a discipline comes about when there emerges a critical mass of scholars who perceive themselves as engaging in research strategies that are substantively different from those that preceded them. This leads them to formulate their new method in more precise terms, distinguishing it from what came before; ultimately, it leads them to question the previous paradigm's hegemony, validity or both.[37]

Those familiar with the work of Thomas Kuhn may conclude, wrongly, that I am here predicting or advocating some kind of paradigm shift in Buddhist Studies. It is not my intention, however, to forecast, much less to argue for, an end to philology as a mode of scholarship.[38] This essay is rather a call for conversation and mutual understanding between different views on key issues that I perceive to be representative of different styles of contemporary scholarly praxis. Not to engage in methodological reflection and debate at this point, however, could indeed polarize the field, whether or not this inevitably results in a paradigm shift. In general, however, I do not believe that the Kuhnian model for

36. This is not, strictly speaking, a methodological, but rather a theoretical (or meta-methodological), issue. It is a claim *about* methodology (that it needs to be more fully discussed) rather than an issue *in* methodology proper.

37. To question the hegemony of a previous paradigm is to demand a voice alongside the latter; to question its validity is to demand an end to the previous mode of scholarly praxis altogether.

38. Indeed, I have argued in print for the importance of textual studies, and for the fact that methodological speculation should occur alongside such studies and not replace them. See my "On Retreating to Method and Other Postmodern Turns: A Response to C. W. Huntington," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15.1 (1992): 134-144.

change within disciplines—essentially agonistic, one mode of discourse defeating another—is the only viable one. An alternative is the critical-dialogical model I am setting forth here, the result of which is not the wholesale triumph of one view over another, but the mutual, albeit critical, understanding of perspectives.

The question of objectivity

At a previous meeting of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in Paris I had the great fortune to have dined with a one of those rare colleagues who holds close to a positivist view on the issue of objectivity. In his characterization of it, it went something like this. In working with a Buddhist (or indeed any kind of classical) text, scholars can and should be devoid of—or rather, since this is something that must be cultivated, "void themselves of"—all bias and prejudice, allowing the text to speak for itself. This critical distance, though difficult to achieve, is attainable through training and sustained effort. The result is the total eradication of all subjective elements in the scholarly enterprise, so that one becomes "the disinterested observer, wherein one strives to bracket one's own opinions and agendas and applies the methods of historical criticism."[39] This is essential if scholarship is to be scientifically sound. Religious commitment to the text one is studying necessarily clouds judgment and prevents the scholar from achieving the kind of neutrality that is necessary to presenting the text as it was originally written and understood.[40] When confronted with difficult philological decisions—for example, key textual emendations or questions of authorship that run counter to the doctrines of the tradition—allegiance to the religious world view one is investigating prevents the scholar with a faith commitment from making the appropriate decision.[41] Therefore, Buddhists can never achieve the kind of pure objectivity that is called for in scholarly research on Bud-

39. See, e. g., Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" p. 173. An attempt to come to terms with and to dispel some of the prejudices that have infiltrated the field of Indian Studies is found in Johannes Bronkhorst, "L'Indianisme et les préjugés occidentaux," *Études de Lettres* (Lausanne) (April / June 1989): 119-136.

40. On some of the tensions between being Buddhist and studying Buddhism in a Japanese context see Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" pp. 106-108. See also Paul J. Griffiths' caricature of the Buddhist buddhologist in "Buddhist Hybrid English" pp. 21-22.

41. See Paul Griffith's remarks in his review of Schmithausen's *Ālayavijñāna*, p. 173.

dhist texts.[42] For this same reason scholars should refrain from relying on "native informants," lest scholarship become tainted by the bias that is endemic to traditional exegesis.[43] As a corollary, the study of the modern spoken languages of Asia, if necessary at all, are to be given low priority.

At the other end of the spectrum from this view is what we might call the hyper-subjectivist or constructionist position. It claims that a scholar's own subjectivity infiltrates every aspect of his or her work. Texts cannot speak for themselves because they do not exist objectively. It is the reader that creates or constructs a text in the very act of reading. Versions of this view are to be found in the writings of Paul De Man,[44] and more recently in a book by Jerome McGann.[45] A text exists only in the act of reading, and when scholars read a text, they do not glean an author's intention, but, as it were, only their own. Rather than a scholar being a mirror that reflects an author's original intention, it is the text that serves as a mirror for the scholars' own concerns: their personal and social situation. Objectivity is a myth, as is the notion of a set of standards or criteria on the basis of which to arbitrate between competing interpretations. In De Man's words, "[reading] is an act of understanding that can never be observed, nor in any way prescribed or verified."[46]

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42. It is sometimes maintained, as a corollary to this view, that even the mere exposure to living traditions is enough to contaminate the scholar's judgment, and should therefore be avoided.

43. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that Japanese Buddhist Studies has inherited many of the positivistic tendencies of its European counterpart, the Japanese do not exhibit this allergy to contact with the cultures they study. Tibetan Buddhist Studies in Japan, for example, began with the travels of Japanese scholars to Tibet; and Nagao Gadjin marks 1961, the year when three Tibetan informants came to Japan, as a turning point in Tibetan Studies in that country. See his "Reflections on Tibetan Studies in Japan," *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the Institute of Eastern Culture* 29 (1975): 107-128. See also Matsumoto, *Tibetan Studies in Japan* p. 10.

44. See, for example, De Man, "The Rhetoric of Blindness."

45. Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition*. McGann's version of textuality differs from De Man's in that it is less idealist and more materialist, emphasizing the social and historical dimensions of the act of reading. Both theorists, however, fall into the constructionist camp.

46. "The Rhetoric of Blindness" p. 107. For McGann (*The Textual Condition* p. 10) the fact of interpretational variety is due not only to the situational diversity of readers, but is something that inheres within texts themselves.

The true subjectivist is a relativist.[47]

My purpose here, and in this paper as whole, is not to suggest a resolution to the question of objectivity, or even a direction for a critical dialogue on this or other issues. This is of course impossible both to predict and to prescribe. It is something that will instead evolve in response to the interests and needs of scholars. My goal is simply to point out that methodological differences on this question (and the others that follow) do exist, and to suggest that their discussion is an essential part of the critical dialogue on method that is needed in the discipline.

Interpretation and creativity

To consider *fully* the disciplinarity of a field like Buddhist Studies, which this paper does not purport to do, requires an investigation of its intellectual sociology. What social processes are involved in becoming employed as a buddhologist, in the granting of tenure and in the making of reputations? What books and articles get published and how is this decided? How are students supported and trained[48]? In brief, what criteria are operative in deciding what constitutes knowledge, and how is this knowledge institutionally transmitted and disseminated, and to whom? These issues are too complex to treat here in their entirety. It is however possible to use the discussion of interpretation and creativity as a venue—or perhaps "excuse"—for examining one somewhat contained issue: the nature of acceptable research.[49] Guidelines—usually implicit—

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47. A critique of the notion of the objectivism implicit in Western scholarship on Nāgārjuna is to be found in Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy*. Though not as radical as the position outlined here, and though rhetorically repudiating relativism, Tuck's view that all reading is isogetical leaves one with the impression that the various Western interpretations of Nāgārjuna that he analyzes are *solely* the result of the relative paradigmatic and psychological "site" of various scholars, making him effectively a relativist. See also Johannes Bronkhorst's review (and criticism) of Tuck on this very issue, "On the Method of Interpreting Philosophical Sanskrit Texts," *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 67.3 (1993): 501-511, though it might be argued that Bronkhorst's rejection of the fact that knowledge is culturally embedded in fact goes too far, risking a fall into the extreme of positivism.

48. May's "Études Bouddhiques" is dedicated in large part to setting forth principles along the lines of which the training of students should be based.

49. An interesting attempt to prescribe what constitutes valid research, or in his words, "true progress of Tibetan Buddhist studies as a highly developed field of scholarly inquiry," is Michel Strickmann's bibliographical article, "A Survey of Tibetan Buddhist Studies," *Eastern Buddhist* 10.1 (May, 1977):

for what constitutes an acceptable doctoral dissertation topic, and for that matter criteria for research funding evaluation and even tenure and promotion decisions, are often good indicators of the ethos of a field. A generation ago in the United States it may have been possible to submit as fulfillment of the research requirement for the doctorate, or as the subject of a postdoctoral research grant, work that was strictly philological in character: undertaking a critical edition of a text, say. If this was ever the case, it is even rarer today. In our time, such work is considered to lack a certain originality and creativity that is an essential characteristic of scholarly research. Ironically, this is due in large part to the picture that many philologists have themselves painted of their own specialty. Philological work is seen as lacking originality because it is believed—falsely it seems to me—to consist of the mechanical reconstitution of another author's work. Hence, the editing of texts, the compilation of anthologies, and even translations, are perceived by the most extreme critics to be just one step removed from plagiarism.[50]

True research, so the story now goes, is creative. That is, it contains an element of novelty: the defense of a clear thesis that is not only new but significant. Hearkening back to our discussion of interpretivism, this requires the full involvement of the scholar not only in the text, but beyond it as well, utilizing the text as an object of interpretation with the goal of achieving results that are broad and general in scope. Ideally, the research should shake the field from within, and the waves from the "splash" should be felt outside of it as well. It is probably clear that this

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128-149. Here Strickmann attempts to distinguish real scholarship from "gaudy productions" that, "hardly relevant to the study of Buddhism," are "tracts telling harassed Americans how to relax." Unfortunately, Strickmann never cites examples of the latter, nor does he ever disclose his criteria for including and excluding the works that he does. One is to surmise from his rhetoric that the list of "gaudy productions" consists of all those works to which he does not grant his imprimatur. What I find most interesting about Strickmann's article is not the actual scholarly canon he attempts to "catalogue," but the fact that it represents a prime locus for the investigation of the sociology of knowledge in one subfield of Buddhist Studies: a site for exploring one scholar's attempt at delineating what constitutes valid research, clouded in a rhetoric that makes it appear as though that scholar's own subjectivity has no part to play in the process.

50. In the United States, to take the example with which I am most familiar, it is almost inconceivable to imagine that tenure would be granted solely on the basis of text-critical work, or even on the basis of a well-received annotated translation.

notion of creativity is modern,[51] and—at least in the way I have characterized it here—particularly North American, based as it is on a kind of hyper-individualism. But it is also clear that such a model of what constitutes adequate research has been received warmly and is functionally normative in geographically diverse institutional settings outside of North America as well.[52]

In the United States and Canada today[53] we operate with this as the ideal of what constitutes real research in the field of Buddhist Studies. There are reasons for this that go beyond the realm of the merely intellectual. For about a decade or so, buddhologists in North America have found employment in increasing numbers in departments of religious studies and schools of theology. Often this has meant that we have had to expand our pedagogical repertoire beyond courses in Buddhist Studies to accommodate the curricular needs of these institutions. In addition, we increasingly find ourselves in conversations with colleagues whose specialty lies outside of the discipline of Buddhist Studies. Our de facto professional organization has become the American Academy of Religion, an institution that stresses broad and interdisciplinary research. The editorial bodies of academic presses seek work that has "broad appeal," is "original," and "cutting-edge." And finally, it is in accordance with the standards (often only implicitly) set forth by these various institutional bodies that tenure and promotion decisions are made. All of these factors have contributed to what we might call the diversification of the buddhologist: a movement away from classical Buddhist Studies based on the philological study of written texts, and toward the investigation of more general, comparative and often theoretical issues that have implications (and audiences) outside of Buddhist Studies. Some colleagues have

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51. On this point see my *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994) 83-87.

52. To cite just one example, I know of several Tibetan scholars who have chosen not to seek doctorates at Indian universities precisely because of the requirement that they undertake research that is innovative, something they consider anathema—a betrayal of the tradition.

53. I am not unaware of the dangers of generalizing about the patterns of scholarship in large geographical areas. My goal here is not to speak for my colleagues in the United States and Canada; many will undoubtedly disagree with what I have to say. Nor is it my intention to imply that North American scholarship is homogeneous; it is certainly not. With these caveats, however, it does seem to me possible to venture upon some general remarks about patterns of scholarship, like the ones that follow.

resigned themselves to this situation: a set of circumstances that must be tolerated for the sake of gainful employment. Others—and I count myself in this camp—have found the pressure to greater diversification intellectually stimulating, affording an opportunity to enter into broader conversations where Buddhist texts are one, but not the only, voice.

Be that as it may, it is clear that this latter model of what constitutes adequate research, based as it is on an interpretivist paradigm, represents a clear departure from a positivist program of exclusively textual scholarship. What kind of dialogue will arise as a result of these methodological differences concerning the nature of adequate research? This, of course, remains to be seen.

The question of normative discourse

Related to the questions of objectivity and creativity, though not reducible to either one, is the issue of the appropriateness of normative discourse.[54] The classically positivist position that I have outlined above maintains of course that there is no room for evaluative assessment in Buddhist Studies. Perceiving its own discourse to be value-free and neutral, positivism operates under the assumption that the role of the scholar is to mirror, rather than to evaluate, textual meaning.[55] In addition, *philosophical* positivism—where all normative questions pertaining to religious matters are considered either meaningless, undecidable or

54. The question of objectivity has to do with self-identity and normative commitment rather than with discourse. It is possible, for example, that a scholar be a committed Buddhist and not write from an overtly theological perspective (although in the present context the question of objectivity deals precisely with whether or not there is always an *implicit* theological agenda even in such writing). The question of creativity is broader than that of normative discourse, and in a sense contains it, since normative discourse can be considered one instance of interpretive creativity.

55. It is interesting that in his characterization of the scholarship of the 18th century Jesuit missionary Ippolito Desideri, de Jong ("A Brief History," pt. I, pp. 65-66), in his preoccupation with the philological and descriptive dimensions of Buddhist Studies, should have overlooked the fact that Desideri's chief interest in Buddhism was polemical, that is to say *normative*. It is motivated by a desire to engage Tibetan Buddhism philosophically and religiously that Desideri delved into the Buddhist religion and gained the expertise that he did. If, as Petech and Tucci state, Desideri managed to fathom the intricacies of Tibetan (principally dGe lugs pa) Buddhism in ways that even later scholars could not, it is not in spite of, but *precisely because of*, his interest in normative issues.

both—exerts a different kind of pressure in the direction of ignoring the implications of the normative claims of Buddhist texts. But even when the latter is not operative as an assumption, *philological* positivists consider the issue of the truth of religious claims, and even issues of aesthetics and literary worth—of texts, practices, art forms and methods—as necessarily clouding judgment, and as leading to the infiltration of personal bias and prejudice into scholarship. By contrast, as we have seen, interpretivists believe that, far from meaningless, forms of discourse that bring to light the full significance of texts—as normative discourse, for example, does—represent the epitome of the scholarly enterprise: its fulfillment. Ascribing to the view that all scholarship is necessarily evaluative, interpretivists claim that there is no escape from subjective assessment. Hence, *all* scholarship is normative; and those that admit to its normativity in exploring the philosophical implications of texts are simply being more candid.

At the very least three forms of discourse are objects of contention in this debate: religious or theological, philosophical, and methodological.[56]

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56. The dividing line between these three is not always very precise. For example, some authors, ostensibly writing as philosophers, often exhibit theological presuppositions in their writings. Be that as it may, the distinctions between the three forms of discourse I discuss below seem to me valuable. Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" p. 112, opts for another method of distinguishing theology from Buddhology (that is, from Buddhist Studies as an academic discipline). Buddhist theology, he states, is "the study of divine things or religious truth as it is carried on within a normative tradition," while Buddhology is "'objective' (non-normative)." Such a definition, despite his use of quotation marks around the word *objective*, is problematic. As we saw from the discussion of objectivity above, scholars increasingly question the existence of "objective" scholarship. Buddhology, as the academic study of Buddhism, may have *different* presuppositions from Buddhist theology, but—so the critique goes—the former is based as much on subjective and normative presuppositions as the latter. Moreover, Foulk's distinction, by excluding overt forms of normative discourse from Buddhology (this is reiterated on p. 172 of his essay), implies that philosophical and normative methodological treatment of issues in the field falls outside of Buddhist Studies / Buddhology proper. Ironically, it implies that his own essay—in large part normative—cannot be considered a piece of buddhological scholarship. Rather than conflating normativity and subjectivity (and then defining the academic study of Buddhism in terms of its objectivity), it seems to me preferable to distinguish normative from descriptive forms of scholarship (historical, philological, etc.) discursively, that is, in terms of whether a particular work deals *explicitly* with the assessment and determination of the truth

In theological discourse the authorial subject speaks or writes from within a specific religious world view; that is, theological authors explicitly situate themselves within a specific tradition. In its standard form, Buddhist theology presupposes—or, alternatively, argues for—the validity of the doctrinal claims of Buddhism,[57] the value and significance of its art[58] and/or the efficacy of its practices; it also utilizes these as the essential raw materials of the discourse itself. Theological discourse need

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value of doctrinal, more broadly religious, aesthetic or methodological claims. Normative discourse can then be further subdivided in terms of where authorial subjects situate themselves in such discussions: it is theological when authors locate themselves within a religious tradition, and philosophical when they either locate themselves outside of a specific religious world view or are rhetorically neutral on their religious location. Methodological reflection then becomes a specific kind of philosophical discourse that instead of focusing on primary Buddhist artifacts (doctrines, rituals, art, etc.) focuses on second-order issues pertaining to how these artifacts are to be studied. But again, the distinctions between the three modes of discourse is not always clear-cut. And it is frequently the case that a single work will shift between these different modes. A good example of this is a recent work of Anne C. Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists and the Art of the Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), in which she is self-consciously engaged in both methodological and theological reflection. Another example is Lambert Schmithausen's *Buddhism and Nature*. Though principally a philological and historical work, whose goal it is to "describe and analyze, as *objectively* as possible, the attitude of the Buddhist tradition toward nature" (p. 2, sec. 3.1, my emphasis), there are definite normative dimensions to Schmithausen's work, in that he sees Buddhist speculation on nature as contributing to the discussion of the contemporary problem of environmental destruction and pollution. Schmithausen also sees another goal of his work to be that of making "contemporary Buddhists aware of the multifacetedness and ambivalence of their tradition in order to have them lay stress, consciously, on those strands which favor a positive attitude toward nature consonant with present day requirements" (p. 56, sec. 63.1).

57. See, for example, Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* (Antioch, CA: Golden Leavs, 1988 [rpt.]).

58. See Marilyn M. Rhie and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991). A critical review of the work exists in David Jackson's "Appropos a Recent Tibetan Art Catalogue," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde sudasiens und Archiv für indische Philosophie*, Band 37 (1993): 109-130. The latter is in many ways a critique of the former's—sometimes overt, sometimes unacknowledged—theological (Jackson calls them "Geluk-centric" and "thoecratic"), myth-creating and idealizing agenda.

not always be dogmatic, however, since it sometimes engages doctrines and practices in critical ways[59]; but whether dogmatic or critical, theology situates itself within a particular religious perspective.[60]

In contrast to theology, philosophical discourse *does not* situate itself within, say, the Buddhist tradition. Though concerned with the normative evaluation of Buddhism, it is not grounded in a specifically Buddhist religious world view.[61] Finally, methodological discourse too can be normative. When it is so, it can be situated either within[62] or outside[63] of a specific Buddhist religious world view, and rather than taking specific Buddhist artifacts (doctrines, rituals, etc.) as its direct subject matter, it is instead chiefly concerned with the assessment of options in their study.[64]

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59. The work of Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shiro might be considered paradigmatic of what I am here calling critical Buddhist theology. See Jamie Hubbard and Paul L. Swanson, eds., *Critical Buddhism: A Critical Appraisal*, a forthcoming anthology and study of the work of these two figures. N. David Eckel's somewhat ambiguous remarks in "The Ghost at the Table: On the Study of Buddhism and the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62.4 (1994): 1099, might be interpreted as a call for the possibility of a critical Buddhist theology situated in the academy.

60. It is conceivable, however, that such a perspective be non-Buddhist. A critique of Buddhism that situates itself within a Christian perspective is equally theological. See, for example, Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Mutual Penetration vs. Interpenetration* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982).

61. Exemplary of this approach is the work of Paul Griffiths; see his *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Mind-Body Problem* (La Salle, Il.: Open Court, 1986), and *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Discourse* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1991).

62. See Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Anne Carolyn Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists and the Art of the Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

63. See, for example, Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy*.

64. Although the set of distinctions I have drawn here between theology, philosophy and methodology represents one way of conceptualizing the differences between these three modes of discourse, it is not the only one. Christian theologians have discussed this issue for some time—in the context of the debate concerning whether or not theology belongs in the secular academy, to cite just one example. As all three of these underrepresented forms of discourse become more prevalent in Buddhist Studies, as I think they will, we would do well to consider the latter literature in a serious manner.

To summarize, from the positivist point of view, normative forms of discourse—like the three just outlined—fall outside of the scope of Buddhist Studies. From the interpretivist perspective, on the other hand, there does exist a place within the academy for these modes of analysis.[65] Normative forms of discourse are paradigmatic examples of creative scholarship in that they use texts as points of departure for the investigation of broader issues—issues such as the truth or falsity of various claims, or their implications.

The question of the author's original intention

An ancient Buddhist painting, now in a museum, is "restored" using the latest technology; a ritual never before performed in public is enacted before cameras so that the scholar may film it and preserve it "before the tradition is lost"; the textual scholar publishes the definitive critical edition of a tantric manuscript based on all known recensions and utilizing all known fragments. Do we have in these various enterprises the preservation and presentation of the various authors' original intentions? The question is not so easily answered. As the narrator in one of Guenther Grass's recent books says, there is the finest of lines between restoration and forgery.

The positivist will want to argue that every text has a single definitive and final meaning, and that this represents the author's original intention. Recapturing this is the goal of textual scholarship. Interpretivists will respond variously. Some will want to repudiate the notion of authorial intention altogether. What authors intend, if they intend anything at all, is rarely static and monothetic: authors frequently change their minds, even in the very process of writing. And even if authorial intention were capturable in principle, it is doubtful whether an academic, scholarly format of presentation is what Buddhist authors had in mind. The repudiation of authorial intention will be seen by some pessimistically—we are forever doomed to living within the closed world of our own interpretations; and by others optimistically—this gives us license to manipulate texts in creative ways. Interpretivists of another ilk will want to grant the possibility of multiple interpretations, while rejecting the notion that anything goes. For the latter there must exist ways to arbitrate

65. Of course classical Buddhist texts are themselves theological in their mode of discourse. Contemporary examples by Western scholars are more difficult to identify. Some of the writings of Anne Klein, Stephen Batchelor, Robert Thurman, and Rita Gross come to mind.

between competing interpretations; here authorial intention may be one, though not the only, factor in judging adequacy.

In principle, a critical dialogue on authorial intention could of course lead to some kind of resolution or consensus on the issue; but, as with most complex issues of method, if this occurs at all it will most likely occur only locally—in the context of individual self-contained conversations. But the point of a critical dialogue on questions of method is not of course to reach final and universal consensus. Rather, it is to converse, and in so doing to clarify our own and others' positions on important issues, *for* ourselves and others.

Beyond written texts

It is interesting that disciplines that pride themselves on critical distance from their object of study often implicitly incorporate many of its assumptions and presuppositions without being aware of the fact that this is the case. Buddhist Studies is no exception here, uncritically recapitulating in its scholarly literature many traditional Buddhist presuppositions.[66] Nowhere is this more evident than in the discipline's focus on the written, doctrinal text as the principal object of investigation.[67] This

66. In Indian / Tibetan Buddhist Studies a prime example is to be found in the adoption of the fourfold *siddhānta* schema as an explanatory mechanism. In the academic study of Indian philosophy the same can be said to be true of the classical "six systems." On the former see my "The Canonization of Philosophy and the Rhetoric of Siddhānta in Tibetan Buddhism," *Buddha Nature: A Festschrift in Honor of Minoru Kiyota*, eds. Paul J. Griffiths and John P. Keenan (San Francisco: Buddhist Books International, 1990) 7-26; and on the implications of adopting the six *darśana* framework as normative see Tuck, *Comparative Philosophy* pp. 16-30. Strickmann, "A Survey of Tibetan Buddhist Studies" pp. 140-141, discusses the implications of Western scholars uncritically adopting a fourfold division of the Tantras as found in later traditional exegesis. Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies" p. 108, speaks of the recapitulation in Western scholarship of sectarian Japanese interests, and (p. 113) of the ways in which "conclusions reached in Japanese Buddhist theology are carried over into ostensibly critical Western scholarship without being recognized and tagged as coming from a normative tradition"; see also pp. 136 and 145 of that same essay for yet other examples of the phenomenon being described here.

67. That the written text is not an entity that can be isolated and considered separate from other semiotic forms is a point that was made as early as P. Mus's classic study, *Barabuḍur*. More recently, the same point has been made by Steven Collins and Gregory Schopen (see note 3).

emphasis on the conceptual, chirographic and doctrinal seems to be in large part inherited from monastic Buddhism itself, where we often find a rhetoric that emphasizes the study of texts and the doctrines found in them over the study of other semiotic forms. Be that as it may, it is indisputable that written texts and the doctrines they teach have received a disproportionate amount of attention in the scholarly literature of the field. There may be good scholarly reasons for this, but these will have to be given, and no longer simply assumed, in the critical dialogue on method that I envision. This is especially true given the fact that critics have, from within the discipline itself, begun to challenge what they perceive to be the monopolization of the field by the written text, and especially by doctrinally oriented scholarship.[68] There is today a call for the increased investigation of alternative semiotic forms—oral and vernacular traditions,[69] epigraphy,[70] ritual,[71] patterns of social and institutional

68. It is no accident, for example, that when J. W. de Jong wrote his masterful "A Brief History of Buddhist Studies in Europe and America," he should have put the "main emphasis . . . on philological studies."

69. Recently, Anne C. Klein has explored the importance of "oral genres" in one school of Tibetan Buddhism in her *Path to the Middle: Oral Mādhyamika Philosophy in Tibet, the Spoken Scholarship of Kensur Yeshey Tupden* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994). On the rise and fall of vernacular texts of the Theravāda tradition as the objects of European scholarly study see Charles Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in the Study of Therāvada Buddhism," in Donald S. Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha.*

70. See note 3.

71. What Michel Strickmann sees as essential to the understanding of the Buddhist Tantras, others have seen as essential to Buddhist Studies as a whole. "To make their bare bones live will require a powerful supplement drawn from both Tibetan scholastic and ritual literature and from direct observation (or, indeed, participation). Until Tibetan philology has been durably wed to Mercury in a series of such studies, it would be unwise to imagine that we understand the real import of the later Tantras." "A Survey of Tibetan Buddhist Studies," *Eastern Buddhist* 10.1 (May, 1977): 139; see also p. 141, where he sees the study of iconography as essential to an understanding of the Tantric tradition. On the importance of ritual in Ch'an Buddhism see Robert H. Sharf, "The Idolization of Enlightenment: On the Mummification of Ch'an Masters in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 32.1 (1992): 1-31; and T. Griffith Foulk and Robert H. Sharf, "On the Ritual Use of Ch'an Portraiture in Medieval China," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 7 (1993-94): 149-219.

evolution,[72] gender,[73] lay and folk traditions,[74] art, archaeology and architecture. Moreover, many of the critics who push for greater scholarly emphasis on the nondoctrinal are asking for more than merely a voice, since part of the critique is that the study of alternative semiotic forms directly impinges on, and challenges, the validity of the strictly chirographic-doctrinal paradigm. The claim is not simply that the investigation of other semiotic forms should exist alongside the study of doctrine as it is found in written texts, but that doctrine itself cannot be fully understood independently of culture in the broad sense of the term.[75] The critique is really a call for greater balance and holism within the field; it is not only a demand that equal recognition be given to new areas of research, but a call for an integrated and mutually interpenetrating research program aimed at the understanding of Buddhism as a multifaceted entity. It is, in effect, a critique of methodological isolationism.[76]

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72. See note 3; also, Hallisey, "Roads Taken and Not Taken" p. 51.
73. See note 79.
74. Consider the words of the anthropologist Stan Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989): "Tibetan Lamaism, as one of the world's great ritual traditions, could then be understood as a process that emerges through dialogue with the more ancient folk layer that it confronts, rather than as a completed cultural entity represented in the texts" (p. 2); or again, "The textual language . . . cannot determine the meaning of these rites. Each time they are enacted or commented upon they incorporate traces of local folk consciousness that are embedded in the lived experience of the valley" (p. 12). See also, S. J. Tambiah, *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets,* Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology 49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Richard Gombrich and Gananath Obeyesekere, *Buddhism Transformed: Religious Change in Sri Lanka* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), and the review of the latter by Vijitha Rajapakse, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 13.2: 139-151; George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia, S. C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).
75. For a description of what such a holistic approach might look like in the study of "a single temple or monastic complex," see Michel Strickmann, "A Survey of Tibetan Buddhist Studies" p. 142.
76. For a discussion of this issue in regard to Tibetan Buddhist philosophical studies see my "On the *sGra pa Shes rab rin chen pa'i rtsod lan* of Paṇ chen bLo bzang chos rgyan," *Asiatische Studien / Études Asiatiques* 49.4 (1995).

The relationship of Buddhist Studies to the larger academic community
In much contemporary critical literature in the field we increasingly find Buddhology characterized as a provincial discipline—ignorant of emerging theoretical developments in related fields, and reluctant to enter into conversation even with the most natural of dialogue partners (e. g., Indology, Sinology etc.). The perceived isolationist tendencies of the discipline are seen as fostering a kind of intellectual hermeticism that makes buddhological scholarship increasingly less relevant to the larger academic community. Two types of remedies are called for. On the one hand, we find a call for greater cultural contextualization, where the objects of study of the field (written texts, institutions, art, rituals etc.) are investigated not only against a particular Buddhist background, but vis a vis the larger cultural context in which those objects—and Buddhism itself—exist; hence, for example, the attempt to consider classic questions of Chinese Buddhism in the broader context of Chinese intellectual history,[77] or the attempt on the part of anthropologists to situate Buddhism as "part of a large social and cultural system."[78]

On the other hand, we find in the recent critical literature an insistence on the fact that buddhologists need to become more conversant with theories, methods and forms of analysis current in the academy. This has led to studies (and to calls for studies) that emphasize, for example, comparative, cross-cultural analysis,[79] feminist criticism,[80] deconstruction,[81]

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77. See Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual: Approaches to Enlightenment in Chinese Thought*, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism 5 (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987); and the review by Foulk, "Issues in the Field of East Asian Buddhist Studies." Bernard Faure, *La volonté d'othodoxie dans le bouddhisme chinois* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1988) 11, also sees the importance of "placing Ch'an in its political-religious context," of discussing its relationship with other Buddhist schools, and "with other currents in Chinese religions" (my trans.), although the latter gets dealt with only marginally by him in that particular work. See also Richard Gombrich, "Recovering the Buddha's message," in Ruegg and Schmithausen, eds., *Earliest Madhyamaka* p. 20.
78. Anthropologists have in fact emphasized this direction in scholarship early on. See, for example, Manning Nash, et. al., *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, Cultural Report Series 13 (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Area Studies, 1966). For a more recent study that attempts to do this in the Tibetan cultural area see Stan Mumford, *Himalayan Dialogue*.
79. Much of this work is to be found in the area of comparative philosophy in, for example, the pages of *Philosophy East and West*. See also the volumes in the recent series from SUNY Press, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of

and literary criticism.[82] To give heed to these trends in the broader intellectual sphere is seen as being profitable to Buddhist Studies in two ways. Intellectually, it is said to bring life to the discipline by suggesting new problems, and new perspectives on old ones; it is also said to give the discipline a voice in current debates and ultimately to help the field by demonstrating that the data from Buddhist cultures is relevant to the conversations that are taking place in the broader intellectual community.

The views just outlined clearly emerge out of an interpretivist framework. The positivist response to this kind of scholarship is that it is faddish and that it dilutes the scholarly worth of the discipline. It is sufficiently difficult to gain the expertise necessary to engage in sound scholarship on Buddhist texts, and to impart that knowledge, without requiring of the buddhologist forays into new and unproven areas of investigation. Given that buddhological expertise confined to a narrow geographical

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Religion. Other works with this emphasis include Chris Gudmunsen, *Wittgenstein and Buddhism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1977); C. W. Huntington's introduction to *The Emptiness of Emptiness*; Robert A. F. Thurman's introduction to *Tsong kha pa's Speech of Gold in the Essence of True Eloquence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons*.

80. See the work of Anne Carolyn Klein, Diana Paul, Nancy Schuster, and Rita Gross; for more complete bibliographical references see the volume of essays edited by me, *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

81. See Anne Carolyn Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*; Roger Jackson, "Matching Concepts: Deconstructionist and Foundationalist Tendencies in Buddhist Thought," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52.3 (1989): 561-589; Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

82. The methods of literary criticism are implicit in a variety of studies that employ and analyze categories such as orality, narrativity and rhetoric. In addition to previous references (Klein and Faure) see also Paula Richman, "Gender and Persuasion: The Portrayal of Beauty, Anguish and Nurturance in an Account of a Tamil Nun," and Miriam L. Levering, "Lin-chi (Rinzai) Ch'an and Gender: The Rhetoric of Equality and the Rhetoric of Heroism," in José Ignacio Cabezón, ed., *Buddhism, Sexuality and Gender*; also Robert E. Buswell, Jr., "The 'Short Cut' Approach of *K'an-hua* Meditation: The Evolution of a Practical Subitism in Chinese Ch'an Buddhism," in Peter N. Gregory, ed., *Sudden and Gradual*. Stan Mumford's *Himalayan Dialogue* relies heavily on the work of the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. See also William R. LaFleur, *The Karma of Words: Buddhism and the Arts in Medieval Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

area and time period is already pushing human limits to the extreme, how can we expect worthwhile scholarship to emerge from the pens of buddhologists who attempt broader forms even of intracultural contextualization, not to speak of cross-cultural comparative analysis. Underlying these generally pragmatic arguments, however, is the positivist's general skepticism concerning methodological novelty. Even if they were to accede to the practical possibility of these forms of analysis, positivists would reject them on principle, for interpretive methodologies of this kind distort the objects being studied, forcing them into preconceived theoretical molds. Moreover, *what is* so truly creative and original, asks the positivist, about appropriating the theories developed in other disciplines to buddhological ends? Is this not a form of methodological parasitism that shows little by way of innovation? If capitulation to the current fads in theory is the price of admission into the broader conversation, then perhaps better to send one's regrets.

Politics and the study of Buddhism

In addition to the challenges already mentioned, there has emerged in recent years another category of criticism not yet discussed, one that insists on the fact that politics (and, perhaps more generally, the analysis of power) is relevant to the study of Buddhism in a variety of ways. Most of these works are founded on one or both of the following methodological presuppositions: (1) that cultures are political entities, and (2) that scholarship (for example, the scholarship that takes a Buddhist culture as its object) is never politically neutral, either in its constitution or in its repercussions. The scholarly study of another culture—or of a specific aspect within a culture, e. g., Buddhism—should therefore (a) take into account "the features of asymmetry, inequality and domination"[83] that exist within that culture, (b) reflect on the fact that the scholar's work is affected by the power differential that exists between the two societies interacting (that of scholars and that of the society that is the object of their study), and (c) become aware of the fact that scholarship can itself affect subsequent societal attitudes and political policies.[84]

83. Sherry B. Ortner, *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 12.

84. In this regard it is no accident that the first lines of Stan Mumford's *Himalayan Dialogue* should read, "A Highly reflexive mode of cultural interpretation is emerging, as cultural anthropologists recognize the impact they have on the societies they study and in turn find themselves being transformed internally by their informants" (p. 11).

Although the implications of this form of analysis are only now just beginning to be felt in Buddhist Studies,[85] its impact has had tremendous—and often devastating—consequences in other fields of study.[86] Like the study of most of Asia, the academic study of Buddhism as we know it is the heritage of a colonialist and missionary past. These activities have utilized scholarship as a means of consolidating power over other peoples, and although scholarly praxis has come a long way since the time when it was an overt instrument of such activities, critical theorists of the political sort often maintain that scholarly analysis continues to recapitulate its colonialist past. Some would go so far as to claim that it can never fully be divested of this heritage.

The nature of the relationship between a scholar and the culture that he or she studies may be different today, but economic and political power gradients still exist, and these must be taken into account in the very act of scholarly analysis. Scholarship in its widest sense (including admission to, or exclusion from, scholarly organizations; the publication and dissemination of information about religious liberty, or lack of it, etc.) can have tremendous consequences in the socio-political realm. Scholarship is a powerful mode of legitimation that can influence political events. At the same time, political institutions influence scholarship: by granting or refusing visas, allocating or withholding research funds, and so forth.

In short, the critiques of colonialism, neocolonialism, orientalism, and those that explore more broadly the relationship between power and knowledge, are beginning to challenge Buddhist Studies in new ways. If their claims are valid, it will mean not only reassessing the present of the field in terms of its political past, but also considering the future moral implications of its present.

As is the case with other fields, the response of buddhologists to such a challenge will undoubtedly vary. Some will maintain that socio-political analysis of this sort is reductionistic. In its preoccupation with power and control as motivating forces, it leaves no room for other human motivations, and in any case denies in a naive fashion the possibility of

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85. See Lopez, ed., *Curators of the Buddha*; Christopher Queen and Sally King, eds., *Engaged Buddhism* (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming); T. Tillemans, "Où va la Philologie Bouddhique?" forthcoming in *Études de Lettres* (Lausanne).

86. Consider the way in which Edward Said's *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978) has already affected fields like contemporary Indian and Islamic Studies, for example.

objectivity. Others will maintain that politics has no place in the academy; that scholars simply report what is true. Scholarship may be used for political ends, but that is beyond the control of scholars; and in any case, is it not better that political bodies give support to and utilize fact rather than propagandist fiction?

Conclusion

What I have just described are some of the issues around which the critical dialogue on method will, I believe, take place. This list, however, is more impressionistic than complete. As I have already mentioned, it is of course impossible to predict, much less to prescribe, the agenda of this conversation or the turns that it will take. The issues and their resolutions (if any) are not predetermined. It is for this reason that I have refrained from couching the above discussion in a rhetoric that makes it appear as though the answers are there on the surface, just waiting to be had. I do not believe this to be so, and although I myself have formed some rather strong opinions in regard to many of these questions—something that has probably not gone unnoticed—I still remain baffled by others. Moreover, if I have chosen to frame these issues using extremist positivist and interpretivist views as foils, it is because (a) in the emerging critical literature in the field there already exists a tendency to characterize each other's positions in these ways; (b) many of these characterizations are the result of the ways in which we caricature and stereotype each other; and (c) the use of extremes to frame issues is heuristically useful, a very Buddhist device. If I have not opted for the Buddhist solution—by suggesting that the middle way is the way to go in each of these cases—it is because I believe these issues are complex enough that they are unamenable to moderate, middle-way types of solutions in all cases. Be that as it may, this is something that only future conversation itself can determine. But as Bakhtin has noted, a conversation can begin only when a monologue has ended, and so I end mine here with the hope that whether or not everything I have said is true, it is nonetheless provocative enough to act as the impetus for such a conversation.