

The Sixth Buddhist Council: Its Purpose, Presentation, and Product

Chris Clark

From May 17, 1954 to May 24, 1956, a highly publicized event was staged in Rangoon involving the monastic recitation of a freshly edited version of the Pāli canon.¹ This event was referred to as the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti* or *Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana*, both Pāli terms meaning the “sixth [Buddhist] council.”² In spite of Burma’s ongoing civil war and its economic problems, a large amount of money was spent on the council, including over 16,000,000 kyat for the construction of its buildings alone (U Ohn Ghine 1954),³ demonstrating the seriousness with which it was regarded by the government.⁴ This project was organized by the Buddha

1 In this article, I use the words “Rangoon,” “Burma,” and “Burmese” (as opposed to “Yangon” and “Myanmar”) to reflect the usage of the time period concerned here.

2 Although the term “sixth Buddhist council” is used throughout this article, it is a misnomer. As will be demonstrated, the council of 1954 to 1956 was largely led by Burmese Theravādin monks, with only limited involvement from other Theravādin countries, and therefore its resultant text does not fully represent Buddhism in general, nor even Theravāda Buddhism in particular. Moreover, while it has become commonplace to refer to a standardized list of six Buddhist councils, a number of alternative lists are found in Pāli texts (Hallisey 1991).

3 “U Ohn Ghine” is the *nom de plume* of an Australian Buddhist named David Maurice.

4 However, as reported by Smith (1965: 183), this expenditure was sharply criticized by the Minister of Culture, U Tun Pe. In this article, Romanized Burmese names are generally spelled as per the 1950s primary source material I have accessed.

Sāsana Council (BSC), a newly created body of the Burmese government tasked with the promotion and propagation of Buddhism in Burma and abroad. The sixth Buddhist council took place within the context of a government-led Buddhist revival, which began around the time of Burma's independence in 1948. This revival included, among other things, "state support of Buddhist education, attempts at improving Sangha discipline and unity, Buddhist social service projects, encouragement of meditation for monks and laity, [and] dreams of a state religion" (Mendelson 1975: 263). At times, this revival was framed within a perceived disintegration of Buddhist values and morality during the colonial occupation (e.g. *Light of the Dhamma* 1952: 24–5; U Nu 1955: 166; Nyan 1953) and therefore events that took place prior to the Third Anglo-Burmese War were looked to for inspiration. The sixth Buddhist council is a prime example, being firmly modeled on the "fifth Buddhist council" held in 1871 during the rule of King Mindon.

The two existing principal studies on the sixth Buddhist council—those of Smith (1965: 157–65) and Mendelson (1975: 270–97)—are part of larger investigations into the national politics of Burma and both tend to emphasize the political aspects of this event. Mention, too, has been made of the way in which such state-sponsored Buddhist projects helped Prime Minister U Nu acquire the public persona of a benevolent Burmese king (e.g. Butwell 1963: 61–71). However, the sixth Buddhist council deserves a fresh analysis. There is a growing body of research on the dynamics of *sāsana*, a Pāli term which literally means "teaching [of the Buddha]," but which has also come to include Buddhist institutions and practicing communities. Particularly relevant are a number of recent studies that investigate Burmese responses toward perceived threats to the continuity of the *sāsana* (e.g. Carbine 2011; Braun 2013; Turner 2014). This article is intended as a contribution to this area by drawing upon some previously unexamined sources relating to this major religious event.

Purpose: Purifying the Scriptures to Protect the *Sāsana*

One of the best-known Buddhist teachings is that of impermanence. A pithy example is a well-known line of poetry found in several texts belonging to the Pāli canon, which states, “Conditioned things are indeed impermanent, subject to arising and decay.”⁵ The very teachings of the Buddha are no exception to this rule and, beginning from an early period, Buddhists have been concerned with the manner and time in which their religion will disappear. There are a number of different chronologies detailing this process (Lamotte 1988: 191–202; Nattier 1991: 27–64); however, the one most strongly embraced in Theravādin countries today predicts the disappearance of the good doctrine (*saddhamma*) 5,000 years after the death of the Buddha. This particular chronology was promoted by the famous fifth-century commentator Buddhaghosa (e.g. As 27,_{30–31}; Sp I 30,_{6–7}; Sv I 25).⁶ Particularly important is a passage from his *Manorathapūraṇī* (Mp I 87–92), which describes the gradual disappearance of five aspects, namely, the disappearance of spiritual attainments (*adhigama*), practice (*paṭipatti*), scriptures (*pariyatti*),⁷ external signs of monasticism (*liṅga*), and the Buddha’s relics (*dhātu*).⁸

5 aniccā vata saṅkhārā uppādayadhammino (e.g. Ap 64,₁₅; D II 199,₆; S II 193,_{13–14}). In this article, Pāli texts are cited using the abbreviations and system of Cone (2001: x–xiv). All translations of Pāli are my own.

6 The *Atthasālinī* (As) is attributed to Buddhaghosa; however, some scholars have raised doubts on his authorship of this work (Norman 1983: 123–5).

7 Buddhaghosa clarified, “*pariyatti* [means] the word[s] of the Buddha consisting of the three baskets, the canon together with the commentaries. So long as it exists, *pariyatti* is complete” (*pariyatti ti tepīṭakam Buddhavacanam sātthakathā pāli. yāva sā tiṭṭhati tāva pariyattiparipuṇṇam nāma hoti*, Mp I 88,_{3–4}; my translation assumes that *pariyattiparipuṇṇam* is an error for *pariyatti paripuṇṇā*).

8 In their discussions on this passage, Lamotte (1988: 197) and Nattier (1991: 56–8) mistakenly claim that the first of these aspects disappears during the first millennium, the second aspect disappears during the

According to Theravāda reckoning, 1956 marked the 2,500-year anniversary of the death of the Buddha and therefore the exact midpoint of the aforementioned 5,000-year chronology.⁹ It is clear that the BSC saw this as a particularly auspicious time in which to undertake a large project attempting to combat the predicted decline of the *sāsana*. This project, which they dubbed the “sixth Buddhist council,” was carefully planned so that it formally concluded in 1956 on the day of the year the Buddha is believed to have died, that is, the full moon day of the month of *ဝေဆာ* (Vesākha, in Pāli) (*Light of the Dhamma* 1953a: 52).¹⁰ In order to highlight the significance of this timing, 2,500 monks were selected to participate in the opening ceremony of the council (U Ohn Ghine 1954: 33). A number of speeches made at this ceremony expressed confidence that as a direct result of holding the council, the *sāsana* will last a further 2,500 years (e.g. Anisakhan Sayadaw 1956b; U Saing Gyaw 1956; U Win 1956a). One official publication proclaimed, “This is the most significant event of our century and this will ensure that the Buddha’s *Sāsana* will endure another 2,500 years. It is a great united Buddhist effort which is making the world a happier, cleaner, sweeter place” (*Sangāyanā* [sic] *Souvenir* 1954: 19).

While the sixth Buddhist council may be viewed as a response to the predicted disappearance of the *sāsana*, more precisely, it was a response to the predicted disappearance of its scriptures. This specific focus upon texts can be explained, in part, by the aforementioned passage from the *Manorathapūraṇī*, in which Buddhaghosa stated, “The

second millennium, and so on. Not only does the text not state this, it contradicts it, by indicating that spiritual attainments begin to disappear only after the first millennium has ended (Mp I 87_{,8-10}) and that the disappearance of scriptures (the third aspect) precedes the disappearance of all other aspects (Mp I 91_{,22-92,1}).

9 The date of this anniversary places the Buddha’s death in 545 BCE; however, most contemporary scholars believe that the Buddha died in approximately 400 BCE (Cousins 1996).

10 It is also believed that on this day of the year, the Buddha was born and became awakened.

disappearance of the scriptures is indeed the cause of this fivefold disappearance. For when the scriptures have disappeared, practice disappears. [But] when the scriptures remain, [practice] remains.”¹¹ Primarily for this reason, preserving the scriptures was, and still is, of paramount importance to many Burmese Buddhists. U Nu’s address at the opening ceremony of the council is a rather striking example of this concern (U Nu 1955: 158–69). At the beginning of this speech, he introduces a threefold division of the *sāsana* that is popular in South and Southeast Asia, namely scriptures (*pariyatti*), practice (*paṭipatti*), and realization (*paṭivedha*). He then argues for the primacy of the scriptures and the necessity of their preservation by stating, “Pariyatti Sāsana is the main basis. When Pariyatti Sāsana disappears, Patipatti [*sic*] Sāsana and Pativeda [*sic*] Sāsana will also disappear; men will have no more spiritual light for their guidance and the whole world, nay, the universe will undoubtedly be thrown into a state of pitch darkness complete and everlasting” (U Nu 1955: 159).

In his address, U Nu places this concern within the framework of purification, stating that the scriptures need to be cleansed or purified by having their impurities removed through the work of a Buddhist council. Purification of the scriptures was, in fact, consistently given as the main purpose for holding the sixth Buddhist council in BSC publications and speeches made by members of the government. For example, in another address made at the council, the Minister for Religious Affairs and National Planning, U Win (1956b: 124), stated, “It goes without saying that the main object of holding the Chaṭṭha Sangāyanā [*sic*] is to purify the Text so that it may be in consonance with the Word of the Buddha” (see also Ba U 1956a; *Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 5). However, what exactly was meant by the phrase “purify the Text”?

11 imassa pañcavidhassa antaradhānassa pariyatti-antaradhānam eva mūlam. pariyattiyā hi antarahitāya paṭipatī antaradhāyati. pariyattiyā tṭhītāya tṭṭhātī (Mp I 91,22–92,2).

The Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series is the textual product of the editing work that preceded the council. Volumes of this series that mark the beginning of each major section of the Pāli canon are prefaced with a nine-page introduction (Nidānakathā) written during 1954 in the Pāli language, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not previously been translated into English. An examination of this introduction provides a reasonably clear picture of what was envisaged by “textual purification.” At the beginning of this introduction is a quotation of two verses from the Manorathapūraṇī, which assert the damage caused by not protecting the scriptures and the benefits of protecting them.¹² It is then stated that the first five Buddhist councils have provided the means by which the scriptures have been protected since the Buddha’s death. Following a description of each of these councils, the introduction states:

After [such] a long time this word of the Buddha has been transmitted having been repeated many times through a succession of [hand] writing and a succession of printing.¹³ It is no longer possible to say, ‘It is completely pure simply because they held the first, second, third, etc. council[s].’ On the contrary, it is actually impure¹⁴ because of some wrong, inferior, and

12 “When the *suttas* no longer exist and the Vinaya has been forgotten, there will be darkness in the world, as when the sun has set. When the Suttapiṭaka is protected, practice is protected. Standing firm in practice, one is not deprived from rest from exertion [i.e., *nibbāna*]” (suttantesu asantesu pamuṭṭhe vinayamhi ca / tamo bhavissati loke sūriye atthaṅgate yathā // suttante rakkhite sante paṭipatti hoti rakkhitā / paṭipattiyam ṭhito dhīro yogakkhemā na dhamasati ti // “Nidānakathā” 2008: i; cf. Mp I 93,¹¹⁻¹⁵). Note the similarity between these verses and the statement of U Nu (1955: 159) quoted above.

13 I know of no other instance of the word *muddaṇa* in Pāli literature and, understandably, it does not appear in any Pāli-English dictionary I have consulted. In his Pāli-Burmese dictionary, ဦးဟုတ်စိန် (1959, s.v. မုဒ္ဒဏ) provides the reasonable definition စာပုံနှိပ်ခြင်း, “printing,” and gives the Sanskrit equivalent as *mudraṇa*.

14 I assume that *malīnam* is an error for *malinam*.

corrupted readings produced by careless writing, etc. found in recent books. For in this way, many dissimilar readings appear amongst books which are to be explained differently [yet] which run parallel with each other.

And therefore, desiring a very pure condition for the word of the Buddha, the great elder [monks]—learned in the three *piṭakas*, together with the inner meaning of the texts—after seeing those wrong, inferior, and corrupted readings while reciting the doctrine and disciple, thought and said thus:

‘The word of the blessed one—whose speech was unified¹⁵ [and] whose word was very pure—should be unified, very pure, [and] stainless. But in these books of the [Buddha’s] word, there appear readings which are dissimilar to each other and are impure. [The reading] amongst them which is correct is undoubtedly the original reading. Therefore, another [reading] is simply a reading [produced] by careless writing. And such [readings] are found at any place within the recent books of the [Buddha’s] word.

‘And although these are not currently so numerous that they could completely obstruct the meaning of the Pāli, [by] not being purified now, over the course of time, they would grow more and more numerous. And the last people of that time, unable to purify those [readings], would not correctly understand the meaning of the Pāli in accordance with how it was intended. In this way, these [readings] would lead to the confusion [and] disappearance of the good doctrine.’¹⁶

15 *Advaya* literally means “non-dual.” The claim here is that when the Buddha gave a talk, he did not give multiple versions with different wording, but rather only one version.

16 *cirakālato pan’ etaṃ Buddhavacanāṃ lekhaṇaparamparāya c’ eva muddaṇṇaparamparāya ca anekakkhattuṃ parivattiyābhataṃ na sakkā dāni vattuṃ ‘paṭhamadutiyatatiyādisaṅgītiṃ āropitākāren’ eva sabbaso parisuddhan’ ti. añña-d-atthu panādhunikapothhakesu saṃvijjamānehi kehi ci pamādalekhādisaṇṇajātakhalitādhikaparibhaṭṭhapāṭhehi malinaṃ ev’ etaṃ. tathā hi nānādesiyapothhakesu añña-m-aññaṃ saṃsandiyaṃānesu anekā visadisapāṭhā dissanti.*

In this passage, it is clear that the term “pure” means the very words spoken by the Buddha during his teaching career, while “impure” means any word found in a reproduction of these teachings that was not, in fact, spoken by the Buddha. Contemporary printed editions of the Buddha’s teachings are labeled “impure” for two reasons. The first is that different printed editions of the same text are not identical; in fact, they frequently have readings that are dissimilar to each other. If the Buddha’s speech was “unified” as it is claimed here, then the presence of variant readings amongst contemporary printed editions indicates that some of these readings were not actually spoken by the Buddha. The second line of evidence is that contemporary printed editions contain errors. If the Buddha’s speech was always “stainless” and correct, as it is also claimed here, then such errors could not have been spoken by the Buddha himself. “Purification,” therefore, involves the removal of any readings that are deemed not to have been spoken by the Buddha.¹⁷ This passage concludes

tato yeva ca Buddhavacanassa suparisuddhabhāvākāmino mahātherā sasattāntarapīṭakattāyakovidā dhammavinayaṃ vācentā yeva te khalitādhikaparibhaṭṭhapāṭhe disvā evaṃ samacintesuṃ kathesuṃ ca:

‘advayavādinō suparisuddhavacanassa tassa bhagavato pāvacaṇaṃ advayaṃ suparisuddhaṃ nimmalam ev’ assa. imesu pana pāvacaṇa-potthakesu añña-m-aññaṃ visadisā c’ eva aparisuddhā ca pāṭhā dissanti. nissamsayaṃ kho ayam eva mūlapāṭho. yo nesaṃ yuttisampanno. tad añño pana pamādalekhaṇapāṭho yeva. tādisā ca dissanti ādhunikapāvacaṇa-potthakesu kismiṃ ci kismiṃ ci ṭhāne.

‘kāmaṇ c’ ete dāni na tāva bahutarā. yāva yathābhūtaṃ pāḷiyā atthaṃ paṭisedheyyuṃ. etarahi pana asodhiyamānā te gacchante gacchante kāle bahutarā bahutarā jāyeyyuṃ. taṃkālikā ca pacchimā janā te sodhetuṃ asamatthā yathādhīpettaṃ pāḷiyā atthaṃ na sammā jāneyyuṃ. evaṃ ete saddhammassa sammōsāya antaradhānāya saṃvatteyyuṃ. (“Nidānakathā” 2008: ii–iii).

17 Unfortunately, the process by which the editors hoped to achieve this ambitious goal is not clearly articulated in this passage. The statement, “[The reading] amongst them which is correct is undoubtedly the original reading” is hardly adequate from the perspective of contemporary textual criticism. Particularly given the relatively recent age of the great majority of extant witnesses that preserve the Pāli canon, it is simply not possible to reconstruct the early textual form of the Pāli canon with any certainty.

by suggesting that scriptural purification is an effective means to combat the predicted decline of the good doctrine (*saddhamma*). Later in this introduction, the intent of holding the council is summarized, “And having obtained the purified [and] very pure original of the [Buddha’s] word, it will be printed and, because of the its influence spreading across different countries and different regions throughout the whole world, the long term preservation of the Buddha’s *sāsana* will be accomplished.”¹⁸ In line with this framework, the editors of the sixth Buddhist council text were referred to as “purifiers” (*visodhaka*), the revisers were called “re-purifiers” (*paṭivisodhaka*), and the proof readers were called “readers of pages to be purified” (*sodheyyapattapāṭhaka*) (U Nu 1955: 151–4).¹⁹ While the preparatory editing work was therefore regarded as an act of purification, the means by which the resultant text was declared to be purified was its ceremonial recitation in an official Buddhist council.

Presentation: Creating Connections to Earlier Councils and Advertizing International Collaboration

By the time of the sixth Buddhist council, several sets of Pāli canonical texts had already been published, including the King Chulalongkorn series in Thai script (1893–94), Hanthawaddy series in Burmese script (late 19th century to early 20th century), Syāmrattḥassa Tepiṭaka series in Thai script (1925–28), and Cambodian Tipiṭaka series in Khmer script (1931–73), just to name a few (Grönbold 2005: 39–47). As we have seen, the editors of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series wished for their set to be viewed as authoritative and

18 visodhitaṇ ca suparisuddhaṃ pāvacanamūlaṃ labhivā taṃ muddāpetvā sakalaloke nānāraṭṭhesu nānādesesu byāpanavasena Buddhasāsanassa ciraṭṭhiti ca sādhiyissati (“Nidānakathā” 2008: iv_{18–20}).

19 However, U Nu (1955: 154) erroneously spells the latter term *sodheyapattapāṭhaka*.

free from the “impurities” found in previous sets. The ceremonial recitation and approval of its entire text in an official Buddhist council provided the best means by which this could be achieved. As will be demonstrated, the BSC therefore went to significant lengths to attempt to persuade the public, both local and international, that their event of 1954 to 1956 was a legitimate Buddhist council. In this analysis of the way in which the council was presented to the public, a range of media types will be considered, including literature, architecture, images, speeches, and radio announcements.

In the promotional literature published by the BSC and in speeches made by members of the government, the event is often placed within a narrative describing a lineage of Buddhist councils stretching back to the time of the Buddha. As is well known, the concept of lineage has played, and continues to play, an extremely important role within Buddhism. Lineage narrative typically confers authority and legitimacy to a particular school or teacher by describing a succession of masters that often ultimately traces back to one of the immediate disciples of the Buddha (Welter 2004).²⁰ I would like to suggest that in these publications and speeches, a similar narrative framework has been employed for a similar intended effect. A typical example comes from a BSC quarterly magazine called *Light of the Dhamma* (Nyan 1953). In this article, the sixth Buddhist council is previewed immediately after an account of the first five councils, in which each council is described using the same set of variables, namely, the date and place in which it was held, the number of participants, and the names of the leading monk and supporting king. This gives the reader the impression that, despite some superficial differences, the councils form a coherent and unbroken lineage which has transmitted the Pāli canon up to the present day. Other examples that describe this lineage of councils may be found in BSC publications (e.g. U Lin 1954; “Nidānakathā” 2008: i–ii; *Sangāyanā Souvenir*

20 For a sustained treatment of the importance of lineage within Buddhism in Burma, see Carbine (2011: 32–72).

1954: 1–4, 46) and speeches made by members of the government (e.g. *Light of the Dhamma* 1957: 61; U Nu 1955: 145; U Win 1956a, 1956b).²¹ What is striking about these passages is that, despite having been delivered in different languages and media types, the same previously mentioned variables are consistently noted for each council, with few deviations, suggesting a very deliberate and well-coordinated approach to the event’s promotion (see fig. 1).

	Year (Buddhist Era)	Place	Number of participants	Leading monk	Supporting king
First council	0	Sattapaṇṇi Cave, Rājagaha, India	500	Mahākassapa	Ajātasattu
Second council	100	Vesālī, India	700	Yasa	Kālāsoka
Third council	235	Pāṭaliputta, India	1,000	Moggaliputtatissa	Asoka
Fourth council	450	Āloka Cave, Sri Lanka	500	Rakkhita	
Fifth council	2415	Mandalay, Burma	2,400	Jāgara	Mindon
Sixth council	2448–2500	Mahāpāsāṇa Cave, Rangoon, Burma	2,500	Nyaungyan Sayadaw	

Figure 1 Summary of information contained in descriptions of the lineage of councils.

²¹ The first speech cited here was delivered at a ceremony in Thailand, the second was broadcast on radio by the Burma Broadcasting Service, while the last two speeches were read as part of the council proceedings.

The government organized and funded the construction of a large complex of buildings in northern Rangoon in which to hold the council.²² This attractive and spacious site was designed to draw large numbers of visitors and therefore significantly increase public exposure to the event. One of its most eye-catching structures is the သီရိမင်္ဂလာကမ္ဘာအေးစေတီတော်, “World Peace Pagoda of ‘Glorious Prosperity’ [Hill]” (hereafter referred to as Kaba Aye Pagoda). As described by Daulton (1999) in an earlier volume of this journal, Prime Minister U Nu was heavily involved in planning the construction of this pagoda and obtaining the important relics that were enshrined in it (see also *Light of the Dhamma* 1952: 28; U Ohn Ghine 1953). In 1949, the relics of the two chief disciples of the Buddha—Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna—were returned to India after spending nearly a century in England. In early 1950, these relics were toured around Burma and met with huge crowds of devotees wishing to make offerings. Shortly after the tour concluded, U Nu successfully requested that a portion of these relics be given to Burma. These portions were eventually enshrined in Kaba Aye Pagoda in early 1952 during a festival that lasted for seven days and reportedly attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors.

Being the chief disciples of the Buddha, Sāriputta and Mahāmoggallāna are believed to have attended many of the Buddha’s teachings in person and the physical presence of their relics onsite created a tangible link between the council and the very words of the Buddha, the restoration of which was declared to be the primary goal of the council. The presence of Sāriputta’s relics is particularly significant because of his strong connection to the Abhidhammapiṭaka, which, according to the aforementioned passage from the Manorathapūraṇī (Mp I 88,_{14–15}), will be the first section of the Pāli canon to vanish in the predicted disappearance of the

22 For a map of this site, see *Chattha Sangayana* [sic] *2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebrations* (1956: 67).

scriptures.²³ According to the *Atthasālinī*, the commentary on the first section of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the Buddha taught the *Abhidhamma* to *Sāriputta* who in turn taught it to his own disciples after rearranging it (As 16–17). *Sāriputta* is therefore traditionally considered to be responsible for the first transmission of the *Abhidhamma* in its current form and the presence of his relics just meters from the hall in which the council text was recited was perhaps intended to imbue the proceedings with this untainted transmission.

The focal point of the sixth Buddhist council was the large hall in which the opening ceremony was staged and the edited text was recited. It was designed to seat 5,000 monks and 10,000 laypeople (*Light of the Dhamma* 1953a). It is internally supported by six large pillars and has six entrances to highlight that it was the sixth council (U Ohn Ghine 1954: 34) (see Plate 1). The most unusual feature of this hall is that its exterior has been designed to look like a cave (see Plate 2). The name of this building is, in fact, the မဟာပါသကလိုဏ်ဂူ, “Great Rock Cave” (hereafter referred to as the *Mahāpāsāṇa Cave*). Not coincidentally, two of the previous five councils belonging to the Burmese lineage of councils are said to have been held in caves (see fig. 1). The first council was held at the *Sattapaṇṇi Cave* at *Rājagaha* in India, while the fourth council was held at the *Āloka Cave* in Sri Lanka. The *Mahāpāsāṇa Cave* was designed to reference the *Sattapaṇṇi Cave* in particular and was reportedly based upon a vision that U Nu had while he was meditating under the *bodhi* tree in Bodhgaya, India (*Sangāyanā* [sic] *Monthly Bulletin* 1954). President Ba U (1956b: 34) boasted that the cave “has been so beautifully and magnificently constructed, and which is in no

23 For this reason, many Burmese Buddhists actively attempt to resist the predicted disappearance of the scriptures by promoting the transmission of the *Abhidhamma*, particularly the *Paṭṭhāna* which is predicted to be the first *Abhidhamma* text to disappear (Carbine 2011: 152–6). Significantly, on the title page of many books published by BSC Press, there is a large logo consisting of a wheel with 24 spokes, symbolizing the 24 conditional relations of the *Paṭṭhāna*. Printed around this wheel is the phrase *ciram tiṭṭhatu saddhammo*, “May the good doctrine last for a long time.”



Plate 1 The interior of the Mahāpāsāṇa Cave, 2013 (Photo courtesy of the author).



Plate 2 The exterior of the Mahāpāsāṇa Cave, 2013 (Photo courtesy of the author).

way inferior to the costly temporary structures constructed by King Ajātasattu at the time of the First Great Council” (see also Anisakhan Sayadaw 1956a; *Chattha Sangayana 2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebrations* 1956: 16).²⁴ The design of the council hall was therefore another deliberate attempt by the organizers to establish a tangible connection between this event and the early Buddhist councils.

Although the site attracted a large number of visitors, many others who were unable to visit were exposed to the grandeur of its architecture through images printed in newspapers, magazines, and stamps. Particularly interesting is a series of six stamps that depict the sixth Buddhist council, issued by the government in May 1954 (Min Sun Min 2007: 45) (see Plate 3). These stamps would have been viewed by a large number of people at the time and can therefore inform us about the ways in which the government wished the general public to view the event. The brown 35-pya stamp displays an aerial view of the site—including the pagoda, cave, and monastic quarters—and conveys the dignity and magnitude of the site. The red one-kyat stamp depicts Sri Lankan monks travelling to the Mahāpāsāṇa Cave from perhaps the most well-known Buddhist site in Sri Lanka, the Temple of the Tooth Relic. Each monk appears to be carrying a palm-leaf manuscript. In the green 50-pya stamp, Thai monks are walking towards the Mahāpāsāṇa Cave from Wat Arun in Bangkok. The leading monk is carrying three books that are emanating light, perhaps representing the three major divisions of the Pāli canon. In the blue 10-pya stamp, Cambodian monks are travelling from a building with classic

24 Similarly, in another speech made at the council, the Sri Lankan monk Ven. Buddhadatta (1956: 144) stated, “We have some insignificant caves in India and Ceylon as the reminiscences of the 1st and the 4th Councils. No reminiscences are remaining of the 2nd and 3rd Councils. But this artificial cave in which we have assembled today is one of the wonders of the world as no such other building is existing in any other country. The architect engineer once told me that he was building it as strongly as to last for the next 2,500 years.”



Plate 3 1954 government-issued stamps commemorating the sixth Buddhist council (Scans courtesy of Eli Moallem, member of the Association Internationale des Collectionneurs de Timbres-poste du Laos).

Khmer architectural features.²⁵ Each of the three leading monks is holding an offering bowl on top of which appears to be a palm-leaf manuscript, again perhaps representing the three major divisions of the Pāli canon. The purple

²⁵ While this structure resembles the Throne Hall of the Royal Palace in Phnom Penh, it is difficult to make a definite identification.

two-kyat stamp shows Laotian monks walking from the most well-known stupa of Laos, the Pha That Luang in Vientiane. Finally, the maroon 15-pya stamp pictures the ကုသိုလ်တော်ဘုရား, “Merit Pagoda” (hereafter referred to as the Kuthodaw Pagoda), a well-known site in Mandalay which holds 729 marble stelae engraved with the text associated with the fifth Buddhist council. The monks here appear to be comparing different versions of the Pāli canon. At the far left is one of the marble stelae; to the right of this is a monk reading a printed book with a stack of printed books beside him while in the center is a group of monks reading palm-leaf manuscripts with a chest of palm-leaf manuscripts beside them. The five monks here perhaps represent the five participating Theravādin countries, namely Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Taken as a whole, these six stamps strongly emphasize international cooperation and involvement in the council. They imply that the local versions of the Pāli canon that have been transmitted in each of the five participating countries were brought to the council venue, seriously studied and compared, and used to edit a new and truly international version of the canon. In addition, the stamps imply that handwritten palm-leaf manuscripts were used to prepare the text recited at the council. However, to the best of my knowledge, the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series is only based upon the Kuthodaw Pagoda marble stelae and existing printed editions, not manuscripts (see below). The inclusion of palm-leaf manuscripts in these stamps was perhaps intended to give the viewer the impression that old “authentic” versions of the Pāli canon were brought to the council from each Theravādin country.²⁶

A BSC publication titled *Sangāyanā Souvenir* (1954: 5–8, 11) contains a series of photographs conveying a message that is

26 Almost exactly two years after the release of these six stamps, the government issued a set of four stamps to commemorate the 2,500-year anniversary of the death of the Buddha (Min Sun Min 2007: 46). One of these stamps features the marble stelae of the Kuthodaw Pagoda, while another shows a different aerial view of the sixth Buddhist council site.

highly consistent with these stamps. In early 1953, monastic and lay representatives from a number of Theravādin countries visited Burma as part of the ceremonial preparations for the sixth Buddhist council. These countries are the same as those pictured in the stamps, namely Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. A photograph of each of these “goodwill missions,” as they are referred to in the *Sangāyanā Souvenir*, shows monks visiting sites of religious significance or arriving at the airport. The BSC also published images of monks studying and comparing different versions of the Pāli canon, in a manner not dissimilar from the previously discussed maroon 15-pya stamp. For example, *Light of the Dhamma* (1953d) included a photograph of the Cambodian *saṅgharājā* inspecting a Kuthodaw Pagoda marble stela during his visit to Burma (see also *Sangāyanā Monthly Bulletin* 1953b; *Sangāyanā Monthly Bulletin* 1953c; *Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 10). As with the stamps, these photographs give the impression that the council was a highly collaborative effort involving monastic groups from five Theravādin countries. In fact, the text that accompanies the *Sangāyanā Souvenir* (1954: 4) photographs makes this very claim and calls it a “truly international Council.”²⁷ Doubtlessly, one of main motivations for carefully and consistently advertizing the council in this fashion was to avoid the accusation that the event was simply a Burmese editing project involving Burmese monks, just as the late 19th-century King Chulalongkorn series of Pāli canonical texts was the result of a Thai editing project involving Thai monks. The BSC instead wished for this to be viewed as a legitimate Theravādin council, which required the participation of a unified global monastic order rather than a subsection of it, and hoped that the resulting textual product would transcend local editions such as those of the King

27 Similarly, the council proceedings were divided into five sessions, with the third named the “Cambodian-Laotian session,” the fourth named the “Thai session,” and the fifth named the “Ceylonese session.”

Chulalongkorn series.²⁸ But just how accurate is the description, a “truly international Council”?

In fact, participation by Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian monks was extremely limited. Approximately one year before the council commenced, a small delegation from each country visited Burma for 15 days (*Light of the Dhamma* 1953c; *Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 6–11).²⁹ The aforementioned photographs were taken during these brief visits. While in Burma, these delegations were taken on sightseeing tours and exchanged gifts with the BSC. Two Thai monks contributed to the editing work of the council during their stay for approximately four and a half months (*Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 12); however, this input might be viewed as rather negligible when one considers that 1,129 Burmese monks engaged in editing for several years (U Nu 1955: 151). To the best of my knowledge, no Cambodian or Laotian monks participated in the editing work. Sri Lankan monks made a more substantial contribution. An editing project was set up in Sri Lanka involving 185 monks, including the well-known scholar Ven. Buddhadatta who had already edited several editions in both Roman script and Sinhala script (U Nu 1955: 152; *Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 11–2). Early versions of the sixth Buddhist council text were sent to Sri Lanka, where they were edited with reference to Sri Lankan printed editions of the Pāli canon and then sent back to Burma.³⁰

28 It is admitted in the *Sangāyanā Monthly Bulletin* (1953d: 4) that “To make the Sixth Great Buddhist Council authoritative it required the help the advice the assistance of the other Theravāda countries.”

29 The Thai delegation consisted of eight monks, two novice monks, and five laypeople, and visited between May 23 and June 6. The Cambodian delegation included two monks and one layman, and visited between March 19 and April 2. The Laotian delegation included three monks and one layman, and visited between April 17 and May 1.

30 The BSC had hoped to establish similar editing groups in Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos; however, this did not prove to be feasible. The 1952 rules for the council state, “The Groups for Correcting the Texts shall also be formed in Thailand, Ceylon, Cambodia and Laos by the bhikkhus of those respective countries” (*Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 47). One of the

A large number of speeches were made during the opening ceremony and subsequent council sessions. Some of these were prepared by Burmese monks and politicians; however, a substantial proportion was prepared by foreign monks and politicians, and members of foreign royal families. A BSC publication titled the *Chatṭha Sangāyanā* [sic] *Souvenir Album* (1956) includes the text of 98 speeches and messages, 76 of which (78 percent) were written by foreigners.³¹ Many of these speeches were made in person, though some were read by a proxy. Monks who wrote speeches came from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Nepal, Japan, and Indonesia.³² Politicians who wrote speeches came from Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Nepal, Japan, and Cambodia. Messages from the King of Thailand, King of Cambodia, King of Nepal, Queen of England, and Crown Prince of Laos were also read out. For the most part, the speeches recorded in the *Chatṭha Sangāyanā Souvenir Album* (1956) are short and simply congratulate the government for organizing the council, and express the wish that the proceedings are successful. These speeches were not only heard by the select audience in the hall, but they were actively broadcasted to the public,

reasons why an editing group was established in Sri Lanka but not elsewhere seems to be that its monks appeared to have been more apprehensive about the final wording of the approved text. For example, a 1952 letter written by Sri Lankan monks to Burmese monks and the BSC warns council editors of the difficulty involved with identifying and correcting old corrupt readings in the Pāli canon (*Light of the Dhamma* 1953b). Elsewhere, in a message read at the council, editors are bluntly asked by the Supreme Executive Council of Ceylon (1956: 42) not to reproduce “broken Pāli words [which] are found in the Burmese Books” and are told that the words found in Sri Lankan versions “should be accepted as the ones written by the Arahants of old and preserved by the Mahātheras of Mahāvihāra (who are the spiritual descendants of those Arahants).”

31 This publication excludes speeches made during the final days of the council since it was published for distribution at the closing ceremony (*Chatṭha Sangāyanā Souvenir Album* 1956: 234).

32 Here and in the following sentence, countries of origin are listed in order of most number of speeches to least number of speeches.

including the estimated 200,000 people who, in spite of the rain, visited the site in order to listen to the opening ceremony (*Chatṭha Saṅgāyanā Souvenir Album* 1956: 3, 5). A great deal of effort on the part of the BSC must have been required in order to successfully elicit the presentation of such a large number of speeches and messages from around the globe. Having so many people who wielded considerable political power speak positively about the event would have conferred to it a sense of great importance, in a manner perhaps not dissimilar from having modern day celebrities endorse a product in order to build trust with potential consumers. It might also have helped to reduce some of the foreign resistance to staging the sixth Buddhist council that Mendelson (1975: 277n65) learned of while conducting interviews with monks in Burma during the late 1950s.

Product: The Chatṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka Series of the Pāli Canon

The Chatṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series represents the official sixth Buddhist council version of the Pāli canon³³ and is the event's principal textual product. It was published in 40 volumes between 1950 and 1962 (Grönbold 2005: 47–8).³⁴ Since this time, at least three revisions of this series have appeared. However, before analyzing this series in more detail, it is important to mention the large body of secondary textual products. A second council was held between December 1956 and March 1960 concerning the commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*), which were published in 50 volumes between 1958 and 1959, with at least two subsequent revisions. A third council was held between November 1960 and February 1962 concerning the sub-commentaries (*ṭīkā*), which were published in 31

33 Also included in this series are three paracanonical texts, namely, the *Nettipakaraṇa*, *Peṭakopadesa*, and *Milindapañha*.

34 While most volumes appeared after 1956, Grönbold (2005: 47) claimed that the first volume of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* was published in 1950.

volumes between 1960 and 1961.³⁵ A Burmese-language translation of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series in 40 volumes began to be published.³⁶ An interesting and rarely discussed set of ten books titled သံဂါယနာအမေးအဖြေ, “Council Questions and Answers,” was published between 1954 and 1967.³⁷ This series records the formal exchanges between the council enquirer (*pucchaka*), Mahasi Sayadaw, and responder (*vissajjaka*), Sayadaw Vicittasārābhivaṃsa, in Pāli and Burmese.³⁸ All this literature was printed in Burmese script.

The Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series has a reputation for being a “highly reliable” version of the Pāli canon (e.g. Grönbold 2005: 48) with a strong degree of internal consistency and very few misprints; however, a detailed assessment of its text has not yet been undertaken. Hamm (1973) surveyed some of its features alongside a number of other Asian editions. In

35 Publication dates and volume numbers given for the canon, commentary, and sub-commentary series are as reported by Grönbold (2005: 47–8).

36 As of 2011, only 29 volumes of the projected 40 had been published (ဝိဇ္ဇကတံပိဋ်တော် မြန်မာပြန်ကျမ်းများ၏ ကျမ်းဦးမှတ်ဖွယ်များ 2011, table on the unnumbered page immediately following the title pages). Unfortunately, I have been unable to ascertain the range of publication dates for this series. For information on this series, see *Sangāyana Monthly Bulletin* (1953a).

37 There are two volumes on the Vinayapiṭaka (1954, 1967), one volume on the Dīghanikāya (1954), two volumes on the Majjhimanikāya (1954, 1957), two volumes on the Saṃyuttanikāya (1957, 1959), two volumes on the Aṅguttaranikāya (1960, 1963), and one volume on the Khuddakanikāya and Abhidhammapiṭaka combined (1967).

38 A typical question is, “Friend, where, to whom, on what occasion, and how did the blessed one preach the Accentisutta?” (Accentisuttam panāvuso bhagavatā kattha kaṃ ārabba kismiṃ vatthusmiṃ kathaṃ ca bhāsitaṃ?, *ဆဋ္ဌသံဂါယနာ နုတ်ယသန္နိပါတ သုတ္တန္တဝိဇ္ဇက သံယုတ္တနိကာယ် သံဂါယနာအမေးအဖြေ* 1957: 8). This question is followed by a reply in which the content of the Accentisutta is described. Needless to say, only a fraction of the total number of *suttas* is discussed in this manner. This procedure was no doubt mimicking the Mahāvamsa’s description of the first Buddhist council, in which Mahākassapa questions Upāli and Ānanda (Mhv 3.30–36; see also *Chattha Sangayana 2500th Buddha Jayanti Celebrations* 1956: 16).

particular, he studied the variant readings it includes from textual witnesses produced in Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and England, the latter being printed editions published by the Pali Text Society. Hamm (1973: 126, 131–3) concluded that, at times, these variant readings represent a disappointingly small proportion of the variants actually found in these sources. Bibliographical details of the sources used to edit this series are not supplied in its individual volumes; however, elsewhere it was reported that its primary basis is the text inscribed onto the 729 Kuthodaw Pagoda stelae associated with the fifth Buddhist council (e.g. *Chattha Sangayana* [sic] *the Sixth Great Council* 1952: 5; *Sangāyanā Monthly Bulletin* 1953b; *Sangāyanā Souvenir* 1954: 6).³⁹ Perhaps for this reason, it is often assumed that the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti* Piṭaka series represents a pure “Burmese version” of the Pāli canon, i.e., that it contains only readings that have been transmitted in Burmese manuscripts. For example, Hamm (1973: 126) stated, “we may, however, note that it [i.e. the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti* Piṭaka series] at least appears uncontaminated with any foreign tradition” (see also Grönbold 2005: 48; Mendelson 1975: 281). This assumption has not been tested and, particularly in light of the reasonably substantial involvement of Sri Lankan monks in the editing process, it ought to be.

A full assessment of the primary sources and editing methodology used to produce the entire *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti* Piṭaka series is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, I have carefully analyzed a section of text from just one of its volumes, the second chapter (*vagga*) of the *Apadāna* (*Suttantapiṭake Khuddakanikāye Apadānapāḷi* 1997: 60–73), in the hope that the results might shed some light on the nature of this series as a whole. My principal research to date has involved editing and translating material from the *Apadāna* and during this process I have consulted 29 different witnesses

39 One likely reason for this is that its organizers believed it would be fitting for the sixth Buddhist council to receive the text of its immediate predecessor within the aforementioned lineage of councils.

of this text, including nine printed editions,⁴⁰ 19 handwritten manuscripts,⁴¹ and the Kuthodaw Pagoda marble stelae.⁴² A comparison of the selected chapter in the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition (*Suttantapiṭake Khuddakanikāye Apadānapāli* 1997; hereafter referred to as B^e) with the other 28 versions revealed that the former version drew from only three primary sources, namely the Kuthodaw Pagoda stelae (hereafter referred to as KP); the Syāmrattḥassa Tepiṭaka edition in Thai script (Cattasalla 1958, hereafter referred to as S^e); and the Sinhala script edition edited by Buddhadatta (1929, hereafter referred to as C^e).⁴³

I created a digital transliteration of each version of the selected chapter and compared them with the aid of an open source computer program called Juxta, which visually highlights differences between a base text and alternate versions.⁴⁴ Using this method, I manually counted every syllable in B^e that differed from the wording found in each of its three sources and converted the three figures into

40 Including those printed in Roman, Burmese, Sinhala, Thai, and Khmer scripts.

41 Including those written in Burmese, Sinhala, and Khom scripts.

42 For this analysis, I have studied the inked text visible in photographs of stelae 666–667 taken by myself during 2011.

43 These abbreviations, still widely used in Pāli studies, reflect the period in which they were developed, namely, the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and stand for “Burmese edition,” “Siamese edition,” and “Ceylonese edition.” Volume one of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition of the Apadāna was first published in 1960, three years before the publication of volume one of the Cambodian Tipiṭaka edition of this text. Therefore, the former does not draw from the latter as a source nor does it include variant readings from this edition. Curiously, for almost half of volume one of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition of the Apadāna (pages 50 to 264, which includes the selected chapter), no variant readings are included from the Pali Text Society edition of this text (Lilley 1925–27). It is likely that sections of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition that do include variant readings from the Pali Text Society edition have also drawn from this edition as a primary source.

44 Version 1.7 downloaded from <http://www.juxtasoftware.org>.

percentages of the total number of syllables in B^e.⁴⁵ Listed from lowest to highest (i.e. most similar to B^e to least similar to B^e), the percentages are as follows: 3.1 percent for C^e, 4.9 percent for S^e, and 5.5 percent for KP.⁴⁶ This result is contrary to expectation in that B^e is most similar to C^e and least similar to KP. The Kuthodaw Pagoda inscriptions contain a reasonably large number of spelling mistakes and it might therefore be objected that this is the reason why, amongst all three sources, it is the least similar to B^e. When differences due to spelling errors in the three sources are ignored, the percentages of syllables in B^e that differ from its sources are as follows: 2.6 percent for C^e, 3.9 percent for KP, and 4.6 percent for S^e.⁴⁷ Therefore, when only valid variant readings are counted, B^e is still most similar to C^e; however, unlike when errors are included, B^e is least similar to S^e.

A careful examination of the readings chosen for inclusion in B^e, within the context of all the readings available in its sources, informs us about the methodology used by the monks who edited this series. First, readings that produced an orthographically consistent text, and that better reflect the corresponding Sanskrit, were favored (e.g. *ekatthambham* instead of *ekathambham* and *cittappasādena* instead of *cittapasādena*, B^e: 61_{,10}, 61_{,21}). S^e in particular has had its orthography carefully standardized and much of its influence upon B^e may be attributed to this category of readings. The orthography of B^e, however, consistently reflects the Burmese spelling of Pāli words (e.g. *byamhe* instead of *vyamhe* and *byaggha-* instead of *vyaggha-*, B^e: 60_{,12}, 72_{,17}). Second, readings

45 Valid variations of nasals were not counted (e.g. *sudam āyasmā* / *sudam āyasmā*, *saṅgham* / *saṃgham*, etc.), nor were valid minor orthographic variants that do not involve an addition or subtraction of a consonant (e.g. *upagacchim* / *upagañchim*, *mālam* / *mālām*, *vyamhe* / *byamhe*, etc.).

46 The number of dissimilar syllables is 152 for C^e, 242 for S^e, and 274 for KP. These were converted into percentages by dividing by 4,968, the total number of syllables in the selected chapter in B^e.

47 Ignoring differences due to spelling errors, the number of dissimilar syllables is 130 for C^e, 194 for KP, and 231 for S^e.

that produced metrically standard *śloka* verses containing eight-syllable *pādas* were favored (e.g. *catunnavut' ito kappe* instead of *catunavute ito kappe*, B^e: 60_{,19}). This feature is present in other metrical texts of this series (e.g. the Buddhavaṃsa and Therīgāthā).⁴⁸ The editors of the KP recension, which represents a thoroughly revised version of the Pāli canon made during the founding years of Mandalay, have emended the received text in order to avoid hypermetric *pādas* wherever possible, and much of its influence upon B^e may be attributed to this category of readings.⁴⁹ Third, readings that contain unusual or rare grammatical features have been avoided in favor of readings that contain standard grammar. For example, so *'haṃ aṭṭhārasavasso* (B^e: 64_{,9}) instead of *aṭṭhārasaṇ ca vasso 'haṃ*, the latter reading of the received text being a rare instance of tmesis in Pāli literature (Trenckner et al. 1924–1948, s.v. *aṭṭhārasavassa*), that is, the separation of a compound by another word or group of words.⁵⁰ Finally, readings that produce a sentence more easily understood from a semantic viewpoint have been favored. For example, *sādhukāraṃ pavattesuṃ* (B^e: 63_{,19}), “they set forth their approval,” instead of *sādhukāraṃ pavattiṃsu*, “They were intent upon [expressing] their approval,” and *varanāgo ... sakappano* (B^e: 69_{,3–4}), “an excellent elephant with trappings,” instead of *varanāgo ... sāthabbaṇo*, “an excellent elephant with

48 Regarding the Therīgāthā, Norman (2007: xxxvii–xxxviii) wrote, “despite the many excellences of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgāyana edition (= B^e) suspicions cannot but be aroused by the frequency with which a hypermetrical *śloka* pāda appears in B^e in a regular eight-syllable form. The text of that edition gives the impression of having been subjected to a considerable amount of normalization, which naturally greatly reduces its value.”

49 A thorough examination of this unique and highly influential version is a major desideratum in Pāli and Burma studies.

50 An unfortunate repercussion of this tendency in B^e is that the complexities and difficulties that are a part of the rich diversity of early Pāli literature have been attenuated.

a brahman versed in the Atharva Veda.” Some of these emendations involve the replacement of a whole phrase or even a whole verse with a more readily understood version. Readings in these final two categories most often stem from C^e and, because they are very rarely supported by any manuscript I have examined, they have every appearance of being brash emendations by the editor, Buddhadatta.

31 syllables in B^e (0.6 percent) were not reproduced from any of its three sources, but were instead almost certainly silent emendations made by the council editors. Some of these are minor orthographic changes, while others are modest semantic changes. Over half of these syllables, however, belong to a line inserted from a commentarial text (B^e: 68n3) which is not present in any Apadāna manuscript I have examined.

Although it would be desirable to apply a similar analysis to texts from all major divisions of this series, these limited results might permit some tentative general observations. The choice of readings made by the editors of B^e has resulted in a text that is more homogeneous, adheres more closely to standard Pāli, and is more easily understood. The care with which this was undertaken is reflected in the observation by many of its readers that it contains extremely few misprints. In summary, it could be argued that it is a smoother and more polished series than any of its predecessors and most, if not all, of its successors. This is consistent with the declared purpose of the council, that is, to combat the predicted decline of the *sāsana* by purifying the scriptures of any reading that could be interpreted as erroneous. Moreover, contrary to previous belief, the series does not exclusively represent the Burmese transmission of Pāli literature; in fact, it has liberally used readings from all its sources, which were produced in different countries. This, along with the display of variant readings from these international sources in the critical apparatus, may be viewed as another attempt to represent the council as being an international collaboration. Finally, as previously noted, Buddhadatta was a prominent editor of this series and it is therefore not particularly surprising that

its edition of the *Apadāna* should reproduce many of the readings found in his earlier edition printed in Sinhala script.

Conclusion

On one hand, the sixth Buddhist council may profitably be viewed as an editing project. The scale of this project was truly impressive, involving more than 1,300 editors working together in a highly organized fashion to produce 40 primary publications and more than 100 secondary publications over a surprisingly short period of time. It is all the more impressive that the result has been so well received and has since been used as one of the principal sources in the study of Pāli literature. The editors of the *Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka* series aimed to restore the “original” words spoken by the Buddha by means of favoring the most “correct,” i.e., least difficult, readings. A close inspection of a chapter from one of its volumes revealed that it has been eclectically edited by freely adopting readings from the Kuthodaw Pagoda stela and several early printed editions from South and Southeast Asia, with preference given to readings that are most easily understood.

It is striking how sharply this highly organized project contrasts with the manner in which Pāli texts have been edited by Western scholars, which has typically involved individual scholars working on individual texts using their own idiosyncratic editing styles and which has, in the words of Balbir (2009: 3), resulted in a “heterogeneous collection of editions of unequal quality based on materials of different types.” It is also striking how sharply this project’s editing goal and methodology contrast with those advocated by most scholars working in the field of textual criticism. In general, it is no longer considered appropriate to apply the concept of a single “original” text to an ancient work (e.g. Epp 1999; Tov 2012: 163–9), particularly those that were orally composed. Moreover, a central guideline used in text critical methodology is that, in fact, the most difficult reading is considered most likely to be the earliest, that is, the principle

of *lectio difficilior* (e.g. Katre 1954: 72; Metzger and Ehrman 2005: 302–3).⁵¹

However, viewing the sixth Buddhist council simply as an editing project is ultimately inadequate, for it was most often portrayed by its organizers as an auspiciously timed purification project aiming to combat the predicted decline of the *sāsana*. It is true that much of this purification consisted of preparatory editing work; however, just as important was the recitation and approval of the edited text during council proceedings. This formal and ceremonial recitation within the framework of an official Buddhist council acted as a kind of certification process by which the edited text was deemed purified and which conferred upon the text an authority that previous series of the Pāli canon lacked.⁵² It was therefore of utmost importance to the organizers of the event that it was accepted by the Theravāda Buddhist world as being a full-fledged and legitimate council having the same status as the early Buddhist councils. A connection between this event and previous councils, particularly the first council, was therefore heavily emphasized in literature published by the BSC, speeches made by members of the government, and

51 The utility of this guideline is supported by the previously mentioned observation that the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition of the Apadāna, which appears to have been edited using the opposite logic, contains numerous readings that have every appearance of having been created in the 1920s (by Buddhaddatta).

52 It does not appear that this process was entirely successful. Bond (1992: 79) reported that a separate state-sponsored Buddhist council was staged in Sri Lanka during 1957, the year after the council in Rangoon concluded. That the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series was not strongly embraced in Sri Lanka is evidenced by the fact that the Buddhajayanti Tripiṭaka series in Sinhala script began to be published in 1957 (Grönbold 2005: 50–1). This series is not a simple transliteration of the Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka series into Sinhala script; rather, it is a freshly edited and differently worded version. This series has since been the standard version of the Pāli canon used in Sri Lanka. In at least one of its volumes, an editor, Ven. Kodāgoḍa Ñāṇāloka Nāyaka, criticized numerous readings found in the corresponding Chaṭṭhasaṅgīti Piṭaka edition (*Āṅguttaranikāya* 1960: xv₃₁–xvii₃).

architecture commissioned by the government. The BSC appears to have made genuine attempts to solicit the full involvement of monastic groups from all major Theravāda Buddhist countries; however, with the exception of Sri Lankan monks, this involvement was not forthcoming. Nonetheless, the BSC took pains to present the council to the public as also involving Thai, Cambodian, and Laotian monks via carefully worded publications, carefully designed illustrations, and carefully chosen photographs. Recent studies that investigate Burmese responses toward perceived threats to the continuity of the *sāsana* have generally focused upon local efforts. What is striking about the sixth Buddhist council is that it was intended to be an international response involving the participation of several Southeast Asian countries.

Consistent with the Buddha's teaching on impermanence, Burma's Buddhist revival was short-lived and lost its vitality by the early 1960s; however, the sixth Buddhist council had a particularly lasting impact and the site at which this monumental undertaking was held is still a popular place to visit for the Burmese.

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CHRIS CLARK is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. As part of his doctoral research, he is currently completing an edition, translation, and study of a section of Pāli narrative literature titled the Therāpadāna. His research interests include Pāli language and literature, Sanskrit Śrāvakayāna literature, and Theravāda Buddhism in Burma. He can be reached at chris.clark@inbox.com.

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