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# From *cakravartin* to *bodhisattva*: Buddhist models for globalization

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## Abstract

This article examines globalization in an Asian context through the lens of two Buddhist concepts: the *cakravartin* and the *bodhisattva*. A *cakravartin* is a ruler who fuses spiritual and political power in his global reign. This article argues that the *cakravartin* represents one model of Buddhist globalization where the spread of the religion coincides with the growing military dominion of a Buddhist king. A *bodhisattva*, on the other hand, is an enlightened being who has chosen to be reborn out of compassion with the entire suffering world. A *bodhisattva* watches over a ‘Buddha field’, or spiritual realm. Each Buddha field has its own laws, culture, language, or even separate forms of time and space. The *bodhisattva* provides a new model for understanding cultural diversity in the absence of a unified political power: the Buddhist world is a transnational network where new identities are negotiated.

**Keywords:** globalization; Buddhism; ancient globalization; *cakravartin*; *bodhisattva*

When and how did globalization begin? Is Wallerstein correct in asserting that a transcultural ‘world system’ can be only be traced back to the global explorations and trade networks of the sixteenth century?<sup>1</sup> Is globalization as a phenomenon inextricably tied to the rise of modern capitalism?<sup>2</sup> Or can forms of globalization be identified in the premodern world as well, as Frank and Gills propose when they see the first ‘world systems’ forming five thousand years ago; as Seland argues when he analyzes Indian Ocean trade; or as Jennings maintains when he identifies globalizing tendencies in Ancient Mesopotamia, Cahokia, or the Indus Valley?<sup>3</sup> A number of studies have demonstrated that globalization is a useful category for understanding long-distance connectivity in antiquity and the middle ages as well as in the modern era, even if early ‘globalizations’ were not primarily transregional economies.<sup>4</sup> In his magisterial work on the history of Islam, for example, Lapidus argues that a worldwide cultural system such as Islam can be understood as a global ‘world system’ even if it is not a ‘world economy’.<sup>5</sup> Voll similarly analyzes the Islamic world as a community of discourse, built on a shared ‘Islamic experience’,

<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1 (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 15; Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2004), x.

<sup>2</sup>Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1, 16.

<sup>3</sup>Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills, ‘The 5000-Year World System: An Interdisciplinary Introduction’, in *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?*, ed. Andre Gunder Frank and Barry K. Gills (London/New York: Routledge, 1993): 1-79; E. H. Seland, ‘The Indian Ocean and the Globalisation of the Ancient World’, *Ancient West and East*, 7 (2008): 67-79; Justin Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup>See Matthew Adam Cobb, ‘Introduction: The Indian Ocean in Antiquity and Global History’, in *Indian Ocean Trade in Antiquity: Political, Cultural, and Economic Impacts*, ed. Matthew Adam Cobb (New York: Routledge, 1998), 6.

<sup>5</sup>Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 551.

rather than a Wallersteinian economic ‘world system’<sup>6</sup>. I argue that it is precisely this formation and continued negotiation of a transregional identity, rather than a shared economy, that defines globalization, whether ancient or modern.

This article analyzes two different forms of transcultural connectivity in the ancient world, both associated with the expansion of Buddhism. I contend that the formation of a premodern transregional Buddhist network must be understood as a form of globalization, and that a shared ideology facilitated the creation of a transregional communal identity. Ancient Buddhism may be understood as a ‘world-system’, but not necessarily in a purely economic sense (although it is also closely associated with a system of trade networks), but in terms of Wallerstein’s more expansive definition of a world-system as ‘a social system, one that has boundaries, structures, member groups, rites of legitimation, and coherence.’<sup>7</sup> To this I would add that the formulation of a new group identity is what makes this type of social ‘world system’ possible.

In my analysis of Buddhist expansion as a form of ancient globalization, I hope to contribute to the larger debates surrounding globalization in the ancient world in two specific ways. First, this article seeks to draw more attention to the role that issues of identity play in globalizing processes; second, it interrogates whether notions of core and periphery, so often invoked in models of globalization are necessary components of all forms of globalization.

I will present two ancient Buddhist concepts, the *cakravartin* and the *bodhisattva*, that may serve as lenses for understanding two different modes of globalization:

1. Globalization as a form of long-distance connectivity between centre(s) and periphery.
2. Globalization as a network of interconnected nodes without a single centre.

This article, like those of Cobb and Høisæter in this Special Issue (henceforth SI), argues that one form of transregional connectivity in the ancient world can be understood as a network with a multiplicity of centres and a multidirectional flow of goods and ideas (the *bodhisattva* model). But I also identify a different model of globalization, the *cakravartin* model, that involves an initial unidirectional process of influence from a chronological and geographical origin point, even if that connectivity may become more multidirectional over time.

The idea of globalization as a network of multiplicities that resists geographical and chronological organization echoes Appadurai’s notion of the global economy as a rhizome or non-linear network (an idea ultimately derived from the French poststructuralists Deleuze and Guattari).<sup>8</sup> The metaphor of the rhizome was first applied to the global spread of Buddhism in Rocha’s work.<sup>9</sup> I argue, however, that it is only possible with one of the two models of globalization (that associated with the *bodhisattva*) to trace a history of Buddhism that is rhizomatic; the other model (that of the *cakravartin*) is what Deleuze and Guattari would call an ‘arboreal’ model that is linear and defined by a vertical hierarchy. But the *cakravartin* model is arboreal in the way of an Indian banyan tree, in that it involves movement out from a centre, but also the continuous creation of new centres.

<sup>6</sup>John Obert Voll, ‘Islam as a Special World System’, *Journal of World History* 5, no. 2 (1994): 219. See also Stefan Reichmuth, “Netzwerk” und “Weltsystem”: Konzepte zur neuzeitlichen “Islamischen Welt” und ihrer Transformation’, *Saeculum* 51, no. 2 (2000): 268.

<sup>7</sup>Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, vol. 1, 347.

<sup>8</sup>See Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33-6; G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup>Cristina Rocha, ‘Buddhism and Globalization’, in *Buddhism in the Modern World*, ed. David L. McMahan (London/New York: Routledge, 2012), 293.

## The *cakravartin* and Buddhist globalization

Although the precise dates for the lifetime of the historical Buddha (Siddhārtha Gautama in Sanskrit, Siddhattha Gotama in Pali), are still debated, there is consensus that Buddhism originated in north India around the fifth century BCE.<sup>10</sup> Although Buddhism began in a specific region at a particular time, it would be an oversimplification to see the expansion of Buddhism as an outward movement from a single centre towards ever more peripheral points. Rather, after the initial rapid expansion from a geographical node in north India, Buddhism soon turns into an expanding network of interconnected locations, where each new node in the network has the potential to become a new centre from which further expansion can happen.

I examine globalization in an ancient Asian context through the lens of two central Buddhist concepts: the *cakravartin* and the *bodhisattva*. Buddhist texts define a *cakravartin* as a world monarch, a benevolent ruler who fuses spiritual and political power in his global reign.<sup>11</sup> A *cakravartin* is the ‘conqueror of the four directions’, and his realm is therefore per definition a global one, extending to the ends of the known world.<sup>12</sup> The term *cakravartin* is first used during the Indian Maurya Empire (322–185 BCE), and is especially applied in later Buddhist literature to the emperor Aśoka (ca. 270–232 BCE), who expanded the borders of the Mauryan Empire and was instrumental in the expansion of Buddhism.<sup>13</sup> Buddhist texts construct an image of Aśoka as an ideal world ruler and the very embodiment of the *cakravartin* ideal. This article argues that the *cakravartin* can be understood as a symbol of one model of Buddhist globalization, one where the outward spread of the religion from a central location coincides with the growing military and ideological dominion of a Buddhist king. I will show, however, that this form of globalization, associated with a *cakravartin*, only represents the initial stage of the formation of a Buddhist world system.

The term *cakravartin* literally means ‘turner of the wheel’ and is closely connected with the image of the Buddhist doctrine as a wheel set in motion by the Buddha at the time of his first public sermon, a metaphor that itself conveys a sense of mobility and expansion.<sup>14</sup> A *cakravartin* is, per definition, someone who is instrumental in keeping the wheel of Buddhism moving. The *cakravartin* becomes the locus for a new sort of globalizing aspiration as he is seen as a monarch with a potential worldwide rule. While a wheel is an appropriate metaphor for the consequent movement of the Buddhist doctrine throughout Asia, it is simultaneously an image that evokes war chariots and conquest and perhaps even Aśoka’s military expansion of his realm.<sup>15</sup> A *cakravartin* is, according to Buddhist texts, an ideal ruler who extends his political territory to the ends of the world while also promoting social order and righteousness. While Buddhism began as a small religious movement in northern India, it expanded into a transregional culture under the auspices of the Maurya emperor Aśoka, himself a convert to the tradition. The reason for

<sup>10</sup>See Heinz Bechert, *When Did the Buddha Live? The Controversy on the Dating of the Historical Buddha* (Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1995).

<sup>11</sup>See for example the Pali text *Dīgha-Nikāya* 17 where the *cakravartin* is described as ‘righteous king who ruled in righteousness, the lord of the four regions of the earth, the conqueror, the protector of his people’, see T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Suttas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 289.

<sup>12</sup>See Michael Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 47.

<sup>13</sup>It is notoriously difficult to assign precise dates to Indian rulers, but in the case of Aśoka, his own inscriptions are helpful. Aśoka’s thirteenth major rock edict mentions communication with five foreign kings: Antiochus, Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magus, and Alexander. These kings have been reasonably identified with Antiochus II Theos of Syria (261–246 BCE), Ptolemy II Philadelphus of Egypt (285–247 BCE), Antigonos Gonatas of Macedonia (276–239 BCE), Magas of Cyrene (ca. 258–250 BCE), and Alexander of Epirus (276–255 BCE); see Romila Thapar, *Aśoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961; repr. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 41. A likely date of composition for the thirteenth rock edict is therefore around 256–255 BCE.

<sup>14</sup>For a discussion of images of mobility and paths in early Buddhism, see Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange Within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2.

<sup>15</sup>Patrick Olivelle, ‘Kings, Ascetics, and Brahmins: The Socio-Political Context of Ancient Indian Religions’, in *Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe*, ed. Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 126.

this expansion of Buddhism was not merely military power, however, but rather Aśoka's deliberate use of Buddhist ideology to construct a new type of translocal identity.<sup>16</sup>

While several modern historians have followed the Buddhist tradition in interpreting Aśoka's enthusiastic promotion of Buddhism as stemming from his own personal piety following a religious conversion,<sup>17</sup> Thapar is surely correct in pointing out that Aśoka's particular version of Buddhism, with its emphasis on social responsibility and religious tolerance, also served a useful role in unifying his complex multicultural empire.<sup>18</sup> Buddhism was not merely the religious tradition that happened to be promoted by the first Indian emperor with globalizing ambitions, but also an integral part of the ideology of expansion itself.

As I have argued elsewhere, the articulation of a transregional identity, as exemplified in Aśoka's edicts, plays a vital part in the cultural expansion of Buddhism.<sup>19</sup> The creation and use of a particular form of non-denominational Buddhist-based ideology in the Asokan edicts helped construct a new type of translocal identity, defined by adherence to a common ethos rather than religious or local affiliation. The creation of a new identity that is global in its aspiration in the rock edicts therefore lays the ideological groundwork for the expansion of the empire itself.

Through his public edicts, carved into rocks and pillars throughout his empire,<sup>20</sup> Aśoka constructed an overarching imperial ideology around the significant Buddhist term *dhamma*, which occurs over one hundred times in his brief edicts.<sup>21</sup> This Middle Indic term, which can be translated as 'duty', 'righteousness', or even 'the teaching of the Buddha' is not, however, in Aśoka's edicts associated with uniquely Buddhist ideas such as the Buddha's four noble truths. It is possible, therefore, that the *dhamma*-centred ideology Aśoka was advocating should not necessarily be identified with Buddhism itself, but rather that it constituted a new non-denominational Buddhist-inspired ideology that was meant to transcend religious differences. Out of Aśoka's edicts, we can see a new form of identity emerging, an identity defined more by adherence to a new common ethos than merely by religious or local affiliation. Olivelle has even argued that Aśoka's ideology, as it emerges from his edicts, may be defined as a form of 'civil religion', a non-sectarian form of nationalism.<sup>22</sup> In fact, in the Greek and Aramaic translations of Aśoka's edicts, found in the far north-western parts of his empire,<sup>23</sup> *dhamma* is rendered in a way that removes it from a Buddhist context altogether and gives it a meaning that transcends traditional religious boundaries: *dhamma* is translated as *eusebia* ('piety') in the Greek inscriptions

<sup>16</sup>This is not to say that military power played no role in Aśoka's programme of political expansion. The emperor expresses deep regret for the loss of life after his successful battle with the Kali gas (thirteenth rock edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 255-6, and D. C. Sirkar, *Inscriptions of Aśoka* (Delhi: Government of India Press, 1957, rev. ed. 1967), 56-8), but nevertheless makes clear that he will still punish those who refuse to behave in accordance with *dhamma*. This edict simultaneously asserts the emperor's kindness and reminds the audience of the extent of his military power, should he choose to use it.

<sup>17</sup>Vincent Smith, *Asoka: The Buddhist Emperor of India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901); Nayanjot Lahari, *Ashoka in Ancient India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). For depictions of Aśoka in ancient literature, see the Sanskrit *Aśokāvādāna* (second century CE), and the Pali *Dīpavaṃsa* (fourth century CE) and *Mahāvamsa* (fifth century CE).

<sup>18</sup>Thapar, *Aśoka*, 2-5.

<sup>19</sup>Signe Cohen, 'A Universal *Dhamma*: Buddhism and Globalization at the Time of Aśoka', in *Globalization and Transculturality from Antiquity to the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Serena Autiero and Matthew A. Cobb (London: Routledge, 2021), 207-25.

<sup>20</sup>Several more Aśokan inscriptions were identified after the publication of the classical Aśokan corpus in Alexander Cunningham, *Corpus inscriptionum indicarum*, vol. 1, *Inscriptions of Asoka*, (1877; repr. Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1961). Norman lists fourteen major rock edicts, two separate rock edicts, two minor rock edicts, seven major pillar edicts, as well as individual rock inscriptions in K. R. Norman, 'The Languages of the Composition and Transmission of the Aśokan Inscriptions', in *Reimagining Aśoka: Memory and History*, ed. Patrick Olivelle, Janice Leoshko, and Himanshu Prabha Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39-40.

<sup>21</sup>Olivelle, 'Kings, Ascetics, and Brahmins', 131.

<sup>22</sup>Patrick Olivelle, 'Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology', in *Reimagining Aśoka*, 173. Olivelle borrows this idea of a 'civil religion', which may be traced back to Rousseau, from Robert Bellah, 'Civil Religion in America', in *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditional World* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 168-89.

<sup>23</sup>Norman, 'The Languages of the Composition and Transmission of the Aśokan Inscriptions', 43.

and *qsyt* ('truth') in Aramaic, terms that convey ethical behavior, but certainly not anything exclusively Buddhist.<sup>24</sup>

In his edicts, Aśoka advocated for non-denominational ethical ideas, applicable to his subjects regardless of rank and geographical location, such as doing much good and little evil, and being kind, generous, truthful, and pure. He wrote about pardoning prisoners sentenced to death,<sup>25</sup> banning the killing of animals,<sup>26</sup> planting fruit trees to benefit the public,<sup>27</sup> and promoting tolerance toward all religions, decreeing that his subjects should listen to and respect the doctrines of others.<sup>28</sup> Aśoka's vision of a religiously diverse empire where everyone lives by a non-denominational code of conduct served to create cultural cohesion and harmony in an otherwise very diverse society. Aśoka even promoted a universal health care plan that included providing necessary medicines for both humans and animals.<sup>29</sup>

Famously, Aśoka also expressed deep regret for the loss of life in a battle he had won against the rebellious Kali ga people.<sup>30</sup> While the emperor's grief over his slain enemies has often been read as a personal testimony to the devastating effects of war, the very public expression of Aśoka's grief in a massive rock edict suggests that the emperor is simultaneously sending a message of hope for future peace and an implied reminder that a king does have the power to destroy rebellions, should he choose to do so. The thirteenth rock edict thus manages to convey both the emperor's deep love for all his people and the futility of any future rebellions against him. Aśoka's compassion for his enemies is in later Buddhist literature interpreted as one of the signs of his status as a universal monarch. A *cakravartin* is supposed to embody the ten royal virtues of generosity, morality, self-sacrifice, truthfulness, kindness, self-control, lack of anger, non-violence, patience, and adherence to righteousness, and Aśoka's grief over the fallen Kali gas serves as further proof of his position as *cakravartin* in the later Buddhist tradition.<sup>31</sup>

In his edicts, Aśoka took the first step towards the creation of a global cultural identity by articulating a unified *dhamma* that is applicable to people across his vast empire, as well as to those foreigners who live on its outskirts. In addition to Aśokan inscriptions in the popular Middle Indic Prakrit dialect, there are also an Aśokan bilingual Greek-Aramaic inscription in Kandahār (present-day Afghanistan), one in Greek, five in Aramaic, and one bilingual inscription in Prakrit and Aramaic, in which the Prakrit is written in Aramaic script. Similar ideas of a universal *dhamma*, applicable to all, are conveyed in all these inscriptions. For whom were these texts written? The use of the vernacular language of Prakrit, rather than the prestigious literary language of Sanskrit, suggests that the emperor's goal was to communicate with as many of his subjects as possible, regardless of their social status.<sup>32</sup> As Thapar has noted, Prakrit was in this time period a language that 'transcended political boundaries and most religious affiliations'.<sup>33</sup> It is, however,

<sup>24</sup>D. Schlumberger and E. Benveniste, 'A New Greek inscription of Asoka at Kandahar', *Epigraphica Indica*, 37, no. 5 (1968): 197; Olivelle, 'Kings, Ascetics, and Brahmins', 131-2.

<sup>25</sup>First separate rock edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 258.

<sup>26</sup>First major rock edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 250, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 46; fourth major rock edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 251, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 46; fifth pillar edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 264, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 73.

<sup>27</sup>Seventh pillar edict, see Thapar, *Aśoka*, 265, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 76.

<sup>28</sup>Seventh major rock edict, Thapar, *Aśoka*, 253, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 51; twelfth major rock edict, Thapar, *Aśoka*, 255, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 55.

<sup>29</sup>Second major rock edict, Thapar, *Aśoka*, 251, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 47.

<sup>30</sup>Thirteenth major rock edict, Thapar, *Aśoka*, 255-6, and Sirkar, *Inscriptions*, 56-8.

<sup>31</sup>Jātaka V. 378, see Donald K. Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 64.

<sup>32</sup>Von Hinüber raises the question of why Aśoka did not compose messages in Dravidian languages in the South; it is curious that the emperor translated his texts into Greek and Aramaic, but not any of the local languages of South India; see Oskar von Hinüber, 'Linguistic Experiments: Language and Identity in Aśokan Inscriptions and in Early Buddhist Texts', in *Reimagining Aśoka*, 195.

<sup>33</sup>Romila Thapar, 'Aśoka: A Retrospective', in *Reimagining Aśoka*, 35. See also Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture, and Power in Premodern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 6-37.

unclear how widespread literacy was in India during Aśoka's reign; Aśoka's edicts are themselves the oldest preserved Indian texts, with the exception of the undeciphered seal inscriptions of the Indus civilization. Was writing known in India in the centuries before Aśoka? While it is possible that writing on perishable materials flourished in India prior to Aśoka, there is no preserved writing that predates his edicts. Falk has even proposed that Aśoka himself may be the inventor of the *kharoṣṭhī* script used in his edicts.<sup>34</sup> If this is the case, Aśoka's audience must have been deeply puzzled by the appearance of his public inscriptions and their intended message. Since Aśoka employed the popular language of Prakrit, rather than more formal Sanskrit, however, I find it reasonable to assume that he wanted to communicate his intentions to people who spoke Prakrit. The fact that several of his inscriptions were also translated into grammatically correct Greek and Aramaic further suggests that his motivation for ordering the carving of the edicts must have been a desire to communicate his ideas as widely as possible, and that some degree of literacy must be ascribed to his audience. The inscriptions can of course still be interpreted as 'a symbolic assertion of imperial presence' as Olivelle claims, but it seems unlikely that his edicts were mere visual symbols intended to impress a completely illiterate public.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to his edicts, Aśoka established numerous *stūpas*, or Buddhist shrines containing relics of the Buddha, throughout his empire. Alongside the royal edicts, the *stūpas* served to establish the emerging religion of Buddhism as a physical, monumental imperial presence throughout the Indian landscape. Pious Buddhist legends claim that Aśoka built a staggering 84,000 *stūpas* in India, but the impossibly high number is likely a way of indicating the significance of relic cult as religious worship under Aśoka.<sup>36</sup> While the construction of *stūpas* containing relics appears to be a pre-Buddhist practice as well, Aśoka appropriated this local form of worship as part of an imperial ideology. So effective was Aśoka's *stūpa* construction – or appropriation of pre-existing *stūpas* – as a reminder of his status as a *cakravartin* that many later Buddhist monarchs took to building *stūpas* precisely to imitate Aśoka in an attempt to establish themselves as *cakravartins* as well.<sup>37</sup>

*Stūpas* are not just visual markers of Buddhist presence, but significant centres of Buddhist practice as well, both for monks and nuns and for lay followers. Worshippers would circumambulate the *stūpas* in order to gain spiritual rewards, and leave gifts to the Buddha or to the monastic centre associated with the *stūpa*.<sup>38</sup> Common gifts included monastic robes, food, land, and medicine.<sup>39</sup> Many *stūpas* developed into building complexes with monasteries, refractories, and assembly halls.<sup>40</sup> Pilgrims often visited sites associated with important Buddhist relics, and the building of new *stūpas* was therefore also a significant boost for long-distance connectivity and the establishment of new monasteries, trade, and pilgrimage networks.<sup>41</sup>

Through his advocacy for the Buddhist concept of *dhamma*, his political and military expansion, and his dispatching of envoys to other realms, Aśoka ushered in a globalizing period in Buddhist history. His edicts and his *stūpas* represent a transformative moment in the history of

<sup>34</sup>Harry Falk, *Schrift im alten Indien: Ein Forschungsbericht mit Anmerkungen* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1993). See also Olivelle, 'Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology', 170.

<sup>35</sup>Olivelle, 'Aśoka's Inscriptions as Text and Ideology', 170.

<sup>36</sup>See Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 68, Susan Whitfield, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas: Material Culture of the Silk Road* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018), 84, John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 124, and Kevin Trainor, *Relics, Ritual, and Representation in Buddhism: Rematerializing the Sri Lankan Theravāda Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997), 40.

<sup>37</sup>Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 72-3.

<sup>38</sup>Whitfield, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas*, 98-9.

<sup>39</sup>Michael Willis, 'Offering to the Triple Gem: Texts, Inscriptions and Ritual Practice', in *Relics and Relic Worship in Early Buddhism: India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Burma*, ed. Janice Stargardt and Michael Willis (London: The British Museum, 2018), 66ff.

<sup>40</sup>Peter Skilling, 'Relics: The Heart of Buddhist Veneration', in *Relics and Relic Worship in Early Buddhism*, 13.

<sup>41</sup>Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, xiii.

Buddhism, a moment when a regional form of practice is reinvented as a universal religion and a new non-local identity is formulated.

### The spread of Buddhism after Aśoka

By the third century BCE, Buddhism had become what Reynolds and Hallisey call a ‘civilizational religion’,<sup>42</sup> a religious tradition associated with high culture and transcending regional boundaries, not unlike Lapidus’ vision of Islam as a world culture in the seventeenth century.<sup>43</sup> Buddhism reached the island of Sri Lanka around the third century BCE; according to Buddhist tradition, the *dhamma* was brought there by a monk by the name of Mahinda, Aśoka’s own son. The king of Sri Lanka eagerly accepted Buddhism, and several Buddhist monasteries were built. In Sri Lanka, a Buddhist canon was first recorded in writing at the fourth Theravāda Buddhist council in the first century BCE. The language used was Pali, a vernacular Middle Indic language that would have been understood by a large percentage of people in India and Sri Lanka, and Sri Lanka soon became a vibrant centre of Pali literature and Buddhist scholarship.

The detailed monastic codes (*vinaya*) of Theravāda Buddhism outlines a complete code of conduct for monks and nuns, down to the tiniest details of daily life, such as when and what to eat, what to wear, what not to say to other monks, and how to avoid even the appearance of sexual misconduct. The *vinaya* codes also outline the various sanctions that are taken against those who break the rules. The *Prātimokṣasūtra* of the Sarvāstivādin school, for example, list four infractions that are so serious that they will lead to immediate expulsion from the monastic community: Engaging in sexual intercourse (‘even with an animal’, the text adds helpfully), stealing, committing murder, and claiming to have supernatural knowledge when this is not the case.<sup>44</sup> Claiming to have supernatural knowledge if one actually does possess such knowledge is also a violation of the monastic code, but this is a lesser infraction that is met with nothing more than a stern reprimand. Other rules prohibit carrying messages from lay followers to their illicit lovers, asking generous lay people for lavish gifts, speaking suggestively to women, or touching money. Many of these rules for monks’ and nuns’ behaviour seem designed to maintain a good working relationship with the lay community; the lay followers should be able to trust that monks will not seduce local women, steal from rich merchants, or make false claims about supernatural abilities to attract attention or donations.

The *vinaya* rules form a part of the Pali Canon (*tipiṭaka*), alongside the compilation of words ascribed to the Buddha (*suttapiṭaka*) and the philosophical explanations of Buddhist ideas (*abhidhammapiṭaka*). When Buddhism spreads throughout Asia, then, what is transmitted is not only ideas, but also practices, rituals, and the very idea of monastic institutions where significant numbers of monks or nuns devote their lives to meditation and studying, while observing appropriate conduct.

Theravāda Buddhism, the ‘School of the Elders’, then spread from Sri Lanka to Southeast Asia. According to the Pali chronicle *Mahāvamsa* (fifth century CE), Buddhism was brought to Burma (*Suvarṇabhūmi*, present-day Myanmar) by two monks, envoys sent by Aśoka himself, in the third century BCE. During the Kingdom of Pagan (849-1297), Theravāda Buddhism flourished in Burma and spread from there into mainland Southeast Asia. Although Theravāda Buddhism may have been introduced to Thailand by emissaries from Sri Lanka early on, the area was dominated by Mahāyāna Buddhism until the thirteenth century, when Theravāda Buddhism was made state

<sup>42</sup>Frank E. Reynolds and Charles Hallisey, ‘Buddhist Religion, Culture and Civilization’, in *Buddhism and Asian History*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Mark D. Cummings (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 8. See also Jørn Borup, ‘Spiritual Capital and Religious Evolution: Buddhist Values and Transactions in Historical and Contemporary Perspective’, *Journal of Global Buddhism* 20 (2019): 49-50.

<sup>43</sup>Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 551.

<sup>44</sup>Georg von Simson, *Prātimokṣasūtra der Sarvāstivādin*, Teil II (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 267-270.

religion in the Kingdom of Sukhotai (1238-1583). Theravāda Buddhism had already been introduced in Laos in the seventh to eighth centuries CE.

While Theravāda Buddhism used Pali, a northern Indian dialect, as a sacred language, the Mahāyāna, or 'Great Vehicle' school frequently used the ancient culture language of Sanskrit instead, supplemented by texts in local languages. Mahāyāna Buddhism reached China via Silk Road trade around the first century CE, and spread from there to Korea, Vietnam, and Japan in the fourth century.

In the seventh century CE, Buddhism was introduced to Tibet by the local king Songtsen Gampo, perhaps due to the influence of his Chinese wife. By what mechanisms did Buddhism continue to spread throughout Asia? Although Buddhism was often patronized by local monarchs, the continued expansion of Buddhism after Aśoka was due to two groups of people: monks and merchants.

This widespread diffusion of Buddhism was closely tied to writing and literacy.<sup>45</sup> While the older Hindu tradition of India had perfected elaborate techniques of memorization in order to transmit sacred texts orally from teachers to initiated students, Buddhism adopted two new communication strategies that played a significant part in its global spread: writing and translation. While the Vedas of Hinduism were meant to be memorized and recited orally in the holy ancient language of Sanskrit, a majority of the Buddhist community initially adopted the vernacular language of Pali. Pali is a constructed language, combining elements of many different Middle Indic regional dialects into a new non-local language that would have been accessible to a large number of people. While Hindus viewed the Sanskrit language as a sacred, primordial reality, rendering the idea of translating the Vedas absurd, the early Buddhists took a far more pragmatic approach to language: language was a mere tool for communicating ideas, and the message of the Buddha could therefore be transmitted in whatever language people could understand. Sanskrit was regarded as too sacred to commit to writing, but there were no similar restrictions on writing down Buddhist texts. Some Asian countries, such as China, already had a long-standing literary tradition before the arrival of Buddhism, but in many other places, the idea of writing was introduced alongside Buddhism itself. Significantly, Indian-based alphabets were often given a local form, and Buddhist texts were translated into the local language or languages. Although Buddhism certainly brought with it Indian ideas and traditions to other parts of Asia, it was often simultaneously instrumental in recording local literary traditions in writing. While the original Pali canon of Buddhist texts, often believed to contain the words of the Buddha, was revered in many Buddhist countries, different Asian cultures nevertheless developed their own local Buddhist canons that include texts translated from Pali or Sanskrit as well as original Buddhist works in the local language. Such local canons include the Chinese *Tripitaka*, the Japanese *Taisho Issaikyo*, the Tibetan *Kanjur* and *Tanjur*, and the Mongolian Buddhist canon. Because vernacularization played a critical role in the very formation of the earliest Buddhist canon in India, it is hardly surprising that the spread of Buddhist culture was not coterminous with the spread of Indian languages. By implication, then, Buddhist identity was not closely tied to language, script, or geographical location, but rather to a shared ideology.

The spread of Buddhism was also closely associated with trade and trade networks. Whitfield claims that there is a 'symbiotic link' between Buddhists and merchants in the early Buddhist world.<sup>46</sup> On an ideological level, trade itself became a metaphor for Buddhist values; the Buddha is often referred to in early Buddhist texts as a 'great caravan leader' (*mahāsārvabhauḥa*), leading his followers from the suffering of *saṃsāra* to their final destination of *nirvāṇa*.<sup>47</sup> On a more practical level, many monasteries were closely allied with traders and their networks and

<sup>45</sup>See Jens Braarvig, 'The Spread of Buddhism as Globalization of Knowledge', in *The Globalization of Knowledge in History*, ed. Jürgen Renn (Berlin: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 2012), 223.

<sup>46</sup>Whitfield, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas*, 85.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 85; Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 33.



supported regional trade both by lending money and warehousing goods.<sup>48</sup> In return, traders and merchants gave substantial donations to monasteries, which helped to maintain the monastic communities. Many *stūpas* and monasteries are located along trade routes, which further facilitated the close relationships between the monastic and merchant communities.<sup>49</sup> When monks and nuns had to travel to other regions and monasteries, they frequently travelled with trading caravans, which made travel for individual monks or nuns a great deal easier.<sup>50</sup>

How does the transregional spread of Buddhism, beginning with the reign of Aśoka, compare to other forms of globalization in the ancient world? Significantly, even though Buddhism initially spread through the military expansion of Aśoka's empire, the main spread of Buddhist religion and civilization was not tied to military power or the hegemony of any one kingdom. Buddhism rose to prominence at a time of expanding Indian trade relations with other parts of Asia, which allowed for a globalizing spread of the tradition and the development of multiple local forms of Buddhist practice. The expansion of Buddhism, however, was not a single event, a movement outward from a powerful centre towards a periphery, but rather a series of complex concentric waves, with several starting points.<sup>51</sup> While Buddhism began in India, India did not remain the centre of all Buddhist civilization, geographically or ideologically. China developed its own distinct form of Buddhism, which spread to Korea and Japan; Tibetan Buddhism became highly influential in Mongolia; and the Theravāda Buddhism of Sri Lanka spread to Southeast Asia.

In post-Aśokan times, Buddhism was no longer an expanding national religion, but an international exchange network where ideas, texts, religious artifacts, and relics, flowed freely across far-flung regions. Epigraphic material has proven to be an excellent source for tracing this expanding network.<sup>52</sup> This network was made possible by a new technology of knowledge, writing, as well as the transregional spread of monastic institutions, which were particularly well suited to the transmission and preservation of that knowledge. Just like the internet has sometimes been identified as a factor in recent forms of globalization, so writing can be seen as a similar transformative technology in ancient Asia that effected improved communication and significant cultural interchange.

The spread of Buddhism necessitated a constant re-negotiation between a transregional Buddhist identity and local identities. Extensive translations from Sanskrit and Pali into highly literary Chinese allowed, for example, Chinese Buddhists to define themselves as Buddhist while remaining immersed in classical Chinese culture. Sometimes, local populations devised creative strategies to argue for the indigenous and local nature of authoritative Buddhist texts. Tibetan Buddhists developed the innovative idea of *termas*, sacred texts or relics that the eighth-century Indian Buddhist master Padmasambhava was said to have hidden in secret places in Tibet. These 'hidden treasures' could then literally be dug up from the Tibetan soil in future generations, and many such *termas* have been identified by pious Tibetan Buddhists. Although these texts or objects have cultural connections to India and to the Indian sage Padmasambhava, their burial and reemergence from the Tibetan soil have made them, in a powerful symbolic sense, indigenous products of the Tibetan land itself.

Significantly, Buddhism possesses not just one, but multiple religious canons, composed in different geographical regions, each with their own spheres of cultural influence. The Pali canon (*tipiṭaka*), codified and written down in Sri Lanka, was enormously influential in Southeast Asia. But while the texts were preserved in their original Pali linguistic form, they were often recorded in local scripts, rendering the canon more accessible and perhaps also more familiar to the local

<sup>48</sup>Todd T. Lewis, 'Story of Sīṃhala, the Caravan Leader', in *Buddhism in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>49</sup>Whitfield, *Silk, Slaves, and Stupas*, 92.

<sup>50</sup>Lewis, 'Story of Sīṃhala, the Caravan Leader', 151.

<sup>51</sup>See Stephen C. Berkwitz, 'The Expansion of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia', in *Dynamics in the History of Religions Between Asia and Europe*, 223.

<sup>52</sup>Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*.

population. Pali texts were also composed in India, as were Sanskrit Buddhist texts, particularly those of the Mahāyāna school. The Chinese *Tripitaka* is a completely separate canon, consisting of texts translated from Sanskrit, as well as original compositions. The Tibetan Buddhist canon consists of texts translated from both Sanskrit and Chinese, as well as original Tibetan works. While the *Kanjur* portion of the Tibetan Buddhist canon consists of sūtras translated from Sanskrit or Chinese, the voluminous *Tanjur* portion contains commentaries and assorted texts. The Tibetan Buddhist canon was in turn translated into Mongolian and exerted a profound influence on Mongolian Buddhism, while the Manchu and Tangut canons are both based on translations of Chinese texts.<sup>53</sup> The Japanese translation of the Chinese *Tripitaka* consists of an astonishing 2,184 texts, including many original works.<sup>54</sup> The tradition of printing texts using xylographs or woodcuts was passed from China to Tibet, where xylographs are still in widespread use.<sup>55</sup> In South and Southeast Asia, however, hand written palm leaf manuscripts have remained far more common than printed books.<sup>56</sup> In spite of all these local differences in textual traditions and modes of transmission, however, the ideal of a single Buddhist *dhamma* and a transregional Buddhist identity has nevertheless persisted to this day.

### From *cakravartin* to *bodhisattva*

After the decline of the Indian Mauryan empire, the notion of the *cakravartin* as an ideal political and worldly figure begins to fade from Buddhist texts, although there are sporadic attempts at identifying *cakravartins* elsewhere. From the third to the sixth centuries, several Chinese Buddhist texts attempted to identify *stūpas* built by Aśoka at various sites in China, despite the historical improbability of Aśoka's builders traversing the Himālayas, and Deeg argues that these texts are likely attempts at legitimizing local Chinese rulers by connecting them with Aśoka's universal rulership as a *cakravartin*.<sup>57</sup>

Some later kings, like the eighth-century Tibetan Khri Srong Lde Brtsan (Trisong Detsen), claimed *cakravartin* status.<sup>58</sup> In Southeast Asia, the Cambodian Jayavarman II, the ninth-century founder of the Khmer Empire,<sup>59</sup> Anawrahta and Kyanzitta of Pagan in the eleventh century,<sup>60</sup> Lu'thai of Sukhothai (fourteenth century),<sup>61</sup> and Tilokarāja of Chiang Mai in the fifteenth century define themselves as *cakravartins*, but in these cases, the titles are mere honorifics, evocations of the power of Aśoka.<sup>62</sup> King Lu'thai even used to carry a great wheel with him while traveling around his kingdom, a visual reminder of his claim to *cakravartin* status.<sup>63</sup> When the term *cakravartin* is used in post-Mauryan Buddhist texts, however, it is more often used in a metaphorical sense, applied to the spiritual figure of the *bodhisattva*, which features prominently in Mahāyāna Buddhist texts.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Lewis Lancaster, 'Buddhist Literature: Its Canons, Scribes, and Editors', in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, ed. W. Doniger (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979), 220.

<sup>54</sup>Harold Coward, 'Scripture in Buddhism', in *Scripture in the World Religions: A Short Introduction*, ed. Harold Coward (London: Oneworld, 2001), 145.

<sup>55</sup>Lancaster, 'Buddhist Literature', 227.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>57</sup>Max Deeg, 'From the Iron-wheel to Bodhisattvahood: Aśoka in Buddhist Culture and Memory', in *Aśoka in History and Historical Memory*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2009), 128.

<sup>58</sup>Walter, *Buddhism and Empire: The Political and Religious Culture of Early Tibet*, 242-5.

<sup>59</sup>Jayavarman embraced Śaivism, rather than Buddhism, as state religion, but was nevertheless inspired by Buddhist articulations of the role of the *cakravartin*; see Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 77. See also David Chandler, *A History of Cambodia*, 3rd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 34-5.

<sup>60</sup>Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 82-4.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 88-9.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>64</sup>The *bodhisattva* ideal does, however, have its origins in Theravāda Buddhism, see Sanath Nanayakkara, 'The Bodhisattva Ideal: Some Observations', in *Buddhist Thought and Ritual*, ed. David J. Kalupahana (New York: Paragon House, 1991), 59.

A *bodhisattva* (literally: an ‘enlightenment being’) is an enlightened person who has chosen to be reborn out of compassion for a suffering world. Although a *bodhisattva* may possess great powers, he or she is not viewed as a political figure, but rather as someone who aspires to bring all living beings to enlightenment. A *bodhisattva* is said to watch over a ‘Buddha field’ (*buddhakṣetra*), or dimension of space and time. Scholars of Buddhism even refer to these Buddha fields as ‘world systems’, in a sense that goes far beyond the Wallersteinian; a Buddha field is an entire universe, stretching in all cardinal directions, and home to countless sentient beings. In a sense, these Buddha fields are alternate dimensions, and only *bodhisattvas* can travel from one to the other. Humans inhabit a Buddha field called Sahā, located ‘in the south’ of this infinite hyperspace.<sup>65</sup>

Each Buddha field has its own laws and inhabitants and may have different cultures, languages, or even separate forms of time and space from other Buddha fields. A *bodhisattva* can travel freely between different Buddha fields but does not try to change their local features; the *bodhisattva*’s only task is to purify the Buddha field by eliminating suffering and bringing all sentient beings in it to spiritual liberation. I argue that even though Buddha fields, as purely religious and philosophical abstractions, have no direct impact on politics, they do nevertheless provide a conceptual paradigm for a new form of globalization in a time of continued Buddhist expansion. Local cultures may (like Buddha fields) be radically different from each other and from the original Indian Buddhist culture, but as long as Buddhist compassion reigns there, nothing needs to change. The idea of a *bodhisattva* governing a Buddha field provides a new model for understanding cultural diversity after the decline of a unified political empire: No longer an empire, the world becomes a network of interdependent cultures with a shared identity running across political (and even cosmic) boundaries.

The transition from a *cakravartin* to a *bodhisattva* as a symbol of Buddhist power is exemplified by the re-interpretation of Aśoka himself as a soteriological figure in China during the realm of the fifth-century Chinese emperor Wu of Liang; a statue of Aśoka from this time period depicts him as a Buddha and bears an inscription associating the Indian emperor with enlightenment and freedom from rebirth.<sup>66</sup> Popular Chinese Buddhist texts similarly describe Aśoka statues with miraculous, salvific powers.<sup>67</sup> Empress Wu Zetian (690-705 CE) of the Tang Dynasty initially gave herself the title *cakravartin*, before adopting the title of Maitreya, the *bodhisattva* of the future, instead.<sup>68</sup> The Pagan King Kyanzittha is similarly referred to as both a *cakravartin* and a *bodhisattva* in an inscription in the Ananda temple.<sup>69</sup> Striving to become a *bodhisattva* is a Mahāyāna ideal, described in great detail in such texts as the *Bodhicāryāvātāra* (ca. 700 CE).

The *bodhisattva* figure becomes a powerful locus for the negotiation of Buddhist identity. A *bodhisattva* is the very epitome of the universal as opposed to the local; his or her sphere of influence is an entire dimension of space-time. While a *bodhisattva* can be reborn in any location, at any time, as male or female, human or animal, the one unchanging part of a *bodhisattva* identity is boundless compassion with all living beings, a compassion that can in some sense be seen as an extension of Aśoka’s articulation of the *dhamma* at the heart of a new Buddhist identity that transcends ethnic, linguistic, and regional boundaries.

<sup>65</sup>Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1989), 224.

<sup>66</sup>Deeg, ‘From the Iron-wheel to Bodhisattvahood’, 130-1.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>69</sup>Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 86.

## Buddhism and globalization

Other globalizing cultures from the ancient world, such as the Roman Empire or the polities which belonged to a wider Hellenistic civilization, often involved a strong political centre whose influence extended over a large surrounding area. How can we understand the continued globalizing tendency in Buddhism even after (and perhaps especially after) the decline of a central Buddhist state?

In the post-Mauryan era, we see a transition from a form of Buddhist globalization that involves expansion from a single centre to a different sort of global connectivity that involves multiple nodes of influence. Post-Mauryan Buddhism becomes a religious and cultural network, or what Goh refers to as a 'Buddhist ecumene',<sup>70</sup> recalling John Tomlinson's definition of globalization as 'complex connectivity'.<sup>71</sup> What held this cultural network together in the absence of a central state? Even when there is no single Buddhist canon, Buddhist ideas traveled widely, as did the material artifacts of Buddhism: Buddha images, votive tablets, and architectural forms like the *stūpa*. Swearer describes these material artifacts as 'emblems of a ritually based galactic polity', but they are also powerful symbols of a Buddhist identity that traverses local and regional boundaries.<sup>72</sup>

I argue that the Buddhist concept of a *bodhisattva* and the attendant notion of a Buddha field may have helped facilitate the idea of multiple diverse regions being connected by and through the Buddhist tradition itself. The Buddhist vision of a cosmic multiverse filled with highly disparate realms, without a centre, but deeply connected to each other through a shared Buddhist identity, serves as a model for a global vision of the human world as well. While the initial *cakravartin* model of Buddhist expansion, exemplified by Aśoka as a virtuous, but powerful Buddhist emperor, to some extent privileged Indian culture over all others, the *bodhisattva* model of globalization fosters the local as well as the universal and does away with notions of centre and periphery.

The *bodhisattva* ideal is not India-centred, and it does not privilege any one geographical region over another. The *bodhisattva*, with boundless compassion for all living beings, regardless of nationality, gender, species, or universe of origin, exemplifies the interconnectedness of all living beings in a larger network of compassion. While *bodhisattvas* are not bound to a particular time or place, they can manifest locally. In Japan, *bodhisattvas* are sometimes identified with the local *kami*, and in Tibet, forms of the divine Tara are seen as *bodhisattvas*.<sup>73</sup> Such identifications can, of course, have political consequences, as seen in the identification with the Dalai Lama with *Chen Rezig*, or Avalokiteśvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion.

A *bodhisattva*, as a Mahāyāna Buddhist ideal, is someone who can travel between various realms, in the widest possible sense, and yet sees all humanity as one.<sup>74</sup> In the words of the current Dalai Lama, who is identified by Tibetan Buddhists as a *bodhisattva* himself:

We should have this [compassion] from the depths of our heart, as if it were nailed there. Such compassion is not merely concerned with a few sentient beings such as friends and relatives, but extends up to the limits of the cosmos, in all directions and towards all beings throughout space.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>70</sup>Geok Yian Goh, 'Beyond the World-System: A Buddhist Ecumene', *Journal of World History* 25 (2014): 493.

<sup>71</sup>John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2. See also Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World*, 3.

<sup>72</sup>Swearer, *The Buddhist World of Southeast Asia*, 67.

<sup>73</sup>According to the *honji suijaku* (本地垂迹) theory, Indian Buddhist figures may choose to appear as *kami* in Japan. A *kami* can therefore simultaneously be a local divinity and trace (*suijaku*, 垂迹) of the true nature (*honji*, 本地) of a Buddha or *bodhisattva*.

<sup>74</sup>Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, 225.

<sup>75</sup>T. Gyatso, *Aryashura's Aspiration and a Meditation on Compassion* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1979), 111.

This articulation of humanity as one and as interconnected may have its roots in the older idea of the *cakravartin's* world-wide realm, but it is here re-interpreted as a *bodhisattva's* vision for a global age.

### Networks, agency, and globalization

The question of agency in globalizing processes is one that several authors in this SI raise. What is the role of individual agents vis-à-vis the role of larger systemic networks in globalization? While earlier historians have often over-emphasized the significance of individuals and neglecting the roles of larger networks, network analysis has often been critiqued for placing too much emphasis on systems and too little on the role of individual agents.<sup>76</sup> To some extent, all the authors in this SI choose a 'middle path' between emphasizing the networks to the exclusion of individuals and focusing on individual agents and neglecting the networks.

While Jiun-Yu Liu's article in this SI takes a bird's eye view and analyzes the complexities of larger exchange networks, it also discusses the role of small groups of specialized craftspeople in these networks. Tomas Larsen Høisæter's article demonstrates the crucial role of small local nodes in larger exchange networks. While acknowledging the importance of larger networks, Høisæter shows that the networks themselves are created and sustained by local communities. Matthew Cobbs's article, similarly, focuses on the neglected role of individual agents from India, such as sailors and merchants, in the Indian Ocean trade, as well as the role of local sea and inland networks. Jeremy Simmons' article moreover analyzes individuals, corporate trading groups, and communities, and states as 'players' in the 'game' of long-distance trade, thereby finding a middle ground between ascribing globalization either to individual agency or to networks.

In a similar fashion, this article has sought to demonstrate that globalization can be understood as the result of both personal and group agency as well as the function of larger networks of exchange. As the case of the *cakravartin* Aśoka demonstrates, individual agency can, in fact, play a significant role in historical processes such as globalization. At the same time, the role of networks must not be underestimated; it is quite likely that Aśoka's global aspirations would have been far less successful had he not been able to utilize pre-existing trade and social networks of exchange in order to promote Buddhism. But as the case of the *bodhisattva* ideology demonstrates, globalization is not always dependent on identifiable individual agency, or on a single centre from which change spreads. I have attempted to show, however, that no matter what the role of larger networks or individual agency may be, ideology and shared practice can play a crucial role in formulating a new global identity.

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<sup>76</sup>See for example Mustafa Emirbayer and Jeff Goodwin, 'Network Analysis, Culture, and the Problems of Agency', *American Journal of Sociology*, 99 (1994): 1411-54.