

Offensive language in Chinese Buddhist discipline texts

The anecdotal preambles to the precepts

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Chinese Buddhist writings condemn verbal abuse since their very beginning, but it is the translations of Indic works about *vinaya* that offer a systematic discussion of the topic. The juxtaposition of passages of various monastic discipline texts shows slight yet not unimportant differences concerning both the worrisome details causing the Buddha to dictate the precepts as well as the parables the Buddha resorts to in founding the censure of offensive language.

Keywords: Offensive Language, Buddhism, *vinaya*, Chinese, translation

πας λογος σαπρος εκ του στοματος υμων μη εκπορευεσθω
 “Let no bad word come out of your mouth” (*Ephesians* 4:29)

1. Introduction

Offensive language is among the topics discussed in Chinese Buddhist writings. Some related linguistic data, significant for a cultural tradition based in China upon translations from Indic sources, are in a bilingual glossary compiled between 695 and 712 by the Tang period monk and translator Yijing 義淨.¹ The words *ākrośa* and *paribhāṣaṇa* are respectively glossed *ma* 罵 and *ru* 辱 (CBETA 2021.Q3, T54, no. 2133A, p. 1195c21-24).² Both the Sanskrit and the Chinese terms convey the meaning of abusing,

¹ The glossary is often mentioned as *Fanyu qianziwen* 梵語千字文 (“A Thousand Sanskrit Words”) but it is also called *Fantang qianziwen* 梵唐千字文 and *Tangzi qian manshengyu* 唐字千變聖語 (CBETA 2022.Q1, T54, no. 2133A, p. 1196b12-13). The only three extant copies of the work survive in Japan where it arrives from China during the Tang period. One of them lists the Sanskrit terms in Siddham Script and their meaning in Chinese characters (T2133A), the other two carry a phonetic transcription in Chinese characters of the Indic ones before the translation (T2133B).

² In Chinese characters *ākrośa* and *paribhāṣaṇa* are transcribed 阿(去)矩盧舍 and 波里婆(引)沙拏 (CBETA 2021.Q3, T54, no. 2133B, p. 1214 c20-21).

cursing, humiliating, insulting, reprimanding, reproaching, reproving, reviling, scolding, slandering, assailing with harsh language, calling in an abusive manner.³ 罵 as “speaking ill of someone” already appears in what is said to be the first Chinese Buddhist scripture, *Sishier zhang jing* 四十二章經 (“The Sūtra of Forty-Two Sections”) a kind of introduction to Buddhism officially brought into the Chinese by Kāśyapamātāṅga and Falan in 67. The text is possibly not a translation, but rather an apocryphal work produced in China without a direct basis in Indic literature, or a revised version of the one originally translated during the first century (Nattier 2008: 35-37). In explaining essential concepts of the doctrine to the Chinese reader this sūtra anticipates in a simple style later formulations of the precepts against sinful language. It reports the word of the Buddha about evil deeds and mentions – following those performed with the body, i.e. killing, theft, and sex (殺盜淫) – those performed through speech: “deceit, slander, lying, and idle talk” (Shih 2005: 32) 兩舌、惡罵、妄言、綺語 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T17, no. 784, p. 722b7-8).⁴

Sentences praising forbearance of verbal abuse, condemning injurious utterances, and securing protection against insults and slanders resort to 罵 and 辱 in translations of a fundamental text such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* (“The Lotus Sūtra”).⁵ A strophe of the first chapter, celebrating as a means to reach perfect wisdom the impassiveness of virtuous disciples of the Buddha to offences cast against them by arrogant coreligionists, reads as follows in the fifth-century Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation.

又見佛子， 住忍辱力， 增上慢人， 惡罵捶打， 皆悉能忍， 以求佛道。 (CBETA 2021.Q2, T09, no. 262, p. 3b4-6).⁶

³ The Sanskrit words *ākrośa* and *paribhāṣaṇa* may be subsumed under the verbal roots *ākruś* and *paribhāṣ*. *Ākrośa* - linked to *āvkrūś* आक्रुश् briefly “to curse” - means “assailing with harsh language, reviling.” The meanings of the word *paribhāṣaṇa* (or *paribhāṣā*) - linked to *pari-√bhāṣ* परि-√भाष् “to abuse” - range from “admonition, reprimand” to “blame, reproof” (Williams 1872: 128, 598). The meanings “to curse” and “to dishonor” for logograms 罵 and 辱 are expressed as follows by the first Chinese lexicon *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (c. 120): 罵詈也; 辱恥也 (Sturgeon 2006-2022:

<https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=31262>; <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en&id=36439>) - i.e. 罵 is “harsh language” 辱 is “shame.”

⁴ *Liangsheyu* 兩舌語 “double tongue speech” - possibly a rendering of Sanskrit पेशुन *paiśuna* or *paiśunya* “calumny, reporting evil of others” - is a form of sinful speech close to insulting, condemned as a cause of monastic and social discord (cf. Heirman 2009: 76, 76⁵⁰⁻⁵¹).

⁵ There are multiple versions of this scripture. It has been turned into Chinese six times but only three renditions survive: *Zhengfahua jing* 正法華經 (T263) completed in 286 allegedly by 竺法護 Dharmarakṣa’s team of translators from an Indic language; *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (T262) completed in 406 by Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什) possibly from Sanskrit; *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing* 添品妙法蓮華經 (T264) a copy completed in 601 of Kumārajīva’s version with an “added chapter.”

⁶ *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing* has the same sentence (CBETA 2021.Q3, T09, no. 264, p. 136b4-6).

Ferner gibt es Buddha-Söhne, / Die in der Kraft der Geduld (auch bei schmachvoller Behandlung) verweilen. / Menschen, die, von Hochmut aufgeblasen, / Sie mit bösen Worten schmähen und schlagen, / Sind sie fähig, geduldig zu ertragen. / So erstreben sie den Buddha-Weg. (Von Borsig 2003: 14).

And I see Buddha sons/ abiding in the strength of fortitude,/ taking the abuse and blows/ of persons of overbearing arrogance,/ willing to suffer all these,/ and in that manner seeing the Buddha way (Watson 1993: 11).⁷

The expressions *renruli* 忍辱力 and *ema* 惡罵 render perhaps original terms which in a Sanskrit edition of this passage read as *kṣāntī-balā* (patience-power) and *ākrośa paribhāṣa* (abuse and blame).⁸ In the previous, third-century Chinese version of the *sūtra* the monks' steadiness before humiliations is rendered in the same way (忍辱力) while the mortifications and insults they stoically endure for the sake of salvation are translated *qinghui mali* 輕毀罵詈.⁹

The hero of ataraxic response to offensive language in *The Lotus Sūtra* is *Sadāparibhūta*. Chapter 19 of *Zhengfahua jing* and chapter 20 of *Miaofa lianhua jing* translate his name respectively “always despised” *chang bei qingman* 常被輕慢 and “never despising” *chang buqing* 常不輕.¹⁰ The Sanskrit expression *sadāparibhūta* is ambiguous¹¹ and the story provides a good reason¹² – during an age of religious degeneration, no matter how disregarding of Buddhist teachings clergy and laymen are, constantly respects, encourages and commends them. Incessant refrains on his lips are words like “I

⁷ Cp. “He sees also Buddha-sons who, / ‘Abiding in the strength of long-suffering, /Though men of utmost arrogance/Hate, abuse and beat them, /Are able through all to endure, /To find the Puddha[sic]-way.” (Soothill (1930) 1975: 62).

⁸ *Kṣāntībalā keci jinasya putrā adhimānāprāptāna kṣamanti bhikṣuṇām | ākrośaparibhāṣa tathaiva tarjanām kṣāntiā hi te prasthita agrabodhim* || Kern 1908-12, Vol. I: 13, lines 5-6). “Quelques fils de Djina, doués de la force de la patience, supportent de la part des Religieux pleins d'orgueil, injures, outrages et reproches; ceux-là sont partis à l'aide de la patience pour l'état suprême de Bôdhi” (Burnouf 1852: 8). “Some sons of the Gina, whose strength consists in forbearance, patiently endure abuse, censure, and threats from proud monks. They try to attain enlightenment by dint of forbearance” (Kern 1884: 13).

⁹ 最勝之子， 據忍辱力， 為諸貢高， 卑下謙順， 輕毀罵詈， 若搗捶者， 其求佛道， 默然不校。(CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 263, p. 65a6-8). Hirakawa (1997: 1135) proposes a correspondence between 輕毀罵詈 and *ākrośa-paribhāṣa*.

¹⁰ 有一比丘， 名曰常被輕慢 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 263, p. 122c22-23). 爾時有一菩薩比丘名常不輕 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 262, p. 50c16). The Sanskrit counterpart reads *sadāparibhūto nāma bodhisattvo bhikṣurabhūt* (Kern 1908-1912, Vol. IV: 377 lines 10-11); “il y eut un Religieux nommé le Bôdhisattva Mahāsattva Sadāparibhūta” (Burnouf 1852: 228); “there was a monk, a Bodhisattva Mahāsattva, called Sadāparibhūta” (Kern 1884: 356).

¹¹ “*Sadāparibhūta* (celui qui est toujours méprisé)” (Burnouf 1852: 229); “‘always contemned’ (*sadā* and *paribhūta*) and ‘always not-contemned, never contemned’ (*sadā* and *aparibhūta*)” (Kern 1884: 357¹).

¹² 彼時不輕， 則我身是。(CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 262, p. 51b24). “For it was myself who at that time, at that juncture was the Bodhisattva Mahāsattva Sadāparibhūta” (Kern 1884: 359).

don't despise you," "I dare not slight you."¹³ Even when whipped, the saintly man repeats the phrase. On the other hand, it's people who despise him. They show hostility, casting insults against him (恚怒毀訾罵詈), reviling and abusing him (惡口罵詈).¹⁴ Sadāparibhūta secures his double-edged nickname and promulgates the power of *The Lotus Sūtra*. The versified summary of the chapter in *Miaofa lianhua jing* analogously describes his patient acceptance of the insults, and celebrates his coming to know the salvific scripture at the end of a life untainted by sin.¹⁵

Which kind of language is offensive, which are, according to Buddhist writings, insulting words? The Chinese canon contains expressions common sense suggests us to be abusive, such as “unfathered child, son of a bitch” 無父之子，姪女所生.¹⁶ But it is the writings concerning monastic discipline that provide considerable information about the topic.

¹³ 我身終不輕慢諸賢人 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 263, p. 122c28-29). 不敢輕慢; 我不敢輕於汝等; 我不敢輕於汝等; 我不輕汝 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 262, p. 50c19; p. 50c22-23; p. 50c29-51a1; p. 51b16). *Nāhamāyusmanto yuṣmākaṃ paribhavāmi / aparibhūtā yūyam* | (Kern 1908-1912, Vol. IV: 378 lines 1-2). “Je ne vous méprise pas, ô vénérables personnages! Vous êtes de ceux qu'on ne méprise pas.” (Burnouf 1852: 228) “I do not contemn you, worthies. You deserve no contempt” (Kern 1884: 356).

¹⁴ 恚怒毀訾罵詈 (CBETA 2021.Q3, T09, no. 263, p. 123a2). 四眾之中，有生瞋恚、心不淨者，惡口罵詈言 (CBETA 2021.Q3, T09, no. 262, p. 50c23-24). “Amongst the four classes, there were those who, irritated and angry and low-minded, reviled and abused him saying:” (Soothill 1975: 227). Sanskrit **ākruś* and **paribhāṣ* occur as verbs in the passage *aprasādamuṭpādayanti ākrośanti paribhāṣante* (Kern 1908-1912, Vol. IV: 378 lines 9-10). “lui en voulaient du mal, lui témoignaient de la malveillance, et l'injuriaient.” (Burnouf 1852: 228-229); “showed him their displeasure, abused and insulted him” (Kern 1884: 356). On *paribhāṣante* for *paribhāṣanti*: “Sic Cb. ऋि O” (Kern 1908-1912, Vol. IV: 378¹⁰).

¹⁵ 諸人聞已，輕毀罵詈；不輕菩薩，能忍受之。其罪畢已，臨命終時，得聞此經 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T09, no. 262, p. 51b17-19). The Sanskrit verse inflects the verbal roots **ākruś* and **paribhāṣ* as nouns: *evaṃ ca saṃśrāvayi nityakālaṃ ākrośaparibhāṣa sahanu teṣāṃ | kālakriyāyā samupasthitāyāṃ śrutaṃ idaṃ sūtramabhūsi tena* || (Kern 1908-1912, Vol. IV: 384 lines 1-2). “Telles sont les paroles qu'il leur faisait entendre sans cesse; mais on lui répondait par des reproches et par des injures. Et quand s'approcha le moment de sa fin, il lui arriva d'entendre ce Sūtra” (Burnouf 1852: 232); “It was his wont always to utter those words, which brought him but abuse and taunts from their part. At this time when his death was impending he heard this Sutra” (Kern 1884: 361).

¹⁶ From *Foshuo nainü qiyu yinyuan jing* (佛說捺女祇域因緣經) a Chinese version of Āmrapālī and Jīvaka's story. 諸小兒共罵之曰：「無父之子，姪女所生，何敢輕我？」 (CBETA 2021.Q3, T14, no. 553, p. 897b28-29). “Un jour ce petits garçons l'injurièrent ensemble en lui disant: ‘Fils sans père, né d'une fille débauchée, comment vous permettez-vous de nous traiter avec mépris?’” (Chavannes 1910-11, Vol. III: 331-332). The following not unsimilar passage in Sanskrit is from a story where Āmrapālī is the mother of Abhaya instead of Jīvaka: *bhavaṃto 'sya dāsiputrasya kaḥ pitā anekasatasahasraṇi[r]jāto 'yam* (Diplomatic transliteration from the story of Abhaya in the Gilgit Sanskrit manuscript of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Cīvaravastu, Wu 2017: 340). “Sirs, who is the father of this son of a female slave? His father could be any one of many hundreds of thousands of men” (Wu 2017: 321).

2. The founding parable in *vinaya* texts

Some Chinese texts about *vinaya* (“moral precepts,” “rules of discipline” in Sanskrit and Pali), translations of closely related Indic works of various schools governing monastic behaviour, contain a systematic discussion of offensive language. I looked for data in the following sources: *Shisonglü* 十誦律 (“Sarvāstivāda School’s Ten-Recitation Discipline,” T1435) translated around 405 by Kumārjīva’s team; *Sifenlü* 四分律 (“Dharmaguptaka School’s Four-Part Discipline,” T1428) translated in 408; (*Misha saibu hexi*) *Wufenlü* (彌沙塞部和醯)五分律 (“Five-Part Mahīśāsaka Discipline,” T1421) translated around 423; *Mohe sengqilü* 摩訶僧祇律 (“Mahāsāṃghika Discipline,” T1425) translated about 416; *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶 (“Mūlasarvāstivāda Discipline,” T1442) and *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pichuni pinaiye* 根本說一切有部苾芻尼毘奈耶 (“Mūlasarvāstivāda Nuns Discipline,” T1443) translated by Yijing at the beginning of the eighth century (cp. Frauwallner 1956: 177-198; Clarke 2015).¹⁷ All of them present the rules about insulting speech as the reply to troubles stirred up by the Group of Six Monks, whose improper conduct often cause in *vinaya* texts the Buddha to produce a series of monastic precepts. The dictation of canonical details follows a narrative providing an instructive example of the harmfulness of offensive language.

In *Shisonglü* the six troublemakers start a verbal conflict within the religious community, whose result is coreligionists continuously insulting each other. The text makes clear that the offensive utterances pertain to disdained sociocultural proveniences: the monks “paying unpleasantly attention to abnormal physiognomies of their fellows shout insults concerning base ancestry, shameful surnames, ignominious working activities” 出他過形相輕喚下賤種姓下賤名字技術作業.¹⁸ Before dictating the rules, the Buddha tells a story of his former incarnation; he talks, rather, about the ongoing state of affairs interlacing it with circumstances of a previous life (說本生因緣)¹⁹. Édouard Chavannes translates the apologue in 1911:

Le Buddha dit aux bhikṣus assemblés: Autrefois il y avait un homme qui possédait un bœuf noir. Il y avait encore un autre homme qui possédait aussi un bœuf et qui, pour gagner des

¹⁷ Throughout many centuries after the introduction of Buddhism in China, the life of monks and nuns in monasteries flows on the basis of several disciplinary books, often without a clear distinction among them, but from the eighth century onwards *Sifenlü* becomes the *vinaya* text that exerts the greatest influence on Chinese monastic discipline (cp. Heirman 2007, and Heirman 2009: 63-64).

¹⁸ The *Taishō* edition punctuates the insults as a quote. 出他過形相輕喚：「下賤種姓、下賤名字、技術作業。」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1435, p. 64a7-8).

¹⁹ For an English translation of the *Jātaka* Pali counterpart of this parable (*Nandi-Visāla Jātaka*) see Fausböll, Rhys Davids (1880: 266-269).

richesses, allait criant: «S'il est quelqu'un dont le bœuf l'emporte en force sur le mien, je lui livrerai mes biens comme enjeu; si (son bœuf) se montre inférieur, il me livrera ses biens comme enjeu.»

Or, le maître du bœuf noir ayant entendu sa proclamation, répondit qu'il acceptait; alors, ayant chargé sur un véhicule une pesante charge, il attacha le bœuf à gauche du char; sa mine fut tournée par lui en ridicule et il s'adressait à lui en l'appelant «noir à corne courbe»; avec un bâton il le frappait pour qu'il allât en tirant ce char. Comme ce bœuf entendait ces injures à propos de sa mine, il perdit son sentiment de l'honneur et sa force; il ne put tirer la lourde charge au haut de la pente. Le maître du bœuf noir perdit donc de grandes richesses (Chavannes 1910-11, Vol. II: 231).

The animal offers his master the opportunity to challenge the rival again. Since the loss of the contest has been due to the insulting bad words the man addressed to him – “you humiliated me for my appearance and called me with the insulting name Black Twisted Horn” 形相輕我，以下賤名喚謂：「黑曲角。」 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1435, p. 64b5) – the ox advises his master to avoid pronouncing such offensive expressions in order to win the betting contest. The moral is summarized by the final stanza, before the Buddha draws the conclusions.

「『載重入深轍，隨我語能去；是故應軟語，不應出惡言。軟語有色力，是牛能牽重；我獲大財物，身心得喜樂。』」佛語諸比丘：「畜生聞形相語尚失色力，何況於人？」 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1435, p. 64b15-20).

«*Quand on a mis sur un char la lourde charge et qu'on est entré dans les ornières profondes, - (mon bœuf) a pu aller suivant le langage que j'ai tenu. - Ainsi il faut employer un doux langage; - il ne faut pas proférer de mauvaises paroles. — Les douces paroles produisent le sentiment de l'honneur et la force; — ce bœuf a pu (ainsi) tirer la lourde charge; - j'ai gagné de grandes richesses - et mon propre cœur est joyeux et content.*»

Le Buddha dit aux bhikṣus assemblés: Si même des animaux peuvent perdre le sentiment de l'honneur et la vigueur en entendant ce qu'on dit de leur forme extérieure, à combien plus forte raison n'en sera-t-il pas de même lorsqu'il s'agira d'hommes? (Chavannes 1910-11, Vol. II: 232-233).

The general outline of this founding narrative is similar in other *vinaya* texts while particulars differ. Isaline Horner translates in 1940 the Pali version of the story.

Formerly, monks, at Takkasilā, Nandivīsāla was the name of an ox belonging to a certain brahmin. Then, monks, Nandivīsāla, the ox, spoke thus to the brahmin: 'Brahmin, you go, bet a thousand with the great merchant, saying: "My ox will draw a hundred carts tied together."' Then, monks, that brahmin made a bet of a thousand with the great merchant,

saying: ‘My ox will draw a hundred carts tied together.’ Then, monks, that brahmin having tied together a hundred carts, having yoked Nandivisāla, the ox, spoke thus: ‘Go, hornless one, let the hornless one pull them along.’ Then, monks, Nandivisāla, the ox, stood just where he was. Then, monks, that brahmin, having suffered the loss of a thousand, was overcome by grief. Then, monks, Nandivisāla, the ox, spoke thus to the brahmin: ‘Why are you, brahmin, overcome by grief?’ ‘Because I, good sir, suffered the loss of a thousand through you.’

‘But why do you, brahmin, bring me, who am not hornless, into disgrace with words of deceit? Brahmin, you go, bet two thousand with the great merchant, saying: “My ox will draw a hundred carts tied together,” but do not bring me, who am not hornless, into disgrace with words of deceit.’ Then, monks, that brahmin bet two thousand with the great merchant, saying: ‘My ox will draw a hundred carts tied together.’ Then, monks, that brahmin having tied together a hundred carts, having yoked Nandivisāla, the ox, spoke thus: ‘Go, good creature, let the good creature pull them along.’ Then, monks, Nandivisāla, the ox, drew the hundred carts tied together.

Speak only words of kindness, never words

Unkind. For him who spoke him fair, he moved

A heavy load, and brought him wealth, for love.

(Horner 1938-1966, Vol. II: 172-173)²⁰

In *Sifenlü* the Group of Six insults monks engaged in a dispute settlement; bringing up the position assigned them by birth, caste, family and race, they shame coreligionists, who lose their train of thought and become unable to speak (六群比丘斷諍事種類罵比丘，比丘慚愧忘失前後不得語 CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1428, p. 634c12-14).²¹ The Buddha has to intervene. His story takes place in about the same setting of *Shisonglü*, a brahman and his bovine property as principal characters. The ox having been attached to the carriage on the crowded scene of the betting contest, the master “phrases the insulting words: ‘Single-horned One, draw now!’” 作毀訾語：『一角可牽。』(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1428, p. 635a9-11). Hearing the offensive epithet the animal, deeply ashamed, becomes reluctant to seriously exert himself in the competition (時牛聞毀訾語，即懷慚愧不肯出力與對諍競. CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1428, p. 635a10-11). The brahman loses his money but wins a double wager in the rematch when he praises the ox instead of insulting him. The Buddha ends the parable saying:

²⁰ “Hornless one” translates *kūṭa*, not horned, therefore harmless, maimed beast not good for work. *Kūṭa* also means false, deceitful. “Words of deceit” translates *kūṭavāda* or “words about being hornless” (Horner 1938-1966, Vol. II: 172⁴, 172⁹).

²¹ About *zhonglei* 種類 cp. *infra* p. 509 and p. 509²⁵.

凡人欲有所說，當說善語、不應說惡語，善語者善、惡語者自熱惱。是故，諸比丘！畜生得人毀訾，猶自慚愧不堪進力；況復於人，得他毀辱能不有慚愧耶？(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1428, p. 635b1-4).

This story also applies to all people of worldly existence. You should say good words, you should not say bad words. If you say good words the result will be good, if you say bad words you will mentally afflict yourself. Therefore, monks, even beasts insulted by humans feel so ashamed that they are unable to vigorously move forward. How could humans not be ashamed if a fellow man insults them?

According to *Wufenlü* the six troublemakers, envious of the outstanding knowledge that untiring monks are attaining through ceaseless learning, resolve to upset the diligent coreligionists using verbal abuse:

「我等當共毀訾，惱使廢業。」便往語言：「汝是下賤種姓，工師小人！汝曾作諸大惡，無仁善行！」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1421, p. 37c11-13). “We should all together revile them, the harassment will cause them to abandon their study.” Thus they go and tell them: “You are baseborn mean manual workers. Even worse, you commit a lot of big wrongdoings and do not behave charitably.”

Then the habitual parable is related. During the betting showdown the brahman, fearing his ox might be not as strong as the rival, “brutally urges him with reviling words: ‘you twisted horn, alas! Pull, skinny neck, shit! Why don’t you proceed in a fit way?’” 毀訾催督：『曲角！痛挽，薄領痛與！汝今行步何以不正？』(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1421, p. 37c26-27). The short story runs more or less as in the other texts, the Buddha’s final hint for the monastic audience being “that beast even lost his strength as he heard insulting words, imagine their effect on humans!” 彼畜生聞毀訾語，猶尚失力，況於人乎！(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1421, p. 38a9-10).

In *Mohe sengqilü* the Six deceitfully obtain from young monks information about their family names, their ancestry, their parents’ working activities (爾時六群比丘軟語誘問諸年少比丘言：「汝名字何等？汝家姓何等？父母名字何等？汝家本作何生業？」CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1425, p. 325b13-15) and then, during an altercation, greatly shame their junior fellows turning those disclosures against them:

於後嫌恨時，便作是言：「汝是極下賤種，汝是旃陀羅、剃髮師、織師、瓦師、皮師。」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1425, p. 325b17-19).

Later, on the occasion of a quarrel, they phrase without hesitation these words: “You have been born in a family of the basest condition. You are a bastard of the lowest caste.²² A barber. A weaver. A potter. A leather-worker.²³”

The Buddha does not fully relate a parable in this *vinaya* translation. After rebuking the Six, he only brings it to mind as the story of Nandi (難提), the name of its bovine protagonist:²⁴

佛言：「此是惡事。六群比丘！汝云何於梵行人邊作種類形相語，如《難提本生經》中廣說。」乃至佛告諸比丘：「畜生尚惡毀咎，況復人乎！」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1425, p. 325b23-26.). The Buddha says: “It is an evil action. Why do you, group of six monks, address your young spiritual companions with insulting language as in the story told at length in the writing about my past life as Nandi?” He finally announces to the whole monastic audience: “Even beasts heartily dislike insults. How much more humans!”

As long as the Six shame the young monks’ social condition the discourse may concern offensive language about “birth” 種類 and “caste” 形相 but it may also concern “various kinds of insults”²⁵ since the expression 種類 is later in the text used in the sentence 種類毀咎有七事：種姓、業、相貌、病、罪、罵、結使 (CBETA 2021.Q4, T22, no. 1425, p. 325b29-c1) “the categories of offensive language are seven: birth, work, appearance, illness, sinfulness, slander, mental fetters.”

The preambles to the precepts censuring offensive language found in two *Mūlasarvāstivāda* texts turned into Chinese by Yijing at the beginning of the eighth century, *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye* and *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pichuni pinaiye*, partly differ from the other *vinaya* translations. Introducing the theme of the chapter, to begin with, they quote quite a few abuses which cause sadness, humiliation and sorrow in the monastic community. Similar specific quotations or examples of offensive language often appear only in passages concerning the articulation of detailed rules. To be blamed are as usual

²² *Zhantuoluo* 旃陀羅 (for Sanskrit *caṇḍāla*). Tang period phonetic reconstruction (cp. Sturgeon 2006-2022: <https://ctext.org/dictionary.pl?if=en>) *jiendhala*.

²³ Some of many low occupations.

²⁴ Nandi-visāla in both *jātaka* and *vinaya* Pali language tradition (cp. Fausböll, Rhys Davids 1880: 266-269; Horner 1938-1966, Vol. II: 172-173.)

²⁵ *Zhonglei* 種類 may simply mean “a variety of” but it also translate *jāti*, the position assigned by birth, rank, caste, family, race, lineage. *Xingxiang* 形相 may render both class, tribe or caste-condition (*varṇa-saṃsthāna*) and physiognomy as facial configuration and expression indicating inner character and quality, bodily conformation and appearance of a person also showing moral disposition, social condition, luck. On the other hand, *Zhonglei xingxiang yu* 種類形相語 translates *omṛṣya-vāda* as does *Huiziyu* 毀咎語 (cp. Hirakawa 1997: 694; 903). Ann Heirman, translating the sentence 若比丘種類毀咎語者波逸提 (CBETA 2022.Q1, T22, no. 1428, p. 635b10) of *Sifenlü*, understands 種類毀咎 as “a variety of insults”: “If a *bhikṣu* insults [someone] in several ways, he [commits] a *pācittika*,” (Heirman 2009: 76).

the Six Monks who in *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye* “phrase insulting words as ‘Squint-eyed, Cripple, Hunchback, Dwarf, Fatso, Boor, Deaf, Blind, Dumb, Lame, Lard-Legs, Maimed, Dunderhead, Trembling Lips, Snaggletoothed’” 作毀訾語云：「眇目、癡躄、背僵、侏儒、太長、太僂、聾盲、瘡瘻、拐行、腫脚、禿臂、大頭、哆脣、齟齬。」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 763c4-6). *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pichuni pinaiye* adds “runt” 太短 and “skinny” 太細 to the row of insults.²⁶ Thereafter the writings relate two foundation narratives instead of one. The second parable is essentially a variation of the above story about the betting contest, with a hornless ox hurt by the name “baldhead” 禿頭.²⁷

The first parable only appears, to the best of my knowledge, in Chinese translations of *vinaya* texts authored by Yijing. Bovines play an exemplary role in it too. Of the two oxen held by a village elder, the bigger has an excellent disposition, the smaller has a greedy nature. This latter is nicknamed “Tailless Single-horned” 禿尾禿角 since he has had his horns and tail mutilated in retaliation for his undiscipline.²⁸ When their master denies the promise he made to give his daughter in marriage to the young man who takes care of the animals, the big ox offers to testify together with the other ox before the sovereign. A trial will prove that the promise was actually made if the two oxen, once free to feed themselves after being compelled to fast for seven days, raise their heads toward the sky instead of lowering them to the grass. But the small ox refuses to testify in favor of the youngster because, the animal says, “he always calls me Tailless Single-horned. When I hear him calling me that way I wish I could gore and disembowel him to death” 常喚我為禿尾禿角，我聞喚時即欲以角決破其腹(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 764c15-16). The story has a happy ending – the big ox contrives a trick that forces the small one to raise his head – and the Buddha draws the conclusions:

汝等當知！在傍生趣聞毀訾言尚懷害念，況復於人。是故苾芻不應惡語毀訾他人。
(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 765a9-10). You all ought to be now aware that even animals, when they are target of offensive words, harbor evil thoughts for a long time. All the more humans. That’s why monks should not insult others with bad words.²⁹

²⁶ 作毀訾語，云：「眇目、癡躄、背僵、侏儒、太長、太短、太僂、太細、聾盲、瘡瘻、拐行、腫脚、禿臂、大頭、哆脣、齟齬。」(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1443, p. 968a28-b1).

²⁷ 時彼長者便喚牛曰：『歡喜長角宜可疾牽，美味禿頭亦當急挽。』時禿頭牛聞毀訾語，即便却住不肯挽車。(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 765a23-26).

²⁸ 時彼長者家有二牛每令驅使：大者為性調善，小者稟識貪饕，雖復拘制犯暴是常。童子發憤放石遙打折其一角，因即立號名為禿角。後於他日尚犯田苗同前不止，便放鎌斫遂截其尾，因即名為禿尾禿角。(CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 764a5-10).

²⁹ The discourse addresses monks (*bhikṣu*, *pichu* 苾芻) also in the *vinaya* disciplining the behaviour of the nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*, *pichuni* 苾芻尼, T1443).

This first narrative omen seems somehow not enough to fix monastic rules on the subject. After warning the audience that performing offensive language in their life will interfere with karmic improvement (作毀咎語時，於現在世所作事業不能成就 CBETA 2021.Q4, T23, no. 1442, p. 765a11-12)³⁰ the Buddha asks them to listen to the second story.

3. Conclusions

Chinese translations of *vinaya* (monastic discipline) books deal in a comprehensive and systematic way with the Buddhist condemnation of verbal abuse. As for other transgressions, the wrongdoing originating reprimand and regulation is imputed to the riotous Group of Six. Their indulgence in humiliating speech induces the Buddha to prescribe rules governing the occurrence of offensive language. To illustrate the harmfulness of insults he, before dictating detailed precepts, tells one of the many Buddhist parables featuring animals, oxen in this case. The role played by the bovine protagonists in Chinese translations is generally similar to that reported by Indic traditions as the Pali *vinaya* text, but two writings translated by Yijing at the beginning of the eighth century preserve also a very different version unrecorded in the four early fifth-century translations. The passages from monastic discipline books quoted in the present essay contain some examples of blameworthy verbal abuse, but their methodic treatment is found in the section of the texts following the anecdotal preambles, discussing the gravity of sins concerning offensive language and the consequently required acts of reparation and atonement. In a future essay I intend to focus on the precepts minutely reported in the Chinese *vinaya* texts.

Abbreviations

CBETA = Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (<https://www.cbeta.org/>)

T = Takakusu, Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe, Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 (eds). 1924–1932. Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai.

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³⁰ This passage is only in *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pinaiye* (T1442) not in *Genben shuo yiqie youbu pichuni pinaiye* (T1443).

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