

Making Merit through Warfare and Torture

According to the

Ārya-Bodhisattva-gocara-upāyaviṣaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa Sūtra

Stephen Jenkins

The impression of Buddhist pacifism is so strong that it has suggested to historians that it was a significant factor in the downfall of Buddhism in India. Buddhist kings would seem to be implicated in a hopeless moral conflict. No Kṛṣṇa seems to rescue the Buddhist Arjuna from the disempowering moral conflict that arises between a warrior's duty and the values of *ahiṃsā* (nonviolence). However, we can see from the example of the *Ārya-Bodhisattva-gocara-upāyaviṣaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa Sūtra* that Buddhist kings had conceptual resources at their disposal that supported warfare, torture, and harsh punishments. The exploration of its intertextual details opens up an ever-wider view of a sort of Buddhism strongly at odds with the pacifist stereotypes. Here, an armed bodyguard accompanies the Buddha and threatens to destroy those who offend him. Torture can be an expression of compassion. Capital punishment may be encouraged. Body armor and a side arm are among the most important metaphors and symbols of the power of compassion. Celestial bodhisattvas, divinized embodiments of the power of enlightened compassion, support campaigns of conquest to spread the influence of Buddhism, and kings vested with the dharma commit mass violence against Jains and Hindus.

The *Ārya-Bodhisattva-gocara-upāyaviṣaya-vikurvaṇa -nirdeśa Sūtra*, otherwise known as the *Ārya-Satyakaparivarta*, engages a variety of questions in relation to the violence of warfare and punishment. As the two different titles indicate, its name can be a source of confusion. Although it is cataloged under its long title, it is more often cited and better known as

the *Satyakaparivarta*.¹ I would translate the long name as “The Noble Teaching through Manifestations on the Subject of Skillful Means in the Bodhisattva’s Field of Activity.”² The doctoral dissertation of Lozang Jampal contains a translation and study. It is also the subject of a rich research article by Michael Zimmermann, who makes use of the Chinese translations and compares perspectives from the Hindu *Arthaśāstra* and *dharmasāstras*.³ Lambert Schmithausen mentions it in passing in a sweeping article with which all students of Buddhism and violence should begin.⁴ I will synthesize their contributions and make some observations, corrections, and additions. Dr. Sangye Tandar Naga, the former head of research at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, supported my own study. The merit of this work is largely due to him.

The *sūtra* was translated twice into Chinese less than a hundred years apart. According to Zimmermann, the chapter on royal ethics is missing in the earliest Chinese translation by Guṇabhadra. Zimmermann astutely notes that this type of omission does not necessarily indicate that a chapter is a later interpolation into a *sūtra*. I would add that this is particularly true here, since in China violent or erotic materials were frequently modified or omitted when translating Indian texts.⁵ Jampal notes that the text is frequently cited in Indian Buddhist literature.⁶ Its most important citation is in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* attributed to Nāgārjuna.⁷ Lindtner takes the attributions of the *Sūtrasamuccaya* to Nāgārjuna by Candrakīrti and Śāntideva quite seriously, and it has been often used as a key source for dating texts.⁸ This would seem to give the *Satyakaparivarta* an early date. However, dating texts according to their appearance in compendiums such as the *Sūtrasamuccaya* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya* is highly problematic. This type of text, built around a catalog of *sūtra* citations, is very susceptible to interpolation and *sūtras* should not be definitively dated to Nāgārjuna based on this alone. However, it is important to

note that the section cited by the *Sūtrasamuccaya*, possibly as early as the second century CE by the enormously influential Nāgārjuna, is from the very section on royal ethics which is not included in Guṇabhadra's fifth-century Chinese translation. This could mean that the section is not an interpolation into the later version of the *sūtra* and may have been deliberately excluded by Guṇabhadra. On the other hand, it could be taken as evidence that the *Sūtrasamuccaya* itself contains later interpolations. Further, since the internal content of the *sūtra* was also likely changed, we do not know whether the rest of the chapter that may have been in Nāgārjuna's hands was the same as the one we have today.

When Nāgārjuna addresses royal ethics, as in the *Ratnāvalī*, he does not directly cite this *sūtra*.⁹ However, this *sūtra* says many things about military policy and punishment, through the mouth of a manifestation that should not be addressed by an ordained monk such as Nāgārjuna. The citation in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, attributed to Śāntideva some 600 years later, also comes from the section on royal ethics.¹⁰ In terms of evaluating the *sūtra*'s currency and influence, particularly the chapter on royal ethics, all we can say is that influential figures in the Mahāyāna tradition believed that its foundational figure, Nāgārjuna, had cited the *sūtra*. Even if the *sūtra* evolved and changed, it would have continued to carry this pedigree. Tsong-kha-pa's frequent citations and exhortation to study it seem to suggest that this is true at least in the Tibetan tradition and for the currents of Indian tradition that influenced it.¹¹ Considering that the extent of Indian Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature may have been almost as daunting to ancient scholars as it is to modern ones, citation catalogs, such as the *Sūtrasamuccaya* and *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, may have been more important in monastic education than the vast corpus of *sūtras* themselves. So the *Satyakaparivarta*'s presence there is especially significant. Having stated the qualifications, the best evidence is that this *sūtra*'s section on royal ethics was well known and influential since the

second century through the influence of Nāgārjuna and that its absence from the earlier Chinese translation was a deliberate exclusion. However, as usual in Indian Buddhism, the best evidence in such matters is highly subject to doubt.

On the Setting

With apparent humor and irony, this *sūtra* describes a dialogue between an ascetic called Satyavaca Nirgranthaputra and a king. A character by this name also appears in two Pāli *suttas* as a clever and aggressive anti-Buddhist debater.¹² In this earlier account of Satyavaca, he makes the mistake of challenging the Buddha to debate with highly insulting language. Subsequently, when he hesitates to answer a key question during the debate, the Buddha's menacing armed bodyguard, Vajrapāṇi, threatens to split his head open with a blazing *vajra*. The *vajra* was a handheld weapon that would later become the primary symbol of the power of compassion. The key question put to Satyavaca by Śākyamuni Buddha shows a connection to the later Mahāyāna *sūtra*. The question is whether an anointed king may exercise the power in his own realm to execute those who should be executed. The Buddha's argument hinges on the fact that this is so. Satyavaca concedes that an anointed king could indeed exercise the power of capital punishment and he would be worthy (Pāli: *arahati*) to exercise it. He strengthens the point by saying that this is true even for groups and societies that do not have such kings. So the Buddha forces Satyavaca, under threat of death, to concede that an anointed king both has and merits the power to execute criminals.

The violence of Satyavaca's situation is typical and shows how dangerous the world of the Indian ascetics was imagined to be. Those who lost debates are often described as being swallowed up by the earth, drowning in the Gaṅga, or spitting up blood and dying. It was not

uncommon for the stakes to be death or conversion. The threat to split someone's head was typical of intellectual challenges and occurs often both in the Upaniṣads and in early Buddhist literature.¹³ The fact that the threat is taken very seriously is shown here by Satyavaca's terror and the presence of Vajrapāṇi, who often works violence on the Buddha's behalf from early mainstream Buddhist literature to late Tantric literature. The legends of such debates often end in the forfeit of the losing community's right to assemble, or even being forced to fund new monasteries for the opponent. The relations between groups of ascetics were seen as violently competitive, even involving espionage and assassination. The Buddha is depicted as an attempted murder victim on multiple occasions and even as the victim of a conspiracy to implicate him in a murderous sex scandal (Jātaka 285).¹⁴ One thinks of the attempted assassinations of the Buddha, the murders of Āryadeva and Nāgārjuna, the wizardly battles of Śāntideva and Dignāga, Candrakīrti's involvement in warfare, etc. In the Pāli account of Satyavaca, the shadow of deadly force hangs over the Buddha's debate in the form of Vajrapāṇi. If legend and scripture are any indication, the violence of the Indian Buddhists' imagination, and probably the violence of their world, was extreme. It is no wonder that in Tibet debate has evolved into a highly physical, intellectual martial art.

In the much later Mahāyāna *sūtra*, which existed at least as early as the fifth century CE, Satyavaca is actually a manifestation of the Buddha, and the text frequently states that he both is a manifestation and teaches through many manifestations. Perhaps he does not manifest in this context as a Buddhist monk or deity, because he teaches on topics, such as military tactics, which are forbidden for monks to discuss. Here, he finds himself again in a potentially deadly situation for an ascetic, an audience with a vicious king. The king's Sanskrit name, Pradyota, means "Radiance," a typical name for a king suggesting that he has an overabundance of *rajas*,

dynamism, a quality kings are supposed to embody. The epithet *Caṇḍa* means Pradyota the Cruel, just as the great Aśoka was called *Caṇḍa-Aśoka*. He is a stock character in Buddhist lore. Zimmermann tracked him down in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* and describes him as “a mean little bald guy” who would kill anyone “on the spot” who said the word “fat.” He was also said to have massacred 80,000 *Brāhmaṇas*.¹⁵ He appears elsewhere in Sarvāstivādin *avadāna* literature in ethical tales focused on violence. In one case, he threatens to kill a Buddhist teacher, and in another, he savagely beats a young novice monk who presumes to teach the women of his court.¹⁶

Zimmermann notes that the king is described as ruling according to dharma, even though he is also seen as dangerously violent. This illustrates the usual Buddhist attitude of ambiguity toward kings. Aśoka, according to Buddhist legend, slaughtered 18,000 Jains, among other atrocities, well after he became “Dharma-Aśoka.”¹⁷ Some note that he renounces such violence after this pogrom takes the life of his own brother; nevertheless, Aśoka continues to commit horrible acts of violence even after this episode. In the literary accounts, dangerous Buddhist kings have a disturbing tendency for mass violence against non-Buddhists. The Buddhist historian Tārānatha records, for instance, that the great King Harṣa trapped and burned alive “12,000 experts of the doctrine of the mlecchas [foreigners].”¹⁸

It is not entirely clear, but the irony and absurdity of Satyavaca’s encounter suggest a comical aspect. After Satyavaca advises him against capital punishment, the king calls for a public assembly with the Buddha and proclaims that anyone who does not show up will be executed. When Satyavaca criticizes him for being excessively wrathful, Pradyota comes very close to killing him. Satyavaca escapes execution by apologizing for criticizing the king in the presence of others. The situation is perhaps too dangerous and too commonly attested to be

humorous. In the *Milindapañha*, the monk Nāgasena tactfully tells King Milinda that he will only speak to him as a fellow scholar, because disputing with a king can result in punishment.¹⁹

In another case, Śākyamuni is described as avoiding directly confronting even the favorable King Pasenadi, who was fresh from impaling his enemies, for fear of alienating him.²⁰

On Punishment

Satyavaca advises *Caṇḍapradyota* on criminal justice and military violence. In regard to criminal justice, the ascetic warns the king against excessive compassion. This is the point cited by

Śāntideva in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*.²¹ Sentimental reluctance to act with harsh violence is a

downfall of a king and leads to general criminal mischief. As in Buddhist thought in general,

compassion should not be mistaken for sentimentality. While manifesting *maitrī* and *karuṇā*, the

king should “bind, imprison, terrorize [or hurt/whip], beat, and harm uncivilized people.”

Harming, terrorizing, and beating clearly fit the modern definition of torture. On the other hand,

the king should not mutilate criminals, deprive them of their senses, or execute them. Although

historically “Buddhist polities have nearly always maintained capital punishment,”²² capital

punishment is ruled out. This is in direct contrast with the *dharmasāstras*, compendiums of

Hindu ethical thought, which generally advocate all three acts of violence. Permanent physical

damage should be avoided in such harsh treatment, and such violence should be done with the

intention of training the victim. Violence is a tool of both prevention and rehabilitation.

Likewise, in the case of tax collection, a king should discern between those who are unable to

pay by no fault of their own and those who evade taxes or squander their wealth.

The *Milindapañha*, a highly authoritative Theravādin text framed as a dialogue between a king and a monk, offers an interesting contrast by arguing that punitive violence should be

understood as the fruition of the victim's own karma. How, the monk Nāgasena is asked, is a king to reconcile the Buddha's apparently contradictory injunctions not to harm anyone, on the one hand, and to punish those who deserve it, on the other? King Milinda pointedly reminds him that punishment includes amputation, mutilation, torture, and execution. Nāgasena affirms both teachings. If a robber deserves death, he should be put to death. Is, then, the execution of criminals part of the dharma laid down by the Tathāgatas? No, it is the robber's own karma that causes the execution, not the *Buddhadharma*.²³ The king merely facilitates this fruition. This concept of the king facilitating the fruition of negative karma is also prominent in the Hindu *dharmaśāstras*, which are based more on the logic of ascetic expiation of karma. In Hindu sources, the king functions as Yama, lord of death and dispenser of karmic outcomes.²⁴ Even the death penalty can be seen as a benefit from this perspective. The victim is benefited through relief of a karmic burden. The *Satyakaparivarta* argues instead that compassionate torture that does not result in permanent physical damage may have a beneficial influence on the character of the victim. The death penalty is not allowed, perhaps partly because it disallows the possibility of reform. Although the royal use of deadly force in battle is not explicitly described as an enactment of karmic outcomes, the *sūtra* says that weapons cannot harm a warrior protected by good karma. The unstated implications are that one's victims must be ripe for their own destruction, and losing suggests moral failure on the part of the loser.

The domination of vassals is spoken of in much the same terms as controlling criminals, and the *sūtra*'s arguments for the benevolent treatment of vassals are more pragmatic than naïvely idealistic. Compassion is generally understood in Buddhism as having a magical power to protect. The common description of bodhisattvas putting on the armor of compassion is more than metaphorical. One can cite many cases of saints being protected from assassins or vicious

animals by manifesting compassion. Even today, the *Mettā Sutta* is recited to protect from snakebite and other dangers. The *Milindapañha* tells of a prince, renowned for his compassion, who was struck by an arrow only precisely when he allowed his concentration on compassion to lapse.²⁵

The *Seyya Jātaka*, a story about one of the Buddha's previous rebirths, portrays an extreme example of a king who refuses to fight to protect his kingdom, because it will require him to do harm. While imprisoned by the victor, he pities his conqueror for the karmic outcomes of his actions. His captor is then attacked by great physical pain through the power of his victim's compassion. As a result, the king is released and his kingdom is returned (Jātaka 282). The implication is that compassion magically serves to sustain a king's power. Similarly, it is believed in this *sūtra* that the weather, public health, and agricultural productivity are enhanced by the power of compassion.²⁶ When we consider the rhetorical and political value of what may be regarded as merely magical perspectives, it must be remembered that in their cultural context these were not supernatural, but reflected concrete concerns for the forces at work in their world. It is also true that sometimes what initially appear to be mere formulations of magical thinking may be informed by practical insight. In a 2008 presentation on the moral reasoning of *avadāna* literature, Rotman showed how Buddhists viewed moral qualities and karmic merit as quantifiable forms of capital.²⁷ This is a somewhat magical form of what we would characterize in terms of intangible qualities such as political capital, moral bankruptcy, or the value of consumer confidence, institutional morale, work ethics, or creativity. There is a sense that the benefits of moral values may be entrepreneurially accumulated and developed. The store of those values is a fundamental source of the well-being of a people. The concern with karmic merit goes beyond the impact of ascetic values on popular culture to a highly pragmatic and self-

interested concern for community well-being. In the same way, the Buddhist ethics of violence represents more than a simple allegiance to the values of ascetics. They are part of a comprehensive view of human thriving that values worldly abundance.

But in this *sūtra*, as even in the brutally pragmatic Hindu *Arthaśāstra*, there are also practical arguments for the protective power of justice and benevolence that go beyond the usual magical sense. A king must recognize that his own policies are a substantial cause of hostile relations and that his own virtue is his first defense, reasoning that has currently been used in regard to the rise of terrorism. In an argument reminiscent of the *Aggañña Sutta*'s claim that crime arises from poverty, it is stated here that enemy attacks and insurrections arise from unhappiness and dissatisfaction. A king is therefore indirectly protected by his benevolent cultivation of the well-being of his subjects, vassals, and neighbors. It is emphasized that, if they are happy and secure then, instead of becoming enemies, they will be allies when enemies do arise. In the same way, a benevolent king will successfully enrich his treasury through gifts and the general prosperity of his realm, while a rapacious and exploitive king will fail.²⁸ Compassion serves the purposes of domination, pacification, security, and enrichment.

On Warfare

Although the *sūtra* allows for war, it does so only under special conditions and with special restrictions on its conduct. In a graded series of skillful means, a king must first try to befriend, then to help, and then to intimidate his potential enemy before resorting to war. This set of four stratagems diverges from an ancient and pervasive set only by substituting "intimidation" for "fomenting dissension."²⁹ In Hindu sources, this common argument that war should be a last resort is grounded on the practical point that battle is highly unreliable and unpredictable. So we

cannot simply assume, in this Buddhist context, that using war as a last resort is a moral issue. In Hindu contexts, the preliminary techniques are often not attempts to avoid conflict, but to win by safer means. It is not clear in this *sūtra* whether wars of aggression are acceptable or not. There is no explicit rejection of campaigns of conquest. It should be remembered that, in the *dharmasāstra* literature, all of the activities of kings are regarded and referred to as “protection.” So, references to protection do not necessarily refer to defensive activity.

Should attempts to succeed without armed conflict fail, the king is then instructed in how to assemble and deploy the various divisions of an army. He is to go to war with three intentions: to care for life, to win, and to capture the enemy alive. Only Zimmermann, based on the Chinese version, correctly translated the phrase for capturing the enemy alive. This is not immediately convincing because the Chinese translation often strives to soften the impact of the violent aspects of the text. However, the Sanskrit phrase corresponding to the Tibetan *Srog gzung ba*, *jīvagrāham*, occurs often with this meaning in the *jātakas* (stories about the Buddha’s previous rebirths), perhaps the most important Buddhist source for statecraft (Jātaka 23, 24, 282, 283). The *jātakas* frequently valorize intentions to capture the enemy alive or to win without bloodshed through intimidation (Jātaka 229, 230, 181). In comparing this *sūtra* to the *Arthasāstra* literature, which for him includes the *Manusmṛti* and the *dharmasāstras*, Zimmermann states, “There can be hardly any doubt that the main effort of the warrior must have been directed towards annihilation of the enemy.”³⁰ However, the *Arthasāstra*, *Manusmṛti*, Dharmasūtras, and *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* all agree that noncombatants, or those surrendering, fallen, disarmed, fleeing, or petrified by fear, shall not be harmed.³¹ Bhīṣma, the great *ksatriya* guru of the *Mahābhārata*, proclaims that a warrior should only fight for the sake of conquest, not out of wrath.³²

The concern to care for life in the *sūtra* also includes the well-being of all innocents, including animals and the spirits that dwell in trees and water. In contrast to most Hindu *dharmaśāstras*, the *sūtra* forbids burning homes or cities, destroying reservoirs or orchards, or confiscating the harvest. This condition is extended to what might be called infrastructure in general, i.e., “all things well developed and constructed.”

On Karma

Having come to war with these preconditions and restrictions, the king still faces a problem that plagued the imagination of Indian warriors: how to reconcile the necessity of battle with the horrific karmic repercussions of killing. It is well known that the Buddha denied the idea that those who die in battle automatically go to heaven.³³ However, the *jātaka* tales are full of stories of Buddhist warriors, often the Buddha himself in a past life, and occasionally romanticize their heroic deaths in battle (Jātaka 23, 24, 182, 226, 283, etc.). This *sūtra* gives the same answer for the warrior that is found for bodhisattvas elsewhere:

A king, who is well prepared for battle, having used skillful means in this way, even if he kills or wounds opposing troops, has little moral fault or demerit and there will certainly be no bad karmic result. Why is that? It is because that action was conjoined with intentions of compassion and not abandoning. On the basis of having sacrificed himself and his wealth to protect living things and for the sake of his family, wife and children, there is immeasurable merit; it even strongly increases.³⁴

If he does so with compassionate intentions, a king may make great merit through warfare, so warfare becomes auspicious. The same argument was made earlier in relation to torture, and the *sūtra* now proceeds to make commonsense analogies to doctors and to parents who

compassionately inflict pain in order to discipline and heal without intending harm.

Zimmermann expresses surprise at the reference to compassion here and describes it as an irrelevant “sporadic addition,” out of keeping with the context. The *sūtra*, he says, fails to address the “obvious contradiction between his obligation to protect sentient beings . . . and his warfare activities.” He states that “the pair ‘killing with compassion’ was incompatible with the basic Buddhist ethics.”³⁵

Based on a similar perspective, Davidson argues that Buddhists were ultimately unable to find a satisfactory answer to the conundrum of how to uncompromisingly stand by their pacifist values without alienating or disempowering the kings upon whom they depended for endowment and protection.³⁶ He refers to a much-discussed passage from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, supporting compassionate killing, as an example of the fact that Buddhism was “not unequivocal” in its pacifism.³⁷ He sees this as an equivocation based on two assumptions which have been common to the field of Buddhist studies. The first is that this is an isolated passage representing an exceptional view. It has also been more expansively asserted, “Needless to say, this stance is particularly favored by the Consciousness-Only school and in esoteric Buddhism.”³⁸ However, the Mādhyamika thinkers Bhāviveka, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva all agree on the basic point that bodhisattvas may do what is ordinarily forbidden or inauspicious, including killing, and make merit as long as they remain compassionate.³⁹ In the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Śāntideva says that the very things that send others to hell send a bodhisattva to the heavenly Brahmaloḥas, a traditional result of generating compassion.⁴⁰ The validation of compassionate violence made by Asaṅga here is found across Mahāyāna traditions and is common to its ethics, not an unusual exception to normative pacifism.

Second, Asaṅga's passage is misread as an ethic of self-sacrifice which "allows the bodhisattva to engage in the slaughter of thieves or brigands . . . so that the bodhisattva could go to hell instead of the criminals"; "the bodhisattva replaces himself for the other and suffers in his stead."⁴¹ Obviously, this would be a problematic model for a king. First, it should be noted that Asaṅga recommends stealing from thieves. Killing is for the purpose of preventing crimes, with similar karmic results. It is true that Asaṅga says that the bodhisattva killer is compassionately freeing his victim from the karmic outcome of great crimes and has the wish that he, rather than the criminal, should be born in hell. However, he goes on to explain that the result of killing with this intention, far from going to hell, is that the bodhisattva actually becomes blameless and produces great merit (Skt. *anāpattiko bhavati bahu ca puṇyaṃ prasūyate*) exactly as in the *Satyakaparivarta*.⁴² One could say that the more willing bodhisattvas are to go to hell, the more certain it is that they will not.

Asaṅga's conception of compassionate violence validates not only the prevention of terrible crimes, but also the aggressive removal of vicious rulers from power, a motivation that could be very important for kings:

Likewise, the [karmic] outcome for a bodhisattva established in compassionate intentions for benefit and happiness, who removes from power kings or ministers who are excessively fierce, merciless and solely set out to afflict others, is that they generate great merit.⁴³

Davidson goes on to say, "This same rubric allows wide latitude in questionable behavior," and "evidently this doctrinal basis was used to justify belligerence on the part of their favorite monarchs."⁴⁴ He gives the example of the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang's depiction of King Harṣa. However, Hsüan-tsang records neither Asaṅga's actual argument that Harṣa should

invoke compassion toward his enemy, nor the argument based on the reading that he should willingly enter hell. The story depicts Harṣa as oppressed by a vicious anti-Buddhist enemy who killed his father. In his distress, Harṣa supplicates the celestial bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara with prayers and offerings.⁴⁵ In return for a promise to overthrow the anti-Buddhist king, restore the influence of Buddhism, and rule compassionately, Avalokiteśvara lends his power to Harṣa's campaign of military conquest. In fact, although Harṣa's general motivation is compassion, the ethics in the example of Harṣa is far more unapologetically open to violence and free from conditions than in Aśaṅga's thought or in the *sūtra*. His war of conquest is not regarded as at all questionable in the legend. In fact, it has the sanction of Avalokiteśvara, the divine personification of compassion. This also belies the idea that Buddhist kings did not go to war to spread Buddhism.

Davidson intends to support the argument that there was a fundamental conflict in Buddhist support for violence. But Aśaṅga's argument for compassionate violence is broadly and authoritatively attested in Mahāyāna literature. It is not an ethics of self-sacrifice, but one that offers merit for killing. This *sūtra* is somewhat more expansive in explicitly making compassionate killing an option not just for bodhisattvas, but also for kings. There is no sign that the kings addressed by this *sūtra* were regarded as bodhisattvas, quite the opposite; and one has to assume that the king's entire army, and those who enforced his punishments, would be implicated in his karmic situation and the logic of making merit through compassionate killing. Tantric literature, which was used in the royal cult in later Indian Buddhism, supplemented the basic Mahāyāna ethic of compassionate killing with hyperbolic exhortations and deadly ritual technologies.

Davidson notes inscriptions in Nālandā, the great North Indian monastic university, that glorify the gore-smeared swords of widow-making Buddhist kings, but finds their grisly language weaker and less common than comparable Śaivite inscriptions.⁴⁶ There can be no question that, in terms of both warfare and harsh penal codes, Hindu literature and inscriptions are far more robust and unreserved in their enthusiasm for violent imagery. Davidson makes an important argument here that Buddhist values were much more suited to periods of pacification and stability than to the violent instability of the last centuries of Indian Buddhism, and so Buddhist kings were ideologically disadvantaged. However, the force of the argument needs to be reconsidered to the degree that it is based on the normative perception of exaggerated Buddhist pacifism. The location of such inscriptions in a monastic university of vast international prestige suggests that Buddhists, rather than being conflicted or duplicitous, found it appropriate to publicly honor, and so validate, military violence. The relationship between rhetoric and action is complex. For instance, despite idealizing an ethic of compassion, Buddhist polities have historically done all of the things forbidden in the *Satyakaparivarta*, from aggressive warfare to blinding and capital punishment. On the other hand, despite their violent rhetoric, the Hindu ethics of violence are deeply intertwined with ideals of dharma and *ahiṃsā*. Considering the broad success of Buddhism with a remarkable variety of patrons, including Indian kings, Mongol khans, samurai warlords, and Chinese emperors in diverse political circumstances over several millennia, it seems dubious to attribute the downfall of Buddhism in India to the inability to ideologically support the violence of its protectors.⁴⁷

Conclusions

General conceptions of a basic Buddhist ethics broadly conceived as unqualified pacifism are problematic. Compassionate violence is at the very heart of the sensibility of this *sūtra*. Buddhist kings had sophisticated and practical conceptual resources to support their use of force, which show a concern for defense, political stability, and social order through a combination of harshness and benevolence. These resources offer techniques for removing and preventing the causes of hostility, but fully empower the use of warfare when it is deemed appropriate and necessary. Military readiness and intimidation are important elements of a king's responsibilities. Violence is an important tool for criminal rehabilitation, social stability, and military defense. Torture, but not mutilation or execution, is approved as a means, and in battle a king should seek to capture the enemy alive. A king may avert fear of karmic retribution by establishing proper intentions, making efforts to avoid conflict, and limiting modes of waging war. The only killing compatible with Buddhist ethics is killing with compassion. Moreover, if a king makes war or tortures with compassionate intentions, even those acts can result in the accumulation of vast karmic merit. Values of compassion were not necessarily in conflict with the political necessities of Indian statecraft. Rather than an awkward extension of ascetic values into the realm of power politics, there was a recognized symmetry among dharmic rule, compassion, and the acquisition and retention of power.

In the course of orally presenting this research at conferences and in university lecture series, I have experienced how distressing it can be for Buddhists that compassionate warfare and torture could be advocated in Buddhist scriptures. I would ask those who find this disturbing to also consider that these texts advocate that warfare should only be pursued when all other means have failed; that benevolence is a state's first defense; that we must take responsibility for exploitation, which creates our enemies; that physical punishment may only be undertaken from

a compassionate intention to benefit the recipient; that the destruction of infrastructure and the natural environment is a mistaken policy; and, above all, that a nation will thrive or fall based upon its capacity for compassion, rather than on the ethics of self- or national interest.

1. The word *parivarta* normally indicates a chapter title. However, Indian Buddhist sources cite from multiple chapters of the *Bodhisattva-gocara-upāyaviṣaya-vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa Sūtra* under the title, *Satyakaparivarta*.
2. Zimmermann renders “*vikurvaṇa-nirdeśa-sūtra*” as *Sūtra Which Expounds Supernatural Manifestations*. Michael Zimmermann, “A Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*, the Chapter on Royal Ethics in the *Bodhisattva-gocaropāyaviṣaya-vikurvaṇa[sic]-nirdeśa-sūtra*,” *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism at Soka University for the Academic Year 1999* (2000). In my understanding, Satyavaca is the manifestation that expounds the *sūtra*. Regarding the spelling of the title, some sources and catalogues have “*vikurvāṇa*” rather than “*vikurvaṇa*.” All the Tibetan editions I have seen give a phonetic rendering of “*vikurvaṇa*.”
3. Zimmermann, “A Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*”. Zimmermann at the time of his study was apparently unaware of Jamspal’s dissertation, and I became aware of both only after doing my own translation work. See also “Only a Fool Becomes a King: Buddhist Stances on Punishment,” in *Buddhism and Violence*, ed. Michael Zimmermann (Kathmandu: Lumbini International Research Institute, 2006).
4. Lambert Schmithausen, “Aspects of the Buddhist Attitude towards War,” in *Violence Denied: Violence, Non-Violence and the Rationalization of Violence in South Asian Cultural History*, ed. E. M. Houben and K. R. Van Kooij (Leiden: Brill, 1999).
5. Zimmermann, “A Mahāyānist Criticism of *Arthaśāstra*,” 179. According to Tatz, passages related to compassionate killing were omitted from three out of four Chinese translations of the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*. Mark Tatz, *Asaṅga’s Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986), 296, note 396.
6. Lozang Jamspal, *The Range of the Bodhisattva: A Study of an Early Mahāyānasūtra*, “*Āryasatyakaparivarta*,” *Discourse of Truth Teller*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1991), 4.
7. *Ibid.*, 210.
8. Chr. Lindtner, *Nāgārjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987), 172.
9. Jamspal points out numerous examples from Nāgārjuna’s *Ratnāvalī* and *Suḥrillekha* that suggest the *sūtra*’s influences. Candrakīrti’s *Catuhśatakaṭikā* also makes a number of arguments that could have been drawn from this *sūtra*, rather than the *Aggañña Sutta*, particularly in the discussion of the king as an employee of the people. See Karen Lang, “Āryadeva and Candrakīrti on the Dharma of Kings,” *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Asienkunde/Études Asiatiques: Revue de la Société Suisse d’Études Asiatiques* 46.1 (1992): 232–243.
10. See Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya: A Compendium of Buddhist Teaching Compiled by Śāntideva Chiefly from Earlier Mahāyāna Sūtras*, ed. Cecil Bendall, (The Hague: Moutons, 1957), 165; and Jamspal, “The Range of the Bodhisattva,” 228.
11. Tsong-kha-pa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment: Lam Rim Chen Mo*, trans. Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion, 2000), 1:184, 236, 250, 256.
12. Majjhima.i.229; 239; *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, (Boston: Wisdom, 1995).
13. See Michael Witzel, “The Case of the Shattered Head,” *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 13–14 (1984): 363–415; and A. Syrkin, “Notes on the Buddha’s Threats in the Dīgha Nikāya,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7 (1984): 147–158. This model of menacing the insolent and rude with Vajrapāṇi can be seen

among the commentators of the Bodhisattva-bhūmi. Tatz, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa*, 130, 326.

14. All Jātaka references refer to the Pali Text Society numbering as in *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, 6 vols., trans. E.B. Cowell et al, (London: Pali Text Society, 1895-1907).

15. Zimmermann, "A Mahāyānist Criticism of Arthaśāstra," 180.

16. Charles Willemen, trans., *The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables (Tsa-pao-tsang ching/Kṣudrakāgama)* (Berkeley, Calif.: Numata Center for Translation and Research, 2004), 59–62, 210–219.

17. John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 232.

18. Lama Chimpa, trans., *Tāranātha's History of Buddhism in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970), 178.

19. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda* (New York: Dover, 1963), vol. 1, 46.

20. Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom, 2000), 410, note 257.21. Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. Bendall, 162; and Jampal, "The Range of the Bodhisattva," 228.22. Robert Florida, *Human Rights and the World's Major Religions*: vol. 5, *The Buddhist Tradition* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2005), 57.

23. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, vol. 1, 254-257.

24. Terence P. Day, *The Conception of Punishment in Early Indian Literature* (Waterloo, Ont., Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1982), 38–39, 200–205.

25. T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *The Questions of King Milinda*, vol. 1, 280-281.

26. Jampal, "The Range of the Bodhisattva," 211.

27. Andy Rotman, "Marketing Morality: The Economy of Faith in Early Indian Buddhism," *International Association of Buddhist Studies Meeting*, Atlanta, GA, June 23-25, 2008.

28. Jampal, "The Range of the Bodhisattva," 211.

29. Kautilya, *The Arthaśāstra*, tr. L. N. Rangarajan, (New York: Penguin, 1992) 637-9; *The Law Code of Manu*, tr. Patrick Olivelle, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 200; Saṃyutta.i.100–102.

30. Zimmermann, "A Mahāyānist Criticism of Arthaśāstra," 202.

31. *Arthaśāstra* 739; *Law Code of Manu* 113; *The Mahābhārata: Book 11, The Book of the Women; Book 12, The Book of Peace, Part One*, Volume 7, trans. James L. Fitzgerald, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 412; *Dharmasūtra of Baudhāyana*, 18.11–12, in *Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana, and Vasiṣṭha*, trans. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) 159; *Dharmasūtra of Āpastamba* 2.10.10–11, in *Dharmasūtras* 53; *Dharmasūtra of Gautama*, 10.17–18, in *Dharmasūtras*, 94)

32. *The Mahābhārata*, 410.

33. Rupert Gethin, "Can Killing a Living Being Ever Be an Act of Compassion? The Analysis of the Act of Killing in the Abhidhamma and Pali Commentaries," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* (2004): 62.

34. Tib. *de ltar thabs mkhas shing gyul legs par shom pa'i rgyal pos ni pha rol gyi dpung bkum mam | rma phyung yang des rygal po la kha na ma tho ba chung zhing bsod nams ma lags pa chung ba dang | 'bras bu myong ba yang nges pa ma mchis par 'gyur'o || de ci'i slad du zhe na | 'di ltar des snying rje ba dang | yongs su mi gtang ba'i sems kyis las de mngon bar 'du bgyis pa'i slad du'o || gang des skye dgu yongs su bskyang ba dang | bu dang chung ma dang | rigs kyi don du bdag dang longs spyod yongs su btang ste las de bgyis pas | gzhi de las bsod nams tshad ma mchis pa yang rab tu 'phel lo ||* Derge, mDo-sde, Volume Pa, 110.b.2-4.

35. Zimmermann, "A Mahāyānist Criticism of Arthaśāstra," 203–205.

36. Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 24, 90.

37. *Ibid.*, 88.

38. Christoph Kleine, "Evil Monks with Good Intentions," in *Buddhism and Violence*, 80.
39. Malcom David Eckel, *Bhāviveka and His Buddhist Opponents*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2008), 183-189; See Candrakīrti's commentary on Āryadeva's *Catuḥśatakam*, Chapter V, verse 105. Āryadeva supports compassionate transgression and Candrakīrti extends this to compassionate killing. *Catuḥśatakam: Candrakīrtipraṇītaṭīkāyā Sahitam*, Sanskrit and Tibetan edited with Hindi translation, Gurucharan Singh Negi, PhD Dissertation, (Sarnath: Central Institute Higher Tibetan Studies, 2005) 250-253; Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. Bendall, 167-169; In *Ratnāvalī* verse 264, Nāgārjuna makes the analogy of a doctor cutting off a finger bitten by a poisonous snake in advising a king that it may be his duty to compassionately inflict pain. *Ratnāvalī of Ācārya Nāgārjuna with the Commentary of Ajitamitra*, ed. Ācārya Ngawang Samten, (Sarnath: Central Institute Higher Tibetan Studies, 1990), 181-182. A comparative analysis of these sources will be offered in separate publication.
40. Śāntideva, *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. Bendall, 165.
41. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 88. See also Michael Zimmermann, "War," in *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, ed. Robert Buswell Jr. (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 2:893-897.
42. Asaṅga, *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, Sanskrit Ed. Nalinaksha Dutt, K. P. (Patna: Jayasawal Research Institute, 1978), 114.2.
43. Asaṅga, *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, 114.3; Tatz, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa*, 70-1.
44. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 88. According to legend, Guṇaprabha, the iconic seventh century vinaya master who wrote a commentary on the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi*, was the tutor to King Harṣa. Historically this is questionable, but it does suggest the kind of political influence such figures may have had on Buddhist kings. Tatz, *Asaṅga's Chapter on Ethics with the Commentary of Tsong-kha-pa*, 29; 43, note 36.
45. Samuel Beal, *Si-Yu Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World* (London, 1884; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1981), 2:210; and D. Devahuti, *Harṣa: A Political Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 92-94.
46. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 88.
47. I specially thank Ronald Davidson who, despite his disagreement with my conclusions, generously read an earlier draft of this chapter and shared his criticism.