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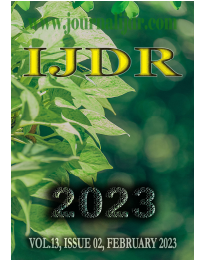
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## INVESTIGATING EXACTLY WHAT THE BUDDHA HAD TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT OF FEMALES

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### ABSTRACT

The scriptures provide evidence of the superiority generated for men through the words and teachings of the Buddha, and they place women in a position of helplessness as a result of this superiority. On the other hand, we have heard thousands of times through the sūtras that Buddha Shakyamuni asserted that within every living being there is a seed of a Buddha who will become, equal beings including everything from dinosaurs to tiny creatures. This assertion was made through the sūtras. If you believe what is written in the sutras, then you will understand that the Buddha excluded women from his teachings because he regarded them as unequal creatures. How can we explain the apparent contradiction between one side, which is the Buddha's expansive, profound, and extremely open view of sentient beings, and the other side, which is the amount of data that can be gathered from the scriptures in the Buddha's previous lives that have been attributed to the Buddha saying and doing things that are in opposition to feminism? The only method to overcome contradictions and bring the truth to light is to conduct a point-by-point logical analysis of the words and dharmas involved.

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## INTRODUCTION

In order to arrive at a conclusion and steer clear of contrived justifications, I believe it is important to bring up a few overarching issues prior to beginning the conversation. Scriptures are the primary means by which people in modern times get knowledge of both the Buddha's words and the Buddha's dharma (the term dharma in this context has retained its original connotation of action). However, what exactly is the sūtra, and how should we interpret it in light of the discoveries that have been made by modern science? The Sanskrit word sūtra comes from the Pāli word sutta, which literally translates to rope used for binding. Sūtras are written works that continuously copy the teachings that the Buddha gave in order to practice, which are referred to as Dharma. Even though there were scriptures in India around the period of the Buddha's life, very few people really made use of them because they were still in a very early stage of development. The Dharma was disseminated by the Buddha, who also provided verbal explanations of its principles. The disciple listens to what is being said with his own ear and then repeats it to those who are unable to hear it firsthand. Following the Buddha's passing, the disciples gathered for a congress and then sat down to read the sutras in an effort to maintain their attention. This gathering was referred to as the assembly (Sangiti). After some time had passed, the sūtras that had been recited in Sangiti were written down and documented.

There has been no research done up until this point to prove two crucial criteria, namely the time when the Buddhist scriptures first appeared in language and which text recorded the first *Buddhist Sūtras*. Both of these questions are extremely important. Concerning the period of time, the *Therāvada Buddhist* School of Ceylon and Burma asserts that the *Buddhist Sūtras* were written in texts before the time of Emperor Asoka (Asoka, 273-232 BC) and that the texts that are currently in existence in Ceylon are natural resources. Furthermore, the school considers the existing texts in Ceylon to be natural resources, whether or not they adhere to orthodoxy. Because the Pāli school has not presented any evidence to support the statement, newer generations of academics have little faith in the validity of this idea. Because the Buddha spoke Pāli and preached in Pāli, the Sri Lankan and Burmese schools both believe that the first Buddhist scripture was written in Pāli. Since the Pāli Sūtra is considered to be orthodox, this supports the schools' claims that the Pāli Sūtra was the language used to write the first Buddhist scripture. The most recent research that makes use of scientific methods suggests that Pāli evolved into inscriptions after the reign of King Asoka. This is because the inscriptions carved on the Asoka pillar are not in Pali. Again, the Buddha did not speak Pali because a small dialect like Pāli, in order to become a great script and language, must certainly rely on a huge dialect in the region, such as Magadhi., where the Buddha used to live); Pali, on the other hand, resembles a dialect in the Sanchi region, which is thousands of miles away from the

Buddha's homeland. The grounds that have just led Buddhists to query if *Pāli* (for example, the word grape) has ever been used to talk, and very few individuals are willing to say that the *Pāli Sūta* is orthodox. The only thing that can be said with absolute certainty is that the *Pāli Sūta*, which is transmitted and conserved as a national treasure in Ceylon, must represent the teaching of the Buddha in a manner that is extremely similar to the original. From the time the Buddhist scriptures arrived in Ceylon (probably orally) until the transition to the Pāli script (at the beginning of the A.D. epoch), it would be another two hundred years later. However, the time that passed from *nirvāṇa* (the year that Buddha passed away) until Buddhism entered Ceylon is estimated to have been three hundred years long. How can it be determined that it is the *Pāli* scriptures every time they are written on a palm leaf or carved into a stone face? Since the sutras were passed down orally for a half millennium, then copied with an embryonic script, and since all of these *Sūttas* have not yet been entered into the system, how can it be determined that it is the *Pāli* scriptures? Has not any additions or modifications been made to it?

Even more troublesome was the course of the *Mahāyāna sūtras*, which were composed in *Sanskrit*. *Sanskrit* was the language and script of the *Brahmin* religious and aristocratic class during the lifetime of the Buddha. This was the class that was responsible for the birth of the *Sanskrit* civilization. The Muslim troops invaded India, fought a war of conquest that lasted for four hundred years, obliterated the *Sanskrit* civilization in its entirety, 'burnt all the heretical writings' (that is Buddhist scriptures), and 'buried the bald heads' (i.e. Buddhist monks and nuns). After that point, the *Sanskrit* language is no longer taught in India. We are fortunate that some of them made it to Tibet in the north and then on to China along the silk road. A script that could convert *Sanskrit* into Tibetan did not become available in Tibet until the seventh century. A thousand years after the Buddha attained *nirvāṇa*, prominent Indian teachers began to arrive in China to interpret the *sūtras*. Because the translation is done under such unique time constraints, and because it relies on very rudimentary techniques of audiovisual, note-taking, and printing, how can we be sure that it is *Sanskrit* every time it is recorded in the context card? or tissue paper, or engraved on the stone surface, and that it has not been added to or altered in any way?

One further thing to keep in mind is that the ancient people in the civilizations of India and China had a deep appreciation for the written word. Not even a shred of paper with writing on it is discarded; it is filed away instead. The person in charge of the Buddhist studies program at Princeton University in 1970, Kenneth Ch'en, drew a comparison between the people of China searching for Buddhist scriptures and fishermen who "throw their nets into the sea and collect all the big fish, small fish, clams, etc. sandstone...".<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is imperative that we keep in mind that the Buddhist scriptures, whether written in *Pāli* or *Sanskrit*, are the product of the highest levels of human thought, logic, and imagination. At the same time, however, we must study Buddhist scriptures with a deductive mind in order to clear away unnecessary clutter. The use of filters is not sufficient. In order to properly understand the Buddhist scriptures, we need to keep an open mind and be adaptable. Because the Buddha had previously imparted a number of teachings, he used the analogy of a master painter to describe the process, describing how the painter would add some ingenious touches to a silkscreen while simultaneously arranging the overall scheme of things and letting the latter enlighten, a great religion, whose practice is guided by the fundamental truths that underpin and justify. Latecomers such as *Asanga* and *Vasubandhu* five hundred years ago from *nirvāṇa*; latecomers such as *Nagarjuna* seven to eight hundred years from *nirvāṇa*; latecomers such as *Bodhidharma*, *Zhikai*, and *Dushun* more than a thousand years from *nirvāṇa*. Not to mention the fact that individuals in China and India do not have access to the media; how can preconceptions and contradictions be avoided while formulating and conveying concepts?

We now return to the conversation that took place between the Buddha and Ananda, who recounted the Buddha's disparaging words against women, in light of the fact that we have such a distinct and adaptable vision of the structure of the Buddhist texts. According to Alfred Foucher, the leader of the Buddhist research program of French scientists in Asia, the conversation took place around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on a hospital bed, just prior to the Buddha's passing:

- “- *World-Honored One, please instruct me on how I should behave with women.*  
 - *Discontinue all further contact with them.*  
 ‘*But, World-Honored One, how can we prevent ourselves from coming into contact with them?*’  
 - *Ananda, if you meet, avoid conversing.*  
*So, tell me, what exactly do they say to you?*  
 - *The only way out is to keep a watchful eye on everything at all times.*”<sup>2</sup>

Ananda was considered to be the hands and feet of the Buddha due to their intimate relationship. He is a gentleman, a member of the *Shakyamuni* family, and, much like the Buddha, he possesses a charismatic personality that endears him to a large following. As a result of the fact that she is young, stunning, and very handsome, Ananda is admired by females. Because of his laid-back nature and easygoing demeanor, he was easily swayed by a few ladies whose tempers would occasionally flare. The Buddha was aware of this, so he used his enlightened powers to cleanse him of his transgressions. The sutras also instruct the Buddha to look into Ananda's prior lives, during which he should be aware that Ananda committed the offense of deserting his wife and children in one of his previous incarnations. In addition, the Buddha, despite having a great deal of affection for his devoted disciple, chose not to elevate him to the status of arahant before he died away. The reasons for this decision are detailed above.

From this vantage point, the consistency of the issue may be seen. It was solely for the sake of asking the Buddha directly about his practice that Ananda posed his query, and the Buddha only answered Ananda personally because of his intimate familiarity with Ananda's persona. The Buddha simply restated the teachings he had previously given to the student whom he loved. It was inappropriate for Ananda to ask the Buddha such a question while he was nearing the end of his life, and it was much more inappropriate for him to repeat this statement to the masses as a teaching of the Buddha that is applicable to all sentient beings. Men, need to avoid women. It was because of Ananda that the *sūtras* recorded exactly what the Buddha had taught, but it was also because of him that the Buddha was sometimes misinterpreted. Ananda is a person who is as honest as counting. This situation is rather typical. In another statement found in the Buddhist scriptures, women are categorized into seven different types, ranging from immorality and thievery to virtuous conduct and kindness. The model that the Buddha valued the most was the calm woman. This phrase is sometimes interpreted as demeaning women's regular participants. In his book *Buddhism and Women*, which was published by Regulus in 1980, the Japanese scholar Y. Iwamoto analyses the scriptures and provides an in-depth explanation of this particular subject. According to him, the Buddha's viewpoint on women is documented in six *sūtras*, and these *sūtras* divide females into seven distinct categories:

1. The *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, the Female *Sattabhariya* portion (Seven sorts of women), *Pāli Nikāya*.
2. The *Ekottara Āgama Sūtra*, which is a Chinese *Āgama* and translates as "Increasing the most a function".
3. The *Asoka Datta Vyākaraṇa Sūtra*, Chinese is A-sou-ta-ching (The art of reaching *Sūtras*).
4. The Chinese *Āgama* and the Buddhist idea of the female jade.
5. The *Nu-Huangshi A Female Sūtras* of the Chinese *Āgama* tradition
6. The *Nu-Huangshi Sūtras*, Chinese *Āgama*.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ch'en, Kenneth Kuan Sheng. *Chinese Transformation of Buddhism*. Vol. 1351. Princeton University Press, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Foucher, Alfred; "La vie du Bouddha, d'après les textes et les monuments de l'Inde"; *Revue Philosophique de la France Et de l'Inde* (1951); p. 266.

The account told in *Sūtra* 1 describes the time when the Buddha was living at the home of *Anathapindica*, and he was instructing the elderly man's daughter-in-law, *Sujata*, who was already well-knowledgeable about Buddhism. The Buddha classified females into seven distinct groups:

- a. People who are malicious;
- b. People who are greedy and steal;
- c. Individuals who are talkative and aggressive;
- d. The sort of person who makes a good mother;
- e. The type of person who makes a good sister.
- f. The kind that is calm and tolerant makes for an excellent buddy;
- g. The security type typically appreciates having a family around them.

The three types that came before it will be punished for all of eternity in *samsara*; the four types that came after it, if nurtured correctly, will produce the desired result. Because the Buddha is depicted in the *Sujata* as aspiring to live like the seventh form of a woman after listening to the preaching, the *sūtra* also gives the impression that the Buddha favored the seventh and final type of woman. The second *sūtra*, titled *Ekottara Āgama*, places women into one of four simpler categories: those with the vocation of motherhood; hard-working people to be the breadwinner of the family; a person with a stubborn and ferocious disposition; and people who are aware that security and commonality are both common. As in *sūtra* first, the third *sūtra*, titled *Asoka Datta Vyākaraṇa*, discusses the Buddha's perspective on the seven different categories of women.

The fourth *sūtra*, which is known as "Buddha's idea of the jade family business" discusses married women in particular and categorizes women into the following five classes:

- a. love and protect her husband as if he were a child;
- b. fear her husband as if he were the lord of the house;
- c. respect for her limited husband, as if he were a big brother;
- d. to be a servant in order to serve her husband, and
- e. lovingly views her husband as though half of her soul has been separated into another flesh.

Despite the fact that *sūtras* fifth and sixth have names that are extremely similar to those of *sūtras* first through fourth, the classification is determined by the first *sūtras*. In addition, the ten unfortunate events that befell the woman in the book are detailed in the three scriptures numbered fourth, fifth, and sixth.

1. The birth of a girl, the parents are not happy, and take it as a misfortune;
2. Having foster care is also reluctant;
3. Growing up to worry about getting married;
4. Having a husband, one step must also ask for permission;
5. When getting married, they must break up with their parents' families;
6. Having to live off the husband's family;
7. Very heavy pregnancy;
8. Giving birth is very dangerous;
9. Always afraid of her husband leaving;
10. Life as a wife and mother is not free.

Iwamoto, a scholar, provides an in-depth explanation of the classification of women in the aforementioned scriptures as well as an explanation of the living conditions described in the *sūtras* about each type of woman. Iwamoto performed an analysis of the *sūtras* concerning the calamity that befell women and demonstrated that only the Buddhist scriptures at that time spoke of the woes that had been amassed for many generations in the past due to the fact that dissatisfied ideas had been passed down. Iwamoto comes to the conclusion that in general, if we read and understand the passages of *sūtras* about women, it is apparent that the Buddha preached the

concept of the prior concept of woman as well as the present concept of woman<sup>4</sup>. This is what Iwamoto believes to be the case. He did not accept the deplorable reality of women; rather, he wanted to show his contemporaries clearly the good points, the wholesome condition in everything, and the dignity of women, far from the ugly image and harm that traditional Indian society has ascribed to women. He did not accept the deplorable reality of women<sup>5</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Borrow Iwamoto's opinion, to sum up exactly what the Buddha had to say female that he wanted to show his contemporaries clearly the good points, the wholesome condition in everything, and the dignity of women. Later individuals studied the *sūtras*, and they forgot that their job was to continually give a concept of the Buddha. Instead, they pointed out that the weak position of women was where they wanted to lead. Therefore, if one were to cite from such a paragraph without repeating it, it would almost always suggest that one had purposefully or inadvertently distorted the Buddha's opinion, leading to confusion among the subsequent audience.

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<sup>3</sup> Yuichi, Kajiyama. "Women in Buddhism." The Eastern Buddhist 15, no. 2 (1982): 53-70.