

INTRODUCTION¹

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The following essays by Thomas Borchert, Georges Dreyfus, Justin McDaniel, and Jeffrey Samuels are among the signs of a growing interest in education among scholars of Buddhism. In addition to detailed accounts of historical and contemporary educational practices in Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Yunnanese, and Thai-Lao contexts, these articles provide a powerful point of departure from which to think more broadly and comparatively about approaches to the study of Buddhist education. Thomas Borchert's essay examines the first Buddhist Studies Institute (*foxueyuan*) formed in Sipsongpanna in 1994, after the Chinese government altered its stance toward religious education (and the training of religious specialists) in the 1980s. This Institute is a formal educational center for the training of young Theravādin monks in a geographical area at the intersection (historically, and in the present day) of the cultures we now know as Chinese, Thai, Lao and Burmese. Borchert's essay discusses Chinese governmental involvement in Buddhist education during the last two decades, with special attention to the government's approach to Buddhist education in minority communities. Against this background, Borchert describes the curriculum — and some of the educational practices connected to it — used at the *foxueyuan* opened at Wat Pā Jie. He attends also to informal educational settings, such as sermons and work periods, in which monastic students participate.

Borchert is explicitly concerned to explore the processes through which 'identity' is formed in education and, especially, the relationships between Chinese, Dai-lue, and Buddhist identities as understood by students and teachers in Sipsongpanna. In doing so, Borchert examines the subjects set

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out within the Institute's curriculum as well as the ways in which actual pedagogical practices blur the lines between subject areas, and provide contexts for the articulation of more than one form of identity. For instance, classes in Mandarin sometimes include Dai-lue cultural information, while the alphabet book foundational to *dhamma* instruction may shape students' attachment to Dai-lue language. According to Borchert, fieldwork at Wat Pā Jie in the early 1990s revealed a 'sub-nationalist' Dai-lue cultural identity, co-existent with Sipsongpanna Theravādin monks' self-identification as Chinese, and their engagement with educational materials produced in Theravādin Southeast Asia.

Georges Dreyfus discusses the educational methods and topics privileged within contemporary Ge-luk and non-Ge-luk educational settings. In contemporary educational practices, pedagogical methods differ across these settings. Debate is stressed by Ge-luk institutions, while commentary is the central method for those connected to Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sagya traditions. Despite this difference, Dreyfus argues that the topical focus of education remains similar. Although *tantra* study is undertaken at different points in the educational cycle, and in different institutional settings, *tantra* is always engaged as *supplemental* to exoteric materials. Moreover, common roots in Indian intellectual practices have led the Tibetan traditions to share a preference for *śāstra* over *sūtra* in monastic education.

Dreyfus proceeds to develop a history of the difference between debate and commentarial methods found in Ge-luk and non-Ge-luk educational institutions. He argues that the contemporary identification of Ge-luk training with debate and Nyingma, Sakya and Kagyu training with commentary is of fairly recent origin. According to Dreyfus, non-Ge-luk monastic and scholastic educational institutions distinctively oriented by commentarial training are rooted in the non-sectarian movement of the 19th-century. This movement was, itself, a response to the ascendance of Ge-luk patrons and institutions from the 15th century onward. The gradual crystallization of Ge-luk forms of pedagogy, and growing Ge-luk authority, triggered a response within non-Ge-luk circles. Tibetan Buddhists involved with the non-sectarian movement sought the authority provided by monastic educational establishments and their own distinctive pedagogy.

Justin McDaniel develops a comparative study of the modes through which the *Dhammapada* was transmitted (orally, and in a variety of textual forms) and received in the areas we call Thailand and Laos prior to the Fourth and Fifth Reigns of the 19th century, and in the 20th century. Using evidence of *Dhammapada* transmission and reception as an extended example, McDaniel argues that scholars of Thai/Lao Buddhism have overstated the impact of print technologies and centralizing educational reforms originating in Bangkok. In doing so, McDaniel calls into question common understandings of the ‘westernizing’ and ‘modernizing’ trajectory of Siamese/Thai-Lao Buddhism since the 19th century. McDaniel does not deny the considerable emphasis on standardization and centralization characteristic of elite Bangkok approaches to education from the Fourth Reign onwards. However, he questions the degree to which such moves affected the ways in which a majority of lay and monastic Buddhists encounter(ed) Buddhist texts.

McDaniel frames his detailed account of the varied uses and manifestations of the *Dhammapada* in contemporary Thailand as an extended argument for the study of reading practices. According to McDaniel, if we focus solely on educational institutions and ideologies, we may fail to see what people (lay and monastic) really learn, how they learn it, and how it is transmitted. This essay argues that the activities of reading, listening, and sermon-giving found in contemporary Thailand bear a considerable resemblance to practices of exegesis and homiletics found in Thai-Lao regions prior to the 19th century. Such practices may be seen as a bridge between pre-modern and modern forms.

In an essay drawing on recent Sri Lankan fieldwork, Jeffrey Samuels explores the role of ritual practice, and especially *paritta* training and performance, in the formation of monastic comportment and identity. Samuels locates his work in relation to discussions of the role of text-based education in the cultivation of monastic discipline and conduct. He argues for the importance of ritual performance, and the observation of it, to the processes through which young monks develop specifically monastic behaviors and mental states. According to Samuels, young monks are disciplined through *paritta* performance, and they learn to be monks in part by learning how to provide what their lay donors require of them. Samuels suggests the value of looking more closely at the ways in which specific

Buddhist texts are used in instruction outside the classroom and, especially, in contexts of performance.

Samuels' discussion of *paritta* performance and monastic education develops through close attention to statements made by monastic teachers and students. In doing so, Samuels attends particularly to the terms used by junior and senior monks to describe acts of learning and performance. These remarks reveal the centrality of vision — of seeing and being seen — to the ways in which these monks describe the process of becoming accustomed to the distinctive public exhibition of discipline expected of them. Such expectations about monastic conduct are, according to Samuels' informants, shaped by understandings of the relationship between emotional states and merit-making. The observation and performance of *paritta* teaches young monks about the mental and physical conduct required of them in order to render efficacious lay acts of merit-making.

The richness and analytical range of the essays collected here should teach us a great deal about how to approach further study of Buddhist education, in varied regions and periods. One seemingly natural point of departure for the study of Buddhist education, as the essays by Borchert and Dreyfus remind us, is the examination of curricula. Which subjects are taught at what levels to whom, through which texts, and in which languages? A close look at curricula will often show the rather limited presence of *tipiṭaka* and *aṭṭhakathā* texts in Buddhist education and the importance of a wide range of compendia ranging from medieval treatises to contemporary textbooks. It will also begin to suggest ways in which 'non-Buddhist' subjects co-exist with those more obviously connected to the *dhamma*, its language, and authorized styles of interpretation.

Looking for, and at, curricula also provides one way to gain an understanding of the terms in which knowledge and skill are organized in a particular context. This, in turn, if examined within a wider framework, may also give some indication of the extent to which desirable monastic knowledge in a given time and place is local knowledge, distinct in some fashion from a broader, embracing, school, lineage, or tradition. An examination of a curriculum, however, raises further questions. For instance, whose terms and categories are to be used to describe and analyze the curriculum? What is accomplished by using emic, or etic taxonomies in such

accounts? The terms in which elements of a curriculum are designated, as well as the temporal and textual weight attributed to each element, are themselves evidence of educational emphases and the terms within which knowledge and skill are organized. Reading such evidence carefully arguably requires that one not move too quickly to offer a description of a curriculum in terms external to it, whether those terms be taken from tradition-internal understandings of canon and commentary or from more distant frames of reference.

Gaining an understanding of the structure and terms of curricula, however, provides only partial access to the character of teaching and learning in specific contexts. The ethnographic evidence adduced by Borchert, McDaniel, and Samuels underscores the need to examine specific educational practices of instruction and reception if one seeks to understand the ways in which educational activities help to constitute what I call 'visions of collective belonging', as well as attitudes to particular texts and rituals. Moreover, all three of these essays explore the intersection between what we might call, for analytical convenience here, informal and formal educational practices. Informal learning is that which occurs outside clearly defined teacher-student-classroom contexts and examinations, involving activities such as attendance at sermons, independent reading, performance of rituals, and other institutional work. This includes the 'action-oriented pedagogy' described by Samuels², as well as many of the acts of textual reception described by McDaniel in this volume, and the monastic participation in sports and labor noted here by Borchert. The study of student formation thus involves looking at activities within, and outside of, the classroom with particular attention to the ways in which formal and informal learning relate to one another, and to the specific texts and activities that mediate units from a curriculum.

The study of Buddhist education, of course, need not focus? on the ways in which individuals are formed with respect to specific bodies of knowledge and visions of collective belonging. McDaniel suggests the utility of distinguishing between the study of institutions, ideologies, and reading practices in the study of Buddhist education. That is, quite apart

² "Towards an Action-Oriented Pedagogy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, (2004), 72:4:955-972.

from the study of the transmission and reception of texts, one may attend to the history of educational institutions and their structure, as well as the discourses that grant them authority, may also draw upon concepts related to learning and education for a variety of purposes. In the essay by Dreyfus we find helpful indications of how one might pursue the study of educational institutions, as well as the place of reflections on desirable knowledge and pedagogy in ideologies linked to institutions, lineages, and traditions. Dreyfus' essay reminds us of the value of biographies and lineage histories to institutional studies of Buddhist education. He is, moreover, particularly concerned to explore the relationship between the development of Buddhist institutions, the crystallization of distinctive pedagogies, and instances of competition for authority and prestige. Dreyfus has drawn our attention to the ways in which the study of Buddhist education may involve the study of representations of educational practice and desirable learning that are drawn into broader social relationships of competition and definition. In this sense, educational practices may offer symbolic capital. Particular pedagogies or curricula — or, even, just a reasonably consistent discourse about them — may come to serve as a 'signature line' or an 'iconic practice' for specific communities and institutions. In such cases, recovering such patterns of reference may help to clarify histories of Buddhist institutional formation well beyond the specific sphere of education.

Readers will, undoubtedly, find still more of interest in these essays, which should prompt further attention to the place of teaching and learning in the constitution of visions of collective belonging, obligation, and motivation. Moreover, these essays signal the tremendous potential for ethnographies of educational practice in contemporary Buddhist communities, as well as for histories of education and educational institutions that make careful use of our growing archive of local Buddhist texts and genres.