



## “A vast unsupervised recycling plant”

### *Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos*

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#### *Cosmology, Sentience and Animal Life*

Buddhism has flourished in most regions of Asia, in some cases for more than two thousand years. Its heritage has been preserved in written texts, architectural structures, political systems, and village customs. Not unsurprisingly, its view of animals is complex—periodically shifting and, to a substantial extent, determined by cultural attitudes that often predate the emergence of Buddhism itself.

Given the overwhelmingly agrarian condition of Indian society in the early Buddhist period and the practice of mendicancy among the first members of the monastic order, among other factors, it is perhaps unsurprising that animals feature regularly in the writings of the canonical and classical periods of Buddhist history. This is particularly the case for the Pāli canon of Theravāda Buddhism, where animals are mentioned simply as part of the narrative background, may hold some symbolic significance, or—more rarely—may be fully characterized as central figures in a narrative sequence. Their categorization also occurs quite frequently in the texts where folk taxonomies such as grass-eaters, dung-eaters, creatures born from water, beasts of the forest, footless, many-footed, etc., are quite frequent. Categories of birds and creeping things are also widely acknowledged although the notion of species, as such seemed alien to the redactors of this literature.

The early texts display a fair to good knowledge of specific animals and their habits.<sup>1</sup> The most commonly mentioned animal in the popular stories of the Buddha’s previous lives (*Jātaka*) is the monkey<sup>2</sup> and the Buddha is said to have lived in the form of the monkey Nandiya (J.ii.199f).<sup>3</sup> Monkeys are often a metaphor for mischievousness and lack of wisdom but there is no evidence that they were ever regarded as having any special filiation with humans. The elephant is also well represented; twenty-four different individuals are mentioned in the *Jātaka* collection alone. Such stories demonstrate a good

knowledge of these animals' natural history, although some inaccuracies may be identified. They also demonstrate a "background acceptance of captivity and instrumental" usage, perhaps unsurprising given the close connection between elephant ownership and kingship.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, being able to ride an elephant or a horse is said to be the sign of high merit (Aiii.302), and in an interesting metaphor the training of an elephant is compared to the meditative techniques associated with the four foundations of mindfulness (M.iii.136). However, the welfare of elephants is not ignored and some stories recognize that elephants prefer freedom to captivity, and may suffer in servitude.<sup>5</sup>

Some care is needed in the proper interpretation of the *Jātaka* and other animal-oriented stories. Certainly, animals are often displayed in a positive light. They are shown to be capable of tender feelings for one another; they perform acts of extreme altruism; and they may live together harmoniously.<sup>6</sup> As such, they provide a guide to the proper conduct of humans. However, it could be argued that the often highly anthropomorphic character of the essentially pre-Buddhist folk-tradition of these narratives is largely devoid of "naturalistic" content, thus defeating the intention of those who bring them forward as evidence in support of an authentic Buddhist environmentalist ethic. Indeed, the animals are not really animals at all, for at the end of each story the Buddha reveals that the central character was none other than himself in a former life, with his monastic companions playing the supporting roles.

From the ultimate perspective, Buddhism views the world as unsatisfactory and a place of both gross and subtle suffering. All beings within the realm of rebirths (*saṃsāra*) suffer, but the level of dis-ease endured by animals is held to be an especially gross kind. This is partially related to their position in the "natural order" where the weak are at the mercy of the strong (M.iii.169). Nevertheless, animals possess the faculty of thought,<sup>7</sup> although their ability to develop useful insights into the true nature of things is limited. Their inferiority in this regard is linked to the fact that beings living in a state of perpetual insecurity have difficulty in maintaining calm mental states. For this, and other reasons, animals may not seek admittance to the monastic order (*saṅgha*)<sup>8</sup> and cannot easily act upon the teachings of a Buddha. Indeed, recitation of the monastic rules in an animal's presence is an offense (Vin.i.135) and monks are prohibited from imitating their behavior. Thus, the Buddha condemned a monk who decided that he would graze like a cow (Vin.11.134) while an ascetic who copied the manners of a dog (M.i.387-89) was soundly castigated. Even though they may be regarded as autonomous entities, possessing both consciousness and devotional capabilities, animals are more unfavorably oriented to the possibility of liberation than are humans and rebirth as an animal has been universally regarded in a negative light.

A lack of insight into the true nature of reality has an impact on an animal's moral status. The animal may, for example, be constitutionally disposed toward acts of violence and sexual misconduct. The commonly encountered term, *tiracchānakathā*, meaning

“low conversation” but literally “animal talk,” seems to point in this general direction. Animals also tend to disregard the taboos that are held to be binding on human society, particularly those connected with cannibalism or incest. Goats, sheep, chickens, pigs, dogs, and jackals are particularly blameworthy in the latter regard (D.iii.72). Indeed, it is not unusual for the texts to classify animals alongside human matricides, parricides, hermaphrodites, thieves, and Buddha-killers (*Vin.i.320*).

From the Buddhist perspective, beings may be reborn into one of five destinies (*gati*), i.e. gods (sometimes subdivided into the realms of the *devas* and *asuras*, or demi-gods), humans, ghosts, animals, and denizens of hell, that comprise *saṃsāra*. It is worth noting that, while humans have a *gati* to themselves, all animals are lumped together in a single category. The universe, however, is a vast unsupervised recycling plant, in which unstable but sentient entities circulate from one form of existence to the next. The number of rebirths experienced by beings is theoretically without number, and promotion or relegation from one destiny to another, solely on the basis of past actions (*karma*), is accepted doctrine in all traditional forms of Buddhism. In consequence, the Buddha taught that we have all enjoyed close kinship relations with a virtual infinity of other beings in the past: “Monks, it is not easy to find a being who has not formerly been your mother, or your father, or your brother, your sister or your son or daughter.” (S.ii.189)

This mutability of individual identity implies that we are loosely related to all beings whether divine, infernal, or animal. “All beings, throughout the six realms, can be considered as our father and mother” is the standard Mahāyāna Buddhist expression of the position—the most explicit Buddhist variation on Thomas Berry’s notion of the world as “a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”

### *Animals in Buddhist Ethics*

“I undertake the precept to abstain from the taking of life” is the first of the five ethical precepts that are theoretically binding on all Buddhists, whether they are monks or members of the laity. The precept is underlined by the Buddha’s statement that:

Putting away the killing of living things. ... (the Buddha) holds aloof from the destruction of life. He has laid the cudgel and the sword aside and ashamed of roughness and full of mercy, he dwells compassionate and kind to all the creatures that have life.  
(D.i.4)

The Buddha spoke against the immolation of animals in the sacrificial rites connected with the Vedic tradition (D.i.127f) and trade in living beings is one of the five modes of

employment to be avoided by the Buddhist laity (A.iii.208). Indeed, when an anthropologist invited Sinhala villagers to define what Buddhism had taught them, they replied, “not to kill animals.”<sup>9</sup> The Theravāda *Vinaya* tells us that butchers, fletchers, hunters, fowlers, and animal tamers are all destined to suffer a horrible death. In a much later text, the *Sutra of the Remembrance of the Good Law*,<sup>10</sup> the eight levels of hell are described in great detail. We read that, in a region called the hell of repetition, reprobates who have killed birds and deer without any regret are forced to eat dung alive with flesh-eating worms as punishment for their misdeeds.<sup>11</sup>

The first precept applies to all forms of life, ranging from the most complex to the most simple, but in reality the situation is rather more complicated. All of the ancient Indian renunciant traditions accepted the existence of minuscule entities, but the Buddha’s position was that “if you can’t really see them, then you can’t be said to have caused intentional harm.” Buddhism, then, steers a middle way between the inordinate diligence of the Jains<sup>12</sup> and a complete lack of care. Size is another significant factor in determining the magnitude of a crime against sentience. For Buddhism, killing an elephant is worse than killing a dog, for large animals take more effort to kill and the degree of sustained intention must be consequently greater (cf. *MA.i.165f*). This seems to imply that the consequences are worse when killing an elephant than a chimpanzee. As we have already noted, there is no anthropomorphic principle in Buddhism that can act as a counterbalance in this ethical equation.

We might expect that the first precept would entail the observance of a fully vegetarian diet but, as Gombrich has noted, vegetarianism is “universally admired, but rarely practiced” in Buddhist Asia.<sup>13</sup> In actual fact, the Buddha accepted meat and resisted the schismatic Devadatta’s attempts to place the *saṅgha* on an exclusively vegetarian diet (*Vin.ii.171-2*), arguing that such practices were optional. Indeed, vegetarianism as a fully articulated ethic manifests itself only at a comparatively late stage in Buddhist history, some seven hundred years after the Buddha’s death.<sup>14</sup>

It seems that Buddhism from its inception regarded only intentional killing as wrong, for only intentional acts are *karmically* productive. Bearing this in mind, the Buddha deemed it acceptable to receive meat<sup>15</sup> from lay donors, since both recipient and giver were innocent of intentional killing, and, in any case, to deny a member of the laity the opportunity for making merit was felt to be a more serious matter. The only stipulation governing the monastic consumption of most meats is that they should be pure in three respects: a monk should neither have heard or seen the slaughter, or suspected that the animal had been killed on his behalf.<sup>16</sup>

The rules of monastic discipline also restrict walking during the rainy season to avoid killing small creatures, but the injunction is not binding on the laity. Suppose a Buddhist peasant plows a field prior to sowing seed. It is inevitable that worms and other small creatures will be killed and injured in very large numbers. This appears contrary to the spirit of noninjury (*ahiṃsā*) on which the first precept is founded. However, since the

action is deemed devoid of the intention to kill, and because food production is essential to the maintenance of society, and of course to the continuity of the *saṅgha*, whose members rely on food donations from their lay supporters, plowing is permitted for the laity. Monks, on the other hand, must studiously avoid injury to animals, as well as plants,<sup>17</sup> and may not engage in agricultural labor (Vin.iv.32-33).<sup>18</sup>

If a monk should dig a pit into which a human falls and is killed, he is guilty of a serious offense and should be permanently expelled from the order. But if the victim turns out to be an animal, the monk must merely expiate his crime. A monk guilty of theft from another human must also be permanently excluded, but if he releases an animal from a hunter's trap out of compassion, rather than through any desire to own the creature (Vin.iii.62), he is innocent of an offense. Some texts accept the possibility that an animal may have the right of property. The collection of honey is not considered quite right in most Buddhist cultures, unless the honey is to be used as a medicament. A beast of prey can also be said to rightfully possess its quarry. Nevertheless, the rules of monastic discipline do not find it an offence if a monk were to take the quarry for himself; although why he should wish to do so is a little difficult to comprehend!

Animal protection has a long history in Buddhist Asia. When Prince Vessantara returns to his kingdom at the end of the famous *Jātaka* story he releases all animals, even cats, from servitude as a kind of thank-offering (J.vi.593). Indeed, the ideal king, ruling in conformity with the Buddha's teachings, ensures the harmonious ordering of the entire natural order<sup>19</sup> by protecting his people as well as the wild animals of the forest and birds (*migapakkhī*) (D.iii.58ff). In another mythological fragment Sakka, the chief of the gods, commands his charioteer, even though they are both fleeing from enemies, to drive in such a way that bird nests are not shaken from the trees since "it is better to give up one's own life than make a bird nestless" (S.i.224). In a final story, a devout boy (SAii.112) is told that his mother will be cured from an ailment only by eating the flesh of a hare. Catching the creature in a field, the boy subsequently repents and releases the hare. But the mother is revived through the power of her son's rejection of violence.

This is an important theme in the edicts of the ancient Indian Buddhist king, Aśoka. Animal sacrifices were banned in his capital city during fifty-six "no-slaughter days" each year.<sup>20</sup> The attitude later transplanted itself easily in China. The Emperor, Wu Ti (502-550 ce) is said to have fed fish held in a monastery pond as part of his Buddhist devotions while, in 759 ce, a Tang emperor is reported to have donated a substantial sum toward the construction of eighty-one such ponds (*fang sheng chi*) for the preservation of animal life. As late as the mid-1930s, the National Buddhist Association broadcast radio lectures on the need for animal protection, particularly around the period of "animal day," a date that traditionally coincided with the Buddha's birthday festivities.<sup>21</sup> Even today ethnobotanical studies seem to support the notion of the monastery as nature reserve.<sup>22</sup>

However, not all of the evidence points in the same direction. We know that during the Tang period monasteries "engaged in multifarious commercial and financial

activities”<sup>23</sup> that may very well have had an adverse influence on the natural environment. There is also evidence that the widespread practice of animal and bird release, as a merit-making exercise, causes great harm, not least because the creatures are caught from the wild and kept in conditions of overcrowding and starvation before recovering their freedom. When the practice of releasing fish was imported into Japan, perhaps being blended with elements of Shintō in the process, more fish died in the ritual than were in fact granted freedom.<sup>24</sup>

As we have already seen, the putative structure of the Buddhist cosmos underlines a sense of solidarity between humans and other forms of life. This sense is conducive to the arising of the important Buddhist virtue of loving-kindness (*mettā*): “Just as a mother would protect with her life her own son ... so one should cultivate an unbounded mind towards all beings, and loving-kindness (*mettā*) towards all the world” (*Sn.149-50*)

*Mettā* is the first of the four divine-abidings (*brahmavihāra*), a series of important meditative exercises. The initial stages of the practice involve the direction of loving kindness towards oneself, for he “who loves himself will never harm another” (*S.i.75*). The circle of *mettā* may then be extended toward an honored teacher, a friend, a neutral person, a foe, a dead person, etc., with the motivation, “May all beings be happy and secure, may they be happy-minded. Whatever living beings there are—feeble or strong, long, stout or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, those dwelling far or near, those who are born or those who await rebirth—may all beings, without exception, be happy-minded” (*Khp.8-9*). However, only those most advanced on the path should extend *mettā* to beings that might evoke strong feelings of aversion or desire. Clearly, animals fall into this category. Indeed, when a specific animal is mentioned in connection with *mettā*, the context is, more often than not, apotropaic.<sup>25</sup> Thus, when the schismatic Devadatta attempts to destroy the Buddha by sending the enraged and intoxicated elephant Nālāgirigiri to trample him underfoot, the Buddha employs *mettā* to subdue the beast (*Vin.ii.194*).

### *The Culture / Nature Distinction*

In many traditional settings it is a very bad omen for a wild animal to enter the village at night. It may bring along evil spirits in its wake. Spiro,<sup>26</sup> for instance, describes how monks chanted the *Ratana Sutta* (*Sn. 222-38*) in a Burmese village the morning after a stag had been seen entering the settlement. Forest-dwelling monks are also particularly prone to the dangers represented by the natural world. They may be attacked by tigers or snakes, hence the importance of *mettā* as a protective mechanism.

Looked at from another perspective, the monk is subject to the depredations of many small creatures. Their cumulative effect is to make his existence in the forest distinctly uncomfortable. Insects, rats, and the like are continually attacking his limited range of possessions. Though this may be inconvenient, the monk can turn it to his

advantage, for it is an example of the process of decay affecting all conditioned things.<sup>27</sup> Meditation on this fact can develop a deeper understanding of impermanence, insubstantiality, and suffering. The perception of danger may also be utilized on the spiritual quest. Fear is a particularly strong emotional state. Its strength and associated physical effects may become the focus of meditation that leads to the development of important insights into the functioning of the mind.<sup>28</sup> In conquering fear the forest-dwelling monk may also gain supernatural powers. Plenty of contemporary evidence exists to support the view that this is what, in part, defines the charismatic monk.<sup>29</sup>

The *Upāli Sutta* (M.i.378) tells of some cultivated land that is transformed back into dense forest through the agency of wicked persons. The context of the story makes it clear that wickedness is the human counterpart of wilderness while moral goodness corresponds to a physical environment under the management of human agency. In the *Vessantara Jātaka* we also hear that the wilderness may be tamed through the practice of *dharma*<sup>30</sup> and, in some senses, a prepared and moderately manicured version of wilderness is of more appeal to early Buddhism than nature “red in tooth and claw.” Some ancient Brāhmaṇical writers appear to have shared this feeling for improved nature. Nevertheless, positive nature mysticism is not entirely absent from the early Buddhist tradition. The *Sāma Jātaka* (no. 540), for example, tells of a man who lives in harmony with his surroundings. Deer are not afraid of him and he is compared favorably with the king of Benares, who is addicted to hunting. Many verses composed by the early Buddhist saints invoke a similar sense. Speaking of his enlightened state, Mahā Kassapa sings: “With clear water and wide crags, haunted by monkeys and deer, covered with oozing moss, these rocks delight me.” (*Thag.1070*)

However, such sentiments are relatively rare. The overwhelming attitude remains one of resigned pessimism about the impermanence of all conditioned things, an outlook later established as the majority position of the Mahāyāna, at least in India.

### *Buddhist Modernism and Animal Protection*

When we survey Buddhist-inspired environmentalism in Asia today, concerns for water resource conservation and forestry are particularly prominent. In contrast, the preservation of species and other matters related to animal welfare come much further down the list of priorities. This is partly because the availability of water supplies and the adverse effects of deforestation have a more obvious impact on the lives of ordinary people. In this connection, some prominent Thai monks have recently championed the practice of ordaining trees as a way of ensuring their protection.<sup>31</sup> Animals, though undoubtedly important, do not seem to be so immediately relevant to the concerns of most socially engaged Buddhists.

Of course, there are exceptions to this general rule. In wealthier and more urbanized regions, like Taiwan, Buddhist-inspired organizations, such as the Life Conservationist

Association (LCA) of Taipei, founded by Master Shihchaohui and Bhikkhuni Sakya Chao-Fei, campaign against the adverse effects of certain Chinese-cultural practices, such as the collection of bile from farmed bears, horse-racing, private tiger ownership, eating of bird's nests, and stray dogs.<sup>32</sup> A crucial point here is that the organization recognizes that traditional values, including those related to Buddhism, have not been conducive to animal welfare. The aim, then, is to replace them with a more enlightened and global ethic. It is, however, noteworthy that the LCA has established strong links with other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the World Society for the Protection of Animals.<sup>33</sup>

It is difficult to imagine that Tibetan communities in exile in India could flourish successfully without support from the government of India, other foreign donor countries, and a variety of NGOs. Significant financial and moral support has been made available to create employment in areas considered worthwhile by these international donors and ecologically beneficial projects of rural development have been assigned a high priority. Indeed, there is some evidence that Tibetan refugees have been specifically advised that, in embracing environmentalist credentials, they will significantly advance their ultimate cause.<sup>34</sup>

Since 1985, the Tibetan government-in-exile has become involved in the Buddhist Perception of Nature Project (BPNP),<sup>35</sup> a program of environmental awareness with a specific emphasis on education. Resources for school children have been prepared and a number of practical projects are underway.<sup>36</sup> The project is funded by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF)<sup>37</sup> and the Hong Kong and the New York Zoological Societies. It also has the blessing of H.H. Dalai Lama, who now regularly takes the opportunity to publicize his environmental credentials on the international stage.<sup>38</sup> This is the background to the *Five Point Plan for Tibet*, published in September 1987, in which the Dalai Lama has insisted that the Tibetan people are dedicated to environment protection (point 4). An official statement that, "prior to the Chinese invasion, Tibet was an unspoiled wilderness sanctuary in a unique natural environment"<sup>39</sup> nicely reinforces this position while blackening Chinese environmental and other credentials at the same time. A case of killing two political birds with one stone! The government-in-exile's recent packaging of pre-1959 Tibet as a green Shangrila<sup>40</sup> draws on these motifs. But, as a little detailed investigation suggests, all is not quite as it seems. To give one example, most Tibetan-language environmentalist terms are neologisms, coined in recent times in an attempt to translate alien concepts.<sup>41</sup>

### *Concluding Remarks*

Fielding's classic observation<sup>42</sup> that the Buddhists of early-twentieth-century Burma held an attitude of "noblesse oblige" toward animals seems to hold good for the tradition as a whole. Buddhism encourages kindness toward animals. Such kindness was, certainly,

in accord with the renouncer conventions of the Buddha's own time, and he did nothing to undermine that outlook.

Traditional Buddhist cosmology instills a fellow feeling, or sense of community, with all sentient beings caught in the beginningless circle of *saṃsāra*. This general ethical principle stands at the root of the practice of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Yet, more detailed analysis of the practice itself reveals a significant level of instrumentality in the sense that the meditation aims, at least in part, at the enhancement of the practitioner's own spiritual status rather than the alleviation of the suffering of others. Having said this, a positive approach to the natural world based on a doctrine of enlightened self-interest is better than no approach at all.

However, Buddhism's ultimate aim is to escape from the restrictions imposed by our position as beings-within-the-world. This can be accomplished only by the elimination of all negative desires. Concern for the animal kingdom can happily be taken along as baggage on the path to perfection, but at some stage it will be left at the side of the road. Indeed, from the Buddhist perspective some of the major ecological issues of our day, such as the extinction of species, are really pseudo-problems that can be straightforwardly resolved through the application of the principle of the preservation of sentiency that allows for the rebirth of beings in a variety of different destinies (*gati*) within *saṃsāra*. This is the context in which we should view some of the rather negative portrayals of the animals in canonical sources. Schmithausen has argued "that in an age where establishing ecological ethics has become imperative [such teachings] ... ought to be de-dogmatized by being relegated to their specific didactic contexts."<sup>43</sup> This has been the route taken by a variety of modern-engaged Buddhists both in Asia and farther afield. My only slight worry is that this tacit elimination of traditional doctrine, combined with an overdependence on intellectual and financial support from non-Buddhist sources, may tend to distort the tradition.

In the final analysis, Buddhism can contribute significant resources for the development of a global ecological ethic but it is not, in essence, an ecological religion. To quote the final words of the Buddha, "Decay is inherent in all conditioned things. Work out your salvation with diligence" (*.D.ii.156*).

## NOTES

1. See Florian Deleanu, "Buddhist 'Ethology' in the Pāli Canon: Between Symbol and Observation," *Eastern Buddhist* (New Series) 23, no. 2 (2000): 79-127.

2. Christopher Key Chapple, "Animals and Environment in the Buddhist Birth Stories," in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryuken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997), pp. 131-48.

3. Pāli canonical sources are cited using the following abbreviations:

- A. *Anguttara Nikāya*
- D. *Dīgha Nikāya*
- J. *Jātaka*
- Khṇ. *Khuddakapāṭha*
- M. *Majjhima Nikāya*
- MA. *Papañcasūdanī*
- S. *Samyutta Nikāya*
- SA. *Sāratthappakāsinī*
- Sn. *Suttanipāta*
- Thag. *Theragāthā*
- Vin. *Vinaya Piṭaka*
- Vism. *Visuddhimagga*

4. Thai kings are said to have sometimes offered the gift of an auspicious white elephant to over-powerful courtiers with the intention of ruining them through the cost of the creature's upkeep; hence the English term "white elephant," meaning an unwanted gift. In a variation on the ancient Indian horse-sacrifice, Burmese kings are known to have allowed an elephant to wander unhindered about the land. A pagoda was built at each of its stopping places, thus extending that monarch's territory. See Aung Thwin, "Jambudīpa: Classical Burma's Camelot," in J. P. Ferguson, ed., *Essays on Burma*, Contributions to Asian Studies Vol. XVI (Leiden: Brill, 1981), p. 52.

5. Welfare issues are also expressed in connection with farmed animals. Cowherds are cautioned against ill treatment; they are warned not to milk their cattle dry and to tend them carefully when they are injured or troubled by flies' eggs (*A.v.* 347-48).

6. A good example is the courtesy, deference, and general benevolence shared between a partridge, a monkey, and a bull elephant in *Vin.ii.* 161.

7. Buddhism makes a distinction between the realms of sentient beings and the receptacle world (*bhājanaloka*), i.e., the physical environment in which they are located. The most frequent term for an animal is *tiracchāna*, literally "going horizontally," although animals are included in the following more general categories: *sattā*—sentient beings; *pāṇā*—breathing things; *bhūtā*—born things; *jīvā*—living things. Plants seem to straddle the divide between the animate and inanimate realms. Some early sources assign them a limited form of sentiency, i.e., the possession of the sense of touch.

8. *Vin.i.*87f tells the story of a snake (*nāga*) that, having taken the form of a youth, gains admission to the *saṅgha*. He reverts to his true form at night when asleep and is expelled from the order by the Buddha with the admonition, "You *nāgas* are not capable of spiritual growth in this doctrine and discipline. However ... observe the fast on the fourteenth, fifteenth, and eighth day of the half-month. Thus you will be released from being a *nāga* and *quickly attain human form*" [my italics].

9. Martin Southwold, *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 66.

10. Taishō 17:1-379.

11. The “hell where everything is cooked,” a region of the burning hell (*tapana*), is reserved from those who have set fire to forests, while the “bird hell” in the hell of no interval (*avīci*) contains sinners who once deliberately caused famines by disrupting water supplies. For a full discussion of the Buddhist hells, see Matsunaga, Daigan, and Alicia *The Buddhist Concept of Hell* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972).

12. The Jains scrupulously aim to avoid all injury to such beings, whether this is intentional or otherwise.

13. Vegetarianism in contemporary Sri Lanka is on the increase. Most nuns are vegetarian, according to Tessa Bartholomeusz, *Women Under the Bo Tree: Buddhist Nuns in Sri Lanka* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 140. The practice is also recommended by the popular lay-based Sarvodaya movement, according to George D. Bond, *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation and Response* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 280. In 1985 the powerful All Ceylon Buddhist Congress lobbied the government against setting up a Ministry of Fisheries, for this was seen as an endorsement of the fishing industry (p. 118).

14. See D. S. Ruegg, “*Ahiṃsā* and Vegetarianism in the History of Buddhism” in S. Balasoorya, et al., eds., *Buddhist Studies in Honour of Walpola Rahula* (London: George Fraser, 1980), pp. 234-41.

15. However, monastic discipline (Vin.i.218ff) totally forbids ten kinds of meat. The list includes human flesh, elephant, lion, snake, tiger, etc. The reasons for the emergence of this particular list are quite complex. Some items, such as the elephant, are royal animals and protected by the king. Relatives of a dead lion have the capacity to track down and kill those who have consumed it—a powerful disincentive! A similar list of prohibited meats is found on Asoka’s Pillar Edict V

16. For further discussion of the issue, see C. S. Prasad, “Meat-eating and the Rule of *Tikotiparisuddha*,” in A.K. Narain, ed., *Studies in Pāli and Buddhism* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1979), pp. 289-95.

17. The eleventh expiatory offence in the Theravāda monastic code is directed toward the destruction of vegetable growth (*bhūtagāma*) (Vin.iv.34). For a detailed examination of the problem of plant sentiency, see Lambert Schmithausen, *The Problem of the Sentiency of Plants in Earliest Buddhism*, Studia Philologica Buddhica: Occasional Paper Series VI (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991).

18. A particularly interesting case related to this complex issue comes from Rangoon, Burma, in the late 1950s. The authorities, wishing to do something about the large population of stray dogs in the city, put down pieces of meat, only some of which were

poisoned, in various locations. It was argued that the procedure would ensure that only those dogs with unfavorable *karma* would die, thus absolving anyone else of blame. See Winston L. King, *In the Hope of Nirvana: An Essay on Theravada Buddhist Ethics* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1964), p. 281.

19. The establishment of a universal and hereditary monarchy as sole guarantor of harmony on a global scale fits the bill for an authentically Buddhist position on the protection of animals. However, apart from the practical difficulties of establishing such a polity, the suggestion is quaintly anachronistic and likely to be deeply unattractive, even to most contemporary inhabitants of the traditional Buddhist heartlands.

20. N.A. Nikam and R. McKeon, *The Edicts of Asoka* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), pp. 55-56.

21. J. Prip-Møller, *Chinese Buddhist Monasteries: Their Plan and Its Function as a Setting for Buddhist Monastic Life* (Copenhagen and London: G.E.C. Gads Forlagand, Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 161-163.

22. On the influence of Buddhist temples on the dispersal of certain plant species, see Pei Shengji, "Some Effects of the Dai People's Cultural Beliefs and Practices on the Plant Environment of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, Southwest China," in Karl L. Hutterer, A.T. Rambo, and G. Lovelace, eds., *Cultural Values and Human Ecology in Southeast Asia*, Michigan Papers on Southeast Asia no. 24 (Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1985), pp. 321-39.

23. D. C. Twitchett, "Monastic Estates in T'ang China," *Asia Major* (New Series) 5 (1956): 123.

24. Williams, Duncan Ryūken, "Animal Liberation, Death, and the State: Rites to Release Animals in Medieval Japan," in Mary Evelyn Tucker and Duncan Ryūken Williams, eds., *Buddhism and Ecology: The Interconnection of Dharma and Deeds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 1997), pp. 149-62.

25. On the way in which Buddhist protective rituals positively support environmental concerns, see Ian Harris, "Magician as Environmentalist: Fertility Elements in South and Southeast Asian Buddhism," *Eastern Buddhist* (New Series) 32, no. 2 (2000): 128-56.

26. Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and its Burmese Vicissitudes* (2nd, expanded edition) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 270.

27. Writers as varied as Buddhaghosa (*Vism.*ii. 58) and Candrakīrti (*Prasannapadā* 246, 1a3 and 299, 9f) both recommend the forest with its continual fall of leaves as a practical metaphor for impermanence.

28. In this connection, see F.L. Woodward, trans., *Manual of a Mystic, Being a Translation from the Pāli and Sinhalese Work Entitled the Yogavachara's Manual* (London: Pāli Text Society, 1916).

29. On the charisma of successful forest-dwelling monks see S.J. Tambiah, *Buddhism and the Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) and *The Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). Also see M. Carrithers, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Dehli: Oxford University Press, 1983).

30. See M. Cone and R. Gombrich, trans., *The Perfect Generosity of Prince Vessantara* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 28-29.

31. The practice may well have its origin in a widespread revival of tree-planting in Thailand in the wake of the Bangkok Bicentennial of 1982. See Kasetsart University, *Invitation to Tree Planting at Buddhamonton* (Bangkok: Public Relations Office, 1987).

32. The first edition of the Association's newsletter *Animal News Taiwan* was published in October 1994.

33. I am grateful to Oliver Yih-Ren Lin, University College, London, for supplying me with some of this information.

34. Toni Huber, "Green Tibetans: A Brief Social History," in Frank J. Korom, ed., *Tibetan Culture in the Diaspora* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997), p. 109.

35. See Shann Davies, ed., *Tree of Life: Buddhism and Protection of Nature* (Hong Kong: Buddhist Protection of Nature Project, 1987). Both Thai and Tibetan strands of the project now exist. They aim to disseminate selections of the Buddhist scriptures, particularly those deemed relevant to environmental awareness, etc. In Thailand it is claimed that fifty thousand such selections have already been distributed to schools, monasteries, and other institutions. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, a significant Thai scholar associated with the project, has published a number of works under its auspices, for example, *A Cry from the Forest: Buddhist Perception of Nature, A New Perspective for Conservation Education* (Bangkok: Wildlife Fund Thailand, 1987).

36. The impact of foreign NGOs on the development of environmentally engaged Buddhism is not restricted to the Tibetan exile community. For information on a parallel situation in Cambodia, see my "Buddhism in Extremis: The Case of Cambodia," in Ian Harris, ed., *Buddhism and Politics in Twentieth-Century Asia* (London: Pinter, 1999), pp. 54-78.

37. The first international interfaith event dealing with ecological issues from a religious perspective was held at Assisi on September 29, 1985 on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the WWF. The Dalai Lama's representative, Ven. Lungrig Namgyal, delivered one of the tradition-specific declarations. See *The Assisi Declarations: Messages on Man and Nature from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism* (London: WWF, 1986).

38. My comment is devoid of any personal animosity—the Dalai Lama is clearly a man of the highest integrity. Nevertheless, as an international figure he must face in two directions at once; toward his Buddhist countrymen and toward influential international

elites. An enthusiastic endorsement of the contemporary agenda of the second group, with its emphasis on the global nature of the world's problems, may be the most effective means of eliciting their support for the Tibetan people's fight to regain their homeland.

[39](#). International Campaign for Tibet 1990, p. 50, quoted in *Five Point Plan for Tibet*, point 4.

[40](#). For more on the modern construction of Tibet as an eco-paradise, see Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Peter Bishop, *The Myth of Shangri-La: Tibet, Travel Writing and the Western Creation of Sacred Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[41](#). *Five Point Plan for Tibet*, p. 111.

[42](#). H. Fielding, *The Soul of a People* (London: Macmillan, 1908), pp. 257-58.

[43](#). Lambert Schmithausen, "The Early Buddhist Tradition and Ecological Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 4 (1997): 22.