

Article

Oneself as Another: Yantraputraka Metaphors in Buddhist Literature

You Zhao 

Institute of Foreign Philosophy, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Peking University, Beijing 100871, China; zhaoyou@pku.edu.cn

Abstract: While Buddhist teachings deny the presence of a stable, unchanging self, they must still make sense of human agency. In this article, I look through metaphors of mechanical men in Buddhist literature, which inform us of attempts to tackle the problem by resorting to figurative speech. With a selection of examples, we shall see not only a basic rationale of these metaphors, as well as the dynamics of their usage in Buddhist texts against different doctrinal backgrounds, but also their meta-philosophical role in penetrating through the agent-oriented “universe of discourse”.

Keywords: metaphor; Buddhism; embodied experience; first person; universe of discourse

1. Introduction

In the forest of Buddhist tales, one often comes across intriguing contrivances of one kind or another, such as those set up in the shape of human guardians and elephants (*hastīyantra*) to counter rival troops. These tales cannot show less care about the engineering details of the machinery described. Instead, the point is rather didactic, exploiting the fact that these mechanical men or animals never fail to perform their job, despite the fact that they are not what they appear to be. For example, in the *Aśokāvadāna*, Susīma rushed out in a fury towards Aśoka’s city on hearing of his enthronement:

Meanwhile, in Pāṭaliputra, Aśoka posted his two great warriors at two of the city gates and Rādhagupta at a third. He himself stood at the eastern gate. In front of it, Rādhagupta set up an artificial elephant (*yantramayo hastī sthāpitah*), on top of which he placed an image of Aśoka that he had fashioned (*aśokasya ca pratimā nirmītā*). All around he dug a ditch, filled it with live coals of acacia wood, covered it with reeds, and camouflaged the whole with dirt. He then went and taunted Susīma: “If you are able to kill Aśoka, you will become king!”

Susīma immediately rushed to the eastern gate, thinking “I am fighting with Aśoka (*aśokena saha yotsyāmīti*)!” But he fell into the ditch full of charcoal, and came to an untimely and painful end.¹

From Susīma’s point of view, he was dashing towards the newly crowned king mounted on an elephant,² as a monarch was supposed to be—other versions and parallels omit Susīma’s shouting in first person.³ However, the target turned out to be nothing more than a rough resemblance of Aśoka, purposefully arranged only to trap the envious brother. Using a scarecrow instead of the real king to end the combat renders the tragedy rather absurd and hence instructive: how easily fooled is a man blinded by his ignorance, anger and desires?

Other tropes of mechanical men may yield more complicated meanings. In this article, I aim to provide an outline of what I call the *yantraputraka* metaphors in Buddhist texts.⁴ They suggest thinking of oneself as mechanical so as to immerse oneself in a completely different kind of embodied experience.⁵ The following examples are roughly dated to the first half of the first millennium, which surely bears witness to their contemporaneous achievements of machine making. However, unlike other studies on *yantras* in Indian



Citation: Zhao, You. 2023. Oneself as Another: Yantraputraka Metaphors in Buddhist Literature. *Religions* 14: 503. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040503>

Academic Editors: Ru Zhan and Jinhua Chen

Received: 15 February 2023

Revised: 1 April 2023

Accepted: 3 April 2023

Published: 5 April 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

literature, (Raghavan 1952; Ali 2016) I am little concerned with the historical and scientific facts these wonderful creatures reveal to us, but rather the rationale of using such a metaphor in making philosophical points: how did Buddhist scholars play with the stock metaphor, what did they attempt to do with it, and why does it work?

As we shall see, these examples generally introduce mechanical men or women in two ways: either straightforwardly as a simile or metaphorically as a plot device. If the first offers us a roadmap to read the stock metaphor, the second experiments with it and induces further speculations. While read side by side, they can complement one another to articulate a poetic argument of the Buddhist doctrine that persons lack selves. I hope to show that, as a mechanical man moves without possessing his own drives, the stock metaphor naturally questions the agency problem, given that a proper agent is traditionally understood as “self-dependent” (*svatantraḥ kartā*)⁶. Moreover, to invoke a mechanical participant in episodes of collective activities (encounter, collaboration or combat) has a special rhetorical power: by triggering the recognition of multiplied likenesses between characters and other characters or between characters and readers, such a device engages readers, raising suspicion and suspense among them, not only with regard to the main participants in the story but also their own.

Meanwhile, it is important to note that comparing human beings to *yantraputraka* in the Buddhist context does not merely reduce a living man to a pile of components. By taking an aesthetic rather than literal stance,⁷ it facilitates the penetration through a common universe of discourse, in Ricoeur’s terms, so as to transform from a motive-action-oriented to a cause-event-oriented mode of thinking (Ricoeur 1992, pp. 64–67) and thence engender an utterly novel and surprising experience.⁸ This stance makes the meaning of the same figuration distinct from that in other traditions. Cohen (2003) once illustrated the difference in her article: for Jain and Hindu authors, a humanoid represents an unanimated body that requires a separate agent to move, while for Buddhist authors, it stands for what living beings are (Cohen 2003, pp. 69–71). At the end of this paper, a brief comparison with similar tropes in Jain and Hindu texts will endorse her observation and offer a possible explanation for the divergent path of the same vehicle: while non-Buddhists take a third-person view when looking at a mechanical man, Buddhists rather insist on taking a first-person view to experience the possible life of a mechanical being.

By and large, this is a reconstructive case study of metaphors in Buddhist literature, with an underlying reflection on the interplay of literary devices and philosophical messages (Stepien 2020, p. 14). Accordingly, while limiting myself to sources from a specific era, I intentionally avoid organizing the following texts in a neat chronological order or based on their scriptural genres. Instead, I try to make use of these texts as a common pool of knowledge as it may have been to ancient writers, who did not only adopt the metaphor but also experimented with it. The actual usages of the stock metaphor thus do betray certain cultural backgrounds and doctrinal orientations of the time.

2. Embodied Experience as Dāruyanta

While contemporary thinkers tend to ask whether robots are sentient beings just like us, Buddhists might feel that it is more natural to turn the question around: are we, as human beings, in fact, artificial products? After all, everything in this phenomenal world is constructed (*samskrta*); the living facts of an ordinary man are but conditioned states (*samskāra*). What is the ontological difference between a human and an activated robot, given that no self is found in either? In fact, from quite early on, it has been suggested that one can think or imagine oneself as a mechanical being in Buddhist traditions—“a psychophysiological machine”, to quote Rahula (1978, p. 26). In fact, he was precisely referring to Buddhaghosa’s (5th century) comments in the *Visuddhimagga* (henceforth *Vism*):

Tasmā yathā dāruyantam suññam nijjīvam nirīhakam, atha ca pana dāruarajjukasamāyogavasena gacchati pi tiṭṭhati pi, sa-īhakam savyāpāram viya khāyati, evam idam nāmarūpam pi suññam nijjīvam nirīhakam,⁹ atha ca pana aññamaññīnasamāyogavasena gacchati pi tiṭṭhati pi sa-īhakam savyāpāram viya khāyati ti datṭhabbam.¹⁰

Therefore, just as a wooden contrivance is empty, soulless and without desires, while it walks and stands merely through the combination of strings and wood, yet it seems as if it had desires and occupation; so too, this *nāmarūpa* is empty, soulless and without desires, while it walks and stands merely through the combination of one another (i.e., *nāma* and *rūpa*), yet it seems as if it had desires and occupation.

The wooden contrivance is used as a handle here to illustrate the flow of mental and material events that are together taken as *nāmarūpa* without a self:¹¹

- (1) The embodied experience (*nāmarūpa*) is like a mechanical wooden man;
- (2) A mechanical wooden man is not coordinated or controlled by any supervising soul that possesses desires;
- (3) So is this embodied experience.

Let us look at the example more closely: pay attention to the demonstrative “*idam*”. One may immediately recall the formulation of the four noble truths in suttas: “This (*idam*), monks, is the noble truth that is suffering . . .”. Such a demonstrative is not idle: “it relates to specific events that are perceived in real time . . . for objects that can be pointed to specifically by the observer” (Shulman 2014, pp. 145–58). To understand the current passage in this way, we believe that Buddhaghosa is not simply offering a true proposition through analogical reasoning but urging the reader to contemplate his or her own embodied experience, to think and to experience “now, this!” as a mere compound of *nāmarūpa*, the five-fold events. Note that, accordingly, he makes no attempt to figure out who pulls the strings. Meanwhile, it should not be mistaken that this soulless thing is inert: the mental or psychological remains an essential part of the complex. As a preceding paragraph emphasizes, the immaterial events (*cetasika*) are always involved, yet only too subtle to be aware of by means of ordinary perceptions (Davids 1921, pp. 591–92; Nānamoli 2010, pp. 614–15). Through this comparison, Buddhaghosa could not make it more explicit: let us understand ourselves as robots, *to be* as if “we are all robots” (Cohen 2003, p. 71).

The exegetical tradition that Buddhaghosa passed down to us seems to have a special interest in making comparisons of embodied experience to mechanical man. This simile also occurred earlier in the *Vism* in the section of “Mindfulness Occupied with Body” (*kāyagatāsati*) among a dozen kinds of “Recollections as Meditation Subjects” (*Anussati-kammaṭṭhānaniddesa*).¹² Additionally, in the *Sumaṅgalavilāsini* (SV) and *Papañcasūdanī* (Ps)¹³ we encounter similar metaphors:

abbhantare attā nāma koci sammiñjento vā pasārento vā n’atthi . . . suttākadḍhan-
avasena dāruyantassa hatthapādālāṇaṃ viya...veditabbam.¹⁴

There is nothing inside called self that causes to bend or stretch. One should know that it is . . . just like the sport of hands and feet of a wooden mechanical [man] through the forces of pulling strings.

*tam enam bhikkhave nirayapālā ti ādim āha. tattha ekacce therā nirayapālā nāma n’atthi,
yantrarūpaṃ viya kammam eva kāraṇaṃ kareti ti vadanti.*¹⁵

Monks, it says “the guardians of the Niraya hell”, etc. Regarding this, some elders explain that the beings named the guardians of the Niraya hell do not exist, the beings are just like a mechanical device. Like a machine, *kamma* alone makes the action.

Both adopted the trope of the mechanical man, yet we may observe the nuances between the two. While the first, following the previous example, prompts a first-person view to understanding one’s embodied experience as self-less, the second identifies the hell-guardians in the infernal world as mechanical men who lack proper agency and are hence unreal. The latter seems to have little to do with thinking of oneself as mechanical, especially not with regard to one’s embodied experience. However, if Mori (1997, p. 461) was right to attribute the second view to early Vijñānavāda, for whom the infernal beings are nothing more than a resemblance of an object (*viśayābhāsa*), i.e., appearances of the

mind, then the difference between the two is perhaps smaller than it seems: both apply a reflexive approach to see how we are often duped in assuming something is real that is not.

Although the figure of the mechanical man is not well-attested in canonical suttas, it is not unknown to *Vinayavastu* and exegetical comments.¹⁶ In fact, the earliest datable witness, as far as I can tell, is the first Chinese translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (AP), the *Daoxing bore jing* 道行般若經 (henceforth DXJ). It proves that before Buddhaghosa, by the 2nd century of the common era, this simile had already become a popular one to illustrate a certain self-less state.¹⁷

The 23rd chapter of the DXJ (26th chapter of AP) starts with Indra's limited understanding of the altruist practice of a bodhisattva.¹⁸ The Buddha reminded him that the benefit is innumerable if one aspires to full enlightenment. This topic led Subhuti to ask an interesting question: if the mind is as empty as mere illusion, how can it know anything and achieve the so-called unsurpassable full enlightenment by his aspiration on the path 心譬如幻，何因當得佛 (*katham ca bhagavan māyopamam cittam, anuttarām samyaksambodhim abhisambudhyate*)?¹⁹ The discussion then turns to the non-conceptual and indifferent nature (*avikalpatva*) of the *prajñāpāramitā* with two sets of similes. First, when an aspiring Bodhisattva courses in the perfection of wisdom, he does not conceive how close or how far away full enlightenment is because the perfection of wisdom in function is totally indifferent, just like the space (*ākāśa*), a magical man (*māyāpuruṣa*), or a reflection (*pratibhā*) that has no inclination to anything.²⁰ Second, the Tathāgata or the perfection of wisdom neither favors (*priya*) one nor detests (*apriya*) another, i.e., with no desire to drive actions, it simply accomplishes what it is supposed to do.²¹ The text then compares the *prajñāpāramitā* to an artificial body conjured up (*nirmita*) by the Tathāgata and a mechanical being (*yantrayukta*).²² From these two sets of comparisons, one gains the impression that while the first group of similes emphasizes the state of mere appearance that has no conceptual constructions, the second focuses on the efficacy of bodily activities. This might be true, but it does not entail that the two sets of similes are fundamentally different from each other, but only that they can be context-sensitive to support different aspects that form the same argument. Further accounts of such a mechanical being provide us with more details:

A. 譬如工匠點師剋作機關木人，若作雜畜。(a) 木人不能自起居，因對而搖。(b) 木人不作是念言：“我當動搖屈伸低仰，令觀者歡欣。”何以故？(c) 木人本無念故。般若波羅蜜亦如是，隨人所行，悉各自得之。雖爾，般若波羅蜜亦無形無念。²³

Just as a skillful craftsman carves out a wooden mechanical man, or a certain [mechanical] animal. [Such a] wooden man cannot stand or stay by itself. It moves by depending on causes. The wooden man would not think: 'I shall move, shake, bend, stretch, lower or raise [my head], in order to please the audience.' How is that? A wooden man does not have any thought (*avikalpatvāt*). So is the Perfection of Wisdom: [a bodhisattva] accomplishes all [the work for the sake of] which he develops [the Perfection of Wisdom]. Despite that, the Perfection of Wisdom has neither form nor thought.²⁴

B. 譬如工匠作機關木人，若男若女，隨所為事，皆能成辦，而無分別。世尊！般若波羅蜜亦如是，隨所修習，皆能成辦，而無分別。²⁵

Just as a craftsman makes a wooden mechanical being, male or female, it accomplishes all that is supposed to be done, while it has no discrimination. Exalted One! So is the Perfection of Wisdom: [a bodhisattva] accomplishes all [the work for the sake of] which he develops [the Perfection of Wisdom], while he has no discrimination.

Let me first add a couple of philological notes with regard to the textual variation in A because it matters for our understanding of the metaphor.²⁶ First, neither of the two phrases (a) and (b) is attested in the AP or PP parallels²⁷ nor in variation B from Kumārajīva's translation, followed by later Chinese versions.²⁸ The way it stands in the DXJ looks

like a commentarial note on the simile, which is witnessed rather flexibly in other Prajñāpāramitā texts.²⁹ The same description is attested in the *Yogācārabhūmi* of Saṅgharakṣa.

觀四大身因緣合成, 若如幻化。譬如假物, 則非我所有, 亦非他人。猶如合材機關木人, 因對動搖: 愚者觀之, 謂為是人; 慧明察之, 合木無人。³⁰

Contemplate on the body composed of four great elements: it is just like an illusion, like a false object, that it does not belong to me or any other. Just like a wooden mechanical man moves on account of the combination of wood—on seeing that, the ignorant believes it to be a [real] man, while the wise observes by insights that there is no man but a combination of wood.

The affinity between the DXJ and the meditation book suggests that the additional description of the mechanical man in the DXJ might be inspired by meditation techniques available to the editor. Accordingly, this would inspire us to approach the DXJ paragraph in a particular way: we are not encouraged to infer an external causal agent from the motions of the mechanical man, but just like the case in the Vism, to experience what it feels like to *be* one ourselves.

On account of this, I do not strictly follow Karashima's translation of (a), as I find that there is little ground to interpret the phrase *yindui er yao* 因對而搖 as "somebody stands in front of it and moves it" (Karashima 2011, pp. 422–23, n. 276). Karashima did not only supply the subject of the sentence with the puppeteer but also read the *yindui* in a peculiar way. It is peculiar precisely because it is interpreted based on common sense: a puppeteer makes a puppet move.³¹ However, as we have seen above, what is striking about the Buddhist use of mechanical man metaphors is exactly its omission of the external agent.³² In the Buddhist context, seeking a causal agent is not at all the point of invoking the metaphor. Would the DXJ constitute an exception? I believe not. We can come to this conclusion by scrutinizing the word *yindui*. Since it has no witness in other languages, we have to look for its uses in early Chinese translations. In fact, this bi-syllable is only found in those texts attributed to Lokakṣema and Dharmarakṣa. The handful of cases shows that the word simply means "facing towards/depending on causes". To take Dharmarakṣa's more idiomatic uses of the word, for example,

如水中月, 亦如呼響, 因對而出。³³

Just like the moon on the water (*pratibimba*), and echoes (*pratirava* or *pratiśrutka*), it (i.e., *dharmā*) arises by depending on causes (*pratītya*?).

諸法住本原哉? 因對而發。³⁴

Does a *dharmā* abide in its essence? [Not really,] it arises by depending on causes.

緣起因對, 無對無起也。³⁵

Dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) means depending on causes; there would not be origination without depending on [causes].

The first verse appears to play with the prefix *prati-*. Meanwhile, in classical Chinese, *yin* means "the cause", and *dui* literally means "facing towards" (as a preposition) or "to answer" (as a verb), which seems to draw out the meaning of *prati*. Hence, I propose reconstructing *yindui* as *pratītya* or perhaps (*hetu-*)*pratyayāpekṣā*, which is more regularly rendered as *yindai* 因待 in later translations. Similarly, the other two examples use *yindui* to gloss the notion of dependent origination in opposition to essentialist claims. Lokakṣema used the bi-syllable more freely than Dharmarakṣa. In the DXJ, at times, *dui* alone means "dependence"³⁶ or the causal contact (*samavahita*) of successive *dharmas*.³⁷ In whichever case, *yindui* does not allude to an external agent who stands in opposition, but the causal relation. The focus remains on the *dharmā* caused to arise (*pratītyasamutpanna*). Therefore, there is good reason to read *yindui er yao* 因對而搖 simply as [the mechanical man] moves by depending on causes, i.e., the combination of wood and strings.

The paragraph in question is thus saying that a wooden man walks and stands like a real man, but he does not meet the criteria of a proper agent; he does not consciously instigate the actions (a, b), and he does not acknowledge the actions as his own (b). It is nothing more than a conjunction of wood and stuff set in motion. In spite of all that, a mechanical man accomplishes whatever is supposed to be done,³⁸ or more precisely, what he is made for (*kr̥tyasyārthāya kr̥tas*). So is the Perfection of Wisdom: it functions perfectly as it is prepared for, but it is not a self-dependent agent who drives its own activities. This idea was reformulated more explicitly and elegantly in a later Prajñāpāramitā text, *Su-vikrāntavikramipariṣṭhā*: “The lack of an agent and the lack of someone who causes to act on the part of form, feeling, notion, compositional factors and consciousness, is itself the Perfection of Wisdom.”³⁹ Thus, the *prajñāpāramitā* is not only insight or wisdom, as we usually put it for the sake of convenience, but a new mode of action and a new mode of embodied experience.

Moreover, the new mode of action and experience we have to remember is not easily taken in by an ordinary frame of mind. A reader would naturally follow up with questions, such as, then who set the machine in motion? Thus, in order to make the point solid and accessible, the teaching has to transform the listener’s mindset, even temporarily. Nevertheless, how is that possible? Invoking the metaphor of a mechanical man, I argue, forces readers to suspend an ordinary portrait of action, an ordinary codification of our language to describe an action that requires a real agent with real motives. It facilitates a reader to penetrate through universes of discourse, from the agent-motive-oriented to the cause-event-oriented. Therefore, the metaphor, more than a mere analogy, also works as a thinking tool. It prepares one to experience oneself as completely of another kind. Not until then does it make the new mode of action comprehensible.

The *hypothetical line of thought* of the mechanical man (b) in the first person plays its role here. Similar thoughts are also found in other early Mahāyāna scriptures, such as the *Śālistambasūtra*.⁴⁰ In the majority of these cases, the thought is always expressed and then denied the status of being factual. If we believe that such detail does not just randomly occur in various contexts but is picked up by choice, the *hypothetical line of thought* is thus purposefully put forward to make a point. However, what is the point of uttering an impossible thought? In my view, aligning with the mechanical man metaphor that invites readers to contemplate their own embodied experience, this *hypothetical thought* in the first person is also intended to put readers in the shoes of a self-less state, here the Perfection of Wisdom, making them “capable of articulating what truth feels like when attained by a specific embodied individual” (Mikkelson 2020, p. 68), despite the fact that it is hardly effable.

3. Mechanical Youth versus Painted Corpus

Quite different from the standardized and emotionally neutral simile used to gloss the idea of the non-self in Mahāyāna sūtras and Pali exegesis, the following stories of exquisite mechanical men and women generate abundant feelings, including curiosity, desire, wonder, mourning, and ridicule, followed by a sense of peace—a palette of rasas indeed. In fact, such a mechanical being became a favorable plot in the broad Jātaka-Avadāna genre, and it grew into highly elaborated variations. The first example is from an early collection of Jātakas, the *Shengjing* 生經 translated by Dharmarakṣa in the 3rd–4th century. This “Five Men of the King” 國王五人經 (Chevannes 1911, vol. II. pp. 12–13, no.163) is parallel to the much more famous *Punyavanta Jātaka* in the *Mahāvastu*. (Marciniak 2019, pp. 42–48). They share the same characters and general framework of the story but with a completely different tale of the second prince Śilpavanta, which is exactly our focus here.

時第二工巧者，轉行至他國，應時國王，喜諸技術。即以材木，作機關木人；形貌端正，生人無異；衣服顏色，點慧無比；能工歌舞，舉動如人。

Then, the second [prince] Śilpavanta (skillful of crafts) travelled to another state, whose king at the time was fond of various kinds of art. [The craftsman] thus manufactured a wooden mechanical man with logs, who was good-looking, hardly

different from a real man; with incomparably smart clothes and outlook; and good at dancing to music; behaving just like a human being.

辭言：“我子生若干年，國中恭敬，多所餽遺。”國王聞之，命使作伎。王及夫人，升閣而觀。作伎歌舞，若干方便，跪拜進止，勝於生人。王及夫人，歡喜無量。⁴¹

[The craftsman] report [to the king]: “My ‘son’ was born quite a few years from now. [He is] respected in [our own] country [for his art], by which he received abundant gifts.” On hearing this, the king asked him to display his art. The king, together with his wife, went up to the spectacular pavilion. [The “son”] started showing dances to music, with different kinds of skills. [He] bowed down, proceeded or halted, [with a deportment even] more charming than a living man. [This made] the king and his wife extremely happy.

In this brief opening, three perspectives are integrated: the “father”, the omniscient figure; the “son”, the un-knower; and the king, an outsider (emphasized by the “foreignness” of the craftsman). Śilpavanta obviously knew from the beginning what this youth was, though the youth did not know for himself, while for the time being, the king could only believe what he sees. Let us hang onto this crucial detail prepared for further scenarios. Another intriguing point is that the craftsman introduced his work of art as “his son” in Chinese 我子 (from [yantra-]putraka?). The narrator (possibly the translator) seeks to exploit this father–son relationship to facilitate the effectiveness of the main plot. Let us continue.

便角瞻眼，色視⁴²夫人。王遙見之，心懷忿怒，促勅侍者：“斬其頭來！何以瞻眼視吾夫人？謂有惡意，色視不疑。”其父啼泣，淚出五行，長跪請命：“吾有一子，甚重愛之，坐起進退，以解憂思。愚意不及，有是失耳。假使殺者，我共當死。唯以加哀，原其罪豐。”

[The artist “son”] then coveted the queen with the corner of his eyes. Seeing this from a distance, the king burst into anger and urged his servants: “Cut off his head! How does he dare to covet my wife? That is absolutely evil-minded and creepy!” The “father” cried, having five lines of tears [on his face]. He kneeled for a long time and begged: “I [only] have one son that I love him so much. [He has been with me no matter I am] sitting, standing, going or leaving, which gives me great comfort. It is my stupidity to have failed to [discipline him], up to this point for him to make such a mistake. If you want to kill him, I shall die together. May you have mercy on him and forgive his crimes.”

時王恚甚，不肯聽之。復白王言：“若不活者，願自手殺，勿使餘人。”王便可之。則拔一肩樞，機關解落，碎散在地。⁴³

At the time, the king was too wrathful to accept this. [The craftsman then] begged the king again: “if you must let him die, please let me kill with my own hands, and do not make others execute him.” The king thus agreed. [The craftsman] pulled out a wedge from [his son’s] shoulder, the mechanism collapsed and fell apart onto the ground.

Throughout these scenes, Śilpavanta insists on naming the dancer as his son. The outspoken intimacy makes his unbearable grief on the king’s order of execution so reasonable for someone witnessing the death of one’s own blood that, for a moment, we almost forget that the “son” is not real. The narrative then cracks quite unexpectedly, with the father begging to “kill” his son with his own hand. At the collapse of his “son”, we do not only awake to what we should have known from the beginning, that the whole scenario was all carefully orchestrated by Śilpavanta, and that the “son” is only a puppet, but also realize how deluded we were immediately before this moment, just like the king. In such a way, the narrative leads the readers to penetrate back and forth between two realms of facts: one deluded and the other the truth.

王乃驚愕：“吾身云何瞋於材木？此人工巧，天下無雙，作此機關，三百六十節，勝於生人！”即以賞賜億萬兩金。即持金出，與諸兄弟，令飲食之。⁴⁴

The king was astounded: “Why would I myself have been angry with [a pile of] logs? The craft of this man is unparalleled in this world, who made this mechanism with three hundred and sixty pieces. Almost a real human being!” [The king] thus granted him billions of gold coins. The craftsman left with these gold coins, distributed them among his brothers for their beverage and food.

The end of the story may appear less surprising. However, the number of bones is notable: three hundred and sixty, a precise anatomical observation in agreement with mainstream Indian medical traditions.⁴⁵ We learn the same from the embryology transmitted along with Buddhist meditation manuals and introduced to the Chinese world around the same time. In the *Daodi jing* 道地經 (*Yogācārabhūmi* of Saṅgharakṣa, translated by An Shigao in the late 2nd century), we read: after the head to toes appeared, followed by arteries to ears, during the twenty-seventh week of conception, the embryo is equipped with three hundred and sixty jointed [bones].⁴⁶ A baby soon to be born is only capable of moving. Similarly, when a man is frightened still or about to die, the three hundred and sixty bones are said to shake and fall.⁴⁷ The number, therefore, marks the edge of a living man with active bodily movement. With such a concrete picture, we are drawn back to doubt again whether the youth is or is not a real man.

This unsolved question offers us a key with which to read the story: we should understand the whole as a metaphorical plot. At face value, it relates a craft master’s exhibition of his skill with a mechanical youth to a king. However, in actuality, it tells us how the Buddha’s teachings work on a reader-practitioner through meditation upon one’s own embodied experience.⁴⁸ Suppose that, at the end of the story, the king gets the same message which we glean from the similes in the DXJ and Vism, meaning that he realized not only the falsehood of the mechanical man but also that of what it is compared to: himself. Consequently, the whole dramatic scene mirrors what we experience by hearing the profound teaching of *non-self*, and the king’s experience mirrors ours. We can roughly break the process into three steps:

- (1) Exhibition of the mechanical youth: pay attention to one’s embodied experience;
- (2) Decomposition of the mechanical youth: analyze the experience and find only events;⁴⁹
- (3) Immersion in the mechanical youth: experience anew from a first-person perspective.⁵⁰

There is no doubt that this is one of the most fascinating moments in this collection of Jātaka stories. No wonder it immediately captured readers’ attention as soon as it was translated into Chinese and was incorporated into the *Liezi*,⁵¹ where the king happened to meet a craftsman on his way home from a tour of inspection in the west.⁵² Meanwhile, in the Buddhist world, the same metaphorical plot seems to have been transmitted quite stably in mainstream Sarvāstivāda communities. We also have more concise versions in the *Bhaisajyavastu*,⁵³ the *Vinaya*, as is quoted in the *Prasannapadā*, etc.⁵⁴ However, what we are going to read closely here is a rather playful variation in a Tocharian fragment of the *Punyavanta Jātaka*, known as the “Painter and Artisan” story.⁵⁵ The eighth tale in the *Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經 (T207) proves to be an earlier version of the same story.⁵⁶ However, due to the different morals they present, I will not treat them equally here. The following will largely be based on the Tocharian episode, which stands out as more experimental and philosophically more sophisticated.

There is a painter from a foreign country (again!) that came to stay in his artisan friend’s house. The latter introduced him to a female servant—in fact, one of his own works. The pretty maiden aroused the burning desire of the painter. He could not help but to take her hand as she was not verbally responsive. Inevitably, the mechanical girl collapsed into a pile of wood. The painter was utterly fooled. Then, he thought to himself, “Just like this thing I perceived was put together from rags, ropes and sticks, so is also the perception human beings have of the *ātman* put together from bones, flesh, and sinews...” (Cohen 2003, p. 71). The purpose of invoking a mechanical person is outspoken here: to understand every human being in the same way. However, the story does not end here

with the painter's "awakening moment". Instead, as a revenge and a challenge,⁵⁷ in the deep night, the painter is said to create a self-portrait hanging dead on the wall:

Thereupon, in the morning, the artisan having come to the painter, saw the mechanical girl fallen in pieces and saw the painter hanging dead on the hook . . .

Thereupon the artisan was intending to cut the rope with the axe. Then, the painter, having come out in sight, says to the artisan-teacher:

Do (it) not, do (it) not. Be not sad, O artisan!

Not thy wall, not my painting, destroy with cause!

Look closely, friend. First make (out) the tokens:

One (is) the painting, another the painter. Why do you not recognize (it)?⁵⁸

Compared to the version in the *Shengjing*, everything is doubled here: two artifacts made by two men, two moments of delusion, with two different sentiments, terminated twice by two revelations. Through the doubled structure and the painter's determination to challenge his friend, this variation seems to suggest a certain hierarchy between the two artists, that the painter's work is more deceptive: he deluded his artisan friend only by a mere resemblance,⁵⁹ without anything tangible and movable that is usually considered to be the inferential sign of a soul or a self (see below). As Martini (2008, p. 92) insightfully pointed out, "believing the reality of a represented image is in itself a powerful analogy to the deception of mind-made *samsāra*." The mind is the cause, the real "painter" who is meant to be revealed here in this version. The structure of the story thus guides one to proceed from the mindfulness of embodied experience to the more subtle examination of one's mental projections so as to be fully aware of the root of delusions.⁶⁰ We can probably also surmise that it witnessed some actual challenges from the idealists to the reductionists around the middle of the first millennium: a Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda era was on its way.⁶¹

4. Inference from Moving Limbs: Non-Buddhist Perspectives

Before we close the discussion, let us take a quick look at non-Buddhist uses of *yantra-putraka* metaphors. Due to the limits of my knowledge and the scope of this article, I will confine myself to the following examples that were purposefully selected from Jain and Brahminical works of the same era: *Mahābhārata*, *Gaṇadhara-vāda* and *Vākyapadīya*. They all integrate the metaphor in their discussions of agency. In contrast to Buddhist invocations of such a comparison in a first-person point of view, the stock metaphor in the non-Buddhist context assumes that one must infer from the moving limbs that there is a separate soul, with no suggestion to immerse oneself within it, and no attempt to penetrate an ordinary universe of discourse.

As is known to many, a wooden puppet is a common motif in the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh). When Samjaya consoles Dhṛtarāṣṭra that he should keep calm even if the war turns out to be inevitable, he compares a man to a wooden puppet (*dāruyantravat*) that is manipulated by an external force—God, chance, or past deeds. A man is not the agent of his good or evil karma, thus not (fully) responsible for his deeds (Mbh 5.156-14-15).⁶² Therefore, one should not hesitate but act in accordance with his duty. Similarly, Draupadī complains that human suffers just like a wooden girl (*dārumayī yoṣā*) controlled by the God (Mbh 3.31.22). Even her alias *Pāñcālī* conveys the meaning of "puppet" (Hiltebeitel 1980, p. 106). Her actual challenge to the divine power is another fascinating topic that is beyond the scope of the present article. Nevertheless, we can definitely see how Draupadī, as a puppet herself, questions the agency problem. In all of such cases in the Mbh, the figure of a puppet always leads to an external power that pulls the strings.

The *Gaṇadhara-vāda* is a handbook of essential teachings attributed to Jinabhadra. The sixth dialogue between Maṇḍika and Mahāvīra focuses on the bondage and liberation of the soul (*jīva*)⁶³. In the center of the piece, he raises a question: given that the soul is formless (*amūrtatva*), and we admit that formless things do not move, just like the space (*ākāśa*), how do we know the soul exists, and it can move to higher realms? Mahāvīra

replied that in spite of being formless, the soul is indeed qualified by its actions (*sakriyā*). Why? Because we can infer from the moving limbs.⁶⁴

kattāittanao vā sakkirio'yam mao kulālo vva |

dehapphandanao vā paccakkham jantapuriso vva || 1846

Or it is recognized as being active on account of its being the doer, etc., like a potter;

or because the movements of the body are directly perceived, like a mechanical man.⁶⁵

Unlike the Buddhists, whose conception of *nāmarūpa* presumes the concomitance and interplay of mental–physical events, the Jains, in agreement with other realists, are more typical dualists with regard to the mind–body relationship: the body is inert, “just as we learn the causal force of wind when we see the trees wave, we know the existence of man (*ātman*) while we see the activities of body”.⁶⁶ In this sense, the body is nothing but the material instrument of the moving and sentient (*cetana*) soul. It does not seem that the invocation of a mechanical man here aims to invite readers to consider their own personhood as such, nor suggest a different kind of discourse or frame of thought oriented towards the phenomenology of experience. Instead, it relies totally on inference based on daily observation and ordinary language.

Similarly, but on a much larger scale, Bhartr̥hari (5th century) compared the whole world to a mechanism, which would be out of order without the pulling force of time:

tam asya lokayantrasya sūtradhāram pracakṣate |

pratibandhābhyanuññābhyaṃ tena viśvam vibhajate || III.9.4⁶⁷

[They] say it (i.e., time) is the string-holder of this world-machine, Everything is individuated by it through [its] restraint and release.

The commentator Helārāja (11th century) made it clear that the whole world is here compared to a mechanical man whose activities are bound to time, the string-holder of a puppet. Things are told apart as concealed or manifested, born or dead, through the power of time, just like a string-holder can cause the mechanical man to open or close his eyes by pulling the strings. This is a cosmological type of account, in the ethos of *Puruṣa Sukta*, and perfectly echoes the beginning of the *Brahmakāṇḍa* of *Vākyapadīya*, where the eternal Word Brahma is the whole that appears to be manifold due to the force of time (*kālaśakti*) (Biardeau 1964, p. 30). As with the inference from moving limbs in the *Gaṇadharavāda*, here, it looks at the moving world from the outside and infers from the activities that there must be an overpowering agent, the final cause of the universe. Unlike the Buddhist texts investigated above, the comparison here does not compel one to feel like a mechanical man from the inside. I believe that this is the crucial point why it is ultimately so different when the same figuration is applied in Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts.

The consequence of this different way of applying the *yantraputraka* figuration is twofold: it argues for different ontological views of the self, and it yields a completely different atmosphere when a mechanical man is invoked in narratives. Let us take a well-known episode from the *Kathāsaritsāgara* (XLIII)⁶⁸ to illustrate the observation. When Naravāhanadatta first visited the Snow City (*Hemapura*):

He entered that city by the market street, and beheld that all the population, merchants, women and citizens, were wooden automata (*kāsthayantramaya*), that moved as if they were alive (*sajīvaavat*), but were recognized as lifeless (*nirjīva*) by their want of speech (*vāgviraha*) . . . he entered, full of wonder, that palace, which was resplendent with seven ranges of golden buildings. There he saw a majestic man [i.e., Rājyadhara] sitting on a jewelled throne, surrounded by warders and women who were also wooden automata, the only living being (*cetana*) there, who produced motion (*spandana*) in those dull material things (*jadā*), like the soul (*adhishṭhātr*) presiding over the senses.⁶⁹

This silence with noises, solitude within a crowd, and a fantastic yet quirky atmosphere immediately confronts any reader. The Hemapura looks like a prosperous city.

The king, living in a city of mechanical beings made by his own hand,⁷⁰ is now safe from arrest for the crime he never committed. However, wherever the king's eyes and ears fall upon, we wonder, does he not find a mere absence of the soul, except for himself? On the contrary, imagine one enters a city of bodhisattvas who act just as mechanical beings do. How would it feel like? I suppose it should be wonderous rather than gothic, blissful rather than lonely because nothing is absent.

5. Conclusions

Indian literature has never been short of imaginations about mechanical beings, simple or cunning, entertaining or challenging. These beings can be a mechanical animal that fights in a battle and returns in triumph from impossible missions, or more frequently, a mechanical man or woman that interacts with real human beings. In this article, I chose to take a close look at Buddhist uses of this figuration as a simile or metaphorical plot device. As shown above, a mechanical man is thought not to be an independent agent but is effective in all kinds of physical–mental activities. By invoking the metaphor, it invites the reader to consider and experience from the first-person perspective how “agency” works in a being without an enduring self.

As a case study of metaphor in Buddhist literature, I hope to show how we could understand a metaphor and why (not always but quite often) we should take it seriously.

First of all, there is no necessary contradiction between rational sense and metaphors.⁷¹ On the contrary, our ancient writers made good use of metaphors out of rational choices to convey crucial philosophical messages. While it is true that some similes and metaphors are hastily dropped into theoretical or literary compositions, others are carefully designed to reveal novel ideas. These metaphors are even “far from being merely ornamental”, but “highly important in developing argumentation and outlining its soteriological horizons.” (Tzohar 2018, p. 3).

Second, metaphors are particularly useful for Buddhists to philosophize because they evoke subjective experiences. Some of them are used as thought experiments that become especially indispensable when one encounters the limits of ordinary language, just like in our examples: if our language is encoded with the sense of agent and motive, how is it possible to use the same language to make sense of actions with no agent and motive? In order to crack open a closed system of semantics and reasoning, Buddhists resort to metaphors in order to bring in utterly novel experience and understanding.

From anonymous storytellers to Buddhaghosa, our authors seem to have been aware of this unique function of metaphors. In this particular way, the mechanical man serves not only as a comparison, but also a site where readers can explore what is essential to the human experience and understand how persons can function without a self. To be more precise, by transforming the subjective experience, the *yantraputraka* metaphor breaks through the ordinary sphere and creates “a new descriptive frame [that] produces the sort of person for whom this sort of new description can be true” (Kachru 2021, p. 295). Through reflexive analysis and re-immersion in what is normally misunderstood to be a causal agent, the metaphor of the mechanical man invites individuals to transform their embodied experience so as to be prepared for the extra-ordinary. Therefore, an uttering of the metaphor is a speech act: it encourages one to think and act in the *possible mode of being*.

Funding: This research was funded by 國家社會科學基金重大項目《印度古典梵語文藝學重要文獻翻譯與研究》(the major project of the National Social Science Foundation of China “Indian Art and Literary Theories in Classical Sanskrit Literatures: Translation and Studies on Fundamental Works (No. 18ZDA286)”).

Acknowledgments: I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers of *Religions* for their helpful comments. I am also grateful for Li Wei and Fu Chong for inspiring conversations before and after the article took its shape.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Abbreviation

Mbh *Mahābhārata*. See (Sukthankar 1933–1966)

T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See (Takakusu and Watanabe 1924–1932)

Notes

- 1 Strong's (1989), pp. 209–10) translation from Mukhopadhyaya's edition (1963, p. 42) with my own minor changes.
- 2 Elephants are known as an emblem of a sovereign. Aśoka story circles even emphasize his sovereignty through his natural inclination towards elephants, e.g.: *aham hastiskandhenāgato mama yānam śobhanam aham rājā bhaviṣyāmīti* (Mukhopadhyaya 1963, p. 37).
- 3 Compare the *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 1 (T. 2042, 50.100c16-26), where Susīma is said to 直趣象上欲捉阿恕伽; "He rushed straight towards the elephant to seize Aśoka" (Mukhopadhyaya 1963, p. 42, fn.11; Przulski 1923, pp. 234–35). A more concise version is found in the *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 23 (T. 99, 2.163b8-14; Skt. *Samyukta Āgama*): 彼王子即趣東門.
- 4 The term for such mechanical beings is not univocal. Apart from *kāṣṭhayantramaya*, lit. "one made of wood contrivance", *dāru-maya*, *dāruyanta*, *yantarūpa(ka)*, *yantraputraka*, *yantrapurusa*, etc., are among the most common ones (Cohen 2003, pp. 65–66). For convenience, I will stick to *yantraputraka* or "mechanical man" in this article unless the text in focus uses something else.
- 5 In light of Ganeri's (2012) reconstruction of Buddhist philosophy of mind as "No Place Views", I use "immerse" and "embodied" in their phenomenological sense as he does, without any implication of dualism in terms of mind-body problem.
- 6 *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 1.4.54 (Cardona 1997, p. 611).
- 7 For a definition of aesthetic stance, see Kachru (2020, p. 9).
- 8 On figurative speech that generates novel experience in general, see (Fogelin 2011, p. 69). Gummer also agrees that "metaphors are never 'just' metaphors: they do the crucial work of linking two different concepts . . . that enables new ways of thinking about the issue in question-and new kinds of speech acts." (in Stepien 2020, p. 200).
- 9 Compare the use of *nirīhaka* in the Mahāyāna context, e.g., AP (Vaidya 1960, p. 230): *tatkasya hetoh? nirīhakā hi ānanda sarvadharmā agrāhyā akāśanirīhakatayā. acintyā hy ānanda sarvadharmā māyāpuruṣopamāh. acintyā hy ānanda sarvadharmā māyāpuruṣopamāh.*
- 10 This is part of the proper examination of *nāmarūpa* (*nāmarūpam yathāvadassanam*) from the 18th chapter of Vism: "The Purification of View" (*Ditṭhivissuddhiniddesa*). See Davids' edition (1921, pp. 594–95); my translation based on Nāṇamoli's (2010, p. 618).
- 11 Vism (ibid. p. 593): *nāmarūpamattam ev' idam, na satto, na puggalo atthīti, etam attham saṃsanditvā vavatthapeti.* "This is mere mentality-materiality, there is no being, no person" is confirmed by a number of scriptures. (Nāṇamoli 2010, p. 616)
- 12 There, Buddhaghosa offers a careful description of righteous observation from hair to toe and compares the mesentery part (*okāsato*) holding on to the marionette's strings (*yantasuttakam iva*). See Davids' edition (1921, p. 258); Nāṇamoli's (2010, pp. 251–52) translation. For meditations on the body in aid of abundant similes in the *Majjhima Nikāya* and Vism, etc., see Collins (1997, pp. 190–94). On the role of body in advanced meditation, see (Shulman 2021).
- 13 This is not an exhaustive list of examples. Others include the commentary of *Jātaka* ascribed to Buddhaghosa (ad *Jātaka* no.512, verse 8): *dārukataḷḷako vā'ti dārumayayantrarūpakam viya.* (Fausbøll 1963, vol. 5, p. 18).
- 14 *Sāmaññaphalasuttavanṇanā* in *Sumaṅgalavāṇī* (Rhys Davids et al. 1968, Vol. 1, p. 197).
- 15 *Devadūtasuttavanṇanā* in *Papañcasūdanī* (Horner 1977, Vol. 4, p. 231). Mori rendered *yantarūpa* as "contrived image" (1997, p. 461), but I stick to "mechanical man" in order to remain consistent in this paper.
- 16 One may speculate that such a carved (or moulded, embroidered, painted) girl that is forbidden in monks' life might be an inspiration for further philosophical experiments with them. For example, in the *Wufen lü* 五分律 [*Mahāsāśaka Five Part Vinaya*] (T. 1421, 22.182a17-19) and *Shisong lü* 十誦律 [*Sarvāstivādin Ten Recitation Vinaya*] (T. 1435, 23.182c11-22), the Buddha sanctions that if a monk purposefully touches a wooden girl, he gets a *tuṣkṛta* offense. A particularly interesting case is found in the *Sapodu bu pini modeleja* 薩婆多部毘尼摩得勒伽 3 [*Sarvāstivāda Vinaya Mātrikā*]. A monk confessed his sexual pleasure with a wooden mechanical girl, which is said to open her vagina; he committed a *pārājika*: "有比丘見木女像端正可愛, 生貪著心, 即捉彼女根欲作姪. 女根即開, 尋生怖畏疑悔, 乃至佛言: '若舉身受樂, 犯波羅夷. 若女根不開, 犯偷羅遮.' 如木女, 金銀七寶石女, 膠漆布女, 乃至泥土女亦如是." (T.1441, 23.584a1-5) It is notable that (as informed by Dr. Li Wei), such intricate a machinery is not attested in other Vinayas, hence even a monk has certain sensual pleasure with a wooden girl, he does not offend the *pārājika*. For the metaphor in the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya quoted by *Prasannapadā*, see below, note 54.
- 17 This was then followed by its recurrence in the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*), as well as a considerable range of Mahāyāna sutras. For example, in the *Da boniepan jing* 大般涅槃經 13 [*Parinirvāṇamahāyānasūtra*]: "若以進止俯仰視眴知有我者, 機關木人亦應有我." (T. 375, 12.688c3-4) *Da fangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經 14 [*Mahāsamnipāta*]: "善男子! 喻如工匠刻作木人身相備具, 所作事業皆能成辦, 於作不作不生二想. 菩薩為成就莊嚴本願故, 發勤精進修一切業, 於作不作不生二想, 去離二邊, 亦復如是." (T. 397, 13.98a16-20.) The DZDL used this simile frequently. Not only a donor (*dātr*) is compared to a *yantraputraka*, but also a Bodhisattva who accomplishes his goal in a human body (T. 1509, 25.168a18-22.). Some give more weight to the bodily aspect, while some portray it as more or less the same as other illusory things. At the end of the day, all conditioned dharmas are just like a mechanical being, functioning by coordination of various causal factors. (T. 1509, 25.326a8-28.)

- 18 See Karashima (2011, pp. 413–24). This frame is probably echoing Indra’s request and his repeated frustration in searching of the *Self* in the *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. See Kapstein (2001, chp. 2).
- 19 Vaidya (1960, p. 217); T. 224, 8.466a16-17.
- 20 DXJ 8: “譬如幻師作化人, 化人不作是念: 師離我近, 觀人離我遠。” (T. 224, 8.466b22-24.)
- 21 DXJ 8: “般若波羅蜜, 敵無所愛, 敵無所憎。 怛薩阿竭所有, 無所著, 無所生。 般若波羅蜜亦如是, 亦無所生, 亦無所著。” (T. 224, 8.466c2-5.)
- 22 In Lokaksema’s translation, this is followed by an additional set of similes, including a boat, desert, sun, water, etc., which are not attested in other parallels (Karashima 2011, p. 423, n.280). The final part of the chapter thus seems to have more fluidity than other parts.
- 23 DXJ 8 (T. 224, 8.466c9-14). Zhi Qian’s translation largely follows the DXJ and retains the content of phrases (a) (b) that are absent from other versions: “譬如匠工點師刻作機關人, 若作雜畜, 不能自起居, 因對搖。 木人本不念言: ‘我當動搖屈申低仰, 令觀者喜.’” (*Daming du jing* 大明度經 5, T. 225, 8.501c13-15). See the AP parallel below in note 40.
- 24 My translation, based on Karashima’s (2011, pp. 422–23) partial translation in footnotes. In his Glossary, Karashima (2010, pp. 519–20) gave examples of *wuxing* 無形 corresponding to *svabhāva* or *asad-bhāva*, and I feel this is probably the case here.
- 25 Xiaopin *bore boluomi jing* 小品般若波羅蜜經 9 (T. 227, 8.576a16-19) parallels better with the AP, see below in note 27.
- 26 For the idea of “textual variation” in the Prajñāpāramitā text families, see Zacchetti (2021).
- 27 *tadyathāpi nāma bhagavan daksheṇa palagandena vā palagandāntevāsīnā vā dārumayī strī vā puruṣo vā yantrayuktah kṛto bhavet. sa yasya kṛtyasyārthāya kṛtas, tac ca kṛtyam karoti. sa ca dārusamghāto’vikalpah. tatasya hetoh? avikalpatvād eva bhagavan dārusamghātasya. evam eva bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvo yasya kṛtyasya kṛtāsa imāṃ prajñāpāramitāṃ bhāvayati, tacca kṛtyam karoti. sā ca prajñāpāramitā avikalpā. tatasya hetoh? avikalpatvād eva bhagavan asyāḥ prajñāpāramitāyā iti.* (Vaidya 1960, p. 219)
- 28 T. 228, 8.661c18-23; T. 220, 7.851a8-15; T. 220, 7.915c7-10.
- 29 In fact, the only version of the Prajñāpāramitā literature that I found to include (b) is in the *Ratnagūṇasamcayagāthā*, despite the fact that it is put into the mouth of the “magical man” (*māyākārapuruṣa*) rather than a mechanical man. See *Ratnagūṇasamcayagāthā* XXVI. 5: (A) *yathā māyākārapuruṣasya na eva bhoṭi toṣṣiyimāṃ janata so ca karoti kāryam* (Yuyama 1976, p. 103); (B) *... te śīṣya mām, ...* (Obermiller 1937, p. 96); *toṣṣiyi* can be read as first-person singular future in this form of hybrid Sanskrit, see Yuyama (1973, p. 149, §36.11). If it is true that the *Gāthā* derived from a north-western recension of the AP (Ji 1995, pp. 234–55), the DXJ may belong to a recension from an approximate region where such cultivation techniques were popular.
- 30 The Chapter on Bodhisattva 菩薩品 of the *Xiuxing daodi jing* 修行道地經 30 [Yogācārabhūmi of Saṅgharakṣa] (T. 606, 15.229c14-19).
- 31 Occasionally, it is said to be moved by natural powers. For example, we find another variation of the *yantraputraka* trope in the *Da zhuangyan lun jing* 大莊嚴論經 5; this mechanical man is wind-forced: “但以風力故, 俯仰而屈伸。” (T. 201, 4.285b20-23.) Although such cases do attribute mechanical man’s movement to certain external force, yet notably, it is not a *sūtradhāra*.
- 32 I thank one of my anonymous reviewers for highlighting this point that he/she believes to be crucial.
- 33 Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the *Tathāgatamahākāraṇīrdeśa*, the *Da’ai jing* 大哀經 (T. 13, 2.398.419a1). The newly discovered Sanskrit fragment covers this chapter and runs up to the beginning of the next, but it does not included the verse quoted (Ye 2021; confirmation via personal communication).
- 34 *Chixin fantian suowen jing* 持心梵天所問經 [Viśeṣacintibrahmaparipṛcchā, translated by Dharmarakṣa in 286 AD] (T. 585, 15.13c28).
- 35 *Foshuo pumen pin jing* 佛說普門品經 [Samantamukhaparivarta] (T 315a, 11.771c27-28); parallel to the *Da baoji jing* 29 [Mahāratnakūṭa]: “因緣和合起, 離緣終不生。” (T. 310, 11.161b3.)
- 36 DXJ 8 (T. 224, 8.466a24-29).
- 37 DXJ 16 (T. 224, 8.457a17-19): “佛言: ‘初頭意, 後來意, 是兩意無有對’ 須菩提言: ‘後來意, 初頭意無有對, 何等功德出生長大?’” AP XIX (Vaidya 1960, p. 175): *paurvako bhagavaṃś cittotpādaḥ paścimakena cittotpādenāsamavahitaḥ paścimakaś cittotpādaḥ paurvakena cittotpādenāsamavahitaḥ. katham bhagavan bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya kuśalamūlānām upacayo bhavati?*
- 38 Haribhadra’s *Āloka* (Vaidya 1960, p. 513): *sa ca dārusamghāto’vikalpa ity anena kriyāsāphalyavikalpaviraho nigaditah.*
- 39 Quote from the *Tathatāparivarta*, Salvini’s translation (Salvini 2008, p. 48): *na hi suvikrāntavikrāmin rūpasya kaścit kartā vā kārayitā vā. evam vedanāsamjñāsamskārānām. na vijñānasya kaścit kartā vā kārayitā vā. yā ca rūpavedanāsamjñāsamskāravijñānānām akartrtā akārayitṛtā iyaṃ prajñāpāramitā.* (Hikata 1958, p. 32.) More or less the same as in Xuanzang’s translation, *Da bore boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經 595 (T. 220, 7.1081a14-21). Hikata dated the text to the 5-6th century AD (ibid., p. LXXXII); (Zacchetti 2015, p. 197).
- 40 E.g., *evam yāvad rtor api naivam bhavati — aham bijasya pariñāmanākṛtyam karomi iti.* (Vaidya 1961, p. 109.)
- 41 T. 154, 3.88, a17-23
- 42 The term *seshi* 色視 “having one’s eyes fixed on beauty/forms” is interesting here, forming an antithesis with *kongguan* 空觀 “the insight of emptiness”. Dharmarakṣa used the same pair of expressions in another section of the *Shengjing*: “不曉空觀, 但作色視。” (T. 154, 3.71a13-21.)
- 43 T. 154, 3.88, a24-b3.
- 44 T. 154, 3.88, b3-7.

- 45 See Hoernle (1907, pp. 22–26), who also mentioned that the 360 bricks in the fire altar are compared to the number of bones in the *Śatapathabrahmana* (p. 105).
- 46 “二十七七日，三百六十節具。” (T. 607, 15.234a15-c5; T. 606, 15.187b16-17).
- 47 The king shakes with his 360 bones out of fear in the Chinese versions of Śyama Jātaka, *Pusa shanzi jing* 菩薩睽子經 (T. 174, 3.437a23-27; T. 175a, 3.439a16-17).
- 48 This is suggested by other variations of the plot, e.g., *Da zhuangyan jing lun* 大莊嚴經論 5 (*Kalpanāmandītikā*): “譬如幻師以此陰身作種種戲，能令智者見即解悟。” (T. 201, 4.285a3-4.)
- 49 The execution of the mechanical youth is like one artificial being hindered by another artificial being, resonant in many Mahāyāna sutras and Nāgārjuna’s famous verse: *nirmitako nirmitakam māyāpuruṣaḥ svamāyayā sṛṣṭam | pratiśedhayeta yadvat pratiśedho ‘yam tathaiva syāt* || VV 23 (Westerhoff 2010, p. 49).
- 50 *Da zhuangyan jing lun*: “我諦觀身相，去來及進止，屈申與俯仰，顧視并語言，諸節相支柱，骨肋甚稀疎，筋纏為機關，假之而動轉。如是一一中，都無有宰主，而今此法者，為有為無耶？” (T. 201, 4.278c1-6).
- 51 *Shengjing* thus helps to redetermine the date of the *Liezi*, see (Ji 1950).
- 52 The new setting intimates a slightly different view. Richey (2011, p. 195) cited Company (1996, p. 309): “Chinese literary trope of visits to foreign climes ‘envisions the periphery as the locus of the simple, the natural, and thus by implication the primordial condition that has been progressively lost in the Central Kingdom’.”
- 53 Dutt (1984, p. 166); T. 1448, 24.77a25-b18.
- 54 *Prasannapadā ad Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.3: *vinaye ca yantrakārakāritā yantrayuvatīḥ sadbhūtayuvatīśūnyā sadbhūtayuvatirūpeṇa pratibhāsate, tasya ca citrakārasya kāmarāgāspadībhūtā | tathā mṛṣāsvabhāvā api bhāvā bālānām samkleśavyavadānanibandhanam bhavanti* || See MacDonald (2015, p. 179, and fn. 346).
- 55 For a comparison of the two versions, and their possible origin, see Beguš (2020, p. 4).
- 56 T. 207, 4.523c29-524a20.
- 57 The sense of competitive revenge is made rather explicit in T. 207, tale 8: “主人誑我，我當報之。” (T. 207, 4.524a10).
- 58 (Lane 1947, pp. 41–45). Due to my ignorance in Tocharian, I completely rely on Lane’s (and Cohen’s partial) translation of the story.
- 59 Beguš believes that there is no practical difference between painter and artisan (2020, p. 19).
- 60 *Mañjuśrīnairātmyāvataśāstra*: “All forms (rūpa) are like paintings on a scroll. Empty (śūnya), they are not material substance (dravya) [but are] like what is projected by a magic spell.” Quoted from Martini (2008, p. 92, and note 11); (Kachru 2015, p. 10).
- 61 A few other variations of the story from the *Dārṣṭāntikas*, e.g., tale 29 of the *Da zhuangyan jing lun* (T. 201, 4.285b16-c2); for the French translation, see Huber (1908, pp. 147–50). Compare tale 20 (T. 201, 4.285a18-26; Lüders 1979, pp. 204–5).
- 62 Sukthankar 1933–1966, vol. p. 110. Samjaya’s words is in fact ambiguous. See (Hudson 2013, pp. 125–26).
- 63 *Gaṇadhara-vāda* vv.1802–1806 (Vijaya 1942, pp. 309–13).
- 64 *Gaṇadhara-vāda* v.1845 (Vijaya 1942, pp. 348–49).
- 65 Chāyā: *kartrādīvatō vā sakriyō ‘yam mataḥ kulāla iva | dehaspandanato vā pratyakṣam yantrapuruṣa iva* || (Vijaya 1942, pp. 349–50). Solomon’s interpretation is slightly different (Solomon 1966, p. 40, 160–61, 291).
- 66 *Apidamo dapiposha lun* 阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論 199 [**Mahāvibhāṣā*] on realist views: 如見樹動知風所為，機關動時知人所為。 “Just as from the movement of the tree, [we know] it is the work of wind; from the movement of the mechanical man, [we know] this is effectuated by a [real] man.” (T. 1545, 27.p. 995c27-28.)
- 67 *Vākyapadīya* III.9.4, with Helārāja’s *Prakāśa*: *yantrapuruṣaprakhyam viśvam sūtradhārapuruṣakalpapakālapratibaddhaceṣṭam. kālena hi svaśaktyā bhāvānām sthaganonmajjane janmanāśaparyāye vibhajātā, sūtradhāreṇeva yantrapuruṣasya sūtrasañcāravaśenonmesanimesādikriyākārinā, viśvam prāptapaurvāparyavivibhāgam pravivhāgalakṣaṇāś ceṣṭāḥ kāryante.* (Iyer 1973, p. 42.)
- 68 Such stories with sophisticated machines that arose at the turn of the second millennium are very likely “the result of wider cosmopolitan interaction with the Abbasid world”. (Ali 2016, pp. 466–71.)
- 69 *Kathāsaritsāgara* 7.9.10-15 (Durgaprasad and Parab 1915, p. 195). Tawney’s (1924, vol. III, p. 281) translation.
- 70 *Kathāsaritsāgara* 7.9.58: *sarvaḥ kṛto mayā.* (Durgaprasad and Parab 1915, p. 197). Admittedly, this fictional city is also modelled on a dualist view of sentient beings composed of “dull materials” and a supervising soul, here, the robot citizens and the king Rājadhara.
- 71 “In the English-speaking tradition of philosophy of language it has generally been taken for granted that the ideal rational language is literal and univocal and has a unique relation to truth . . . The presence of metaphors and other tropes in language is a deviation from rational sense.” In contrast to literary language that is closely connected with the analysis of science, “metaphoric language . . . is ambiguous, holistic in meaning and context-dependent, and in this view fit only to express subjective attitudes and emotions.” (Hesse 1993, p. 49.)

References

- Ali, Daud. 2016. Bhoja's Mechanical Garden: Translating Wonder across the Indian Ocean, circa 800–1100 CE. *History of Religions* 55: 460–93. [CrossRef]
- Beguš, Nina. 2020. A Tocharian Tale from the Silk Road: A Philological Account of The Painter and the Mechanical Maiden and Its Resonances with the Western Canon. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30: 681–706. [CrossRef]
- Biardeau, Madeleine. 1964. *Vākyapadīya Brahmakāṇḍa avec la Vṛtti de Harivoṛṣabha*. Paris: Editions E. de Boccard.
- Campany, Robert Ford. 1996. *Strange Writing: Anomaly Accounts in Early Medieval China*. SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cardona, George. 1997. *Pāṇini*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, vol. I.
- Chevannes, Édouard. 1911. *Cinq Cents Contes et Apologues*. Tome. II. Paris: Ernest Lerous.
- Cohen, Signe. 2003. Romancing the Robots, and Other Tales of Mechanical Beings in Ancient Indian Literature. *Acta Orientalia* LXIV: 65–75.
- Collins, Steven. 1997. The Body in Theravāda Monasticism. In *Religion and Body: Religion and the Body*. Edited by Sarah Coakley. Cambridge: University Press.
- Dauids, C.A.F. Rhys, ed. 1921. *Visuddhimagga*. London: Pali Text Society, Vol. 2.
- Durgaprasad, Paṇḍit, and Kāsināth Paṇḍurang Parab, eds. 1915. *Kathāsāritsāgara*. Bombay: Nirnaya-Sagar Press.
- Dutt, Nalinaksha, ed. 1984. *Mūlasarvāstivādinayavastu, Part 1: Bhaisajyavastu*, 2nd ed. Delhi: Gilgit Manuscript, vol. III.
- Fausbøll, V., ed. 1963. *The Jātaka with its commentary being tales of the anterior births of Gotama Buddha*. Vol. V. London: Trübner and Co.
- Fogelin, Robert J. 2011. *Figuratively Speaking*, Rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ganeri, Jonardon. 2012. *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hesse, Mary. 1993. Models, Metaphors and Truth. In *Knowledge and Language (Vol. III): Metaphor and Knowledge*. Edited by Frank R. Ankersmit and Jan Johann Albinn Mooij. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.
- Hikata, Ryusho, ed. 1958. *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-paripṛcchā Prajñāpāramitā-Sūtra, Edited with An Introductory Essay*. Committee of Commemoration Program for Dr. Hikata's Retirement from Professorship. Fukuoka: Kyushu University.
- Hiltebeitel, Alf. 1980. 'Draupadī's Garments'. *Indo-Iranian Journal* 22: 97–112. [CrossRef]
- Hoernle, A. F. Rudolf. 1907. *Studies in the Medicine of Ancient India*. Part I, Osteology or the Bones of the Human Body. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Horner, I. B., ed. 1977. *Papañcasūdanī Majjhimanikāyaṭṭhakathā of Buddhaghosācariya*. London: Pali Text Society, vol. 4, (Part IV–V).
- Huber, Edouard. 1908. *Sūtrālamkāra traduit en français sur la version Chinoise de Kumārajīva*. Paris: E. Leroux.
- Hudson, Emily T. 2013. *Disorienting Dharma: Ethics and the Aesthetics of Suffering in the Mahābhārata*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Iyer, Subramanian, ed. 1973. *Vākyapadīya of Bhartr̥hari with the commentary of Helārāja, Kāṇḍa III, Part ii*. Poona: Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute.
- Ji, Xianlin. 1950. Lieh-Tzu and Buddhist Sutras. A note on the author of Lieh-tzu and the date of its composition. *Studia Serica* 9: 18–21.
- Ji, Xianlin. 1995. Lun fanwen ben Sheng shenghui dao bi'an gongdebao ji ji 論梵文本《聖勝慧到彼岸功德寶集偈》 [On the Sanskrit Versions of the Prajñāpāramitā Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā]. In *Ji Xianlin fojiao xueshu lunwen ji* 季羨林佛教學術論文集. Taipei: Dongchu Press.
- Kachru, Sonam. 2015. *What Is It like to Become a Likeness of Oneself? Gestures of Light, Motion and Mind at the Surfaces of Representation*. Essays of the Forum Transregionale Studien 1. Berlin: Forum Transregionale Studien.
- Kachru, Sonam. 2020. The Translation of Life: Thinking of Painting in Indian Buddhist Literature. *Religions* 11: 467. [CrossRef]
- Kachru, Sonam. 2021. Surely You're Joking, Mr. Nāgasena! *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 44: 275–309. [CrossRef]
- Kapstein, Matthew. 2001. *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Karashima, Seishi. 2010. *A Glossary of Lokakṣema's Translation of the Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica, v. 11. Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University.
- Karashima, Seishi. 2011. *A Critical Edition of Lokakṣema's Translation of the Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica, v. 12. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University.
- Lane, George S. 1947. The Tocharian Punyavantajātaka: Text and Translation. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 67: 33–53. [CrossRef]
- Lüders, Heinrich. 1979. *Bruchstücke buddhistischer Dramen; Bruchstücke der Kalpanāmandītikā des Kumāralāta*. Preussische Turfan-Expeditionen. Kleinere Sanskrit-Texte; Heft 1-2. Wiesbaden: Steiner.
- MacDonald, Anne. 2015. *In Clear Words: The Prasannapadā, Chapter One*. Beiträge Zur Kultur Und Geistesgeschichte Asiens, Nr. 86. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Marciniak, Katarzyna, ed. 2019. *The Mahāvastu: A New Edition*. Bibliotheca Philologica et Philosophica Buddhica, XIV.1. Tokyo: The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhism, Soka University, Vol. III.
- Martini, Giuliana. 2008. Tracing the Sources of the Book of Zambasta: The Case of the Yakṣa Painter Simile and the Kāśyapaparivarta. *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 3: 91–97. [CrossRef]
- Mikkelsen, Jane. 2020. Flights of Imagination: Avicenna's Phoenix (ʿAnqā) and Bedil's Figuration for the Lyric Self. *Journal of South Asian Intellectual History* 2: 28–72. [CrossRef]

- Mori, Sodō. 1997. The Vijñānavādin View as Depicted in the Pāli Commentaries with Special Reference to the Nirayapālakathā. In *Bauddhavidyāsudhākarah: Studies in Honour of Heinz Bechert on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*. Edited by Heinz Bechert, Petra Kieffer-Pülz and Jens-Uwe Hartmann. Swisttal-Odendorf: Indica et Tibetica Verlag, pp. 453–64.
- Mukhopadhyaya, Sujitkumar, ed. 1963. *The Aśokāvadāna: Sanskrit text compared with Chinese versions*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.
- Ñānamoli. 2010. *The Path of Purification*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society.
- Obermiller, E., ed. 1937. *Prajñā pāramitāratnagūṇasamçaya-gāthā: Sanscrit and Tibetan text*. Bibliotheca Buddhica XXIX. Moscow: The USSR Academy of Sciences Press.
- Przyluski, Jean. 1923. *La légende de l'empereur Açoka (Açoka-Avadana) dans les textes indiens et chinois*. Ministère de l'Instruction publique et des Beaux-Arts. Paris: P. Geuthner.
- Raghavan, V. 1952. *Yantras or Mechanical Contrivances in Ancient India*. Transaction No. 10. Basavangudi, Bangalore: The Indian Institute of Culture.
- Rahula, Walpola. 1978. *What the Buddha Taught*. London: Fraser.
- Rhys Davids, Thomas William, J. Estlin Carpenter, and William Stede. 1968. *Sumaṅgalavilāsini, Buddhaghosa's Commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya*. London: Luzac & Company LTD, vol. I, (Part I).
- Richey, Jeffrey L. 2011. I, Robot: Self as Machine in the Liezi. In *Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Scholarship on the Daoist Classic*. Edited by Jeffrey Dippmann and Ronnie Littlejohn. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 193–208.
- Ricœur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Translated by Kathleen Blamey. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Salvini, Mattia. 2008. Convention and Agency in the Philosophies of the Mahāyāna. Ph.D. thesis, SOAS University of London, London, UK.
- Shulman, Eviatar. 2014. *Rethinking the Buddha: Early Buddhist Philosophy as Meditative Perception*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shulman, Eviatar. 2021. 'Embodied Transcendence: The Buddha's Body in the Pāli Nikāyas'. *Religions* 12: 179. [CrossRef]
- Solomon, Esther tr. 1966. *Gaṇadharavāda*. Ahmedabad: Gujarat Vidya Sabha.
- Stepien, Rafal K., ed. 2020. *Buddhist Literature as Philosophy, Buddhist Philosophy as Literature*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Strong, John S. 1989. *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Sukthankar, Vishnu Sitaram, ed. 1933–1966. *Mahābhārata for the First Time Critically Edited*. 19 Volumes. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Takakusu, Junjirō 高楠順次郎, and Kaigyoku Watanabe 渡邊海旭, eds. 1924–1932. *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新修大藏經 [Buddhist Canon Compiled under the Taishō Era (1912–1926)]*. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, Vol. 100.
- Tawney, Charles Henry. 1924. *The Ocean of Story*. Edited by Norman Mosley Penzer. London: private print for subscribers only by C. J. Sawyer, Ltd., Vol. III.
- Tzohar, Roy. 2018. *A Yogācāra Buddhist Theory of Metaphor*. New York: United States of America: Oxford University Press.
- Vaidya, Paraśurāma Lakshmaṇa, ed. 1960. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā—With Haribhadra's Commentary Called Āloka*. Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no. 4. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute.
- Vaidya, Paraśurāma Lakshmaṇa. 1961. *Mahāyānasūtrasamgraha, Part I*. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute.
- Vijaya, Ratnaprabha, ed. 1942. *Kṣamāśramaṇa Jinabhadra Gaṇi's Gaṇadharavāda, Along with Maladhārin Hemacandra Sūri's Commentary*. Ahmedabad: Sri Jaina Siddhanta Society.
- Westerhoff, Jan. 2010. *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Viśvavārtanī*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ye, Shaoyong. 2021. A Preliminary Report on a Sanskrit Manuscript of the *Tathāgatamahākaruṇānirdeśa* or *Dhāraṇīśvararāja*. *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* 69: 1054–59. [CrossRef]
- Yuyama, Akira. 1973. *A Grammar of the Prajñā-Pāramitā-Ratna-Guṇa-Samçaya-Gāthā (Sanskrit Recension A)*. Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies in association with the Australian National University Press.
- Yuyama, Akira, ed. 1976. *Prajñā-pāramitā-ratna-guṇa-samçaya-gāthā (Sanskrit Recension A)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Zacchetti, Stefano. 2015. Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra. In *Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism*. Edited by Jonathan A. Silk, Oskar von Hinüber and Vincent Eltschinger. Leiden: Brill.
- Zacchetti, Stefano. 2021. *The Da Zhidu Lun 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa) and the History of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā: Patterns of Textual Variation in Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature*. Edited by Michael Radich and Jonathan A. Silk. Hamburg Buddhist Studies 14. Bochum Freiburg: Projekt.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.