

which he deals with this, and also with the spread of Brahmanism to Southeast Asia, is disappointing in its brevity. I grant that this is a good question that is hard to answer, but, having introduced the issue in the very title, one wishes that it had been discussed in greater detail. One solution he proposes is stories – how the creation of stories can propagate ideas and “render social phenomena permanent, predictable, and commonsensical” (p. 409). That is certainly true. But the Buddhists also told stories, as evidenced in the Jātakas. Why did those stories have a lesser impact than the Brahmanical ones?

Patrick Olivelle

University of Texas at Austin

SHI HUIFENG:

Old School Emptiness: Hermeneutics, Criticism and Tradition in the Narrative of Śūnyatā.

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Old School Emptiness is an engagingly written, thoroughly researched, and innovative study of the Buddhist notion of emptiness (*suññatā/śūnyatā/空*) as elaborated in Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese sources. As a whole, the book’s arguments may heuristically be divided into critical and constructive elements, to which are devoted three chapters each.

Chapter 1, “Swollen with emptiness”, begins the critical work by delineating what is here identified as the “generally held understanding of *śūnyatā* within the sphere of Buddhist studies” (p. 3). According to this narrative, Nāgārjuna is taken to be the “epitome” or “telos” (p. 8) towards which earlier elaborations of *śūnyatā* tend. Huifeng thus briefly traces how *śūnyatā* has been interpreted in the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, Abhidharma, and “Early Buddhism” according to this “dominant position” (p. 28).

Chapter 2, “Criticism, hermeneutics and tradition”, continues the critical project in a more theoretical vein. Drawing on the hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Gadamer, Huifeng problematizes the narrative he has identified through “historical”, “text-critical”, and “strictly hermeneutic” (p. 44) approaches. Respectively, these methodological critiques seek to demonstrate that the prevailing narrative is guilty of anachronism (§2.4.1), source biases (§2.4.2), and importing etic interpretive presuppositions (§2.4.3). Huifeng rounds out this chapter with a summary of the “core questions” (p. 29) under study in the remainder of the work (§2.5).

In chapter 3, “Text-critical sources”, Huifeng traces the critical sources for the study of *suññatā/śūnyatā* in the “Early Buddhism” of the Pali *Nikāya* and Chinese *Āgama* collections (§3.1), and the “Mainstream Buddhism” of both the Sthavira and Mahāsāṃghika schools (§3.2).

Chapters 4 and 5, “Interpretation of *Suñña(tā)* in early Buddhism” and “Interpretation of *Śūnya(tā)* in sectarian Buddhism” are by far the longest in the book, and constitute “the body of [Huifeng’s] inquiry” (p. x). The first of these investigates *suñña(tā)* in early sources under five sub-headings: “The *Suñña* abode for meditation (*Suññāgara*)” (§4.1), “*Suñña* of self or what pertains to self (*Anattā* and *Anattiya*)” (§4.2), “The *Suññatā* mental release and meditation (*Suññatācetovimutti* and *Śūnyatācetasamādhi*)” (§4.3), “The three *Samādhis*: *Suñña*, *Ākiñcañña/ Appanīhita* and *Animitta*” (§4.4), and “*Suññatā* and dependent origination” (§4.5). In the final section, “*Suñña(tā)* in early Buddhism” (§4.6), Huifeng summarizes

these “five main meanings” (p. 249) of the term and applies his findings to both text-historical questions regarding the convergences and/or divergences among doctrinal traditions and the chronological stratification of early sources, and the broader question of the relation of *suññatā* to the Buddha’s core teachings.

Huifeng then moves his inquiry on from the early to “the mainstream sectarian period” (p. 172). Specifically, he studies *śūnyatā* with reference to “Not self of individual (*pudgalanairātmya*) and not self of *dharmas* (*dharmanairātmya*)” (§5.1), “Role of *Śūnyatā* in the cultivation of the holy path” (§5.2), “*Śūnyatā* as *Nirvāna* and the inexpressible” (§5.3), “*Śūnyatā* as illusion and non-validity” (§5.4), and “*Śūnyatā* and dependent origination” (§5.4). These sections range among an array of schools and sub-schools, including what he calls the Sthavira and Mahāsāṃghika nominalists, Vātsīputrīya personalists, and Theravādin and Sarvāstivādin Ābhidharmika realists (p. 173). Huifeng then devotes a section to “*Śāstra* collated lists of *Śūnyatā*” (§5.6), with particular attention to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, an early sectarian para-canonical Theravādin text. The chapter concludes with a summary of the five usages of ‘*Śūnya* (*tā*) in sectarian Buddhism’ (§5.7), a comparison of these with the five usages of early Buddhism, and some concluding comments as to how the material studied complicates the blunt “standard narrative of *śūnyatā*” (p. 293).

Finally, chapter 6, “Old school emptiness: a hermeneutic of *Śūnyatā*”, returns to general methodological questions regarding the critical interpretation of pre-modern Buddhist texts. Huifeng problematizes the “linear and sequential model of development” (p. 299) as applied to both the schools of Buddhist teaching and the teachings themselves, and situates his work as “a historically and critically conscious part of the tradition of *śūnyatā* itself” (p. 307).

The main shortcoming of the book is that the narrative of *suññatā*/*śūnyatā* that Huifeng claims is “paradigmatic within the sphere of modern Buddhist studies” (p. 56) is largely that of mid-twentieth-century scholarship and no longer regarded as reliable, let alone paradigmatic, among specialists today. Although Huifeng does cite many recent publications, his critique is primarily aimed at figures such as Stecherbatsky, Lamotte, Murti, Conze, and Ramanan (cf. pp. 8–9); it neglects to address the philosophically sophisticated and historically astute elaborations of Madhyamaka undertaken over the last two decades by scholars such as Dan Arnold, Jay Garfield, C.W. Huntington, Mark Siderits, Tom Tillemans, and Jan Westerhoff. In a work published in 2016 and centrally concerned with overturning “the academic narrative of *śūnyatā* [which] itself appears to have Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka as its telos” (p. 296), this near-complete absence of twenty-first century scholarship on Nāgārjuna’s philosophy is a serious deficiency. Huifeng’s claim that he has “consciously not covered” either Madhyamaka or Prajñāpāramitā in the book in order to “overcome” this narrative (p. 296) cannot mask the fact that his “corrective to the methodology of the dominant narrative of *śūnyatā*” (p. 304) is a “corrective” to sources that are outdated and/or peripheral to, rather than constitutive of, contemporary Madhyamaka scholarship.

The major strength of *Old School Emptiness* thus lies not in its critical but in its constructive project. Thankfully, the detailed studies of emptiness Huifeng provides in chapters 4 and 5 stand independently of whatever one takes the prevailing position to be, and introduce a truly impressive range of Pali, Sanskrit, and Classical Chinese primary sources located outside of the Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka traditions. These references range over a wide spectrum of content, genre, and provenance within multifarious Buddhist traditions, are copiously and judiciously commented, and helpfully include the original language text in hundreds of footnotes. Huifeng also draws on a vast body of scholarship in Modern Chinese not widely cited by Western scholars; his indebtedness here to the prolific Chinese scholar Yinshun 印順 is particularly evident throughout the book.

In all, Huifeng's study performs a valuable function by significantly nuancing our understanding of Buddhist emptiness, and should therefore be of great use to scholars specializing in Buddhist studies, and more broadly in religious studies, intellectual history, or textual hermeneutics.

Rafal K Stepien
University of Oxford

CATHERINE B. ASHER:

Delhi's Qutb Complex: The Minar, Mosque and Mehrauli.

Mumbai: The Marg Foundation, 2017. \$69.95. ISBN 978 93 83243 19 8.
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This generously illustrated volume makes a welcome contribution to the scholarship on the Delhi Sultanate, the medieval monuments of Delhi, and the military, religious and architectural relations between northern India and the wider Islamic world. While the Qutb Minar and its adjacent mosque are acknowledged as the first great Muslim architectural complex in India, the history of the complex through the centuries, together with the surrounding settlement of Mehrauli, has not previously been chartered in a comprehensive manner. This narrative, spanning more than 900 years, may be considered Asher's chief contribution, and to this end she has drawn on a wide range of official chronicles and saintly hagiographies, as well as epigraphic and archaeological reports.

Asher's approach is essentially chronological. She begins her narrative with Qutb al-Din Aibak, commander of the Ghurid army, who established the Qutb Minar at the very end of the twelfth century. At that time, and indeed until just a few years ago, this was the tallest such tower in the entire Islamic world. Asher explores the political motivations for Aibak's hugely ambitious project and the purpose of its inscriptions, few of which could actually be read from below. She also refers to the minarets in Afghanistan, from where the Ghurids hailed, that served as models for the Minar's characteristic multi-stage, tapering shaft, with its projecting circular and pointed flanges. But Asher also discusses the contributions of Indian craftsmen to the arched façade and colonnades of the adjacent mosque, especially under Aibak and a later ruler, Sultan Shams al-Din Iltutmish, who is buried in an elaborately decorated tomb to the rear of the prayer hall. While Iltutmish is generally credited with setting up the iron column in the middle of the mosque courtyard, which he had removed from a Gupta-period site in central India, confirming data for this act of pillage and its incentive are lacking.

Asher next considers the Mongol threat to northern India in the mid-thirteenth century, and the subsequent expansion of the Qutb complex under the Tughluq sultans who made Delhi capital of an all-India empire. Ala al-Din Tughluq was responsible for extending the mosque and adding a finely finished entrance gate. While the markets and civic buildings that must have surrounded the complex at this time have disappeared, the tombs of several saintly figures whose careers underpinned those of the Tughluq sultans can still be seen. A later Tughluq ruler, Firuz Shah, repaired and heightened the Minar in 1369. An inscription recording his contribution mentions Vishvakarma, the divine architect of Indian legend, suggesting this sultan was concerned to express respect for his Hindu subjects. Timur's raid on Delhi in 1398 shattered the Tughluq polity, and it was only under the Lodi sultans in the fifteenth century that the complex once again attracted attention. Asher directs the reader's attention to the doorway leading to the staircase within the Minar added by Sikandar Lodi. That the Minar played a significant role in Indian Muslim religious architecture during these