

## Article

# What about Rats? Buddhist Disciplinary Guidelines on Rats: Daoxuan's *Vinaya* Commentaries

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**Abstract:** Buddhist texts generally prohibit the killing or harming of any sentient being. However, while such a ban may seem straightforward, it becomes much more complex when annoying or dangerous animals are involved. This paper focuses on one such animal—the rat. These rodents feature prominently in monastics' daily lives, so it should come as no surprise that both Indian and Chinese Buddhist masters pay attention to them. In the first part of the paper, we investigate the problems that rats can cause, how monastics deal with them, and what the authors-compilers of Buddhist *vinaya* (disciplinary) texts have to say about them. In the second part, we focus on how Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667)—one of the most prominent *vinaya* masters of the early Tang Dynasty—interprets the *vinaya* guidelines and their implementation in Chinese monasteries. As we will see, he raises a number of potential issues with regard to strict adherence to the Buddhist principles of no killing and no harming, and so reveals some of the problematic realities that he felt monastics faced in seventh century China.

**Keywords:** Chinese Buddhist monasticism; Daoxuan; rats; *vinaya*



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## 1. Introduction

As is well known, Buddhism calls for the protection of all living beings, humans and animals alike. Yet, what at first sight may seem a straightforward stipulation becomes much more complicated in circumstances involving dangerous and/or annoying animals. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that Buddhism's monastic guidelines contain extensive advice on how to deal with such animals. This paper focuses on a particularly disturbing group of creatures—namely, rodents. First, it investigates early Indian *vinaya* (disciplinary) texts' recommendations on the subject of rats and mice; then it explores how Chinese commentators, notably the *vinaya* master Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), interpreted these instructions.<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand how early Indian disciplinary masters attempted to regulate monastics' responses to rodents, we must look closely at the *vinaya* texts. There are six full, extant *vinayas*. Four of these survive only in Chinese translation; there are Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan versions of the fifth; and the sixth is extant only in the Pāli language. In chronological order of translation, the five Chinese *vinayas* are:<sup>2</sup> the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 (T no. 1435, 23; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*); the *Sifen lü* 四分律 (T no. 1428, 22; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*); the *Mohesengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 (T no. 1425, 22; Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*); the *Mishasai bu hexi wufen lü* 彌沙塞部和醯五分律 (T no. 1421, 22; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*); and the *Genbenshuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (T nos. 1442–1451, 23–24; Yijing's 義淨 (635–713) translation of large parts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*).<sup>3</sup> The first four of these texts were translated in the fifth century CE, whereas Yijing translated the fifth much later, at the beginning of the eighth century. By then, however, a number of influential Buddhist masters had already started to promote the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*; in consequence, this became the principal reference point for monastic discipline in China.<sup>4</sup> Arguably the most important of these masters was the monk Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), who wrote extensive commentaries and accounts in which he meticulously analyzed the *vinaya*

guidelines and introduced them to Chinese audiences. He studied every *vinaya* translation that was available to him, and although he repeatedly stressed that the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* was paramount, he urged his followers to consult the others when necessary (T no.1804, 40: 上 1.2b19–20). Information was thus, gleaned from various texts to inform a detailed exposition on the correct interpretation and implementation of Buddhist guidelines. Potential regional differences among the various traditions were consequently not considered, as all of the guidelines were regarded as the words of the Buddha himself. This paper focuses on Daoxuan's most renowned commentary—*Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* 四分律刪繁補闕行事鈔, *An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T no. 1804, 40).

In general, all of the Buddhist disciplinary texts, Indian and Chinese alike, regard every living being as a creature to be protected: that is, they should never be harmed or killed. However, they do permit humans to safeguard themselves against dangerous and/or annoying animals.<sup>5</sup> When addressing the subject of dangerous animals, all of the *vinaya* texts focus primarily on snakes, which are often discussed in conjunction with scorpions, centipedes, and venomous insects. In addition, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 3.585b21–22, 3.586c5) defines places where there are tigers, wolves, lions, bears, and other “evil animals” (*zhu e shou* 諸惡獸), including ants, as “difficult” (*nan* 難).<sup>6</sup> While these ferocious animals may pose a mortal danger to monastics, annoying creatures—especially insects, such as mosquitoes, flies, ants, and bedbugs—have the capacity to plague their lives on a daily basis.<sup>7</sup> In this context, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* advises monastics to avoid “dangerous” (*jing* 驚) places, which are defined as places that house thieves; “dreadful” (*bu* 怖) places that are inhabited by tigers, leopards, and wolves; and “perilous” (*weinan* 畏難) places that are blighted by mosquitoes and flies, snakes, and scorpions, or wind and heat (T no. 1442, 23: 24.756c18–20).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, any environment where snakes, scorpions, insects, and/or ants congregate is deemed unsuitable for monks (T no. 1442, 23: 12.688b29–c1).

As we shall see in the first part of this paper, the *vinayas* are less restrictive on the subject of rats and mice, either or both of which may be meant by the term *shu* 鼠 in the Chinese translations. For instance, monasteries are not required to find locations that are entirely free of these creatures, nor relocate if they infest an established community. Instead, the *vinayas* provide recommendations on how to live alongside them, such as how to avoid or repair damage they may cause without harming the animals themselves. It is self-evident from these texts that rodents were pervasive in monastic buildings, so handling them was a daily concern. The presence of food in monasteries particularly attracts these annoying animals, and the damage they cause can be very substantial. It is as such no surprise that they are seen as a nuisance, and that measures need to be taken.

The second part of the paper focuses on how these guidelines were interpreted and extended in Tang China, particularly by Daoxuan. For instance, there was increasing domestication of dogs and cats around this time in China, often specifically for pest control, which led to a prohibition against Buddhists keeping them. Here again, rodents provoke strong antipathy, leading to intense discussions on the fate of these animals.

## 2. Rats in the Vinaya Texts

As mentioned, the Chinese translations of the *vinaya* texts do not differentiate between rats and mice, so hereafter, for the sake of simplicity, this paper will use the term “rats” in reference to both.<sup>9</sup> As we will see, rats can cause a great deal of trouble in monastic communities: they eat leftover food, gnaw on clothes and mats, and make holes in the floor or walls. Moreover, they epitomize uncleanness. Yet, Buddhism treats them in precisely the same manner as it treats all other animals: they should not be harmed, but gently removed. That said, the *vinaya* stories do not cast rats in a positive light. For example, they often portray them as evil thieves. On the other hand, there are occasional references to their loyalty and cleverness, particularly with regard to their ability to outwit their worst enemies—cats.

## 2.1. Annoyances Caused by Rats

### 2.1.1. Eating Leftover Food

All of the *vinayas* categorize storing leftover food as a *pācittika* offense.<sup>10</sup> The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 8.54b1–7) explains that this prohibition was drafted because insects and rats (*chong shu* 虫鼠) may damage the monks' lodgings by chewing through the walls to gain access to the leftovers. Moreover, if laypeople were to see the resulting holes in the walls, they would likely deduce what had attracted the rats and criticize the monks' overabundance of food. Monastics are warned not to hoard other edible goods, too. For instance, the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin III, pp. 250–51) cautions against storing medicines such as ghee, butter, oil, honey, and molasses in pots and bags that are liable to leak. Should that happen, the monastery would be overrun by rats (*undura*),<sup>11</sup> which would lead to rebukes and criticism of the monks' luxurious lifestyle.

Notwithstanding these two examples, the *vinayas* contain surprisingly few references to rats eating human food, so it seems that this was not considered a major problem. Moreover, a parallel text that served as a moral code for lay Buddhist followers (the *Youposai jie jing* 優婆塞戒經; *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra*; *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts*, translated by the monk Dharmarakṣa between 424 and 426 CE), goes so far as to encourage compassion towards rats (and sparrows) that eat grain in fields or barns. It says (T no. 1488, 24: 5.1059a21–23):

復觀田倉多有鼠雀犯暴穀米。恒生憐愍復作是念。如是鼠雀因我得活。念已歡喜無觸惱想。當知是人得福無量。

If, when [a person] sees many rats and sparrows damaging grain in his field or barn, he always feels compassion for them and then thinks, “In this way, rats and sparrows are able to live because of me,” and if, after thinking this, he feels joyful and has no thoughts of harming them, you should know that this person will attain immeasurable blessings.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, in this text, compassion and the merit it ensures override any annoyance a rat may cause.

### 2.1.2. Gnawing on Mats and Robes

While the *vinayas* rarely address the issue of rats eating the monastics' food, they are much more concerned with the damage they can do to mats and robes, especially when these items are improperly stored.<sup>13</sup> The Pāli *vinaya*, for instance, mentions that rats—and often also ants (*upacikā*)—have a tendency to gnaw on robes, mats, bags, and even fastenings made out of creepers and cords that are used to tie doors to walls,<sup>14</sup> while the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (T no. 1425, 22: 9.308b13–17; p.309a16–20) warns that birds and rats are liable to pilfer mats that monks store incorrectly. Similarly, the *Pinimu jing* 毘尼母經 (\**Vinaya Mātrkā Sūtra*), a *vinaya* commentary that was translated into Chinese in the second half of the fourth or the start of the fifth century CE, states that insects and rats will gnaw on abandoned mats (T no. 1463, 24: 4.824a9–14).<sup>15</sup> Consequently, the Buddha urged monks to beat mats clean and fold them neatly prior to leaving a room. Meanwhile, the Mūlasarvāstivāda \**Vinayasamgraha*—Viśeṣamitra's (?–?) commentary on the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* that the aforementioned Yijing translated into Chinese—insists that robes must be handled with care and stored in places where they will not be eaten by insects (including ants), chewed on by cows, or gnawed on by rats (T no. 1458, 24: 5.554b1–3).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, the *Binaiye* 鼻奈耶 (a transcription of *vinaya*)—a *vinaya* text that was translated into Chinese in 383 CE<sup>17</sup>—cautions against storing surplus robes in a pile as this will cause them to rot, and insects, moths, and mice (*chong du shu* 虫蠹鼠) will gnaw on them. Should laypeople witness this, they will surely criticize the monks. As a result, the Buddha prohibited the accumulation of extra robes and categorized any breach of this rule as a *niḥsargika pācittika* (T no.1464, 24: 6.874b19–27).<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, then, rats are viewed as opportunists that will take full advantage of monks' neglect of their belongings by gnawing at them and so rendering them unclean (*bu jing* 不淨). The Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 21.142a22–24) hints at this when advocating the use of an underskirt (*chen shen yi* 襯身衣; probably a simple piece of cloth) to protect the main monastic robes from soiling (*bu jing*) with mud, as this would attract rats.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* urges monks to ensure that their seating material is not soiled (*bu jing*) by insects, rats, dirt, or dust (T no. 1425, 22: 14.342c3–11).

Given that a monastic robe becomes unclean from the moment when a rat gnaws on it, some of the *vinaya* texts consider whether such a tainted item may still be worn. This discussion is inextricably linked to the subject of *pāṃśukūla* (*cīvara*) robes—otherwise known as “refuse rags”—which were fashioned from material retrieved from a “dust-heap” (*pāṃśu-kūla*)<sup>20</sup> and worn by some members of the monastic community in accordance with one of the twelve (or thirteen) ascetic practices (*dhūtaguṇa*).<sup>21</sup> Many of these dust-heaps were located in cemeteries, while others were adjacent to washing places or simply on the roadside.<sup>22</sup> The monks and nuns who wore refuse rags did so to demonstrate their detachment from property and beauty, which they insisted overrode any negative connotations of filth and waste. Here, though, it is important to note that robes are a highly sensitive issue in the *vinaya* texts, as they are said to represent the reputation and purity of the monastic community. As Gregory Schopen points out: “To be accepted as a Buddhist monk one must not present in public an unkempt appearance or be seen in disreputable robes.” (Schopen 2007, p. 70). Similarly, Steven Collins emphasizes that a monastic’s social position rests on “a spotless performance.” (Collins 1997, p. 198). Therefore, as a general rule, any dirty robe should be thoroughly washed.<sup>23</sup> That said, as Nicholas Witkowski has demonstrated, monastics who chose a *dhūtaguṇa* lifestyle felt that it was incumbent on them to wear nothing but refuse rags, or at least transform them into respectable robes. However, this leaves the question of whether monastic robes that have been defiled by rats may be considered as legitimate refuse rags and repurposed accordingly.

There is a distinct lack of consistency on this issue not only across the *vinayas* but sometimes within individual traditions. In the Pāli *vinaya*, any robe that rats or ants have gnawed is classified as “destroyed” (*naṭṭhacīvara*), which means it may be replaced (Vin III, p. 213). However, such a robe may still be considered an acceptable refuse rag. Indeed, in the same *vinaya*’s *Parivāra* chapter, robes that have been gnawed by rats appear in a list of acceptable (Pāli) *pāṃsukūla* robes (Vin V, p. 129).<sup>24</sup> There are comparable guidelines in the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition: while the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1442, 23: 17.715c10–13; T no. 1443, 23: 8.947a25–28), the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayakārikā* (T no. 1459, 24: 626c17–20),<sup>25</sup> and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *\*Vinayasamgraha* (T no. 1458, 24: 5.552a20–23) all include robes gnawed by rats in their lists of legitimate refuse rags (*fen sao yi* 糞掃衣—that is, *pāṃsukūla* robes), the latter text also notes that clothes that have been damaged by insects and rats should be considered “lost” (T no. 1458, 24: 6.557b3–4). In contrast, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* includes rags gnawed by rats in two separate lists of *inappropriate* refuse rags (T no. 1435, 23: 51.371a7–8 and 56.413c23–25)<sup>26</sup>, while the *Sapoduo pini piposha* 薩婆多毘尼毘婆沙 (a commentary on this *vinaya*) urges monastics not to accept or offer gifts of robes that rats have gnawed (T no. 1440, 23: 5.531c20–21 (accept); T no. 1440, 23: 7.546b22–23 (offer)).<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the latter text clearly acknowledges that some monastics do own such items as it includes them in a list of monks’ possessions (T no. 1440, 23: 4.526c23–25). In contrast, again, the Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka traditions are at least internally consistent, as their respective *vinayas* (T no. 1421, 22: 21.143b13–17; T no. 1428, 22: 39.850a22–23 and 60.1011b26–28) not only permit monks to wear rags that have been gnawed by rats but also include them in their lists of permissible refuse rags.

Overall, then, while most of the *vinaya* traditions consider clothes gnawed by rats as problematic, the guidance on their use often remains a matter of debate.

### 2.1.3. Making Holes in Floors and Walls

The holes that rats make in floors or walls are another cause for concern for the authors-compilers of the six *vinayas*. For instance, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* characterizes areas with holes made by snakes, centipedes, venomous insects, and rats as “difficult” (nan 難; *T* no.1435, 23: 3.20c16–18).<sup>28</sup> Similarly, both the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (*T* no. 1425, 22: 34.505c21–23) and the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 22: 33.802b15–16 and 49.931b1) advocate filling in rats’ holes with mud.<sup>29</sup> The latter *vinaya* also explains that while monastics should usually abstain from digging the ground or even asking someone else to do so, there are some exceptions to this rule, such as when cleaning the floor or removing earth that rats have disturbed (*T* no. 1428, 11.641b20–24).<sup>30</sup>

The maintenance of a spotlessly clean environment was probably the primary motivation behind these injunctions to fill in rats’ holes and tunnels and therefore, eliminate the most visible signs of their presence. However, doing so clearly would have had the added, more practical benefit of making it more difficult for them to reenter and traverse the monastic compound.

### 2.2. How to Deal with Rats

Unsurprisingly, given the annoyance, damage, and disruption to Buddhist practice that rats can cause, the *vinayas* offer a series of guidelines for monastics on how best to protect themselves and their belongings from these persistent pests. First, though, all of them reiterate that no member of the Buddhist community should intentionally kill any living creature, including rats, and that violating this stipulation constitutes a *pācittika* offense:

若比丘故殺畜生命者波逸提。

If a *bhikṣu* [monk] deliberately breaks off the life of an animal, he commits a *pācittika*.<sup>31</sup>

Moreover, the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayasamgraha* explicitly states that this rule encompasses birds, snakes, and rats (*T* no. 1458, 24: 12.595a9–10). However, the injunction against killing does not imply that monks and nuns must remain completely defenseless against annoying animals.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, some of the *vinayas* actively encourage the removal of rats from monastic buildings. For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (*T* no. 1428, 42.870c16–19) relates that a group of monks were frightened (*jing wei* 驚畏) by an infestation of rats, which prompted the Buddha to assure them that they were permitted to startle (*jing* 驚) the animals and drive them out of the monastery. He also sanctioned catching the creatures in a box, on the condition that they were subsequently released and not left to die.<sup>33</sup> Protecting the lives of rats and snakes is similarly inviolable in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinayakārikā* (*T* no. 1459, 24: 3.647c15–20), which states that such creatures must always be considered with “compassionate thoughts” (*bei nian* 悲念). However, if necessary, they can be gently removed and released in a safe place where there are no people. The Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (*T* no.1425, 22: 14.343b8–19) adopts a slightly different perspective by focusing on what might motivate a rat’s removal. After specifying that a monk who drives a fellow monastic out of a room commits a *pācittika* offense, the *vinaya* goes on to explain that banishing a snake or a rat while feeling anger or hatred (*chen hui* 瞋恚) toward it is also an offense, albeit a less serious one, termed a *yuepini zui* 越毘尼罪.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, if the monk calmly announces, without anger or hatred, “It is a useless thing” (*wu yi zhi wu* 無益之物) prior to driving it out, he commits no offense.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the injunction is clearly against acting maliciously, rather than the act itself.

Some of the *vinayas* go further than these prohibitions against harming the creatures themselves and warn against damaging or blocking their habitats. For instance, the Pāli *vinaya* (Vin III, p. 151) insists that no rat’s nest (*āsaya*) should be destroyed during the construction of a new building. The same goes for the homes of ants, termites, snakes, scorpions, and many other creatures, too. Meanwhile, according to the *Mulian wen jielü zhong wu bai qing zhong shi* 目連問戒律中五百輕重事, *Five Hundred Questions Asked by*



*Maudgalyāyana on Light and Heavy Vinaya Issues*, which was translated into Chinese between 317 and 420, (Demiéville et al. 1978, p. 126) an interior rat's hole may be blocked on condition that it leads to another hole outside the house. If only one hole is found, it must remain unblocked (T no. 1483, 24: 983b25–27 and 995b24–27).

In summary, all Buddhists must take great care not to harm any living creature, including rats, even if they are a nuisance. However, they can be gently driven away or captured, taken to a safe place, and released, if necessary.

### 2.3. The Rat's Reputation

As mentioned earlier, the *vinayas* have a generally negative attitude toward rats, often characterizing them as bad-mannered creatures or thieves. On the other hand, they sometimes allude to rats' supposed loyalty to other animals, and consequently to their role in defeating Devadatta—the Buddha's cousin and rival, who came to be seen as the embodiment of evil behavior.<sup>36</sup>

#### 2.3.1. Rats' Bad Manners

The Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* is especially concerned with rats' bad manners in its guidelines on how monastics should walk and eat. For instance, when a monk enters a layman's house, he should not shake his head as “prostitutes, rats, and wolves” do because his host will associate this with the behavior of evil men (*huai bai ren* 壞敗人) (T no. 1425, 22: 21.401b14–17). In addition, monks should not lap up food with their tongues and allow spit to dribble out of their mouths because this is how negligent people (*fang yi ren* 放逸人), snakes, rats, dogs, and cats eat. Once again, this sort of vulgar conduct is associated with evilness (T no. 1425, 22: 22.404b22–25). Similarly, monks who chew noisily are bracketed with pigs and rats (T no. 1425, 22: 22.406a4–7).

#### 2.3.2. Thieving Rats

Several *vinayas* portray rats as thieves that hide their booty in their holes, which naturally raises the question of what monks should do if they come across the stolen items. For instance, if monks collect them for their own use, have they themselves committed theft? In general, the *vinayas* classify stealing as a *pārājika* offense—the most serious category, which is usually punishable by loss of monastic status.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the Mahīśāsaka *vinaya* (T no. 1421, 22: 28.183c26–28) states that if a monk finds a bag of money in a rat's hole and seizes it in the knowledge that he is stealing, he commits a less serious (although still grave) *sthūlāttyaya* offense, just as he would if taking something that he knew belonged to a bird or some other creature.<sup>38</sup> So, while rats are not accorded the same status as human victims of theft, seizing their possessions is still considered an offense.

The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*'s guidelines on this issue are more complex, so it illustrates them with two distinct stories (T no. 1428, 22: 55.978a24–29). First, it tells of a group of rats that gathered walnuts in the local village and stored them in the monastery. When the monks found the nuts and took them, knowing that they were stealing, they committed a *pārājika* offense. The circumstances—and the judgment—in the second story are rather different. The monks in the Jetavana monastery found a number of rats' holes, so they sent an attendant to fill them in, whereupon the attendant found medicine and pieces of silk that he handed to the monks.<sup>39</sup> Unsure whether they should accept these items, the monks petitioned the Buddha for advice. The Buddha decreed that the animals had no use for the medicine or the silk, so the monks had not committed a (*pārājika*) offense. Nevertheless, they should still not accept such items as gifts. There are several important aspects to this story. First, by ordering an attendant to destroy the rats' holes, rather than doing it themselves, the monks seem to avoid any responsibility for a deliberate act of destruction. Second, as the monastics had no knowledge of the medicine and silk prior to the moment when the attendant handed them over, they cannot be accused of intending to steal these items. Third, unlike the walnuts in the first story, medicine, and silk are said by the Buddha to be of no use to rats (although one could of course wonder whether rats might not have

liked to use the silk as bedding, for instance). Thus, it is clear that the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* is primarily concerned with the monks' intentions, and the extent to which animals need what they have gathered, rather than the status of rats.

The Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1435, 23: 58.431a20–29) raises another issue in relation to theft: whether one has the right to recoup one's stolen belongings. In the illustrative story, the monastery's storeroom contains food, drinks, and precious objects. A group of rats make their way inside, steal (*tou*) these items, and carry them to their holes. They also seize pieces of material. At first, the monks do not know who or what is stealing their belongings. However, one day, a monk deposits the alms he has received while begging in the storeroom. Later, when he returns for the food, he sees a group of rats scurrying off with it. The monk chases the rats, destroys their holes, and collects not only the food they had taken from him (i.e., his possessions) but other items, too (i.e., the rats' possessions). His fellow monks decide that he has committed a *pārājika* offense, but the accused monk doubts this ruling. The Buddha decrees that he has not, in fact, committed a *pārājika* offense; nevertheless, he should have taken only his own belongings.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* permits a victim of theft to recoup their own—but not others'—stolen goods (at least from rats).

The very next story in the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1435, 23: 58.431a29–b11) begins with a monk sleeping in his room. A rat enters with food and places it under the monk's bed. In the morning, the monk washes his hands and receives the food from an attendant (*jing ren* 淨人). The other monks rarely see this monk begging for alms, yet they notice that he still has food. When they ask him about this and he tells them what happened, they decide that he has committed a *pārājika* offense because the rat itself did not offer him the food. However, the Buddha explains that the rat who brought the food was the monk's father in a previous life, so in this instance the monk has committed no offense. Nevertheless, the message is clear: monks cannot simply take rats' food whenever they wish. Indeed, under normal circumstances, this would be considered a *pārājika* offense.

In summary, several *vinayas* discuss rats' thieving nature and provide various guidelines on how monks should deal with it. Although there are some slight differences across the texts, all of the traditions consider intentional theft from a rat as a punishable breach of the monastic code, albeit not always a *pārājika* offense. In addition, the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* permits monks to recoup their stolen belongings.

### 2.3.3. Rats' Loyalty and Cleverness

The Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, which is renowned for its colorful stories, includes three in which a rat plays a major role. On each occasion, the rat defeats Devadatta after the Buddha's evil cousin has tricked his companions. All three of these tales appear in the *Samghabhedavastu* (T no. 1450, 24), the chapter on schisms.

In the first story (T no. 1450, 24: 17.188a29–c20), a rat, a snake, a lion, and a number of other animals all fall into a pit. The lion knows that he is the strongest creature there, but he also understands that they are all in the same predicament, so he chooses not to harm any of the others. A hunter then comes across the pit. First, he helps out the lion, who thanks him and informs him that one of the creatures in the pit is an insect with a black head (*hei tou chong* 頭蟲) is ungrateful, so the hunter should not bother to save it. However, the hunter disregards this advice and saves all of the other stranded animals, including the insect. Later, each of the formerly trapped animals "profits"—that is, acquires something—and offers it to the hunter. For instance, an owl steals jewelry from the king and his courtiers while they are sleeping in a garden, then presents it to the hunter. The black-headed insect hears of this and tells the king where he will find the jewels, whereupon the furious king tracks down the hunter and seizes hold of him. The hunter swears that he has never stolen anything, explains that the jewels were a gift from the owl, and returns them to the king. Nevertheless, the king still imprisons him. The rat sees this and alerts the snake, who hatches a plan: he will bite the king so that the hunter can use a charm to save the monarch's life; the grateful king will then release the hunter and give him a

reward. The rat dutifully relays the plan to the hunter, who plays his part perfectly, saves the king, and receives his reward. Finally, it is revealed that the hunter is the Buddha while the duplicitous black-headed insect is his cousin Devadatta. However, perhaps the most interesting aspect of this tale is that the rat is characterized as loyal and grateful, rather than annoying and larcenous.

The second story (T no. 1450, 24: 17.188c22–189a15) similarly highlights rats' fidelity. A weasel (*shu lang* 鼠狼), a rat, and a venomous snake all seek shelter in the same hole during a downpour. The weasel wants to attack the rat, but the snake points out that they are all in the same predicament, so they should not harm each other. The weasel and the snake then ask the rat to venture outside and collect some food. The rat complies with their request, but the weasel still vows to eat him should he return empty handed. However, the snake warns the rat, which enables him to escape from the weasel following his failure to find food. The rat is the Buddha, who is loyal and trusts his companion, the snake. The weasel is Devadatta.

The third and final story (T no. 1450, 24: 20.201c10–202a7) focuses on the king of the rats, who uses his cunning to defeat his worst enemy, a cat (*mao*). The king has five hundred subjects, all of whom live in the vicinity of an old cat. The cat killed many rats in his younger days, but now he finds it much more difficult to catch them, so he devises a new strategy. He sits, seemingly in meditation, in front of the rats' hole. When the rats emerge, they ask the cat what he is doing, and the cat replies that he committed many offenses in the past, but now he wants to atone for those crimes. The rats are happy to hear that the cat has decided to follow a more virtuous path, so they honor him by walking three times around him. The cat watches quietly until almost all of the rats have passed by but then pounces and eats the final rat. This happens a number of times until the king of the rats realizes that some of his subjects are missing. He also notices that the cat seems to have much more energy than previously. Upon investigating the cat's excrement, the king finds evidence of his fellow rats' hair and bones, and his suspicions are confirmed when he catches the cat in the act of eating one of his subjects. He also considers that if the cat had eaten only plants, fruit, roots, and leaves, there would be no bones or hair in its excrement. He wishes the cat peace, but announces that he will no longer be able to feed on rats. The false cat is Devadatta.<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly, this story not only discusses rats but also focuses on a cat—an animal that rarely features in the *vinaya* texts. A short anecdote in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya* (T no. 1442, 23: 32.799c23–801b12) in which a young man sets himself on the road to wealth by offering a dead rat to a cat's owner suggests that at least some people kept domesticated cats.<sup>42</sup> And two separate passages in the Mahāsaṃghika *vinaya* mention cats spying on rats.<sup>43</sup> Otherwise, though, cats are notable by their absence. One possible explanation for this is that they were rarely kept as fully domesticated animals in Indian monasteries or laypeople's homes.<sup>44</sup> However, they were widely used for pest control in China, which meant that Chinese *vinaya* commentators felt duty bound to tackle the issue of whether it was advisable or even permissible for monasteries to keep cats and other animals for that purpose.

### 3. Rats in Chinese *Vinaya* Commentaries

The sudden abundance of translated disciplinary texts in fifth century China soon prompted local masters to write extensive commentaries in which they analyzed the *vinayas* and introduced them to the domestic monastic audience. This paper focuses on the commentaries and guidelines of one of these early Chinese Buddhist masters, Daoxuan (596–667), who effectively established the benchmark for monastic behavior in China for the next millennium and beyond. In his works, Daoxuan strongly adheres to every aspect of the Indian *vinaya* texts, including their prohibitions against deliberately harming or killing any living creature. In addition, though, he provides detailed guidelines on issues that the original Indian texts fail to address, including the common Chinese practice of keeping cats and dogs for the sole purpose of killing rodents.



### 3.1. Daoxuan's Vinaya Commentaries

All of Daoxuan's commentaries, including his foremost work, the *Sifen lii shanfan buque xingshi chao*, *An Abridged and Explanatory Commentary on the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya* (T no. 1804, 40), explore the *vinaya* guidelines in forensic detail. When discussing the *vinayas'* guidelines on animals, his primary focus is on acting with intent to cause harm, and the karmic consequences of doing so. For instance, after acknowledging that the *vinayas* classify deliberately killing an animal as a *pācittika* offense, Daoxuan goes further and suggests that the karmic consequences of committing such an offense cannot be entirely expunged merely by observing the stipulated *vinaya* protocols. He writes (T no. 1804, 40: 下 1.104b17–18):<sup>45</sup>

雖懺三惡道罪不除。如比丘殺畜。罪報猶在。

Even if one repents the offenses that lead to the three evil destinies [hell, hungry ghost, and animal], [the karmic effect] is not annulled. This is the case when a *bhikṣu* kills an animal. The retribution for the offense remains.

Here, as throughout Daoxuan's commentaries, the intent of the perpetrator is paramount. Hence, the karmic impact is undiminished because the monk *deliberately* killed an animal, even though he subsequently regrets committing a *pācittika* offense and atones for that offense by performing the requisite penance. This message is reiterated in another section of the same text (T no. 1804, 40: 中 1.49a9–14):

如明了論述云。有四種惡言犯罪。一者濁重貪瞋癡心。二者不信業報。三者不惜所受戒。四者輕慢佛語。故心而造則得重果。以此文證。由無慚愧初無改悔。是不善心。故成論害心殺蟻。重於慈心殺人。由根本業重。決定受報縱懺墮罪。業道不除。

As mentioned in the *Mingliao lun*,<sup>46</sup> there are four kinds of despicable acts that are recorded as offenses: one, being greedy, angry, or foolish with a contaminated mind; two, showing disbelief in the workings of karma; three, not cherishing the precepts one has accepted; and four, belittling the words of the Buddha. If one acts intentionally, one experiences a heavy karmic effect. As this text explains, since there is no shame and not even a beginning of repentance, this is a non-benevolent state of mind.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the *Cheng lun* 成論 (\**Tattvasiddhiśāstra*)<sup>48</sup> [says] that killing an ant with an evil state of mind is worse than killing a person with a compassionate state of mind. Since the karmic effect will be heavy, one certainly receives retribution,<sup>49</sup> even if one expiates the *pācittika* offense (*duo zui* 墮罪).<sup>50</sup> The karma will not be annulled.

This conviction that intentionally harming animals has serious karmic consequences informs Daoxuan's analysis of several of the *vinaya* passages that discuss rats. Although he does not refer to many of the problems that rats may cause, he mentions them briefly during a discussion of clothes that are gnawed or burned, and adds that such items of clothing are considered taboo in India and consequently thrown away (which may be taken as a hint that Chinese monastics did not have such a taboo) (T no. 1804, 40: 下 1.112a13–14).<sup>51</sup> Later, when discussing the prohibition against monastics digging the ground, he echoes the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya's* exception that they may remove earth that rats have disturbed (T no. 1804, 40: 中 3.76c25–28; T no. 1806, 40: 中 .443c16–20).<sup>52</sup> Similarly, he asserts that holes made by snakes and rats in a *stūpa* should be filled (T no. 1804, 40: 下 3.134b12). Finally, he endorses the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya's* guideline that rats may be driven out of a building on condition that this is not done in a state of anger (T no. 1804, 40: 中 5.78b5–6) as well as the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya's* recommendation that they may be removed as long as they are released safely (T no. 1804, 40: 下 4.148b7–8).

On the subject of taking animals' possessions, and specifically those belonging to rats, Daoxuan discusses whether this should constitute a *pārājika* offense. Although he does not directly address the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *vinayas'* contrasting views on this

issue, he offers an explanation for the former's somewhat harsher ruling (T no. 1804, 40: 中 1.59a18–21):

有人斷同大重者。胡律云。鼠故桃積成大聚。比丘盜之。佛言波羅夷。故有解。非望畜生還望本主。以鼠盜疑豫未決望人猶是本主。故還就人結重。

Some people judge that [the theft of animals' possessions] is similar to a grave offense [in this case a *pārājika* offense]. Therefore, [the Dharmaguptaka] *vinaya* says:<sup>53</sup> "Rats steal walnuts and pile them up on a big heap. A *bhikṣu* steals them. The Buddha says that he commits a *pārājika* offense." The reason can be explained. It is not judged from the perspective of the animal, but it is still judged from the perspective of the original owner, because, when the rat steals, it is not yet certain and not yet decided [who the true owner is]. Thus, the [issue] is still judged by regarding the person [whose walnuts the rats stole] as the original owner. Therefore, with reference to the person, [the theft] is seen as a grave offense.

Thus, Daoxuan's interpretation of this passage is that the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* must consider that the walnuts' original human owner is still their rightful owner, regardless of the fact that a rat has stolen them, so any subsequent theft from the rat would still constitute theft from the person—that is, a *pārājika* offense.<sup>54</sup> The implication of this analysis is that stealing something that truly belongs to a rat (as opposed to something the animal has stolen) may be considered a lesser offense, because no transgression has been committed against a previous human owner. In this way, Daoxuan deftly reconciles the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *vinayas*' seemingly incompatible guidelines on the subject of stealing from animals.

### 3.2. Daoxuan's Comments on the Situation in China

Much of Daoxuan's renown stems from the fact that he was a fervent defender of Buddhism.<sup>55</sup> This is reflected in his texts, where he frequently advocates strict adherence to the *vinaya* guidelines on the grounds that they constitute a first line of defense against the decline of the Dharma. For instance, in his biographical work *Further Biographies of Eminent Monks* (Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳; T no. 2060: 621a14–15), he states:

律法命。弘則命全。今不欲不弘<sup>56</sup>正法斯滅。

*Vinaya* is the life of the Dharma. If one propagates it, the life [of the Dharma] is complete; now, if one does not intend to promote [*vinaya*], the True Dharma will be extinguished.<sup>57</sup>

Daoxuan also warns against the decline of the Dharma in the *Sifen lü shanfan buque xingshi chao* (T no. 1804, 40: 上 2.23c8–15):

滅法不久。寺家庫藏廚所多不結淨。道俗通濫淨穢混然。立寺經久。綱維無教。忽聞立淨惑耳驚心。豈非師僧上座安居淨住導引後生同開惡道。或畜貓狗專擬殺鼠。牛杖馬靽韁絆概。如是等類並是惡律儀。雜心云。惡律儀者流注相續成也。善生成論。若受惡律儀則失善戒。今寺畜貓狗。並欲盡形。非惡律儀何也。同畜一無戒。

[If the aforementioned behavior continues], the disappearance of Dharma is not far away. The storage rooms and kitchens of monasteries have often not been designated as purified [places] (*jie jing* 結淨).<sup>58</sup> Monastic and laity intermix [throughout the monasteries], and what is pure or dirty becomes indistinguishable. Monasteries have been established for a long time, but regulations have not been taught. When [monastics] suddenly heard of [the correct procedure for] establishing a purified [storage room and kitchen], they were confused and shocked. Is it not that teachers and seniors, completely oblivious of a pure life, lead the younger generation on a journey down an unwholesome path? Some keep cats and dogs with the specific intention of killing rats, or they [have] sticks for cattle, reins for horses, halters and pegs. All such acts are evil deportment (*e lü yi* 惡律儀).<sup>59</sup> The *Za xin* 雜心 (\**Samyuktābhīdharmahrdayaśāstra*) says that

“evil deportment” (*e lü yi*) means that there is a flow [of unwholesome acts], continuously being accomplished.<sup>60</sup> The *Shansheng* 善生 (*Upāsakaśīla Sūtra*)<sup>61</sup> and the *Cheng lun* 成論 (*\*Tattvasiddhiśāstra*)<sup>62</sup> [leave no doubt that] if one embraces evil deportment, one loses good morality. Now, [monastics] keep cats and dogs in their monasteries, intending to have them for their whole lives. If this is not evil deportment, what else can it be? [If] the whole community together raises [cats and dogs], [then] the entire community is lacking [*vinaya*] rules.

In this lengthy extract, Daoxuan builds a strong argument that all animals should be treated well, and certainly that cats and dogs should not be kept to hunt other creatures, including rats. Indeed, he draws on several texts to explain why the latter practice contradicts Buddhist principles. First, he refers to a passage in the *\*Saṃyuktābhīdharmahṛdayaśāstra* (T no. 1552, 28: 3.890b12–c3)<sup>63</sup> that addresses the issue of “restraint and non-restraint” (*lū yi bu lū yi* 律儀不律儀; i.e., good and evil deportment). This text asserts that both good and bad morality (*shan ji bu shan jie* 善及不善戒) flow and that they are continuously or successively accomplished (*liu zhu xiang xu cheng* 流注相續成), then explains that good morality should be displayed toward all living beings and that it is a prerequisite for monastic ordination. Its much more detailed definition of “non-restraint” (*bu lū yi* 不律儀; i.e., evil deportment and thus bad morality) includes a list of twelve “evil” occupations, many of which relate to animals: slaughterer of sheep, chicken-keeper, pig-keeper, bird-catcher, fisherman, hunter, slaughterer of dogs, and game warden (i.e., chief hunter), along with thief, executioner, jailer, and dragon-charmer.

Next, Daoxuan cites the *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra* (T no. 1488, 24: 7.1069c8–1070a2), which states that those who follow good precepts (*shan jie* 善戒) receive many blessings, whereas those who follow incorrect precepts (*e jie* 惡戒) amass immeasurable faults.<sup>64</sup> The *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra* equates “incorrect precepts” with “evil deportment” (*e lü yi*) and illustrates this with a list of fifteen improper occupations that is broadly similar to the aforementioned list in the *\*Saṃyuktābhīdharmahṛdayaśāstra*.<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, the same *sūtra* specifically prohibits keeping dogs for hunting (and thus killing) purposes and suggests that anyone who does this, or follows one of the other banned careers, is sure to accumulate a great deal of bad karma throughout the life course. Daoxuan seems to share this view, as he asks how keeping cats and dogs in monasteries can be anything other than evil deportment.

Finally, Daoxuan supports his argument with reference to a philosophical treatise, the *\*Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. He does not include a quotation at this point, but he is most likely thinking of two passages that contrast the benefits of good deportment (*shan lū yi* 善律儀) with the unwelcome repercussions of bad deportment (*bu shan lū yi* 不善律儀) (T no. 1646, 32: 8.302b21–303c3).

In another commentary, the *Liang chu qing zhong yi* 量處輕重儀, *Models for Measuring and Handling Light and Heavy Property* (T no. 1895, 45: 845b22–c19), Daoxuan distinguishes between animals that are economically useful, even in a monastery, and those that are not.<sup>66</sup> First, he mentions domesticated animals—such as camels, donkeys, cows, and sheep. These animals may be kept as long as they are treated properly, without recourse to whips or sticks. Next, he insists that all wild animals—including monkeys and apes, deer, bears, pheasants, rabbits, mountain cocks, wild ducks, and geese—should be released into nature. He then introduces a third and final group of animals: those that monasteries keep for the express purpose of killing rodents. Once again, Daoxuan is unequivocal on this issue (T no. 1895, 45: 845b26–27):

畜惡律儀即狗鴉梟鷹鷂鼠鼯鼠弩弓檻等。及弓箭五兵機羅殺具者。

Keeping [these animals] is [a sign of] evil deportment (*e lü yi*): cats, dogs, owls, and hawks.<sup>67</sup> Poison and crossbows [are also used to kill] rats, as are cages, and so on. And bows and arrows, five kinds of weapons, traps and snares, [all] instruments to kill.<sup>68</sup>

Later in the same text, he explains (T no. 1895, 45: 845c9–19):

惡律儀具。事類乃希。時復邊塞首中表無知。或加畜用。既事在罪。並可焚屏。則同瓦屋之非法也。故善見論云。若有施器仗者。僧應打壞。不得賣。若賣與人。前得行殺。賣者同業故。論中其有畜非法之物。主破之無損財咎。正論明斷。準用何疑。亦有養畜狗專行殺害。經論斷在惡律儀。同畜便失善戒。出賣則是生類。業障更深。施他還續害心。終成結。宜放之深藪任彼行藏。必之顯柱更勞役。但依前判彼我夷然。便息生殺怨家。新樹慈悲聖宅(其餘鷲鳥例此騰空)。

As for things [connected] to evil deportment, there are not so many in this category. At times, in remote as well as central regions, a lack of knowledge is evident. Some people keep and use [such things]. And since these things exacerbate the offense [against living beings], they should be burned and rejected. It is just as much against the Dharma as a hut made out of mud, [which must be destroyed].<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the *Shanjian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙 says that if one is offered weapons, the *saṃgha* should destroy them, and one cannot sell them.<sup>70</sup> If one sells [weapons] to a person prior to their committing murder, then the karmic retribution for the seller is the same [as the murderer]. In commentaries [it is said that] if one keeps things that go against the rules, then the monastic managers destroy them, so they do not increase wealth or fault.<sup>71</sup> The correct position is that [these things] are clearly proscribed;<sup>72</sup> this is doubtless the standard to use. There are also those who raise and keep cats and dogs, specifically to kill [rats]. The *sūtras* and commentaries proscribe this as “evil deportment.” Together keeping these [animals for pest control], one diverges from the good precepts. If one sells them, the karmic retribution will be even worse, since they are living beings. If one gives them to someone else, this still perpetuates harmful intentions (*hai xin* 害心) and ultimately manifests [karmic] bondage. The deep wilds of fitting release let them come and go as they please. The manifest yoke of forced bondage further increases their hardship. Only by following the previous determination we can both [i.e., the animals and the monastics] feel at ease, thus calming the enemy of birth and death and newly establishing a holy residence of compassion. (As for birds of prey, they should be dealt with according to the same principle, and released into the open.)<sup>73</sup>

It may come as a surprise that people kept dogs as rat-catchers, but there is clear evidence that they were domesticated in China as early as the Shang era (c. twelfth century BCE onwards),<sup>74</sup> and they were certainly associated with pest control prior to the start of the Common Era.<sup>75</sup> For example, there is a beautiful illustration of a dog catching a rat in a Han Dynasty tomb in Sichuan (see Figure 1).<sup>76</sup> It is generally agreed that the domestication of cats—and their use as rat-catchers—was a somewhat later development, although opinions differ on precisely when this began. The debate centers on how best to interpret the term *li* 狸/狴, which at one time may have encompassed everything from wild cats, to other small felines, to completely different species, such as raccoon dogs.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, von Kispal insists that *li* was used—if not exclusively—in reference to domesticated cats from at least the third century BCE onwards.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, Barrett and Strange argue that the previous, broader definition may have persisted long into the Common Era.<sup>79</sup> Either way, it seems likely that the domestication of wild cats was a slow and gradual process. That said, as Wilt Idema has demonstrated in his study and translation of Chinese animal fables, there is evidence that not only keeping but breeding cats became increasingly popular over the course of the Tang Dynasty.<sup>80</sup> This may explain why Daoxuan felt the need to comment on the animals’ use in pest control.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, several entries in the Chinese Buddhist dictionary *Yiqiejing yinyi* 一切經音義 (Sounds and Meanings for all [the Words in the] Scriptures; T no. 2128, 54), begun by the seventh century monk Xuanying 玄應 and completed in the early ninth century by his fellow monk Huilin 慧琳, hint that the breeding of rat-catching cats (by now termed *mao* ) was fairly commonplace in Buddhist circles, if not necessarily in wider Chinese society.<sup>82</sup>





**Figure 1.** Image of a rat-catching dog in a cliff tomb, Qijiang 綦江 region of Sichuan Province, Han Dynasty. Reprinted from (Dai 2018), <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001742/7%2C000-years-of-the-dog-a-history-of-chinas-canine-companions> (accessed on 6 July 2021).

Other sources similarly point to the presence of cats in Tang monasteries. For instance, von Kispal cites a number of poems in which scholar-monks praise the cat's aptitude for catching rats,<sup>83</sup> while Barrett and Strange quote a number of historical sources that contain references to the animal's "duty" (*zhi* 職) to catch rodents and protect grain supplies (Barrett and Strange 2019, pp. 88–93). All of these sources indicate that domesticated cats' primary task was to keep rodents at bay. For instance, there is very little evidence that Daoxuan's contemporaries either viewed them as pets or attempted to turn them into friendly, gentle companions.<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, an eighth century medical treatise, the *Bencao shi yi* 本草拾遺 (*Additions to Materia Medica*) by Chen Cangqi 陳藏器 (?–757), cited in *Zhenglei bencao* 證類本草 (*Collected and Classified Materia Medica*), a book on pharmacology written by the Song scholar Tang Shenwei 唐慎微 (1056–1093), includes details of a medical experiment in which cats were fed nothing but rice. Unsurprisingly, the experiment was a total failure, as the animals' bones decayed so dramatically that they were left unable to walk.<sup>85</sup> There is no evidence that Chinese monastics either knew of this experiment or attempted to replicate it with their own cats (and dogs), but even if they had, they surely would not have succeeded in keeping the animals away from meat for very long.<sup>86</sup>

This brings us back to Daoxuan's concerns about monasteries' use of cats and dogs for pest control, and whether this is consistent with Buddhist principles. He was not alone. For instance, one of the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經's precepts,<sup>87</sup> which concerns the assistance that Buddhists should extend to both the living and the dead, explicitly encourages compassion (*ci xin* 慈心), for example by releasing captive animals and safeguarding all living creatures.<sup>88</sup> It also specifically condemns the rearing of cats, swine, and dogs.<sup>89</sup>



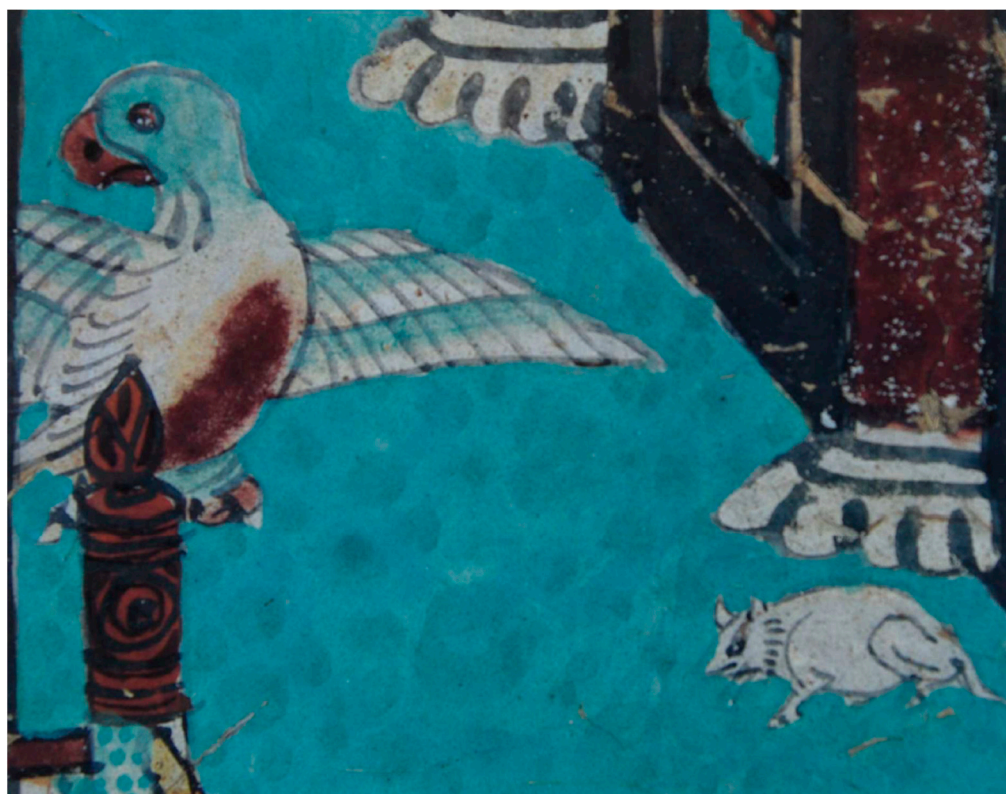
Nevertheless, rats were widely despised for the annoyances they caused both within and outside monasteries. This antipathy is evident in a number of Buddhist texts that discuss rebirth as a rat, such as the fifth–sixth century *Shan'e yinguo jing* 善惡因果經 (*Sūtra of the Outcome of Good and Bad Deeds*), which was found at Dunhuang.<sup>90</sup> In particular, this *sūtra* connects current misdeeds and wrongful attitudes to a previous life as a rat (T no. 2881, 85: 1382a25–26):

穿牆竊盜貪財健怨無有親者從鼠中來

[A person who] breaks walls, steals, is avaricious, and displays anger, and who has no close or distant relatives, comes from the life of a rat.

Meanwhile, Daoists—who were often heavily influenced by Buddhist concepts—drew the same connection, but in reverse.<sup>91</sup> For instance, the *Taishang dongxuan lingbao yebao yinyuan jing* 太上洞玄靈寶業報因緣經, *Scripture of the Most High from the Dongxuan Lingbao Canon Regarding Retribution and Karmic Causes*, which dates to the Sui Dynasty (589–618) at the latest, suggests that rebirth as a rat is karmic retribution for living the life of a greedy human (DZ 336, Vol. 10, p. 366b8).<sup>92</sup> This notion is reiterated in the popular seventh century *Dongxuan lingbao sandong fengdao kejie yingshi* 洞玄靈寶三洞奉道科戒營始, *Regulations for the Practice of Daoism in Accordance with the Scriptures of the Three Caverns*, a *Dongxuan Lingbao Canon* (DZ 1125),<sup>93</sup> which asserts that “life as a rat or a weasel (*you* 鼯) comes from greedily devouring the leftovers from rites of purgation, drinking alcohol, and eating meat.”<sup>94</sup> Clearly, then, rats’ problematic behavior is directly associated with and explained by negative karma and retribution in both the Daoist and the Buddhist traditions.

Finally, it is worth taking a moment to look at the mysterious rat that adorns the mid-Tang southern wall of Yulin Cave 25 (see Figure 2),<sup>95</sup> which represents the paradise of Amitābha Buddha. This rat—with characteristic bloated body, sharp nose, long tail, and sleek feet—seems to be sneaking surreptitiously into a monastery at the foot of a pillar, so it may represent an unwelcome intruder. On the other hand, Vaiśravaṇa, the god of wealth as well as a forceful protector of Buddhism, is sometimes depicted in the company of a rat,<sup>96</sup> and he also appears in Yulin Cave 25. However, his image is on the northern wall—the direction with which he is commonly associated—so in this instance a direct connection with the rodent seems unlikely.<sup>97</sup> Maybe the rat simply represents the practical difficulties that all Chinese monasteries were facing, given the damage that rodents could cause; or perhaps there is a deeper meaning to its unsettling presence. Either way, it probably provoked the customary reactions of revulsion and fear among anyone who caught a glimpse of it.



**Figure 2.** Rat below a pillar, mid-Tang southern wall of Yulin Cave 25. After (Dunhuang Yanjiuyuan Dunhuang Academy, p. 124).

#### 4. Conclusions

Rats are rarely seen as friendly animals. Although a handful of Indian and Chinese fables portray them as loyal companions, they are usually cast as badly behaved pests. Similarly, the *vinaya* texts address a number of the annoyances with which rats are commonly associated, such as their voracious appetite for leftover food and the damage they can cause to floors and walls in their attempts to reach it. This allows the *vinayas* to highlight the issue of greedy monastics who gather more food than they need, to the dismay of lay followers. Rats thus represent two distinct but interconnected problems: on the one hand, they damage monastic buildings; on the other, they are a visible sign of monks' and nuns' improper behavior, which damages the image of the *samgha*.

At least one Buddhist text (*Youposai jie jing*; *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra*; *Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts*), which was primarily directed at laypeople, calls for compassion toward rats and insists they should be allowed to live their natural lives and eat their fair share of grain. Unfortunately, though, they also gnaw greedily on mats, robes, and other material, which reinforces their reputation for uncleanness (*bu jing*)—an unwelcome trait that the *vinayas* are keen to eliminate. This further extends what Suzanne Mrozik terms the “physiomoral” discourse, i.e., the physical body being both a manifest cause and effect of (un)ethical behavior.<sup>98</sup> In our case, it is an unclean robe that signifies an unclean mind, so the presence of rats is not merely annoying but potentially dangerous because it undermines the purity that every monastic community seeks to display. On the other hand, dirty or threadbare robes can also signify a strong commitment to asceticism and a lack of attachment—another monastic ideal. Consequently, the *vinaya* texts are forced into a compromise: while they express an aversion to robes that rats have gnawed, they do not fully prohibit their use. This highlights the delicate balance that Buddhist monastics are expected to maintain between wearing humble clothing (and, by extension, living a humble life) and presenting an exemplary, spotless appearance to the outside world.<sup>99</sup>

The *vinaya* texts are clear on the subject of rats' presence in monasteries: they are disruptive nuisances, so they are unwelcome. However, they are also sentient beings, which means they are covered by the prominent Buddhist injunction against harming or killing any living creature. Although killing an animal is not of the same magnitude as killing a human being, the *vinaya* masters are still keen to promote it as a general principle by which all monastics should abide. As a result, monks and nuns are obliged to devise inventive strategies to dissuade rats from entering their monasteries—or to capture and release them—without causing them any harm. It is important to note that people are expected to carry out these tasks without the assistance of rat-catching animals, such as weasels or cats, which are scarcely mentioned in the *vinayas*. From this, it may be assumed that such animals were not yet used for pest control at the time when the *vinayas* were written.

Finally, the *vinayas* draw parallels between rats' behavior and some undesirable traits. Notwithstanding occasional references to the animals' loyalty, and the prominent role they play in a couple of stories in which the Buddha's evil cousin Devadatta is vanquished, the prevailing attitude toward them is overwhelmingly negative. For example, the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* deems their scurrying and messy eating socially unacceptable and therefore evil. That said, this and the other *vinaya* texts are most concerned with rats' larceny, although they do not go so far as to sanction depriving the animals of all their possessions as punishment for their bad behavior. Indeed, while stealing from a rat is generally not classified as a grave (*pārājika*) transgression, every *vinaya* that addresses it still considers it an offense.

Following the translation of the *vinayas* into Chinese, a number of local masters, such as Daoxuan, analyzed the texts and added their own comments and interpretations, in part to make the guidelines more relevant to the seventh century Chinese monastic context. For instance, in a general discussion on animals (*T* no. 1804, 40: 下 3.141a24), Daoxuan reminds his readers:

念一切衆生同是佛因。起不殺行。即是敬信信知因果。作長壽緣

Remember that all living beings are equally endowed with the potential to Buddhahood. That is why we should not kill. This is to respect the teaching, to put trust in the law of cause and effect, and so secure a long life.

Therefore, every sentient being, including rats, should be protected from harm. Here and elsewhere, Daoxuan's primary focus is on the intent behind the act, rather than the act itself, as he warns his audience that the karmic consequences of committing an offense against animals cannot be entirely expunged merely by following the recommended *vinaya* procedures. Hence, it is no surprise that he strictly prohibits each and every form of animal abuse. Moreover, he broadens this injunction to encompass the use of cats and dogs for pest control and hints that this might be a double offense because, in addition to being held in captivity, the animals are encouraged to kill (or at least intentionally threaten) other sentient beings. To Daoxuan's mind, this is a clear example of "evil deportment" and a sad reflection of the decline of the Buddhist Dharma. Given the strength of his comments, it seems safe to assume that Tang monasteries had few qualms about using cats to keep rats at bay, to the dismay of at least some *vinaya* masters. Indeed, this may have been a contentious issue long before Daoxuan was even born, as the *Fanwang jing*, a fifth century text that was aimed at both monastics and laypeople, condemns the domestication of cats and dogs and advocates the release of all captive animals. In other words, all Buddhists, not just monks and nuns, have an obligation to treat all animals, including rats, with compassion.

Although Daoxuan and his fellow *vinaya* masters may have convinced at least some of their readers to abide strictly by this principle, the general antipathy toward rats persisted in China, as is reflected in both Buddhist and Daoist reincarnation tales. These stories invariably present rebirth as a rat as karmic retribution for misdeeds in a previous life, while typical rat-like characteristics, such as larceny, greed, and anger, may resurface as human flaws. Did the artist who painted the southern wall of Yulin Cave 25 have this in mind when he added the image of a rat to his mural? Or was his intention to draw

attention to one of the many challenges that Chinese monastics had to face each day? Either way, the rat seems to be sneaking surreptitiously into the monastery, whereupon Daoxuan would have insisted that the monks were duty bound to avoid it, carefully remove it, or simply tolerate it, in accordance with the Buddhist principle of treating all living creatures with respect and compassion.

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## Abbreviations

DZ	<i>Daozang</i> 道藏. Taipei: Xin wenfeng chuban gongsi 信文豐出版公司 edition, 1977.
T	<i>Taishō shinshū daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大經. 85 vols., ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–1934.
Vin	<i>Vinaya Piṭakam: One of the Principal Buddhist Holy Scriptures in the Pāli Language</i> . 5 vols., ed. Herman Oldenberg. London: Pali Text Society, 1969–1993 [1879–1883].
ZLBC	Tang Shenwei 唐慎微. Eleventh century. <i>Zhenglei bencao</i> 證類本草 ( <i>Collected and Classified Materia Medica</i> ). <i>Siku yixue congshu</i> 四庫醫學叢書. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991.

## Notes

- Later sets of rules, such as the so-called ‘rules of purity’, *qing gui* 清規 a new genre that started to develop in China from the eighth century onwards and that aims at the practical organization of large public monasteries, fall beyond the scope of the present study. Research on these later developments can further shed light on the step by step formation of a Chinese Buddhist identity.
- For further details, see: (Yuyama 1979; Clarke 2015).
- A Tibetan translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, as well as many Sanskrit sections of the same text, are also extant. For details, see (Yuyama 1979, pp. 12–33; Clarke 2015, pp. 73–81).
- See, among others, (Heirman 2007, pp. 192–95; Zou 2019, pp. 188–207).
- For more information on the *vinaya* texts’ views on annoying and dangerous animals, see: (Schmithausen and Maithrimurthy 2009; Heirman 2019).
- Dogs are also classified as dangerous, but nearly always in the context of meat consumption. This is considered dangerous on the grounds that they are likely to attack members of the monastic community if they fear they will be killed for their meat (see Heirman and Rauw 2006, pp. 60–61).
- On insects in a Buddhist context, see (Heirman 2020).
- See also T no. 1450, 24: 8.139c9–11: monastic dwellings should be quiet, with moderate heat and wind, and no mosquitoes, flies, snakes, or scorpions.
- Biologically, the difference between a mouse and a rat is rather nebulous, with size being the most important factor. On the Chinese terminology, see, among others, (von Kispal 2015, pp. 39–40), who argues that problematic rodents in medieval China were usually relatively large, so she prefers the translation “rats”.
- A *pācittika* (or variants) is an offense that must be expiated (cf. Heirman 2002, pp. 141–47). Keeping, storing, and/or eating leftover food is a *pācittika* offense in all six *vinayas*: Pāli *vinaya*, (Vin IV, pp. 86–87); Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, T no. 1421, 22: 8.54b1–19; Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, T no. 1425, 22: 17.359b11–360c12; Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*, T no 1428, 22: 14.662c25–663b9; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1435, 23: 13.95b26–c24; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1442, 23: 36.824c20–825a24.
- The term *undura* is usually translated as “rat” (cf. Rhys et al. [1921] 1992, p. 137, s.v. *undura*). The Pāli *vinaya* commonly uses this term. Still, it also mentions a *mūsikā*, which is usually translated as “mouse” (Rhys et al. [1921] 1992, p. 540, s.v. *mūsika*/mūsikā). The *mūsikā* is classified as a creeping creature, alongside snakes, scorpions, centipedes, spiders, and lizards (Pāli *vinaya*, Vin II, p. 110).
- Translated after (Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, p. 126) (with minor changes). The text emphasizes the importance of *bodhisattva* practice of lay Buddhists. As pointed out by (Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, p. 1), “the sutra concludes that lay bodhisattvas encounter more difficulties in following the precepts than ordained bodhisattvas.” The compassion lay Buddhists show is therefore highly valued.

- In his account of a long and difficult journey to India that he undertook between 399 and 412, Faxian 法顯 (?–?) tells of a rat that caused even more damage by chewing on a lamp’s wick and starting a fire in the Jetavana monastery (Gaoseng Faxian zhuan 高僧法顯傳, Record of the Eminent Monk Faxian; T no. 2085, 51: 860b25–27). For translations, see: (Li 2002, p. 182; Deeg 2005, p. 537).
- Pāli *vinaya*, Vin I, p. 109, p. 284, Vin II, p. 117, and Vin III, p. 263 (robes); Vin II, pp. 148–49 and Vin III, p. 227 (mats); Vin II, p. 152 (bags); Vin II, p. 148 (door fastenings).
- See (Clarke 2004) for further information on the *Pinimu jing*. The affiliation of this text is unclear.
- See Kishino (2017) detailed discussion on this commentary tradition.
- The affiliation of this text remains a subject of debate, but it is generally thought to be Sarvāstivādin (Clarke 2015, p. 72).
- Nihsargika pācittika* rules relate to objects that are unlawfully obtained and therefore must be surrendered.
- See (Heirman 2002, pp. 515–17), note 197 for a discussion on this method of protecting monastic robes.
- See (Witkowski 2017) for a discussion on the practice of *pāṃśukūla*.
- See (Dantinne 1991) for a detailed study of Buddhist ascetic practices. See also (Ray 1994, pp. 293–323); Muller (1995), *Digital Dictionary*, s.v. *shī’er toutuo* 十二頭陀, <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/ddb>, last accessed 9 January 2021.
- See (Witkowski 2017, pp. 269–74, 281–83) for further details.
- See (Heirman 2014) for a discussion on how and why monastic robes are cleaned.
- See (von Hinüber 1996, pp. 21–22) for further information on the *Parivāra*, which may be considered as a kind of appendix to the *vinaya*.
- The *Vinayakārikā* is a versified compilation of Mūlasarvāstivāda monastic guidelines, composed by Viśākhadeva (?–?) and translated into Chinese by Yijing.
- The first of these passages forms part of the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*’s *\*Ekottarikā*; the second is found in the same *vinaya*’s *Māṭṛkā* (cf. Clarke 2015, p. 71).
- The *Sapoduo pini piposha* (*\*Sarvāstivāda-vinaya-vibhāṣā*) was probably translated into Chinese after the translation of the Sarvāstivāda *vinaya* itself but before 431 (cf. Yuyama 1979, pp. 8–9). Funayama (2006, pp. 44–46), draws attention to Chinese exegetical elements interpolated in the translation.
- This description is echoed in the *Sapoduo pini piposha* (T no. 1440, 23: 3.520c29–521a1).
- The *Youposai jie jing* (*Upāsakaśīla Sūtra*) also advises filling in rats’ and snakes’ holes in its guidelines on how to construct a *stūpa*. Thereafter, such animals should be kept away from the site (T no. 1488, 24: 3.1052a7; see Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, p. 94 for a translation).
- For more information on the general ban on digging, see, among others: (Schmithausen 1991, pp. 46–51; Heirman 2020, pp. 36–39).
- Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 15.677a24–25). Killing any animal is categorized as a *pācittika* offense in the other five *vinayas*, too: Pāli *vinaya*, Vin IV, pp. 124–25; Mahīśāsaka *vinaya*, T no. 1421, 22: 8.58a15–b9; Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya*, T no. 1425, 22: 19.377a26–378a26; Sarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1435, 23: 16.110b28–111a26; Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, T no. 1442, 23: 40.847c18–848a16. For further discussion on early Buddhist attitudes towards killing animals, as opposed to killing humans, see, in particular, (Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi 2009, pp. 77, 90–100).
- Of course, monastics are banned from using rat poison, as explicitly stated in the Mahāsāṃghika *vinaya* (T no. 1425, 22: 4.255b10–12 and 19.377b28–c1).
- The Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* also advocates using incantations to protect oneself from rat bites (T no. 1428, 22: 53.963b25).
- A *yuepini zui* (*vinayātikrama*) is equivalent to a *duṣkṛta* in the other *vinaya* traditions. See (Hirakawa 1982, pp. 105–6, note 10; Nolot 1991, pp. 384–86). A *duṣkṛta*, lit “a bad deed”, is a minor offense (cf. Heirman 2002, pp. 148–49). Rules, such as these, do not incur severe institutional measures. They rather function as a warning.
- The *vinaya* adds that no offense is committed by a monk who drives out camels, oxen, or horses that have soiled or damaged the monastery.
- See (Buswell and Lopez 2014, pp. 233–34) for a brief introduction to Devadatta.
- In the non-Pāli traditions, a monk or a nun may be permitted to retain a minor position within the monastic community after committing a *pārājika* offense; see (Clarke 2000, 2009a). On remaining a monk, albeit in another monastery, see (Clarke 2009b). For a critical response to Clarke’s hypothesis, see (Anālayo 2017).
- A failure to commit a *pārājika* offense is commonly classified as a *sthūlātyaya* offense. The latter is still a grave offense, but less serious than a *pārājika*.
- A *shou yuan ren* 守園人 (lit. “gardener”; *ārāmika*) is a (lay) attendant in a monastery (cf. Heirman 2002, p. 497, note 48 and p. 854, note 53). His functions can sometimes overlap with those of a *jing ren* 淨人 (*kalpikāraka*), a layperson who, among other duties, makes situations “pure”—that is, acceptable or permissible—for a monk, such as by accepting donations on the monk’s behalf. See (Kieffer-Pülz 2007, pp. 15–21) for further information on both terms.



- 40 The Mūlasarvāstivāda \**Vinayasamgraha* contains a similar guideline (T no. 1458, 24: 2.536c25–26).
- 41 See (Liang 2010, pp. 251–80) for more information on this story and several alternative versions.
- 42 The cat's owner repaid the young man with some garden peas. See (Barrett 1998, pp. 18–19) for more information on this anecdote.
- 43 T no. 1425, 22: 2.238b9 and 27.445a8.
- 44 See (von Kispal 2015, pp. 21–33) for a detailed history of the cat in Asia.
- 45 See (Heirman 2020, pp. 28–34) for a detailed discussion on how Daoxuan interprets the proscription against killing animals.
- 46 The *Lü ershier mingliao lun* 律二十明了論, *Treatise on the Elucidation of 22 [Verses] on Vinaya* (568 CE; T no. 1461, 24) is the Indian master Paramārtha's translation into Chinese of a *vinaya* commentary by the Indian monk \*Buddhatrāta (?–?). The latter was a member of the Sāṃmitīya school, and the commentary discusses this school's views on a variety of important *vinaya* matters (see Clarke 2015, pp. 82–83).
- 47 Daoxuan uses the phrase “*mingliao lun shu yun* 明了論述云 [lit. *The Treatise on the Elucidation* (明了論) explains (述云)].” It is important to note that the character *shu* 述 is not part of the treatise's title. Rather, Daoxuan uses it to indicate that he is not quoting directly from the text but simply presenting a summary in order to emphasize that any offense committed with an evil state of mind results in especially harsh karmic retribution.
- 48 Daoxuan uses the abbreviation “*Cheng lun* 成論” to refer to the *Chengshi lun* 成實論 (\**Tattvasiddhīśāstra*; The Treatise that Accomplishes Reality; T no. 1646, 32). See (Heirman 2020, pp. 32–33 for further details). This is a philosophical treatise compiled by the Indian monk Harivarman in the middle of the third century CE, and translated into Chinese by the monk Kumārajīva at the beginning of the fifth century (see Demiéville et al. 1978, p. 139; Potter 1999, pp. 255, 741, note 317). The passage in question can be found at T no. 1646, 32: 7.291a11–13.
- 49 Both *bao* 報 and *baoying* 報應 are routinely translated as “retribution,” even though the karmic effect of an evil act is seen as a natural consequence, rather than a punishment. Therefore, a preferable translation might be “repercussion.” Many thanks to Peter Harvey for this suggestion.
- 50 The technical term *duo zui* 墮罪 may refer to either a *nihsargika pācittika* (or variants thereof)—an offense that must be expiated while surrendering an object that is prohibited or has been improperly acquired (see Heirman 2002, pp. 138–41)—or a *pācittika* (or variants thereof)—simply an offense that must be expiated (see Heirman 2002, pp. 141–47). In this case, it probably refers to the aforementioned *pācittika* rule on the killing of animals.
- 51 For more information on cleanliness and the purity of robes, see, among others: (Schopen 2007; Heirman 2014; Witkowski 2017).
- 52 This guideline is contained within the *Sifen lü biqiu hanzhu jieben* 四分律比丘含注戒本 (T no. 1806, 40), Daoxuan's commentary on the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya*'s *bhikṣuprātimokṣa*.
- 53 The term *hu lü* 胡律 is problematic. It may be presumed that the character *hu* 胡 (“foreign”) in the Taishō edition should be *gu* 故 (“therefore”), which appears in the same position in the alternative *gong* 宮 and *jia* 甲 editions (the former, which dates from the Song Dynasty, is housed in the Japanese imperial library (*Kunaishō* 宮省); the latter dates from the Tokugawa period, 1603–1868). Likewise, a few characters later, the term *gu tao* 故桃 (“reason-peach”) in the Taishō text should presumably be *hutao* 胡桃 (“walnut”), as we find in the *jia* edition. In other words, it seems that the scribe of the Taishō edition transposed *hu* 胡 and *gu* 故. This conclusion is corroborated by the fact that the original Dharmaguptaka passage concerns rats stealing walnuts (*hutao* 胡桃) (T no. 1428, 22: 55.978a24–29).
- 54 With many thanks to Sakda Hemthep and Max Deeg for their constructive comments on this passage.
- 55 See, for instance, (Zou 2019, pp. 150–207).
- 56 The Taishō edition actually reads *bu yu bu hong* 不欲弘 (“if one does not intend *not* to promote [*vinaya*]”), rather than *bu yu hong* 不欲弘 (“if one does not intend to promote [*vinaya*]”). However, the latter reading is found in the so-called “three editions,” commonly dated to between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries, as well as the *gong* edition. All of these editions are related to a *tripitaka* edition that was compiled and printed between 1080 and 1176 in Fuzhou, southern China (cf. Mizuno 1982, pp. 176–77). These latter readings make much more sense than the double-negative clause in the Taishō edition.
- 57 Translation based on (Lin 2014, p. 102).
- 58 The term *jie jing* signifies that a particular location has been officially designated (*jie* 結) as a “purified place” (*jing di* 淨地). In this case a monastery's storage room and kitchen should be *jie jing* before food is stored and prepared in them (potentially by laypeople as well as the monks themselves). In this way, behavior that is not ordinarily permitted in a monastery may be “purified”—that is, made acceptable. All of the *vinayas* outline their own versions of the *jie jing* procedure. For instance, the Dharmaguptaka *vinaya* (T no. 1428, 22: 43.874c8–18) states that a purified place must be designated by a *bai er jiemo* 白二羯磨 (*jñaptidvītiya karman*), a formal procedure consisting of one motion (*jñapti*), one proposition (*karmavācānā*), and a conclusion. Similarly, the traveler-monk Yijing, translator of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *vinaya*, stresses the importance of cooking and eating in a proper, well-marked place, as is found in every Chinese monastery (T no. 2125, 54: 2.216c22–217a23; translated by (Li 2000, pp. 80–82)).
- 59 The term *e lü yi* (*asaṃvara*) refers to bad practices that go against *vinaya* (Muller, *Digital Dictionary*, s.v. *e lü yi* 惡律儀, <http://www.buddhism-dict.net/cgi-bin/xpr-ddb.pl?q=E6%83%A1%E5%BE%8B%E5%84%80> (accessed on 22 January 2021)).

- <sup>60</sup> *Za xin* 雜心 is a reference to the *Za apitan xin lun* 雜阿毘曇心論 (\*Saṃyuktābhidharmahr̥dayaśāstra; T no. 1552, 28), a Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma* text written by Dharmatrāta at the beginning of the fourth century and translated into Chinese by the monk Saṃghavarman in 434. See (Dessein 1999) for an introduction and full translation.
- <sup>61</sup> *Shansheng* 善生 is a reference to the *Youposai jie jing* (Upāsakaśīla Sūtra; Sūtra on Upāsaka Precepts; T no. 1488, 24). This *sūtra* is also known as the *Shansheng jing* 善生經 (*Sujata Sūtra*), as Sujata is the main character (cf. Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, p. 1). It is intriguing to see how Daoxuan, himself a firm promotor of Mahāyāna practices (discussed in, for instance, Zou 2019, pp. 191–97) refers for his argumentation to both *abhidharma* texts and lay *bodhisattva* texts. It testifies of his broad knowledge and of his encompassing view on Chinese Buddhism.
- <sup>62</sup> See note 48, above.
- <sup>63</sup> See (Dessein 1999, vol. 1, pp. 167–69) for a translation.
- <sup>64</sup> See (Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, pp. 176–77) for a translation.
- <sup>65</sup> There are lists of improper occupations, with slight variations, in several Buddhist texts (see Dessein 1999, Vol. 2, p. 155, note 265). It is unclear which of these inspired the list that appears in the *Upāsakaśīla Sūtra*.
- <sup>66</sup> See (Chen 2009, pp. 35–41) for a detailed discussion of this passage.
- <sup>67</sup> It is difficult to know which species Daoxuan means by the phrase *diao xiao ying yao* 鴞梟鷹鵄 as both *diao* 鴞 (another term for *chi* 鴟) and *xiao* 梟 are general terms for “owl,” while *ying* 鷹 and *yao* 鵄 are general terms for “hawk” (although (Schafer 1958, pp. 309–10) specifically identifies *ying* as a goshawk and *yao* as a sparrowhawk; see (Wallace 2012, p. 102) for more on the use of these two species in Chinese falconry). However, in the context of this paper, the important point is that all of these are birds of prey, so they could have been domesticated and used to kill rodents. Hunting with eagles, hawks, and falcons (in conjunction with dogs) was possibly introduced into China from the west in the final few centuries BCE. It had become quite a popular pastime among the Tang elite by Daoxuan’s lifetime. Some markets even specialized in the sale of these birds. See (Schafer 1958; Wallace 2012; De Troia 2020, pp. 153–58).
- <sup>68</sup> *Wu bing* 五兵 (“five weapons”) is a general term for a list of five different types of weapon. All of these lists mention daggers, lances, and spears, whereas only some of them include bows and arrows (see 1986, p. 132, s.v. 五兵).
- <sup>69</sup> Two *vinayas* (Mahīśāsaka vinaya, T no. 1421, 1.5b1–21; Dharmaguptaka vinaya, T no. 1428, 22: 1.572b6–c4) prohibit the construction and use of mud huts (*wa wu* 瓦屋; “tile hut”), as does the *Shanjian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙 (T no. 1462, 24: 8.727b2–c27, which is related to Pāli vinaya, Vin III, pp. 41–42; see note 70), a text that Daoxuan mentions in the next sentence. All of these sources tell the story of a monk named Dhaniya whose thatched hut was destroyed by people collecting firewood. In response, Dhaniya made tiles by burning mud on a wood and cow-dung fire, then used the tiles to build a new hut. When the Buddha saw this, he explained that mud huts testify to a lack of compassion (*ci xin* 慈心, *ci min* 慈愍, *ci bei* 慈悲) towards living creatures, as animals may be killed in the fire or when digging up the mud. Consequently, he not only banned their construction but insisted that existing mud huts should be destroyed. (Another interesting aspect to this story lies beyond the scope of this paper. Dhaniya questions whether his offense is sufficiently grave that his home should be destroyed, and ultimately accepts this ruling only because it originated with the Buddha himself. This may be an interesting first instance of an investigation into the authority of the Buddha’s commands and regulations.)
- <sup>70</sup> The *Shanjian lü piposha* (T no. 1462, 24) is sometimes presented as a direct translation of the Pāli *Samantapāsādikā*, a commentary on the Pāli *vinaya* that is traditionally attributed to the monk Buddhaghosa. (See von Hinüber 1996, pp. 103–4 for further information on this attribution and why it may be problematic.) The Chinese translation, which was completed in 488–489, is attributed to the monk Saṃghabhadra. Its relationship to the Pāli text is far from straightforward and has been widely debated. (See Pinte 2011 for further details on the Chinese text and its relationship to the Pāli *Samantapāsādikā*.) The passage that Daoxuan mentions (T no. 1462, 24: 13.762c4–6) discusses fighting implements. If received as gifts, such items must not be used as weapons or sold, but they may be rendered ineffective and repurposed; then they can also be sold (see Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, p. 368 for a translation).
- <sup>71</sup> A monastic manager, *zhong zhu* 衆主, might be the monastery’s quartermaster; the term is sometimes used as a translation of the Indian word *vaiyāpṛtyakara*, a kind of manager-monk (cf. Silk 2008, p. 48).
- <sup>72</sup> This translation is very tentative. The term *zhenglun* 正論 (translated as ‘the correct position’) might as well be an abbreviation of *Apidamo shunzhenglilun* 阿毘達磨順正理論 (\*Nyāyānusāra, T no. 1562, 29), an *abhidharma* text compiled in the late fourth or early fifth century by the monk Saṃghabhadra (?–?) and translated in Chinese in 653 by the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664). For a detailed study of this text, see (Collett 1995). Still, I could not identify a corresponding passage.
- <sup>73</sup> Daoxuan expresses these thoughts on birds of prey in a supplementary note.
- <sup>74</sup> See, for instance, (Sterckx 2019, p. 49).
- <sup>75</sup> For further details, see: (Xu 1993, p. 4; Peintinger 2001, pp. 397–98; von Kispal 2015, pp. 42–43). Smoke was also used to drive out rats, as were exorcisms. Roel Sterckx describes one of these rituals in his study of animals in early China: in the first lunar month, the head of the household would “behead” (or cut open) a rat, suspend it in the middle of the house, and chant an exorcistic prayer (Sterckx 2002, pp. 64–65, 152–53, 266–67, note 90).
- <sup>76</sup> Image of a rat-catching dog in a cliff tomb, Qijiang 綦江 region of Sichuan Province, Han Dynasty (after (Dai 2018), <http://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001742/7%2C000-years-of-the-dog-a-history-of-chinas-canine-companions>, last accessed 28

February 2021). See also (Xu 1993, p. 4; Peintinger 2001, p. 411. See, for instance, (Erickson 2003) for further information on the Qijiang tombs.

The authors add that there is increasing evidence that the rat catchers of early China were Chinese varieties of the Bengal cat. One seems to have tried to tame their kittens, without being very successful (Barrett and Strange 2019, p. 85, note 4). See also (Müller 2009, pp. 50–60) for further details of the various interpretations of *li* and the domestication of cats in China.

von Kispal (2015, pp. 43–61). The implication is not that there were no (wild) cats in China prior to this time; rather, that this was when humans started to keep them in their homes. That said, it seems certain that cats had previously lived in close proximity to people, attracted by the prey opportunities that human environments generated (see also Barrett and Strange 2019, p. 85).

See (Barrett and Strange 2019, pp. 84–87). See also (Barrett 1998, pp. 16–19; 2010, pp. 109–10).

Idema (2019)Idema.

For further details, see: (Barrett 1998, pp. 14–21; 2010, p. 109; von Kispal 2015, pp. 131–32). See (von Kispal 2015, pp. 158–60) on the subject of cats in the Tang imperial court.

T no. 2128, 54: 11.371c18–19; 14.394a23–24; 24.458b22; 27.485b17–18; 31.513a5; 32.525c4–5; 68.754c14. See also: (Barrett 1998, p. 36, note 74; von Kispal 2015, p. 55). Later, from at least the twelfth century onwards, a myth started to circulate that the monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (who traveled to India between 629 and 645) introduced the cat to China specifically to safeguard the Buddhist scriptures from suffering damage due to hungry rats (Barrett 1998, pp. 15–16; von Kispal 2015, pp. 59–60; Barrett and Strange 2019, p. 88; Idema 2019, pp. 38–39). Xuanzang himself does not refer to cats catching rats, but he must have seen at least one in a monastery because a seventh-century biography by Huili 慧立 and Yancong 彦恭 quotes him comparing a non-Buddhist ascetic smeared with ash to a cat (*maoli* 狸; here used as a composite term) sleeping on a kitchen range (T no. 2053, 50: 4.245a27–28; translation in (Li 1995, p. 132)).

von Kispal (2015, pp. 131–32). See also (Spring 1993, pp. 49–75) for details of late Tang stories that draw parallels between cats hunting rats in laypeople's homes and human behavior. These fables provide strong evidence of the widespread domestication of cats in Chinese society by the ninth century. All such animals were kept primarily for the purpose of catching rodents.

Barrett (2010, p. 109) suggests that the practice of keeping cats as pets may have begun at the very end of the Tang period, in the late ninth and early tenth centuries. See also (Barrett and Strange 2019, pp. 91–93).

Young cats and dogs were used in this experiment. See ZLBC, scroll 26, p. 1012, b4 (translation in Huang 2000, p. 581): “Prolonged consumption of rice weakens the body; feeding [polished] paddy or glutinous rice to young cats and dogs will so bend their legs that they will not be able to walk.” See also (Barrett 2010, p. 109).

Of course, in addition to eating humans' gifts of food, both cats and dogs are well equipped to hunt and kill other animals. That said, some monastics may have hoped that cats' mere presence would cause rats to give their monasteries a wide berth, which would absolve the monks of any blame in the rodents' demise. (Prip-Møller 1967, pp. 128, 369–71) found evidence of this type of thinking in a number of early twentieth-century Chinese monasteries, as the doors of the rice-flour stores were equipped with cat-flaps and a room was sometimes (although not often) set aside for a cat- or dog-keeper. Unfortunately, though, there is no evidence that such cat-friendly innovations were prevalent in the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, they might not have been very effective, as Prip-Møller adds that he saw numerous rats in monasteries' kitchen gutters, and no one paid them any attention.

The *Fanwang jing* (Brahmā's Net Sūtra; T no. 1484, 24), which was aimed at both laypeople and monastics, was probably composed in China around 420. Its second fascicle comprises a list of fifty-eight so-called *bodhisattva* precepts. See (Muller and Tanaka 2017, p. xix).

T no. 1484, 24: 下.1006b9–20 (translation in Muller and Tanaka 2017, p. 55).

T no. 1484, 24: 下.1007b11–13 (translation in Muller and Tanaka 2017, pp. 61–62). The *Fanwang jing* lists *maoli* 狸, *zhu* , and *gou* 狗, which Muller and Tanaka translate as “cats, badgers, swine, or dogs” in the belief that *maoli* is a reference to two separate animals—*mao* (cat) and *li* (badger). However, as Barrett (1998, p. 36, note 74) has demonstrated, Buddhist authors regularly conjoined *mao* and *li* when referring only to cats. A prominent example appears in the Buddhist encyclopedia *Jinglü yixiang* 經律異相 (Different [Entries] on Sūtra and Vinaya; T no. 2121, 53), compiled by Sengmin 僧旻 (467–527) and Baochang 寶唱 (466–?), among others, and commissioned by Emperor Wu 梁武帝 of the Liang Dynasty (502–557), which explains terms by means of illustrative stories. For instance, the *maoli* entry tells of a cat swallowing a rat (T no. 2121, 53: 47.253a14–20) and cites the *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經 (*Samyuktāgama*; T no. 99, 2; translated into Chinese by Guṇabhadra in the middle of the fifth century) as a source. (The dictionary text does indeed correspond to a passage in the *Za ahan jing* at T no. 99, 2: 47.345c8–13.) The rearing of cats is also condemned in the *Youposai jie jing* (T no. 1488, 24: 3.1050a2–4; translation in Shih Heng-ching Bhikṣuṇī 1994, p. 82).

For discussions on the subject of rebirth in the *Shan'e yinguo jing*, see: (Teiser 1994, pp. 114–16; Kohn 1998, pp. 22–36). According to (Kohn 1998, p. 27), this apocryphal Chinese text may have been compiled in the fifth century, while (Zieme 2009, p. 392) presents a Dunhuang colophon as evidence that it must have been written by 601. It has been translated into Sogdian (see MacKenzie 1970, p. 21 for the passage under discussion), Tibetan, and Uighur (see Zieme 2009 for further details of these translations). Early Indian Buddhists were equally unenthusiastic about the prospect of being reborn as a rat, not least because the creatures were routinely associated with devious behavior (see Schmithausen and Maithrimurthi 2009, p. 80).



- <sup>91</sup> Confucian texts similarly equate corrupt, greedy administrators with rats (see, for instance, von Kispal 2015, pp. 161–62), not least because they are both hard to destroy without also damaging the institutions they undermine through their harmful actions (see Sterckx 2002, p. 267, note 90). Yet, the rat heads the list of twelve creatures in the Chinese Zodiac, and it is often praised for its extraordinary reproductive capacity (see, for instance, Peintinger 2001, pp. 393, 406; Idema 2019, pp. 31–34). See (Spring 1993, pp. 65–75) for further information on the sometimes positive (protector or harbinger of good fortune) but mostly negative (metaphor for grasping officials or portend of disaster) depictions of rats in late Tang literature.
- <sup>92</sup> For further details, see: (Kohn 1998; 2004, pp. 31–32; Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 518–20). This text, which echoes the aforementioned *Shan'e yinguo jing* in many respects, testifies to the copious cross-fertilization between Buddhism and Daoism in medieval China.
- <sup>93</sup> For more on this text, see: (Kohn 2003, pp. 217–19; 2004, pp. 23–47; Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 451–53).
- <sup>94</sup> DZ 1125, Vol. 41, p. 671b4–5 (translation based on Kohn 2004, p. 81). In the same context, both texts explain that eating meat can lead to rebirth as a cat. See, for instance, (Kohn 1998, pp. 1–4) for more on Daoist rebirth doctrines.
- <sup>95</sup> After (Dunhuang Yanjiuyuan Dunhuang Academy, p. 124) (an edited volume on depictions of animals in the Dunhuang caves). The editors note that it might be the only image of a rat in the Dunhuang murals.
- <sup>96</sup> Vaiśravaṇa is invariably accompanied by a mongoose (symbol of riches) in Indian iconography, but in China the companion is sometimes described as a *shu* 鼠 (“rat” or “mouse”). See (Shahar 2015, pp. 153–58), who suggests that *shu* signified wealth in China, just as the mongoose did in India. Similarly, the editors of (Dunhuang Yanjiuyuan Dunhuang Academy, p. 124) believe that rats generally symbolize good fortune. On the other hand, (Anderl 2018, p. 289) suggests that the association with Vaiśravaṇa may derive from a story about the god’s defense of Anxi, a western protectorate of the Tang Empire, in which a pack of rats assists him by devouring the enemy’s weapons. See *Pishamen yi gui* 毘沙門儀軌, *Ceremonies in the Worship of Vaiśravaṇa* (supposedly translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by the eighth-century master Amoghavajra), T no. 1249, 21: 228b26; see also (Granoff 1970, pp. 150–51 for a discussion).
- <sup>97</sup> This is also the opinion of the editors of (Dunhuang Yanjiuyuan Dunhuang Academy, p. 124).
- <sup>98</sup> See (Mrozik 2007, pp. 61–81) for a discussion. See also (Powers 2009), who identifies a strong correlation between virtue and physical beauty in *jātaka* (birth) stories.
- <sup>99</sup> See also Heirman (2014) discussion on the washing and dyeing of monastic robes.

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