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# SOMMARIO

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## DISCUSSIONI E RICERCHE

# LISTS AS DYNAMIC DEVICES IN EARLY BUDDHIST DOCTRINE AND TEXTUAL TRADITION

Bart Dessein

## 1. Introduction

Regardless of their school affiliation, the numerous extant *sūtra*s typically depict the Buddha as instructing his disciples through one by one explaining the different elements of a numerical list.[1] Also the extant Vinaya texts, i.e., texts with rules for monastics and regulations for the practical arrangement of the monastic order, abound in such numerical lists.[2] This use of numerical lists – called *mātikā* in Pāli and *mātṛkā* in Sanskrit – must undoubtedly have started as a mnemotechnic aid in oral transmission.[3] It should in this respect be reminded that Buddhism arose within a Brahmanic context,[4] and that it has been suggested that the Brahmins – who joined the Buddhist order – are known for their memorizing skills.[5]

While numbers and standard combinations of elements are loaded with symbolic meaning in many religious and philosophical traditions – Abraham's seven sons, the ten commands, the twelve apostles, the opposing forces Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, the threefold Vedic knowledge (*trayī vidyā*), *ātman* and *brahman*, *yin* and *yang*, … – the presence of numerical lists in Buddhism is so prominent that even for someone who is only superficially acquainted with the doctrine, the term 'Buddhism' will immediately be associated with such lists as the four noble truths (*āryasatya*) or the concept of the eightfold noble path (*aṣṭāṅgika mārga*). It is probably true to say, however, that in Buddhism these numerical lists have served to structure and expound the doctrine, have become the vehicle of doctrinal development and the matrix for the textual format in

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[1] The Pāli Theravāda *sutta*s are preserved in five collections: *Dīghanikāya* (*DN*), *Majjhimanikāya* (*MN*), *Saṃyuttanikāya* (*SN*), *Aṅguttaranikāya* (*AN*), and *Khuddhakanikāya*. In Chinese, apart from a multitude of individually translated *sūtras*, four collections of *sūtras* are extant: the *Chang ahan jing* (T. 1, no. 1; *Dīrghāgama*) that roughly corresponds to the Pāli *Dīghanikāya* and that is attributed to the Dharmaguptaka school; the *Zhong ahan jing* (T. 1, no. 26; *Madhyamāgama*) that roughly corresponds to the Pāli *Majjhimanikāya* and the *Za ahan jing* (T. 2, no. 99; *Samyuktāgama*) that roughly corresponds to the Pāli *Saṃyuttanikāya*, both attributed to the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda school; and the *Zengyi ahan jing* (T. 2, no. 125; *Ekottarāgama*) that roughly corresponds to the Pāli *Aṅguttaranikāya* and that has been attributed to the Mahāsāṃghika school.

[2] The extant collections are the Pāli Vinaya of the Theravāda school, the *Wufen Lü* (T. 22, no. 1421) of the Mahīśāsaka school, the *Mohesengqi lü* (T. 22, no. 1425) of the Mahāsāṃghika school, the *Sifen lü* (T. 22, no. 1428) of the Dharmaguptaka school, the *Shisong lü* (T. 23, no. 1435) of the Sarvāstivāda school, and the *Genben shuo yiqie you bu lü* (T. 23, no. 1442) of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school.

[3] Other important mnemonic devices for an oral transmission are redundancy, the use of stock phrases, and versification. See Gombrich 1990, pp. 21-24.

[4] On the precise relation of Buddhism to Brahmanism, and a challenge to the traditional view that Buddhism originated in reaction to Brahmanism: see Bronkhorst 2011.

[5] See von Hinüber 1989, p. 68; Gombrich 1990, p. 23.

which the doctrine is outlined, to a larger extent than in any other tradition. The following pages provide an analysis of these dynamic uses and functions of numerical lists in Early Buddhism.

## 2. Early Doctrine and the Creation of Standardized Lists

Touching upon the council (*saṃgīti*) of Rājagṛha (present-day Rajgir in Uttar Pradesh) on which five hundred disciples of the Buddha are recorded to have assembled shortly after the demise of Śākyamuni Buddha,[1] the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayakṣudrakavastu*, a text that regulates the details of monastic life within the Mūlasarvāstivāda order, informs us that:

> At that moment, Kāśyapa deliberated [as follows]: "People of later generations will have little knowledge and blunt faculties, and their explanations of the [Buddhist] texts will [therefore] not lead to profound understanding. Would it be suitable that I now explain the *mātṛkā*s myself, wishing that the meaning of the scriptures (*sūtra*) and of the rules of discipline (*vinaya*) is not lost?" Having thus reflected, he submitted his consideration to a motion accompanied by a single formal question (*jñaptidvitīyakarman*) in order to inform the community (*saṃgha*) [of his intention]. The community agreed and, thereupon, an elevated seating was erected [from which he] proclaimed the so-called four applications of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), the four forms of correct abandoning (*samyakpradhāna*), the four footings of supernatural power (*ṛddhipāda*), the five faculties (*indriya*), the five powers (*bala*), the seven members of enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*), the eightfold noble path (*āryamārga*), four forms of fearlessness (*abhaya*), […] to all *bhikṣu*s (monks).[2]

Kāśyapa's deliberation that the *mātṛkā*s should be explained «wishing that the meaning of the scriptures (*sūtra*) and of the rules of discipline (*vinaya*) is not lost» shows the great importance that was attributed to these numerical lists as comprising the essence of the doctrine that had been expounded by the Buddha, and as instruments to – within a context of oral transmission – preserve the correct interpretation of this doctrine. As Kāśyapa is one of the first five disciples of the Buddha and as, according to tradition, the above event occurred shortly after the demise of Śākyamuni Buddha, the sanctioning of the *mātṛkā*s and their explanation by the monks who had assembled on this allegedly first Buddhist council, brings the existence of an explanatory practice with respect to *mātṛkā*s back to the very beginnings of Buddhist history, and portraits it as a fundamental Buddhist practice.

That «People of later generations will have little knowledge and blunt faculties», and that «their explanations of the [Buddhist] texts will [therefore] not lead to profound understanding», predicts a moment when the precise meaning of scriptures and rules of discipline will have become unclear to the monastic community. It is not difficult to imagine that, in such circumstances, discussion on the correct meaning of the words of the Buddha would ensue, and that the necessity to explain the elements of the numerical lists that are included in *sūtras* and Vinaya texts and the necessity to sanction this explanation would be felt all the more in a situation in which existing uncertainty about the precise meaning of the words of the Buddha were aggravated by competing doctrines. Such circumstances are mentioned in the *Saṃgītisūtra* and the *Saṃgītiparyāya*. The *Saṃgītisūtra* says:

[1] On the historicity of this council: see Prebish 1974.

[2] T. 24, no. 1451: 408b2-8.

[I]n another place, there were the heretic Nirgraṇṭha Jñātiputra and others. They had uttered light slander concerning the *śrāvaka bhikṣu*s, and wanted to destroy them and to fight with them. They proclaimed untrue words and all kinds of slander.[1]

On which the *Saṃgītiparyāya* comments as follows:

At that moment, Śāriputra told the community of *bhikṣu*s: "In this city of Pāpā, Nirgraṇṭha [Jñātiputra] and his disciples were abiding in a community that knew no shame, and they were calling themselves to be masters. Not long after this man has died, his disciples join two-by-two, and they are arguing and are mutually confused; they are offensive, and each of them is saying they explain the [true] doctrine and *vinaya* and no-one else is. […] Of what their teacher has taught them, each follows what suits him. […] We now have to listen to the Buddha who, abiding in the world, harmoniously unites the doctrine and the *vinaya*, and we should not let it happen that, when the Tathāgata is in *parinirvāṇa,* the disciples of the World-honored One [start to] struggle".[2]

Knowing, further, that the *Saṃgītiparyāya* probably is the oldest extant doctrinal text of the Sarvāstivāda school, and most likely has to be dated during the lifetime of the Buddha,[3] this further sustains the suggestion made above that the practice of explaining the elements of numerical lists goes back to the very beginnings of Buddhist history. This practice, and the sanctioning of this explanation, must gradually have developed into the recognition of a set of such numerical lists as authoritative and as representative of the doctrine as a whole. This explains the occurrence of the term '*Mātṛkāpiṭaka*,' i.e., adding the element '*piṭaka*': canonical collection of texts. In the *Aśokarājāvadāna* (Tale of Exploits of King Aśoka), e.g., we read the following:

Kāśyapa deliberated [as follows]: 'I now have to recite the *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* myself, and have to proclaim the *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* to the *bhikṣu*s: the so-called four applications of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), the four forms of correct abandoning (*samyakpradhāna*), the four footings of supernatural power (*ṛddhipāda*), the five faculties (*indriya*), the five powers (*bala*), the seven members of enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*), the eightfold noble path (*āryamārga*), the four things that are difficult to be done (*duṣkara*), […]'.[4]

Mentioning the «recitation» of the *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* alludes to an oral origin of a *mātṛkā* 'collection'. That a separate authoritative collection of *mātṛkā*s – a *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* – must have existed prior to the moment the originally orally transmitted texts were submitted to writing, an undertaking that to all probability started around the 1st century BCE,[5] is also suggested in the *Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*. This text records that the Buddha referred to the «recitation» of the Sūtra, the Vinaya and the *Mātṛkā* by old, middle-aged and young monks in the context of a dispute.[6]

[1] T. 1, no. 12: 227b7-10.

[2] T. 26, no. 1536: 367b8-24. This event is also recorded in *DN* III 117-118, *DN* III 209-210, and *MN* II 243-244.

[3] See T. 41, no. 1821: 8b24-c13. See also FRAUWALLNER 1964, p. 71; WILLEMEN *et alii* 1998, p. 177.

[4] T. 50, no. 2042: 113c2-9; T. 50, no. 2043: 152a15.

[5] See NORMAN 1992, p. 248. NORMAN 1993, p. 280 suggests that Buddhist texts started to be submitted to writing in the 2nd century BCE.

[6] T. 22, no. 1425: 334c20-22. The allusion to an oral origin of a *mātṛkā* collection is further corroborated in the canonical references to the *vinayadhara*, *dhammadhara* and *mātikādhara*. See for this GOMBRICH 1990, p. 25. Jan Willem de Jong (1979) refers to the mentioning of reciting the *Daśottarasūtra*, i.e., a very early type of *mātṛkā* texts, several of the categories of which also occur in the Sarvāstivādin *Saṃgītiparyāya*, on the first council. See also T. 22, no. 1421: 191a15 ff. and T. 22, no. 1428: 968b15 ff.

Mentioning of a *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* and the abundance of lists in the transmitted Abhidharma texts have led to the suggestion that *mātikā* / *mātṛkā* must be the early name for 'Abhidhamma (Pāli) / Abhidharma (Sanskrit),' the third of the traditional three collections of Buddhist literature, parallel with and complementary to the *Sūtrapiṭaka* and the *Vinayapiṭaka* (the compilation of which is in the Buddhist tradition dated back to the already mentioned council of Rājagṛha).[1] As will be argued below, rather than being synonymous with 'Abhidharma,' the *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* should be seen as the forerunner of what became known as the Abhidharma: the literature in which the exposition of the early numerical lists of elements further developed.[2]

## 3. Mātṛkās as Dynamic Devices in the Development of Buddhist Doctrine

The *Dharmaguptakavinaya* informs us that the compilation of the *Abhidharmapiṭaka* was the result of an oral recitation.[3] That early Abhidharma texts indeed must have originated in an oral / aural milieu is confirmed by chronological arguments and arguments of textual development.[4] It is further likely that the practice to sanction one specific interpretation of the meaning of the elements enumerated in a given *mātṛkā* against another interpretation gained importance in a period in which sectarian disagreements and discussions between different Buddhist groups had become prominent.[5] Along with the transition from an oral/aural transmission of the word of the Buddha to a written transmission, these polemical discussions were written down in increasingly intricate texts.[6] In this way, the *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* developed in the *Abhidharmapiṭaka*: the collection of texts in which the philosophical positions of, especially, the dogmatic schools of *Nikāya* Buddhism, i.e., schools that originated due to dogmatic disagreements, are articulated. In this process of formation of an *Abhidharmapiṭaka*, the original *mātṛkā*s that had been culled from *sūtra*s and Vinaya texts were not only adapted to suit doctrinal interpretations and developments, but they also became the force of doctrinal development themselves.

[1] See Rhys Davids and Stede 1992: s.v. *mātikā*; Edgerton 1953: s.v. *mātṛkā*; Lamotte 1958, p. 164; Norman 1983, p. 96. The precise meaning of the Sanskrit term '*mātṛkā*' (Pāli: *mātikā*) is not fully clear. The Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, *Shi song lü*, T. 23, no. 1435: 449a19 ff. identifies the Abhidharma with teachings that are presented in list form. The fifth century Buddhaghosa understood *mātikā* as part of *mātikādhara* as referring to the lists of rules for fully ordained monks and nuns. See *Manorathapūraṇī* II 189, III 382. See also Pali Vinaya V 86, and Gethin 1992, pp. 158-159.

[2] Bronkhorst 1985, p. 318 states the following: «There is evidence that there were Abhidharma-like activities going on well before the Sūtras of the Sūtrapiṭaka had achieved anything like their present shape». Discussing an inscription of the 3rd century CE in Nāgārjunikoṇḍa (Andhra Pradesh) that mentions five '*mātuka*' in an account of a gift done to the Aparamahāvanaselīyas, Bareau 1947-1950, p. 4, argues that these five '*mātuka*' may well be the summary of the Abhidharma of this sect, that, even at that late moment, did not yet possess an *Abhidharmapiṭaka* as such. For the concerned inscription: see *Epigraphia Indica* XX, p. 20. See also Bareau 1955, p. 21 ff.; Lamotte 1958, p. 19; Gethin 1992, pp. 158-160, 162; Willemen *et alii* 1998, pp. 13-14; Dessein 2012, pp. 142-143.

[3] T. 22, no. 1428: 968b15 ff. This oral recitation is connected to Ānanda, another of the first five disciples of the Buddha, in *Sumaṅgala* (Davids and Carpenter 1968, vol. 1, p. 17), *Aṭṭhasālinī* (Bapat and Vadekar 1942, p. 3), *Samantapāsādikā* (Takakusu and Nagai 1975, p. 18), T. 1, no. 1: 1a9-10; T. 49, no. 2030: 14b8; T. 22. no. 1428: 968b25-26; T. 24, no. 1463: 818a28-29.

[4] See Dessein 2012.

[5] Cox 1995, pp. 30-31, states that the Abhidharma texts that developed from *mātṛkā*s increasingly became polemical, and are characterized by an increasing «attempt to cogently summarize salient doctrinal positions and yet also refute, point by point, positions thought to represent rival groups».

[6] See Dessein 2012, p. 125.

The probably best known adaptation of existing numerical lists is the formation of the standardized list of 'thirty-seven aids to enlightenment' (*saptatriṃśadbodhipakṣa*). In the above quoted passages of the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayakṣudrakavastu* and of the *Aśokarājāvadāna*, Kāśyapa starts his exposition of the doctrine with enumerating the four applications of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*), the four forms of correct abandoning (*samyakpradhāna*), the four footings of supernatural power (*ṛddhipāda*), the five faculties (*indriya*), the five powers (*bala*), the seven members of enlightenment (*bodhyaṅga*), and the eightfold noble path (*āryamārga*). Although these texts do not present these thirty-seven elements as a closed unit – in the *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayakṣudrakavastu*, they are followed by, among others, four forms of fearlessness (*abhaya*), and in the *Aśokarājāvadāna*, they are followed by, among others, the four things that are difficult to be done (*duṣkara*) – these thirty-seven elements developed into a new standardized list, called: 'the thirty-seven aids to enlightenment': application of mindfulness on the body (*kāya*), on feelings (*vedanā*), on thoughts (*citta*), and on factors (*dharma*); correct abandoning produced from desire-to-do (*chanda*), from energy (*vīrya*), from thoughts (*citta*), and from deliberation (*mīmāṃsā*); desire-to-do (*chanda*), energy (*vīrya*), thoughts (*citta*), and deliberation (*mīmāṃsā*) as footings of supernatural power (*ṛddhipāda*); the faculties (*indriya*) faith (*śraddhā*), energy (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*prajñā*); the members of enlightenment (*saṃbodhyaṅga*) energy (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), joy (*prīti*), tranquility (*praśrabdhi*), equanimity (*upekṣā*), concentration (*samādhi*)), and investigation into factors (*dharmapravicaya*); and correct effort (*samyagvyāyāma*), correct mindfulness (*samyaksmṛti*), correct view (*samyagdṛṣṭi*), correct conceptualizing (*samyaksaṃkalpa*), correct speech (*samyagvāc*), correct action (*samyakkarmānta*), correct livelihood (*samyagājīva*), and correct concentration (*samyaksamādhi*) as eight members of the path. The repeated occurrence of some elements (*dharma*) in this list of thirty-seven and the simultaneous categorization of some elements in different sub-groups point to it that this list is a combination of previously existing separate lists that were not thought of as a unity from the outset. That this list of thirty-seven elements is mentioned in a number of *sūtra*s and Vinaya texts, suggests that the earlier standardized lists of fours, fives, sevens and eights had already been combined to this new list of thirty-seven prior to the moment the *sūtra* and Vinaya texts were transmitted to writing.[1] This list of thirty-seven elements must have been highly esteemed already at an early moment, as it is sometimes stated that practicing the items of this list is the way to make an end to defilement (*āsrava*), i.e., the way to attain liberation.[2] This list is therefore also presented as the teaching of the Buddha in a nutshell.[3]

The importance of this standardized list of thirty-seven elements did not prevent its further development. As these thirty-seven elements – the teaching of the Buddha in a nutshell – are 'psychic characteristics' (*dharma*), and as it is the ultimate aim of the Buddhist doctrine to reach *nirvāṇa* through meditative states, it may not come as a surprise that some *sūtra*s add a list of four stages of meditative attainment (*dhyāna*) to this list of

[1] *DN* II 120; *DN* III, 102; *DN* III 127-8; *MN* II 238-239; *MN* II 245; *SN* III 96; T. 1, no. 26: 753c6-7. See also *MN* III 289-90; *SN* V 49-50; *AN* V 175-6; T. 2, no. 99: 87c2-5. See also Stache-Rosen 1968, p. 8; Bronkhorst 1985, p. 305; Cox 1995, p. 7.

[2] *SN* III 153-154, *AN* IV 125-127, T. 2, no. 99: 67a28-c1.

[3] I.e. in a *sūtra* quotation in T. 26, no. 1539: 544a12-16, 544c4-7, 545a25-28. Also in *MN* II 245, the Buddha summarizes his teaching in this list of 37 elements. See also T. 1, no. 26: 753c6 ff.

thirty-seven, bringing the total number of elements in the list to fourty-one.[1] In the eventual systematized 'path to liberation,' a philosophical construct that must have been created around the beginning of the common era and is known to us especially through Theravādin and Sarvāstivādin philosophical texts,[2] it is to these meditative stages that the function of obtaining knowledge (*jñāna*) and abandoning defilements (*āsrava* / *kleśa*) was attributed.[3] In this systematized 'path to liberation,' further, along with the development of the doctrine, even elements that are of non-Buddhist origin and that had been rejected in the early tradition became integrated as part of canonized *mātṛkā*s and integral part of the Buddhist doctrine. One such example is the list of four immaterial (*ārūpya*) attainments that, in the process of attaining liberation, are presented as equivalent to and as alternative for the four stages of meditative attainment (*dhyāna*).[4] The origin of these four immaterial attainments most likely has to be situated in Jain or related circles.[5]

Another important example of how the early *mātṛkā*s were redesigned to suit philosophical developments is the standardized list of twelve members of the chain of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). As this list symbolizes transmigration and deliverance thereof, it can be claimed to represent the fundament of the Buddhist doctrine and as, in this sense, equal in importance to the list of four noble truths (*āryasatya*).[6] The twelve members of the standardized list of dependent origination are: (1) ignorance (*avidyā*), (2) conditioning factors (*saṃskāra*), (3) perceptual consciousness (*vijñāna*), (4) psychophysical complex (*nāmarūpa*), (5) six senses (*ṣaḍāyatana*), (6) contact (*sparśa*), (7) feeling (*vedanā*), (8) craving (*tṛṣṇā*), (9) grasping (*upādāna*), (10) existence (*bhava*), (11) birth (*jāti*), and (12) decay-and-dying (*jarāmaraṇa*). The enumeration as given here is the so-called emanation series (*anuloma*), as this series explains the conditioned origin of suffering. Because one is ignorant (member 1) regarding the four noble truths, one engages in actions (member 2) for the sake of a 'self' (*ātman*). This leads to perceptual consciousness (member 3) and so on, up to decay-and-dying (member 12), after which a new cycle will start. In reverse order, i.e., the so-called extirpation series (*paṭiloma*), the order in which, according to tradition, the Buddha discovered the formula, it leads to *nirvāṇa*.[7] For liberation, therefore, the adept has to make sure that his present existence (member 10) is such that its karmic result will not project a new birth (member 11). It is recognition of the four noble truths that stops actions for the sake of a 'self' that will – eventually – lead to this result. The latter is related to the following famous teaching of the Buddha which is, among others, found in the Pāli *Vinaya*:

> Now monks […], there is a middle course, fully awakened to by the Truthfinder, making for vision, making for knowledge, which conduces to calming, to super-knowledge, to awakening, to nirvana;[8]

[1] E.g. in T. 1, no. 1: 16c11, 74a15, 76c29; T. 1, no. 26: 805c12 f. See also Bronkhorst 1985, pp. 306, 318.

[2] See Frauwallner 1971.

[3] See Cox 1992, pp. 65-66, 77; Dessein 2009.

[4] The four immaterial attainments (the sphere of unlimited space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*), the sphere of unlimited consciousness (*vijñānānantyāyatana*), the sphere of unlimited nothingness (*ākiṃcanyāyatana*), and the sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*naivasaṃjñānāsaṃjñāyatana*)) were rejected in *MN* I 163-167, and omitted in *MN* II 212; T. 1, no. 26: 776b5-777a4; T. 22, no. 1428: 780b7-c19. They were included in, e.g., *DN* III 221 f., T. 1, no.1: 50c9 f.; T. 1, no. 12: 228c14-22.

[5] See Bronkhorst 1993, pp. 80-93.

[6] On the origin and probable original order of this list of four truths: See Bronkhorst 2000, pp. 33-41.

[7] For the Buddha's recognition of the chain of twelve members: see Waldschmidt 1960, p. 114. For the relative dating of the emanation and the extirpation series: see Cox 1993, p. 139 note # 25. See also Frauwallner 1953, p. 197.

[8] Horner 1962, p. 15; Oldenberg 1879, p. I 10. See also T. 22. no. 1421, 104b23-104c7; T. 22, no. 1428, 788a9-20.

and:

Then the Lord addressed the group of five monks, saying: "Body, monks, is not self […] Feeling is not self […] Perception is not self […] Consciousness is not self […] What do you think about this, monks? Is body permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Lord." "But is that which is impermanent painful or pleasurable?" "Painful, Lord." "But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, painful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self'?" "It is not Lord." "Is feeling…perception…are the habitual tendencies…is consciousness permanent or impermanent?" "Impermanent, Lord." "But is that which is impermanent painful or pleasurable?" "Painful, Lord." "But is it fit to consider that which is impermanent, painful, of a nature to change, as 'This is mine, this am I, this is my self?" "It is not so, Lord." "Wherefore, monks, whatever is body, past, future, present, or internal or external, or gross or subtle, or low or excellent, whether it is far or near – all body should, by means of right wisdom, be seen, as it really is, thus: This is not mine, this am I not, this is not my self." Whatever is feeling…whatever is perception…whatever are the habitual tendencies…whatever is consciousness, past, future, present […] Seeing in this way, monks, the instructed disciple of the ariyans disregards body and he disregards feeling and he disregards perception and he disregards the habitual tendencies and he disregards consciousness; disregarding he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in freedom the knowledge comes to be: 'I am freed', and he knows: Destroyed is birth, lived is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or such;"[1]

whereupon the five monks were freed and, so the text goes, there were six perfected ones (Śākyamuni and the first five monks) in the world. The five elements body (= *rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*) mentioned in the above passage, in themselves form the famous *mātṛkā* of the five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*). Before we return to the importance of this *mātṛkā* of five elements and its significance in the above passage, some further observations have to be made concerning the numerical list of twelve members itself.

The central importance of the *mātṛkā* of the twelve members of dependent origination for Buddhist doctrine notwithstanding, there is textual evidence that this twelvefold list is not original. The *Suttanipāta* of the Pāli canon, one of the oldest scriptures of Buddhism, e.g., does not mention the twelve-membered formula. This text has the notions of ignorance (1), craving (8), grasping (9), existence (10), and decay-and-dying (12), but these are not presented as part of a systematized doctrine.[2] It is further evident from Sūtra literature that the twelve-membered formula is a compilation of smaller series, the two prominent of which are a seven-membered and a five-membered formula, i.e. a list starting with ignorance (*avidyā*) and leading to feeling (*vedanā*), and a list starting with craving (*tṛṣṇā*) and leading to decay-and-dying (*jarāmaraṇa*).[3] As ignorance actually is ignorance about the four noble truths and is precisely the reason why there is craving, these two shorter lists appear as historically redundant variants that were combined to one list only at a later stage.[4] This may be corroborated by the fact that the list of twelve

[1] Horner 1962, pp. 20-21; Oldenberg 1879, p. 1 13-14. See also *SN* III 67 f., T. 22, no. 1421, 105a15-24; T. 22, no. 1428, 789a12-b1.

[2] *Suttanipāta* 1033, 1048, 1065. Nakamura 1980, pp. 165-166, states: «Buddhists of the earliest stage of early Buddhism did not try to demonstrate […] theoretically, but set forth their own experience as such».

[3] See e.g., Prajñāvarman's Tibetan translation of the *Udānavargavivaraṇa*, where the two series are explained with respect to the same stanza. See Bernhard 1968-1969, pp. 57-60.

[4] See Bernhard 1968-1969, pp. 57-63; Wayman 1970-1971, p. 186.

appears to at first have been added to the biographies of the Buddha as a kind of addendum.[1] Other variants are a ten-membered version of the formula in which the members ignorance (1) and conditioning factors (2) are absent,[2] and an eight-membered version in which the members psychophysical complex (4), six senses (5), birth (11), and decay-and-dying (12) are absent.[3] Still another variant starts with 'impurities' (*āsava*), not with ignorance.[4] The latter variant parallels the ultimate aim of the Buddhist doctrine: attaining *nirvāṇa* through annihilation of defilement (*āsrava* / *kleśa*).[5] It is not unlikely that the creation of the list of twelve members of dependent origination was given in by the wish to integrate all the Buddha's explanations of dependent origination in a coherent philosophical system.

The list of twelve also illustrates how *mātṛkā*s were dynamic devices in doctrinal development. With respect to the latter, the creation of the list of twelve members of dependent origination is interesting from at least two perspectives. The first is that, although the doctrine of the four noble truths is presented as the core of the historical Buddha's teaching in Sūtra and in Vinaya literature,[6] this fourfold truth does not give a philosophical explanation for the cause of suffering (*duḥkha*) and the process of transmigration (*saṃsāra*). The prominent role this list of twelve members attained in Buddhist doctrine may be explained by the fact that this list explains that eternal suffering in the cycle of rebirths is caused by karmic activity, and that liberation is the stopping of this karmic activity.[7] In this development, an existing list of four conditions (*pratyaya*) and a redundant list of six causes (*hetu*) were further introduced to explain precisely how this karmic activity functions.[8] That two redundant lists were introduced might, again, have been given in by the wish to preserve all transmitted words of the Buddha. Gradually, these six causes and four conditions, in their turn, became the main philosophical explanation of *karman*, and the twelve-membered chain became the structure to explain a human being's individual share of suffering. Herein lies the second point of relevance of the creation of the twelve-membered chain. Compared to the twelve-membered list, the four members that are absent in the eight-membered list of the *Suttanipāta*,[9] are the essential elements that constitute a human being: the psychophys-

[1] See Bernhard 1968-1969, pp. 54-55.

[2] *DN* II 56-57.

[3] *Suttanipāta* 1848, 728 ff.

[4] *MN* I 54.

[5] Schmithausen 1992, p. 124 remarks that «In Buddhist canonical (and post-canonical) texts, the *ās(r)avas* are often specified as three, viz. [desire for] sensual pleasure (*kāmās(r)ava*), [desire for] existence (*bhavās(r)ava*), and ignorance (*avijjāsava* / *avidyāsrava*), to which later on a fourth one, viz. (false) views (*diṭṭh'āsava* / *dṛṣṭyāsrava*), is added. This means that the *ās(r)avas* are understood as evil mental attitudes or states, i.e., in later terminology, as *kleśas*, and often the terms *āsrava* and *kleśa* are even taken to be quasi-synonyms».

[6] See *MN* I 140, *SN* IV 384; *MN* I 69, 72. *DN* I 110, 148, II 41; *MN* I 380, II 41, 145; *AN* IV 186, 213; Vin I 16, 18, 19, 181, 225-226; II 156. See also Bronkhorst 2000, pp. 33-35.

[7] The importance of this concept of conditioned production for the Buddhist doctrine is, e.g., to be read in *MN* I 191. In T. 1, no. 1: 467a18 and T. 24, no. 1463: 820b13 ff., dependent origination is seen as synonymous with the doctrine.

[8] The Sarvāstivādin *Prakaraṇapāda*, T. 26, no. 1541: 674b8-22, a text that most likely was written in the beginning of the 300 years after the Buddha, e.g., explains the four conditions in their relation to the four noble truths. The list of six causes first appears in the Sarvāstivādin *Aṣṭagrantha* / *Jñānaprasthāna*, a text that was most likely written at the end of the 300 years after the Buddha: T. 26, no. 1543: 773a13-21, 774b22-775a9; T. 26, no. 1544: 920c5-921a10. Stcherbatsky 1958, vol. 2, p. 138 remarks that «There is no hard and fast line of demarcation […] between what a cause and what a condition is. The list of six causes seems to be a later doctrine which came to graft itself upon the original system of four 'conditions'». See also Conze 1962, pp. 153-156; Kawamura 1972, pp. 187-193. For the dating of these texts: see Dessein 2012.

[9] See note 3 on this page.

ical complex, six senses, birth, and decay-and-dying. Interpreted in this way, the twelve members can be seen as an integration of an individual human being's life into the dynamic system of causal forces. The concept of dependent origination as it is expressed in the numerical list of twelve members can thus be explained in two ways: on the one hand, it represents the mechanic process of retribution that is at the core of the Buddhist doctrine, and, on the other hand, it represents an individual human being's experiencing of suffering.[1] Once the list of twelve members had become the canonized *mātṛkā* of dependent origination, the above enumerated five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*) that constitute a human being were interpreted as moving through these twelve. The construct of twelve members, four conditions, six causes, and five aggregates was subject to further doctrinal interpretation, leading to the theories of connected proceeding (*sāṃbandhika*), instantaneous proceeding (*kṣaṇika*), extended proceeding (*prākarṣika*), and segmented proceeding (*āvasthika*), resp. denoting that any two moments are connected qua cause and effect, that every moment perishes immediately, that each moment is connected to many births, and that the members of existence, i.e., the five aggregates, are successively present in each of the twelve members of the chain of dependent origination.[2]

In accordance with early Buddhist doctrine that is preoccupied with liberation of human beings through meditative and cognitive practices, the elements of the lists discussed so far can be characterized as belonging to the psychological domain. With the development of what has been termed 'ontological' Buddhism in which a *dharma* theory – reducing all constituents of the existing world to ever smaller constituent parts, and thus leading to the concept of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) – became one of the major dynamic forces in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, also material elements – equally called '*dharma*' – were introduced in the numerical lists. This, again, illustrates the mutual influence of numerical lists and doctrinal development. The inclusion of non-psychic elements in what originally were lists of psychic elements can be illustrated by the development of lists of repulsive elements. The twelve-membered chain of dependent origination implies that death (*maraṇa*) is not only the final instant of a human being's present life span, but simultaneously contains the beginning of a new life. Contemplation on death, i.e., on bones and skulls as visualizations of death and impermanence, developed into an essential constituent of the Buddhist religious practice that aims at liberation from mundane life and attainment of salvation, because it recognizes the repulsiveness (*aśubhā*) of the body and thus subverts the basis for all physical desires. Contemplation on death, the transitory point between this life and the next, hereby serves to give the meditator control over his passions which would, through karmic retribution, invoke a new birth, and, by revealing impermanence as the true state of existence, serves him to liberate himself from worldly aspirations, and to further him on the path to liberation.[3] The 'repulsive' (*aśubhā*) is the focal element of a series of

[1] See Wayman 1980, p. 275.

[2] The latter interpretation became the peculiar Sarvāstivādin interpretation. See T. 27, no. 1545: 117c3-5; T. 28, no. 1552: 935c25-936a21; T. 28, no. 1558: 48c5-8 and 49c24-51c9. See also Fukuhara 1965, p. 17; Kawamura 1972, pp. 193-194.

[3] See Bond 1980, p. 248. Williams 1997, p. 214 remarks that when the body is not used for noble ends, it is considered to be disgusting. The body gains value as object of meditation, serving to convince the adept of its impermanence, thus generating enthusiasm for following the teaching of the Buddha.

*mātṛkā*s that occur in Sūtra literature, and the concept has been further developed and discussed in the Abhidharma literature.[1] The shortest *mātṛkā* that mentions contemplation of the repulsive is a list of three types of contemplation that each serve to discard another type of evil: (1) contemplation of the repulsive (*asubhā*) as antidote for lust (*rāga*), (2) development of loving kindness (*mettā*) as antidote for vice (*dosa*), and (3) development of wisdom (*paññā*) as antidote for ignorance (*moha*).[2] The shortest list that develops contemplation of the repulsive as such contains five elements: (1) the unloveliness of the body, of (2) the repulsiveness of food, of (3) distaste for all the world, and of (4) the impermanence in all the activities, leading to it that (5) the thought of death is well implanted.[3] Contemplation of the repulsive also is part of another list of five,[4] of lists of seven,[5] lists of nine,[6] and lists of ten.[7] While all these lists only mention psychic characteristics, the following list enumerates psychic and material elements: (1) consciousness of the foul (*asubha*), (2) death (*maraṇa*), (3) repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikkūla*), (4) non-delight in all the world (*sabbaloke anabhirata*), (5) of impermanence (*anicca*), (6) of the ill in impermanence (*anicce dukkha*), (7) of the non-existence of the self in impermanence (*dukkhe anatta*), (8) of abandoning (*pahāna*), (9) revulsion (*virāga*), (10) of ending (*nirodha*), (11) of impermanence (*anicca*), (12) the not-self (*anatta*), (13) of death (*maraṇa*), (14) of repulsiveness in food (*āhāre paṭikkūla*), (15) non-delight in all the world (*sabbaloke anabhirata*), (16) of the skeleton (*aṭṭhika*), (17) the worm-eaten corpse (*puḷavaka*), (18) the dismembered corpse (*vicchiddaka*), and (19) the bloated corpse (*uddhumātaka*).[8] The development of this *mātṛkā* thus not only illustrates a similar pattern of development as in previously discussed *mātṛkā*s, but also shows that, with the development of the doctrine, non-psychic elements were included in lists. Also lists that only contain material elements were formed. With respect to the decomposition of the body, e.g., the Pāli Abhidhamma eventually came to differentiate ten states of decomposition of the corpse, while nine such states became standard for the texts of the Northern tradition.[9] With the word '*dharma*' thus gradually being used in reference to

[1] For a detailed study: see Dessein 2013.

[2] *AN* III 446.

[3] *AN* II 150, 151, 155-156; *AN* III 83, 142-143. The perception of the repulsiveness of food regards the transformation of food in the process of eating, digestion, and excretion. Food as thus regarded only serves to maintain the body during the monk's crossing over to *nirvāṇa*. See on this *Visuddhimagga* p. 347. See also Collins 1997, p. 193. Williams 1997, p. 218, remarks that pollution, in Brahmanic culture, is intimately related to issues of food: «Food can very easily become polluted through contact with the ground, the bodily fluids of another, or an outcaste and so on. Polluted food pollutes the eater. One's own bodily fluids are the body's discards, again polluting to oneself and others».

[4] *AN* III 79, 277.

[5] *DN* II 79 and III 253; *AN* IV 24, 148; *AN* IV 46, 148; T. 1, no. 1: 11c26-29.

[6] *DN* III 289-290; *AN* IV 387, 465; T. 1, no. 1: 56c22-24.

[7] *DN* III 291; *SN* V 132-133; *AN* V 105, 309; *AN* V 109.

[8] *AN* I 41-42.

[9] Thus, in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, pp. 145-146, 155-157, the following ten states are listed: (1) the bloated corpse (*udhumāta*), i.e., bloated by gradual dilation and swelling after the close of life; (2) the livid (*viṇīlaka*), i.e., with patchy discoloration; (3) the festering (*vipubbaka*), i.e., trickling with pus in broken places; (4) the cut up (*vicchiddaka*), i.e., opened up by cutting it in two as is the case with corpses found on battle fields or in a robbers' forest or on a charnel ground where kings have robbers cut up, or in the jungle in a place where men are torn up by lions and tigers; (5) the gnawed (*vikkhāyitaka*), i.e., chewed here and there in various ways by dogs, jackals, etc.; (6) the scattered (*vikkhittaka*), i.e., strewed about in this way: here a hand, there a foot, there the head; (7) the hacked and scattered (*hatavikkhitakaka*), i.e., hacked, and scattered in the way described above; (8) the bleeding (*lohitaka*), i.e., it sprinkles, scatters blood, and it trickles here and there; (9) the worm-infested (*puḷuvaka*), i.e., it sprinkles worms when, at the end of two or three days, a mass of maggots oozes out from the corpse's nine orifices; and, finally, (10) the skeleton (*aṭṭhika*). The standardized list of nine states of the Northern tradition has eight of the ten states we find in the Pali tradition, i.e., omitting the gnawed (*vikkhāyitaka*) corpse and the hacked and scattered (*hatavikkhitakaka*) corpse, and adding the corpse when burnt (*vidagdhaka*). The list thus is: (1) the livid (*viṇīlaka*);

'elements of existence,' Abhidharma texts became the instrument to discuss these 'elements of existence' as they are listed in *mātṛkā*s either as an exposé of the own interpretation, or, and increasingly so, also in the form of a polemical discussion with other Buddhist groups. The *Mātṛkāpiṭaka* thus gradually developed into what became known as the *Abhidharmapiṭaka*, and the expositions of Buddhist doctrine in the Abhidharma texts witness a gradual development of ontological concepts. In fully developed Abhidharma texts, the elements contained in the numerical lists are crafted into a comprehensive philosophical construct.

## 4. Mātṛkās as Devices in the Development of the Textual Fomat of Abhidharma Texts

The method in which the five aggregates (*pañcaskandha*) are discussed in the above quoted passage of the Pāli *Vinaya* is peculiar in this sense that minimal pairs of contradictory elements are applied to the five aggregates, and that these minimal pairs are, in their turn, subjected to other minimal pairs, as follows: «Is body permanent or impermanent?»; «[I]s that which is impermanent painful or pleasurable?»; «Is feeling … perception…are the habitual tendencies…is consciousness permanent or impermanent?»; «Whatever is body, past, future, present, or internal or external, or gross or subtle, or low or excellent, whether it is far or near – all body should, by means of right wisdom, be seen, as it really is». This methodological device brings us to the issue of the dynamic function of *mātṛkā*s in the development of the textual format of Abhidharma treatises.

In accordance with what may be the earliest meaning of the term *mātṛkā*, i.e. numerical list, it may not come as a surprise that the earliest Abhidharma texts are constructed according to standardized numerical lists. The Sarvāstivādin *Saṃgītiparyāya*, e.g., essentially consists of the explanation of the same mnemonic lists of categories of elements – given in ascending numerical order from one to ten – as those of the *Saṃgītisūtra* on which it is a commentary.[1] Similar to the passage of the Pāli Vinaya quoted above, the explanation of the elements in the lists of the *Saṃgītiparyāya* proceeds through applying a minimal *mātṛkā* of two elements – a positive and its negative alternative – to these elements, or, as a variant, an expansion to three elements, i.e., adding the neutral option. The Sarvāstivādin *Dharmaskandha* and *Prajñaptiśāstra*, works that were written in approximately the same period as the *Saṃgītiparyāya*, already are one step further in the development of the use of *mātṛkā*s as the elements of the lists in these texts are no longer ordered according to numerical order, but according to content. The method of exegesis employed, however, is similar to the one used in the *Saṃgītiparyāya*.[2] The increase from 'lists' of two to 'lists' of three to discuss the elements of thematic numerical lists predicts the method used in mature Abhidharma texts: the application of increasingly complex *mātṛkā*s to explain other increasingly complex *mātṛkā*s. This application of the elements of a second *mātṛkā* to explain the elements of a first *mātṛkā*, whereby

(2) the bloated corpse (*vyādmātaka*); (3) the festering (*vipūyaka*); (4) the cut up (*vidhūtaka*); (5) the bleeding (*vilohitaka*); (6) the worm-infested (*vikhāditaka*); (7) the scattered (*vikṣiptaka*); (8) the skeleton (*asthika*); and (9), the body as burnt bones (*vidagdhaka*). See T.27, no.1545: 205a9-11. The *Sphuṭārthābhidharmakośavyākyā* refers to a *sūtra* that has the following list: *viṇīlaka*, *vipūyaka*, *vyādhmātaka*, *vipaṭumaka*, *vilohitaka*, *vikhāditaka*, *vikṣiptaka*, *asthika*, and *asthisaṃkalikā*. See for the latter: Wogihara 1971, p. 55, 1. 1-2.

[1] See Cousins 1983; Dessein 2012. For reflections on the Vedic origin of this type of exposé: see Gombrich 1990, p. 21.

[2] See Willemen *et alii* 1998, pp. 182-187, 194-196.

the number of elements in the second *mātṛkā* is larger than a list of two or three basic alternatives can, e.g., be seen in the Sarvāstivādin *Dhātukāya* and *Vijñānakāya*. These texts were written in the period spanning from the 1st to the 3rd century after the demise of the historical Buddha. The following quotation from the *Vijñānakāya* may serve as an example of this expanded practice:

> There are fifteen types of thoughts (*citta*): there are five types of thought that are bound to the sensual realm (*kāmadhātu*), five types of thought that are bound to the realm of form (*rūpadhātu*), and five types of thought that are bound to the realm of formlessness (*ārūpyadhātu*). These fifteen types of thoughts are either past, or future, or present. [Question:] "What are the five types of thoughts that are bound to the sensual realm?" [Answer:] "It are the thoughts that are to be abandoned through vision of suffering (*duḥkhasatyaprahātavya*) bound to the sensual realm, and the thoughts that are to be abandoned through vision of the origin, of cessation, of the path, and through spiritual practice [bound to the sensual realm]. To [thoughts that] are bound to the realm of form and to the realm of formlessness, the same applies as to [thoughts that] are bound to the sensual realm. Are the envelopers (*paryavasthāna*) of the thoughts of the past that are to be abandoned through vision of suffering and that are bound to the sensual realm caused by an increase of such thoughts? […]".[1]

This short exposé that explains a *mātṛkā* of fifteen types of thoughts introduces the following further *mātṛkā*s: three realms of existence, the three time periods, and five types of abandonment of defilement. Also the concept of 'envelopers' (*paryavasthāna*) that lead to defilement, is introduced. The practice to summarize the doctrine in thematic numerical lists and the practice to explain these lists through multiple other lists in a carefully structured 'analysis' (*vibhaṅga*, lit. 'breaking up'), made that the mentioning of the first element of a list automatically brought to mind the other elements of the series, and that *mātṛkā*s themselves came to evoke other *mātṛkā*s.[2] In this sense, each *mātṛkā*, as it were, contains or evokes other *mātṛkā*s, and the automaticity with which this is done underlines the mechanic process of causality that is at the core of the Buddhist doctrine. The discriminatory way the elements of the lists are discussed, further, underlines the principle of selflessness.[3] Or, to speak with Rupert Gethin, how «a *mātikā* is something creative – something out of which something further evolves. It is, as it were, pregnant with the Dhamma and able to generate it in all its fullness».[4]

While early Abhidharma texts do not explicitly state doctrinal positions – they must be inferred from the categories used[5] –, the fact that different numerical lists are interconnected and that they – as an interconnected whole – contain the doctrine, explains that, with the development of the Buddhist doctrine and the necessity to explain this doctrine in a comprehensive manner, the *mātṛkā*s not only shaped the way doctrinal issues were discussed within texts, but also became devices for constructing these texts as a whole, i.e., they developed to be the organizing feature of doctrinal texts. *Mātikādhara*s not only knew these numerical lists, but understood how to craft them in function of the doctrine that had to be comprehensively explained.[6] Some of the Abhi-

[1] T. 26, no. 1539: 555c6 ff.

[2] According to Georg von Simson 1965, p. 143, this is an important psychological devise of the texts: the audience feels a harmony between what he hears and his thinking.

[3] Gethin 1992, p. 157 states that «the act of reducing suttas to lists was seen […] as laying the Dhamma bare and revealing its inner workings».

[4] Gethin 1992, p. 161.

[5] See Cox 1992, p. 75.

[6] See Gethin 1992, pp. 161-162.

dharma texts that ensued were not only arranged according to such lists, but were even named after them. The Sarvāstivādin *Pañcavastuka* is a typical example in case. It is to this text that we turn our attention now.

Expositions in Sūtra literature not seldom relate the noble truth of suffering (*duḥkhasatya*) to the five aggregates of grasping (Pāli: *upādāna-khanda*; Sanskrit: *upādānaskandha*).[1] This is logically explained by it that, as discussed above, these five aggregates (matter (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*)) constitute a human being who, because he is ignorant of the Buddhist doctrine, is subject to constant transmigration in the cycle of rebirths and, as such, to constant suffering. In early Abhidharma literature, these five *skandha*s were assembled with a list of twelve sense-fields (*āyatana*) and a list of eighteen elements (*dhātu*) to form a framework in which the elements of existence were explained. In this framework, the list of five aggregates remained fundamental.[2] In a later time, when the older doctrine was being developed into a comprehensive philosophical system, a new series of five elements, called *pañcavastuka* («five categories») evolved.[3] This list is an attempt to cover exhaustively all the elements and principles of existence. It is composed of matter (*rūpa*), thoughts (*citta*), mental elements (*caitta/caitasika*), and habitual tendencies that are dissociated from thought (*cittaviprayukta saṃskāra*) as four categories of conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) factors, and the unconditioned factors (*asaṃskṛta*) as fifth category. In the same way that material elements were added to numerical lists that originally had only consisted of psychological qualities – e.g., the mentioning of matter among the five aggregates –, also the explanatory framework was thus expanded to enable the inclusion of all possible categories of existence, i.e., also these categories that were difficult to bring into the concept of the five aggregates. A comparison of the list of five aggregates and the list of five categories shows that matter in the *pañcavastuka* list corresponds to the aggregate matter (*rūpa*). The aggregates feeling (*vedanā*) and perception (*saṃjñā*) are part of the category mental elements (*caitta/caitasika*) of the *pañcavastuka* list. Habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*) either belong to the categories mental elements (*caitta/caitasika*) or habitual tendencies that are dissociated from thought (*cittaviprayukta saṃskāra*) of the *pañcavastuka* list. The aggregate consciousness (*vijñāna*) now belongs to the category thoughts (*citta*). The category of unconditioned factors has no correspondence in the list of aggregates. This new list of five categories is preserved as a separate text, called *Pañcavastuka*.[4]

Notwithstanding the fact that this new list of five categories could better explain all elements of existence than the list of five aggregates could, and thus was a major step in the creation of the Buddhist philosophical construct, it, at first, was only little influential as the list of five aggregates had already become deeply integrated in early doctrine.[5] Gradually, however, this new list encroached upon the existing explanatory frame. This can, e.g., be seen in the Sarvāstivādin *Dharmaskandha* that categorizes the habitual tendencies that are dissociated from thought (*cittaviprayukta saṃskāra*) as a

[1] See e.g. *SN* v 421-422.

[2] See Frauwallner 1963, p. 33.

[3] Imanishi 1969, p. 12, suggests that the *Pañcavastuka* might originally have been called *Pañcadharmaka*. Frauwallner 1963, p. 34 refers to similar developments in Sāṃkhya and Vaiśeṣika philosophy.

[4] In T. 28, no. 1556 and T. 28, no.1557. The latter text, *Apitan wu fa xing jing*, was the first Abhidharma text that was translated into Chinese by An Shigao in the second century CE. This text discusses the five categories along with other topics.

[5] See Frauwallner 1963, p. 35; Bronkhorst 2000, p. 97.

sub-type of habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*).[1] Actually, also the *Saṃgītiparyāya* already differentiated sub-types of matter and unconditioned factors.[2] In the first chapter of the Sarvāstivādin *Prakaraṇapāda*, called 'pañcadharmaka' in the translation by Guṇabhadra and Bodhiyaśas of 435-443 CE, and called 'pañcavastuka' in Xuanzang's translation of 660 CE, the five categories of the new list are discussed extensively, and serve as the framework for the expositions in the remainder of the text.[3] The fourth chapter of the text, called 'saptavastuka' in both versions, discusses aggregates (*skandha*), elements (*dhātu*), sense-fields (*āyatana*), feelings (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*), habitual tendencies (*saṃskāra*), and consciousness (*vijñāna*).[4] The two extant translations of the *Prakaraṇapāda* are also interesting for the following: While the translation of Guṇabhadra and Bodhiyaśas lists 14 categories of mental elements (*caitta* / *caitasika*), Xuanzang's version adds a 15th category: the virtuous factors of great extension (*kuśalamahābhūmikadharma*). This category is the antipode to the defiled factors of great extension (*kleśamahābhūmikadharma*) that was listed in the earlier translation.[5] The above shows how the Buddhist doctrine broke through the straightjacket of early dogmatics, and was increasingly crafted along the lines of rational inquiry. *Mātṛkā*s were an important tool to guide this rational process.

Also the Sarvāstivādin *Aṣṭagrantha* was called after its basic structure: eight chapters that, together, present the major issues of the Buddhist cosmology and doctrine of salvation: fetters (*saṃyojana*), knowledge (*jñāna*), action (*karman*), fundamental material elements (*mahābhūta*), faculties (*indriya*), concentration (*samādhi*), and views (*dṛṣṭi*).[6] These seven chapters are preceded by the chapter miscellany (*saṃkīrṇa*) that starts with a discussion of the practice of the path. This indicates that in this text, the thirty-seven members of enlightenment discussed above, are exchanged for the mature Sarvāstivādin path structure.[7] On the *Aṣṭagrantha* / *Jñānaprasthāna*, *vibhāṣā* (lit.: extensive commentaries)[8] were written. As the term *vibhāṣā* indicates, the exegetical method used in these texts is an analytical discussion of elements of existence.[9] Although they play a major role in these commentarial texts, the elaborateness of the discussions, interspersed with references to a variety of doctrinal schools and Abhidharma masters, is such that the original use of the *mātṛkā*s – mnemonic devices – became snowed under. Rational inquiry and polemic discussion won over the mere preservation of the word of the Buddha. The latter is also evident – albeit in a different way – in the so-called Prajñāpāramitā literature. This literature can serve as a peculiar illustration of the mechan-

[1] T. 26, no. 1537: 501b16-20: «What is the aggregate habitual tendencies? The aggregate habitual tendencies is twofold: habitual tendencies associated with thoughts and habitual tendencies dissociated from thought. What are the habitual tendencies associated with thought? …». See also IMANISHI 1969, pp. 13-16; DESSEIN 1999, volume 2, pp. 91-94.

[2] T. 26, no. 1536: 412a16 ff. and 369c1 ff. resp.

[3] T. 26, no. 1541: 627a19-628c27; T. 26, no. 1542: 692b23-694b2. See also WILLEMEN *et alii* 1998, p. 216; BRONKHORST 2000, pp. 97-98. Also later Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma texts know the *pañcavastuka* list and bring it into the scheme of five aggregates. See FRAUWALLNER 1963, pp. 26-27.

[4] See DHAMMAJOTI 2009, pp. 98-99.

[5] T. 26, no. 1542: 698b28-c2. For other examples: see DESSEIN 1996.

[6] See WILLEMEN *et alii* 1998, pp. 224-227. On the title *Aṣṭagrantha* / *Aṣṭaskandha*: see *ibid*., p. 222.

[7] Other topics discussed in this first chapter are such fundamental issues as types of causes, dependent origination, mental factors, etc. See WILLEMEN *et alii* 1998, pp. 225-226.

[8] See EDGERTON 1953, vol. 2, p. 495.

[9] MONIER-WILLIAMS 1190, pp. 978-979 explains *vi-√bhāṣ* as «to speak variously», and *vibhāṣā* as «an alternative, […] one of two ways».

ic process of causation and the use of numerical lists. This earliest specifically Mahayana literature is large and repetitive, and *sūtra*s are called after the number of repetitive verses, such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*: the Perfection of Wisom in Eight-thousand Verses. Later texts are the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (in twenty-five thousand verses), the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (in one hundred thousand verses), and the *Aṣṭadaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (in eighteen thousand verses). In their own peculiar way, they illustrate the process of cyclic rebirth, and reciting and copying these texts are thought to be karmic favorable. As such, they lead to salvation, i.e., to the *paṭiloma* interpretation of the twelvefold chain of dependent origination and the purpose of Buddhist practice.

## Conclusion

Buddhist texts abound in numerical lists of doctrinal elements, called *mātikā* in Pāli and *mātṛkā* in Sanskrit. In early Sūtra and Vinaya literature, these lists primordially served as mnemonic aids in an oral transmission, whereby explaining the elements contained in such lists was a fundamental Buddhist practice. In circumstances in which the correct meaning of the word of the Buddha became blurred and in which Buddhists had to defend their doctrine against competing doctrines, and one Buddhist group had to defend its interpretation against the interpretation of a rivaling school, sanctioning a given interpretation of the elements of such lists became a matter of school identity. This, and the fact that the doctrine of the Buddha increasingly became the subject of rational inquiry, led to it that specific interpretations of these lists were sanctioned by specific Buddhist groups, as opposed to the interpretation of other groups. From the outset, the elements of these lists had been analyzed through subjecting them to basic lists of two or three elements. Gradually, primary lists were discussed using the elements of complex lists, and different lists became interconnected. The practice to explain lists through other lists and their intricate relatedness thus created, as it were, systems of lists that contain the full meaning of the doctrine. Also the textual format of the texts in which this doctrine was explained, was inspired by the elements of such lists.

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