

DISCONTENTED CATEGORIES: Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna In Indian Buddhist History*

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“THE SON OF a barren woman:” this is a Tibetan commonplace for an impossible figment of an observer’s imagination, something utterly non-existent. Perhaps adoption was not common within Tibetan culture; it is a part of ours. In the historical study of religions, nothing is quite so common as a barren woman’s son: a fact or category appropriated and nurtured in a new discursive home. Within the study of Buddhism, one such child is the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. Introductory courses and textbooks have long adopted this pair of native Indian terms for their presentation of Buddhism. If students retain one fact from introductory courses on Indian Buddhism, it is probably this distinction. And even at more advanced stages of scholarship, *Hīnayāna* and *Mahāyāna* remain valued concepts, like elder children who keep the younger in line. This paper is one case-worker’s study of the treatment these terms have received within our discursive household. Taking my evidence from Indian Buddhist polemical literature, sūtra literature, and epigraphs, I will explore how scholars have adopted a view of Buddhism’s past that realizes, naturalizes, and historicizes the analytic functionality of the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. I will conclude that Buddhism so-constituted is a changeling, unrealistic, unnatural, unhistorical. Yet, let me emphasize from the

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first that this project is not deconstructionist. I have no (anti)metaphysical agenda to rid the world of the binary opposition between Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna. To the contrary, my interest is to conserve these categories for scholars' use. In this case, however, conservation is tantamount to problematization: I offer no final resolution for this dilemma.

THE MAHĀYĀNA/HĪNAYĀNA DISTINCTION IN THE STUDY OF INDIAN BUDDHISM

Tracing the margins of difference between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna has long been a popular concern in the study of Indian Buddhism.¹ Typically the two are represented in stark opposition: the Hīnayāna champions the arhat ideal, the Mahāyāna, the bodhi-sattva ideal; the Hīnayāna is centered on the saṅgha, the Mahāyāna, on the Buddha; the Hīnayāna is rationalist in its metaphysics, the Mahāyāna, mystical; Hīnayāna is ethical, Mahāyāna devotional; the Hīnayāna has closed its canon, the Mahāyāna allows for continuing "revelation." These distinctions streamline Buddhism's complex history, emplotting the religion's development around a clearly articulated transition. The implications of such simplification are at least twofold. First, exaggeration of the differences between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna for the sake of easy comparison implies a thoroughgoing divorce between them on every level, in terms of institution, doctrine, practice. Second, the custom of teaching them sequentially—one *yāna* and then the other—implies that the Mahāyāna was a historical *fait accompli* that more or less superseded Hīnayāna in India.

Simplification of material is a necessary evil in any discipline, not just Buddhist studies. Moreover, these remarkably clear characterizations of the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna do not derive from modern scholarship alone. The Mahāyāna's own rhetoric warrants such dualist constructions, fostering an expectation that historically the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna were completely separate. One of the clearest statements thereof is found in Ārya Asaṅga's fourth-

¹Williams (6-33) provides a synthetic treatment of scholarship on the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. See Rawlinson for a cogent explication of the Mahāyāna's origin in its broad strokes. More generally see Conze, Lamotte (1954), Bareau (296-305), Bechert (1973), Hirakawa, Schopen (1975, 1979, 1981), Harrison, and MacQueen. This is just the iceberg's tip.

century *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, a formative classic of Mahāyāna doctrine: “the Śrāvakayāna [i.e., Hīnayāna] and Mahāyāna are mutually opposed.”² For Asaṅga this fundamental incommensurability is ideological and practical in nature: the two *yānas* diverge in their aspirations, teachings, practices, supports,³ and times.⁴ Asaṅga’s brief analysis ends with the assessment that “as a result of [the two *yānas*] mutual opposition, the Hīnayāna is truly inferior; it is not capable of becoming the Mahāyāna.”⁵

Asaṅga’s polemic is seductive, suggesting that the distinction between Great and Little Vehicles is thoroughgoing, and thus that a comprehensive set of criteria can be formulated through which to distinguish them. Indeed, the indices of differentiation Asaṅga cites—aspirations, teachings, etc.—are precisely those that modern analyses of Buddhism use for reconstructing Buddhism’s history along *yānic* lines. Nevertheless, although Mahāyāna polemic literature fosters the treatment of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna as ideal types, the historian’s task is “to complicate not to clarify,” in J. Z. Smith’s phrase (290). And one does find historical studies of the Mahāyāna’s origins, genealogy, and progressive development that reveal a range of institutional and doctrinal (dis)continuities between the two *yānas*. Studies of this sort problematize the stark characterizations of the *yānas* found in native Mahāyānist literature, but they often do not address that rhetoric’s essential bifurcation of Indian Buddhism. The following passage from Andrew Rawlinson demonstrates this point:

We are asking the wrong question if we try and find *an* origin of the Mahāyāna. . . . We will not find it among the laity or the Mahāsāṃghikas or among rebel monks or breakaway Abhidharmists or among the invading tribes of northwest India. All of these made a contribution, but the contribution of each was controlled by the multi-dimensional model of the Mahāyāna that existed from the beginning (170).

²*viruddham eva cānyonyam śrāvakayānaṃ mahāyānaṃ ca* (Shastri:4).

³According to Mahāyāna doctrine, spiritual transformation takes place over a more or less prolonged span, during which an adherent accumulates spiritual merit (*puṇya*) and develops spiritual insight (*jñāna*). These two are envisioned as “supports.”

⁴See the previous note. Because the Mahāyāna purports to require more and greater “supports,” the period of time necessary for the realization of its highest goal also surpasses that of the Śrāvakayāna.

⁵*tasmād anyonyavirodhād yad yānaṃ hīnaṃ hīnam eva tat na tan mahāyānaṃ bhavitum arhati* (Shastri:4).

I wholly agree with Rawlinson's presentation of Mahāyāna's origin as "multi-dimensional." But what is one to make of the turn Rawlinson takes at the end of his statement, whereby he abstracts the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction from the realm of history and reconstitutes it in terms of an original model "that existed from the beginning."⁶ The present paper is concerned in large part to argue against such attempts to "save appearances," an expression that derives from efforts to maintain the Ptolemaic cosmos in the face of mounting contradictory evidence. On the one hand, the division of Indian Buddhism into two mutually exclusive "species" compels analytic precision; on the other hand, the complex history of those *yānas'* interactions belies that design.

Scholarship on Indian Buddhism is caught in the uneasy grip of these two hands. One particularly interesting case to review in this regard is the treatment of a little-known Mahāyāna sūtra, the *Ajitasenavyākaraṇanirdeśa Sūtra* (*Aj*). Known only from a single sixth century manuscript discovered at Gilgit, this text's colophon calls it a "Mahāyāna sūtra" (Dutt 1984:169). Yet, despite this explicit identification of the *Aj* with the Mahāyāna on the part of its sixth-century scribe, the text's modern editor, Nalinaksha Dutt, feels it "represents the semi-Mahāyānic form of Buddhism" containing "an admixture of both the Hīnayānic and Mahāyānic ideals" (1984:71). This hybrid form of the religion is called "proto-Mahāyāna" by another scholar to write on the *Aj*, Paul Williams, who explains "the strange mixture of pre-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna elements" as follows: "What marks this sūtra [as Mahāyānist] is the supremacy of Buddhahood and the possibility of anyone, monk or lay, becoming a Bodhisattva. But what distinguishes it from most other early Mahāyāna sūtras is the lack of antagonism towards the Hearers [i.e., Hīnayānists], Arhatship, or the monastic tradition" (26-28). For Dutt and Williams the *Aj* is a kind of missing link, representing "Mahāyāna prior to its own self-awareness as 'Mahāyāna,' with all the concomitant senses of superiority and contrast with religious practices and beliefs deemed inferior" (Williams:26).

The point these two scholars miss, of course, is that however early in the Mahāyāna's development one sets the date of the *Aj*'s

⁶See Foucault's classic essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" for a statement on the disparity between the project of producing a multi-leveled genealogy and that of recovering an essence at the origin.

first composition, the manuscript's colophon tells us that as late as the sixth century two lay Buddhists, Bālośimha and his wife Jījaḍi, chose to have *this* sūtra copied, perhaps at the behest of their spiritual benefactor Sthirabandhu (Hinüber:63). The manuscripts discovered at Gilgit, of which the *Aj* is one, are the only cache of Buddhist manuscripts that have survived intact from ancient India, our single window onto the precise texts that held interest for an identifiable local Buddhist community. If in the first century the *Aj* was a text characteristic of "Mahāyāna before 'Mahāyāna'" (Williams:26), in the sixth century it was simply another Mahāyāna sūtra to be copied and worshipped.

Be this as it may, Dutt's and Williams's discomfort with a sixth-century scribe's designation of the *Aj* a "Mahāyāna sūtra" illustrates one difficulty scholarship on Indian Buddhism has faced in its treatment of the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. Both scholars expect that a single characteristic, or set of characteristics, *prima facie* distinguishes the Mahāyāna. This may be why they discuss the *Aj*'s institutional affiliation and doctrinal content in terms of the religious milieu at the unknown moment of its original composition rather than that of its known reproduction in Gilgit. As a text from the Mahāyāna's earliest stratum, the *Aj*'s "inconsistencies" are interpretable as indices of transition within the accepted *yānic* framework. As a sixth-century expression of the Mahāyāna, the *Aj* makes no sense.

Moreover, although Dutt and Williams agree that the *Aj* is a Mahāyāna sūtra, almost, they differ as to why this is so. The *Aj* invokes many characteristically Mahāyānist doctrines and myths but does not actively place these elements in contradistinction to a Hīnayāna. Accordingly, Williams aligns the text with the Mahāyāna as a body of doctrine but not as an institution. Indeed, for Williams, the term "Mahāyāna" is meaningful only insofar as Mahāyānists define themselves within an institutional dyad, in contradistinction to the Hīnayāna. For Dutt, by contrast, the text represents a "semi-Mahāyānic" form of Buddhism because it "incorporates the Mahāyānic ideals without, however, [the Mahāyāna's] philosophy of *Dharmaśūnyatā*"⁷ (1984:74); here doctrine supersedes institution as a criterion for separating the *yānas*.

⁷*Dharmaśūnyatā* is the "emptiness of phenomena." According to Mahāyāna literature, one of the principle distinctions between the *yānas* is the differing scope in their application of the *śūnyatā* doctrine. The so-called Hīnayāna is "lesser" in part because it only acknowledges

One wonders what these two would make of the *Tathāgatabimbakārāpāṇa Sūtra*, another text from Gilgit in which one finds a curious admixture of *yānic* elements. This text claims that anyone who makes an image of Buddha becomes intent upon Awakening and will attain Buddhahood (Mette:137)—characteristically Mahāyānist statements. But at the end of this sūtra its protagonist attains arhatship (138)—characteristically Hīnayānist. Yet, unlike the *Aj*, the *Tathāgatabimba*^o does not identify itself with either *yāna*. One can imagine the irony here for a scholar who cut his wisdom teeth on Asaṅga. In short, although the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna distinction is a popular topic within the study of Buddhism, this research has not produced a sufficiently subtle taxonomic codification of the *yānas*, one capable of fixing the *Aj*'s identity within the Buddhist landscape.

THE MAHĀYĀNA/HĪNAYĀNA DISTINCTION IN THE STUDY OF BUDDHIST CAVE SITES

For me, the fundamental tensions occasioned by the lack of consensus regarding how to distinguish the *yānas* became clear while researching a dissertation on the beliefs and practices of the local Buddhist community associated with the Ajaṅṭā caves between 462 and 480 C.E.⁸ Attempting to relate evidence at the site to Buddhism's native categories, I was struck first by my expectation that Ajaṅṭā's fifth-century community belonged exclusively to one of the two *yānas*, and second by my inability to establish which *yāna* it was. This was all the more frustrating because most literature on Ajaṅṭā recapitulates an art-historical commonplace that periodizes the over one thousand Buddhist caves scattered across western India into two neat phases. There is the Hīnayāna phase, stretching from approximately the second century B.C.E. until the third C.E., followed by the Mahāyāna, commencing in the fifth century after a two-hundred year hiatus. Indeed, the early *magnum opus* of Indian religious speleology, Fergusson and Burgess's *The Cave Temples of India*, even presents a simple morpholog-

the emptiness of the person (*pudgalaśūnyatā*), the individual's lack of a true, fixed Self. The Mahāyāna considers itself "greater" in this regard because it acknowledges *pud-galaśūnyatā* as well as *dharmāśūnyatā*, that all material and mental phenomena are devoid of an inherent nature.

⁸These dates and most current statements on Ajaṅṭā's chronology come from the computer of Walter M. Spink. For the most recent overviews of his work see Spink 1991 and 1992.

ical screen through which caves belonging to the two are to be distinguished: Hīnayāna caves “are generally plain in style, and are devoid of images of Buddha for worship” (170), whereas those of the Mahāyāna have as their principle characteristic the “multiplications of images of Buddha” (297). Nor is this periodization based upon *yānic* associations only a nineteenth-century relic. It has continued in the major textbooks of Indian art history: Benjamin Rowland discusses Ajaṅṭā’s fifth-century Cave 19 as a “Mahāyāna Buddhist sanctuary” (130); Susan Huntington typologizes Cave 17 as “a standard Mahāyāna *vihāra*” [i.e., monastery] (254).

I went to Ajaṅṭā expecting that art historian Sheila Weiner was correct when she wrote, “Ajaṅṭā occupies a unique position in the history of Indian art because it is the only extant site of such grandeur which . . . extends in time from the early *Hīnayāna* aniconic phase through the *Mahāyāna* period. . . . It is in itself a kind of document which traces visually the development of Buddhist thought and evolution” (2-3). But after living at the site for nearly one year I was not so certain. Two separate points may be questioned in Weiner’s remarks and the conventional use of the *yānas* for the study of western Indian Buddhist caves. First, one may wonder whether all fifth-century cave monasteries are Mahāyānist? Perhaps Ajaṅṭā was a Hīnayānist site in the fifth century. Second, one may wonder whether the *yānas* are a useful or meaningful set of categories through which to describe and discuss these caves. Although I am interested ultimately in the latter point, towards that end I will take as a springboard the observations of two scholars who made the former, i.e., who rejected the common identification of Ajaṅṭā as a *Mahāyānist* site in the fifth century, proposing instead that it was Hīnayānist.

In order for the non-specialist to understand those scholars’ arguments for why Ajaṅṭā was Hīnayānist, I must first review a crucial assumption about Buddhism’s institutional history, one widely accepted within the field. To wit, several centuries after Śākyamuni’s *nirvāṇa* the saṅgha split into numerous fraternities based upon diverging teachers’ lineages as well as disputes over doctrine and monastic practice. Native doxographers have traditionally numbered these sects (Sanskrit, *nikāyas*) as eighteen;⁹ and Indian

⁹The number eighteen is the traditional count of Buddhist sects. A browse through any text on the subject, however, will quickly reveal that there were more than eighteen schools in total. For a summary of the fundamental Indian literature on the sects see Lamotte

Buddhist literature and epigraphs make reference to “the monks of the eighteen *nikāyas*” as a metonymy for the saṅgha as a whole. The important point here is that modern scholars corporately equate the eighteen *nikāyas* with the Hīnayāna and, more significantly yet, represent these *nikāyas* as a corporate group in contradistinction to the Mahāyāna. Such an understanding is witnessed, for example, in a recent monograph by Jan Nattier. Her index includes the entry “Nikāya Buddhism (the ‘eighteen schools’)” (314)—a terminology Nattier equates with, but prefers to, “Hīnayāna” (9, n. 1)—and she explicitly sets Nikāya and Mahāyāna Buddhisms in opposition on several occasions (25, 89, 124, 127).¹⁰ Let me repeat, Nattier is not alone in drawing this equation; the institutional incommensurability between the Hīnayāna as comprised of the eighteen *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna is accepted wisdom within scholarship on Buddhism. Further exemplified by the title of the finest study on the eighteen sects, André Bareau’s *Les Sectes Bouddhiques du Petit Véhicule*, and Étienne Lamotte’s calling the Sthavira, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, and Saṃmatīya *nikāyas* “the four principal Hīnayānist schools” (1988:548), this attitude is succinctly reviewed by Heinz Bechert:

That Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a ‘sect’ is settled by unambiguous textual evidence. The formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with Śrāvakayāna, the vehicle of the hearers, or Hīnayāna, the small vehicle i.e. with the old doctrine. The so-called ‘sects’, i.e. the *nikāyas* or *vādas*, on the other hand had come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna or Śrāvakayāna (1973:11).

Bechert’s precis assumes the well-rehearsed account of Buddhism’s institutional development: a linear branching of monastic assem-

(1988:517-548), which includes a bibliography of the principal secondary work on the Buddhist sects to his date. The terms ‘sect’ and ‘school’ are both found variously in the scholarly literature on Buddhism. As ‘school’ generally connotes a group formed around a particular doctrine or teacher, while ‘sect’ carries no such definite implications, and as there were a multiplicity of reasons for the sects’ divergence, I have used the latter term.

¹⁰The question of what to call non-Mahāyāna Buddhism has long vexed Western scholars. The term *Hīnayāna* is the most common but is also the most problematic. *Hīna* has qualitative as well as quantitative implications: it can be translated as “debased,” “inferior,” or “mean” in addition to the more common “smaller” or “lesser,” and thus is offensive to many Buddhists. Alternatives such as “Theravāda” (which is just plain wrong), “sectarian (i.e., *nikāya*) Buddhism,” “early Buddhism,” and even “non-Mahāyāna Buddhism” have been used. At the moment, “*nikāya* Buddhism” seems to be scholars’ alternative of choice for *Hīnayāna*, bolstering my argument that this equation has become a given within the study of Indian Buddhism. Though I am sensitive to the pejorative significance of *Hīnayāna*, I contend that “*nikāya* Buddhism” is not the most historically accurate substitute.

blies due to disputes over cenobitic rule and doctrine resulted in the eighteen Hīnayāna *nikāyas*; the Mahāyāna, by contrast, had a diffuse origin, in which monks, nuns, and lay-persons drawn from many communities, with their multiplicity of doctrines, practices, and texts, were united around a common religious aspiration: to become Buddhas themselves for the benefit of all living beings.

Based upon this stereotypic history, at least two art-historians have set out to show that in the fifth century Ajaṅṭā's so-called Mahāyāna phase was in fact patronized by members of Hīnayāna sects. Both scholars use a similar argument: 1) some piece of evidence at Ajaṅṭā can be tied to one of the eighteen *nikāyas*, 2) these *nikāyas* comprise the Hīnayāna, 3) thus claims for a Mahāyānist presence at Ajaṅṭā are unwarranted. The first of these two, Dieter Schlingloff, makes this claim on the basis of an extensive study of literary precedents for Ajaṅṭā's paintings: "pictorial subjects [at Ajaṅṭā] agree with the form of stories as they are recounted . . . within the tradition of Hīnayāna Buddhism [particularly the Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin schools]. Pictorial representations of decidedly Mahāyānistic themes are not . . . to be found in Ajanta" (175). The second, Marilyn Leese, warrants her claim that the Ajaṅṭā Caves were a Hīnayāna establishment through appeal to an inscription painted on a pillar of Ajaṅṭā's Cave 10, paleographically localizable to the fifth or sixth century. Found beneath the image of a Buddha, the inscription reads, "Vipaśvin, the Complete and Perfect Buddha. Belonging to ?rika, a Cetika."¹¹ The inclusion of the word *cetika* in this record has been widely interpreted to indicate that this image's donor was a member of the Cetika *nikāya*, one of the sects that scholars consider to corporately comprise the Hīnayāna. In the first half of her essay, Leese argues this inscription proves that "Buddhism of the so-called 'Hīnayāna' variety was still in vogue at a time which scholars popularly describe as the 'Mahāyāna' Period" (137); the second half attempts to show how the site's iconography reflects Cetika doctrine.¹² Here we see

¹¹ This inscription has been published three times: Burgess and Indrajī (85, #17), Burgess (137, #9), and Chakravarti (1946:93, #14). Based upon my examination of it *in situ*, I read: *vi(pa)śv[i] samy[k]sambu[ddha] cetika.rikasya*. This does not significantly differ from previous publications.

¹² The doctrines of the Cetika *nikāya* are collated from various native doxographies and summarized in Bareau (87-88). For the purposes of this paper, I will accept Leese's interpretation of Cave 10's inscription; because the notion that within the inscription *cetika* refers to the Cetika *nikāya* is the basis for Leese's discussion of Ajaṅṭā, it is a "given" for my explica-

Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna retained as a frame of reference, even though the positioning of Ajaṅṭā within that frame has been altered.

AN INSCRIPTION FROM AJAṆṬĀ OF UNCERTAIN ATTRIBUTION

So far I have shown, somewhat impressionistically, that the Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna distinction provides art historians a crucial set of categories with which to periodize and characterize Buddhist caves in Western India. This *idée reçue* provides the background against which Schlingloff and Leese argue that evidence for the presence of *nikāyas* at Ajaṅṭā in the fifth century precludes classifying the site as Mahāyānist. However, because they understand the *nikāyas* and Mahāyāna to be institutionally incommensurable, both are forced to contend with contradictory data. For Schlingloff the difficulty is explaining icons of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. He summarily dismisses this conundrum, observing that “the worship of this Bodhisattva was not limited to the followers of the Mahāyāna; this is demonstrated primarily by evidence of the Avalokiteśvara cult that it is not unusual to find in regions of classical Hīnayāna-Buddhism like Ceylon” (175).¹³

For Leese, the contradictory evidence is more explicit: she must contend with an inscription that has been interpreted as identifying its author as a follower of the Mahāyāna. This inscription is located in Cave 22, and accompanies an image containing seven Buddhas and the bodhisattva Maitreya, all seated beneath their personal Bodhi trees.¹⁴ If this record does indeed mention the Mahāyāna, then, in terms of associating the site with one or the other *yāna*, it would fully counterbalance Cave 10’s mention of the Cetika *nikāya*. In defense of her position, Leese claims that AJ’s (see note 14 for abbreviations) reading of *Mahāyāna* within this

tion of scholarship on the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. This interpretation is not impossible; nor, however, is it by any means secure.

¹³This is a remarkable equivocation on Schlingloff’s part, as he must be aware that the Mahāyāna had a prominent presence in Sri Lanka for much of the first millennium C.E. An early treatment of this subject is found in Paranavitane. More recently, Heinz Bechert (1977) has reviewed the Mahāyāna literary remains found in Sri Lanka. For recent studies on Avalokiteśvara in Sri Lanka in particular, see Holt and Obeyesekere.

¹⁴This inscription has been edited three times, in Daji, Burgess and Indrajī (88, #30), and Chakravarti (1955:112). In the body of this paper these three editions will be referred to by the abbreviations DAJI, ICTWI, and AJ respectively.

inscription “appears unacceptable” (136). She argues that ICTWI *does not* include *Mahāyāna* in its transcription and is more reliable than AJ because the record suffered greatly due to time and vandalism during the seventy years between ICTWI’s publication and that of AJ. Indeed, if the record were to include *Mahāyāna*, this would be the earliest instance in India in which somebody identifies himself epigraphically using this title, the next instance not occurring until the ninth century (Schopen 1979:14).

Prompted by Leese’s essay, I reviewed Cave 22’s disputed inscription during my year at Ajañtā and determined that Leese was correct to reject the reading *Mahāyāna*. But I found more. In the place where the previous epigrapher had found “Mahāyāna,” I discovered the term *Aparaśaila*. Along with the Cetikas, *Aparaśaila* is the name of a *nikāya*, one of the eighteen! In point of fact, in the genealogical tables of Buddhist sects, the *Aparaśaila nikāya* and *Cetika nikāya* are very closely related.¹⁵ My reading of Cave 22’s inscription appears to fully confirm Leese’s arguments as to the *yānic* affiliations of Ajañtā. Case closed? Of course not. But, before I present the difficulties with this inscription, here is its translation:

Success! This is the religious donation of the *Śākyabhikṣu Aparaśaila* . . . [the donor’s name and other epithets could have fit in this lacuna] . . . for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by [my] parents [and] all sentient beings

Those who have an image of the Conqueror made
In this [very life] become possessed of
Beauty, fortune, and good qualities;
Blazing like the sun in their faculties and senses,
They become a delight to the eye.¹⁶

Now, if Cave 22’s record, like that in Cave 10, simply stated the patron’s sect affiliation and name, we might acknowledge Leese’s

¹⁵ See Lamotte (1988:529-546) for various genealogical lists of the *nikāyas* drawn from Buddhist doxographies. Bareau (30) offers a genealogy synthesizing these lists, which he qualifies as “une quasi-certitude.”

¹⁶ [siddham] *deyadharmmo ‘yaṃ śākyabhikṣom aparasāila nīyasya mātāpitṛ [u]tranya . [o] [sa]rvvasatvānām anuttara[jñā]nāvāptaye saurupyasaubhāgyagunopapamnā gunendriye bhāsvaraḍīptayas te bhavaṃnti te nayanābhirāmā ye kārayamti[ha] jī[nasya] bimbam*. This reading is based upon my own close scrutiny of the cave supplemented by the reproductions found in Daji (where the plate is called “Cave XXI”), Burgess and Indrajī (plate “Cave XXII,” #30) and Griffiths (vol. 1, plate #91). Because my reading of this inscription differs from those of previous editors in crucial ways, I plan to publish a more technical assessment in the near future.

interpretation of Ajaṅṭā as Hīnayānist based upon this epigraphic evidence. The Cave 22 donor gives us more information, however. In addition to this apparent self-identification with the *Aparaśaila nikāya*, he adopts the epithet *Śākyabhikṣu* and makes use of a certain well-known formula for dedicating spiritual merit (i.e., “. . . for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by [my] parents [and] all sentient beings”¹⁷). Whereas the mention of *Aparaśaila* is unique to this record at Ajaṅṭā, these two other elements are found together in a great many inscriptions at Ajaṅṭā as well as throughout Buddhist India; they have a web of associations that cannot be ignored.

To understand the fuller ramifications of these two epigraphic pericopes, we may look to the work of Gregory Schopen, who has attempted to document the Mahāyāna’s emergence as a self-conscious institutional presence in India, defining and declaring itself publicly as a distinct entity through the unique epithets and formulae by which its members identified themselves epigraphically. Schopen’s historical conclusions are not our concern at present. Instead, his analysis is salient, for it attempts to prove that epigraphs can be associated with the Mahāyāna even if they do not use this term explicitly. More important yet, the two indices whose presence marks an epigraph as Mahāyānist are precisely the two aforementioned elements found in Cave 22. First, according to Schopen, “The term *śākyabhikṣu*. . . must be a title used to designate a member of the Mahāyāna community who was also a member of a monastic community” (1979:11). Second, Schopen’s study of Buddhist epigraphs has determined that the formula used in this inscription for dedicating spiritual merit is “virtually the exclusive property of the Mahāyāna” (12). In view of Schopen’s broad study of Buddhist inscriptions, the Cave 22 inscription cannot confirm Leese’s proposition about Ajaṅṭā’s *yānic* affiliation but may suggest, rather, that the site was Mahāyānist. Indeed, out of Ajaṅṭā’s fifty-nine donative inscriptions dated to the fifth century, twenty-three use the epithet *śākyabhikṣu*, and about fourteen use a varia-

¹⁷There seems to be no specific mention of merit here because the record is so damaged. However, the portion that remains and size of the lacuna leave little doubt that this inscription used a dedicatory formula that became popular in the fifth century and continued in use until Buddhism’s final demise in India. Although there exist many minor variations on this formula, quite typically it reads: Whatever merit there is in this [donation] may that be for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by my parents and all sentient beings (*yad atra puṇyam tad bhavatu mātāpitaroḥ sarvasatvānāṃ cānuttarajñānāvāptaye*).

tion of the Mahāyānist dedicatory formula.¹⁸ These indices far exceed a single mention of the Cetika *nikāya*, even when supplemented by a mention of the Aparasāila. Yet, one cannot deny that this donor, whatever his Mahāyānist sympathies, seems to have declared himself a member of a *nikāya*. Nor can one dispute that for modern scholars (to recite Bechert from above) “the formation of Mahāyāna is contrasted with the . . . Hīnayāna. . . . The . . . nikāyas . . . come into being inside the development of Hīnayāna.” In short, this inscription appears to transgress the fundamental taxonomy by which we have constructed Buddhism’s institutional history.

IDENTIFYING THE MAHĀYĀNA IN EPIGRAPHY AND LITERATURE

To grasp the issue here, let us examine the second of the two so-called Mahāyānist elements of this inscription.¹⁹ A reconstruction of this formula, based upon parallels from Ajaṅṭā would read, more-or-less, “Whatever merit there is in this religious donation, may that be for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by my parents and all sentient beings” (see note 17). What makes this a *definitively* Mahāyānist formula? Schopen’s answer relies upon a survey of epigraphic clichés: across the corpus of Buddhist epigraphs there exists a high statistical correlation between, first, instances of the epithet *sākyabhikṣu* and the title *Mahāyānānuyāyin* (i.e., follower of the Mahāyāna), and second, between *sākyabhikṣu* and this formula. Yet, well before Schopen’s attempt to set this formula’s *yānic* association upon an “objective” basis, scholars already referred to it as “a common Mahāyāna formula” (Johnston:366) or “in the well-known *Mahāyāna* style” (Venkataramayya and Trivedi:148) or “of Mahāyāna origin” (Shizutani:355). Schopen observes that although he concurs with Johnston et. al vis-à-vis his conclusions, none of those scholars “has given any evidence to support his assertion” (1979:7). Indeed, “internal” evidence from

¹⁸This count derives from my collection of materials from published sources and *in situ* investigations. It includes both readable and unreadable inscriptions, as well as inscriptions noticed by prior scholars that no longer exist due to time and wear.

¹⁹I leave aside discussion of the first so-called Mahāyānist element, *sākyabhikṣu*, because this epithet’s range of meanings is too complex to elaborate in the available space. See my dissertation from the University of Michigan, “Setting the Three Jewels: The Complex Culture of Buddhism at the Ajaṅṭā Caves,” for an in depth study of India’s *sākyabhikṣus*.

Mahāyāna Buddhist literature cannot be the source of these unsupported insights, for “the vocabulary used to express the idea [of transferring merit] in our formula is not the vocabulary used to express the same idea in Mahāyāna literary sources” (7). The epigraphic formulation for transferring merit towards Buddhahood is “for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge” (*anut-tarajñānāvāptaye*), whereas Mahāyāna scriptures and exegetical treatises typically use a formulation that reads, “he turns [merit] over to Unexcelled, Perfect, and Complete Awakening” (*anut-tarasamyaksambodhaye parināmayati*). These two formulations differ in regard to the phrase used to describe the goal towards which merit is transferred (*anuttarajñāna* vs. *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*), as well as the verb indicating transference (*ava-āp* vs. *pari-ṇam*).

So moving from the question of this epigraphic formula as *definitively* Mahāyānist, the more salient question is, what makes it *prima facie* Mahāyānist? Schopen’s observations provide a clue. Although the epigraphic and literary formulae for dedicating merit differ in vocabulary they “express the same idea,” namely, the intention to catapult oneself and others towards Buddhahood through a strategic manipulation of merit. In brief, this formula is *prima facie* Mahāyānist, because it expresses a goal specifically associated with bodhisattvas, beings en route to Buddhahood. Such an equation is made throughout Buddhist literature, such as when Aśaṅga claims in the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* that the Mahāyāna is truly the native ground of bodhisattvas.²⁰ Similarly, a second work attributed to the Aśaṅga, *The Bodhisattva Stages* (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*), begins with the following apposition, “the bodhisattva path, the Mahāyāna” (Dutt 1978:1). Although the precise vocabulary of the epigraphic formula is not used by Aśaṅga, the ideas expressed therein are so fundamental to the Mahāyāna that Aśaṅga treats them within the first chapter of his treatise on the bodhisattva’s career. To wit, the bodhisattva path, the Mahāyāna, surpasses all other spiritual paths, for bodhisattvas alone eliminate the impediments to Omniscience, the *jñeyāvaraṇa* (Dutt 1978:2). This, of course, echoes the formula’s *anut-tarajñānāvāptaye*, “for the attainment of Supreme Knowledge,” Omniscience. Second, a bodhisattva pursues the spiritual welfare of others as well as himself, whereas according to Aśaṅga, travellers

²⁰ *mahāyānam hi bodhisattvānām adhyātmanam* (Shastri:166).

on other religious paths pursue their own benefit alone.²¹ And so, the epigraphic formula almost always “transfers” to others the merit accumulated through an act of donation; typically, beneficiaries include the donor’s parents and all sentient beings.

A second ideological match between native Mahāyāna polemics and the epigraphic formula is found in the encyclopedic *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśasāstra*, a work traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna preserved only in a fifth-century Chinese translation. This treatise’s author sets three criteria for distinguishing the *yānas*: the Hīnayāna is diminutive, the Mahāyāna is superlative; the Hīnayānist acts for himself, the Mahāyānist, for himself and others; the Hīnayāna leads to a spiritual knowledge more restricted in scope than the absolute insight resulting from Mahāyāna practices (Lamotte 1981:238-39). Again, this text and the epigraphic formula differ greatly in their vocabulary and explanatory scope. Nevertheless, this simple epigraphic statement of a bodhisattva—“Whatever merit there is in this religious donation, may that be for the attainment of Unexcelled Knowledge by my parents and all sentient beings”—appears to encapsulate the quintessence of what native theoreticians of the Mahāyāna understood by that Vehicle. For the Mahāyāna polemicist, as for the Western scholar,²² action

²¹Let me emphasize that the literature to which I refer is highly polemic and highly ideological in its characterization of its opponents. I am *not* myself claiming that ancient “Hīnayānists” or modern Theravādins were or are petty, selfish, or spiritually mean. Indeed, the phrasing Asaṅga uses within the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* to describe the bodhisattva’s interest in others—“the bodhisattva [becomes perfected] for his own benefit as well as for the benefit of others, for the benefit of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the sake, the benefit, the happiness of gods and men” (*bodhisattvah apyātmahitāya parāhitāya bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya lokānukampāyai arthāya hitāya sukhāya devamanuṣyānām* [Dutt 1978:2])—is found almost word for word within the Pāli vinaya of the Theravāda, where the Buddha tells his followers to “walk, monks, on tour for the blessing of the many folk, for the happiness of the many folk out of compassion for the world, for the welfare, the blessing, the happiness of *devas* and ‘men’” (Horner:28). Indeed, this unit of tradition is found throughout Buddhist literature of all stripes.

²²These Indian Buddhist equations between the bodhisattva path and the Mahāyāna have been with us in the West almost as long as Buddhism. To restrict my examples to this half of the twentieth century, however, Paul Williams summarizes this line of thinking in his recent textbook on the Mahāyāna: “this, if anything, characterizes the Mahāyāna. . . . To set the path of the Bodhisattva as the ultimate aspiration for all seems to be a uniquely Mahāyāna conception” (25). Note Williams’s phrasing: the unique Mahāyānist formulation of the bodhisattva ideal stipulates that *all beings should* aspire to bodhisattvahood and Buddhahood. Although one may view this prescription to universal Buddhahood as the Mahāyāna’s hallmark, the belief that there are bodhisattvas is universal to Buddhism. Within non-Mahāyāna literature one can find the bodhisattva’s path acknowledged as a viable religious goal for extraordinary individuals. Needless to add, a Mahāyānist polemicist would claim that such individuals are fellow-travellers on the Great Vehicle without knowing it.

in *imitatio Buddhi* is the hallmark of a traveller on the Great Vehicle.

TOWARDS A TAXONOMY OF THE YĀNAS

Here is the central question my reconstruction of Cave 22's inscription raises: Can a self-described member of a *nikāya* accept the bodhisattva vow and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? Clearly, the answer has less to do with Buddhist history than with the scholarly conventions we adopt. This is a matter of definition, of "low order meaning" in Roy Rappaport's phrase (127). It is a matter of fixing distinctions within a hierarchy of meanings. In short, it is a question of taxonomy. How do we, should we, construct a taxonomic model of Buddhist institutions?

To understand what is stake in this question, let us review how taxonomies work. (The following discussion is indebted to Frederick Suppe's *The Semantic Conception of Theories*.) Taxonomy is a means for organizing information whereby units of information, taxa, are clearly distinguished one from the other, enabling the coherent grouping of individuals with shared attributes. Differentiation occurs in terms of characteristics—morphological, phylogenetic, functional, social, etc.—resulting in a system of taxonomic categories capable of being emplotted on two axes, horizontally as well as vertically. The Linnaean system is the most familiar, allowing a quick reminder of how these two axes relate. Using Indian society as an example, we may abstract the *religious* from the *political* from the *economic* realm, for example, and call these "families." *Buddhism* would then be one "genus" of Indian religion, and *Hīnayāna Buddhism* one "species." According to this classic taxonomic model, a *nikāya*, a sub-species of the species *Hīnayāna Buddhism* cannot belong to another species, e.g., *Mahāyāna Buddhism*. The taxonomic architecture prohibits this vertically (recall Bechert from above: "Mahāyāna itself is not to be conceived as a 'sect' ") as well as horizontally ("the *nikāyas* come into being inside the development of *Hīnayāna*"). Nevertheless, in terms of the particulars of religious life—practices, monastic rule, and so on—the *Mahāyāna* may be continuous with one *nikāya* or another in many details. *Mahāyānists* might come from all *nikāyas*; yet there is an expectation that prior *nikāya* affiliations are moot once a *yānic* conversion is made. Or, more generally put, any given taxon is characterized by the similarity of the members of its class, which

are absolutely differentiated from members of other taxa within the taxonomy's universe *contingent upon the level of abstraction within the categorical hierarchy*. Accordingly, a clear understanding of the relationship between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna will depend upon the precision with which one maintains awareness of the relationships and logical levels between the contrasted entities. Although overlaps between an individual *nikāya* and the Mahāyāna may occur in selected individual characteristics, analytically the two remain absolutely separate.

Now, in the broadest terms, taxonomies come in two flavors, "natural" and "artificial." Taxa definitions in natural taxonomies are considered to have a natural basis in reality; they "are factually true or false assertions about the characteristics distinctive of [their] members" (Suppe:248). In artificial taxonomies, categories are defined according to arbitrary and functional conventions. Accordingly, when we seek to classify these two "species" of Buddhism, we must first decide whether we want this classificatory system to conform to, and describe, historical actualities on their own terms, reconstructed through available evidence; or whether it should be treated as a conventional construction, stipulatively defined so as to yield a useful analysis of whatever specific material is at hand. There is no reason to believe that scholars of Buddhism have heretofore sought anything but a natural, historical understanding of the *yānas*.

For a taxonomy to be natural, the taxa must be defined so that there is "a single intrinsic property characteristic of all and only those individuals belonging to a given taxon" (Suppe:217). To make "Mahāyāna" and "Hīnayāna" work as natural taxa we need but a single intrinsic property characteristic of all members of the Mahāyāna and another characteristic of all Hīnayānists. In this study, I have claimed that Western scholars commonly satisfy these minimum requirements by presenting the Mahāyāna's essential property as its members' acceptance of a universalized bodhi-sattva ideal and the Hīnayāna's as its members' identification with a specific *nikāya*. Membership in the Mahāyāna is diagnosed primarily by an ideological position; membership in the Hīnayāna by an institutional affiliation. Yet, according to my reading of the Cave 22 inscription, we have a self-identified member of the Aparasāila *nikāya* committing himself to the quintessential Mahāyānist aspiration. In view of this inscription, how do we maintain a strict analytic separation between taxa, such that every individual fits into

only a single taxon? Do we choose (1) the nominal separation between the *nikāyas* and the Mahāyāna as our criterion for categorizing the *yānic* affiliation of the Cave 22 donor? Or (2) do we choose as criteria the tenets and practices this donor accepts within his epigraph?

Selection of the former possibility leads to an identification of this donor with the Hīnayāna; select the latter and he is a Mahāyānist. In natural taxonomies “the definitional form for given taxa in a domain is a question of empirical fact” (Suppe:248). Accordingly, if we choose the first alternative, “Mahāyāna” and “Hīnayāna” are meaningful as naturally defined taxa insofar as they are defined through data that explicitly communicates a *nikāya* or *yāna* affiliation. Such a taxonomy could not support generalizations about the *yānic* substrate of Buddhist ideologies and practices: the identification of the *bodhisattvayāna* with the Mahāyāna, so prevalent in scholarship on Buddhism, would have to be relinquished. Selection of the second alternative leads to the conclusion that an individual’s membership in one of the *nikāyas* cannot be treated as having a predictive value for his *yānic* affiliation. This, in turn, means that the prevailing conception of the *nikāyas* as sub-species of the Hīnayāna should be aborted. Here the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction can be preserved on the level of doctrine and practice but loses most of its significance as a handle for Indian Buddhist institutional history.

Can a member of a *nikāya* vow to lead all beings to Buddhahood and still be categorized as a Hīnayānist? If one assents to this proposition, then one treats Hīnayāna/Mahāyāna as a pair of institutional taxa whose members are best determined through sociological and demographic studies. If one denies the assertion, then the *yānas* retain their value as categories for Buddhist ideology, and the nomological and doxographical literatures of Buddhism remain principle sources for their definition. The trade-off is that these taxa will lose value as institutional indices, except where direct, explicit evidence for an individual’s *yānic* affiliation is preserved. However, since we possess no evidence for a Buddhist affirming his inclusion within the “Hīnayāna” akin to Asaṅga’s professions vis-à-vis the Mahāyāna, we are left with a history of Indian Buddhism that includes a few self-declared Mahāyānists, a few members of various *nikāyas*—albeit of unknown *yānic* affiliation—and no Hīnayānists at all. Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna becomes an odd distinction indeed.

The irony underlying the use of this distinction as the basis for a natural taxonomy of Buddhism becomes even more evident when one considers the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction from the “Hīnayānist” perspective. According to the witness of non-Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, the Mahāyāna was almost not existent in ancient India. As André Bareau observes, “although the texts of the Great Vehicle are not at all hesitant to cite and critique the opinions of the Hīnayāna often, no work of the Small Vehicle either cites or refutes theses that necessarily and uniquely belong to the Mahāyāna” (299).²³ And Bareau finds this state of affairs *très troublant*, especially because texts associated with the *nikāyas* do not shy away from citing and critiquing the doctrines of their non-Buddhist opponents: membership in the *nikāya*-club was not a prerequisite for notice. As the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan Tsang put it, “the different schools [of Buddhism] are constantly at variance, and their contending utterances rise like the angry waves of the sea” (Beal:80). Why was the Mahāyāna, so prominent a figure on our intellectual horizon, virtually ostracized from these disputations? Rawlinson suggests a solution to this conundrum: the Mahāyāna was a pan-Buddhist inspirational movement that did not consider itself a *nikāya* and was, in turn, ignored by the Hīnayānists (696, n. 23). Yet, even if this explanation could be verified by some means other than *argumentum e silentio*, it is not supported by the Mahāyāna’s own self-mythology. According to Mahāyāna sources, their authors and followers were often the targets of hostility and condemnation at the hands of brother Buddhists despite the lack of traces for this in the *nikāyas*’ literary remains.²⁴ As Alice would say, curiouser and curiouser.

²³The best known exception to this point may be found in Pāli literature. Buddhaghosa’s commentary to the *Kathāvatthu* attributes several tenets to a school he identifies as the *Vetulya*, which is also called the *Mahāsuññatāvāda* (Aung and Rhys Davids:318, 323). Needless to say, a school named “The Proponent of Great Sūnyatā” satisfies some modern characterizations of the Mahāyāna. For an elaboration of these references, and one scholar’s rejection of the *Vetulya*/Mahāyāna equation, see Rawlinson (696, n. 23). More recently, I have come across a far more significant exception within the *Abhidharmadīpa*, a fifth or sixth-century (Jaini:134) presentation of orthodox Sarvāstivādin doctrine and refutation of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*. The *Dīpa*’s author refers to Vasubandhu (called *Kośakāra*, i.e., *Kośa*’s author) as a “*Vaitulika*” and criticizes his teaching of the three-natures (*trisvabhāva*), a distinctly Mahāyānist tenet (Jaini:282). Moreover, this text contains the only reference I have found to the Mahāyāna *by name* in a non-Mahāyānist Indian Buddhist text (Jaini:358).

²⁴The most famous example of this is doubtless the tale of *Sadāparibhūta* told in the *Lotus Sūtra* (Hurvitz:279-285). The only secondary work known to me on this topic is that of

CONCLUSION

I introduced this paper with a set of questions regarding the functional value of the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction. To be sure, these taxa make our lives simpler when talking or writing about Buddhism in India. But (to paraphrase Geertz) they formulate a conceptual ordering of Buddhism and clothe this conception with such an aura of factuality that it seems uniquely realistic. They are icons, in both senses, Piercean and devotional. Of all the categories through which to reconstruct Indian Buddhism's history, Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna are the most productive. Nevertheless, our reconstructions have a secret life of their own. Each *yāna* can be defined positively, through a necessary and sufficient characteristic for individuals' membership within that taxon. Moreover, because these two *yānas* are logical opposites, each can also be defined negatively, through its lack of the other's necessary and sufficient characteristic. However, in both cases, these positive and negative definitions are not conceptually equivalent. That is, the Mahāyāna is positively characterized by its members' pursuit of the bodhisattva path; the Hīnayāna is negatively characterized as the non-Mahāyāna, i.e., its members do not necessarily pursue Buddhahood as their ideal. However, when positively characterized, the Hīnayāna is defined by members' affiliation with one or another *nikāya*, which, of course, means that the Mahāyāna is known negatively by its members' institutional separation from those same *nikāyas*. In short, discourse on the *yānas* has treated an apples-and-oranges distinction as one of apples alone.

Stephen Kent. Although Kent's overarching argument is interesting, his use of Buddhist sources is highly problematic and one must check every citation before accepting its validity. Both the *Lotus* and Kent's sources come from early strata of Mahāyāna literature. Yet this topos was not discarded as the Mahāyāna developed. One clearly late Mahāyāna sūtra that invokes it is the *Sarvatathāgatādhiṣṭhānasatvāvalokanabuddhahsetrasaṃdarsanavyūha* found at Gilgit (Vira and Chandra:1772.6-1773.1, 1776.4-5). In addition to its presence as a scriptural pericope, non-Mahāyānist hostility to the Mahāyāna is recorded in contemporary accounts of Buddhism (told, of course, by Mahāyāna narrators). For instance, the philosopher Vasubandhu's biographer records that before Vasubandhu converted to the Mahāyāna, his brother accused him of not believing in the Mahāyāna and constantly attacking and discrediting it (Takakusu:291). Similarly within Hsüan Tsang's *Si Yu Ki* we learn of a fifth-century Sarvāstivādin monk named Vimalamitra who vowed to "cause the learned men of Jambudvīpa [i.e., India] to forget the name of the Great Vehicle and destroy the fame of Vasubandhu" (Beal:196-7). In point of fact, Jaini (133) suggests that this same Vimalamitra may have been the author of the *Abhidharmadīpa*, a text highly critical of Vasubandhu (see note 23).

Finally, perhaps the only single intrinsic property characteristic of everything Mahāyānist is that it is not Hīnayānist, and vice versa. Here we are left with the Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction as a mere structural dualism devoid of specific content, a mere nominalism. This conclusion hardly yields a worthwhile definition of these taxa appropriate for historical research. Nevertheless, it is possible to construct natural, historical, and meaningful taxonomies based upon these *yānas*, wherein all individuals within each taxon possess at least one element in common, and that element does not belong to members of the other *yāna*. To realize this possibility, we must recognize that taxonomic schemes, like maps, are appropriate only to restricted domains. One can create more than one taxonomic scheme using a single set of data. Change the way taxa are defined, the model's conceptual universe, and the categorization of members may change as well. We do not labor within a Linnaean universe where individuals are defined only by the totality of their characteristics. Cave 22's donor can be a both a "Mahāyānist" and a "Hīnayānist," albeit not within the same taxonomic moment. Our approach to Buddhism's history in India must rely upon a hermeneutic sensitive to, and respectful of, the many divergent discursive, historical, institutional, psychological, practical, ideological, and social contexts within which we use these analytic categories. In the end, there is no Mahāyāna/Hīnayāna distinction: there are many.

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