The character and relevance of the *Abhidhamma-pitaka*

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Introduction

There are very many Buddhist traditions throughout the world, often varying in doctrine, beliefs and practices. Perhaps remarkably, those involved in the multitudes of Buddhist traditions worldwide generally agree the Buddhist teachings (i.e., the Dharma[1]) may be classified into three major divisions known as baskets (Sanskrit, piṭaka). These three baskets (Sanskrit, tripiṭaka) or collections are (1) the sūtra (Pāli, *sutta*) collection (Sanskrit, Sūtra Piṭaka), (2) the vinaya collection (Sanskrit, Vinaya Piṭaka) and (3) the Abhidhamma collection (Pāli, Abhidhamma piṭaka; Sanskrit, Abhidharma piṭaka). Not surprisingly, those of the various Buddhist traditions are sometimes in disagreement about what constitutes the specific contents of one or more of these three baskets.

According to traditions, the sūtra collection contains a variety of scriptures purporting to record the words of the Buddha and may include certain commentaries on the sūtras by patriarchs or learned adherents to the views of a tradition. Unlike the commentaries, the sūtras typically contain written stories of the Buddha's life and teachings to his followers. These stories are commonly written in dialogue or discussion format, in the voice of a disciple or someone directly present during the event or sermon. For this reason, sūtras often begin with the words, "Thus I heard." In many cases, the stories in the sūtras are embellished with lavish descriptions of the surroundings and numerous repetitions of questions and responses. This is likely related to the early nature of these scriptures as lessons to be learned, chanted and transmitted orally. Owing mostly to these characteristics, sūtras can be extremely lengthy while the essential sayings of the Buddha therein may be relatively short. While most traditions agree about the content of the sūtra piṭaka, particularly in East Asia, many have created doctrinal classification

[1] It is a growing convention among English writers on Buddhism to use the word Dharma, beginning with a capital "D", in referring to the Buddhist teachings. In contrast, these writers use the word "dharma", written with a small "d", to refer to elements of existence. In both cases, dharma is the Sanskrit equivalent to the Pāli word *dhamma*. Because the word Dharma has become a part of the English language, it is appears in this paper following the convention of using the capital or lowercase "d" as appropriate.

systems in hopes of establishing the supremacy of those sūtras most closely related to their own traditions. As we will see below, these characteristics contrast with those of the Abhidhamma piṭaka.

The vinaya piṭaka can generally be characterized as a collection of texts specifying rules of discipline or guidelines for behavior of Buddhist followers, particularly monks and nuns but sometimes including lay adherents. Beyond the regulatory prescriptions, these scriptures have provided scholars with a wealth of additional information such as the dates, circumstances and proceedings of monastic assemblies. Factors such as differences in translations, interpretations and the special circumstances of isolated communities or countries may account for the varieties in contents of vinaya scriptures. Regardless of the variety and as with the sūtras, the Buddha is held to be the authority for truth of the vinaya and it is again his direct admonition to the follows that the various vinaya scriptures usually profess to record. This may not be the case with Abhidhamma literature.

The third basket of Buddhist teachings, the Abhidhamma piṭaka, formed between the third century BCE and the third century CE, and codified between 400 and 450 CE,[2] also varies widely among traditions. The Abhidhamma writings are widely believed to be systematic classifications of the Buddha's teachings. Generally, Abhidhamma literature lists, summarizes, expounds and enlarges upon the essential characteristics of the Buddha's teachings found in the more elaborate and often repetitive writings of the sūtras[3]. The name Abhidhamma likely gives us an indication of the intended purpose and content of these writings. *Abhi* can express such ideas of higher, best, special, etc., while *dhamma*, in this case, means the teachings of the Buddha. According to Buddhaghosa (*fl.* early 5th century CE), an extremely important commentator on the Abhidhamma for Theravāda Buddhists, when used in conjunction, the terms *abhi* and *dhamma* convey the feeling of "supplementary Dhamma" and "special Dhamma."[4] Owing to this meaning, some scholars feel the very word Abhidhamma indicates these writings are not a part of the Buddha's original teachings but arose as teaching tools about his messages.

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[2] Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber et al, eds., *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen* (Boston, Massachusetts: Shambhala, 1991), 1.

[3] Etienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism, From the Origins to the Śaka Era*, trans. from the French by Sara Webb-Boin (Paris: Peeters Press, 1976), 180.

[4] See G.P. Malalasehera, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Kandy: Government of Ceylon, 1961), 38.

However, the name may as likely express that the contents are a separate basket of essential teachings with no indication that they are not the Buddha's words.

Theravāda Buddhists maintain a story in their scriptures that in the fourth week after his enlightenment, the Buddha meditated upon the contents of the Abhidhamma and bright light emanated from his body as a sign of its truth. The scriptures further report that the Buddha ascended to Tushita heaven where he taught the truth of the Abhidhamma to his mother.[5]

Others suggest the Abhidhamma was created later than the sūtras and vinaya and so the use of the term in those collections did not refer to a third piṭaka. Instead, it is suggested, in the sūtras and vinaya literature, the word Abhidhamma refers to the "higher Dharma" or simply to the Dharma. Commentators on the Pāli Abhidhamma piṭaka retained this meaning, but also clearly use the term Abhidhamma to mean "a superior teaching."[6]

As with the scriptures of the other two baskets, those of the Abhidhamma piṭaka claim authority as the direct words of the Buddha. Yet, probably more so than the sūtras and vinaya writings, this claim has been long challenged by Buddhist practitioners and scholars. Among the reasons for this may be the fact that a number of traditions had Abhidhamma texts that appeared to contradict or even criticize the teachings of other Buddhist traditions. In defense of their sectarian views, scholars wrote commentaries to the Abhidhamma. Some traditions included such commentaries as a part of the Abhidhamma piṭaka while others rejected them. In fact, in the first three centuries after the passing of the Buddha, as the Abhidhamma rose in status to the rank of a separate but equally venerable piṭaka, sentiment among Buddhists toward those writings ranged from reverence to complete rejection of them as actual words of the Buddha.[7] There also is some indication that at one time, each tradition possessed it's own unique Abhidhamma piṭaka that summarized the essentials of their own particular teachings.

The vinaya literature sets out regulations for individuals and communities according to their positions as monks, nuns, householders, lay followers, etc. Likewise, it is widely accepted

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[5] Kevin Trainor, ed., *Buddhism, The Illustrated Guide* (NY& Oxford: Buncan Baird Pub., 2001), 193.

[6] Leo Pruden, "The Abhidharma: The Origins, Growth and Development of a Literary Tradition," in Vasubandhu & Louis de La Vellée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośobhāṣyam, Volume I* (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), xxxvii.

[7] Thera Nyanaponika, *Abhidhamma Studies, Buddhist Explorations of Consciousness and Time* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998), 13-4.

that the various sūtras differ in their messages because the Buddha, being the Great Physician, prescribes different medicines for different illness. That is to say, as the *Lotus Sūtra* and other canonical works explain, the reason messages appear to vary among sūtras is that each is tailored for individuals with capacities to understand those particular aspects of a fundamentally common message. In contrast, the teaching method of the Abhidhamma literature disregards individual differences in presenting information considered essential truths about the nature of existence.[8] One might say the hearer of these truths is assumed to be of significant advancement to understand them.

There are two major opinions about how the Abhidhamma literature arose to become a third piṭaka. A number of Japanese scholars believe the contents of discussions and debates on the Dharma were collected, summarized and systematized. These became the Abhidhamma piṭaka. A European view holds that in the Pāli canon there existed three bodies of literature for study: the suttas, the vinaya and mātikās (Sanskrit, mātṛkās). Mātikās were summaries, similar or identical to commentaries. An early meaning of mātikās is, "a list of items or words that serve as the object of debate or discussion, the technical terms of the commentarial literature."[9] It may be that the Abhidhamma piṭaka began as such a list. Over time, the bare list underwent codification to a remarkable degree.

Regardless of the format as codified lists, the Abhidhamma piṭaka is more than strictly analytical documents and advice against proceeding in such a way. It contains the essentials for a philosophical and ethical basis for living and understanding reality.

Unlike Theravāda and East Asian Buddhist traditions, Tibetan Buddhism has a different categorization system of the Buddhist canon into not three baskets, but into two groups: Kangyur (lit., Translation of Buddha's Words) and Tengyur (lit., Translation of Buddhist Teaching). The Kangyur contains the collection of Śākyamuni Buddha's instructions and the Tangyur is the group of the works by Indian commentators. Tibetan Buddhists assign the sūtra piṭaka and vinaya piṭaka to the Kangyur group and the Abhidhamma piṭaka to the Tengyur.[10]

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[8] U Nārada Mūla Patthāna Sayadaw, *Discourse on Elements* (*Dhātu-kathā*), *The Third book of the Abidhamma Piṭaka* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1962), xiii.

[9] Leo Pruden in Vasubandhu, *op. cit.*, xxxviii.

[10] Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber et al, eds., 111.

The content of the Abhidhamma piṭaka

There are vast amounts of materials of and about the Abhidhamma piṭaka in a number of languages, although only a small amount in original Indic languages compared to the sūtras and vinayas.[11] The Abhidhamma corpus is the collections of the individual Buddhist schools, which interpret, comment on and explain the meanings of the sūtras.

The major Abhidhamma corpus of Theravāda Buddhism, comprehensively systematized by Buddhaghosa, comprises seven Pāli texts: "(1) the *Book of the Elements of Existence* (*Dhamma-sangani*), which contains an enumeration of both mental elements organized in relation to various meditations and material elements organized into groups; (2) the *Book of Classifications* (*Vibhanga*), which defines the aggregates (*skandha*), fields (*āyatana*), and faculties (*indriya*), etc.; (3) the *Book of Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*), which deals with 219 points of controversy significant for the history of the development of Buddhist thought; (4) the *Book of Individuals* (*Puggalapaññati*), which describes the different types of clerics and lay persons; (5) the *Book of Elements* (*Dhātukathā*), which is concerned with the elements (*dhātu*); (6) the *Book of Pairs* (*Yamaka*), which derives its name from its treatment of questions in a "doubled," i.e., positive and negative, fashion; and (7) the *Book of Causality* (*Patthāna*), which describe the relations existing between individual dharmas.[12]"

The major Sanskrit Abhidhamma texts of Sarvastivada School are composed of seven books as follows: "(1) The *Book of the Recitations of the Teaching* (*Sangītiparyāya*), which expounds the elements of the teaching as divided into monads, triads, etc.; (2) the *Book of Things* (*Dharmaskandha*), part of which is identical with the above-mentioned *Vibhanga* and defines aggregates, meditations, etc.; (3) the *Book of Descriptions* (*Prajñaptishāstra*), which gives proofs, in the form of songs, for numerous legendary events; (4) the *Book of Understanding* (*Vijñānakāya*), which contains a number of chapters on controversial points that recall the *Patthāna* and the *Dhātukathā* of the Theravāda Abhidhamma; (5) the *Book of Elements* (*Dhātukāya*), which essentially corresponds to the *Dhātukathā* of the Theravāda; (6) the *Book of Literary Treatises* (*Prakarana*), which deals with the definition of the various elements of the teaching and their division into categories; and (7) the *Book of the Starting Point of Knowledge*

[11] Leo Pruden in Vasubandhu, *op. cit.*, lv.

[12] Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber et al, eds., 1.

(*Jñānaprasthāna*), which treats various aspects of the teaching, such as propensities (*anushaya*), knowledge (*jñāna*), absorptions (*dhyāna*), etc."[13]

Below is a treatment of two famous Abhidhamma texts. The first, modified in some ways by Vasubandu (fl. mid-late 5th century C.E.), is the *Abhidhammakośa* (*kośa* meaning treasury). It is the representative text of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma literature. The second writing, considered with the *Abhidhammakośa*, is the *Visuddhimagga* (*The Path of Purification*) by Buddhaghosa, a text summarizing the Theravāda Abhidhamma literature. The *Abhidhammakośa* consists of two parts, the six hundred verses and a prose commentary on these verses. The *Visuddhimagga* is a classic manual of Buddhist doctrine and meditation, containing several chapters summarizing the outstanding monk-scholar Buddhaghosa's understanding of the Abhidhamma piṭaka. From these two useful commentaries the following can be understood about the contents of the third piṭaka.

Viewed in its entirety, the *Abhidhammakośa* can be seen as a well-organized management scheme of a wide-range of Buddhist themes, likely meant to be comprehensive in nature. It is organized into nine chapters: (1) "Elements" (*dhamma*s), (2) "Sense Organs," (3) "Realms," (4) "Actions," (5) "Earthly Desires," (6) "Stages of Worthies and Sages," (7) "Wisdom," (8) "Meditation," and a chapter added by Vasubandhu, (9) "Refutation of the Idea of the Self." In both of these texts we find practice and development of the mind is the emphasis. A detailed system of concentration is the method. The last ninth chapter, an independent unit, strongly negates the Vātsīputrīya's subtantialist view.

The *Visuddhimagga* is composed of three parts with 23 chapters. The first part, comprising the first two chapters, discusses the moral precepts (Sanskrit, *śīla*); the second part, composed of the chapters 3-13, deal with concentration (Sanskrit, *samādhi*), and the third part, including the chapters 14-23, discuss wisdom (Sanskrit, *prajñā*). The second part comprehensively introduces meditation, including its method, objects, development, and its fruits. The third part expounds central teachings such as the Four Noble Truths, dependent origination and the Eightfold Path.

The chapters of the *Abhidhammakośa* begin with devotional verses to the Buddha and connect the Abhidhamma piṭaka with his direct words. Then Abhidhamma is defined as "pure

[13] *Ibid*.

prajñā",[14] which, it says, is undefiled perception. According to the *Abhidhammakośa*, what we know of the world comes to us through our sense organs. This experience of reality involves mind and its interaction with matter. The Abhidhamma literature closely analyses both, beginning with the sense organs. As in the *Abhidhammakośa*, the first chapter dealing with the Abhidhamma in the *Visuddhimagga*, Chapter XIV, reviews the type of information received through each sense organ.[15]

However, both of these commentaries explain, that which we understand as reality, consisting of sense data, is only a small part of a larger reality. That is to say, empirical reality is relative and there exists an ultimate reality beyond the scope of the senses. The three areas of analysis in the Abhidhamma literature are then, (1) the mind, (2) matter and, (3) ultimate reality.

Next, the analysis in both writings turns from the sense organs to the mind (*manas*) by stating, what we perceive through the sense organs comes to us either from corporeal matter or from psychological factors. Either way, such perceptions are examples of temporary occurrences subject to change and in that and other ways are evanescent and non-substantial. The nature of all phenomenal occurrences (*skandha*) is that they are non-substantial and, the commentaries state, are impure and defiled.[16] These non-substantial elements comprising our sensory reality are known individually and collectively as *dhammā*, elements of existence. There are two phenomenal mental states which are also considered defiled *skandha*: sensation and ideas.[17] Because these mental states are connected with pleasure and greed, etc., they keep us in ignorance of the full nature of reality.

The Abhidhamma literature terms full reality *paramattha* (Sanskrit, *paramārtha*: absolute truth). It consists of four types: (1) mind, (2) co-efficients of mind, (3) matter and (4) ultimate reality. Of these, the first three are conditioned and impure. Accordingly, only the unconditioned can be ultimate and pure. There are three unconditioned things: space and two types of extinctions (*nibbāna*, Sanskrit, *nīrvaṇa*). The two types of extinctions are, "extinction due to

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[14] Vasubandhu & Louis de La Vellée Poussin, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam, Volume I*, English translation by Leo M. Pruden (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988), 56.

[15] Buddhaghosa, *op.cit.,* 443-452.

[16] Vasubandhu, *op.cit*., 58.

[17] Vasubandhu, *op.cit*., 81.

knowledge" and "extinction not due to knowledge."[18] We see from this that although it is stated there are four types of reality, the first three types are clearly considered different than the fourth. Here the *Abhidhammakośa* and the *Visuddhimagga* elaborately outline the numerous categories making up each of the four types of reality. In the Theravāda Abhidhamma, there are said to be eighty-two of these categories: the mind, fifty-two co-efficients of the mind, twenty-eight forms of matter and *nibbāna*.[19] The *Abhidhammakośa* and the *Visuddhimagga* further explore the material world by dividing it into four primary elements (earth, fire, air and water), also called four *dhātus*,[20] and twenty-four kinds of materiality derived from them (e.g., sound, odor, weight, etc.). The *Abhidhammakośa* devotes the remainder of the first of its nine chapters to the exploration of the *dhātus*. Accordingly, from our experiences with this materiality and their derivatives come eighty-nine kinds of consciousness. Examples of these include various profitable, unprofitable and indeterminate consciousnesses.[21]

The second chapter of the *Abhidhammakośa* corresponds in subject to Chapter XIV and the beginning of Chapter XV of the *Visuddhimagga*. The subject is again the sense faculties. While the foregoing consideration focused on the relationship of the senses to the physical elements (*dhātus*), now it is expanded to include the "meaning" of the senses. Specifically, the texts consider how our sense organs function as "rulers" (*indriyas*), conditioning us by bringing to consciousness information or data in certain ways. In the course of discussion, the attributes of sense organs are further elaborated. More divisions are made, for example, sexual organs are now considered alongside vital organs and the mental organ. Additional evaluations and categorization of the senses follow. There are those that relate to defilement and those that relate to purification. They are ranked according to relative predominance of various factors such as longevity in the strength by which they convey sensations from birth to death and whether the sensations are agreeable, disagreeable or neutral. Throughout this discussion, the *Abhidhammakośa* reports how various traditions such as that of the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrānikas relate to one another in their explanations of the influences and function of the organs. The *Visuddhimagga* only focuses on the Theravāda teaching.

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[18] Vasubandhu, *op.cit*., 59.

[19] G. P. Malalasehera, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Kandy: Government of Ceylon, 1961), 44.

[20] Vasubandhu, *op.cit.,* 68.

[21] Buddhaghosa, *op.cit.,* 453; Vasubandhu, *op.cit.,* 92.

Eventually these texts turn their attention back to an evaluation of the mind, which is identified as that which is at the root, or is in control of our discriminated reality. Clearly, the complex divisions and categorizations have led to this most important point. The conclusion, as expounded in sūtras, is that the only way to realize ultimate truth and undefiled reality is to develop and purify the mind (*citta*). From this point of view, the rational for creating the complex analytic categories found thus far in these Abhidhamma texts may stem from the assumption that individuals have no impetus for striving to understand ultimate reality until they are to the point of realizing such exists. By so methodically dealing with the nature of the senses, those committed to the teaching method of the Abhidhamma now see that the mind is essentially in charge of the world and in order to reach further understanding, it is the mind that must be developed.

Significantly, the *Visuddhimagga* here turns the discussion to a consideration of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths as found in the Abhidhamma literature. This is quite fitting at this point in the discussion since the Four Noble Truths exactly address the position mentioned above, the method of development in order to cease suffering and realize ultimate truth. In keeping with the Abhidhamma style of analysis, expansion and enumeration as we have seen above, the Four Noble Truths are grouped and regrouped according to fifteen categories. Among these are classification of each Truth according to whether their meanings are "real, not unreal, not otherwise"; how words such as suffering (*dukkha*) may have many meanings; the nature of cessation; why they are called Noble Truths; what are the similarities and differences among the Truths and so on. This is followed by a similar analysis of the Truth of Suffering including a treatment of the meaning of the word birth and numerous types of suffering such as pain, grief and despair. The treatment ends with a consideration of the Truth of the cessation of suffering and ultimately discusses the nature of *nibbana*.[22]

Following the Buddha's teachings as expressed in the Four Noble Truths and elsewhere, the Abhidhamma leads to the realization that ultimate truth is cessation or extinction of discrimination, which is *nibbana*. That being the case, Abhidhamma literature reasons that a thoroughgoing investigation of the mind is the proper method for first understanding that special organ and, most importantly, purifying it. Therefore, the analysis of the mind becomes the most

[22] The consideration of the Four Noble Truths from the perspective of the Abidhamma and with reference to the literature of that piṭaka can be found in the *Visuddhimagga*, 500-514.

important consideration in the Abhidhamma. Although quite early for such a treatment, the Abhidhamma may then be considered a psychological analysis. At the same time and in following the Buddhist analysis, the mind is not considered an abstract, immaterial entity. Instead, it is the supreme sense organ interacting with other sense organs. In a way not entirely dissimilar to the procedural methods associated with modern behaviorists, perception is described as arising from stimuli presented to the mind via interactions with various sense organs. The discussion turns to types of sensations and conceptualizations, all of which are again categorized according to various value judgments (e.g., those pleasant, unpleasant and indifferent). According to the Theravāda Abhidhamma, there are seventeen stages of conceptualization involved with each instance we perceive a change in matter. Because of this, the Abhidhamma says the mind changes sixteen times faster than matter changes.[23] Such statements may be significant in establishing the supremacy of the mind in all things.

Ever leading the aspirant toward realization that the most ordinary perceptions are impure, the *Abhidhammakośa* and the *Visuddhimagga* present analyses of the important Buddhist concept of "dependent arising" (*pratityasamutpada*). Accordingly, the law of dependent arising is behind all of the process of things, including the workings of the mind. To understand and overcome the obstacles to understanding, the Abhidhamma describes the twelve links of dependent arising in two ways. It does so by speaking of how beings change from life to life or throughout a lifetime. It also speaks of the twelve links by referring to changes in consciousness from moment to moment. In the first case, an individual is born, lives and dies over the period of a number of decades. In the sense of the process of changing thoughts, one is born, lives and dies from moment to moment.

The *Visuddhimagga* treats the Theravāda Abhidhamma in three intensive chapters. Afterwards there is a detailed description of states of meditation and the specifics for the mindfulness concentrative meditation practice of Theravāda Buddhism. The preceding presentation of the Abhidhamma categories of analysis flows smoothly into the prescription for practice in the text.

[23] G. P. Malalasehera, *op. cit.,* 45.

Relevance of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka* today

There are a number of areas in which the Abhidhamma piṭaka remains of relevance today. In terms of understanding Buddhism in its vast historical modes and ways of thought, the extent texts of the Abhidhamma piṭaka have proven indispensable to modern scholars and practitioners. This is especially true in the sense of understanding the ways of early Buddhism and those of today's Theravādins. Also, because the sūtras can sometimes lend themselves to a wide variety of interpretations, Abhidhamma texts can be used to aid in the understanding of the doctrine of a particular tradition, showing scholars and other interested persons the relative importance of ideas found in sūtras according to those traditions. Likewise, abstruse sections of sūtras can be clarified by reference to Abhidhamma texts. In some cases, Abhidhamma texts have pointed to the existence of sūtras that no longer exist today.

Certainly for the Theravādins who persevere to this day with their Pāli language version of the Abhidhamma still intact, it remains a relevant and treasured piṭaka. Especially in Burma but also throughout Southeast Asia it is studied carefully and practiced assiduously. There and elsewhere, the Abhidhamma continues to be regarded as the highest basket of Buddhist philosophy.

In terms of its value today as a tool for practice, in recent years a number of Abhidhamma studies have been produced in Southeast Asia. The purpose of these studies is to guide those interested in the detailed principles and practices of the Abhidhamma. In their ultimate messages, the Theravāda Abhidhamma in the *Visuddhimagga* and the Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma in the *Abhidhammakośa* are brought to a climax in their consideration of the method of developing the mind in order to attain ultimate realization. These documents and the larger bodies of literature they drew from deal in great depth with the meditative path to *nibbana*. Specifically, this involves steps of extreme discipline of the mind. We can see the beginnings of this discussion on specific actions aimed at ultimate attainment in the *Visuddhimagga*'s enumeration of the Eightfold Path, naturally following its discussion of the Four Noble Truths. Afterwards, the theory of dependent origination is covered, ending with the words, "Let a wise man with

mindfulness so practice that he may begin to find a footing in the deeps of the dependent origin."[24]

In terms of meditation, the *Abhidhammakośa* first teaches concentration on four topics: (1) the impurity of the body, (2) that perception is the cause of pain, (3) that the mind is transient, and (4) that everything is without eternal substance. Practicing each of these meditations separately at first and then together, the practitioner progresses to more advanced stages of meditation. The purpose of this training is as relevant today as it ever has been, to become acutely aware that bodily and mental functions have no eternal substance so that one becomes free of false and impure views.

Of course, the ultimate attainment advocated in the Abhidhamma is *nibbana*. An important topic for scholars today is the Abhidhamma texts' consideration and analytical treatment of the concept of *nibbana*. In summarizing the Theravāda Abhidhamma views on the characteristics of *nibbana*, the *Visuddhimagga* turns to a question and answer format as more typically found in sūtra literature. It rhetorically asks if *nibbana* is non-existent because it cannot be apprehended. It answers that *nibbana* can be apprehended by proper understanding and concentration. Again, it asks rhetorically if reaching *nibbana* is futile since it is absence. It answers that there is an absence of past and future and so there is no "reaching" of *nibbana*. Other questions involve similar semantic problems such as found in the expression "the absence of present" and the term destruction. The text asks if material is permanent since *nibbana* has permanence. The answer is that only *nibbana* is permanent and has no arising. Such considerations of *nibbana* are rarely found in sūtra literature and provide an opportunity today for discovering how the difficult concept was and continues to be handled.

It is apparent that from its inception there have been people who have disputed the value and relevance of the Abhidhamma texts. They are difficult texts and one wonders while reading them if such elaborate lists do not only create more obstacles to understanding the Buddhist Dharma and waste the time of those intent on doing so. Likewise, some have asked and may continue to question whether the Abhidhamma should properly be considered a legitimate piṭaka. Compared to those who have found treasures in the sūtras and vinayas, those who study the teaching of the Abhidhamma may today be relatively few. However, the continued relevance of the Abhidhamma piṭaka is expressed by productions of new scholarly translations and

[24] Buddhaghosa, *op.cit*., 604.

commentaries, meditation manuals and in devoted practice in Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the world. Today, such writings are increasingly published in western languages.

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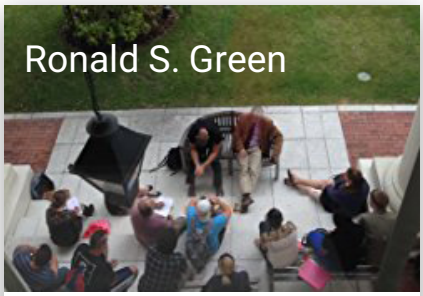

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CCU Buddhism and Asian Religions classes

World Religions

RELG 103 Satisfies Core

Buddhism Goes to the Movies Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice

By Ronald Green

published by Routledge, Taylor & Francis

ISBN: 978-0-415-84148-1
http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415841481/

Buddhism Goes to the Movies: Introduction to Buddhist Thought and Practice explains the basics of Buddhist philosophy and practice through a number of dramatic films from around the world. This book introduces readers in a dynamic way to the major traditions of Buddhism: the Theravāda, and various interrelated Mahāyāna divisions including Zen, Pure Land and Tantric Buddhism. Students can use Ronald Green's book to gain insights into classic Buddhist themes, including Buddhist awakening, the importance of the theory of dependent origination, the notion of no-self, and Buddhist ideas about life, death and why we are here. Contemporary developments are also explored, including the Socially Engaged Buddhism demonstrated by such figures as the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, Aung San Suu Kyi, and other Buddhist activists. Finally, comparisons between filmic expressions of Buddhism and more traditional artistic expressions of Buddhism—such as mandala drawings—are also drawn.

Gyōki Bodhisattva (668–749) and Early Japanese Yogācāra

http://ww2.coastal.edu/rgreen/World_Religions

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An in-progress biography of the life and legacy of Kūkai with a focus on his earlist biographies, subsuquent additions, and hagiographical representations of him as Japan's Buddha.

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"Work out your own salvation with diligence!"
- Buddha's last words to his followers

Japanese Literature and Visual Culture: religious and historical identity

RELG 491
http://ww2.coastal.edu/rgreen/Japanese_Literature_Anime_Identity.htm

Adventure Time, The Heroes Journey

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