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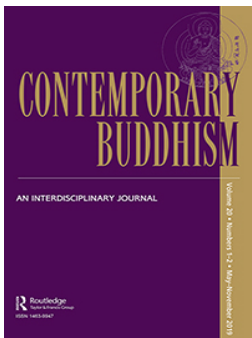
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# TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT: TEXT, TECHNIQUE AND EXPERIENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP ON THERAVADA MEDITATION

Andrew Skilton, Kate Crosby & Pyi Phyo Kyaw

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## INTRODUCTION



# TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT: TEXT, TECHNIQUE AND EXPERIENCE IN SCHOLARSHIP ON THERAVADA MEDITATION

Andrew Skilton<sup>a</sup>, Kate Crosby<sup>b</sup> and Pyi Phyo Kyaw<sup>b,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Oriental Faculty and Theology Faculty, Oxford University, Oxford, UK; <sup>b</sup>Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College, London, UK; <sup>c</sup>Department of Buddhist Meditation and Psychology, Shan State Buddhist University, Taunggyi, Myanmar

Despite the remarkable rise in publications on the subject of meditation practices derived from Theravada Buddhism, the representation of Theravada meditation itself, in all its rich diversity, has remained narrow. The burgeoning literature on meditation and mindfulness has focused on a limited range of practices, with much of Theravada's historical and current diversity of practice, particularly that within Asia, ignored.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, while there is general awareness that the list of meditation *topics* found in early, authoritative Buddhist sources such as the *Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta* and *Visuddhimagga* (see below) is far wider than those practised within modernist meditation culture, it is generally unknown that there is also a rich diversity of *techniques* that may be applied to any given topic. We also find a diversity of expectations, agents or participants, contexts and end goals. A greater attention to global mindfulness has had the unintended consequence of presenting Theravada practice as a modernised version of, or as identical to, the practices described in those early sources, as monolithic and static. The aim of this volume is to buck that trend, to look not at the diversity of the global applications of Buddhism-derived practice, but at the diversity within their presumed source, at the diversity of approaches, practices, techniques and participants.<sup>2</sup> The contributions also offer commentary on how Buddhist meditation has been received and studied and how this might change.

## Trends in the study of Buddhist meditation

The study of Buddhist meditation in western scholarship has undergone a number of significant changes in the last 40 years. Time was – when two of the editors of this volume began their studies – that the academic scholarly discourse on meditation was dominated by text-historical

methods. This in turn had issued forth in relation to a limited number of preoccupations with the subject. As a topic of genuine inquiry *on its own terms*, meditation seems to have been largely ‘beyond the bounds’, possibly because it encroached on or challenged the religious world views of scholars themselves, but also because of insider/outsider tensions in the discourse, and anxieties over the subjective nature of the experiences involved, which were at the time beyond any empirical measure.

Interestingly, and possibly because of the emergent status of psychology as a scholarly discipline in the early twentieth century, an early and far from inappropriate understanding of Buddhist theory and practice as a form of psychology made by pioneer scholar Caroline Rhys Davids was largely ignored.<sup>3</sup> Rhys Davids had studied psychology at University College London as one of its first female graduates (gr. 1886), going on to publish on the topic.<sup>4</sup> This interest must have helped fuel her commitment to editing three of the seven Abhidhamma texts of the Pali canon (plus the *Visuddhimagga*, hereafter *Vism*) and translating two others, thereby exploring the ‘extraordinarily subtle and detailed matrices of mental processes’ presented therein (Neal 2014, 18) and developing a detailed understanding of the ethical implications of Abhidhamma analysis.<sup>5</sup> In a popular work published in 1912, she presents Buddhist teaching as an antidote to metaphysics, ‘a weapon against this state of over-wrought metaphysical speculation. ... [i.e.] the science of the mind or psychology, which the Buddhist movement initiated, and which Buddhist culture subsequently developed’ (Rhys Davids 1912, 61). In particular, she presents Abhidhamma as ‘an instrument for regulating the mind’ (Rhys Davids 1912, 39), as something practical rather than being merely a scholastic and descriptive enterprise, as became the tendency in the later representation of Abhidhamma (see the conclusion of Crosby’s contribution to this volume), a tendency from which scholarship is now beginning to recover, as exemplified by Heim’s in-depth analysis of the Abhidhamma understanding of morality and agency (Heim 2014).<sup>6</sup> For her part, Rhys Davids treats meditation (primarily conceived as *jhāna*) in entirely positive psychological and ethical terms, a strategy of considerable originality for the time (Rhys Davids 1912, 212ff). She singles out Barthélemy St. Hilaire and Sir Monier Monier-Williams as ‘experts’ writing in the previous 50 years, who respectively condemn Buddhism as a metaphysic of ‘incurable désespoir’ (St. Hilaire), of ‘inaction and apathy’ and being ‘ultra-pessimistic’ (Monier-Williams) (1912, 158). She is keen to illuminate the rational and ethical motives and goals behind a detailed presentation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation (with which one finds little to quibble over a century after she was writing), and remarkably extends her account to ‘other formulated methods for regulating mental procedure beside the Jhāna practice’ by discussing the *brahma vihāra* (1912, 218). She does not go on to discuss other *kammaṭṭhāna* (meditation topics),

perhaps being less familiar with Buddhaghosa's taxonomy at this time (she did not publish her edition of *Vism* until 1920) but perhaps also to spare the general readership of the Home University Library, for which she wrote the volume.

Caroline Rhys Davids's approach was not followed through.<sup>7</sup> While Buddhism influenced the development of psychology,<sup>8</sup> Rhys Davids's contemporaries and their successors in Buddhist studies looked elsewhere for disciplines to frame discussion of the topic.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps inevitably, these were the well-established high-status humanities disciplines of philology, textual criticism, history and philosophy, which in their turn determined the kinds of questions that would be raised and answered. Meditation was, it seems, of no interest to the natural sciences of the day.<sup>10</sup>

Reflecting this intellectual context, a theme that has had significant airing over the years is the possible origins of Buddhist meditation, focusing on the Buddha's personal teachers, and variations on claims to identify what is and is not the Buddha's personal innovation in this area.<sup>11</sup> Alongside this, a considerable amount of ink has been spilt in theoretical text-based discussions of the possible internal incoherence of Buddhist meditation *per se*, a position which overlaps with the claim that at least two mutually exclusive meditative procedures and/or goals have been mixed and/or confused – this last point usually bearing on the distinction between *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation.<sup>12</sup> The *samatha-vipassanā* division continues as a trope in presentations of Theravada meditation, including early meditation, in contemporary discourse (on the actual usage of the terms within the tradition, see Skilton's contribution to this volume). Some of this discussion about origins and coherence issues forth in revisionism, seeking to 'uncover' the Buddha's original teaching, in contrast to the received and developed tradition.<sup>13</sup> Almost always, this kind of discussion is focused on the textual sources identified as representing 'early' or 'original' Buddhism, i.e. the *tipitaka* as it survives in Pali language. This was fuelled by and in turn refuelled perceptions that the Theravada Buddhism of Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia which preserved this version of the canon was somehow coterminous with 'original Buddhism', as if the intervening 2500 years had somehow not happened, and that Theravada has been an entirely static phenomenon. The emphasis on those sources as representative of Buddhism and of Theravada as representing original Buddhism have been reaffirmed in global adaptations of Buddhism. Thus, when David McMahan critiques the modern appropriation of Buddhist meditation, the contrast he draws is between the Pali canon and modern practice (McMahan 2017, 21–23), a contrast that reflects the collocation of the two in modern discourse and practice. At all levels, any variety or development within Theravada beyond statements in the Pali texts, until we come to nineteenth–twentieth-century Burmese – and to a lesser extent Thai – revival of meditation in response to colonialism, remains invisible.<sup>14</sup>

By variety, we are referring primarily not to the different *topics* of meditation, i.e. what people meditate on, the narrowing of which in modern practice is observed by McMahan (2017, 21–23), but to the different *techniques* of meditation, i.e. how they meditate, including at advanced levels of practice. To illustrate what we mean by contrasting topic with technique we might take the example of the *boran kammatthan* practices of pre-modern Southeast Asia, to which some contributions to this volume are dedicated. The family of *boran kammatthan* practices uses meditation *topics* familiar from such texts as *Vism*, such as mindfulness of breathing, *brahmavihāra*, *asubha*, *kaṣiṇa*, etc., but employs a completely unfamiliar *technique* involving embedding the results of each meditation into the body of the practitioner (see contributions to this volume by Skilton, Choempolpaisal and Crosby). To complicate this picture, we must also point out that the *boran kammatthan* system incorporates three items from standard meditation discourse as new topics at the start of its programme. In other words, it complicates our understanding of such categories by rendering aspects of *experience* such as *pīti*, the delight felt in the first *jhāna*, as *topics* to be subject to its distinctive *technique* (see Skilton in this volume). Similarly, just in relation to mindfulness of breathing, a practice very familiar in the global context, we can see strikingly different techniques applied to this practice, with markedly different end results (see contributions by Kyaw, Shaw and Skilton to this volume).

### Text, practice and experience

This treatment of early Pali texts as conclusively representative of Theravada seems to express an unconscious ‘protestant’ bias that eschews developed tradition by over-valuing the search for ‘origins’ or the personal ‘word of the Buddha’ and ignoring medieval and early modern accounts of meditation. Yet the preoccupation with origins has also occurred within the Theravada tradition itself, as the expression of emic reassessments and reassertions of identity, particularly at times of crisis, such as the colonial period. Early texts were looked to for renewed inspiration at these times and modern adaptations of Buddhism were influenced by the resulting revival (Charney 2006; Khur-Yearn 2012; Braun 2013; Crosby 2013; see also Khur-Yearn’s and Kemper’s contributions to this volume), hence the link between early texts and global practice noted above. While these revivals produced their own literature, they often obscured previous literature, including that of previous revivals, particularly in the realm of personal practice, i.e. meditation. An outcome of this convergence is that colonial, revivalist and modern secular approaches to Buddhism have co-operated in obscuring the richness of Theravada’s meditation history and practice. Manuscript libraries dating even to the colonial period, when this obscuration began, contain multiple

texts on meditation. Those texts and editions of them published in their local Theravada contexts remain largely unfamiliar to modern global scholars and practitioners, particularly those working in the English-language medium. As we shall see from contributions to this volume, such texts detail a wealth of variety in meditation technique (see contributions by Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Khur-Yearn, Kyaw, Skilton, Terwiel and Wharton).

These preoccupations have not only obscured valid diversity; they also skirt around experience. Inevitably, in seeking to uncover past meditation practice, we are primarily dependent on texts, entirely so in the absence of unbroken living traditions, a situation that pertains to all forms of Theravada and Theravada-derived meditation practised today, since they are predominantly text-based revivals, originating in the main no earlier than the nineteenth century. Exceptions to this are the *boran kammattthan* practices in Thailand and Cambodia which developed sometime during the post-commentarial to early modern period, as far as we can tell in our present state of knowledge. (See contributions to this volume by Skilton, Choompolpaisal and Crosby.) The idea of an 'unbroken' lineage of practice is itself worthy of examination. 'Unbroken' here means that the meditation practice in question has been a matter of personal instruction passed down generation by generation from its 'origin' from a recognised authority. The archetypal authority is of course the Buddha himself, and this sense of continuity is enforced by the apparatus of textual reference that can be invoked through canonical texts. Many practitioners give little critical attention to the widespread assumption that there are (or may be) unbroken lineages of practice that stretch back to, presumably, the time of the Buddha. The sense of such continuity is often very important to the individual's sense of trust in the method, and their sense of 'place' and participation within a well-founded tradition, the efficacy of which is demonstrated by its *imprimatur* by the Buddha and its 'success' over intervening centuries. Even *boran kammattthan* is susceptible to this powerful urge. The present incumbent of the meditation section at Wat Ratchasittharam in Thonburi, Bangkok, where one strand of *boran kammattthan* is preserved, keeps a room of relics of former teachers, but pride of place is given to a relic of Rāhula, the Buddha's son, who is understood at this temple to be the first person to whom the Buddha taught *boran kammattthan* techniques. Western assumptions about the continuity of Theravada Buddhism and 'early/original' Buddhism have unwittingly fuelled unexamined assumptions of continuity in Theravada meditation practice between the time of the Buddha and the present, and, despite historical accounts that expose deep discontinuities in the Theravada world, these assumptions have sometimes appeared to be reflected in scholarly works touching on meditation. We should note that the somewhat fundamentalist textual reform initiated in Siam by Rāma IV (Mongkut), with its rejection of developed tradition,

aggravates the difficulty of accessing records that reveal innovation. (See Skilton in this volume.) Yet the narrative of direct experience of the teacher of a specific lineage is itself important, particularly in contexts where canonical texts do not provide direct confirmation of the authenticity of the practice. The only ‘unbroken’ living traditions are those which reach back to relatively modern or early modern founders, and in this sense they do not fulfil the oft-imagined sense of the phrase. We are therefore forced to accept that the concept of ‘unbroken living tradition’ is, for the analytic scholar, a figment of the imagination, even as, for the practitioner, it remains a potent assumption of continuity and validation.

Quite how to relate text to experience remains a challenge, both to the distant experience in the past to which the text refers and to the contemporary experience which might be regarded as a useful tool for interpreting past texts. Sceptical academic voices have been raised in relation to using experience as a criterion for judging textual accounts of meditation. From the perspective of the textual scholar, apparent contradictions in textual accounts of meditation ‘must not be dismissed on the grounds that accounts of experiential states of mind “elude mere intellectual treatment”’ (Stuart-Fox 1989, 104). This rightly emphasises that variations in textual statements about meditation are themselves historical phenomena, and it reminds us that the historical investigation of the production of a text is reasonably subject to the norms of text-historical discipline. Yet the claim echoes the attitude of text-historical investigators who would ignore or dismiss experience as a valid source of knowledge. By this standard, experience must be subordinated to intellectual logic. While the debate is an old one – insider vs. outsider, or even *pratyakṣa* vs. *anumāna* – it is intriguing to witness it in relation to a topic that is so essentially concerned with experience. It may be that this reflects an attitude (conscious or not) that the experiential component of textual descriptions of meditation are in fact only textual, i.e. are only fictive literary claims, for which the only legitimate standards of assessment are theoretical and textual. Even with the recent growth in contemplative and yogic studies, the way in which experience eludes a direct academic approach shapes the discipline in interesting ways. This issue is tackled head on by John Taber, who treats to a philosophical analysis the questions ‘Is yogic experience possible? ... In short, are these states of consciousness more than mere hallucinations?’ (Taber 2009, 71). He reveals how historically this issue also dogged Buddhist debate when confronted by outsider opponents. Taber concludes both that they are not possible and that they must be! (Taber 2009, 86–87 and 90).

Influential in the study of Buddhist meditation has been Sharf’s argument that ‘meditation experience’ is a retrospective performance that legitimates the institution:



While some adepts may indeed experience ‘altered states’ in the course of their training, critical analysis shows that such states do not constitute the reference points for the elaborate Buddhist discourse pertaining to the ‘path’. Rather, such discourse turns out to function ideologically and performatively – wielded more often than not in the interests of legitimation and institutional authority. (Sharf 1995, 228)

Sharf’s arguments are important in highlighting the role of context in shaping discourse, an argument directly relevant to this volume. (See, e.g. in Kyaw’s contribution, an account of the verification of Sunlun Sayadaw’s and Theinggu Sayadaw’s meditation experiences by Abhidhamma authorities.) Yet a legitimate concern here is that this view, i.e. that such discourse is primarily performative, simply re-affirms a pre-existing distrust for material pertaining to (religious) experience. This distrust is still tangible and found both within the Asian Buddhist context and in western scholarship. In the case of the former, as we see in Kyaw’s contribution, in Theravada Asia it is based on a different type of bias, a bias against those who – whether they are monastics or not – have not received formal monastic education or do not prioritise it, and thus are often perceived with suspicion by monastic and lay literati who place particular value on textual authority and prestige (Kyaw 2015). In the case of the latter, the distrust is more against experience *per se*. This makes it possible for an eminent textual scholar who is not a meditation practitioner to be asked to comment on ‘the epistemic validity and happiness-engendering value of Buddhist meditation’, and to conclude that the efficacy of meditation is based on the *credo* (or placebo) effect – a comment that might as well apply to all religion.<sup>15</sup>

Evidence that might be taken to confirm such a view is that early Indian Buddhist meditation is now practised, and affirmed as effective, in settings and to ends that are in complete contrast to those of its original context. A neat explication of this phenomenon is provided by David McMahan, who looks at how the ‘ideological and performative discourse’ (to use Sharf’s phrasing) of the context in which meditation is practised may shape the experience of meditators. He does this by contrasting the putative experiences of a mindfulness of breathing practice (*ānāpānasati*), on the one hand for the early world-renouncing monk in ancient India, and on the other for the modern middle-class world-affirming American practitioner (McMahan 2017). McMahan affirms the validity of the practice and experience of both: they are reconstructing themselves in different ways, based on the values affirmed in their divergent contexts. McMahan offers his analysis as a critique of the burgeoning neuroscientific study of meditation experience, to argue that the currently fashionable and highly influential measurement of empirical phenomena in such areas as the brain-imaging of practitioners is in itself inadequate to represent practitioner experience. Rather, the humanities and social sciences have a role in comprehending the contexts

that shape those experiences. He writes, 'The study of meditation should not succumb to the modern cult of calculability in which something is only real when it is measurable and measured' (McMahan 2017, 44). This is an interesting step forward in seeking to place experience more securely centre stage, although its relativist conclusion is of course anathema to a traditional – rather than modern eclectic – Buddhist for whom the only valid experience is experience of *the* objective truth, not *a subjective* truth, but it once more directs our gaze away from the elusive experience towards the peripheral context that may shape it.

The argument that meditation was used to affirm doctrine was developed in part in response to the view put forward by scholars such as Regamey (1951), Conze (1962) and, in particular, Schmithausen (1976), who all posited that meditation experience was influential in the development of Buddhist doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Eli Franco has critically reviewed Schmithausen on this subject, confirming the influence of meditation experience on some aspects of Buddhist doctrine, for example the correlation between cosmological realms and *jhāna* experience, but rejecting it in other areas, such as *anātman*, because of a lack of demonstrable causal connection or evidence of pre-existing doctrines to which key Buddhist doctrines may be a response (Franco 2009). There are two difficulties with this critique of Schmithausen. Firstly, as Franco himself points out, 'it would be difficult to prove that spiritual practice is the cause of something when the spiritual practice itself is all but unknown to us' (Franco 2009, 126). Secondly, while we may be able to see in the formulation of Buddhist doctrine the rejection of a pre-existing doctrine, this does not in itself exclude the influence of meditation. The doctrine may be rejected because it does not correlate with experience. Meditative experience may act as an invisible motivation for critiquing certain pre-existing doctrines.<sup>17</sup> Thus, theorisation in this area, whether for the primacy of doctrine or for the primacy of experience, is hindered by the nature of the subject.

### **Bridging divides: academic scholar–scholar practitioner**

Bringing experience into academic research was avoided until the late 1960s (see e.g. King, below), research until then being conducted on purely philological, text-critical and philosophical premises, with no reference to meditation practice or experience *per se*. Nor was there collaboration with meditation users who might have been able to offer some kind of relevant comment or perspective on some of the points of discussion. The scholarly discussion of meditation had thus been driven by individuals whose 'conceptions are basically imagined reconstructions of a putative earliest (set of) practice(s)' (Stuart 2015, 14). Global practitioner interest and active engagement with Asian teachers from the 1960s led to the better representation of

practitioners, such as Jack Kornfield's still useful *Modern Buddhist Masters*, published in 1977, and the significant and well-documented development of the modern mindfulness movement (below). However, work on meditation within the humanities often proceeded without such input, leading to a culture in which such input was not alluded to even when significant. An example of the latter is the work of the late Lance Cousins, a meditation practitioner and teacher as well as a renowned academic scholar, whose published academic work does not, however, explicitly exploit his experience in the field. We might therefore anticipate that others publishing on the subject also shielded their practical engagement from public scrutiny.<sup>18</sup> Yet we can see how practice can inform more sympathetic engagement with meditation texts from scholars such as Sarah Shaw, whose 2016 article, while examining familiar meditation topics on the basis of the *Visuddhimagga* and other Pali sources, seeks to explain their value from the perspective of how they work in practice. She also shows how context and individual predisposition shape the practitioner experience in a different way from that identified by McMahan (above), namely by necessitating an individual approach to practice in order to find the practice that will prove effective for any given practitioner (Shaw 2016, 123). Shaw documents the history and practice of the joint practitioner–scholar background she shares with Cousins in her contribution to this volume. Meanwhile, engagement with scholarship from the practitioner side is enhancing the accessible representation of some aspects of meditation experience, as for example in Leigh Brasington's recent volume on *jhāna* experience (Brasington 2015).

Mention of the possibility of joint practitioner–scholar status reminds us of the almost hermetically sealed divide between scholars and practitioners in the earlier phase of academic engagement with the subject. It is not that insiders were not publishing accounts of meditation practice and experience, as Jarrell's survey of publications on meditation between 1950 and 1982 shows (Jarrell 1985). It is that the insider perspective was not seen as a fruitful path of scholarly enquiry, on the one hand, and the scholarly enquiry not seen as conducive to enhanced practice, on the other. The perspectives and experiences of practitioners therefore did not enter the academic discourse, and if they appeared in print were treated by scholars as merely sectarian or relegated to the category of memoirs.<sup>19</sup> Until recently, serious discussion of meditation could not be undertaken in academic circles on the basis of experience or even with reference to ethnographic accounts of practitioners' experiences. This is changing. A recent, innovative attempt to do exactly this is Yuki Sirimane's textual and ethnographic study of advanced states of attainment based on the first four *nikāyas* of the Pali canon and interviews with practitioners in Sri Lanka (Sirimane 2016). While texts provide the theoretical basis for this study, the focus is on

understanding the experience of the transformative process. We are also now finding more in-depth personal accounts. While social scientific accounts of meditation within the context of discussing the presence of meditation in Asia have tended to offer only accounts of entry-level practice, Hyunsoo Jeon, a psychiatrist from South Korea who first came across Pa-Auk meditation in 2006, details his own personal account of his experience of practising meditation in the Pa-Auk meditation tradition from November 2013 to September 2014 (Jeon 2018). Jeon describes not only the advanced practice instruction that he received from meditation teachers from the Pa-Auk tradition such as Sayadaw U Sila and Sayadaw U Revata, but also his experience as he put the instruction into practice. For instance, as part of practising meditation on dependent origination, he describes in detail how he tried to see past lives after listening to his teacher's explanation of the two methods for doing this (2018, 134–136).

The use of texts in all these studies builds on an important approach to the discussion of meditation that began in the early period of western Buddhist studies, namely the exposition of authoritative texts on meditation. Such work has helped bridge the two sides of the insider–outsider divide from the outset, since it is of interest to both. An early example of such collaboration and mutual influence, between Anāgārika Dharmapāla and T. W. Rhys Davids, resulted in the Pali Text Society's first publication of a meditation text (Rhys Davids 1896; also see Kemper's contribution to this volume). Correspondence between Ledi Sayadaw U Ṇāṇa (1846–1923) and westerners in the early twentieth century also exemplifies such mutual influence. Ledi Sayadaw corresponded regularly with westerners on a wide range of doctrines and complex Abhidhamma topics, including Caroline Rhys Davids of the Pali Text Society and Edmund J. Mills who was chairman of the Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland, the organisation which distributed Ledi Sayadaw's texts in Europe (Braun 2013, 128–129). Although such interactions did not lead Ledi Sayadaw and his western correspondents to think of Buddhism in the same way, each party could achieve their own goals. For instance, Caroline Rhys Davids could take from her conversations with Ledi Sayadaw the philosophical knowledge she sought, while such interactions for Ledi Sayadaw 'reinforced the way he popularised meditation as a close observation of reality informed by Abhidhamma learning' (Braun 2013, 130).<sup>20</sup> As we will see with Nyanaponika's work below, we find meticulous scholarship as the basis for widespread engagement in the case of Ledi Sayadaw's work, which straddled polemics, scholarship and meditation (Visuddha 2018, 3).<sup>21</sup> Mahasi Sayadaw U Sobhana (1904–1982), who came to be regarded as 'one of the "elders" or "grandfathers" of what has become the Western mindfulness movement and insight meditation' (Sayadaw 2016, xxii), drawing on his textual erudition, composed authoritative texts on meditation since the 1940s. Mahasi Sayadaw's *The Progress of*

*Insight (Visuddhiñāṇa-kathā): A Modern Treatise on Buddhist Satipatthāna Meditation*, dealing with the advanced stages of the practice within the framework of the seven stages of purification as in the *Vism*, was one of the first texts to be translated from Pali into English by Nyanaponika Thera (1901–1994), published in 1965 by Forest Hermitage.<sup>22</sup> Mahasi Sayadaw taught *vipassanā* meditation to both Asian and western meditators such as Sayadaw U Paṇḍita (1921–2016), Nyanaponika Thera, Joseph Goldstein (1944–) and Sharon Salzberg (1952–) who became key figures in spreading insight meditation globally.

From the text-historicist side in the West, this consideration of canonical and other authoritative texts is a matter of examining them for their content and their location within a doctrinal framework (often built by western scholars). From this perspective the text is thus an intellectual property to be interrogated by the scholar, who might even presume to opine on its orthodoxy and validity. From the side of the practitioner and insider-scholar this activity is a matter of the exegesis of important and recognised authorities within the tradition. For Theravada, the subject of this present volume, this is exemplified by work on canonical texts, especially the *Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Buddhaghosa's fifth-century *Visuddhimagga* (*Vism*) and – to a lesser extent – Anuruddha's c. eleventh-twelfth-century *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*.<sup>23</sup> Such exegesis could legitimately be conducted by either the academic scholar or the scholar practitioner, the result being cautiously used by the contrasting parties on its individual merits. An example of this approach is the groundbreaking *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera, who practised meditation under the guidance of Mahasi Sayadaw for a period in the 1950s, an exposition of *satipatthāna* based on his translation of the *Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta*, published in 1954.<sup>24</sup> Nyanaponika contextualises the text and its exposition against two meditation methods: 'Burmese *satipatthāna* method' and *ānāpānasati*. The success of Nyanaponika's book (and his work in general) in the West cannot be divorced from his careful scholarship and, possibly, his European ethnicity. Another roughly contemporary example is Vajirañāṇa Mahāthera's (1897–1970) authoritative 1962 study *Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice*, itself a detailed analysis of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation explicitly structured around *Vism*, and originally compiled as a PhD thesis at Cambridge University between 1933 and 1936 (Vajirañāṇa 1962). Vajirañāṇa arrived in the UK as a missionary to the London Buddhist Vihara from Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in 1928, having been selected for this task by none other than Anāgārika Dharmapāla. It seems surprising that 26 years (i.e. 1936–1962) were to elapse before Vajirañāṇa published this major work.<sup>25</sup> A somewhat later example is Henepola Gunaratana's *The Path of Serenity and Insight* (1985), a single-volume exegesis of the *jhānas* that effectively summarises the Buddhist path as set out in

Vism. Drawing on a wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of the Pali canon, including both layers of commentary and Vism, Gunaratana (1927–) compiles an authoritative volume which, in the manner of Vism itself, offers a lucid overview of most aspects of meditation from a single prescriptive perspective that is rooted in Buddhaghosa's fifth-century model. This book also started life as a doctoral thesis, in 1980; the author clearly thought that there was a more sympathetic readership for this material and only 5 years were to elapse prior to publication. In the same year that Gunaratana completed his thesis, Winston L. King published his likewise accomplished *Theravāda Meditation. The Buddhist Transformation of Yoga*, again based primarily on Vism (King 1980).<sup>26</sup> While in part focusing on the origins of Buddhist meditation, it then examines the function of different meditations holistically, and in the final section contains short accounts of contemporary Burmese masters including Sunlun Sayadaw (discussed more extensively in this volume by Kyaw).

Such textual treatments evidence at least two interesting angles: on the one hand they have emphasised the authority of the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* and, in particular, Vism, thereby affirming the hegemony of these two texts in modern Theravada meditation discourse, and leading many western scholars to take these as the authoritative starting point for discussion of meditation; and on the other hand, they reflect the assimilation of individuals between the two worlds of academic and monastic or practitioner scholarship. Gunaratana, whose important work we cited above, was already a learned monk in Sri Lanka, having been ordained at the age of 12, and then acquired a BA, MA and PhD at an American university (in Washington DC) once established in America. As we saw above, Ledi Sayadaw could be seen as a pioneer in this, though he is now primarily known in the West for his association with meditation rather than scholarship. This assimilationist trend is now accepted as to some degree commonplace, with notable individuals continuing to produce work that is widely accepted in practitioner and academic scholarship. Analayo's book *Satipatṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realisation* is a good example. First published in 2003, it offers a detailed exploration of the four *satipatṭhānas*, i.e. contemplation of the body, feelings, mind and Dhammas, according to its exposition in the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta*. Drawing on the related early discourses and the works of modern scholars of Buddhism, Analayo not only explicates some etymological points regarding key words and the meditation instructions given in the *Satipatṭhāna Sutta*, but also relates the discussion to meditation practice. In order to achieve the latter, he draws on the teachings of meditation teachers such as Mahasi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin of Myanmar and Ajahn Chah of Thailand. The sensitivities towards 'insider' scholarship – of whatever kind or degree – that in part informed former western squeamishness towards meditation as a subject – appear to have vanished.

To make these reflections is not an attempt to privilege 'experience' over textual or historical research, but rather an effort to underline how the history of our engagement with and understanding of meditation has been shaped by our own cultural preoccupations and prejudices and by accidents of history, and to balance these otherwise legitimate research strategies with an acknowledgement that Buddhism is an inhabited realm of action, understanding and experience. For many Buddhists, *pace* Sharf, meditation is something to be practised rather than performed.

Aside from the integration of the Buddhist practitioner into the western scholarly community (and vice versa), other important historical, cultural and academic changes affecting the study of Buddhist and Theravada meditation have emerged in the last half century or so, some of which we have touched on above.<sup>27</sup> These include:

- (1) The social revolution of the 1960s in the West, partly fuelled by the American war in Vietnam, that introduced many 'dropouts' to Asian cultures and meditation techniques and to altered mental states, and made mainstream discussion of both possible;
- (2) The diaspora of Asian Buddhist teachers of meditation throughout the West, during the second half of the twentieth century, facilitated by the lifting of the ban on Asian immigration to the USA that was in place between 1924 and 1965 (Hickey 2019, 15), complemented by easier international travel allowing many westerners to travel to Asia and practice meditation there, with the result that Buddhist practice has to some extent been 'normalised' in the West;
- (3) A broad subjectivist turn in western attitudes and values away from ideas of objective truth and towards relativistic positions which emphasise 'what's true for me';
- (4) A surge in medical interest in the psychological effects of meditation reflected in clinical studies;<sup>28</sup>
- (5) A scientific correlative of the last item, involving hard science investigations of the physiology and effects of meditation in a laboratory setting, often employing MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) and other scanning methods, more recently testing blood, skin temperature (Manocha et al. 2010) and hair (Taren et al. 2015). Overall, this is the approach that has taken meditation to the furthest degree of acknowledgement outside of the traditional meditational and therapeutic communities. This began in the 1970s with a surge of more or less clinical studies of the effects of meditation, often focussing on Transcendental Meditation (Jarrell 1985).<sup>29</sup> A recent assessment of and response to this phenomenon and responses to it has been provided by McMahan and Braun (2017).

- (6) The global reach of a secularised therapeutic form of meditation known as mindfulness that draws on various influences, including Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, but primarily Burmese *vipassanā*, that seems to have left everyone on the street now thinking that they know what meditation is, regardless of how carefully its practitioners define it. This follows on from earlier therapeutic implementations of meditation for 'relaxation' which had popularised forms of narrative visualisation for that purpose;<sup>30</sup>
- (7) The emergence of a new field of study and research entitled 'contemplative studies' (as distinct from older, outmoded categories such as mysticism);<sup>31</sup>
- (8) And specifically in Theravada studies, from Francois Bizot, a series of studies of a major tradition of Buddhist meditation that was not consistent with the prescriptive view of meditation derived from the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and *Vism* – and largely unrecognised in the Anglo-German tradition of Buddhist studies at the time – but that turns out to have been hegemonic in multiple Southeast Asian Theravada countries at least as far back as the sixteenth century and well into the twentieth century (see Choompolpaisal's contribution to this volume), and also to have been transmitted to Sri Lanka in the eighteenth century (see Crosby's contribution to this volume). This tradition is referred to by the denominator *boran kammathan* (or cognates) in this volume. It is an irony that publications on aspects of this meditation had been put out by practitioners all through the twentieth century (with a flush of items in the 1930s in Thai; see Choompolpaisal in this volume), but also books in English as early as 1960, by Terry Magness, dealing with the strand of this earlier tradition taken up by Luang Por Sot (Candasāro).<sup>32</sup> That they were and have since been largely ignored could be put down to at least the heritage if not the lingering presence of anti-practitioner bias in western scholarship, although we should also consider the dismissal of this tradition as a theoretical invention, for example by the influential anthropologist, Michael Carrithers (See 'Themes' below).
- (9) A further promising development in material on esoteric Theravada practice is the recent return to the study of Burmese *weikza* (e.g. Rozenberg, Brac de la Perrière and Turner 2014), facilitated by the increasing openness of Myanmar to foreign researchers. Whether close examination of the meditations practised within *weikza* will be possible without the normative lens of Burmese normalising authorities remains to be seen.<sup>33</sup>

For reasons such as these, then, a combination of broader social changes and the 'discovery' of hitherto unconsidered forms of meditation, the overall



complexion of scholarly work in the field of Theravada meditation has changed considerably with the passage of a few decades. Everyone nowadays does have an opinion about meditation or at least 'mindfulness', and we have seen variants of that practice applied to a very wide range of clients, including UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), British Members of Parliament, prisoners, pregnant mothers, gamblers, people suffering from depression, teachers and their pupils, to name but a few.<sup>34</sup> In this sense meditation has been thoroughly 'normalised', largely by being secularised initially as 'relaxation' and later as 'mindfulness', and has begun to receive wide attention from psychiatric and hard science research programmes, formerly the reserves of deepest scepticism.<sup>35</sup> No longer is the subjective aspect of meditation experience a problem, but rather it is now the object of medical and scientific scrutiny. There is even an increasing awareness of so-called 'dark night' experiences, which some for the moment call 'adverse reactions' to mindfulness and other meditation techniques, and these too are the object of study.<sup>36</sup> It should be pointed out here that 'unpleasant' experiences in or resulting from meditation may be indicators of progress on the path (see Kyaw in this volume), but get to be classified as 'problematic' due to the mismatch of expectation and motive in undertaking the practice in the first place, e.g. experience of the 'purification by knowledge and vision of the path' (*paṭipadāñāṇadassana-visuddhi*) involves the 'knowledge of the fearful' (*bhayatūpaṭṭhānā-ñāṇa*). This may be tolerable for the practitioner if undertaken for soteriological purposes but a very unwelcome development if one has taken up meditation to reduce anxiety or control depression.<sup>37</sup> We can thank Andrea Grabovac for pointing out that not all experiences of meditation are or should be expected to be pleasant (Grabovac 2015). The processes of insight are extremely challenging and some of what is understood superficially as 'bad' meditation experiences might, from a practitioner perspective, be positive steps forward on the path, be a crucial object of learning (see Kyaw this volume), or relate to broader expectations of Buddhist meditative experience.<sup>38</sup> This last consideration brings us neatly back to the division between practice and scholarship/investigation, which otherwise has been partially blurred by meditation's therapeutic popularity.

The work of Bizot and a handful of other scholars from the 1970s onwards on the so-called *yogāvacara* traditions of Cambodia (hereafter *boran kammathan*), combined with more recent fieldwork amongst Dai communities (Khur Yearn, and Wharton, in this volume) has alerted the scholarly community to a variety of now-marginal meditation techniques which involve more than the normative and canonically authorised techniques outlined in *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna-sutta* or *Vism*. The exploration of these is justified on a number of fronts.

On the one hand, these less familiar meditation traditions have a regional and cultural significance which can easily be lost under the impact of regional political centralisation and of globalisation. Ignoring them, we fail to understand regional forms of Theravada Buddhism in their entirety. On the other hand, by unwittingly colluding in the narrowing of meditation to a set of prescribed activities from one authoritative source or another, we fail to understand the broader functions and potentials of meditation, and it may not be overextending the claim to suggest that to the degree that we do this, we also fail to appreciate Buddhism in both its historical fullness and its potential. Another consideration arises from reflection on the success of just one technique in therapeutic applications, akin to our dependence on the commercial production of the Cavendish banana. Somewhat in the manner of ecologists who argue for the protection of rainforests by speculating on the potential value of their species for pharmaceutical applications to benefit human beings, it is neither unreasonable, nor at odds with the Buddhist ambition to 'benefit the many' (*bahujanahitāya*), to make a similar case on behalf of yet-unexplored meditation techniques.

It is therefore not unreasonable to see our historical engagement with meditation as having fallen into two major phases: textual, up to the 1970s, and thereafter divided between textual and clinical studies. To this, more recently, we can add the contributions made by the fieldwork of social scientists such as Houtman (1990, 1999) and Jordt (2006, 2007) in Myanmar (Burma), and Cook (2010), Schedneck (2015) and Cassaniti (2017, 2018) in Thailand to understanding the significance of context, culture, community and political functions to the practice and discourse of meditation. Houtman's 1990 work on traditions of Buddhist practice (*patipatti*) in Myanmar explores not only complex dimensions regarding *vipassanā-samatha* and *pariyatti-patipatti* divides as understood by his respondents, but also institutional aspects of the practice such as the social organisation and function of meditation centres. Building on his study of *vipassanā* and *samatha* meditation traditions of Myanmar, Houtman (1999) examines how Burmese ideas about these two traditions of 'mental culture' inform and shape Burmese politics, especially during the 1988 political crisis. Drawing on observations at the Mahasi meditation centre in Yangon and interviews with members of government ministries and senior monks, Jordt (2007) gives a detailed account of the development of Burmese *vipassanā* practice in contemporary Myanmar in the broader context of the mass lay meditation movement. Using the lay meditation movement in Myanmar as a case study, Jordt's 2006 article examines 'how people who acquire meditation-derived knowledge' have come to form 'a community of knowers'.

Turning to ethnographic studies in Thailand, Cook (2010), drawing on fieldwork at Wat Bonamron in northern Thailand, examines motivation, experience, practice and duties of monks, and those of *mae chi* (Thai

Buddhist female monastics), highlighting complex social relationships and a gender hierarchy within the context of the monastery. She also argues that meditation has an important social dimension, influencing the psychological benefits that people experience as a result of its practice (Cook 2010, 7). Cassaniti (2017) analyses how understanding and practice of mindfulness in a Thai cultural context contrasts sharply with those of mindfulness in America, and shows that ideas about non-self (*anattā*), spirits that inhabit the body (*khwan* in Thai) and personhood inform understandings of mindfulness in northern Thailand. Building on her study of the concept of mindfulness and mindfulness practice in Thailand, Cassaniti's recent book (2018) investigates how mindfulness is understood in the cultural, religious and social context of Theravada Asia (Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka), and highlights how this is similar to and differs from that in the American context. While the above studies focus on the practice, experience and understanding of meditation among Asian practitioners, Schedneck (2015) looks at experiences of 'international meditators' (i.e. tourists, expatriates and non-Thai visitors) at meditation centres or temples in Thailand. She examines the ways in which the international meditators relate to their motivations for and expectations of life at meditation centres and how they make sense of such experiences in the context of the commodification of meditation through promotional materials. She also explores the cultural translation performed by teachers at international meditation centres for international meditators, bringing meditation into dialogue with modern discourses such as psychology, secularism, individualism and universalism. As part of this cultural translation, Schedneck (2015, 166–167) observes that many of the external practices of the meditation retreat such as bowing to a Buddha statue, chanting etc. are not performed or are deemed unacceptable or unnecessary by international meditation centre teachers, their students, or both.

In these social scientific studies of meditation practitioners, we see an emphasis on understanding the place of meditation in the wider social, cultural and political contexts and how this shapes practice, discourse and the way the practitioner negotiates their place in that context. They thus exemplify the type of work commended by McMahan (2017), noted above, and place them in a different genre from those fieldwork-based studies that focus on the dynamics of the practice-experience itself, including higher level practice, within the framework of the Buddhist path, such as those by Sirimane and Jeon, noted above.

Nowadays, discussion of meditation is no longer restricted to textual statements that are to be understood solely by text-critical, historical or philosophical analysis. Yet there remain further horizons to reach. Moreover, while these later fields of engagement, the clinical and the social scientific, have added much, they have perhaps – with some exceptions noted

above – contributed to a simplified representation of what meditation entails, often repeating for Theravāda the *samatha-vipassanā* trope, and assuming that basic mindfulness of breathing exercises to be found in closely related forms in the normative texts and modern classes are a valid representation of what Theravāda meditation is and has been. While the academic study of Buddhism has always acknowledged the differences between traditions, with Zen and Tibetan practices being highest on the radar of those looking to the influences on global Buddhist-derived meditation culture, it is now perhaps time for a third evolution of engagement to begin, and that is to recognise and explore the internal diversity of meditation practice within specific traditions of Buddhism. Interesting developments in this area are underway in non-Theravada traditions (see e.g. Greene [forthcoming](#) on early Chan). However, for Theravada, the exposition of meditation has for too long been dominated by iconic texts of the Pali canon and *Vism*, and their representation in the uptake of *Vipassanā* and within the modern mindfulness movement. The danger is that these can be taken as a prescriptive and exclusive account of what meditation is and can be within Theravada.

### Origins of this volume and some of its themes

Despite all the advances in the study of Buddhist and Buddhist-derived meditation, investigation into variety in Theravada meditation has been long overdue and was the motivation behind three workshops related to our project of comparing Theravada meditation systems and to some of the material presented in this volume. These events were ‘Variety in Theravada Meditation’, held on 23 October 2014 at King’s College, London; ‘Traditional Theravada Meditation (*boran kammattthan*)’, 5–6 July 2016, held at the École Française d’Extrême-Orient, Siem Reap, Cambodia; and ‘Buddhism, Meditation and Ageing’, held on 27 October 2017 at King’s College, London. The first two looked at identifying and exploring different types of meditation within Theravada, with the second specifically tackling the problem of identifying different techniques with manuscript collections. The third conference was inspired by the documentation of the benefits of mindfulness meditation on the preservation of cognitive reserve in ageing (Malinowski and Shalamanova 2017) and the traditional periods of meditation practice held in certain Theravada communities specifically for their senior generation (Eberhardt 2017; contributions by Khur-Yearn and Wharton to this volume). Versions of a number of the papers that follow were originally aired at one or another of these three events.<sup>39</sup> At the first event, we also had the honour of a keynote paper on ‘Continuities and Discontinuities’ given by the late Lance Cousins, who included in his talk a short review of the changing understanding of the word *kammattāna*.

Alas, Lance, who – with his eminent scholarship and practice experience – had acted as a wonderful mentor in our work, had declined to be recorded at the conference, and we have been unable to trace his notes. For this subject, then, and in Lance’s honour, Andrew Skilton has included his own exploration of this subject in his contribution. These have been supplemented with invited contributions from a number of authors which help broaden the view in a number of ways.

Several themes emerge in these articles. Firstly, several seek to examine advanced practice and the correlation with advanced spiritual progress (Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Kyaw, Skilton). While there have been attempts to compare teachings and methods given by different meditation teachers in the past (Kornfield 1977; van Oosterwijk 2012; Schedneck 2015), those accounts have necessarily been of entry-level practice, whereas the articles here look in detail at advanced stages of the practice, with Kyaw and Choompolpaisal comparing the advanced practices of different teachers following closely related practices. Related to this, Abhidhamma’s relationship to practice is examined in Kyaw, Crosby and Skilton. Several articles look at lay practice outside of the modern Vipassanā and mindfulness movements (Khur Yearn, Wharton, Shaw, Kyaw, Kemper, Terwiel). While the spread of practice among lay people undoubtedly reflects the changes in colonial Burma and the subsequent spread of practices to the West during the counter-cultural revolution and beyond, other lay practice can be found and some of it may significantly predate that modern development. They may even be inspired by the same authoritative text, Buddhaghosa’s commentary on the *Mahāsatippaṭṭhānasutta*. There, Buddhaghosa describes the country where the Buddha teaches the *sutta* as the ideal place because lay people too are focused on practice:

When people are at the weavers or ford, they don’t stand about gossiping, they ask one another about their meditation practice. If a woman answers that she doesn’t practise they criticise her for the lost opportunity of being born as a human in the time of the Buddha’s teaching. (quoted in Crosby 2014, 218)

Given the importance of the *Mahāsatippaṭṭhānasutta* and its commentary in the nineteenth-century revival, against the devastation and social upheavals of the British period, those such as Ledi Sayadaw (Braun 2013) and Sao Amat Long (Khur-Yearn 2012), who promoted meditation practice among lay people, may have been inspired by the description of the ideal society of practice-orientated lay people offered by Buddhaghosa.

Several articles touch on the relationship between meditation and ‘ageing and death’ as well as meditation on death. Khur-Yearn and Wharton look at communities among Tai ethnic groups in Southeast Asia in which meditation practices are undertaken by middle-aged lay people, and how such practice marks the beginning of their religious or spiritual life. Kyaw documents that

a near-death experience of Theinngu Sayadaw led him to undertake meditation. Crosby and Kim discuss recollection and understanding of death as it appears in the texts they explore. A range of meditation topics is examined (to varying degrees) in these articles: breath (Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Kemper, Kim, Kyaw, Shaw, Skilton), *asubha* (Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Kong, Kyaw, Skilton), *nimitta* (Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Kemper, Kim, Kyaw, Skilton), *vedanā* (Kim, Kyaw) and food, the *āhāre paṭikulasaññā* practice (Kong). As mentioned above, the focus in this volume is on a variety of *techniques*, not of *topics*. For example, the articles mentioning breath as a meditation topic highlight different techniques of meditating on breath: to follow the breath up from navel to the nose or lip (Choompolpaisal), to count from 1 to 10 with each breath (Kemper), to observe strong, rapid, rhythmic breathing (Kyaw), to count up to a given number during the inbreath and count back down from it during the outbreath (Shaw), or to focus on the breath at specified points of the body (Skilton).

The articles are based on textual, historical and fieldwork approaches. Around half of them are also written by those who have experience of practice within the tradition they discuss – or one closely related to it, in the case of the historical studies. While this volume addresses a wide range of themes, issues and perspectives, there are several areas that need further research. The first relates to the terminology, either Pali or vernacular, used in meditation texts and meditation instruction in different contexts and communities. Cassaniti (2018) explores how Buddhists in Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka understand and relate to *sati* – ‘mindfulness’ in a broader context – a topic examined in relation to early Pali literature by Kuan (2008). In this volume, Skilton explores the changing referents of the term *kammaṭṭhāna* from canonical through to contemporary usage. This work on changing referents and other specifics of terminology, as well as ways of expressing Pali and Pali-derived technical terminology with nuance in English, needs expanding. Secondly, more adventurous textual work looking at manuscripts of non-normative texts still needs to be done. In the case of meditation texts in Myanmar, identification of non-normative texts has yet to be started. In manuscript collections everywhere, texts on meditation abound, their variety often hidden beneath normative or descriptive titles. Thirdly, the relationship between Abhidhamma and meditation practice as well as meditative experience needs further research (see contributions by Kyaw and Crosby here). For instance, apart from *boran kammathan* texts, the extent to which other Abhidhamma texts and concepts could be used in practice requires further textual work and fieldwork to uncover more about the ways in which Abhidhamma relates to practice and has different modes of transformative power.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, given the unwarranted assessment by Michael Carrithers of the Sri Lankan and Siamese lineages of *boran kammathan* as ‘an example of an

imaginative but not very insightful attempt to revive meditation from the texts' (Carrithers 1983, 233), i.e. a kind of early modern fiction, it has been a desideratum to establish not only its historicity, the historical lineages of transmission of this meditation tradition, but also its authenticity, its internal coherence as an expression of recognisable Theravada principles, values and goals. This concern is expressed through a number of the contributions to this volume, notably Skilton, Choompolpaisal and Crosby, but could usefully be the focus of considerable future research, both manuscript based and in the field.

## Overview of articles

The present volume consists of 12 articles, most revealing aspects of the variety of meditation practices and techniques found within Theravada in the early modern and modern periods. Two (Harris and Kemper) indicate the difficulties experienced by those not within a living tradition but faced with the challenge of recovering or understanding Theravada practice in the colonial period, when this subject as a whole was so alien to the wider world. We have placed the articles in an order that is roughly chronological in respect of their contents, although a number of them discuss material from several of the periods covered: from canonical and commentarial periods though to medieval, pre-modern, colonial, modern and contemporary texts and practice.

In the first article, framing our study by tracing the history of meanings of key words such as *kammaṭṭhāna*, *samatha* and *vipassanā*, Andrew Skilton's 'Meditation And Its Subjects: Tracing *Kammaṭṭhāna* From The Early Canon To The Boran Kammathan Traditions Of Southeast Asia' shows how the meanings and referents of these key terms have changed over time. He also examines the development of different lists of *kammaṭṭhāna*, meditation topics, drawing out features that are distinctive to the pre-modern Theravada meditation (*boran kammathan*) that is also the subject of several articles in this volume (Choompolpaisal, Crosby, Terwiel). He identifies variations between different transmissions of *boran kammathan* into the twentieth century and explores the relationship of its *vipassanā* practices to Abhidhamma, while also indicating criteria useful for identifying *boran kammathan* manuscripts in the field. Two articles then tackle variety of practice in early Theravada sources. Kyungrae Kim's 'A Comparison of the Lists and Categorisation of Meditation Practices (*Kammaṭṭhāna*) in the *Visuddhimagga* and \**Vimuttimagga*' explores the commentarial classification of *kammaṭṭhāna* in the \**Vimuttimagga*, preserved in Chinese, and the text thought to be its successor, the more familiar *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa, the latter seen as normative in Theravada tradition. He observes the variations in topic and method of meditation between these two works. Man-Shik Kong's 'Variations in the Contemplation

of the Repulsiveness of Food, *Āhārepatikūlasaṅṅā*: Canonical, Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna Forms' looks at the rather neglected topic of meditation on food. He demonstrates two key developments from the canonical to commentarial periods. One is the progressive restriction of the benefits attributed to the practice. The other is the divergence between Theravada and Sarvāstivāda/Mahāyāna in how to practise. Theravada developed a practice that focuses on the reality of repulsiveness of stages of the alms-round, i.e. the acquisition of food, and its consumption and digestion, rather than seeing food as repulsive in and of itself. In contrast, Sarvāstivāda/Mahāyāna teach the practitioner to develop an attitude of repulsiveness by cognitive association, allocating an aspect of *asubha* (impurity) to different types of food.

The next three articles address visual aspects of meditation in pre-modern Theravada, evidence for which is drawn from the sixteenth century to the modern day. They all relate to the family of practices referred to in this volume as the 'old meditation method', *boran kammatthan*, a theme commenced in the opening article. Kate Crosby's 'Abhidhamma and *nimitta* in Eighteenth-Century Meditation Manuscripts from Sri Lanka: A Consideration of Orthodoxy and Heteropraxy in *boran kammatthāna*' examines manuscripts that attest to the presence of a transmission of *boran kammatthan* from Ayutthaya in eighteenth-century Sri Lanka. After surveying the available evidence, she focuses on the relationship between different types of *nimitta*, visual signs experienced prior to death and in meditation, and how they are utilised within this tradition. She shows how the practice offers a detailed working out of the spiritual path as contained within commentarial Abhidhamma through a progressive substitution of increasingly pure mental states within the embodied individual. Phibul Choempolpaisal's 'Nimitta and Visual Methods in Siamese and Lao Meditation Traditions from the Seventeenth Century to the Present Day' also focuses on *nimitta*, to draw out differences in high-level practice between the *boran kammatthan* systems of several high-ranking Lao and Siamese clerics including three supreme patriarchs (*saṅgharāja/sangharat*): from sixteenth century Laos, to eighteenth–nineteenth century Thailand, as recorded in publications from the early twentieth century. He is then able to show the connections between specific lineages in the pre-modern period and three important heirs to *boran kammatthan* in the modern period: the meditation lineages at Wat Ratchasittharam, those at Wat Pradusongtham, and among the network of temples that adopt Sodh Candasaro's (1884–1959) Dhammakaya method (*vijjā dhammakāya*). Depictions of high-level attainments and even of Nibbāna itself are the topic of the next article, by Barend Jan Terwiel, whose 'The City of Nibbāna in Thai Picture Books of the Three Worlds' identifies for the first time the detailed symbolism of depictions of the City of Nibbāna and the eight supramundane stages that culminate in arhatship in manuscripts from the eighteenth century containing the cosmological text the 'Depiction of the Three Worlds', *Samutphāpraiphūm*. The final stage of the *arhat* in these



depictions is shown as a monk holding what looks like a crystal ball at his navel, a motif recognisable from several *boran kammattān* schools of meditation, including the practice followed by King Taksin, who had commissioned one of these illustrated manuscripts. As an aside, this adds further evidence against the oft-stated claim that manuscript illustrations do not relate to their contents in a Theravada context.

There follow two articles on the efforts in the nineteenth century to comprehend the then-elusive practice of meditation in Sri Lanka from two completely contrasting camps, that of the British colonial observer in Elizabeth Harris's 'Buddhist Meditation and the British Colonial Gaze in Nineteenth-Century Sri Lanka' and that of the Buddhist revivalist Anāgārika Dharmapāla in Steven Kemper's 'Anagarika Dharmapala's Meditation'. Elizabeth Harris follows the development of the use of 'meditation' and related terms in writings by different British observers of Sri Lanka in the colonial period, showing how this reveals not only the varied colonial influences and preoccupations, including the varying influences of Christianity and theosophy, but also the range of practice present in Sri Lanka. She finds that the term 'meditation' begins to accommodate its current range of referents (i.e. moving away from a western understanding of meditation *on* something, which excluded its use for the *jhāna* experiences, for example) only in the mid-nineteenth century with William Knighton, with the broader range then later used by the influential Pali scholar and dictionary-writer Robert Childers. She identifies the importance of *jhāna* experience among the local informants of these observers and suggests that the tendency to equate meditation with *Vipassanā* is a subsequent narrowing down of the range of the term that comes with the twentieth-century emergence of global Buddhist modernism. In 'Anāgārika Dharmapāla's Meditation', Steven Kemper traces Anāgārika Dharmapāla's commitment to meditation, observing how – contrary to his portrayal in earlier biographical sources – self-transformation and the attainment of the supramundane states (from stream entrant to arhatship) were his primary motivation. As documented in his diaries, he experimented with meditation on an almost daily basis and sought information on meditation practice from multiple sources. He drew on the *Visuddhimagga* and arranged for a copy to be made of the *boran kammattān* manuscript that he would lend to T. W. Rhys Davids, as noted above, to be published in 1896 as *The Manual of a Mystic*, the first modern publication of a meditation manual. Surprisingly, given his oft-cited falling out with Olcott, theosophy and his belief in Koot Hoomi, one of the *mahātma* above Tibet with whom Blavatsky claimed to be in communication, influenced Dharmapāla's quest throughout his life.

The final four articles all examine varieties of practice in contemporary Theravada, and all relate to lay practice rather than that of monastics. Three

of these examine practices in Southeast Asia, while that by Sarah Shaw looks at a Southeast Asian practice transposed to and adapted in the UK. Offering a window into the diversity of practice found within the revival of meditation in Myanmar since the nineteenth century, Pyi Phyo Kyaw's 'The Sound of the Breath: Sunlun and Theinngu Meditation Traditions of Myanmar' offers a detailed account of the meditation practices and experience of two famous meditation teachers, Sunlun Sayadaw Ven. U Kavi (1878–1952) and Theinngu Sayadaw Ven. U Ukkattha (1913–1973), both considered to have reached Awakening. Their practices, commenced as middle-aged lay men, offer interpretations of suffering (*dukkha*) that may be surprising to outsiders. She documents the experiences they reported and the ways in which their experiences were confirmed as valid against canonical and commentarial evidence by senior members of the Sangha. She also examines the meditation techniques and popularity of the two traditions founded by them. Kyaw's article highlights a challenge with terminology. Once we are beyond general terms and into the realm of describing experience, within a Theravada context we enter the often untranslatable realms of Abhidhamma – untranslatable both in terminology and in terms of the way Abhidhamma seeks to capture processes, rather than the perspective on an undeconstructed individual. Jotika Khur-Yearn and David Wharton document the collective practices of undertaking precepts and meditation on the part of usually older lay practitioners during the rainy season. While the goals of most practices treated in the preceding articles have been personal transformation and even liberation, the primary objectives of the meditation practitioners discussed in David Wharton's 'Meditation in Tai Nuea Lay Buddhist Practice' are merit-making and a preparation for death. The practitioners are women and men over 50 years of age during the annual rainy season retreat in a Tai Nuea village in north-western Laos. Wharton follows their meditation practices within the context of their attendant rituals, offerings and attitudes of non-attachment to the lay life they have temporarily left behind. Meanwhile, Jotika Khur-Yearn examines how meditation is brought into the lives of Shan lay people from their early childhood, culminating in the dedicated practice of meditation during 'temple sleeping' in later life. In his 'Traditional and Modern Meditation Practices in Shan Buddhist Communities', he examines changes to Shan practice within the twentieth century, as part of traditional temple sleeping and with the introduction of meditation centres, both in the 1930s with the rise of Burmese Vipassanā and more recently with the global spread of Mindfulness. Our final contribution brings us to the UK, where a group established as The Samatha Trust built up a dedicated community of lay practitioners inspired by the teachings of Nai Boonman Poonyathiro, a Thai ex-monk and gem trader who began to teach meditation shortly after arriving in the UK in 1963. Sarah Shaw's 'Tradition and Experimentation:

the Development of The Samatha Trust' summarises the sparse availability of Buddhist meditation in the UK in those early days, and tells us of Nai Boonman's life and practice, the development of the trust, including its openness to other teachers, and the practices at its core. We learn of the practices undertaken, *samatha* practices based on breathing leading to both calming and insight, how these relate both to Pali canonical and commentarial sources and to practices once popular in Thailand, and how they differ from Vipassanā practice.

### Technical terms relating to meditation

A group of technical terms used in Theravada discourse about meditation appear repeatedly through the volume, and so provisional explanations or definitions are given here to assist the reader unfamiliar with this technical terminology. Readers should be aware that on occasion more complex definitions, and the effects of semantic change over time and in a given context, may well be addressed in individual articles, and those explanations supersede the explanations offered here.

- *samādhi*: Literally meaning 'collected' in the sense of 'brought together', this is usually translated as concentration and in both the canon and Vism designates a 'one-pointed state of mind (*ekaggacittatā*)' and equanimity in which mental activity is calmed and focussed either on an object or in itself.
- *jhāna*: These are a series of stages in the calming and collection of the mind leading towards full one-pointedness. In canonical sources there are four such stages, and in Abhidhamma the first is sub-divided, making five in total. They are characterised by increasing simplicity of mental contents and activity, as disruptive mental activities – even subtle and 'positive' ones – drop away to leave the mind experiencing just one-pointedness and equanimity. They are temporary states and the practitioner enters and leaves them. They have been variously translated as absorption, rapture, ecstasy and even trance, of which the first is most suitable.
- *upacāra*: This is the stage of mental activity in *samatha* meditation where the mind has begun to focus preceding attainment of the first *jhāna*. It is usually translated as 'access concentration' or 'neighbourhood concentration'.
- *appanā*: This is understood as the immediate run-up into the experience of the *jhāna* proper. It is sometimes translated as 'absorption concentration', and is the phase of concentration in which the mind is fixed onto its object. Vism identifies the capacity for specific

meditation topics (*kammaṭṭhāna*) to lead to *upacāra-*, *appanā-* and full *samādhi* (see Kim Kyungrae in this volume).

- *nimitta*: Usually translated as ‘sign’, a *nimitta* is understood to be an eidetic image (or sometimes another sensory experience) that corresponds to the object of concentration. For this reason it is also sometimes translated as ‘mark’ or ‘image’. In *Vism* *nimitta* are understood only to appear during *upacāra-* and *appanā-samādhi*, i.e. as the mind approaches full *jhāna*. In this sense they are precursor signs that herald approaching success in the development of full *samādhi*. In *boran kammaṭṭhan*, *nimitta* are given an enhanced role in several practices (see Choempolpaisal, Skilton and Crosby in this volume). In *Vism* they are subdivided into *uggaha-* and *patibhāga-nimitta*, where the former are associated with *upacāra-samādhi* and the latter with *appanā-samādhi*.
- *samatha*: This is the general designation for practices (and activities) that calm the mind and promote the development of *jhāna* and *samādhi*. In Theravada meditation it is paired with *vipassanā* (see below), the two required as complementary factors for progress on the path and realisation of awakening.
- *kammaṭṭhāna*: This emerges as a technical term in the commentaries to designate the topic of meditation taken up by the meditator. See Skilton in this volume for further discussion of this term.
- *bhāvanā*: This means ‘cultivation’ or ‘development’ and designates several meditation topics that are treated as ‘developmental’ exercises. These include the four *brahma vihāras* (of which the most widely practised is the *mettā bhāvanā*) and the *asubha* practices.
- *vipassanā*: This term means ‘insight’ and designates the cognitive or ‘wisdom’ component of awakening in Theravada. It is considered the counterpart to *samatha* in the meditation context, in that the practitioner needs to calm the mind and on that basis cultivate insight into the ‘way things really are’, invariably as formulated in such classic Buddhist formulae as the *tilakkhaṇa* (the three characteristics: *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*), *abhiññā* or *vimokkha*, etc.

## Notes

1. Another type of simplification in the popularisation of Buddhist-derived practices in the therapeutic context has been the narrowing of the reference of mindfulness itself, a problem that is actively being addressed in Buddhist studies, for example Kuan (2008) which seeks to address this issue by integrating a text-historical perspective with cognitive psychology.
2. An extremely useful contribution to the study of variety in meditation across religious divides is Halvor Eifring’s 2016 volume, which includes his own proposals for developing a comparative framework for the study of meditation across cultures (Eifring 2016).

3. Primarily see Rhys Davids (1900, 1914, 1936).
4. She was invited to edit two volumes based on the lecture notes of George Croom Robertson, her teacher in the topic, the first of which was dedicated to psychology and the second to philosophy – the two themes that dominated her interpretation of Abhidhamma. See Rhys Davids (1896a, 1896b).
5. The edited texts are *Paṭṭhāna*, *Vibhaṅga*, *Yamaka* and *Visuddhimagga*; the translated texts are *Dhammasaṅgani* and *Kathāvatthu*; she also performed a co-translation of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*. (Neal 2014, 18, states incorrectly that she translated all five of the canonical texts.)
6. See Heim for a discussion of the troubled and recovering relationship between western scholarship and Abhidhamma (Heim 2014, 88–89).
7. It cannot be ignored that prejudice against Caroline Rhys Davids herself, as was still perceptible in the 1990s and whether purely misogynist or not, also played a part here. Wakoh Shannon Hickey's work on the earlier phase of pre-1960s interest in Hindu and Buddhist meditative practices provides context for Rhys Davids' interest. Hickey documents the role of vested interests and misogyny in shaping practice and discourse, and sidelining early western pioneers in these and related areas. This had the effect of stemming early twentieth-century applications of meditation from Hindu and Buddhist sources in the USA and set the parameters for the expansion of modern mindfulness (Hickey 2019).
8. We are thinking here of the influence of Tibetan Buddhism and Zen on such well-known figures as Karen Horney and Carl Jung.
9. There are a handful of exceptions to this. We can see a thin thread of her influence in this respect running through publications by other authors until the late 1960s, when the association of Buddhism and psychology became ubiquitous. While Rhys Davids herself continued publishing on this topic until 1936, we can note English-language volumes interpreting Buddhism as psychology primarily in response to Abhidharma – written mainly by practitioners – as follows: Dharmapāla (1921), Govinda (1938), Thera (1949), Guenther (1957), Jung (1958), Suzuki (1960), Jayasuriya (1963) and Johansson (1969).
10. A valuable survey of aspects of this history can be found in Stuart (2015, vol. 1, 7–17), as a part of contextualising the significance of the early Mahāyāna *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*. Stuart's survey confirms the doggedly historicist and philosophical cast of western studies of Buddhist meditation. Stuart explicitly stops short of reviewing non-text historical studies. See Hickey (2019, Chapter 1, e.g. 28ff.) for some interesting examples of early nineteenth-century assessments of practices such as mesmerism and hypnosis that would go on to shape the later reception of Buddhist-derived meditation. Caroline Rhys Davids was still using the language of hypnosis in her discussions of meditation in the early twentieth century (e.g. Rhys Davids 1912, 212).
11. As merely representative recent examples (a full history is a matter for another occasion), we might cite Nakamura (1979), King (1980) and Wynne (2007).
12. Again, as representative examples only: La Vallée Poussin (1936–1937), Griffiths (1981), Bronkhorst (1986), Vetter (1988).
13. A surprisingly recent example of this strategy would be Polak (2011).
14. McMahan brings in a variety of topics, pointing out how the *Mahāsatipatṭhāna Sutta* contains a progression of potential practice not developed by the modern world-affirming practitioner, including, for example, the repulsiveness and

deconstruction of the body (McMahan 2017, 29). However, as will be seen, our interest is primarily the variety of techniques rather than topics.

15. The discussion is published in ‘an academic journal “dedicated to the manifold interactions between the sciences and human religious and moral convictions” (<http://www.zygonjournal.org/>)’. The quote is from Deleanu (2010, 605) who candidly admits that his ‘rambling thoughts are only a hypothetical view put forth with a genuine intention to tackle meditation free from traditional presuppositions’ (ibid., 620–621). In fairness to the author we should also note that in a footnote (n. 28) Deleanu describes himself as ‘in my private hopes and fears, a Buddhist – not an orthodox believer and definitely not a practicing follower, but a sympathizer who finds a modicum of solace in some teachings and their chanting’ (ibid., 624). In all such discussions it strikes us that when dismissing meditation on one basis or another, western authors are always privileging their own experience and values over those of the real or imagined Buddhist practitioner, without reflecting on their own experiential and intellectual biases. Deleanu is to be commended for making the autobiographical perspective on his conclusions explicit.
16. For summaries of these and further works on Schmithausen, see Franco (2009, 94–95).
17. For an overlapping critique of Franco and other recently influential scholarly positions on meditation, see Stuart (2015, vol. 1, 18–26).
18. Between 1973 and 2015, Lance Cousins published eight scholarly articles mostly addressing aspects of Buddhist meditation in early Buddhist sources, but latterly broaching aspects of practice (see Harvey 2015). We await with great interest the posthumous publication of a volume, to be edited by Sarah Shaw, of his writing on the subject of meditation.
19. For example, Randall (1990). Embedded within an autobiographical narrative set in the 1950s, this volume contains detailed descriptions and discussions of the author’s meditation experience. Though obviously written after the events it describes, at the earliest 1957, and prior to Randall’s death in 1971, it only came to be published at least 20 years later and then by a Buddhist publisher (Aukana Publishing) on the basis of donations raised for the purpose.
20. We should note Caroline Rhys Davids’s collaboration with U Shwe Zan Aung in preparation of the latter’s translation of the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha* published by the Pali Text Society in 1910. He, a sometime pupil of Ledi Sayadaw, had already prepared his own translation of the text, and Rhys Davids, interested in preparing her own, had been put in touch with him. He shared his text; she responded with her own translation and deferred to him ‘to collate the two and decide as to choice of renderings’. She describes the result as ‘To the best of my belief, ... the first attempt to treat of Buddhist philosophy by East and West working hand in hand, and I trust it may prove the forerunner of many another collaboration’ (quoted in Aung 1910, xii–xiii). She was to be disappointed.
21. For a detailed analysis of the impact of Ledi Sayadaw and the recognition of his credentials in Myanmar and beyond, see Braun (2013).
22. Mahasi Sayadaw wrote it first in Burmese in 1950, and later he wrote a Pali version of it (Mahasi Sayadaw 1995, 3).
23. For the Indian mainland and the Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna traditions, the counterpart text is the *Yogācārabhūmi*, an exposition of the stages of the path hugely influential in its homeland and in the Buddhist traditions of East and Central Asia, which, due to its unfortunately fragmented survival in various

languages, is still not translated in full into a western language. Readers can consult Kragh (2013) for an extensive overview of this text. In contrast to this, *Vism* has been translated into English in full twice: Pe (1922–1931), and Nyanamoli (1956). It is also translated into a number of other European languages. This results from the easy access to the text at an early date of western interest in Buddhism through reliable manuscripts in the original language, and to native practitioner authorities, both of these as a result of the colonial presence in Theravada countries.

24. In addition to his translation of the *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sūta*, the book includes a 75-page anthology of translated passages ‘dealing with Right Mindfulness’ (Thera 1954, 151–226).
25. After his return to Ceylon in 1932 he had served in government and university, as inspector of *pirivena* and eventually as Dean of the Philosophy Faculty at Vidyodaya University, concurrently holding the Presidency of the Mahabodhi Society Colombo. These facts are drawn from Russell Webb’s chronicle of the London Buddhist Vihara (2004, 14), and Alec Robertson’s memoir of the author fronting the second edition of Vajirañña’s book (1975, iii–vi, n.p.).
26. King was himself an important bridge between the worlds of practice/belief on the one hand and western academia on the other. Serving as pastor in two churches between 1930 and 1949 and Dean of the Chapel at Grinnell College (1949–1963), he simultaneously developed an academic career, eventually retiring as professor of the history of religions at Vanderbilt University (1964–1973). His methodological perspective has been described by Donald K. Swearer thus: ‘he saw being a person of faith as an advantage rather than a disadvantage in the study of religion ... [he] believed that the adherent of a particular faith is better able “to penetrate to the centrally important features of another religion” that might be opaque to the “nonreligionist”’ (Swearer 2001, iv). As early as 1961 he had published an account of his experience of meditation during a 10-day retreat at U Ba Kin’s International Meditation Centre, in part describing his subjective experiences and U Ba Kin’s explanations of them (King 1961).
27. The mutual interpenetration of, on the one hand, western and Asian scholarship and on the other of practitioner and academic scholarship, makes categories such as ‘western’ somewhat anachronistic.
28. An important 2007 meta-survey reviewed 813 research publications on ‘meditation practices for health’ (Ospina et al. 2007, 1) culled from 17 databases and published between 1956 and 2005. The authors concluded that ‘The field of research on meditation techniques and their therapeutic applications has been clouded by confusion over what constitutes meditation and by a lack of methodological rigor ...’ (2007, 209). Of the 10 broad categories of technique identified by the review, four were more or less directly related to Buddhism: Vipassana, Zen meditation, MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction) and MBCT (Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy) (2007, 28–46). Without doubt the number of publications has expanded dramatically in the 12 years since that review. For example, a 2014 review of publications about the rather narrower topic of meditation used for stress reduction and well-being identified 18,753 unique items drawn from eight databases (of which only 47 studies met reasonable inclusion criteria, such as being randomised, using controls, and original data. Goyal et al. 2014). On the early twentieth-century interest in this area, and how the approach of the establishment to it then, as

well as US health insurance now, has shaped its representation divorced of the Buddhist context, see Hickey (2019).

29. A 2018 meta-survey of studies of the effect of mindfulness on brain activity located 1601 publications on the topic (Young et al. 2018).
30. We should note the pioneering studies of Herbert Benson in the late 1960s, which combined some of the earliest clinical investigations of the physiological and psychological effects of meditation – in his case a secularised version of TM (Benson and Klipper 1975). In Benson’s case the development of meditation as a relaxation therapy went hand in hand with the discovery of ‘stress’ as a clinical factor in illness.
31. As examples only, at the time of writing there are programmes at Brown University, Rice University, Emory University, Naropa University and the universities of Michigan, Redland, San Diego and Virginia, and this does not include higher education institutions simply offering courses on the subject of meditation or courses in meditation practice to support study. (We need to carefully differentiate the study of contemplation and the contemplation of study.)
32. The original publication by Magness in 1960, *The Dhammakāya – Metaphysical Implications*, was quickly reprinted in an enlarged second edition in 1961 under the title *Sammā Samādhi I*. It is now available online, under yet another title, *Vistas Buddhist Insight into Immortality* 2007. Magness’ practice lineage was at Wat Paknam in Thonburi, rather than the now famous Wat Dhammakaya in Pathumthani, and his writings are not considered authoritative guides to practice at the latter temple.
33. On the normative control of meditation practice in Burma on the part of the centralised Sangha hierarchy, see Ashin and Crosby (2017, e.g. 217–218), and Kyaw in this volume.
34. A recent survey study lists meditation in use for alleviating ‘stress, addiction, chronic pain, mood disorders, psychiatric disorders, and medical conditions’ plus improving ‘cognitive abilities and emotion regulation’ (Lindahl et al. 2017, 2). The UNESCO event addressed by the founder of the [British] Mindfulness All Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG) was entitled “Could Emotional Intelligence help us build a better world and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals?” (17 May 2019). For other applications of mindfulness the reader might consult some of the 199 million hits that a Google search for the term produces.
35. ‘Meditation, when shorn of its mystical connotations, is essentially a specific series of techniques much like relaxation training’ (Lazarus 1976, 601). Seemingly, meditation always achieves its therapeutic status by being secularised, by the shearing away of its ‘mystical’ context or accoutrements. The more recent secularisation of ‘mindfulness’ follows the same vein of accommodation.
36. We can thank research programmes led by Willoughby Britton for the development and availability of the ‘Meditation Safety Toolbox’, downloadable from <https://www.brown.edu/research/labs/britton/resources/meditation-safety-toolbox> (accessed 25 February 2019).
37. We can also reflect on the relative lack of broader context or understanding of meditation as a factor in this particular issue. Some Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism have called into question the decontextualisation of mindfulness meditation from larger Buddhist ethical, philosophical and cosmological contexts (McMahan and Braun 2017, 14), and from traditional social support. Well-run mindfulness programmes doubtless provide



mentoring, but courses are always time limited. Participants may also be too goal orientated, i.e. too focused on relief from unwanted negative experiences or gratification of expectations of contentment. Within a more traditional Buddhist context, a practitioner usually has ongoing support, and meditation is itself regarded as a public good, allowing the practitioner to get more guidance and reassurance. This idea is linked to Turner's (2014) assessment of Burmese Buddhism as a public religion, also mentioned in Kyaw (this volume).

38. Anecdotally, a frightening meditation experience on the part of one of the present editors was interpreted as messages from ancestors in need of merit transference, the practice of meditation making one more open to such communication.
39. We would like to thank the Ji Xuegen Research Funding for Buddhist Studies and Dhammakaya International UK for their support of these two workshops.
40. On Abhidhamma and practice, see also Kyaw (2014, Chapter 2).

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