Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia

Places of practice

Edited by James A. Benn,
Lori Meeks, and James Robson

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The area of Buddhist monasticism has long attracted the interest of Buddhist Studies scholars and historians, but the interpretation of the nature and function of monasteries across diverse cultures and vast historical periods remains a focus for debate. This book provides a multifaceted discussion of religious, social, cultural, artistic, and political functions of Buddhist monasteries in medieval China and Japan.

With contributions from leading scholars in the field, this volume explores the multiplicity of the institutions that make up "the Buddhist monastery." Drawing on new research and on previous studies hitherto not widely available in English, the chapters cover key issues such as the relationship between monastics and lay society, the meaning of monastic vows, how specific institutions functioned, and the differences between urban and regional monasteries. Collectively, the book demonstrates that medieval monasteries in East Asia were much more than merely residences for monks who, cut off from the dust and din of society and all its entrapments, collectively pursued an ideal cenobitic lifestyle.

Buddhist Monasticism in East Asia is a timely contribution to the ongoing attempts to understand a central facet of Buddhist religious practice, and will be a significant work for academics and students in the fields of Buddhist Studies, Asian Studies, and East Asian Religions.

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Introduction

"Neither too far, nor too near": The historical and cultural contexts of Buddhist monasteries in medieval China and Japan

James Robson

Buddhist monasteries, with their sumptuous architecture, ornate furnishings, and striking natural settings, have always stuck out dramatically on the religious landscapes of Asia. Buddhist monasteries have constituted one of the most visible aspects of the Buddhist tradition, but until recently it has been rather rare to find explicit reflection on those fundamental elements of Buddhist practice.[1] While the term monastery appears on first glance to refer unproblematically to religious institutions that we all seem to have a general understanding of, it is worth noting how the topic of monasticism rarely enters into the discourse on religion in a neutral way, as the writings of Edward Gibbon and Max Weber attest.[2] Monasteries, as we shall see, have also been contested grounds within Buddhist studies, with much of that contestation centering on their nature and function across diverse cultures and vast historical periods. Therefore, any answer to the most basic question: "What is a Buddhist monastery?" will necessarily be as complex and multifarious as the diverse religious, historical and cultural contexts within which they have existed. Although the topic of Buddhist monasticism has long attracted the interests of Buddhist studies scholars and historians of religion, most representations of those entities have tended to be far more unified than their historical realities would suggest. The goal of this Introduction—and the collection of papers presented here—is not, therefore, to present a normative description of a singular entity called "the Buddhist monastery," and in the process try to house a variety of different institutional entities under a single roof. Rather, this volume aims to capture some sense of the multiplicity—both within and across traditions—of those institutions. The essays gathered here focus on facets of the religious, social, cultural, artistic and political functions of Buddhist monasteries in medieval China and Japan. It should therefore be stated clearly at the outset that this volume does not aim to constitute a comprehensive history of monasticism in Asia. There are no chapters on other forms of monasticism, such as Daoist monasticism, the role of nuns and nunneries is touched on only in passing here, and there is no treatment of Korean monasticism, Tibetan monasticism, or more contemporary forms of monasticism in East Asia.[3] Rather, what are presented here are selected topics of East Asian Buddhist monasticism. In this Introduction I do not intend to review all the recent, and not so recent, literature on Buddhist monasteries or to explore the full range of issues addressed by that literature here, since that project would

require a separate monograph. Instead, I shall limit myself to a discussion of some key issues that lie in the background of—or provide some context to—the topics explored by the individual authors. If there is one thing that we can say for certain about Buddhist monasteries and monasticism it is that they warrant the sustained attention of scholars of Buddhist studies, since what goes on inside and outside of their imposing gates is of central concern to our understanding of Buddhism as it functioned as a living religious tradition.

It would be difficult to overstate the significance of monasticism within Buddhism, where entrance into the monastery was one of the defining characteristics of being a Buddhist practitioner. Indeed, it is a topic that some might argue has been distinctly understated given the central role that it has played throughout the historical development, and geographical spread, of the tradition. Studies of Christian monasticism have far out-paced studies of Buddhist monasticism, despite the claim that Buddhist monasticism is perhaps the oldest form of monasticism in the world.[4] It has also been argued that as a religious style monasticism is more central to the Buddhist tradition than it is generally understood to be for Christianity.[5] Indeed, monasticism is perceived to be such a central part of Buddhist self-definition that one of the final signs of the disappearance of the dharma is when monastic robes turn white—the color of lay robes. Some Buddhists have, however, radically challenged the position of monasteries within the Buddhist tradition, serving as the exceptions that prove the rule. A Chan/Zen practitioner might, for example, ask: If a person already possesses inherent Buddha nature, what need is there to become a monk and pursue a path of spiritual cultivation within a monastery? Based on that perspective, the monastery is seen as merely a vestige of a dark view that required the individual to embark on a long path of self-cultivation, rather than just adopt a radically different self-perception. After the Tang Chan master Shitou Xiqian gave his assent to a verse by Layman Pang, for example, he followed with a question: "Will you put on black robes or will you continue wearing white?" Layman Pang responded by saying that "I want to do what I like" and so he did not shave his head, dye his clothing, or enter a monastery.[6] This account, which might be taken as evidence of the decline of the dharma, illustrates well the range of opinions within Buddhism about the necessity of putting on the robes of a monk and entering into a monastery.

The institutions that are commonly referred to under the general term "monastery" have been a fundamental component of many of the world's major religious traditions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Daoism, and Jainism.[7] Some consideration of the general study of monasteries is therefore essential due to the ways perceptions of monasteries in other religious traditions have conditioned the ways that Buddhist monasteries have been conceptualized and imagined. Let us begin by considering the word "monastery" itself, since a host of intractable interpretive problems arise with that term. Etymologically, the word "monastery"—and all its cognates—derives from the Greek root *monos* meaning one or alone. It has become commonplace, therefore, to trace the origins of Christian monasticism to early cenobitic communities established in the Egyptian desert, where ascetic anchorites lived in cells, only coming together at prayer

times. It is only much later, we are told, that those isolated entities developed into the more familiar monastic styles of the Benedictines, Carthusians, Franciscans, and Cistercians. One of the perduring characteristics found in descriptions of monasteries is the emphasis on their isolation from the daily workings of society. In addition to being marked by its position outside of society (or at least on its margins), monastic communities are also described as being marked off from society by other forms of distinction involving initiation rites, a specific program for living a disciplined life, distinctive clothing, bodily modifications (tonsure), symbolic articles, change of diet, and a special organization of time.

Yet, the word "monastery" is, even in its original Christian usage, imprecise and is a term that is rooted in ambiguity. In contrast to its etymological roots, monasteries essentially developed as places where religious "communities" gathered *together*. Scholars of medieval European monasticism have acknowledged this problem and noted that within studies on Christianity the term monasticism in its general usage "refers—somewhat paradoxically—to religious life within communities."[8] Others have argued that the aloneness of monasticism does not refer to a lack of a communal element, but rather that monks were single, in the sense of being unmarried and celibate, with a single-minded devotion to God.

Although the precise historical details remain unclear, the story that is often told about the origin of Buddhist monasticism is that a cenobitic Buddhist monastic community evolved out of a collection of wanderers (*parivrājaka*) who had set forth from the household (*pravrajyā*) and traveled without a fixed abode, except during the rainy season when they would take up temporary lodgings. Eventually, the temporary rainy season retreat began to extend into the dry season and the temporary retreat huts came to be replaced by elaborate shelters that were provided by wealthy patrons. Buddhism is thus marked by the way its postulants are said to "leave home," renounce "the world," join the family of the Buddha (*saṃgha*), and take up residence in a monastery, where the communal lives of the monks and nuns was governed by a set of detailed rules (*vinaya*) that pertained to issues of individual behavior, communal living, and liturgy. Monasteries were, according to this telling, the primary abodes for monks, the locus of their activities, and central to the functioning of Buddhism as an institution.

While the image of separation from society is played up in many descriptions of Buddhist monasteries, it is clear from other sources that early Buddhist monasteries were to be located "neither too far, nor too near" to urban settlements— neither entirely separated off from the world, nor entirely within the world. The *Cullavagga*, for example includes the story of the householder Anāthapindika who wanted to make an offering of a monastery to the Buddha, but according to the Buddha's wishes it had to meet certain specifications. When Anāthapindika went to Sāvatthī in search of a site he asked himself,

> Now where could the Lord stay that would be *neither too far from a village, nor too near,* suitable for coming and going, accessible to people whenever they want, not crowded by day, having little noise at night, little sound, without folks' breath, secluded from people, fitting for meditation?[9]

As is well known, it was Prince Jeta's grove that ultimately satisfied the Buddha's dual requirement of being neither too close nor too remote from society, and thus the formidable Jetavana vihāra was founded. In the *Visuddhimagga*, the fifth-century Sri Lankan monk Buddhaghosa also stipulates the importance of a place that satisfies five factors, of which I will only mention the first. "For this is said by the Blessed One 'And how has a lodging five factors, bhikkhus? Here bhikkhus, a lodging *is not too far, not too near*, and has a path for going and coming."[10] We will return to the important topic of proximity to and distance from society shortly, but suffice it to say here that although scholars of Buddhism have, like their counterparts in medieval Christian studies, generally found it unproblematic to employ the word monastery as a term of convenience for institutions that were communal in nature and clearly not rooted in aloneness, it has been rare for scholars to reflect on the adequacy of the term monastery—whose precise referent often remains unclear.

When Buddhist monasticism is discussed in general terms, it is often situated within a comparative context alongside Christian and Hindu forms of monasticism. A recent two-volume reference work on monasticism has, for example, an image of a Buddhist deity on the cover of one volume and an image of St. Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux, on the cover of the other, while the cover of a book on the comparative study of Buddhist and Christian monasticism includes images of a medal-cross of St. Benedict and the Buddhist Wheel of Becoming.[11] While the ecumenical gesture implied by the inclusion of those images side by side, and the editor's acknowledgment of the importance of Buddhism to the general history of monasticism, is to be commended, certain questions naturally arise in regard to this alleged proximity. First, is the term monasticism a useful term outside of the Christian tradition that gave rise to its use? Does it make sense to unify the diverse range of Buddhist institutions that we find across different cultures and times under the single label of "monasticism"? If that question is answered in the affirmative, then other questions arise: Is there the danger that all specific uses of the term monasticism will necessarily be marked by such a range of equivocal meanings that it threatens the integrity of the term? Have depictions of Buddhist institutions suffered through the extension of this Christian term to a different religious milieu and overly colored those objects with the hue of the Christian lenses through which they have been viewed?[12] The interpretive problems raised by these questions are no doubt familiar to historians of religion, who have long brooded over the vexing issue of comparison. Despite much reflection on the enterprise of comparison, we are still haunted, as J.Z. Smith has suggested, by the problems opened up by Wittgenstein's pointed question: "How am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?"[13] In order to adequately reflect on these issues, therefore, we must first understand how the term monasticism has evolved and what types of meanings have accrued to it in both the Christian and Buddhist contexts. Only then can we interrogate the ways that the one term—monasticism—has been applied to the two, and perhaps realize that our understanding of Buddhist monasteries is, like their ideal location, neither too close nor too far from the character of monasteries in other religious traditions.

That is to say, rather than merely revel in the comfort of resemblances, we also need to defamiliarize ourselves with the topic and take difference seriously.

Buddhist and Christian forms of monasticism have not always shared the comfortable proximity that they now enjoy on the covers of recent books. Following a brief flirtation with Buddhist monasticism by the Jesuits in China, Western images of Buddhist monasticism quickly became both distorted and disparaging. It is striking to note how in their initial interactions with the Chinese in the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries felt that the best way to represent themselves to the Chinese was as Buddhist monks, perhaps due to the formal resemblances between Jesuit religious institutions and practices and Chinese Buddhist institutions and practices.[14] Therefore, when the Jesuits chose "monastic Buddhism as the initial mode of enculturation" this appeared to be unproblematic for both parties. The Jesuits at first "imagined Buddhist monasticism to be a vehicle for becoming Chinese," since that guise was sure to not attract much attention or raise the suspicions of the Chinese. This experiment did not last long, however, and while Buddhist monasticism initially served a limited function, it was quickly renounced and ultimately denounced. In his discussion of the initial Western contacts with Tibet, Donald Lopez described well the ways that those expressions of Tibetan religion that appeared too similar to those found in Christianity were decried by missionaries as the product of "demonic plagiarism." The missionaries' task, Lopez explained, was to "transmit the word of that [Christian] particularity to those realms where it has not yet spread, to diffuse it from its unique point of origin . . . and to find them already there, suggests the workings of a power beyond history, which could only be seen as demonic."[15] The Jesuits in China may not have blamed their mistaken earlier impressions of Buddhist monasteries on the work of demons, but they did quickly demonize those religious institutions that they initially thought they knew better.

As the Jesuits came to their senses and abandoned the "indigent trappings of the Buddhist cloister" and eventually threw off their Buddhist monastic robes in favor of the "resplendent robes and headdress of the 'literati,'" so too did representations of Buddhist monasticism suffer a decline in the eyes of later European interpreters. The Jesuit Louis le Compte's skewed images of Chinese Buddhist monasteries, for example, were ultimately incorporated into a number of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century encyclopedias, such as *The Encyclopedia Britannica*.[16] The image that is presented in those reference works is typical of Victorian-era images of Buddhist monasticism as both morally suspect and home to a group of selfish, nonproductive, and often ignorant, idlers. According to some nineteenth-century scholars of Buddhism the problem stemmed from the nature of Buddhist monasticism itself, which, we are told, "was productive of evil tendencies and a selfish seclusion."[17] From the outset the Buddhist monastic ideal was taken to be a problem, and it was not looked upon kindly through the anti-Catholic lens of contemporary Victorian intellectuals. The pejorative representation of Buddhist monasticism by Western observers was, of course, nothing new, but was a distant echo of the types of critiques that Buddhist monasticism encountered early on in China, where Buddhist monks were belittled as being nothing more than mere parasites on society.

Significant new reflections on—and reinterpretations of—monasticism have steadily proliferated in recent years, but it has taken a generation of scholars to overcome the foundational early images that were painted of Buddhist monasticism. While Buddhist monasticism has fared somewhat better under the gaze of recent Western commentators, the newer—perhaps more benign—descriptions of those institutions may be as concealing as they are revealing. Under the increasing weight of contemporary scholarship there is less of an imperative to repeatedly decry the problematic impressions of Buddhist monasticism, but there is still unfinished work in detailing how perceptions of Buddhist monasticism in general have been conditioned by (mistaken) impressions about the evolution of Western monastic orders, and how interpretations of East Asian monasticism in particular have been conditioned by (again mistaken) interpretations of Indian monasticism, where canonical materials that present normative ideals are presented as reflections of historical realities.

Descriptions of monasteries as "worlds apart" that are inhabited solely by religious virtuosi, for example, have become increasingly suspect as adequate reflections of the socio-historical realities of monasteries throughout Buddhist history and across different cultures. Gregory Schopen has put a fine point on the issue:

> It is probably fair to say that, because of the way they have been studied, neither Indian Buddhist monasticism nor the Buddhist monastery in India has been allowed to have anything like a real history . . . Once it is allowed that, yes, both Buddhist monasticism and Buddhist monasteries had histories, that both developed and changed over time, then "early" Buddhist monasticisms—and we should probably begin to use the plural seriously here—and the "early" Buddhist monastery, become only one, and certainly not the only important object of investigation. We need no longer be implicitly or explicitly concerned primarily with the question of what Buddhist monasticisms originally were. We might be equally—and probably more fruitfully—concerned with what at given places and given points in time they had become. We might begin to meaningfully talk about "early" and "early medieval" and "medieval" and "late" Buddhist monasticisms and to study each of these in their own right and not, for example, as mere exemplifications of the decline and degeneration of some "early" and largely assumed single "ideal."[18]

These comments, directed at scholars of Indian Buddhist monasticism, are equally applicable to the history of the study of Buddhist monasticism in East Asia. Schopen's remarks highlight how considerations of monasticism have thus far been driven by what might be understood in terms of Gadamer's notion of "effective history." In trying to understand any historical phenomena we are necessarily influenced by the accrued history of the approach to those phenomena. That history, Gadamer argues, "determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there—in fact—we miss the whole truth of the phenomena—when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth."[19] The effective history

of the study of monasticism that has provided the conditions for the present state of the field can be tracked along two lines: the tendency to hypostasize later images of Buddhist monasticism as reflective of an early pure state of Buddhist monasticism and the lingering effect of the Christian sense of monasticism that posits a clear separation between worldly society and the religious pursuits of monastics.

The negative images of Buddhist monasteries propagated up through the nineteenth century persisted into the modern period and are found expressed in the influential writings of Max Weber. Monasticism, including Buddhist monasticism, appears only episodically in Weber's writings, though it is clear that for him monasticism presented both challenges and opportunities.[20] Weber never fully or clearly conceptualized monasticism, as he did other religious institutions, and his image of the world-transcendent status of monasteries—where religious virtuosi push themselves into the rarified heights of religious self-perfection—was in noticeable tension with his imperative to note the ways in which monasteries functioned as rationalizing institutions. Salvation for the Buddhist practitioner, in Weber's reckoning, was

> an absolutely personal performance of the self-reliant individual. No one, and particularly no social community can help him. The specific asocial character of all genuine mysticism is here carried to its maximum. Actually, it appears even as a contradiction that the Buddha, who was quite aloof from forming a "church" or even a "parish" and who expressly rejected the possibility and pretension of being able to "lead" an order, has founded an order after all.[21]

Weber seems to have resolved this tension by portraying monasticism itself as a purely otherworldly entity in its earliest stages that only later devolved into landlordism, pandering to the laity, and participation in commercial functions. He summed up this viewpoint by saying that "the whole history of monasticism is in a certain sense the history of a continual struggle with the problem of the secularizing influence of wealth."[22] A similarly negative view of monasteries is found in Western scholarship on European monasticism, such as in the earlier work of Edward Gibbon, and those general views have infected portrayals of Buddhist monasticism. Indeed, one of the major thrusts of Gregory Schopen's recent work on Buddhist monasticism has been to show how Buddhist monks and monasteries have always been intertwined with economic concerns and it is, therefore, problematic to characterize an interest in money as a later sign of degeneration. Steven Kemper has also shown how in the Sinhalese Buddhist context wealth was not a problem, and in fact the truly detached homeless monk is the one treated with suspicion. Wealthy monks and monasteries are accorded social approval since wealth was deemed a visible sign of accumulated merit.[23] One of the problems with the devolutionary model of Buddhist monasteries is that they presuppose the identification of an ideal that has been deviated from. But, where does the interpreter stop in that return to an ever-retreating ideal point of origin? From one perspective, for example, Buddhist monasticism itself could be seen as a devolution from the earlier ideal to, as the *Khadgavisana-gatha* [Rhinoceros Horn Sūtra] says, "wander

alone like the rhinoceros horn."[24] While it might be easy to dismiss Weber's views of Buddhist monasteries as merely based on early idealized images of Buddhist monasticism, one of the main questions that remains is how we are to analyze and portray both the "ideal" and the "real" aspects of monasteries.

The "ideal" image of early Buddhism that was deployed by Max Weber, Louis Dumont, and other early interpreters of Buddhism, as a gauge with which to measure all subsequent Buddhist developments is no longer tenable. Buddhist monasteries and monastics had at least two faces and neither one was entirely as detached from society as Louis Dumont's representation, which conflated Buddhist monks with other Indian renunciates, might have implied.[25] As Sukumar Dutt long ago noted, "monk-and-layman intercourse was a feature of Buddhist monastic life from the start."[26] Steven Collins has also underscored the point that a clear and distinct separation between the lay community and monastics would not only have been practically impossible, but would also have entailed a violation of vinaya proscriptions that say that the monk is forbidden to collect and cook his own food.[27] Thus, from the outset monasteries were structurally dependent on a relationship with the lay community, and the material support they received entailed obligations for them to come into contact with the laity to provide religious services to fulfill their side of the merit exchange relationship. Koichi Shinohara's chapter in this volume discusses these lay–monastic relationships through a careful study of the responsibility of monks to go out from the monastery and accept meals offered by the laity. Early Chinese Buddhist tales depict a world where lay supporters competed to place themselves in the rarified presence of the Buddha by offering a meal to him in order to aquire merit through the reception of a blessing. It was on these occasions that the lay world came into contact with the monastic world, where monks were obliged to partake of the meal, recite sūtras, and confer blessings. It was precisely due to the necessity of fostering monastic interaction with the laity that in the story related above the Buddha made sure that Anāthapindika did not establish the monastery too far from an urban area, but at a site accessible to them.

As contemporary scholarship on Buddhist monasticism has become increasingly colored by the theoretical and methodological concerns within Buddhist studies aimed at studying lived realities in "practice," a tension has emerged between a focus on the "ordinary" as opposed to the "extraordinary" aspects of Buddhism. The recent attention paid to monastic practices has resulted in evaluations of the day-to-day functioning of monasteries (cooking, cleaning, and management), the ritual and cultic practices of monastics (recitation of texts and propitiation of deities), as well as explications of monastic economies, land-holdings, and money-making business ventures.[28] While studies of both the mundane and supramandane aspects of monastic life have been well accepted by scholars of medieval European monasticism it has taken longer for those perspectives to take root among scholars of Asian monasticism. This may, in part, be due to a lingering preoccupation with romantic notions of "Eastern religious experience" that is allegedly fostered in the monastic environment.[29]

New methodological approaches aimed at understanding the full complexity of monastic institutions has been greeted with excitement by some, but deplored by

others as being either of marginal concern or a minor element that merely reflects the devolution of monasteries away from some allegedly pure state—when those institutions were not yet polluted by economic activities. Those who pursue these new lines of inquiry are sometimes criticized for lowering their gaze too far, to the point of merely focusing on what has been called the "external trappings" of monasticism, rather than its true elevated purpose: the pursuit of enlightenment.[30] Those interested in the more rarified concerns of religious experience might acknowledge the social, economic, political, and sometimes magical dimensions of monasteries and monasticism, but they insist that sustained attention needs to remain focused on their soteriological function and the religious virtuosi that strive for the highest spiritual ideal through dedication to a cenobitic lifestyle.[31] That is to say, there is a general tendency to divide the study of monasticism into two rather different lines of inquiry. The first focuses on the religious practices of elite monastics. The second turns away from doctrine and the pursuits of the "spiritual aristocracy" and turns toward an acknowledgment of the complex motivations driving monks and nuns into monasteries, in addition to a detailed scrutiny of the intricate workings of monastic institutions that are seen to be deeply embedded in the worldly activities of society, sorcery, politics, and commerce.

In one recent articulation of this divide, Victor Sōgen Hori has written:

> Many—perhaps most—who wear the monk's robes do not seek enlighten-ment. But some few do. If you are a scholar, then the many monks who do not seek enlightenment are statistically representative of the monastery. If you are a practitioner, then the few monks who do seek enlightenment are representa-tive of the true purpose of the monastery.[32]

This statement reflects generally held, but not often explicitly stated, sentiments about the fault line that runs between different interpretations of monastic practice. This fault line is not, of course, limited to East Asian Buddhism, but runs through interpretations of South and Southeast Asian Buddhism, as the writings of Melford Spiro attest. One of the main interpretive problems that scholars of Buddhism now face is the following: How we are to account for the real functioning of those insti-tutions and at the same time capture perceptions of those sites as ideal settings that are somehow supposed to transcend the quotidian world that surrounds them? This tension has been articulated well by Stanley Tambiah:

> "The self-denials of the extreme ascetic may serve as models for the good life of the ordinary man," not so much models to be imitated, for lay life makes that impossible, but because as Durkheim perceived, "It is necessary that an elite put the end too high, if the crowd is not to put it too low."[33]

Tensions between a focus on the social, political, cultural, and economic reali-ties of monasteries and a focus on the soteriological function of monasteries seem to come to the fore when modern scholars claim to be representative of the "true

purpose" of a singular entity— "the Buddhist monastery." In the past, these approaches have been seen as inimical, but it is fair to say that there is a growing recognition that in order to account for the full diversity of monks and the monasteries that they inhabit, both the ordinary and the extraordinary need to be attended to. Robert Buswell has, for example, claimed that scholars need to do justice to the complex ways that Buddhist monasticism "weaves doctrine, praxis, and lifeway together into an intricate tapestry" and the ways that the "regimens of monastic life—indeed, the entire cultural context of Buddhist training—therefore interface directly doctrine and practice."[34] This is a worthwhile goal to strive for, but I suspect that not all aspects of practice and doctrine can ultimately be seen to be working in concert. Some aspects of monasticism will always remain outside the tapestry and irreducible to a doctrinal function. Nonetheless, those non-doctrinally oriented actions and tasks should not be set aside as ancillary concerns, but included within our inquiries as a part of a larger picture.[35] While these may seem like our modern problems and preoccupations, they do have some resonance with earlier representations of Buddhist monasteries.

If the pursuit of enlightenment is the primary goal of monasticism, then all other aspects of monasticism tend to be treated as impediments to practice. In the *Visuddhimagga*, for example, Buddhaghosa noted eighteen ways a monastery can be unfavorable to meditative practice. Those features include,

> largeness, newness, dilapidatedness, a nearby road, a pond, [edible] leaves, flowers, fruits, famousness, a nearby city, nearby timber trees, nearby arable fields, presence of incompatible persons, a nearby port of entry, nearness to the border countries, nearness to the frontier of a kingdom, unsuitability, lack of good friends.[36]

Or, to restate them in Paul Harrison's modern paraphrasing,

> too many administrative tasks, frequent distractions from students, constant official meetings, too much construction activity, too many people coming and going for their own purposes or wanting things from you (worse, he says, when the place is famous), and the need to deal with fractious or incompatible colleagues.[37]

It is precisely the topics and practices maligned by Buddhaghosa as detracting from meditation that some modern scholars yearn to account for in putting a human face back on Buddhist monks as inhabitants of complicated social environments and to fill out our picture of the practical functioning of the Buddhist monastery. Buddhaghosa's rich description of the potentially distracting features found in Buddhist monasteries reveals a very real concern for how some monastic institutions were in danger of becoming too deeply enmeshed in the complicated social worlds that they were situated within.

In order to gain a new vantage point into Japanese monasteries, William Bodiford urges scholars of Japanese Buddhism to turn their attention back to a number of