Thus have I read: the place of reading in the practice of Buddhism

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Abstract

Purpose: Reading plays a central role in the transmission, reception, and practice of Buddhism. This dissertation seeks to address a perceived gap in Buddhist studies by suggesting that reading constitutes a valid strategy of practice and a useful phenomenon to analyse Buddhist roles and identities.

Aims and objectives: This study aims to explore several occurrences of reading in Buddhism. It seeks to outline a history of reading in Buddhism and to suggest some theoretical foundations which justify the practice of reading. It also attempts to describe the reception of Dharma-texts through reading in different historical contexts, including the contemporary world.

Methods: The main body of this dissertation comprises the compilation of a corpus of references to reading found in primary and secondary literature. These references have been contextualised by historical research and justified by an exploration of several Buddhist doctrines and theories relevant to reading. This dissertation adopts a phenomenological stance thus allowing religious agents the capacity to provide meaning to their own actions. Interpretative strategies have been informed by reader-response criticism, aesthetics of reception, narratology, and reception theory. Content analysis of Facebook posts and Goodreads reviews has been employed to analyse recent individual responses to Buddhist literature.

Results: A corpus of over 14,500 entries with references to reading in Buddhism has been compiled using primary and secondary literature. An outline of the history of reading in Buddhism has been suggested. A theoretical basis for reading in Buddhism has been proposed. The attitudes of different Buddhist traditions and schools towards reading, including the reception of Dharma-texts in contemporary contexts, has been described. A ranking of the top ten recommended Dharma-texts has been compiled based on a list of 1,217 recommendations found on Facebook groups posts between March and September 2020. 500 of the most recent book reviews of those recommended Dharma-texts on Goodreads have been analysed for content.

Conclusions: No similar study could be traced in the literature. This dissertation concludes that reading constitutes a central practice in Buddhism and one of its main means of transmission. Reading supports Dharma practice, provides moral exemplars, develops faith, purification, and meditation. Buddhism advocates reading slowly and repeatedly, and encourages embodying the teaching by means of familiarity and memorization of Dharma-texts. This study also shows that reviews on social media platforms can be used to understand the reception of Dharma-texts by contemporary audiences, hence enriching the knowledge of the practices of Bookshop Buddhists and Buddhist sympathizers and contributing to the debate about religious identity and affiliation. This analysis suggests that most readers of Dharma-texts seek spiritual fulfilment, religious knowledge, inspiration, and practical advice from a demystified, non-dogmatic, and relatable perspective.
Abbreviations

[NB: This includes references found in this dissertation and in ‘Appendix E: Corpus’]


Kūkai texts: Giebel, R. W. (2004) *Shingon texts: On the difference between exoteric and esoteric teachings; the meaning of becoming a Buddha in this very body; the meanings of sound, sign, and reality; the meaning of the word Hūṃ; the precious key to the secret treasure, by Kūkai: translated from the Japanese (Taishō Volume 77, Numbers 2427, 2429, 2430, 2426)*. Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research. BDK English Tripiṭaka 98-I, II, III, IV, V.


S


Saddh-s


Samādhirājā


Sdp


Senchakushū


Sengyou I


Sengyou II


Shinji Sbgz


Sbgz.1


Sbgz.2


Sbgz.3


Sbgz.4


Sbgz-Z


Shabkar

Shabkar’s autobiography: Ricard, M. et al. (trans.) (2001) *The life of Shabkar: the autobiography of a Tibetan yogi: the king of wish-granting jewels that fulfils the hopes of all fortunate disciples who seek liberation: the detailed narration of the life and
liberation of the great vajra-holder Shabkar Tsgödrün Rangdrol, refuge and protector for all sentient being of this dark age. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications.

Sn

Snc

Srim

Ss

Ssk

Tendai H.

Tsa-pao-tsang

Ud

Up

Uṣ

Vairocana

Vc

Vim
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Introduction

Many people first experience Buddhism through reading. Buddhist sympathizers occasionally read about Buddhism out of intellectual curiosity or spiritual practice. For some, reading becomes their main cause for converting into more committed, involved, and diverse practices. For a sizable number of self-identified Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers, reading remains their main or sole contact with Buddhist practice. Certain traditions of practice, however, may see this phenomenon as compromising ‘true’ transmission and ‘beneficial’ practice. This dissertation intends to explore how this phenomenon has come about.

This dissertation explores the phenomenon of reading in Buddhism. By exploring textual references to reading, this dissertation surveys several historical and geographical contexts, including contemporary practices. This dissertation also features the main theoretical basis for justifying reading practice in Buddhism.

In this dissertation it is argued that, soon after its inception, Buddhist traditions relied on the written word for its practice and transmission, as manifested in reading, reciting, or chanting in a variety of ritual, ceremonial, and pedagogical contexts and in diverse physical, now also electronic formats. By placing reading within several dimensions of Buddhist practice, this dissertation hopes to demonstrate that reading is central to the transmission, reception, and practice of Buddhism in an international setting.

A literature review will reveal that reading has largely remained unexplored within Buddhist studies. This dissertation will attempt to reconstruct several contexts for reading and attitudes towards its practice from within different Buddhist traditions. In particular, the literature review will show that the reception of Buddhist literature amongst contemporary audiences merits scholarly attention. Hence, this dissertation will undertake an analysis of Bookshop Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers
by means of a study of reviews of Buddhist literature on social media platforms to account for the practice of reading Dharma-texts by contemporary audiences.

‘Chapter 2: Reading in Buddhism’ will explore the role of reading in Buddhism. Particularly, it will examine theories and doctrines with which to justify reading practice. It will also survey the practice of reading in several Buddhist traditions and schools. It will conclude that reading constitutes a core practice in many Buddhist traditions and that it plays a key role in the transmission of the religion.

‘Chapter 3: Reading, reciting, orality’ will place reading within the context of oral and recitative traditions. It will also examine the introduction of writing and hence the possibility of reading in the history of Buddhist transmission. ‘Chapter 4: Multiple perspectives of reading in Buddhist traditions’ will survey the role of reading in the development of several Buddhist traditions and their attitudes towards reading in their descriptions of the path of practice and understanding.

‘Chapter 5: Buddhist revivals and modern contexts’ will analyse the role of reading in nineteenth and twentieth-century Asian Buddhist revivals and its position within the transmission of Buddhism to the West. It will also survey different modes of reading in contemporary contexts and will examine the place of reading among Bookshop Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers.

Several appendixes accompany this dissertation. ‘Appendix A: Merit, cults, and pedagogies’ will situate reading in relation to the merit associated with textual practices, the cult of the book, and its place within pedagogical traditions. ‘Appendix B: Merit, copying, and preserving Dharma-texts’ will define several merit-making activities related to the copying of Dharma-texts and its relationship with reading. It will also suggest some ideas about storage, preservation, and destruction of Dharma-texts, and the eventual disappearance of reading. ‘Appendix C: Reading typologies’ will survey several modes of reading Dharma-texts in a variety of settings as found in the literature. ‘Appendix D: Data analysis’ contains the data gathered and analysed to produce the section ‘Reading responses’ on ‘Chapter 5: Buddhist revivals and modern contexts.’ ‘Appendix E: Corpus’ constitutes a database of examples, with references in the bibliography, of evidence for reading practice found in Buddhist scripture, as well as
in primary and secondary literature. Finally, the large majority of endnotes, all found in the ‘Corpus’, have been included for illustrative purposes only and develop no further argument.
Chapter 1: Literature review, methodology, and definitions

Literature review

This section considers some approaches to the study of reading in general and Buddhism in particular. Research into reading remains underdeveloped. This is due to the pervasive nature and the unreliable evidence of its occurrence (Darnston, 1982, p. 78; Chartier, 1994, p. 1; Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 6; Hammond, 2015, p. 240; Howsam, 2015a, p. 5, 12). Thus, readers’ experiences remain elusive and difficult to trace (Todorov, 1980, p. 67; Boyarin, 1993, p. 7).

Histories of religious reading usually focus on Abrahamic religions.¹ The interest falls on texts, seldom on human interaction with scripture (Smith, 1993, ix; Hoover, 2006, p. 2).

In Buddhism, reading is used for philosophical, doctrinal, mythical, ritual, meditative, and contemplative purposes (Smart, 1996, p. 125). In fact, reading in Buddhism appears in all the religious dimensions developed by Smart (1996, p. 10-11): ritual/practical; doctrinal/philosophical; mythic/narrative; experiential/emotional; ethical/legal; organizational/social; and material/artistic.

To reflect that variety, this dissertation will draw from a number of disciplines which provide valid approaches to study reading, including textual and philological studies, anthropology and sociology, and psychology, among others (Smart, 1996, p. 17; Darnton, 2009, p. 206).

Transmission of knowledge, reading techniques, and discursive practices in South, Southeast, and East Asia remain largely unexplored (Graham, 1986, p. 6; Kornicki, 1998, p. 252; Veidlinger, 2007, p. 9; Zwilling, 2013, p. 214). However, as a socially embedded practice, attitudes towards reading may be reconstructed (Darnton, 1982, p. 79; Boyarin, 1993, p. 4; Chartier, 1994, p. 3; Veidlinger, 2007, p. 14).

In this sense, pedagogical reading practices have received special attention (Blackburn, 2001; Samuels, 2004; Veidlinger, 2007; McDaniel, 2008; Baldanza, 2018).

Buddhist studies, historically more interested in theological and hermeneutical discussion than in social and cultural practices, have largely dismissed reading (Bielefeldt, 2005, p. 243). Histories of
reading in Buddhism deal with textual creation and transmission, and occasionally with textual usage and reception (Schopen, 1991, p. 5; Wu, 2016b, p. 46). Thus, the writing and reading of Dharma-texts for contemporary audiences remain largely unexplored (Coleman, 2001, p. 10).

Several studies contain some references to attitudes towards reading and responses to reading Buddhist texts, including reading Dharma-texts as literature (Levering, 1989b; Waterhouse, 1997; Flores, 2008). Buddhist literature has also been the object of stylistic analysis (Cole, 2005), reader’s response criticism (Berkwitz, 2004; McDaniel, 2005; Flores, 2008), and reception theory (Segdwick, 2005; Snodgrass, 2009). Buddhist literature has also been analysed from the perspective of conversion (Gordon-Finlayson; 2012), textual practices (Bielefeldt, 2005; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009), ethical reading (McClintock, 2017), religious practice (Wright, 1998; Humphreis, 1999; Wright, 2003, p. 269), and ritual uses (Kim, 2013), among others.

Griffiths (1999) compares religious and consumerist forms of reading and argues that religious reading ought to be intrinsic to religious practice. Griffiths (p. 3-13) asserts that each religion conveys a comprehensive, unsurpassable, and central account of reality through its literature. It is on the basis of these propositions that this dissertation argues a place for reading in the practice of Buddhism.

Several scholars investigate the existence and practices of contemporary Buddhists in terms of religious affiliation and identity (Nattier, 1998; Hayes, 2000; Coleman, 2001; Cox, 2007; McMahan, 2008). Tweed (1999, 2002) conceptualizes a ‘nightstand Buddhist’, thus enriching the spectrum of categories to define Buddhists while acknowledging the diversity of religious identities.² Despite the difficulty in interpreting the reception of Buddhist literature, Buddhist sympathisers and those who have been influenced by Buddhism are insufficiently examined and merit scholarly attention (Tweed, 1999, p. 83; Withnow and Cadge, 2004, p. 364).

This dissertation attempts to establish some basis for reading in Buddhism. Following on from Tweed, this dissertation seeks to explore some responses to Buddhist texts by Buddhist sympathisers.
Methodology

This section explores some methodological issues arising from examining the place of reading in Buddhism. This study draws from de Certeau’s idea that what appears to be a marginal practice might possibly be a universal, heterogeneous one (Certeau, 1988, xvii). For de Certeau (xix, 30), reading constitutes a way of operating in the world, an everyday tactic or strategy of practice. This framework enables an analysis of reading habits and reading materials (Chartier, 2002a, p. 49).

Phenomenology

This dissertation takes a phenomenological stance and assumes an attitude of ‘informed empathy’ so that religious actors provide meaning to their own actions (Smart, 1996, p. 2). By focusing on textual usage and reception, a ‘phenomenology of the act of reading’ is adopted (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 167; Regan, 1998, p. 143). This stance has facilitated the compilation of evidence of reading and reading responses found in ‘Appendix E: Corpus’ as well as the data gathering and analysis discussed in the section ‘Reading responses’ in ‘Chapter 5: Buddhist revivals and modern contexts.’

Reader-response criticism, aesthetics of reception, interpretative communities

In order to explore the phenomenon of reading in Buddhism, this dissertation considers several theories with a bearing on the act of reading and the role of readers. Reader-response criticism and aesthetics of reception focus on reading practices and readers’ roles.

Reader-response criticism, as formulated by Fish and Iser, analyses readers’ experiences of texts and their production of meaning through reading. In aesthetics of reception, Jauss formulates a ‘horizon of expectation’ to account for literary genres and the reception history of literary works (Culler, 1997, p. 123). A reader’s horizon of expectation and an author’s model of writing are elements of genre theory useful for analysing reading reception since they establish possible parameters of interpretation (Todorov, 2010, p. 199-200). This analysis includes Fish’s concept of interpretive communities according to which certain strategies and beliefs held in common determine textual reception and usage (Fish, 2002, p. 355, 357; Fish, 2004, p. 217).
Narratology

A history of reading must account not only for how actual readers understand texts, but also for how texts portray ideal, implied readers, thus framing readers’ responses (Darnton, 2009, p. 202; Montgomery et al., 2013, p. 187). A history of reading must also consider uses of texts other than reading to provide a fuller context (Colclough, 2009, p. 52). Narratology accounts for how texts represent themselves and for which effects texts intend to provoke (Zwilling, 2013, p. 206).

This results in the portrayal of historical readers based on actual instances of their experiences and responses to reading, both intellectual (hermeneutics) and emotional (aesthetics), including norms, convention, and traditions within their communities (Chartier, 2002a, p. 48; Fish, 2002, p. 351; Colclough, 2009, p. 53, 61; Hammond, 2015, p. 250). It also shows how readers actualise and assert themselves and their identities through reading (Holland, 1975, p. 816). Manuscript and print cultures (authors, scribes, printers, librarians, among others) and the sociology of texts of specific times and places provide a wider context for reading practices (Howsam, 2015a, p. 1). This context determines the practice of reading and places each instance of a text in a communication circuit where readers both affect and are affected by textual production (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 12, 24).

Reception theory

Besides reading-response theory,³ bibliographical analysis, including the publishing history of individual titles and their presence in libraries and collections, among other forms of transmission history, forms another basis to study the reception of authors and their works (Suarez, 2015 p. 200). Religious literature must also be examined in terms of its commercial value and historicity (Howsam, 2015b, p. 257). Thus, scriptural reception can be analysed through the history of commentaries, sub-commentaries, miracle tales, and other such literature (Campany, 2018).⁴ For instance, commentaries inform of the reception of texts and their interpretation and constitute an unending search for meaning (Lopez, 1992b, p. 67).
Sources

From the unreliability of the evidence available for reading described above arises the issue of the means to obtain data about readers and their behaviour, historically and nowadays. Histories of reading rely on data from myriad sources: marginalia, reading records, diaries, biographies, subscription lists, book clubs, printers’ and publishers’ booklists, texts, and libraries and archives catalogues, among others (Littau, 2006, p. 2006; Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 24-25).

Marginalia is the most common source of information about historical, ordinary readers (Colclough, 2009, p. 54; Darnton, 2014, p. 19). Marginalia authors are generally educated, professional intellectuals. Signs of marginalia in students’ textbooks and in master-texts from teaching sessions abound (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 129). Other signs of usage, like copyediting marks, sandalwood and vermillion, or fingerprints, are evidence of the physical handling of books and can suggest evidence of their being used (Kim, 2013, p. 8).

Since this dissertation is mainly concerned with general, common readers, other sources must also be examined (Rose, 2002, p. 324; Towheed, 2011, p. 3). Like marginalia authors, book reviewers are self-conscious, autonomous, interactive readers aware that their reading contributes in constructing their identities (Jackson, 2001, p. 87-88). Their testimonies might seem unreliable when taken individually (Hammond, 2015, p. 250). However, these testimonies might provide some useful insights into their intentions and experiences when collated and analysed together. Importantly, their reading is neither passive nor homogeneous (Certeau, 1988, p. 169). Hence, ‘Reading responses’ in ‘Chapter 5’ analyses some readers’ responses to Buddhist literature.

To sum up, despite its elusive nature, reading constitutes a pervasive presence throughout the history of Buddhism which merits scholarly interest. As a socially-embedded practice, the locatedness of reading can be reconstructed. By examining textual references and readers’ responses, the role of reading in Buddhism can be described. The need to contextualise reading within broader practices
involving texts is developed in ‘Appendix A: Merit, cults, and pedagogies’, ‘Appendix B: Merit, copying, and preserving Dharma-texts’, and ‘Appendix C: Reading typologies’.

**Content analysis**

Content analysis offers a systematic and quantitative analysis of media content. Easy to integrate with other research methods, content analysis proves useful to examine social and cultural issues, values, and phenomena, as well as the intentions of the originator of messages. Although there is no simple correspondence between media content and its reception, ratings and reviews constitute responses to reading and therefore inform of its reception (Hansen and Machin, 2019).

**Defining reading**

This final section provides a summary of attitudes, forms, and purposes of reading by which reading in Buddhism in general and readers’ responses to Buddhist literature in particular can be framed.

**Reading attitudes**

From a psychological perspective, readers present the following attitudes:

a) cognitive, created by logical, rational analyses, led by thought;\(^7\)

b) emotional, related to morality, driven by feelings;\(^8\)

c) behavioural, based on habits and tendencies.

Most readers show mainly emotional attitudes towards reading. Readers usually base these attitudes not on their own judgment or behaviour, but on what they find exciting or rewarding (Willingham, 2017, p. 138).

**Reading levels**

Four basic levels of reading can be established depending on the depth and purpose of reading tasks (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 16-20):

1. elementary or rudimentary;
2. inspectional or skimming;
3. analytical or thorough, conducted for the purpose of understanding;
4. syntopical or comparative reading, when a text is placed in context and compared.°

Reading purposes

According to its reception and effect, scripture becomes (Levering, 1989a, p. 13-14):

i. informative, as it shapes one’s worldview;
ii. transformative, as it enacts some power in oneself or the world;
iii. transactive, as it is used for inner cultivation;
iv. symbolic.

Three basic goals of reading are (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 9-10):

1. information, as one accumulates data about a subject;
2. understanding, as one deepens one’s understanding about a subject;
3. entertainment.

From this perspective, reading always operates a transaction between texts and readers’ expectations, knowledge, or interests. This transaction produces different reading strategies according to the goal and purpose of the reader (Waples, Berelson and Bradshaw, 1940, p. 7; Rosenblatt, 1969, p. 38-39; Davis and Womack, 2002, p. 54-55):

- aesthetic reading strategies occurring during the reading event;
- nonaesthetic, cognitive strategies gained after the event.

Readers’ production of meaning results from that transaction. Future reading will verify or contrast this reading (Smagorinsky, 2001, p. 149). It will also, in turn, encourage or discourage further reading.

As a learning process, reading becomes a method of instruction and discovery (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 13). Within religious practice, learning can be (Van Voorst, 2008, 8-9):
i. cognitive: to understand the doctrines and determine meaning;

ii. worship and ritual, including public readings;

iii. private or communal;

iv. meditative or devotional;

v. non-cognitive: texts and sacred objects, for iconic and magical power.

Regarding intentions, reading can be (Von Voorst, 2008, p. 10):

- informative, documenting history or doctrine;
- performative, to achieve something for oneself or the world;
- transformative, if expecting to be changed as a result of hearing/reading.

Reading produces both knowledge and aesthetic enjoyment (Graham, 1986, p. 7). Hence, all reading has a political and moral aspect. For instance, reading might be restricted or banned as a way of controlling power, pleasure, or agency, and to dissuade dissent (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 109; Hammond, 2015, p. 238-239).

Different intentions when reading might produce different experiences and knowledge. Survey data from the UK indicates that 52 percent of respondents read for relaxation, 27 percent as escapism, and 24 percent for intellectual stimulation (Hammond, 2015, p. 244).

Reading occurs in all types of environments (before going to sleep, while commuting, etc.) and in all modes (scanning for content and reference, reading silently for enjoyment, etc.) (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 131). Further research suggests people choose books over other media to satisfy their psychological needs, particularly for intellectual stimulation, but also for aesthetic enjoyment (Adoni and Nossek, 2011, p. 54-55). However, increasingly people are turning to audiobooks, podcasts, websites, and video material as their main reference source.
Chapter 2: Reading in Buddhism

This chapter explores the role of reading in Buddhism. It places reading within the Buddhist path of practice and understanding. It also examines some Buddhist doctrines justifying reading practice and considers several sources supporting its occurrence. Additionally, this chapter surveys some examples of how Buddhist ought to read according to different Buddhist traditions. Finally, by identifying some readers’ intentions and purposes for reading, this section suggests some outcomes of reading practice.

Theory

Buddhism favours direct experience of the Buddha’s Dharma existentially and practically, and ultimately, of liberation and Nirvāṇa (Smart, 1996, p. 179-180). Dharma comprises the body of the teaching (pariyatti), the practice of the way (paṭipatti), and the realization of each stage towards achieving Nirvāṇa (paṭivedha). Thus, Dharma is to be heard/read, understood, practiced, and realized (Harvey, 2013, p. 245). In this context, reading ought to support Dharma practice (Dhp 51-52). Dharma-texts become guidebooks to inform doctrinal content and address practical problems (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 193). Hence, reading constitutes a form of intellectual nourishment and a key component of spirituality (Lam, 2010).

Within the path of understanding and practice leading to liberation, reading constitutes part of practices for achieving Right View/Understanding and for eliminating ignorance (Mi 70, M iii 230; D 1; i 52, ii 305). Ordinarily, reading facilitates the intellectual understanding of Buddhist doctrines. Hence, hearing/reading corresponds to the first level of wisdom (paññā/prajñā) (Harvey, 2013, p. 83).

By reading descriptions and prescription of the path, reading becomes both a ‘second-hand experience of the world’ and an ‘illuminating possibility’ of existence (Manguel, 2008, p. 18).

Sanskrit and Pāli lack words to distinctly describe the activity of reading. Even when translated as ‘to read’, the originals may refer to a field of meaning comprising ‘reading’, ‘reciting’, ‘causing to recite’, ‘hearing’, ‘studying’, or ‘pondering’ (Griffiths, 1999, p. 116).
Descriptions of the Buddhist path offer faith and practice alternatives (S iii 225). Emphasis on reading and its uses varies according to one’s understanding and tradition. Whereas traditions describing a gradual path tend to place reading at several stages of practice, particularly initial stages, those traditions promoting sudden enlightenment tend to downplay or disparage certain reading practices (Butön, p. 288). On occasion, certain schools include reading within their monastic regulations. Some Sūtras contemplate that reading and other textual tasks might be suitable for certain individuals as their path (Schopen, 1978, p. 324-325).

Common descriptions of the path include the following stages: (i) observing morality; (ii) learning (listening/reading) the teachings; (iii) reflecting on the truths represented by the teachings; (iv) and meditating on these truths. Hence, reading for understanding supports reflection and concentration (ABK vi 142). Understanding through reading also removes all obstacles to liberation (ABK vi 276).

Mimesis, the desire to identify with exemplars offered in Buddhist texts and to achieve the goals described therein, provides another theoretical model to define reading as Buddhist practice (Flores, 2008, p. 36-37, 44). In particular, mimesis and inspiration encourage the compilation and reading of the biographies of Buddhist masters, Tantric practitioners, proficient meditators, and other celebrated individuals.

### Placing Buddhist reading

This section offers some examples of advice on how reading ought to be done according to some Buddhist traditions.

The Pāli suttas, as an authoritative, complete, self-consistent body of texts, offer practical advice, sustain faith and trust in the Dhamma, support meditation practice, and develop skilful qualities (Access to Insight, 2001). Both Access to Insight (2001) and Reading Faithfully (2018) encourage broadly reading suttas in a regular, committed, and serendipitous manner. They advocate rereading to improve understanding, perusing over refrains, discussing the suttas, studying the commentaries, and even learning some Pāli. It recommends that reading is done slowly, as contemplation, wondering
about the meaning of the teaching and its significance to the reader17 (Sumedho, in Walshe, 2012, p. 12; Bodhi, 2017, p. 19). Mahāyāna Dharma-texts also require slow, contemplative reading (Williams, in Crosby and Skilton, 1995, xxvi).

Reading in Zen constitutes a meditative, thoughtful, engaged, self-aware activity, in which texts become mirrors18 reflecting a reader’s own mind19 (Wright, 1998, xii-xiii). Reading in this context requires critically thinking and reflecting while pursuing self-transformation and freedom from grasping and illusion. Reading in Zen thus becomes experiential (Cleary, 2005g, p. 322). Patience and rereading are required to deepen one’s understanding (Grimstone, in Sekida, 2005, p. 16). For Blofeld, reading has a place in the first stages of Zen practice before forms of direct experience occur (Wright, 1998, p. 22). However, some Zen masters engaged in reading all their lives (Wright, 1998, p. 25).

Reading in Tibetan Buddhism is also to be done slowly and repeatedly20 (Van Schaik, 2016, p. 12; Gyatso and Chodron, 2018, p. xvi). After reading a passage, one should ponder quietly over its meaning (Mullins, 1999, p. 21). One should keep an attentive, altruistic intention when setting on reading Dharma21 (Gyatso and Chodron, 2018, p. xvi). Mindfulness is needed to process and retain all learning (Gyatso and Kamalaśila, 2019). Reading constitutes an aspect of the Sūtra path for realizing emptiness and should be done under the guidance of a competent teacher (Tashi Namgyal, 2019, lix, p. 140).

This brief overview shows how, although certain qualities when reading, like slow-paced reading, a contemplative attitude, and the regular engagement with scripture, are common to all Buddhist traditions, each different Buddhist tradition largely define reading so that it aligns with the general outlook of that tradition. Thus, whereas the Theravāda emphasises the role of the Pāli suttas and the role of Pāli as a canonical language, Zen underlines the importance of experience and the mirror-like quality of Dharma-texts, and Tibetan Buddhism highlights the need to set an altruistic intention before reading to develop bodhicitta and the role of the guru in the transmission of the Dharma.
Skilful means

The Buddha’s expedient teaching (Sanskrit ‘upāya-kauśalya’) implies he had the ability to adapt his preaching to specific audiences according to their capacity for understanding (Mizuno, 1982, p. 138). This means that the Buddha taught in particular pedagogical contexts, which need to be considered when examining Dharma-texts (Flores, 2008, p. 14). Although the Buddha acknowledged the conventional, arbitrary, empty nature of language, the rhetorical devices and figurative speech used by the Buddha when teaching constitute Right Speech (A v 198; D i 202; Abé, 2005, p. 308; Flores, 2008, p. 88). As such, language contributes towards liberation although it also presents several dangers (Humphreis, 1999, xi).

Two-Truths doctrine

By reading, one can only access conventional truths rooted in language. Thus, reading becomes merely an entry point into an absolute truth that remains only conceptualised. Ultimately, the emptiness of all phenomena and the equivalence between Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa in certain traditions allow language and literature to be valid practices towards liberation (Humphreis, 1999, p. xii).

Reading should be done according to one’s level of practice and understanding, personality, temperament, needs, and abilities. Dharma-texts are classified according to themes (devotion, morality, penetration, etc.) pertinent to different people at different times, and in relation to their understanding (Kramer, 1987, p. 153; Bond, 1992, p. 35-38).

Therefore, whereas the concept of skilful means conveys the idea that Dharma-texts carry the provisional means by which practitioners can fare towards enlightenment in ways appropriate to different individuals and in diverse contexts, the two-truths doctrine points out some of the limitation of using language to convey the truths necessary to attain that enlightenment.

The end of reading: the ‘Simile of the Raft’ and the ‘Finger Pointing to the Moon’

It is in this light that can be said that reading in Buddhism is for practicing Dharma, for dwelling in the Dharma, for liberation and not an end in itself (A iii 86-87; S ii 267). The ‘Simile of the Raft’ (M i 135)
expresses the idea that the teaching is for crossing over the stream, not for holding on\textsuperscript{23} (Ānanda, 1996, p. 377). Likewise, ‘(…), the teachings of the Buddhist scriptures are like fingers pointing to the moon’ (Cleary, 2005b, p. 164-165). Thus, all Buddhist traditions limit the capacity of reading to be able to produce final liberation. For instance, traditions that emphasize experience advocate abandoning reading once its skilful means has served its purpose (Sharf, 2004, p. 267).

**How Buddhists read**

Buddhism comprises the following reading modes (Chartier, 2002a, p. 54):

- according to the sound produced when reading: articulated, out-loud, subvocalized, or silent reading;
- according to the number of readers and the occasion: individual, solitary, private, or communal reading, including reading to a group, public reading, and simultaneously, by a group of readers reading the same or different texts;
- according to the value placed on the texts: intensive reading of texts to be memorized and/or recited, or extensive, consumerist reading.

Whereas reading out-loud is ‘slow, laborious, and externalized’, silent reading is ‘faster, easier’ and perhaps more impactful in terms of understanding (Chartier, 2002b, p. 125). Both articulated reading and silent reading can add prosody to aid comprehension (Willingham, 2017, p. 67). Although silent reading is generally static, as an embodied activity vocalised reading usually involves bodily movements (Littau, 2006, p. 2-3, 37). Memorization also contains a somatic, physical dimension, as monastics often accompany their recitations with bodily gestures and movements (Dreyfus, 2003, p. 85). The materiality and format of texts affect their reading and prompt different responses in readers (Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p. 3).

Reciting Dharma-text activates their contents. By reading, one recalls the Buddha and invokes his presence\textsuperscript{24} (Ray, 1994, p. 334; Elliot, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014b, p. 8). Those unable to recollect must first learn Dharma-texts by reading or by repeating after a reciter until they are memorized
(Eubanks, 2011, p. 50-51). Textual supports are only required for reading, not necessarily for reciting. Certain contexts however require that a volume also be present to activate its content.

Further, Eubanks (2011, p. 176-177) argues that the materiality and format of texts presuppose a space of reading:

- Linear reading involves reading lines of texts in sequence;
- Radial reading implies access to secondary texts to support the reading of primary texts;
- Representative, emblematic reading, of abridged versions of Dharma-texts;
- Circumambulatory reading where turning or circling is required for textual activation.

Eubanks (2011, p. 17, 177) argues that the rotation found in prayer wheels or rotating libraries is a metaphor for textuality in Buddhism: the same way the Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma, readers turn scriptures, these devices, or themselves, literally and figurately, as they read.

Particularly relevant for contemporary practice is silent, private reading, largely developed from the sixteenth century onwards (Chartier, 2002b, p. 125). Modern Christian monastic orders and Protestantism had developed a mode of practice essentially based on the capacity for silent, intimate reading of scripture and other religious texts as a way to establish a personal relationship with the divine (Chartier, 2002b, p. 126).

**Readers’ intentions**

This section explores how Buddhists themselves read and how they regard reading as practice. Readers of Buddhist texts, it seems, are motivated by adventure, spiritual inspiration, intellectual stimulation, academic prestige, distraction, and/or pedagogical instruction25 (Cleary, 1993, p. 50-51; Griffiths, 1999, p. 40; Flores, 2008, p. 184; Reeves, 2008, p. 5). Additionally, sacred literature in general has an inspiring and transformative capacity and it is both the focus of devotion and of religious performance (Olson, 2013, p. 19-20).

The benefits obtained by hearing/reading Dharma-texts are:
Bhikkhus, there are these five benefits in listening to the *Dhamma*. What five? One hears what one has not heard; one clarifies what has been heard; one emerges from perplexity; one straightens out one’s view; one’s mind becomes placid. These are the five benefits in listening to the *Dhamma* (A iii 248).

Butön (2013, p. 7-9), quoting scriptural authorities, adds the following benefits: knowledge, discriminating good from bad and meaningful from meaningless, attaining transcendence, ethical conduct, training in meditation and insight, right view, overcoming afflictions and karma, renouncing mundane life, guarding the senses, confidence, and faith, among others.

A rationale for reading and the capacity of scripture to convey truths needed towards Enlightenment is found in *Dharma*-texts (Levering, 1989b, p. 61):

(...) You should live as islands onto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge,\(^{26}\) with no other refuge (D ii 100).

*Dharma* thus learned becomes weapons\(^{27}\) for the noble discipline, who then:

Abandons the unwholesome and develops the wholesome, abandons what is blameworthy and develops what is blameless, and maintains [one]self in purity (A iv 110).

All the Buddha taught was for the purpose of liberation (Lamotte, 1988, p. 142). Therefore, Buddhist reading ought to serve the same purpose. The wisdom required for attaining liberation derives from hearing/reading (*śrūtayī*) and from meditation (*bhāvanāmayī*)\(^{28}\) (Bielefeldt, 1992, p. 504n24).

Reading can also help in working with hindrances and defilements,\(^{29}\) particularly against doubt,\(^{30}\) passion,\(^{31}\) or restlessness and lethargy\(^{32}\) (Buswell and Gimello, 1992, p. 12-13; Kyabgon, 2013, The Five Hindrances). Reading cannot be a substitute for any practices\(^{33}\) however, particularly the imperative of experience and own perception\(^{34}\) (Cook, 2010, p. 105; Hawkeye, 2013, p. 43). As such, reading belongs in the second of the seven limbs of awakening (Pāli ‘bojjhaṅga’) required to attain to path of vision: investigating and researching doctrines (Rahula, 1978, p. 75). In the Zen classic *Finding the Ox*, which represents ten different stages in the path toward enlightenment and the functioning of an
enlightened person in society, reading appears at the second stage (finding the traces or discovery of the footprints). It is later forgotten at the eight stage (both bull and man forgotten or both bull and Self transcended) (Myokyo-ni, 1990, p. 41; Sekida, 1985, p. 224-225).

**For purification**

Within the path of practice, listening to oral teachings, recitation, and reading helps produce the purification, particularly verbal, needed to progress in mediation and realisation (Coward, 1986, p. 300; Van Schaik, 2016, p. 67). Used for meditation, recollecting through recitation/reading produces the mental purification required for obtaining meditation (dhyana/jhāna) (Harrison, 1992b, p. 217). This is evidenced by the early practice of carrying a handbook (muṭṭhipotthaka) detailing the virtues of Buddha and Sangha and read whenever unwholesome thoughts arose in one’s mind (Adikaranam, 1946, p. 128; Collins, 1992, p. 122).

**For recollection and meditation**

Reading is also for the purpose of memorization, internalization, and embodiment (Gyatso, 1992a, p. 14; Eubanks, 2011, p. 51-52). Memory is a mark of superior character and intellect (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 26). Memorization helps to ‘uphold’ a sūtra, that is, the retaining and reciting of a sūtra at all times (Yen, 1994). Reciting Dharma-texts is for recollecting the Dharma, and developing wisdom, mindfulness, and faith, among other benefits and purposes (Gethin, 1992, p. 166-167; Harrison, 1992b, p. 218; Collins, 1992, p. 127; Yen, 1994). It can also be for recollecting one’s previous existences. Some meditation manuals say that one can enter single-mode samādhi by reading, for instance, Prajñāpāramitā literature like the Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (Fauré, 1986, p. 100, 108). For Rinzai, one’s mind can be fully absorbed in a kind of samādhi while reading, among other tasks (Sekida, 1985, p. 91). Reading also produces visualizations, visionary experiences, and yogic attainments. Some meditations require the reading of a text for their successful completion (Anacker, 1991, p. 85). Additionally, reading supports several forms of analytical meditation (Lodrö, 1998, p. 173). Thus, ‘even reading (...) is bhāvana’ (Anālayo, 2007, p. 15-16; Shaw, 2014, p. 14).
Conversely, meditation can also help in reading more efficiently, since one develops calmness, relaxation, and concentration, hence making the mind more pliable and receptive while turning reading activity into practice of the path.

**For knowledge and hermeneutics**


1. initial understanding produced by hearing/reading. Path factors produced by listening/reading comprise wholesome but impure factors since they are not produced by cultivation (ABK ii 265);
2. understanding clarified by thinking, with some feelings and experiences (Nānamoli, 2014, xlii; Coward, 1986, p. 304);
3. ‘meditatively acquired wisdom’, with intellectual understanding and practical experience produced by meditation.

Along with the oral tradition, sophistry, or inference, among others, ‘piṭakasampadāya’, the authority of scripture taken as *dicta theologica*, and thus reading, constitutes one of multiple ways of gaining knowledge (Jayatilleke, 1963, p. 175, 200).

For religious readers, reading is key for developing understanding (Yen, 1994; Griffiths, 1999, p. 74; Parker, 2007, p. 74). However, salvation obtained from intuitive knowledge gained by reading might be insufficient for liberation as much as salvation is unavailable without such knowledge (Jayatilleke, 1963, p. 426; Truman, 1978, p. 35; Ray, 1993, p. 165; Jantrasrisalai, 2008, p. 131). Indeed, memorization without understanding or only attending to literal textual interpretations are both undesirable and detrimental (Lamotte, 1992, p. 14, 22).
The Four Reliances (Pali ‘paṭisaraṇa’; Sanskrit ‘pratisaraṇa’), used to examine statements of truth, suggest one should rely on (Truman, 1978, p. 19; Lamotte, 1992, p. 12; Ray, 1993, p. 161):

- the teaching, not the teacher or person;
- the meaning, not the letter or words;\(^{51}\)
- definitive meanings (nītārtha), not interpretable meanings (neyārtha);
- wisdom, not ordinary consciousness.

Similar recommendations exist elsewhere. The Kālāma Sutta (A i 188) recommends relying on intuitive knowledge and enlightened experience for interpreting teachings, rather than depending on the authority of texts, the reputation of teachers, or mere tradition (McDermott, 1984, p. 24; Lopez, 1992a, p. 5; Lamotte, 1992, p. 11). The Netti and the Peṭakopadesa show how to engage in textual interpretation as part of a gradual path of practice (Bond, 1992).

Together with the role of the concept of Skilful Means and of the Two-Truths Doctrine, these recommendations about the capacity of words to convey truths caution readers about the ability of Dharma-texts to support Buddhist practice and the need to rely on intuitive knowledge, wisdom, and the teaching, rather than on ordinary consciousness, authority, or a teacher’s reputation.

**Authenticity, canonicity, and authority**

Despite the caveat that practitioners should not rely solely on the authority of scripture, each Buddhist tradition and lineage place great value in the source of their teachings as a way to ascertain their authenticity. This section examines some ideas about the status of textual collections and the role these play in defining Buddhist practices and identities.

The following four rules dictate the authenticity of teachings/texts and the validity of their contents if received from or approved by (D iv 7-11):

- The Buddha;
- The Sangha;
- A group of elders;
- Monastics keeping the faith handed down by tradition.

Teachings must accord with Vinaya and Sūtras, particularly with disciplinary rules, and with certain central Buddhist doctrines, namely the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination, or else be rejected (Lamotte, 1984, p. 13; Wynne, 2004, p. 101; Cousins, 2005, p. 97-98). Additionally, teachings expounded by previous Buddhas, sages, gods, and other apparitional beings are also deemed authoritative (Lamotte, 1984, p. 6). For the Theravāda, the corpus of authorized scripture constitutes Buddhavacana, the word of the Buddha (Williams, 1970, p. 162). Using different strategies of legitimization, the Mahāyāna also claims its sūtras as Buddhavacana (McDermott, 1984, p. 25; Lopez, 1992b, p. 47).

Buddhism is not a religion of the book and has no textual collection accepted by all Buddhist traditions (Appleton, 2014, p. 574). Each Buddhist tradition developed different canons. Since canons differ, the terms ‘canon’ and ‘Buddhavacana’ are not synonymous (Skillling, 2010, p. 39).

The canons of several early Buddhist schools, including the Theravāda Pāli canon, are essentially closed, stable canons, which provide a sense of coherence and completeness to their interpretations (Collins, 1990, p. 91; Berkwitz, 2009, p. 37). Contrarily, Mahāyāna canons constitute open, developing entities. This is because Mahāyāna sūtras developed over time and exist in different versions, thus reflecting an evolving reading reception. Different reading/textual communities arose around these sūtras (Smith, 1993, p. 153; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 2). Whereas for early Buddhist schools, scriptural authority depended on the criteria detailed above, Mahāyāna Buddhism developed inclusive canons built around Indic precedents (Skillling, 2010, p. 1; Zacchetti, 2016, p. 82). Nonetheless, paracanonical and apocryphal texts have also been popular and widely read.

The status of each tradition’s scriptures constitutes a powerful element of their self-identity (Coward, 1992, p. 142). Reading/textual communities compete to promote their own Dharma-texts. They structure their practice around these texts, which they also use to categorize all other Buddhist
literature\textsuperscript{53} (Coward, 1992, p. 129; Coleman, 2001, p. 46; Hartmann, 2009, p. 104). Altering the canon served particular social and pedagogical functions (Skilling, 2010, p. 38). Although Buddhists were concerned with an accurate, authentic transmission of the teaching, both in form and in content, several schools emerged with distinct canons and versions of scriptures partly the product of differences of interpretation of doctrines and practices, which in turn encouraged the production of further texts (Collins, 1992, p. 124; Wynne, 2004, p. 103; Skilling, 2009, p. 55; Berkwitz, 2010, p. 46; Obadia, 2013, p. 168). Therefore, views on authority and authenticity affect the status of written scripture and reading as means for the transmission of Buddhism (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 3).

This chapter has shown that Buddhists in many traditions view reading as a core practice connected to several stages of the path and as facilitating its transmission. It has developed a theory dependant on the concept of Skilful Means, the Two-Truths doctrine, and the Four Reliances, with the support of the ‘Simile of the Raft’ and the ‘Finger Pointing to the Moon’, to justify a place for reading in Buddhism. It has also described how ideas about authenticity, canonicity, and authority affect not only Buddhist identities but also reading practices. As will be developed below, modern Buddhists and Buddhist sympathisers both accept and challenge authority, and develop their own identities, through reading.
Chapter 3: Reading, reciting, orality

This chapter places reading in the context of earlier and concurrent oral and recitative traditions. It examines the origin of writing and the development of reading in early Buddhist traditions. Finally, it also shows how writing and reading influence the transmission of Buddhism in different contexts.

Buddhism originally developed in an oral/aural context (Sujato and Brahmali, 2013, p. 51). Since the inception of Buddhism, and for a period of three to four centuries, knowledge and texts were composed, preserved, and transmitted orally (Collins, 1990, p. 95; Allon, 1997, p. 3). Texts were memorized and expounded through recitation (McDermott, 1984, p. 23). Oral compositions were designed to facilitate memorization and recitation (Gethin, 1992, p. 149; Anālayo, 2007, p. 5). This tradition, still alive throughout Buddhist cultures, coexisted and interacted with manuscript cultures (Goody, 1968, p. 12; Bechert, 1992, p. 53; Skilling, 2004, p. 84; Shaw, 2009, p. 126).

Texts were later written down to ensure their preservation (Bechert, 1992, p. 45). Indeed, preservation and transmission were the two main roles monastics played (Gombrich, 1984, p. 77). For the Mahāyāna, writing represented both a method of transmission and preservation and the main factor for its survival (Gombrich, 2005, p. 74). Non-Mahāyāna schools denied the authenticity of these new sūtras (Reynolds, 1977, p. 376; McMahan, 1998, p. 252). Despite these preservation efforts, different canonical arrangements and differing sutra versions coexist (Cousins, 2005, p. 97; Hartmann, 2009, p. 95-96; Appleton, 2014, p. 575).

Orally composed texts use repetition as mnemonic device. However, repetition can also be employed as a meditative element in performed and ritual texts (Winternitz, 1972, p.68; Gethin, 2008, xxviii). The emphasis placed on orality and memorization varies by tradition. The advent of writing never fully replaced these practices. Writing and reading merely added another conduit for textual transmission, which in turn created new ritual and devotional practices (Zhiru, 2010, p. 97). Thus, Buddhism remained predominantly an oral tradition (Allen, 1997, p. 3; Gethin, 2008, xvii; Shaw, 2009, p. 129; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 2; Skilling, 2009, p. 71; Collins, 2010, p. 122; Salomon, 2018,
Chap. 3). Early evidence indicates some thought writing/reading inferior to orality as a medium for transmission (Veidlinger, 2006, p. 415). Yet, some vinaya include reading as a valid means of transmission for reciting the Pātimokkha if no other mean for its performance is available (Schopen, 2014, p. 52-53).

The adoption of writing responds to local traditions. In the Indic context, accurate recitation and exact oral transmission were paramount. Writing and reading were generally distrusted and deemed inferior activities. To this day, memorization is still highly regarded (Ray, 1994, p. 31; Allon, 1997, p. 367; Bronkhorst, 2002, p. 1; Gethin, 2008, xvii; Shaw, 2009, p. 129; Hartmann, 2009, p. 98; Malalasekera, 2013, p. 39). This distrust partly emanates from the fact that literacy facilitates unmediated access to reading (Brooks, 2005, p. 158). Buddhism, however, adapted to new contexts and changing environments by translating and writing down its scriptures. This process facilitated the collection and further development of scripture (Wiegand, 2009, p. 532). The expansion of heterodox religions facilitated the transition from orality to literacy in the Indic context (Gupta, 2013, p. 553).

Writing down scriptures has practical consequences (McMahan, 1998, p. 262). Writing has the advantage of potentially preserving the teaching verbatim (Fischer, 2013, p. 41). Regardless of whether Dharma-texts are orally composed or written, their recitation/reading must be easy and aesthetically pleasant (Mizuno, 1982, p. 18). Moreover, writing facilitates analysis, reflection, and discussion, tasks which are not readily available in purely oral contexts. Thus, writing furthers the creation of commentarial literature meant for reference, exegesis, or debate, rather than just for recitation or performance (Anderson, 1999, p. 125; Berkwitz, 2010, p. 105).

In addition to oral, communal recitation conducted in pedagogical, ritual, or ceremonial contexts, writing enables individual, private recitation/reading. However, neither early texts nor religious specialists charged with preserving the scriptures contemplated this scenario (Smart, 1996, p. 106). Access to reading material partly contributed to the dissolution of the bhānakā or reciters institution (Bowden, 2009, p 161). However, transmitting and translating scripture has been a constant in
Buddhist history and a key factor of modern Buddhist revivals (Smart, 1996, p. 125). Access to written materials, particularly printed matter, facilitates the dissemination of ideas and critical reflection, which in turn affects practice (Smart, 1996, p. 286).

**Early Buddhism**

Early texts contain ‘pleasing and agreeable’ monastics who have heard much, engaged in conversation, and preached (A iii 262; Rahula, 1966, p. 288). After the Buddha’s death, monastics convened several councils to ascertain the authenticity of the teachings. As a result, differing canons were created. These were transmitted orally via the *Dharma*-reciters (*Dhammabhānakā*) institution for centuries (Adikaram, 1946, p. 24-32; Allon, 1997, p. 2-3; McQueen, 2005, p. 331; Gummer, 2012, p. 139; Frasch, 2013; Shaw, 2015, p. 427). By then, settled monasticism had developed to preserve and transmit the scriptures, among other duties (Ray, 1994, p. 31). A monastic path centred around learning, preserving, and transmitting scripture (*pariyatti*) frames writing and reading practices (Adikaram, 1946, p. 78). In this context, writing was for the purpose of preservation, reading reserved for public recitation and instruction, not for private reading (McMahan, 1998, p. 253).

The use of writing for recording Buddhist scriptures establishes a *terminus post quem* for reading. Due to famine, war, and the decline of the *Dharma*-reciters institution, Pāli scriptures were first recorded in Sri Lanka in the first century CE (Mhv 33, 100-101; Dip 20, 20-21; Law, 1941, p. 9; Adikaranam, 1946, p. 76; Rahula, 1966, p. 158; Gombrich, 2005, p. 80; Berkwitz, 2009, p. 35; Berkwitz, 2010, p. 49; Olson, 2013, p. 33). Prophecies of decline also justified efforts towards preserving the scriptures (Salomon, 2018, Chap. 2). Concurrently, writing appeared in Gandhāra for similar reasons (Salomon, Allchin and Barnard, 1999, p. 164; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 1; Berkwitz, 2010, p. 50; Salomon, 2018, Chap. 3). Following a Sarvastivāda council, a *Dharma*-text was engraved in copper plates in Kashmir in the first century CE (Mizuno, 1982, p. 161). Writing possibly also developed elsewhere contemporaneously (Salomon, 2006, p. 12). The Pāli *Vinaya* lacks references to the writing of *Dharma*-texts. The Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* develops rules concerning writing scripture. This
however never turned into a grand enterprise (Datta, 1960, p. 15; Schopen, 1997, p. 582). The second-century Divyavadāna also mention reading and writing. Prior to this, although Vinaya, Jātaka, Udāna, and Milindapañha mention texts and writing, the use of writing to preserve religious literature appears unlikely (Allon, 1997, p. 1; Norman, 1997, p. 41; Griffiths, 1999, p. 38; Gombrich, 2005, p. 79; Sujato and Brahmali, 2013, p. 31-32; Malalasekera, 2013, p. 39).


With the advent of reading as practice, handbooks for reading might have been produced. One such example is Dānaśila’s Pustakapāṭhopāya (‘Means of reading a book’) (Datta, 1960, p. 30). The existence of such manuals suggests the extent to which reading had been integrated as a Buddhist practice.

This chapter has shown several attitudes towards writing and reading found amongst early Buddhist schools. It has emphasized the oral character of the earliest Buddhist literature and the relevance of orality in the transmission of the Buddhist dispensation. It has also established a context that enabled the writing down of Buddhist literature and has outlined some of the effects writing had amongst the earliest Buddhist schools.

Although an analysis of these early attitudes is beyond the scope of this dissertation, the following chapter offers a historical overview of reading in Buddhism and surveys reading in different geographical settings to show how various traditions have defined reading and its practice.
Chapter 4: Multiple perspectives of reading in Buddhist traditions

This chapter surveys the various ways some Buddhist traditions have defined, adapted, and sometimes praised or condemned reading as a path of practice.

Theravāda Buddhism

Buddhaghosa, a fifth-century erudite scholar known for his extensive reading, inaugurated the Pāli commentarial literature (Winternitz, 1972, p. 204). Theravāda commentaries define two non-exclusive tasks: scriptural preservation and meditation (Gombrich, 2005, p. 77). Village-dwelling monastics engaged in book-duty (ganthadhura) and teaching (pariyatti). Thought less important, older monastics and those lacking the intellectual skills necessary for executing scholarly duties primarily practiced meditation (vipassānadhura) (Rahula, 1966, p. 159; Carrithers, 1983, p. 141; Tambiah, 1984, p. 53). However, anthropological data suggests many monastic settings disdain scholarly interests and favour meditation and other ascetic practices (Tambiah, 1984, p. 148).

Theravāda monastic institutions developed practical canons in several vernacular languages and scripts (Blackburn, 1999b, p. 281; Berkwitz, 2009, p. 39; Appleton, 2014, p. 579). Pāli, as prestige language, is used for recitation while vernaculars are honoured as languages of instruction (McDaniel, 2009, p. 125).

The colophons of Sri Lankan manuscripts describe the benefits of hearing/reading Dharma-texts: reading has a physical and moral transformative effect, develops wisdom, and brings good fortune (Berkwitz, 2009, p. 43-44). Indeed, listening/reading to Dharma-texts constitutes one of the ten wholesome actions (Crosby, 2014, p. 119).

Mahāyāna Buddhism

The Mahāyāna produced new sūtras considered inspired speech (pratibhāna) as well as Buddhavacana (Harrison, 2003, p. 124; McQueen, 2005, p. 312). However, earlier schools discouraged
their reading since they could count only as poetry, but not as *Buddhavacana* (Mizuno, 1982, p. 125; McQueen, 2005, p. 314).

Mahāyāna sūtras were also stylistically different from earlier sūtras (McMahan, 1998, p. 249). Whereas earlier sūtras display stylistic traits aimed at facilitating their memorisation and recitation, Mahāyāna sūtras use hyperbole and imagery as a way to engage new audiences. They use direct address, assume the presence of listeners/readers, and discuss reading. This immerses Mahāyāna literature largely within an oral culture where transmission was rarely exclusively oral (McMahan, 1998, p. 251; Cole, 2005, p. 14; Flores, 2008, p 14; Berkowitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 2; Drewes, 2011, p. 362; Montgomery *et al.*, 2013, p. 188-189).

Regarding content, some Mahāyāna scriptures read as guides to meditation and visualization, which adds a performative element to the practice (Cleary, 1993, p. 50; Harrison, 2003, p. 122; Williams, 2009, p. 45). This contrasts with compositions in Theravāda contexts, where oral preaching was the main performative aspect (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 55).

As to authority, each Mahāyāna sūtra claims a unique position within the Buddhist teaching and legitimizes its worship. This self-referential attitude justifies several cults revolving around specific texts (Smith, 1993, p. 6; De Simini, 2016, p. 2). Each of these cults claims their sūtra is a complete, authoritative path of practice which can be fully grasped and experienced through sūtra reading and worship (Cole, 2005, p. 2).

As writing was becoming a cultural tool in India, it also became one of the main means for disseminating and establishing Mahāyāna Buddhism (McMahan, 1998, p. 254-255; Gombrich, 2005; Berkowitz, 2010, p. 77). Mahāyāna sūtras still praised memorization and its virtues, but adapted its uses and functions to include a cultic, ritual dimension, and assign roles to the laity (McMahan, 1998, p. 273; Skilling, 2009, p. 72).
Mahāyāna favours communal, aloud reading, rather than solitary, silent reading, possibly as a form of chanting or psalmody to aid memorization (Williams, 2009, p. 45; Zürcher, 2013, p. 334).

**Tantra**

A new genre of *Dharma*-texts containing its own strategies of legitimization, Tantras form an open-ended, incomplete canon transmitted in secret (Davidson, 2002, p. 241; Gray, 2009, p. 1). Tantras are revealed in dreams, rituals, or meditations (Gray, 2009, p. 16, 22). Some Tantras stipulate the reading of *Prajñāpāramitā* literature and ritual actions and initiations for all aspirants to Enlightenment (Winternitz, 1972, p. 390). Some Tantras are allegedly hidden in rock formations and caves, which became pilgrimage sites over time (Elliot, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014, p. 16). Consonant with the *termā* tradition, Tantric revelations might have textual precedents in earlier Mahāyāna literature (Harrison, 2003, p. 124; Williams, 2009, p. 40). Reading Tantra is restricted to adepts initiated in its practice and prohibited to the rest (Rambelli, 2006, p. 55; Yoeli-Tlalim, 2009, p. 420). Even seeing a copy of a Tantric text is forbidden without initiation. Thus, most Tantras remain ontologically unreadable since they exist somewhere inaccessible to most until revealed. Esoteric Theravāda traditions partly participate in this secrecy. For instance, Cambodian *achār/grūṅ* (meditation teachers) in the *borān kammatthāna* tradition would carry meditation manuals with them that only they would access and use to corroborate the meditation attainments of their disciples (Crosby, 2020, p. 72).

**Tibetan Buddhism**

Tibetan Buddhist observances comprise several forms of verbalized religion, including writing and reading (Ekvall, 1964, p. 55, 98; Van Schaik, 2016, p. 4). Tibetans treat all writing with reverence (Elliot, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014a, p. 47). Schaeffer (2014, vii) defines Tibet as a culture of the book. Shuchen, the eighteenth-century editor of the Dergē Tengyur, lists ten scholarly practices integral to the path, including listening, reading, and reciting texts (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 142). Reading follows a practical pedagogy comprising liturgical, ritual, and meditational texts, canonical reading being of secondary importance (Kapstein, 2000, p. 78). Canonical collections, representing the presence of the
Dharma, surround Tibetan and Bhutanese altars (Kapstein, 2000, p. 237; Rigyal and Prude, 2017, p. 67).

**Reading-transmission**

Reading-permissions or reading-transmissions (*lung*) are a characteristic element within Tibetan Buddhism. Used to formalize a teacher-student relationship, occasionally reading-transmissions are given simultaneously to many people, or are given by dākini (Rheingang, 2010, p. 282; Van Schaik, 2016, p. 29). Reading-transmissions consist of a teacher reading a text aloud, thereby authorizing a student to study a restricted text while also showing how to understand it by giving its accompanying oral instructions (Harvey, 2013, p. 207, 348). This liberating instruction should be accompanied by empowerments by a qualified master. Practice guides sometimes also accompany the oral instructions (Padmakara Translation Group, 1994, xxxv). Receiving a reading-transmission situates a practitioner within a legitimate transmission lineage (Kim, 2013, p. 247; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 2; Van Schaik, 2016, p. 5; Khandro, 2020). Reading from the physical script is *conditio sine qua non* for an effective transmission, as well as listening to the sound of those words, since these implicitly contain the guru’s blessing (Urgyen Rinpoche, in Kungsang, 1994, p. 18; Khandro, 2020). Reading-transmissions ensure the accurate transference of form and content, particularly important if mantras and other formulas are written in Sanskrit. A reading-based transmission without a qualified teacher’s oral instruction implies the end of genuine practice (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 1). Reading-transmissions, and the authority derived from them, thus depend on the presence of teacher, teaching, student, reading, and the manuscript which symbolises the teaching. Hence, reading without having acquired the prerequisites is deemed useless and possibly dangerous (Bretfeld, 2007, p. 355; Khandro, 2020).

Related to this, in Zen contexts, copies of certain *sūtras*, like the *Platform Sūtra*, functioned as transmission documents indicating that one belonged to a particular school, namely the Huineng’s school (Schlütter, 2017, p. 436). It also meant that one had read enough, the text becoming a symbol of one’s status along the Path (Rambelli, 2006, p. 55).
**Terma**

*Terma* (treasure-texts) are texts concealed by the eight-century yogi Padmasambhāva and his consort Yeshe Tsogyal in secret locations awaiting their discovery by treasure-finders (*tertöns*) (Dorje, 2006, xli). Their discovery requires faith, merit, another *terma*, a teacher’s instruction, or instructions written in guides to these locations (Clemente, 2014, p. 57). Padmasambhāva grants reading-permissions and empowerments to *tertöns* directly (Urgyen Rinpoche, in Kungsang, 1994, p. 16). The concealment of texts has precedents in India and China (Dorje, 2006, xli). *Dharma*-texts can also suddenly appear (BA, p. 38-39; Steinkellner, 2004, p. 7; Apple, 2014, p. 4). Texts other than *terma* are also hidden to avoid their disappearance.

**Mongolian Buddhism**

*Dharma*-texts entered Mongolia with the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism. Due to Mongolian paper production, *Dharma*-volumes proliferated in the seventeenth century (Wallace, 2009a, p. 83). Originally, texts were copied in Tibetan, which only a few could read (Wallace, 2009a, p. 86). Besides canonical collections, abridged, easy to carry textual collections in Tibetan, Mongolian and/or Manchu were produced to suit nomadic lifestyles (Wallace, 2009a, p. 78-79).

**Chinese Buddhism**

Japanese Buddhism

From China and Korea, Buddhism entered Japan through the transmission and copying of texts (Kornicki, 2009, p. 111). Scriptures in Japan kept the original Chinese and were read/recited using the traditional Chinese pronunciation (Smith, 1993, p. 156). This meant that reading for understanding was the domain of a few intellectuals and trained monastics until later in Japanese history (Tanabe, 2004, p. 137).

Vietnamese Buddhism

In Vietnam, as in Korea, Chinese remained the main canonical language (McHale, 2004, p. 149). Whereas reading was reserved for a few educated intellectuals, most accessed Buddhist knowledge via vernacular works and sermons. From the seventeenth century, printing presses produced works on history, philosophy, Zen and Pure Land Sūtras, and magazines, initially still in Chinese, but increasingly in Vietnamese from the 1920s (McHale, 2004, p. 151, 153-154).

Ch’ān/Zen

Both Zen monastics and the laity engage in sūtra-recitation/reading daily (Mohr, 2000, p. 256; Welter, 2008; Joskovich, 2019, p. 53). However, some Zen literature questions the authority of scriptures and undermines merit-making textual and ritual practices involving texts and readings as they reify both Dharma and Buddha (Wright, 1998, p. 30). This aniconic, apophatic attitude, based on some Buddhist and Taoist precedents, emphasizes direct experience and sudden enlightenment, and disparages overreliance on texts for practice and transmission (Levering, 1989b, p. 63; Bielefeldt, 1992, p. 490; Heine and Wright, 2004, p. 3; Heine, 2008, p. 38; Flores, 2008, p. 121, 126; Heller, 2009, p. 111; Joskovich, 2019, p. 54). As a special transmission outside the scriptures, Zen anti-scripturalism saw some Zen masters destroying, discarding, and abusing scriptures (Heine and Wright, 2004, p. 3; Joskovich, 2019, p. 54). Dōgen believes that this attitude is regrettable as sūtra-reading implies accessing the transmission of the Patriarchs (Sbgz. 3 Bukkyo).
Paradoxically, reverence for the biography and teachings of Zen masters popularised and reformulated reading\textsuperscript{81} by monastics and the laity as education or enjoyment (Smith, 1993, p. 154; Wright, 1998, p. 21; Wright, 2003, p. 267; Welter, 2004, p. 198; Heller, 2009, p. 122). Reading became a means to receive transmission directly from a Patriarch’s heart/mind (Hori, 2006, p. 205). Additionally, Zen has created not only new literary genres (kōan, commentaries, recorded sayings,\textsuperscript{82} letters, Zen phrase books), but also the largest scriptural canon in East Asia (Wright, 2003, p. 261, 263; Heine and Wright, 2004, p. 4; Heine, 2008, p. 37).

Zen transmission, particularly via kōan\textsuperscript{83} and poetry,\textsuperscript{84} requires the use of rhetoric and figurative speech\textsuperscript{85} for its transmission (Wright, 1998, p. 22; Flores, 2008, p. 126; Heine, 2016 p. 349). To this end, Zen employs language and literary devices to overturn readers’ expectations and experiences (Heine, 2016, p. 354). An analysis of the content of Zen literature also shows that, far from being purely the produce of a master’s enlightened mind, as it is often claimed, it draws material from folk stories, hagiographies, and other Buddhist literature, among other material\textsuperscript{86} (Berling, 1987, p. 71; Cole, 2005, p. 23; Flores, 2008, p. 129). Its inclusion in canonical collections expanded the definition of scripture (Heller, 2009, p. 112).

For understanding, Zen recommends the study of sūtras\textsuperscript{87} (Mumon, 2004, 30). However, Zen denies ultimate wisdom can be obtained from this (Mizuno, 1982, p. 145; Mohr, 2000, p. 263). As practice, however, Zen monastics engage in sūtra recitals, ‘turning texts’, and reading the entire canon (Wright, 2003, p. 264-265).

Reading in Zen becomes a form of meditation. While reading, readers negotiate their place in the text, respond to it, imitate teachers and patriarchs, and place themselves within the tradition\textsuperscript{88} (Wright, 2006, p. 6-7). For Zen readers, reading is also an expression of their mastery.\textsuperscript{89} Kōan reading, for instance, constitutes a conduit for experiencing language samādhi (Sekida, 1985, p. 99). Thus, some Zen masters encouraged the reading of collections such as Wu-men kuan (Shūdō, 2004, p. 207-208).
Dōgen

For Dōgen, sūtra-reading leads to understanding of Buddhist doctrines and to faith in Buddha and Dharma (Harvey, 2013, p. 232). Dōgen instructs reading for the benefit of sponsors and for merit-making purposes. Reading can be done silently, aloud, or by ‘turning’ pages and/or libraries (Griffith Foulk, 2006, p. 143).

Dōgen repeats that through reading alone, however, ultimate truth cannot be obtained (Nishijima and Cross, 1994, p. 261; 1997, p. 85). Dōgen argues that contemplating nature, the ‘realization of the words of eternal buddhas’ is no different than reading Sūtras (Sbgz. 1 Sansuigyo 175; Nishijima and Cross, 1994, p. 167). Thus, Dōgen expands the definition of sūtra to include the whole universe, equated here with the Dharmakāya (Sbgz. 1 Kankin; Nishijima and Cross, 1994, p. 261; Sbgz. 3 Bukkyo 23; Sbgz. 4 Jisho-zanmai 82). For the truth of the practice is in the reading act itself, not in the content of what is read: reading is for the purpose of expressing Buddha-nature, not for the attainment of Buddhahood (Humphreis, 1999, xvii, 41; Joskovich, 2019, p. 61).

Pure Land Buddhism

Reading as spiritual practice of Pure Land texts constitutes a performative act (Wiliams, 2009, p. 40).

In Pure Land Buddhism, reading transforms readers as a form of grace (Wright, 2003, p. 270). This contrasts with the Ch’an/Zen self-power attitude towards reading as meditation, where its efficiency depends on the reader.

Nichiren Buddhism

Besides faith and chanting practice, Nichiren-inspired Buddhisms recommend reading to understand Nichiren’s teachings (Causton, 1988, p. 243). Nichiren’s letters and treatises (Gosho) are the object of non-academic reading. The Gosho is read in lectures and courses, and in daily practice, where it can be read one line or phrase a day (Causton, 1988, p. 264-265).
This chapter has offered an overview of how different Buddhist traditions have regarded reading as it acquired roles within ceremonial, ritual, pedagogical, and merit-making contexts. ‘Appendix A: Merit, cults, and pedagogies’ describes some of these roles in detail. Buddhist texts appear in a number of supports, from rock carving, to manuscripts and printed books, to electronic formats and digital platforms. In particular, electronic and digital resources not only facilitate access to reading material but also open up new ways of reading texts and produce new forms of merit-making activities involving texts and reading. ‘Appendix B: Merit, copying, and preserving Dharma-texts’ offers a fuller account of reading formats and typologies.

The following chapter explores reading in modern Buddhism and the reception of Buddhist texts by contemporary readers. It first presents reading in the context of Asian Buddhist revivals and the transmission of Buddhism to the West. It then examines the role of reading in terms of conversion to Buddhism and as an element of knowledge and practice of Buddhism in contemporary settings.
Chapter 5: Buddhist revivals and modern contexts

This chapter examines the role reading played in nineteenth and twentieth-century Buddhist revivals. It also surveys the position of reading in the transmission of Buddhism to the West. Lastly, it reviews the modes of reception of Buddhist literature and the place reading occupies for modern Buddhists.

Buddhist revivals

Throughout its history, Buddhism has spread through texts and reading. Particularly since the nineteenth century, texts and reading have been used to revive Buddhist practice and to counteract and compete with other religions (Smart, 1996, p. 286). In some places, like Sri Lanka or Vietnam, colonial authorities thought monastics had neglected their scriptural duties since many appeared to be illiterate. In response, and sometimes motivated by the laity, Buddhism encouraged the production and dissemination of Dharma-texts (Malalgoda, 1976, p. 27; Zürcher, 1984, p. 211; McHale, 2004, p. 145-146). By emphasizing textual duties, however, other practices and esoteric traditions were neglected (Thompson, 2017, p. 245).

Several nineteenth-century sūtra anthologies were compiled and distributed emulating the model of Christian Bibles in Japan and Sri Lanka (Bond, 1988, p. 119; Wilkinson and Friedrick, 2017). The Theravāda promoted its revival by emphasizing the authority of the Pāli canon. This is somewhat paradoxical considering the currency of practical canons in the pedagogies of Theravāda Buddhism throughout history (Collins, 1994, p. 102-103). Anagārika Dharmapāla (1864-1933), inspired by his reading of pioneer Western titles like Olcott’s *Buddhist Catechism* (1881), promoted the revitalization of Buddhism in Sri Lanka. Olcott’s book is still popular in Sri Lanka (McMahan, 2008, p. 99).

Nineteenth-century revivalist and reformist Buddhist movements are characterised by scripturalism, rationalism, individualism, and universalism, among other traits consonant with Westernising tendencies of Buddhist modernism (Tambiah, 1976, p. 208; Bond, 1988, p. 35; Hanse, 2007, p. 2;
Proceski, 2017, p. 85). Scripturalism is characterized by a normalization of the monastic curriculum, a return to canonical texts and languages, and the production and dissemination of scripture, among other factors (Tambiah, 1976, p. 211-212).


This emphasis on reading moved knowledge transmission further from mainly an oral transmission to a reading-based transmission (McHale, 2004, p. 171; Scott, 2013, p. 32). These dissemination efforts also encouraged the production of scholarly works on lexicography and textual study, among others genres, which furthered the academic interest on Buddhism, as well as the publication of works by contemporary monastics and periodicals, many of which included articles translated from foreign languages (Scott, 2013, p. 39; Soucy, 2017, p. 186; Poceski, 2017, p. 90).

**Buddhism in the West**

Buddhism was first introduced in the West principally as a textual tradition (Almond, 1988, p. 33; Baumann, 1994; Lopez, 1995a, p. 7; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 8; Obadia, 2013, p. 165; Cheah, 2017, p. 329). These first texts catered to Western audiences, and often lacked accuracy (Coleman, 2001, p. 7; Kasulis, 2007, p. 42-43). These texts, full of Western stereotypes of Asian cultures, betrayed a European Protestant focus on texts and rational/scientific explanations proper of Orientalized, Protestant Buddhisms (Goldberg, 1999, p. 344-345; Snodgrass, 2009, p. 49; Falk, 2011).\(^93\) They form a hybrid tradition amply drawing from the European Enlightenment, Romanticism, and Transcendentalism, among other sources\(^94\) (McMahan, 2008, p. 5).

The popularity of these texts was also felt in Asia, where they were published and translated into many languages (Nathan, 2017, p. 113). One such text is Carus’ *The Gospel of Buddha* (1894), once read for edification in Sri Lanka and Japan (Winternitz, 1972, p. 422). However, Asian Buddhism showed modernising and scripturalist trends already before colonization, and modern, new Buddhism responds to global trends and movements in relation to exclusive local settings (McMahan, 2008, p. 6; Foxeus, 2017, p. 213).

Buddhism has aligned with several therapies by emphasizing individualism through a psychologizing process (Illouz, 2008, p. 2-3). This has produced a number of therapy-like, self-help approaches and publications, often providing ‘commodified quick-fix advice’ (Illouz, 2008, p. 13-14).

Modern Buddhism has created new forms of reading. Modern Buddhists and sympathisers favour written texts (and increasingly audiobooks, podcasts, and a range of other formats) and solitary, silent reading. Given the popularity and availability of Dharma-texts, that type of reading is now felt across the Buddhist world (Smith, 1993, p. 165). Preference for book reading over ritual chanting is also observed in some Asian traditions transplanted to the West (Coward, 1986, p. 302).

Popular monastic figures and international bestsellers like Thich Nhat Hanh, Deshimaru, or the Dalai Lama reinterpret traditional Buddhism for these new audiences (Obadia, 2013, p. 179). This partly results in the Westernization of Buddhism and the selection and adaptation of some doctrines. Western publications are often commentarial or popularising works based on historical or Asian Dharma-texts or scripture simplified for general consumption (Obadia, 2013, p. 175-176). Due to globalization, these reinterpretations have become normative across the Buddhist world (Konik, 2009, p. 10). Zen popularisers have transplanted an anti-scholastic, anti-intellectualist streak of Zen
literature consonant with Western countercultures (Segdwick, 2005, p. 179). This has partly produced an intellectualised version of Buddhism which neglects ritual and popular forms of practice and emphasizes rationality, meditation, and compatibility with science (McMahan, 2008, p. 7; Obadia, 2013, p. 172).

Western Dharma practitioners feel freer to organise their own reading due to a more democratic access to education in the West (Obadia, 2013, p. 177). Modernists and modern Western practitioners are generally self-conscious, well-off, well-educated, middle-class, more liberal and respectful of diversity, less committed to organised religion, and more inclined toward exploring spirituality through meditation and reading (Coleman, 1999, p. 95; Coleman, 2001, p. 20; Bluck, 2006, p. 190; Tamney, 2008, p. 226, 228-229, 232). Given its commodification, Buddhism is most visible as a form of elitist practice, requiring access to resources and time to read, acquire equipment, or attend lectures and retreats (Nattier, 1997, p. 79-80).

You cannot learn Buddhism from a book

A frequent trope asserts that Buddhism cannot be learnt from a book and that practitioners always require the guidance of a teacher (Bell, 2002, p. 230). This partly contradicts historical evidence indicating that, histories of Buddhism, biographies, meditation manuals, and descriptions of the path were immensely popular and were in many cases considered definitive instruction handbooks (Goonatilake, 2000, p. 38-39; McMahan, 2008, p. 185). For instance, the Visuddhimagga is considered by the mainstream Theravāda tradition both a reference work and a detailed meditation manual (Carrithers, 1983, p. 46). Contemporary meditation handbooks for Western practitioners serve the same purpose (Brahm, 2006b, p. 4). However, meditation and practice manuals in esoteric transmission lineages served as memory-aids to practical instructions rather than explicit meditation manuals. This made these documents impossible to read for narrative instruction, which in that context could only and fully be supplied by a teacher (Crosby, 2020, p. 71).
These assertions emphasize practice and direct experience\textsuperscript{101} over book learning. This overemphasis on experience, partly produced by revivalist and reformist Asian movements and Western transformations, is not necessarily corroborated by ethnographic and historical data (Sharf, 1995).

This trope appears frequently in Western Zen.\textsuperscript{102} However, some of the same books expressing these ideas often also recount, and praise, the benefits of reading.\textsuperscript{103} More balanced positions, however, recommend abandoning unwholesome, unhelpful, indiscriminate reading of, for instance, novels, newspapers, or magazines, among other unsuitable material\textsuperscript{104} (Kapleau, 2000b, p. 24).

Statistical data indicates that most Western Buddhists frequently or occasionally read about Buddhism, with only under five percent rarely or never reading about Buddhism (Coleman, 1999, p. 97). This means that most Western Buddhists base or complement their practice with reading.

This section has shown that texts and reading have a far-ranging effect in contemporary Buddhist transmission and practice. Reading \textit{Dharma}-texts, practice manuals, and other Buddhist-related literature is commonplace for Buddhist practitioners, Buddhist sympathizers, and spiritual seekers. Reading, once reserved for a privileged few with the skills and means necessary willing to engage with its practice, has now possibly become, together with podcasts, audiobooks, and other media, the primary means by which Buddhism is not only transmitted, but, to a certain extent, also sustained.

\textbf{Conversion and affiliation}

Several generations of readers and Buddhists in the West have been influenced and converted to Buddhist practice through reading. This section explores some of the issues around conversion and affiliation to Buddhism in relation to reading.

Reading is a means of gaining knowledge of one’s own religion, but also of ‘encountering the religious “other”’ (Paloutzian, 1996, p. 19-20; Roland, 2012, p. 341). Each time a text is heard/read constitutes an opportunity for conversion. Conversion denotes ‘a change towards more religious belief,
behaviour, or commitment’ (Argyle, 2000, p. 19). This could happen without an individual participating or affiliating to any organised group (Lowenthal, 2000, p. 47).

Conversion, either sudden or gradual, could result from reading/hearing\textsuperscript{105} (Waples, Berelson and Bradshaw, 1940, p. 13, 121). Exposure to a text might produce a gradual shift in identity or belief due to intellectual and cognitive factors following a personal, conscious quest to seek meaning\textsuperscript{106} (Paloutzian, 1996, p. 149; Bowman, 2000; Sutcliffe, 2000). This intellectual/cognitive conversion type/motif usually follows a life-changing situation, like an illness or the death of a relative.\textsuperscript{107}


This type of self-conversion seems prevalent given the popularity and accessibility of books,\textsuperscript{108} websites, and other media (Strauss, 1979, p. 162; Lowenthal, 2000, p. 47; Snook, Williams, and Horgan, 2019, p. 231). Access to spirituality through literature belongs to the mythic/narrative religious dimension (Smart, 1996, p. 163). Several generations of Buddhists in the West can be said to be in fact ‘self-converted followers of the teaching’ through reading\textsuperscript{109} (Baumann, 2002, p. 87).

This is however not just a contemporary phenomenon. There are historical instances of conversion and spiritual transformation through reading.\textsuperscript{110} For instance, Tibetan biographies abound with examples of experiences leading to contemplative trances and more committed forms of practice.\textsuperscript{111}

For the West, reading once represented an access point for knowledge of Buddhism and perhaps conversion to its practice. Titles like Arnold’s \textit{Light of Asia} (1879), Olcott’s\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Buddhist Catechism} (1881), or Carus’ \textit{The Gospel of the Buddha} (1894) had a profound impact in early Western Buddhist readers\textsuperscript{113} (Almond, 1988, p. 1; Baumann, 1995, p. 56; Tweed, 2000, p. 46; Obadia, 2013, p. 173).

Reading still represents a means of access to Buddhism, since converts to Buddhism in the West often encounter it through reading (Parker, 2007, p. 31; Tanaka, 2007, p. 122). Converts tend to be ‘young,
affluent, liberal, intelligent, and overwhelming white’ (Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels, 2008, p. 101).

When reading determines conversion and/or constitutes a central element in someone’s practice, one can be defined as a bookshop Buddhist (Gordon-Finlayson and Daniels, 2008, p. 100). In this sense, bookshop Buddhists could more appropriately be referred to as sympathizers or practitioners (Campergue, 2015, p. 447).

Gordon-Finlayson (2012, p. 171-173) provides some examples of responses to reading as conversion motif. His informants relate how reading about Buddhism was revelatory, bewildering, inspirational, or stimulating. Importantly, some individuals relate how reading about Buddhism confirmed their existing worldview or made them resolute to pursue Buddhist practice (Parker, 2007, p. 95; Gordon-Finlayson, 2012, p. 195-196). Convert Buddhists often prefer easy, accessible Dharma-texts, such as the Dhammapada, as well as Western, lay commentators, such as Jack Kornfield, Joseph Goldstein, Sharon Salzberg, or Tara Brach, and popular, relatable texts by ordained authors such as Ajahn Chah, Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, or Pema Chödrön, over scripture (Eddy, 2012, p. 35-36). Interestingly, Gordon-Finlayson (2012, p. 162) reports cases of converts to Buddhism whose descriptions of meditation experience resemble what they had read in books, although they claimed to be an inner experience. This shows how the content of what one reads mediates one’s experience of the world.

**Reception and responses**

Based on the context presented above, the following section examines some issues related to the reading of Buddhist texts by modern Buddhist readers and some of their responses to these texts.

**Readers and text**

Literary works are actualised and acquire meaning through reading (Eagleton, 1983, p. 74; Ricoeur, 1990, p. 158; Manguel, 2008, p. 113; Zwilling, 2013, p. 209-210). This actualisation also occurs every time a text is remembered, recited, and meditated upon (Collins, 2010, p. 122). The experiences of
readers when reading and after reading confer meaning to the texts. The study of these practices of interpretation constitutes a history of reading (Culler, 1997, p. 63; Chartier, 2002a, p. 48).

Readers adopt at least three strategies when reading religious literature (Flores, 2008, p. 19, 49):

- traditional readers accept all aspects of the text, including its inherent worldview, and can also read texts as literature;
- sympathetic readers accept the content of the text but offer symbolical interpretations;
- recent readers, who, suspicious of the claims made by texts, read texts as literature but often reject any epic, mythical, and dogmatic claims.

Whereas traditional readers accept the claims found in religious texts, suspicious and sceptic readers interpret texts in political, psychological, or other terms. Literary readers are more open than dogmatists or sceptics and appear more flexible in their interpretations (Flores, 2008, p. 29, 49).

The Buddha praises those who accept the Dharma in order to practice it rather than those who engage only in its interpretation (M i 145). The Buddha, who disapproves of self-deception and mimicry, also reprimands those monastics who delight in literary works but fail to understand the Dhamma. Thus, skilful readers would be those who read mindfully and understand figurative language in doctrinal terms and who can therefore put the teaching into practice (Flores, 2008, p. 100).

**Religious reading**

For Griffiths (1999) religions offer comprehensive, unsurpassable, and central accounts of reality. Reading religiously implies obtaining the knowledge necessary to learn that account (Griffith, 1999, p. 40). The main motivation for acquiring reading skills in most contexts is to access religious, mainly ritual, literature (Drewes, 2003, p. 82). Religions employ several literary genres to convey their accounts of reality, doctrines, and practices (Kramer, 1986, p. 11-12).

Religious readers are a type of ideal reader who read/hear, reread, memorize, ponder, comment, anthologize, expound, and embody scriptures (Griffiths, 1999, p. 147). Odiseos (2020) believes that
(...) until we western Buddhists embrace this more immersive way of studying the core texts and teachings of whatever traditions we are in, it will be harder for the Dharma to really take root in the soil here, like it has wherever it has gone, taking on its own characteristics reflecting our culture but not budging an inch in its authenticity and potency.

Reading religious literature raises theological as well as ethical issues, as one might be reading on a religion to which one does not subscribe (Barnes, 2011, p. 390). Religious literature expects adherents and non-believers alike to read respectfully and requires a reverential attitude towards what is read (Kramer, 1987, p. 13; Griffiths, 1999, p. 42). Religious literature asks readers to find statements of truth from within texts or from an authority (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 293-294). Besides, religious readers experience a range of aesthetic responses, like joy, while reading (Griffiths, 1999, p. 43).

There is a practice within Western traditions of reading literature, including philosophy, as a spiritual, meditative exercise (Hadot, 1995; Stock, 1998). Reading spiritually requires a mindful, reflective practice whereby readers confront themselves with authors, texts, and other readers in a humble, vulnerable way (Coleman, 2009, p. 39, 60). Thus, reading becomes work on the self and for self-improvement (Bloom, 2000, p. 19, 24; Fischer, 2013, p. 344). Buddhist stories, when read ethically, can have a transformative effect on individuals seeking to understand their own condition and place in the world (McClintock, 2017, p. 185-187).

To lead to enlightenment, reading also needs the right motivation (Humphreis, 1999, p. 80). For instance, Shinran commended those who read bearing Amida’s vow in mind (Smith, 1993, p. 167). Using reading as contemplation enables readers to distinguish emotional responses from intellectual responses so that reading becomes not only the object of experience also but the subject of knowledge (Littau, 2006, p. 94, 98). As a spiritual discipline, reading develops qualities consonant with the Buddhist path: alertness, attention, and compassion, among others (Coleman, 2009, p. 125-126). Moreover, literary works, including scripture, can have a liberating effect on readers (Regan, 1998, p. 147).
Although there is no correlation between literacy and spirituality, reading might lead to religious attitudes and engagement, but not constitute the whole of the spiritual life (Coleman, 2009, p. 8, 25). Reading can however lead to confusion\(^{114}\) and become a hindrance to personal development and spirituality\(^{115}\) (Vism, iii 29; Smith, 1993, p. 155; Shaw, 2009, p. 89-90). This is because readers might overidentify with characters or action. They might assume mastery, possession\(^{116}\) and ideological control over texts. They might also indulge in self-gratification, confuse the practice of reading with the practices described in the text,\(^{117}\) or reduce the content of the teaching to rules and regulations to be followed literally\(^{118}\) (Littau, 2006, p. 65, 156; Hawkeye, 2013, p. 44; Flores, 2008, p. 3; Coleman, 2009, p. 45). Readers might also become attached to the teachings (D i 135; Ānānāmoli and Bodhi, 2001, p. 1209n255) or to the merit and benefit expected from the reading act\(^{119}\) (Shūdō, 2004, p. 228). Similar caveats can be raised against recitation (Vism 95; Collins, 1992, p. 123).

Religious readers are ideal readers because, as Nichiren and Dōgen recommended, they receive, recreate, and embody the story they read (Kramer, 1987, p. 13; Smith, 1993, p. 167; Eubanks, 2011, p. 180). That story becomes thus part of their experience and memory and so each text becomes autobiographical (Manguel, 2010, p. 151-152). Hence, the end of reading, like the end of practice, is unending (Griffiths, 1999, p. 41; Manguel, 2015, p. 97).

Careful, slow, vocalised reading and rereading aids memorization and deeper understating (Kramer, 1987, p. 12; Griffiths, 1999, p. 51). Religious reading can also be silent and meditational, while being withdrawn from the world (Kramer, 1987, p. 13). Readers recreate the world represented in Dharma-texts through rereading (Cole, 2005, p. 13).

Religious reading is opposed to consumerist and critical readings of scripture mainly because critical reading undermines the religious account and the claim to authority made by scripture (Griffiths, 1999, p. 42; Zwilling, 2013, p. 212).
Religious literary genres, like all literary genres, imply norms and expectations for their composition and reading (Berling, 1987, p. 58-59). The analysis of these genres thus gives indication as to their readership and the limits of their interpretation.

**Reading literature**

Several scholars have analysed Buddhist literature from a literary perspective. The Buddha, like later authors, used metaphors, similes, analogies, and other rhetorical devices (Gombrich, 2006b, p. 65-95). The need to adapt a teaching to its audience justifies the use of these devices. Thus, through skilful means, audiences are brought to the *Dharma* by both the content and the style of sermons (Chaturvedi, 2010, p. 74).

Reading religiously imposes certain parameters, like faith, devotion, instruction, or authority, which might limit textual interpretation. However, reading *Dharma*-texts as literature might free readers from these constraints. As Flores (2008, p. 9) puts it:

> More than those who are committed to the doctrine, those who read Buddhist scriptures as literature may read freely and creatively, since they temporarily suspend disbelief, or indeed belief on the text’s solicitations. They read with due respect, but less piously, less pedantically, and more playfully, more critically. Reading the texts as literature allows and encourages readers to imagine and speculate—in ways which dogmatists or scholars may disdain—about the existential pathos behind the texts’ formulaic repetitions.

Most readers/hearers have become acquainted with the doctrinal content of Buddhism through sermons, stories, and chants, many of a narrative, poetical, and literary character (Appleton, 2014, p. 581). Thus, reading Buddhist literature *qua* literature offers some parameters of interpretation to understand reading *Dharma*-texts.

However, reading *Dharma*-texts only as literature might produce misunderstandings about the contexts where sermons originated and the purpose for their transmission. When reading *Dharma*-texts as works of imagination, readers might access the aesthetic dimension of texts and disregard the truth statements and religious accounts proposed by these texts (Adler and Van Doren, 1972, p. 205).
In fact, Brehm (2017, p. 188) encourages poetry readers to focus on noticing with mindfulness rather than analysing and interpreting. Brehm (2021, p. 11-13) however suggests poetry can guide readers in their spiritual practice, serve as spiritual exemplars and teachers, and be beneficial in developing qualities, like awareness or nonduality, consonant with some aspects of the Buddhist path.

Certain Buddhist traditions also regulate the reading of non-Buddhist literature. For instance, the precept to refrain from entertainment is understood to mean that some genres, for instance, romantic novels or thrillers make unsuitable reading material (Bell, 1991, p. 278). However, some of this type of literature has occasionally been read qua Buddhist literature. For example, Hesse’s *Siddhartha* or Rampa’s *The Third Eye* and its sequels, among others, have enjoyed great popularity.

**Religious experiences**

There are numerous cases of religious and enlightenment experiences produced by reading. These usually occur either while reading, forming in one’s mind and producing trances, or after reading, producing a transformation (Goodell, 2008, p. 94-95). The authenticity of these experiences requires corroboration from scriptural authority and/or a teacher’s approval (Sbgz. 3 Menju 186). By experiencing a realization by reading, one can be said to be born directly from the Buddha’s mouth (Abé, 2005, p. 301).

**Modernity, secularism, globalization**

Buddhist religious readers, Buddhist sympathisers, and Buddhist literature qua literature readers inhabit modern, literate societies that assume private study and silent reading as the most efficient means to acquire knowledge (Graham, 1986, p. 23). Books as commodities and readers as consumers constitute signs of this modernity (Towheed, 2011, p. 4; Frost, 2011, p. 29; Fischer, 2013, p. 295). Their cheapness and availability in bookshops, temples, train stations, or online and electronic environments, stimulates literacy, but also turns reading into a more undetermined, anonymous practice (Raven, 2015, p 143; Scott, R., 2017, p. 202). Buddhist organizations embrace media technologies to disseminate Buddhism and promote themselves (Grieve and Veidlinger, 2017). Hence,
some Buddhist books and literature participate in the commodification of the religion and its practice (Coleman, 2009, p. 27). For Borup (2016, p. 141):

Buddhism has been transformed from an intellectual capital and practice path for the elite to an easily approachable mindset for the masses in which consumerism, commodification, and mediatization are part of the neo-liberal market where spirituality is for sale.


Western and non-Buddhist readers, culturally determined by their own literacy and religious practices, impose their own interpretative parameters onto their Buddhist reading (Elster, 2003, p. 663; Carrette and King, 2005, p. 95). In this context, Buddhism appeals to educated individuals for whom faith operates as a rational reflection consonant with the European Enlightenment: reason, truth, universal validity, and betterment (Heelas, 2005, p. 261). For most of them, Buddhism is consonant with individualism, personal responsibility, and liberal, democratic values, and fosters introspection and scientific knowledge rather than the adoption of doctrines and the practice of rituals (Wynne, 2015, p. 266).

Books, being agents of societal change since the Enlightenment period, are now also a paramount element of consumerism (Certeau, 1988, p. 166-167). In post-Enlightenment contexts, the predominant mode of reading is silent, solitary, informational, and efficient reading detrimental to rhetoric and memorization (Graham, 1986 p. 23). Due to the effect of secularization and print culture, reading scripture remains historically anomalous in this context (Graham, 1986). In this sense, writing and reading represent solitary, disembodied activities which ‘throw the psyche back on itself’ (Ong, 2012, p. 68).
Consumption might incite addictive, ephemeral types of reading, leading to ‘hasty and impressionistic’ reading experiences, often for ‘self-gratification’ and opposed to religious reading (Littau, 2006, p. 43, 48, 156). Consumerist or commodity readers read texts fast and only once. They appreciate texts for their perceived value and discard them after reading (Griffiths, 1999, p. 51, 59; Frost, 2011, p. 31). Nevertheless, commodity readers are neither passive nor emotionless (Littau, 2006, p. 61). In fact, it might be that they are better informed to adapt and adopt Buddhist doctrines and practices than other Buddhist practitioners (Cox, 2017, p. 340).


In Postmodern contexts, ‘reading became a means to make sense of past events and the uncertainty of the future’ (Brock, 2009, p. 271). The New Age movement and its concomitants respond to a perceived crisis of modernity, particularly consumerism, secularisation, and faith in technology and science (Heelas, 1996, p. 135-136). Although this literature strives to make sense of the world, it is mainly employed by readers to emotionally mediate between themselves and the world (Illouz, 2008, p. 18).

Religious/spiritual literature benefits from the transmission of Asian religions to the West and the development of New Age traditions, mindfulness and, more recently, positive thinking (Cabanas and Illouz, 2018, p. 94). Prior to the 1960s, the available literature on Buddhism was scant (Arai, 1980, p. 1). Nowadays, beside academic literature, there is a wide range of mass-market literature aimed at

Significantly, now it is also possible to access texts ‘which had been considered secret’ (Seager, 1999, p. 119). Current publishing makes some of these texts available, thus creating a situation in which these Dharma-texts can be read without the empowerments and teachings accompanying their transmission by an authorised teacher of recognised lineage (Odiseos, 2020; Khandro, 2020).

The merit accumulated from copying and distributing Dharma-texts stimulates publishing activities (Levering, 1989b, p. 82). Thus, many of these texts have become reading material even in traditional Buddhist countries: ‘modern readings, often inflicted by Western philosophical ideas, are now moving back into Asia as students study these modern texts’ (Garfield, 2016, p. 302). For instance, young, educated Tibetans tend to learn about Buddhism using English-language books even when these are translations from Tibetan, as traditional Tibetan proves often incomprehensible to them (Dreyfus, 2003, p. 157-158; Garfield, 2016, p. 302).

Books and other media have become primary sources for the transmission and representation of religious concepts, particularly populist, individualistic ideas in the form of ‘banal religion’ (Graham, 1986, p. 28; Hjarvard, 2008; Hoover, 2011, p. 610; Mitchell, 2012). Many publications downplay or distort content related to ritual, cosmology, monasticism, authority, or doctrine while emphasizing self-exploration, interdependence, science, and self-satisfaction. This banalization reflects what some see as the ‘cannibalization of the faith’ by quasi-Buddhist groups appropriating decontextualized Buddhist practices (Matthews, 2002, p. 132). The result might be a Neo-Buddhism or Buddhism ‘à-la-carte’ reflecting the ‘desire for fulfilment which characterizes the individual in contemporary societies’ (Fauré, 2009, p. 139). Self-help and popular psychology texts often also simplify the range of human emotions and experiences and codify these by means of banal language (Illouz, 2008, p. 238-239).
Banal Buddhism appears in Buddhist quotes and memes which often contain little if any authentic Buddhism, in publications of the ‘Zen and the art of...’ type, and in Tantric sex titles bearing little if any resemblance with Tantric practices (Coleman, 2001, p. 158, 188; Bodhipaksa, 2017). This banalization represents a ‘fetishist mode of ideology’ which participates in forms of capitalism perhaps contrary to Buddhist thought (Žižek, 2007, p. 253). Critics of this type of literature notice that the so-called happiness experts promote a narcissistic, ego-fulfilling culture consonant with contemporary capitalism (Cabanas and Illouz, 2018, p. 95).

Publishing constitutes a clear indicator of the commodification and availability of Buddhist practice (Mathé, 2010, p. 523; Diez de Velasco, 2013, p. 97; Diez de Velasco, 2018, p. 71). Bookshops, libraries, and publishers produce and disseminate content and thus affect the practice of spiritual seekers (Huthnow, 2013, p. 315).

**Bookshop Buddhists**

This section describes a type of Buddhists in modern, globalized contexts for whom reading constitutes their main or only practice and connection to Buddhism.

Bookshop or nightstand or not-just-Buddhists or *Dharma* hoppers are a group of Buddhist sympathizers. As an ‘audience cult’, bookshop Buddhists are individuals influenced by or introduced to Buddhism by reading books (Stark and Bainbridge, in Nattier, 1998, p. 185; Tweed, 2000, p. 43; Coleman, 2001, p. 187). This mirrors a trend found among spirituality seekers where most of their learning is reading-based at several stages of their development or involvement with a religion (Ruthven and Medbh-Mara, 2001, p. 133). They also partly align with other spiritual seekers within modern and New Age movements and with modern expressions of privatized religion (Tanaka, 2007, p. 115; Huevieu-Léger, 2013, p. 166; Cox, 2017, p. 340). Thus, many Bookshop Buddhist can partly be defined as converts to New Age-type religious practice (Parker, 2007, p. 60; Dawei, 2012, p. 55).
Bookshop Buddhists fit in the categorisation of those who believe but might not necessarily belong to a religion. The term ‘bookshop Buddhist’ refers to self-identification, not to commitment to religious practice (Tweed, 2002, p. 20).

Based on figures of book sales, publishing activities, and media accounts, the size of this group is considered significant and their presence ubiquitous (Coleman, 2001, p. 188; Wuthnow and Cadge, 2004, p. 364; Bluck, 2006, p. 13). Considering the amount of SBNR and SBNA, there are possibly millions of Buddhist sympathizers (Cheah, 2017, p. 317).

As explained above in the section ‘Buddhism in the West’, since the nineteenth century Buddhist sympathizers have played an important role in establishing Buddhism in the West (Tweed, 2000, xii). However, this phenomenon is not exclusively Western. Contexts facilitating syncretic religious practices, like China, Taiwan, Korea, of Japan, might enable individuals to read Buddhist literature without formally belonging to the religion (Pittman, 2001, p. 53).

Regarding strategies for establishing religious identity (membership and/or attendance), bookshop Buddhists negotiate an alternative affiliation, that of sympathisers (Tweed, 2002, p. 17-18). Buddhists who identify as such by normative strategies of affiliation, like attending temple services or participating in meditation retreats, tend to dismiss bookshop Buddhists as amateurish or inauthentic. Solitary practitioners, however, might have dedicated practices and procure their own authoritative sources to justify their practices and beliefs (Coleman, 2001, p. 188-189). Besides, some bookshop Buddhists, as well as certain Zen or Vipassanā practitioners, and those subscribing to various secular Buddhist ideas might not identify as Buddhist (Borup, 2016, p. 44). Contrariwise, many individuals engaging in some sort of Buddhist practice might not identify as Buddhist either (Wallace, 2002, p. 34). For instance, it is estimated that half of the readership of the popular Buddhist magazine *Tricycle* consider themselves not Buddhist (Coleman, 2001, p. 187; Tweed, 1999, p. 74; Tweed, 2002, p. 20). However, it is clear that they engage with Buddhism by at least reading about it.
Based off their reading, Bookshop Buddhists largely see Buddhism essentially as a philosophy, often neglecting the ritual and symbolic dimensions of the practice (Lopez, 1995a, p. 7). Bookshop Buddhists display a form of unregulated, unguided reading. The charisma and popularity of Buddhist teachers and authors rather than one’s understanding of the path often dictates what material is read. Traditionally, however, reading guidance was found within textual communities and directly from teachers (Griffiths, 1999, p. 65). The lack of traditional ritual and pedagogical contexts for the transmission of scripture and access to reading material poses some problems as practitioners read certain texts and engage in various practices without guidance or initiation (Thrangu, 1993, p. 65-66; Lopez, 1996, p. 184; Kapstein, 2000, p. 238n76; Kroll, 2017, p. 87). In Western settings, practitioners deem reading books by an authoritative master as auspicious as attending teachings or participating in ritual (Campergue, 2015, p. 448). For traditional readers, Western ways of reading might appear ‘superficial and foreign to them’ (Odiseos, 2020).

Since individuals practice on their own and create their own paths, in addition to formal and practical canons, readers might create their own ‘individual’ or ‘private’ canons. Therefore one must choose what to read (Bloom, 1994, p. 15).

Modern Buddhism has also formed its own ‘commodified’ or ‘commercial’ canon comprising popular and quasi-scholarly works capable of creating new communities of interpretation and practice (McMahan, 2008, p. 259). This is largely the result of a crisis of authority in the modern world by which practitioners might not require the guidance of a teacher to mediate access to knowledge (Goody, 1986, p. 13). In ignoring the oral dimension of texts and undermining the role of the author, modern readers place themselves at an ontological distance from the texts (Ong, 2012, p. 167). By practicing solitary, silent reading, and neglecting the oral, communal dimension of Dharma-texts, particularly scripture, bookshop Buddhists might fail to appreciate not only the aesthetic, emotional dimension of scripture, but also the benefits of memorization, internalization, and embodiment.
As part of Buddhist modernism, bookshop Buddhists are generally middle-class individuals who rely on reading for their spiritual fulfilment without generally identifying as Buddhist or belonging to a particular Buddhist denomination (Tamney, 2008, p. 234; Rocha, 2017, p. 303-304). Given the spread of literacy and the availability of texts and other media, ‘Bookshop Buddhism’ might not exclusively be a Western phenomenon.

The following section explores some book reviews on social media platforms to account for the reception of Buddhist literature among Buddhist and non-Buddhist ordinary readers.

**Reading responses**

Between March and September 2020, eight Buddhist-related Facebook groups were monitored for content discussing reading and book recommendations. Sixty-seven posts were selected and analysed, from which 1,217 individual recommendations for an author or title were extracted. From these, a ranking of the ten top titles were collated to reflect popularity and authorship. A content analysis of a sample of the 50 most recent reviews of each title (500 reviews) from Goodreads was conducted to produce a semantic analysis of the occurrence of specific words and themes regarding reading experience and reception.

These reviews suggest that readers of Buddhist literature value practical, useful, and comprehensive introductions to Buddhism, often used for reference. They favour simple, clear, easy, concise, and accessible texts on Buddhism presented in a straightforward, demystified manner. On the other hand, they dislike repetitive, difficult, and disorganized texts. They appreciate these texts for their philosophical rather than their doctrinal content, particularly those which cater for Western audiences and which they perceive as having universal validity regardless of religious identity or adherance. They often feel displeased and disappointed with condescending, pretentious, and boastful authors and with simplistic, self-help-type, non-Buddhist, mystifying, and sermonizing content. Additionally, several reviewers feel a teaching is tainted if its author falls into disrepute. Most of all, they prefer texts from which they can extract applicable, relatable, and relevant advice for their lives and dismiss
them if found unrelatable and impractical. Besides, they value examples and cases which resonate with their experience and corroborate their worldview, but disdain content deemed impractical or irrelevant to them. However, many reviewers also highlight the transformative, life-changing, enlightening effects produced by their reading experience as well as the challenging, thought-provoking, and encouraging ideas presented in these texts. Moreover, several readers adduce reading a text sparked their interest in Buddhism or encouraged them to practice, reading thus constituting a conversion motif. Finally, it seems that for a few readers at least reading constitutes their main connexion with Buddhism.

These readers mainly approach Buddhist literature to gain information and knowledge of Buddhism and obtain wisdom and insights applicable to their spiritual journeys, although some also emphasize enjoyment and entertainment as part of their reading experience. Many readers also relate emotional responses to the texts, particularly expressing gratitude towards authors, while also emphasizing the calming, pacifying, purifying, awe-inducing, delightful, comforting, beautiful, wonderful, amazing, profound, uplifting, hopeful, lovely, or delightful effects of their reading, among others. In particular, some readers describe how their reading help them through difficult, challenging times, especially illness, death, and grief.

For some reviewers, these text deserve slow, repeated readings, allowing time to ponder over their contents and put their teaching into practice. Many reviewers would also recommend these texts to others. Lastly, a large number of them declare they often reread or have the intention to return to a text to better comprehend Buddhism and/or themselves, to find inspiration or encouragement for practice, or as an object of meditation.

This analysis portrays Buddhist literature reviewers on social media as showing traits consonant with those of Western and non-Buddhist readers in general, and Bookshop Buddhists in particular. Their reading preferences and attitudes appear consonant with the conclusions drawn by Gordon-Finlayson (2012) and Eddy (2012). Through this analysis it transpires that reading triggered an interest in
Buddhism and its practice in some cases, while for other reviewers reading represents a central component in their knowledge and practice of Buddhism. Significantly, these reviewers appear in many instances as reflective individuals aware of their relationship with Buddhist practice. Some of them also seem to represent a type of reader who is not solely consumerist, but who shows several traits characteristic of religious readers in that they read, reread, use, and ponder over the meaning of the texts, whose content partly accounts for their worldviews. Thus, these readers partly follow the dictum suggested by various Buddhist schools of slow, repeated, and meditative reading conducive to its assimilation and practice.

This analysis suggest Buddhist literature reviewers mainly communicate cognitive and emotional attitudes regarding their reading, particularly emphasizing the reward they obtain in their reading experience, although entertainment is also mentioned. Their reading is conducted mostly for understanding for a variety of purposes, mainly influencing their worldviews and their spiritual cultivation, hence having an informative and transformative result. Reviewers describe both aesthetic and nonaesthetic reading strategies where learning largely comprises cognitive, private, and meditative functions, and where worship, ritual, communal, devotional, and non-cognitive strategies are absent. These readers use linear, silent, individual, solitary, private, and extensive/consumerist reading modes, although a few participate in book discussions and reading clubs. According to their reading strategies, these reviewers are sympathetic readers who tend to emphasize symbolical interpretations of Buddhism, as well as recent, suspicious readers who reject dogma and mystical interpretations.
Conclusions

This dissertation has argued that reading constitutes a central element in the transmission, reception, and practice of Buddhism. Despite the pervasiveness of its nature, the difficulty in examining evidence for its existence, and the elusiveness of its experience by readers, by exploring reading as a religious signifier and examining the contexts for its occurrence, this dissertation has addressed a perceived gap in Buddhist studies. It has argued that historically, down to the present day, reading offers a valid, convenient phenomenon to analyse Buddhist roles and identities.

This study has explored several instances of reading practice in Buddhism. First, by outlining a history of reading in Buddhism it has been shown how the reading of Dharma-texts first became possible in the first century CE and possibly earlier, the consequences this had in the way that Buddhism was transmitted, and how reading coexisted or complemented orality amongst the earliest schools. A characterisation of reading across Buddhist traditions has revealed how reading was adopted and adapted to fit each school’s perspective of the practice. For instance, whereas some early schools emphasized the importance of orality, recitation, and memorization, the Mahāyāna not only adapted writing and reading as a way of transmitting Buddhism, but also made this an element of their self-definition without failing to appreciate memorization and recitation. Secondly, in support of this, this study has proposed a number of theories, namely the concept of Skilful Means, the doctrine of the Two Truths, the ‘Simile of the Raft’ and the story of the ‘Finger Pointing to the Moon’, as well as the ‘Four Reliances’, as hermeneutical tools with which to frame the roles and capacity of reading as an element within the larger context of Buddhist practice. Finally, this dissertation has surveyed the impact of reading in contemporary practice and its reception by contemporary audiences.

In addition to these concepts and doctrines with a bearing in the practice of Buddhism, and in order to help define reading in Buddhism, this dissertation has described several attitudes, levels, and purposes of reading. These categories have been useful to analyse the content of statements about reading found in the literature and described in ‘Appendix E: Corpus’ as well as to examine the roles,
intentions, and experiences of historical and contemporary readers of *Dharma*-texts. Reading is said to support *Dharma* practice as it appears at several stages of the path and performs several tasks. Reading practice is regarded as particularly helpful for gaining understanding and achieving Right View. It is also felt that reading develops faith and offers moral exemplars and inspiration for practice.

This dissertation has described several modes of reading in Buddhism in relation to their perceived benefits and according to different readers’ intentions. Ultimately, reading in Buddhism is seen as a means for removing hindrances, eradicating defilements, and attaining liberation. Purification, recollection, meditation, and understanding feature prominently amongst perceived benefits of reading, either to oneself or to others, silently or aloud.

This study has also summarised how some Buddhist traditions define reading for *Dharma* practice. Most Buddhist traditions advocate reading slowly and repeatedly as a way to familiarize oneself with the teaching. These traditions encourage maintaining a reverential, mindful, contemplative, and meditative attitude while reading. They also urge the pursuit of patience, self-awareness, self-transformation, and direct experience, among other traits, when reading. Importantly, some Buddhist schools, like Ch’an/Zen or the Forest tradition, include warnings about the degree to which practitioners should rely on reading for their practice and knowledge of Buddhism.

In this connexion, this thesis has also suggested that views on authority and on the authenticity of texts affect the status of written scriptures and the capacity of reading as a valid means for the practice and transmission of Buddhism. By placing the discussion of authority and authenticity of reading materials within oral and recitative traditions, this thesis has shown that historical reading cultures coexisted and interacted with traditions emphasizing orality and memorization. It has also accentuated historical trends which facilitated the use of writing and reading in early Buddhism and which formed the basis of several Buddhist traditions. Furthermore, by surveying the position of different Buddhist traditions and schools regarding reading, this dissertation has shown that reading has acquired different roles within particular ceremonial, ritual, pedagogical, or merit-making
contexts, among others, and has been adapted to the needs of Buddhist practitioners. To serve this purpose, different Buddhist traditions have used, developed, rejected, and created literary genres compatible with their practice. For instance, Ch’an/Zen developed kōan and recorded sayings, whereas Tibetan Buddhism developed the terma tradition. This aspect of reading in Buddhism has been further developed in ‘Appendix A: Merit, cults, and pedagogies’ and in ‘Appendix B: Merit, copying, and preserving Dharma-texts’.

This dissertation has discussed how nineteenth and twentieth-century Asian Buddhist revivals encouraged the production, distribution, and reading of Dharma-texts. These processes affected Buddhist practice and conditioned the transmission of Buddhism outside of Asia. This thesis has argued that Buddhism was transmitted to the West mostly as a textual tradition and that this emphasis on texts and reading deeply affected the practice and understanding of Buddhism. This analysis was supported by an exploration of conversion to Buddhism, particularly in terms of the central role reading plays in the access, knowledge, and transmission of Buddhism. Given the success and visibility of the Buddhist publishing industry and the availability of Dharma-texts, it has become clear that reading constitutes a key factor in the knowledge and practice of Buddhism.

Following a discussion of the different modes of reception and responses to texts, this study has defined ways for reading Buddhist literature religiously or as literature. By placing these reading strategies against the background of modernity, secularism, and globalization, several possible ways of understanding reading in Buddhism in the current context have been framed. In this context, books have become commodities, readers consumers, and ‘new’ Buddhists amongst Westerners have introduced elements of syncretism and adaptability, within a largely individualist ethos.

‘Bookshop Buddhism’, evident amongst those in the international community for whom reading has become their main involvement with Buddhist practice, has enriched scholarly definitions of Buddhist identity, commitment, and affiliation. As part of Buddhist modernism, Bookshop Buddhists have been
described as readers seeking spiritual fulfilment, religious knowledge, and practical advice from a
demystified, non-dogmatic, and scientific perspective.

Previous scholarship had identified the need to research the reception of Buddhist literature amongst
contemporary audiences and the practices of Buddhist sympathizers. By examining responses to
Buddhist literature by reviewers on social media, it has been found that, when taken as a whole, these
reviews give an indication of the role reading plays for Bookshop Buddhists and Buddhist
sympathisers, as well as their expectations from and involvement with the practice. Hence, these
reviews have proven helpful in measuring the impact of reading amongst contemporary audiences. It
has become apparent that these readers approach Buddhist literature for information, knowledge,
and practice of Buddhism, and display traits of both consumerist and religious reading. For some of
these reviewers, who largely align with general Western and non-Buddhist modernist and postmodern
reading trends, reading constitutes their main connection with Buddhist practice and, in some
occasions, a factor in their conversion to more engaged practice.

Both the history of reading in Buddhism and the reception of Dharma-texts amongst historical and
contemporary audiences merit further scholarly research. Histories of the transmission, use, and
reception of texts and of their ritual and pedagogical contexts would shed light on the history or
reading in Buddhism as it relates to Buddhist practice. The study of historical and contemporary
audiences of Buddhist Dharma-texts would enrich the knowledge of the transmission of Buddhism
and contribute to the debate on Buddhist practices and identities as well as to the discussion on the
creation, transmission, and definition of idiosyncratic canons of Buddhist literature and their
relationship with Buddhist practice.
Appendix A: Merit, cults, and pedagogies

Reading has been associated with ceremonial, ritual, and merit-making practices throughout Buddhist history. This appendix surveys reading in relation to the writing, distribution, and veneration of Dharmatexts and canons. This survey is completed by examining the place of reading in pedagogical contexts and the merit generated by reading and other scholarly practices.

Merit

Since early Mahāyāna, and particularly within Prajñāpāramitā literature, certain textual roles and duties are said to produce merit, either for oneself or for transfer to another: reading, reciting, revering, respecting, worshipping,148 preaching, expounding, memorizing, copying, distributing, and keeping sutras149 (Mizuno, 1982, p. 162; Drewes, 2007; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 3). To become a Buddha, one ought to engage in these activities150 (Lopez, 1996, p. 148). Thus, Dharmatexts are read and performed (Rambelli, 2006, p. 52).

The fruits of this merit are good rebirth, beauty, longevity, remembering past lives, visions of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, trust, and faith, among others151 (Lewis, 1996, p. 23; Schopen, 2005, p. 159, 165, 208). Fulfilling these duties is a sign of Right Conduct (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 177). When reading for a sponsor,152 sometimes the reward is material153 (Welch, 1967, p. 204; Nishijima and Cross, 1994, p. 269n53; Coleman, 2001, p. 34; Griffith Foulk, 2004, p. 293).

These merit-making activities partly account for the establishment and self-definition of the Mahāyāna (Schopen, 1975, p. 170; McMahan, 1998, p. 255). Merit promulgated in the texts turns reading into sacred practice and the volumes of text into sacred objects (Winternitz, 1972, p. 320). Scriptures are identified with the Buddha and the place where sūtras are kept becomes a Buddha’s abode (Mizuno, 1982, p. 164). This phenomenon is also found in other Indian religions. For instance, the Purānas extol the merits of worshipping, writing, reciting/reading, or donating texts (Schopen, 2008, p. 43; Apple, 2014, p. 38).
The merit of donating manuscripts and writing materials also appears in non-Mahāyāna Buddhist literature (De Simini, 2016, p. 4). Some colophons in Theravāda manuscripts suggest that reading, copying, and possessing manuscripts generates merit and engenders knowledge. This reverential attitude in the Theravāda began to appear in the twelfth century (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 168, 178). The fourteenth-century Saddhammassaṅgha praises the benefits of copying the Tipiṭaka since each teaching implies the Buddha’s presence. These benefits include freedom from suffering, good rebirths, and happiness, among others (Law, 1941, p. 15-16).

Despite this dictum, as late as the fifth century, scripture was still mainly transmitted orally, at least in the Indic sphere. Mahāyāna Buddhism resorted to manuscript transmission early in areas where Indic languages were unknown (Mizuno, 1982, p. 163). Thus, manuscripts were unevenly distributed across the territory.

**Relics and the cult of the book**

The Buddha’s induction that ‘whoever sees the Dhamma sees me’ (S iii 120) justifies several distinct practices, including building stūpas, relic worship, chanting, visualisation, and importantly, creation, transmission, preservation, and enactment of Dharma-texts (Flores, 2008, p. 85). Cultic veneration of the Buddha’s enlightened body, speech, and mind corresponds to the production and worship of statues, scriptures, and stūpas (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 33). The Buddha realized Dharma, had Dharma for his body, became one with it (DN iii 84; Miln 73; Habito, 1986, p. 54). This correspondence indicates that reading scripture amounts to attending to the Buddha’s presence through his speech (Germano, 2004, p. 52). Buddhists take refuge in Buddha and Sangha as well as Dharma, scripture being one of its most obvious expressions (Habito, 1986, p. 54). Dharma, together with discipline (Vinaya) was to become the Teacher upon the Buddha’s departure (D ii 100). This is an important validating point for reading practice: reading scriptures becomes a means to access the Buddha’s preaching directly (Lopez, 1992a, p. 9; Abé, 2005, p. 300). Reverence towards teachings and teachers forms the basis of textuality, even bibliolatry, in Buddhism (Kinnard, 2002, p. 101). Some even refer to Buddhist
grapholatry when reverence includes all written material (Goody, 1986, p. 16). This might occur when dependence on scripture is excessive (Smith, 1993, p. 163; Von Voorst, 2008, p. 9).

According to the cult of relics, scriptural volumes physically represent the body of the Buddha (Buddhakāya) and the body of his teachings (Dharmakāya) (Habito, 1986, p. 55; Harrison, 1992a, p. 44, 76; Jantrasrisalai, 2008, p. 129; Berkowitz, 2010, p. 72; Kim, 2013, p. 38-39). The Sumaṅgalavilāsini (1, 34; 3, 865, in Reynolds, 1977, 377) explicitly relates Dharmakāya to the Tipiṭaka (Bond, 1992, p. 29). This identification extends so that ‘every letter is an image of the Buddha’ (Ruiz-Falqués, 2014, p. 33). Thus, Dharma-volumes are considered the Buddha’s body (Sbgz. 3 Nyorai-zenshin 225). The identification of Buddhakāya with books as material objects becomes evident in Tibetan Buddhism (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 132). As Dharma-volumes become Buddha-relics, so places where sūtra-cults are conducted become shrines (Schopen, 1975, p. 162).

In this context, reading the Buddhakāya and the Dharmakāya, and revering the Buddha and his Dharma, constitute Buddhist practices for embodying the Dharma (Harrison, 1992a, p. 50-51; Zhiru, 2010, p. 97). From this perspective, reading becomes a means to actualise the teaching in one’s own practice. Thus, Dharmabhāṇakas, having memorized Dharma-texts and embodied the Dharma, merit veneration as Buddhas (Apple, 2014, p. 26).

The metaphor extends through to Tantra, where Tantric texts not only represent the mind and body of adepts, but also ultimate reality (Wallace, 2009b, p. 179). The metaphor of embodiment extends to cases in which people can be reborn as books or turned into books. Tantric readers therefore participate in the creation of texts by their reading (Wallace, 2009b, p. 188).

Ritual and worship use scripture metaphorically to represent the very content of scripture (Smart, 1996, p. 126; Cummings, 2013, p. 93). By a process of bibliofication, that is, a sūtra describing its own content, status, and cult, the sūtras themselves become elements of the textual structure of some sūtras and constitute themselves as sacred objects (Berling, 1987, p. 67; Apple, 2014, p. 25).
The symbolic content of Dharma-texts affects their physical representation and their cultic status (Cummings, 2013, p. 95). When Dharma-volumes are used for cultic purposes rather than for reading, they are Dharma-relics (Kim, 2013, p. 40). For instance, Chinese devotional literature mention reverence toward sūtras but seldom discuss reading (Campany, 1991, p. 35-36).

Some sūtras even claim sūtra-cults are the higher form of pūjā (reverence, worship) thus creating individual title-cults (Schopen, 2005, p. 116). When a collection of texts becomes the object of devotion, scholars identify a cult of the canon. Canon-cults have their own protective deity, Fu Xi (Wu, 2016b, p. 46, 56). However, other Mahāyāna sūtras praise memorization and recitation over these practices (Drewes, 2007, p. 137).

Venerating texts is not exclusive to the Mahāyāna (Drewes, 2007, p. 137). Manuscripts are also held in high esteem in Theravāda contexts (Appleton, 2014, p. 580). Sinhalese culture treats religious manuscripts as animate objects and there is evidence that manuscripts were placed in shrines in lieu of Buddha images (Nandadeva, 2009, p. 165). Worshipping Dharma-volumes is however excluded from authoritative Theravāda literature except for an eleventh-century sub-commentary (Veidlinger, 2006, p. 405). Thus, manuscripts, although exalted as embodiments of the Buddha’s teaching, were never equivalent to relics in most Theravāda contexts (Wijayawardhana, 1979, p. 67; Veidlinger, 2007, p. 9).

Pedagogical reading

Educational institutions use reading and other pedagogical tools to convey their religious accounts. These institutions are often referred to as textual or interpretative communities, or reading cultures (Blackburn, 2001, p. 77; McDaniels, 2008, p. 9). Their views on ‘authority, hierarchy, community, and tradition’ are embedded in their accounts (Griffiths, 1999, p. 63). Textual communities compile reading lists and/or revolve around an authoritative text or interpretation (Griffiths, 1999, p. 64, 80). These accounts justify the existence of practical canons resulting from pedagogical strategies, book-cults, and the availability of texts (Blackburn, 1999b, p. 283; McDaniel, 2008, p. 192). Even when
monasteries hold complete canonical collection, these volumes are kept for symbolic functions and seldom used (Blackburn, 2001, p. 198; Samuels, 2004, p. 957; Hansen, 2007, p. 79; McDaniels, 2008, p. 7).

Library collections vary across time and geography. This partly explains doctrinal and practical differences among Buddhist schools (Blackburn, 2002, p. 2). Changes to monastic curricula also occur over time, often responding to geopolitical, nationalistic, and centralizing trends¹⁶⁵ (Blackburn, 2001, p. 198).


Some educational systems embed reading and self-study in their study programmes to supplement debate and memorization and further understanding (Cabezón and Dorjee, 2019, p. 250-251). Pedagogical works include a diversity of genres used in a variety of settings: sermons, bilingual glosses, grammars, anthologies, commentaries, storybooks, biographies, and horoscopes, among others¹⁶⁶ (Griffiths, 1999, p. 97; Kapstein, 2000, p. 78; McDaniel, 2009, p. 130). These genres are the product of religious reading in its effort to develop understanding (Griffiths, 1999, p. 77). As the basis for monastic curricula, these are probably the texts most read by monastics and laity for their education¹⁶⁷ (McDaniel, 2009, p. 131, 135). As such, these pedagogical texts, rather than only canonical ones, are the primary agents in the transmission of doctrinal knowledge. Pedagogical Dharma-texts are also revered as Dharmakāya-relics and thus treated as sacred objects (McDaniels, 2005, p. 332; Nandadeva, 2009, p. 169). Additionally, some religious specialists engaging in protective and divining
activities might only learn to manipulate religious implements and to read and memorize spells (Tambiah, 1986, p. 92).

Reading material for instruction is written in canonical and/or several vernacular languages (McDaniel, 2008). Canonical and classical languages remain symbolically relevant due to their sacred status. However, most people access teachings in vernacular languages using a number of media (Crosby, 2014, p. 71). Vernacular works of literary value were particularly esteemed (McDaniel, 2009, p. 129).

Except scholars, few monastics choose to read anything outside the curriculum (Kapstein, 2000, p. 79; McMahan, 2008, p. 17). In other contexts, however, temple complexes operated as centres of literary activity, as printers, publishers, educators, and distributors (Trân, 2018, p. 116). Temples and monasteries also operated as schools, teaching Buddhism and many other subjects (Dutt, 1962, p. 326; Han, 2009, p. 345). Laity tend to read liturgies, anthologies, magical formulae, textbooks, biographies, or poems (Foxeus, 2017, p. 219; Soucy, 2017, p. 185).

Many curricular texts are still read to be memorized, thus placing transmission within an oral context (Seeger, 2014, p. 156). For instance, Sri Lankan monastics first memorize parittā texts and study their ritual uses in monastic schools (pirivenas) (Samuels, 2005, p. 349). In most Theravāda contexts, reading serves as preparation to deliver oral instruction through sermons and lectures (McDaniels, 2005, p. 302). Other Theravāda pedagogical texts comprise the Paṭimokkha, selections of Jātaka and Vinaya, and ritual abridgments of the Abhidhamma (Appleton, 2014, p. 579). In other traditions, for example Ch’ān, monastics exempt from other duties engage actively in scriptural reading (Goodell, 2008, p. 93-94).

Nowadays, Buddhist organizations express their sectarian affiliation and religious accounts through pedagogical curricula and their attitudes towards reading. These attitudes range from ecumenical, inclusive, and nonsectarian to exclusive, restrictive, and partisan.
Scholarly and scholastic reading

Writing facilitates academic uses of texts for assimilation, debate, and criticism (Graham, 1986, p. 15). It also enables both introspection and the examination of the external world (Ong, 2012, p 104). Reading allows the examination of other authors, traditions, and philosophical schools (Bronkhorst, 2002, p. 24). The use of manuscripts for scholastic reading first appears in second to third-century Gandhāra (Kim, 2013, p. 25). Whereas in Tibet debating was purely an oral event, in Thailand and Burma texts and reading supported debating (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 71). In most contexts, scholastic recitation and liturgical reading involves reading aloud, often communally. However, silent, introspective reading also exists (Dreyfus, 2003, p. 150, 153-154).

Translating and editing as reading

Translation facilitated the transmission of Buddhism outside its birthplace by making the Dharma intelligible. The first translations occurred in an oral context. However, translators working with written texts in China or Tibet possibly inscribed translations of texts being dictated from memory or read aloud from a manuscript (Mizuno, 1982, p. 101; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 20). Translation bureaux collected, collated, compared, and proofread several renderings of each sūtra when creating new translations (Muzuno, 1982, p. 61). Proofreading involved a ‘reader intoning a text out loud and scribes listening and reading along’ (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 22). Translators cared about the reading experience. For instance, Kumārajīva’s translations were praised for their lyrical, pleasant qualities (Mizuno, 1982, p. 101). Given the emphasis on disseminating the Dharma, translating Dharma-texts can be seen as a merit-making act (Hureau, 2010, p. 1).

Reading biographies

Biographical writing participates in the mythic/narrative dimension. As a genre, it originates with the Indian epic (Flores, 2008, p. 12). Intended for large audiences, biographies constitute repositories of collective memory which offer ethical referents to an audience’s identity (Smart, 1996, p. 131-132; Shaw, 2010, p. 19, 25). Biographies also legitimize the cult of certain figures and try to demonstrate
the superiority of Buddhism over other religions (Schober, 1997, p. 2; Hureau, 2015, p. 109). Gotama’s biography, found in textual narratives and visual iconographies, offers both entertainment and a moral exemplar for spiritual edification\textsuperscript{172} (Smart, 1996, p. 156; Berkwitz, 2010, p. 23).

Reading/chanting biographies becomes a transformational activity whereby readers recollect both Buddha and Dharma in order to develop understanding,\textsuperscript{173} and arouse calm and cheerfulness (Shaw, 2010, p. 30, 38). This proves consonant with the benefits of listening, reciting, and contemplating Dharma-texts as it leads to delight, joy, concentration, and the destruction of fetters (Jantrasrisalai, 2008, p. 132; Hureau, 2015, p. 111).

Biographies also convey instruction, both exoteric and esoteric (Rhenigans, 2010, p. 253). This includes Jātaka tales, which not only operate at an intellectual level as narratives, but also at an ethical and experiential/emotional level (Smart, 1996, p. 164-165; Roesler, 2010, p. 4). Inspirational in nature, biographies offer examples of model behaviour, expound and validate doctrinal points in practice, and arouse faith\textsuperscript{174} (Schober, 1997, p. 1; Roesler, 2010, p. 3). In portraying both the individual and the ideal they represent, a life-story and a path to liberation, biographies become theoretical and practical guides (Ricard, 2001, xviii; Van Schaik, 2016, p. 154-155).

Monastics treasured the biographies of other monastics, and often kept personal copies for their personal reading (Lopez, 2004, p. 286).

Some biographies included injunctions warning of the dangers of reading the text without a reading-permission (Roberts, 2010, p. 191). Sumedho (2014c, p. 272), aware of rhetorical devices used in biographical accounts, warns that they may give readers unrealistic prospects about practice.

Learning to read effortlessly and prodigious skill in reading feature prominently in Tibetan biographies. Reincarnated individuals might have learned that skill in previous lives (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 6). Chinese biographies often praise an individual’s reading abilities (Pao-ch’ang, 1994, p. 7).
This appendix has placed reading within ritual and pedagogical contexts and has examined its existence from the perspective of the accumulation of merit.
Appendix B: Merit, copying, and preserving Dharma-texts

This appendix develops some ideas around the merit of copying Dharma-texts using a variety of supports and technologies. It examines the role of generosity in copying and its relationship with reading. This appendix also locates some sites for the preservation of Dharma-texts and mention some ritual uses of libraries and storage cabinets. This appendix closes with some ideas around the destruction of texts and the disappearance of reading thus illustrating when the reading of Buddhist literature is no longer possible.

Copying

Copying Dharma-texts is amongst the most common merit-making activities in Buddhism. Copying benefits scribes and sponsors. Merit is accrued for oneself, transferred to others, or in commemoration of an event or anniversary (Crosby, 2014, p. 78). When the names of scribes and sponsors written in the colophons of Dharma-texts are read aloud, these individuals also accumulate merit (Hartmann, 2009, p. 103; Van Schaik, 2020, p. 59). All material components of a manuscript were considered sacred and therefore treated reverentially (Crosby, 2020, p. 78).

Manuscripts

Making manuscript copies of Dharma-texts became amongst the most meritorious ways to read sūtras as calligraphy turned copying into a meditative practice (Mizuno, 1982, p. 162; Kieschnick, 2000, p. 182; Edgren, 2009, p. 102; Shaw, 2009, p. 195). Making manuscript copies of printed Dharma-books, due to their rarity, was also considered the best way to read sūtras (Konicki, 2013, p. 607).

Copying strives for accuracy to ensure the correct transcription of texts lest readers abandon Buddhism due to bad practices. Scribes were praised for finely produced creations (McDaniel, 2009, p. 133; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 32). Fine copies preclude pedagogical reading and suggest ritual uses (Griffiths, 1999, p. 128).
Copies were done by scribes reading a source text or by oral dictation (Collins, 1992, p. 128; McDaniel, 2009, p. 136). Copying became a textual economy: castes of professional scribes developed in India and Nepal, many unable to read for understanding, but only able to arrange and shape letters; conversely, in China and elsewhere, reading and writing were a prerequisite for any educated scribe (Lancaster, 1979, p. 224-225). Some scribes reflected on the reading experience and made editorial marks to facilitate reading (Drègue, 1991, p. 89).

Rooted in scripture, the metaphor of embodiment is also present in sutra-copying (Kieschnick, 2000, p. 179; Heller, 2009, p. 110). Human remains were used as writing and printing material to produce Dharma-volumes. In Tibet, the remains of eminent individuals were mixed with ink to produce fine manuscripts (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 116). According to some Tantric texts, human bones were used as pens (Kim, 2013, p. 247). In China, blood was mixed with ink to copy Dharma-texts on human skin used as writing support (Kieschnick, 2000, p. 177; Harrison, 2003, p. 128; Wu, 2016b, p. 59). Human skin itself could be the support of yantra incantations in the form of tattoos. These were also printed in clothes and worn, or even inserted under the skin (Crosby, 2020, p. 77).

**Printing**

Buddhists employ printing technologies to multiply the meritorious effects of sūtra-copying, produce complete canonical collections, and distribute Dharma-texts to a growing readership. Both lay Buddhists and monastics organizations have led publishing efforts (Gombrich, 2006a, p. 182; Fisher, 2012, p. 72; Baldanza, 2018, p. 11). The availability of printing presses in the Buddhist world has been historically unequal, with manuscripts and printed texts coexisting (Heller, 2009, p. 109; Wu, 2016b, p. 59; Baldanza, 2018, p. 16; Crosby, 2020, p. 86-87).

Mass producing Dharma-texts initially encouraged ritual practices rather than reading (Kornicki, 2009, p. 111, 118; Fischer, 2013, p. 106). One of the most extended ritual uses of printed and manuscripts texts is to insert them into reliquaries and stūpa (Kornicki, 2009, p. 118). In Japan, for instance, printing for reading started only from the eleventh century (Kornicki, 2009, p. 112). In Korea, from the
tenth century, printing produced texts for study and devotion (Kornicki, 2009, p. 118). In China, where printing and reading was reserved for nobles, bureaucrats, and monastics, mass printing encouraged literacy from the thirteenth century (Fischer, 2013, p. 107). Sinhala Buddhists had no printing press until the late nineteenth century (Malalgoda, 1976, p. 6). Sinhala publishing efforts first modelled themselves on their Christian counterparts (Gombrich, 2006a, p. 179-180).

Printing affects both the availability and audience of texts and the reading experience. Print formats are conducive to private, solitary reading, and produce a sense of ownership over the text (Ong, 2012, p. 128). Thai printing practices, influenced by the West, shifted the focus of the Dhammapada from the narrative, commentarial sections, to the verse component. Thus, these sections began to be published separately, contrary to how the text is taught in educational settings (McDaniels, 2005, p. 315-316). Similarly, editors and translators negotiate how to present orally composed, performative, repetitive texts, meant for memorization and recitation, in publications for silent, private readers (Winternitz, 1972, p. 68; Gethin, 2008, xliv). Some editors recommend mentally expanding the elided content to fully appreciate the text and use it for contemplation (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, 2001, p. 53). Modern editions also include auxiliary material, like glossaries, notes, or thematic guides, to aid readers (Bodhi, 2012, p. 12, 66). Regarding format, smaller, portable volumes of scriptures promote their circulation and reading (Wu, 2016a, p. 38; Scott, 2017).

Printing also comes with assumed cultural practices, which some traditionalist in the Buddhist world resisted as they undermined practices and values regarding the merit inherent in manuscript copying (Crosby, 2020, p. 87). Some nineteenth-century Thai monastics refused to read government sponsored and distributed printed books because they saw that format as intrinsically Christian (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 116). Some nineteenth-century Cambodian monastics supported the spread to printing and literacy so that people could read and understand the scriptures directly (Hansen, 2007, p. 103-104). However, printing was prohibited there until the 1920s for fear scriptures lose their sacrality and copyist their standing (Grieve and Veidlinger, 2017, p. 469; Crosby, 2020, p. 89). In
nineteenth and twentieth-centuries China, the development of a Buddhist print culture not only expanded readership but also helped create a sense of common identity (Scott, 2013, p. 36).

Printing facilitated the transmission of Buddhist literature beyond traditional pedagogical settings and established canons, thus enabling a more diverse range of voices to be circulated. However, the multiplication and distribution of authorised texts and pedagogical practices by central regulatory bodies meant that certain minority discourses were silenced and their traditions and lineages almost forgotten (Crosby, 2020, p. 88-89).

Digital

Digital formats and the Internet have multiplied textual reproduction and consumption. This includes sophisticated tools for radial reading, thus fulfilling devotional and scholarly needs (Obadia, 2013, p. 181; Crosby, 2014, p. 94; Wu, 2016a, p. 24; Wittern, 2017). In a context where readers enjoy autonomy and access to resources, canon creation is a matter of personal choice as well as authority (Purves, 1998, p. 98; Wu, 2016a, p. 38). Ritual reading in digital environments also exists, for instance online prayer-wheels (Elliot, Diemberger and Clement, 2014, p. 79). Digital formats and media access have produced a ‘global folk Buddhism’ where practitioners draw from their own traditions while participating in a transnational culture (McMahan, 2008, p. 262). A mediascape composed of books, films, tv programmes, podcasts, magazines, and social media, participates in the commodification of Buddhism in a globalized world (Rocha, 2012, p. 299). Most contemporary Buddhist organizations employ most of these media (Poceski, 2017, p. 95).

Inscriptions

Starting with the Aṣokan inscriptions and pillars, Dharma-texts are inscribed on different supports for a variety of purposes and not meant to be read in a conventional way. In China and elsewhere, monumental sūtras were carved on mountains (Mizuno, 1982, p. 97). Dharma-texts were also engraved on the walls of palaces and temples in China and elsewhere (Griffiths, 1999, p. 52). Mantra-
bearing rocks, carrying the Avalokiteśvara mantra, human-made or self-produced, populate Tibetan cultural areas (Elliot, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014, p. 16).

Dāna

Generosity (dāna) extends the metaphor of embodiment so that the gift of the Buddha’s body (dehadāna) becomes the gift of Dharma (Dharmadāna) (AN i 91; It 98; Jāt 499; Ohnuma, 1998, p. 325). The Buddha’s gift is the dispensation itself (Ohnuma, 1998, p. 357). Reading a Dharma-text produces the motivation to expound it and copy it (Cole, 2005, p. 335). The gift of Dharma is the highest gift. Giving produces merit and benefits such as longevity, strength, or faith (Uś Chap xix, 1059b-c). Printed and electronic copies of texts for free distribution often recall the merit of Dharma-gifts (Harvey, 2013, p. 268).

The Prajñāpāramita, biographies, Buddhist poetry collections, and other Dharma-texts are copied to accumulate good karma and merit (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 61). These copies were often gifted and treated as objects of worship (Schopen, 2005, p. 6). In India and elsewhere, patronage was often, but not always, lay-based (Kim, 2013, p. 15; De Simini, 2016, p. 6). The choice of texts for copying and distribution indicates which Dharma-texts were popular and informs about proselytizing activities (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 125). Fine editions and commemorative volumes served symbolic functions rather than reading needs (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 64). Dāna accounts partly for the content of temple collections, particularly in South and Southeast Asia (Blackburn, 2002, p. 58).

Libraries, storage, and reading spaces

Evidence for reading can be traced through the history of library buildings and their contents. From the fifth century, most Buddhist establishments, including universities, had some library provision (Steinkellner, 2004, p. 6). Books were seldom on display and mainly stored away (Levering, 1989b, p. 87; Schopen, 2008, p. 38; May and Igunma, 2018, p. 31). Private individuals kept scriptures in shrines at home, where they were read and venerated. Texts are kept in libraries, cells, and temples, alongside images, religious implements, and other valuables, often in conditions designed to ensure
their preservation (Datta, 1960; Campany, 1991, p. 34; Schopen, 2004, p. 51; McDaniel, 2009, p. 125). Buddhist establishments dedicate reading space for the use of Dharma-texts and appoint librarians to manage them (Datta, 1960, p. 21; Welch, 1967, p. 37-38; Wu, 2016a, p. 33). Several deities protect the places where scriptures are present\(^{184}\) (Campany, 1991, p. 34; Schopen, 2008, p. 51).

Monasteries often keep practical, ritual canons, rather than complete scriptural collections (Ekvall, 1964, p. 125; Collins, 1990, p. 104). Besides religious literature, monastic collections include works on astrology, medicine, anthologies, study guides, and fiction, among others necessary to provide a broad education (Gethin, 1998, p. 104; McDaniel, 2009, p. 135; Baldanza, 2018, p. 9). Since texts copied for symbolic purposes tended to be stored away, texts used for study show the most signs of use (Baldanza, 2018, p. 24). Monastic establishments kept all material gifted by donors (Berkwitz, 2009, p. 40-41). Some monastic regulations include clauses detailing which books belong to the library and advice on book theft (Bronkhorst, 2002, p. 27; Schopen, 2004, p. 11, 199, 402). Monastic leaders control access to library collections (Dreyfus, 2003, p. 363n41; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 123). Libraries often reflect the ideological position held by monastic leaders and their views on reading and the transmission of knowledge.\(^{185}\) Personal copies of books passed from master to disciple and remained within family collections, thus enabling devotional uses of scripture (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 122).

Most of these manuscript libraries are now largely irrelevant since, except for a few symbolic uses, most monastics rely on printed books.

**Revolving libraries**

Revolving, carousel, or octagonal cabinet libraries are a convenient storage and retrieval system designed to enable illiterate individuals and others to produce the merit accrued by sūtra-reading by simply rotating these devices (Ekvall, 1984, p. 120-121; Drègue, 1991, p. 91-92; Wright, 2003, p. 265; Wu, 2016b, p. 55). Thus, revolving libraries participate in the cult of the canon (Wu, 2016a, p. 33; Wu, 2016b, p. 53-56). Allegedly invented by sixth-century Chinese lay master Fu Ta-shih, these libraries, now being revived, were popular in China and Japan until the modern period (Mizuno, 1982, p. 167;
Loveday, 2000, p. 228; Eubanks, 2010; Wu and Wilkinson, 2017, Introduction). They might also have Indian antecedents\(^6\) (Schopen, 2005, p. 5; Eubanks, 2011, p. 183).

**Reading locations**

Monastic regulations stipulate when and where to read\(^7\) (Welch, 1967, p. 79). Beside monastic libraries or cells, other places, some unusual,\(^8\) appear in the literature.

Reading is prohibited in the *Sangha* Hall of Zen monasteries (Griffith Foulk, 2004, p. 292). Some Chinese monasteries reserve quarters for laity engaged in scriptural reading and contemplation (Pittman, 2001, p. 54). Likewise, monastics may voluntarily enter periods of meditation and reading in special cells or ‘sealed confinement’\(^9\) (Pittman, 2001, p. 82). Scriptural reading also occurs in Tibetan retreats in caves, huts, and cells for periods of months to years\(^10\) (Ray, 2002, p. 437). Laypersons able to read may read aloud to their families, during their spare time, or as religious practice\(^11\) (Wijayawardhana, 1979, p. 68). Nowadays, besides these contexts described, most forms of Buddhism would locate their reading at private settings (Tanaka, 2007, p. 123). Public forms of reading are described in ‘Appendix C: Reading typologies’.

**Destruction of texts**

Evidence of the destruction of *Dharma*-texts began shortly after they were first written (Dowden, 2009, p. 143). Book destruction is due to monastic rivalries\(^12\) and affiliations,\(^13\) political prosecution,\(^14\) or ideological control\(^15\) (Steinkeilner, 2004, p. 19-20). Book destruction is attested in virtually all countries with Buddhist presence (Baumann, 2002, p. 89-90; Bowden, 2009, p. 143). Destroying, desecrating,\(^16\) or abusing *Dharma*-texts imply a punishment, whose karmic retribution equals that of either the Buddha and his teachings (Campany, 1991, p. 41, 43).

*Dharma*-text were often miraculously spared destruction\(^17\) (Campany, 1991, p. 42). Despite Ch’an/Zen dislike of textual transmission,\(^18\) destruction of *Dharma*-texts\(^19\) appears only exceptionally (Joskovich, 2019, p. 55).
Destruction can also serve other purposes. For instance, in Northern Thailand, merit is accrued by burning worn-out manuscripts and palm-leaf Dharma-texts are crushed into powder to make amulets (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 190; Crosby, 2014, p. 79; Crosby, 2020, p. 79).

**Disappearance of reading**

Dharma-texts, like all phenomena, are impermanent, and will eventually disappear (Olson, 2013, p. 34). With the partial loss of the original recitation, many sutras were lost. The Buddha’s teaching career prior to Ānanda becoming his attendant, after which he retained all teachings he witnessed, remained partially unrecorded. After Ānanda’s passing more sutras were lost (Lamotte, 1984, p. 8; Lamotte, 1988, p. 163). BUTON (p. 264-265) lists destroyed or lost portions of Dharma-texts. Further loss occurs if practitioners attend to teachings other than the Buddha’s or if they attend to the teachings not with faith and acceptance but for their poetic qualities (Lamotte, 1984, p. 9; Lamotte, 1988, p. 164). Incorrect memorization and failing to rehearse recitation add to scriptural loss (Gombrich, 2005, p. 78). Translation of recited scriptures might imply content loss (Coward, 1986, p. 299). A prophecy dictates that the Dharma shall disappear within 500, 1,000, or 5,000 years after the Buddha’s death (Harvey, 2013, p. 80; Salomon, 2018, Chap. 2). Dharma-scriptures will disappear at the last stage of the degeneration of the Dharma (Hartmann, 2009, p. 97). In another prophecy, after the disappearance of attainments and methods, scriptures and their commentaries will disappear, followed by the disappearance of signs and of relics (Nattier, 1991, p. 57). Writing down Dharma-texts was a way to ensure their preservation (Becher, 1992, p. 51).

This appendix has described the merit of copying, giving, and preserving Dharma-texts and has described some cultic functions related to the collecting of Dharma-texts. It has also surveyed some justifications for the destruction of Dharma-text and for the ultimate disappearance of reading.
Appendix C: Reading typologies

This appendix surveys different typologies of reading Dharma-texts to show the diversity of modes of using Dharma-texts and the variety of settings where reading takes place.

Public readings

Recitation and psalmody are the default modes of public reading in Buddhism (Drègue, 1991, p. 91). Public readings, recitation, and sermons would have been the only exposure to Dharma-texts for most. Reading, as indicated by numerous colophons, often started with a formula for protection (Kim, 2013, p. 8).

Reading stories as part of sermons, adding oral explanations, and public monastic reading at temple festivals, customarily on Uposatha days, possibly constitute one of the most extended reading practices (Dutt, 1962, p. 105; Tambiah, 1986, p. 103; McHale, 2004, p. 155). Public readings are first suggested in Asokan inscriptions (Bloch, 1950, p. 43). Early Gandhāran literature also attest to public readings with avadāna compositions supplementing sermons (Salomon, Alchin and Barnard, 1999, p. 164). When reading in canonical languages, for instance Pāli, a paraphrase in the vernacular, for instance Sinhala, most likely follows (Rahula, 1966, p. 253).

Public readings of popular stories, like the Jātaka, had a ceremonial dimension. An individual might read a Dharma-text, but often monastics divided texts among themselves and read simultaneously (Veidlinger, 2007, p. 199). Readings vary around the calendar. Often performed around the Rains Retreat, reading the Vessantara Jātaka was used as thanksgiving for harvest, to petition for rainfall, to raise funds for the temple, or for merit (Collins, 1998, p. 376; Hansen, 2007, p. 28-29; Crosby, 2014, p. 108; May and Ignuma, 2018, p. 233). Public readings of the biography of the Buddha, sometimes going through the night, are offered for Visakha Puja (Buddha’s Day) (Swearer, 2010, p. 43-44). Chronicle readings and recitals in Sri Lanka situate audiences in historical continuity with the past, thus

Some literary genres, like Sinhala preaching texts (banapot) are meant to be read (Berkwitz, 2010, p. 154). Read aloud and rhythmically, banapots have both an aesthetic and a moral dimension (Deegalle, 2007, p. 17). Senior monastics might prefer to have a banana read to them rather than listen to a preacher due to differences in their status. Those unwilling or unable to attend banana readings might resort to reading books describing the virtues of the Buddha by themselves (Deegalle, 2007, p. 75-76). This might also be a convenient solution for contemporary lay practitioners (Wijayawardhana, 1979, p. 76).

**Ritual readings**

Ritually reading the canon is for ‘turning the scripture’, that is, to activate the teachings. This reading recollects the Buddha’s first sermon or the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma (S v 420). In China and elsewhere, it consisted of skimming through the text without necessarily attending to the meaning, either whole or partially, individually or communally, in a ‘scripture perusal chamber’ (Welch, 1967, p. 103). Monarchs\textsuperscript{204} could order the reading of Dharma-texts or the canon\textsuperscript{205} to be performed for specific ceremonies or consecration rituals (Tambiah, 1984, p. 250). Monastics could also commit to reading the canon in solitary confinement over several years (Wu, 2016b, p. 62). In Ch’an/Zen, daily reading was embedded in daily monastic observances and reading was stipulated in monastics regulations (Welter, 2008, p. 126). Reading the Kangyur is a practice to commemorate eminent individuals (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 19). Ritually reading the canon also happened in China as an expression of filial piety towards parents (Wu, 2016b, p. 60).

**Reading for protection and magic**

Buddhist texts serve a magic function independent of their reading (Van Schaik, 2020, p. 80). Some Mahāyāna sutras indicate that merely holding or being close to Dharma-books suffices to benefit from their prophylactic and protective properties (Apple, 2014, 28-29). Blessings can be dispensed by
monastics and ritual specialists through the imposition of Dharma-volumes (Elliot, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014b, p. 10).

Dharma-texts, often of the parittā and rakṣa genres, are worn as talismans or amulets for protection (Skiling, 1992, p. 164; Sivasundaram, 2014, p. 35). They are carried around the neck or on top of one’s head, thus substituting a bodhisattva image, and activated by continuous chanting (Campany, 1999, p. 37-38; Elliot, Diemberger and Clement, 2014a, p. 70-71).

Reading scripture and magic formulae could also participate in magic ritual, notably for rainmaking (Van Schaik, 2020, p. 73-74). Spells were also employed to guarantee the efficient reading and memorising of texts (Van Schaik, 2020, p. 164).

Ritually reading/reciting Buddhist texts aids recovery from illness206 (Anālayo, 2007, p. 16). Prajñāpāramitā texts are read for their healing properties (Lopez, 1996, p. 14; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 130). Parittā texts are possibly among the most popular texts read/recited for protection and to guard off evil (Winternitz, 1972, p. 80). For monastics in Sri Lanka, learning to read/recite parittā supposes a gradual introduction to monastic socialisation and the training required for meditation and wisdom (Blackburn, 1999a, p. 370-371). Of similar protective function are rakṣā texts (Skilling, 1992, p. 113, 167). Textual precedent for the healing properties of hearing/reading texts is found already in the Pāli canon.207

Cultic reading

Possibly established by the sixth century, the first evidence for manuscript cultic reading comes from seventh-century Ellorā (Hartmann, 2009, p. 102; Kim, 2013, p. 25-26). Reciting the Prajñāpāramitā, the Pañcarakṣa, and other Mahāyāna texts imply invoking the presence of the protective and tutelary deities which personify these scriptures (Lewis, 2000, p. 154; Kim, 2013, p. 23, 28). By metonymy, sometimes a book substitutes the deity invoked208 (Campany, 1991, p. 47). Reading as performance is preeminent when ritually reading. Thus, although the Nepali Vajrācāryas require specialised training, textual understanding is not expected (Hartmann, 2009, p. 102; Kim, 2013, p. 273-275). Additionally,
cultic readers require consecrations and permissions to officiate (Emmrich, 2009, p. 141). Participants are also expected to acquire certain requirements and follow some rules, like fasting before rituals (Gellner, 1996, p. 225). The ritual is conducted by dividing the scripture among individuals reading different portions of the text simultaneously (Gellner, 1996, p. 227). Ritual manuscripts often have conservation work done to ensure their accuracy and integrity (Emmrich, 2009, p. 146).

Cultic reading can also refer to meditating upon a manuscript in order to embody its content. This meditation can later be recalled without the manuscript (Kim, 2013, p. 120, 137). The physical handling of a manuscript, its iconographic programme, and its cultic potency make some Nepalese manuscripts like portable shrines (Kim, 2013, p. 132-133).

Cultic readings serve a number of purposes. The Pañcaraksā and similar texts are read on births, birthdays, weddings, to recover from illness, when dying, before travelling, or against bad omens (Gellner, 1996, p. 231-232; Lewis, 2000, p. 155, 159, 160; Rigyal and Prude, 2017, p. 67). The practice of recollection and parittā chanting serve similar purposes in Theravāda societies (Harrison, 1992b, p. 219). Japanese literature contains examples of individuals who became immortals as a result of fasting and reading scripture (Fauré, 1998, p. 262). In Tibet and Bhutan, apotropaic readings could be performed by lay professionals unaffiliated to a monastery (Bechert and Gombrich, 1984, p. 246; Rigyal and Prude, 2017, p. 65-66).

In Tibetan Buddhism, the complete Kangyur is read as part of the festival of Saka Dawa, which celebrates the Buddha’s Birth, Enlightenment, and Parinirvāṇa. The Kangyur is read mainly in Tibetan but also in translation, usually by several individuals communally concurrently.

**Reading in part**

**Reading titles**

In ritual readings, the title of a sūtra represents the whole sutra. Reading/reciting scripture is then conducted by uttering the title or part of the title of a sūtra, or by reading/reciting the mantra
contained in that sūtra\textsuperscript{212} \citep{Smith93, Lopez96, Veidlinger07}. Book cults allow for the hearing/reading of a sūtra’s title\textsuperscript{213} as devotion. In Tibet, only the Kangyur is treated in this manner \citep[Kapstein, 2000, p. 237n74]{Kapstein00}. For Nichiren, metonymically reading/reciting the title of the Lotus Sūtra amounts to reading/reciting all of the teaching. It implies embodying the Dharma\textsuperscript{214} and being in the Buddha’s presence. Thus, chanting the title of the Lotus Sūtra constitutes Buddha-recollection \citep[Anesaki, 1916, p. 16; Habito, 1999, p. 291, 293; Harvey, 2013, p. 216]{Anesaki16, Habito99, Harvey13}. A derivation of this practice is found in an apocryphal Chinese catalogue of sutra titles promoting its reading and copying as spiritual practice, the catalogue being a metaphor for the whole canon \citep{Wu16b, p. 64-65}.

**Reading formulae**

Dhāraṇī are formulaic summaries of scripture used to satisfy worldly concerns, like preventing snake bites or avoiding robbers \citep{Martin07, p. 210}. Dhāraṇī were sometimes inscribed in paintings and Dharma-volumes to ensure protection \citep{Martin07, p. 221}. Dhāraṇī need to be read/recited aloud as their efficacy depend on its sound \citep{Kim13, p. 28, 121}. Dhāraṇī participate in a larger devotional dimension relaying on the magical power of letters \citep{Martin07, p. 224-225}. Mātikā lists, parittā chants, dhāraṇī formulas, mantra, and seed-syllables participate in this form of partial or summarised reading \citep{Gyatso92b, p. 173-174}. Dhāraṇī in particular are related to the holding and remembering of the teachings \citep{Gyatso92b, p. 177}. Thus, remembering the Buddha’s name, titles of sūtras, or summaries of teachings all participate in recollection as meditation \citep{Harrison92b, p. 227}.

**Reading illustrated manuscripts**

The physicality of Dharma-volumes affects the reading experience \citep[Berkwitz, 2009, p. 36]{Berkwitz09}. Illustrations appear on the covers, frontispice, and/or narrative portions of Dharma-texts. Reading illustrated manuscripts produces an aesthetic and sensorial, predominantly visual, experience \citep{Kim13, p. 35}. Illustrations support visualisation practices, and function as visual indexes and iconic representations of the text \citep{Kim13, p. 59-60, 116}. More generally, finely produced Dharma-volumes become visual aids and support to meditation practices \citep{Schaeffer14, p. 29}.
Pictorial reading

Pictorial sūtras, developed in seventeenth-century Japan, use pictograms to represent the Japanese transliteration of the Chinese pronunciation of a Dharma-text. Thus, pictorial sūtras made texts like the Heart Sūtra available to a much wider audience. Reading pictorial sūtras precluded understanding and served only apotropaic, ritual functions (Eubanks, 2013).

Scripture not to be read

The following examples describe symbolic uses of texts where reading is absent:

Relic deposits

Scriptural fragments are installed as relics in full-sized and miniature stūpas and images. They sometimes accompany bodily relics (Pal and Meech-Pekarik, 1988, fig. 109; Berkwitz, Schober and Brown, 2009, p. 5; Crosby, 2014, p. 79; Galamboś, 2014, p. 39). These texts, sometimes worn-out manuscripts, are considered both Dharma-relics and substitute body organs (Bentor, 1995, p. 251; Zhiru, 2010, p. 98). As the epitome of the Buddha’s teachings and a central Buddhist doctrine the Dependent Origination (paṭiccasamuppāda) formula is often found interred as a relic and inscribed in a variety of objects (Bourcher, 1991; De Simini, 2016, p. 11). Thus, objects containing that formula are infused with the whole Dharma (Boucher, 1991, p. 1).

Burials and entombment

Scriptures are also buried as Dharma-relics. Buddhists in Gandhāra, Tibet, East Asia, and possibly India, buried scriptures as though they were body-relics (Salomon, 2009, p. 22, 31; De Simini, 2016, p. 17). Burying scripture ensures its preservation and protects the sanctity of new or used Dharma-relics. Archaeological evidence suggests scriptures were sometimes buried alongside human remains. Thus, burials become reliquaries (Salomon, 2006, p. 7; Salomon, 2009, p. 30). However, no extant textual evidence of sanctioned ritual interment for scripture survives to justify this practice (Salomon, 2009, p. 204-205). In Theravāda contexts, scriptures are sometimes kept in caskets resembling coffins (Reynolds, 1977, p. 377-378). In Tibet, tombs and temples containing remains of important teacher
and other individuals are sometimes furnished with scriptures (Watson, 2009, p. 480; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 119).

**Implausible reading**

Several individuals show incredible reading abilities, like reading in the dark, precociously, speedily, just by glancing over a text, gaining instant understanding, or memorizing texts immediately. Visionary experiences can also produce reading comprehension.

**Reading while sleeping and dreaming**

Other individuals also claim to be able to read while sleeping or dreaming. Tantra in a genre of Buddhist literature often transmitted in dreams (Gray, 2009, p. 16). The fourth Karmapa slept surrounded by his books and was able to read and understand them in his dreams (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 6). Other scriptures are also said to be transmitted via dreams.

**Impossible reading**

Sometimes written Dharma-texts are not meant to be read. Certain practices involve writing or printing Dharma-texts against surfaces, such as the sky or water, unable to support writing (Ekvall, 1964, p. 114; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 146). Secrecy dictated the need for some writing to be kept invisible and only revealed by some contraption. Others urged intended readers to burn secret writings after reading.

**Ingesting as reading**

Bibliophagia, the ingesting of books, has the power to make whoever eats them to understand their contents. This is another form of embodiment of the Dharma. Tibetan examples present women placing small volumes in an adept’s mouth, after which they would understand all doctrines contained in all scriptures (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 130). Ingesting operates as a metaphor for memorization, by which a reader embodies a text (Griffiths, 1999, p. 46). Drinking water which has been in contact with Dharma-texts also produces great benefits.
Mechanically activated reading

Related to the revolving libraries described above, other mechanically activated instances of reading aim at producing merit (Abé, 2005, p. 292).

Prayer wheels

Prayer wheels are a very common form of verbalized religion (Ekvall, 1964, p. 122). Prayer wheels are cylindrical devices upon an axle, mostly handheld, which rotate by manual action. The cylinder contains Dharma-texts and has mantras inscribed on its surface. These are activated by rotating the cylinder, each turn equivalent to a reading/recitation of the Dharma-texts contained. Prayer wheels allow everyone, including illiterates and those unable to memorize texts, access to merit-making activities (Zhiru, 2010, p. 99; Shaw, 2009, p. 182; Harvey, 2013, p. 254). Large prayer wheels are placed on the perimeter of temples in Tibet and elsewhere. Solar-powered prayer-wheels also exist (Elliot, Diemberger and Clement, 2014a, p. 79). Digital and online prayer-wheels are also available.

Prayer flags

Prayer flags are colourful rectangular pieces of cloth containing woodblock-printed prayers, mantras, and images, which are activated by the wind. Often attached to mountain peaks, flagpoles, trees, or houses, prayer flags confer blessings to their surroundings and spread wholesome qualities, like compassion or wisdom (Ekvall, 1964, p. 41).

Circumambulation and walking

Circumambulation, a merit-making activity listed in some Mahāyāna sūtras, consists in walking around a sacred object, in this case a Dharma-volume or collection, or carrying Dharma-volumes over one’s head (Kapstein, 2000, p. 237n.74; Von Voorst, 2008, p. 9; Eubanks, 2011, p. 178; Harvey, 2013, p. 233). ‘Turning’ the scripture is activated by walking around it.

Dharma-texts are also activated by walking past or through them, as when dhāraṇī are affixed above doors for protection (Martin, 2007, p. 211).
Dharma-volumes are taken on parade to confer blessings or to enact some magic power. This practice is attested in Tibet, Bhutan, and elsewhere (Goody, 1986, p. 16; Watson, 2009, p. 480).

Turning-reading

Turning-reading (Japanese ‘tendoku’) is a way of reading scripture, usually the Prajñāpāramitā, by cascading a fan-fold book between the hands while reciting the sūtra’s title (Kennett, 2005, p. 203; Strong, 2015, p. 600). Scripture is activated mechanically and by reading the title only. Tendoku also includes ritual reading of selected portions of scripture at specific times of the year, for instance New Year’s Eve (Baroni, 2002, p. 339).

Reading to the other

The dying, the dead, funeral readings, and ghosts

Reading Dharma-texts to the dying and the dead is a customary practice in Buddhism. The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thödöl), a Nyingma terma, is traditionally read aloud, next to the corpse, by a friend or teacher, to help the deceased through the interval (bardo) between death and rebirth (Lopez, 1998, p. 49; Ray, 2002, p. 354-355; Flores, 2008, p. 165). Those attending the reading also benefit from it as they learn about the dying process (Flores, 2008, p. 168, 181). The Bardo Thödöl became popular in the West for its association in the 1960s with LSD-taking and by emphasizing its psychological aspects (Lopez, 1995b, p. 265; McMahan, 2008, p. 53). In Amdo, excerpts from Shabkar’s autobiography were also popular as funeral reading (Ricard, 2001, xiii).

Newar Buddhists read the Pañcarakṣā during funerals and memorial services out of compassion for those who died inauspiciously (Lewis, 2000, p. 159). Pure Land Buddhists read Dharma-texts to the dying, and encourage confession and chanting of the nianfo to obtain a good rebirth (Stevenson, 2007b, p. 448).

In Sri Lanka, some devout laity wrote merit-books (puṇyapustaka/puññapotthaka) detailing their Buddhist practice. Merit-books were read then to their authors on their deathbed to provide comfort...
and to ensure a good rebirth (Mhv 32, 24-75; Rahula, 1966, p. 254; Malalgoda, 1976, p. 16-17; Lamotte, 1988, p. 430-431; Trainor, 1997, p. 169). The Satipaṭṭhānasutta or another Pāli sutta is also read after someone’s passing as a meditation on impermanence and death (Deegalle, 2007, p. 191n35).

In Japan, selected scriptures were read to women at their funeral, particularly the Transforming Women into Buddhas, so they may be reborn as male and eventually become bodhisattvas (Fauré, 2003, p. 101). The precepts can also be read to a dead person to confer ordination posthumously (Powers, 2016, p. 30). Ritual readings were offered to placate ghosts and guide them towards salvation (Fauré, 2003, p. 77).

Some people also chose to read Dharma-texts in preparation for dying. Animals

Popular narratives mention animals benefiting from hearing Dharma-texts recited (Smith, 1993, p. 163). Animals also recite texts: the Abhidharmakośa was so widely read in a seventh-century hermitage that even parrots recited it (Winternitz, 1972, p. 358).

Criminals

The Pāli poem Kāla-virati-gāthā was reportedly read to criminals to encourage them to abandon their evil state (Malalasekera, 2013, p. 234).

Gods

Some sūtras contain references to deities listening to the Buddha. Likewise, gods also attend scriptural reading (Fauré, 2003, p. 270). Gods, notably Māra, can also deter readers from reading certain texts (Hureau, 2015, p. 112).

Reading by the other

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas only read scripture for the sake of others. Whereas Dharma-texts available to humans are few and brief due to their short lifespan and weak memory, devas, dākinīs, nāgas, and Asura kings of long life and strong memories have myriad, much longer texts (Zacchetti,

This appendix has surveyed several reading typologies and transmission settings. This appendix also enriches the variety of examples of reading and shows that Buddhist literature contains numerous references to reading.
Appendix D: Data analysis

This section introduces the data which forms the basis for the analysis in section ‘Reading responses’ in Chapter 5.

Given its size, it is impracticable to include all these data within this dissertation.

The accompanying CD and USB drive contains the spreadsheet file ‘Appendix D: Data analysis’ containing several tabs:

- Facebook posts: Between March and September 2020, several Buddhist-related Facebook groups were monitored for content discussing reading and book recommendations. This tab presents the posts selected with related metadata. The individual recommendation for authors and titles were collated to produce a list of top-ranking titles and authors.

- Ranking of authors: this list has been compiled using the posts published on Facebook. This resulted in 1,217 individual recommendations or discussions for an author or a title. Highlighted in green are the top-ten ranking authors (excluding websites and scripture).

- Ranking of titles: This list has been compiled using the posts published on Facebook. This resulted in 1,217 individual recommendations or discussions for an author or a title. Highlighted in green are the top-ten ranking titles. The final selection has been chosen to reflect a wide representation of authors and Buddhist traditions. The book by Ambedkar has not been included since the Facebook sample showed that all recommendations came from similar sources. When an author has more than one title in this selection, only the highest ranking has been included. Hesse’s title has been excluded as it is a novel. Roylance’s title has been excluded as all instances of this recommendation came from the author across different Facebook posts. The final selection has been made to reflect popularity ranking school/sect, lay/ordained and gender diversity. Reviews to different editions of the same title can be displayed in a combined view and sorted by review date.
• Goodread posts: between late December 2020 and early January 2021, a combined view of all editions for each of the titles selected for content analysis was identified and sorted by order of the most recent reviews. Of these, only reviews in English (the majority) were considered. Fifty reviews for each title were considered.

• Reviews and keywords: comprising a list of the 500 reviews used for content analysis. Keywords denote salient words, symbols, or themes identified for analysis.

• Content analysis: following a list of keywords of words, symbols, and themes identified in the reviews, this tab represents a visualization of the most often used terms and salient characteristics of the reading experience of these reviewers.

Appendix D is also available from the following link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wmhGPSgwMaWXbB9ig7eryPfoSLaqKKF/view?usp=sharing
Appendix E: Corpus

A database with over 14,500 entries with examples of reading as Buddhist practice and as evidence of the reception of *Dharma*-texts supports this dissertation.

Given the size of this corpus, it is impracticable to include this database within this dissertation.

The accompanying CD and USB drive contains the file ‘Appendix E: Corpus’ with this document.

Appendix E: Corpus is also available from the following link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tI7qZRZlERrDOBDHhyHxzkDZxPV-i9As/view?usp=sharing
We take trust from clarity and confidence. Perhaps a moment of clarity is ely perfected and purified holy life’ so that one that is learned ’remembers them, recites traditions such as the Tibetan are better placed to understand texts in

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†For a literature review of the history of reading, see Finkelstein and McCleery, 2013, p.101-103.

‡Tweed (2000, p. 46) estimates that between 1893 and 1907 around 2,000-3,000 Euro-Americans would identify as Buddhists, but tens of thousands should be considered Buddhist sympathizers. These were all largely introduced to Buddhist ideas and practices through reading.

§For instance, Kasulis (2007) has surveyed the reception of D. T. Suzuki.

¶For instance, Campany (2018) traces the reception of the Lotus Sutra in China in the early medieval period through the creation of miracle tales.

‖Kornicki (1998, p. 256) observes that Japanese learned monks’ and courtiers’ diaries often record little more than titles of books read. This could be taken as the basis to analyse reading habits and literary reception. A modern expression of this is found, for instance, in in Watts’ autobiography (1973) or Nāṇavīra’s diaries (1988).

¶¶Baldanza (2018, p. 18) has studied marginalia in books held in Vietnamese monastic collection as indication for readership.

‘He [gTsān-pa Rinpoche] also read the text on the Mahāmāyā. He understood the meaning of the terms, but thought that he was not clear about one śloka. (…) He went over the commentary on the first half of the Tattvasaṃgraha and believed in the profound meaning of the book. For several days he was filled by the notion of a clear sky, without having previously meditated on it’ (BA p. 293-294).

Rinchen Tashi Lodró reports that his master wept on reading of Butón’s death (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 28). Myōe writes: ‘Everytime I read them [some verses in Avatamsaka Sutra], these passages move me profoundly, and I have no means to stop my tears from falling down’ (in Abé, 2006, p. 157).

Gyatso (2018, p. 32) suggests that traditions such as the Tibetan are better placed to understand texts in context since it combines study and practice.

The teaching is said to be ‘beautiful in the beginning, the middle and the ending, which in spirit and the letter proclaim the absolutely perfected and purified holy life’ so that one that is learned ‘remembers them, recites them, reflects on them and penetrates them with vision’ (D iii 267).

For instance, scriptural studies, i.e., scriptural reading, is the third of the five regulations of Sōn Master Hanam (Uhlmann, 2010, p. 180). The Order of Interbeing includes extensive references to reading activity and to possessing texts (Nhāt Hạnh, 2004).

(The Blessed One said: O Son of good family, it is good, it is good.) Just so, many indeed, O Sons of the Jina, are the skill in means and the maturing of beings of the Tathāgatas. Having known the course of conduct of beings having various inclinations in accordance with [their] mental disposition, (as is [their] training, in accordance with [their] roots of merit), he teaches Dharma: (…) bhikṣus, some are to be trained by seeking after (the copying and having copied) and reading and worshipping (of [this] sūtra), some are [to be trained] by seeking after the adorning [of it] with lamps and flowers and incense and perfumes and garlands and necklaces, (being not possessed of the Dharma which is skilled in the highest meaning and the dharma of Nirvāṇa’ (Buddhabalādjānaprāti-Hāryavikurvānirdeśa-Sūtra 1290, in Schopen, 1978, p. 325-326).

See Appendix A ‘Reading biographies.’

Padmasambhava said about faith: ‘Again Master Padma said: Tsogyal, to escape samsaric existence you must have faith in the path of liberation (…) Faith arises when reading the profound sūtras and tantras. Faith arises when associating with faithful companions. (…) when following a master and spiritual teacher (…) when being in painful difficulties (…) when reading the sacred teachings of your inclination.’ (Padmasambhava, in Kungsang, 1994, p. 136).

For Sakyong Miphan (2003, p. 96) ‘We take trust from clarity and confidence. Perhaps a moment of clarity is what inspired us to practice in the first place. We saw a statue of the Buddha, read a book, or even saw a friend meditating, and we had an immediate sense of clarity about wanting to do this.’

Pema Chödrön (1997, p. 118) reports she reads and rereads Milarepa for advice.

Sumedho (in Walshe, 2012, p. 12) writes, ‘Only then can one insightfully know the Truth beyond words.’

Pai-chang (in Cleary, 2012, p. 86) writes, ‘In reading the scriptures and studying the doctrines, you should turn all words right around and apply them to yourself. All the verbal teachings point to the inherent nature of the immediate mirroring awareness.’

Hakuin (in Waddell, 1994, p. 59) writes, ‘When from time to time they read the scriptures that contain the words and teachings of the buddha-patriarchs, they will illumine those ancient teachings with their own minds.’
The translators of Longchenpa’s *Trilogy of rest* suggest that its profundity ‘emerges only with slow, attentive, and repeated reading’ (Longchenpa, 2018, xv).

Atiśa’s *Lamp of Enlightenment* (Verse 13) reads: ‘Having learned about the infinite benefits / Of the intention to gain full enlightenment / By reading this sutra or listening to a teacher, / Arouse it repeatedly to make it steadfast’ (in Gyatso, 2004).

For instance, Āśvaghoṣa’s *Buddhacarita* is intended for an aristocratic audience, the *Apannaka Sutta* (M 60) implies an audience of laypeople less versed in the *Dharma* than monastics, and Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Bca) addresses a monastic audience (Flores, 2008, p. 22, 73, 147). Śāntideva’s *Śiksāsamuccaya* (Śs) comprises an audience of monks at early stages of their training (Griffiths, 1999, p. 137). The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* was virtually required reading for the aristocracy during Tang China (Campany, 1991, p. 36). Fronsdal (2005, xxvii) presumes a monastic audience for the *Dhammapada* (Dhp) while acknowledging its wider appeal. Roebuck (2010, xvi) distinguishes *Dhammapada* verses geared either towards monastics or laity, while acknowledging many are generally applicable to all. The *Sūtra of Upāsaka Precepts* (Uś) is destined for a lay readership (Shih, 1994, p. 1).

One instance of conversion which also illustrates this point: ‘My own spiritual life was triggered at age fourteen by the gift of T. Lobsang Rampa’s book *The Third Eye*, a semifictional account of mystical adventures in Tibet. It was exciting and thought-provoking and offered a world to escape to what seemed far better than the one I inhabited’ (Kornfield, 1993, p. 3).

This dictum is occasionally repeated by others: ‘At the time of his [’Brom’s] passing away, he said to Po-to-ba: “I did not discover anyone else who could be your teacher. Look upon the sūtras as (your) teacher”’ (BA p. 264). Also, ’Then skam asked him: “Whom should I ask, then feeling uncertain, after you had gone?” Dam-pa replied: “The best kalyāṇa-mitra is your own Mind! A Teacher, able to remove doubts, will emerge from within your own Mind. The second kalyāṇa-mitra is an Ārya (the scriptures of the Buddha), therefore you should read the Prajñāpāramitā. Verily the lowest king of kalyāṇa-mira is the individual. But you will not meet me again. You can discuss with the brothers who had experienced meditation”’ (Chah, 2011, p. 547).

For Myōe, both *sūtra* reading and relic worship were means to bring the past into the present (Unno, 2006, p. 141).

‘Not from mere speech nor solely by listening / can one advance on this firm path of practice / by which the wise ones, the meditators, are realised from the bondage of Māra’ (S i 24).

'*One should keep oneself occupied all the time with wholesome deeds such as: learning, teaching, memorizing, reading, scrutinizing, and chanting the Buddhist scriptures; (...) When one does so, mental defilements do not have much opportunity to arise, and most of the time wholesome mental states will arise at the six sense doors instead*’ (Sayadaw, 2016, p.18). Taixu (in Pittman, 2001, p. 213-214) is said to experience the abandonment of the defilements while reading.

For instance, reading is included in the second power used as method in Mahāmudrā to purify negative emotions (Tashi Namgyal, 2019, p. 160). ‘Meanwhile, I lived as a priest of a small temple. I reached forty, the age when one is not supposed to be bothered any longer by doubts. One night, I decided to take another look at the Lotus Sutra. I got out my only lamp, turned up the wick, and began to read it once again. I read as far as the third chapter, the one on parables. Then, just like that, all the lingering doubts and uncertainties vanished from my mind. They suddenly ceased to exist. (...) Teardrops began cascading down my face (...) A loud involuntary cry burst from the depths of my being and I began sobbing uncontrollably (...)’ (Hakuin, in Waddell, 1994, p. 33). Likewise, Milarepa writes: ‘If sometimes doubts arise, and skepticism, / One should read the holy sayings of the Buddha. / With conviction in the true words of the Dharma, / Confidence and faith in one’s heart will grow!’ (Chang, 1962, p. 152). Kornfield repeats, ‘Doubt can also be dissolved by developing faith. We can ask questions of read great books’ (Kornfield, 1993, p. 98).

‘Abandon defiled thoughts concerning the woman and substitute wholesome thoughts for them by discussing or teaching the Dhamma, reading books or scriptures, chanting, doing volunteer work, and so on’ (Sayadaw, 2016, p. 18).

Ajahn Thiradhammo (2014, p. 135-136) relates how, when lacking energy and inspiration for practice, he would read: ‘The book I kept aside for my monastic emergency was the poems of the enlightened monks and
nuns, the *Theragatha* and *Therigatha* (...) So when I lost my own inspiration I opened these texts and read these profound stories of different people and the way they practised. And they all succeeded, they all realized enlightenment (...) Another valuable lesson from reading these accounts was learning the diverse ways in which people practised.’

33 However, Jingpa (2016, p. 38, 89) suggests that hearing/reading/seeing hells depicted, for instance, should be enough to inspire someone in the path.

34 ‘But at this point he does not add, ‘It is by reading alone that I myself am teaching you all these profound principles, not by personal perception.’ He sells himself for gain and aggrandisement’ (From the Ākaśagarbhā Sūtra, in Ss 62).

35 ‘To read and chant the Sutras is the second preliminary grade’ in the Tendai system (Tendai H. p. 39).

36 It is recommended practice to read a few verses by Longchenpa before settling in meditation (Longchenpa, 2017, xxiii).

37 Preaching texts (*bana*) are read aloud to meditators wishing to develop wisdom in Sri Lanka (Deegalle, 2007, p. 76).

38 Zhu Xi (in Kornicki, 1998, p. 259-260) recommends reading less but more intensely: ‘The ideal reader should be able to know the core texts so well that he is free of the written word.’ This is also exemplified by the following case: ‘When master Ngaripa was a child, his father said, “Since you are the son of a monk, you need good qualities. And for that you must know how to read, so read this,”’ and gave him the volume of the Compendium of Lessons and left to recite the *Dharma*. When he came back, the boy was playing among the children. His father scolded him, “Are you like other children? Not studying how to read, and acting like this!” “I have nothing to read,” Ngaripa replied. “Where did the volume of the Compendium of Lessons go?” “I memorized it, down to the small notes”’ (Stearn, 2006, p. 187).

39 Mhv XXXVIII 16-8 has a monk reciting from a book under a tree, supposedly to memorize the text (Collins, 1992, p. 122).

40 Chu-hung establishes the following link: ‘If people read the sutras, the sutras which are the words of the Buddha, they should practice buddha-remembrance.’ (in Cleary, 1994, p. 22).

41 Miln 78 cites ways by which mindfulness arises, one of which is ‘from reference to books.’ Miln 80 suggests using books as reminders for recollection.

42 ‘After reading the Ratnakūṭa-sūtra the Venerable gLiṅ understood himself to have been the Bodhisattva Vīryaprabha, one of the sixty monks’ (BA p. 660).

43 [Abbot Rinpoche gLaṅ-łun-pa] On one occasion he read through the large commentary of the rTsa-Ituñ and by the power of his faith (in that book) he saw for six days his own body as a cakra-mandala (...) He also read through the Mādhyamakāvatāra, composed by the ācārya Candrakīrti. He perceived all visual objects to be similar to rainbows. Again during five or six days this vision of all internal and external objects vanished amidst hi daily work, and then became similar to the Sky’ (BA p. 298).

44 ‘At the age of 8, the faculty of prescience was born in him [Dharmasvāmin Nam-mkha’ dpal-bzan-po]. At the age of 10, he studied the notes and commentary on the Hevajra-Tantra and other texts. Signs peculiar to the Sādāṅga (yoga) were observed in him without practicing meditation. At the age of 11, the felt boundless commiseration and sadness. He perceived the meaning of profound scriptures’ (BA p. 635).

45 For Ōmori (2001, p. 75) ‘Ten minutes of zazen before reading and the momentary immersion in samadhi before work—how well they help us enjoy our work and reading, and to what a great extent they enhance our efficiency!’

46 The Sinhalese monk Ratanapāla has: ‘As my faith and discipline grew, and I read more and more in the scriptures, my knowledge of Dhamma grew so that I associated with sinful monks less and less’ (in Carrithers, 1983, p. 152). Tenzin Gyatso says: ‘Learning is gained by listening to teachings, reading Dharma books, reflecting on their meaning, and discussing the Dharma with others’ (Gyatso and Chodron, 2018, p. 219).

47 In order: *sutamaya-ñāṇa, cintāmaya-ñāṇa*, and *bhāvanāmaya-ñāṇa*.

48 ‘Wisdom is obtained from studying the twelve divisions of the Tathāgata’s scriptures, which disperse doubts, and from reading the secular treatises, which distinguish good from bad. Wisdom is to discern well the twelve divisions of the scriptures; (...)’ (Us Chap. xxviii, 1075c).

49 In true Zen parlance, Maezumi Roshi (2002, p. 69) expresses it as ‘Reading books is not the way to solve the problem. Not reading books is not the way to solve the problem.’

50 For instance, Shuchen Tsurilrim Rinchen, Degé monastery great editor, lamented that his efforts around books might have been wasted as books lack much potential for spiritual development (Schaeffer, 1994, p. 4).

51 This second predicament encapsulates Shinran’s attitude towards reading: ‘I am pointing to the moon with my finger in order to show it to you. Why do you look at my finger and not the moon?’ (Shinran, in Nasu, 2006, p. 253).
As nearly impossible to follow. People fidgeted.

A. I remember once participating in a ritual that lasted for about eleven hours a day. This is called “oral transmission,” and whispered, and some of the young monks in the back got into rice throwing wars. We didn’t know how long it would take to read through this text, but each day we hoped the next day would be the last.

For example, Vin I 42.2, 48.2; Vin IVb 128, 304. Horner (2012a, xxxvi, p. 177n1; 2014b, xii) discusses occurrences and meanings of writing in Pāli literature.

For instance, Jāt 181, 214, 377, 388.

Writing appears among a list of several other crafts, including accountancy, mathematics, poetry, and debate (Ud 3.9). These also appear in Miln. 59 and 178. Writing is one of the high crafts (Vin iv 7) and one of the mundane actions (ABK iv 254).

For example, Miln 42 has letter writing and Miln 71 has an elder who is a teacher of writing, and another teacher of writing at Miln 349.

E.g. Nāgārjuna’s Sūtrasamuccaya (second century) or Sàntideva’s Sökṣāsamuccaya (eight century).

See appendix A ‘Pedagogical reading’ for a description of reading material in some Theravāda settings.

See appendix A ‘Cult of the book.’

The Buddha appears to have preached a text to a selected few who, forty years after the Buddha’s passing, hid it in rock formations, caves, stūpas, of trusted it to supernatural beings, while waiting for it to reappear in the world half a millennium later (Harrison, 2003, p. 124).

The Hevajra Tantra (Hvt, Chap. 7) stipulates the text should be kept hidden while travelling.

Teacher-student relationships in all Buddhist traditions require students relinquishing to teachers for teacher to transmit the content of scripture (Vism iii 126).

Sakyong Mipham (2003, p. 81) illustrates this scenario: ‘I remember once participating in a ritual that lasted several weeks with His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. We were sitting (…), listening to him read from a text for about eleven hours a day. This is called “oral transmission,” (…). We sat cross-legged on mats while volume after volume was read aloud in such rapid-fire Tibetan that it was nearly impossible to follow. People fidgeted and whispered, and some of the young monks in the back got into rice-throwing wars. We didn’t know how long it would take to read through this text, but each day we hoped the next day would be the last.’

‘When he was listening to the exposition of the Saṃvara-Tantra, a dākinī gave him the permission (to read the text)’ (BA p. 447).

Shabkar offers an example of a lung: after producing a series of visualizations, ‘I gave the transmission, reading with a clear, loud voice; at the end I placed the volumes in Kunzang’s head, praying that these teachings might benefit all those who would see, hear, remember, or touch them’ (Shabkar p. 249).

Shabkar (2018, p. 176) offers an example: ‘I gave these instructions to benefit my disciples at various times during my stay at Kailash, and whatever of the profound and vast Dharma teachings were found useful were written down. These notes were subsequently gathered and laid out in this book—a veritable banquet of instruction. I gave everyone the reading transmission along with an explanation of the entire volume. At the conclusion, my disciples presented me with many gifts and arranged a ganachakra feast.’

An example is the foundational story of a text (sūtra or mantra) falling from the sky into a Tibetan palace. The king, not knowing what to do, resorted to worshiping it (Butöön, p. 279). The later emperor Songtsen Gampo (d. 649) learnt its content and encouraged the creation of the Tibetan alphabet and the translation of scriptures from India (Elliott, Diemberger and Clemente, 2014b, p. 7).

When a Bön king regain power in Tibet, ‘The temple doors of Samyé and Ramoché were sealed with clay, and most Buddhist texts hidden among the cliffs of Lhasa’ (Butöön, 2013, p. 290). ‘A dākinī known as the “Mad-One of Lha-sa” uttered a prediction, following which the Master was able to extract the history of Lha-sa from inside a beam (in the Jo-khaṅ), but she did not allow him to keep it for more than one day. All his disciples shared the manuscript and prepared copies of it. In the evening of the same day, the manuscript was again hidden inside the beam’ (BA p. 285).
The Sixth Patriarch of Ch’an, Hui-neng, allegedly could not read (Wright, 1998, p. 20).

A special transmission outside the scriptures, that does not rely on words and letters’ (Attributed to Bodhidharma, in Heine and Wright, 2004, p. 4). However, Bodhidharma is also said to have read of the scriptures available to him in translation (Riggs, 2008, p. 257).

Te-shan Hsüan-chien (780/82-865) burned his collection of commentaries on the Diamond Sutra (Seizan and Sasaki, 1972, p. 73).

‘But later, when I realized that they were only medicines for salvation and displays of opinion, I threw them [the scriptures] all away. Then in my search for Tao, I turned to Ch’an.’ (Lin-chi, in Seizan and Sasaki, 1972, p. 73). Likewise, Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien (ninth century) threw away his collection of sūtra exegetical material (Seizan and Sasaki, 1972, p. 73).

‘If the sūtras were to be discarded, Rinzai and Unmon might also need to be discarded. If we cannot rely upon the Buddhist sūtras, we are without water to drink, and without a dipper to scoop water’ (Sbgz. 3 Bukkyo 39).

Yamada Mumon said: ‘First, we must study the sūtras and read reverently the records left by the teachers of the past in order to determine where our own nature is. Sometimes you hear it said that Zen monks do not have to read books or to study. When did this misleading idea get started? It’s ridiculous to think that this could possibly be true. We say Zen is “a separate transmission outside the teachings,” but it is only because there are teachings that there is something transmitted separate from it. If there were no teaching necessary in the first place, you could not speak of a transmission separate from it. If we do not first study the sūtras and ponder the records of the ancients, we will end up going off in the wrong direction altogether. The ancient teachers engaged in all branches of scholarship and studied all there was to study; but just through scholarship alone, they were not able to settle what was bothering them. It was then that they turned to Zen. That is why their Zen has real power and dynamism. If you have no understanding of Buddhism, no knowledge of the words of the Dharma, it does not matter how many years you sit, your zazen will all be futile’ (Yamada, in Mohr, 2000, p. 297). The Tendai school resolved this paradox by suggesting a path where enlightenment is impossible outside reading/hearing scripture (Stone, 2006, p. 162).

See Goldberg (1987) for a study of ‘recorded sayings’ as a literary genre.

Cleary (2005h, p. 237-239) offers advice on how to best approach the study of koan through reading.

Fa-yuan writes, ‘Have you not seen the tens of thousands of verses of the Flower Ornament Scripture and the thousands of poems of the Zen masters? Both are profuse and vivid, with elegant language, all of them are refined and pure, without padding. They are hardly the same as imitation of worldly customs with all their fripperies’ (in Cleary, 1997, p. 142).

Kasulis (1985a, p. 83) reflects on his own experiences of reading Shōbōgenzō: ‘to read Shōbōgenzō is to be ensnared in the vines of words (kattō), yet at the same time, its very complexity reveals Dōgen’s own personal presence and gives us the opportunity to entangle our own entanglements with his.’

Fa-yen advises, ‘For writing to be a pathway in later times and true in the mouths of the multitudes it is still necessary to study precedents, and then it is essential to suit it to the occasion’ (in Cleary, 1997, p. 142).

‘In the past I [Baiyun] was living in seclusion in the library at Guizong monastery and read through scriptures and histories, many hundreds of them crossed my eyes. The books were extremely worn and old, yet as I opened each volume I had a sense of new discovery’ (CB Lesson 33).

National Teacher Shōichi of Tōfoku says (in Bielefeldt, 2007, p. 150): ‘The sūtras and spells [dhārāṇī] are not words: they are the original mind of all beings. They are speech, intended for those who have lost their original minds, that teaches through various similes in order to bring about awakening to the original mind and put an end to birth and death in delusion. One who awakens to his original mind and returns to the origin reads the true sūtra.’

‘Under a tree I’m reading / Lao-tzu, quietly perusing. / Ten years not returning, / I forgot the way I had come’ (Hekiganroku Case 34).

‘[In the order of] Great Master Kokaku of Ungo-zan mountain, the story goes, there is a monk who is reading a sūtra in his quarters. The Great Master asks from outside window, “Ācārya, what sūtra is that you are reading?” The monk replies, “The Vimalakīrti Sutra”. The Master says, “I am not asking you if it is the Vimalakīrti Sutra. That which you are reading is a What Sutra”. At this the monk is able to enter’ (Sbgz.1 Kankin 206).

This work was soon translated into Asia languages, e.g., a Burmese translation appeared in 1886 (Foxeus, 2017, p. 232n18).

Bond (1988, p. 110) reports the curious incidence in which monastics tasked with translating the canon into Sinhala for the Jayanti project opted for a Sinhala literary style rather than a popular translation, which rendered
the end result outside of the understanding of the common reader, the laity thus resorting to purchasing these translated volumes as gifts for monastics, rather than for reading themselves. Hansen (2007, p. 143) points that several Cambodian monastic libraries had manuscripts in scripts and languages unintelligible to the population by the beginning of the twentieth century, and how modernizing Buddhist trends advocated the use of Khmer scripts and languages in new printed editions. Buddhadhāsa Bhikkhu is a Thai monastic exemplary for his pioneering efforts in translating scripture so that educated Thai could access it directly (Wiles, 2016, p. 645).


D. S. Wright (1998, viii) offers a pertinent example of his own first reading on Buddhism: ‘In 1968, under the influence of the spirit of the age, I received Blofeld’s transmission. Purchasing a paperback copy of Huang Po from the “Oriental Wisdom” section of my local bookstore, I too began reading Zen. The activity of reading Zen at that time placed one within a specific cultural tradition, and entailed a particular style of reading. It meant reading “romantically,” and thus receiving the transmission of Huang Po through the mediation of a prominent lineage of modern romantics — Blake and Wordsworth, Emerson and Thoreau, all the way up through Kerouac, Watts, . . . and John Blofeld. Romantics in Blofeld’s era could be characterized by their openness to cultural and historical ideals quite other than their own. They assumed that through speculative, imaginative excursions beyond the conventions of their own time and place, fundamental forms of wisdom and transformation were possible.’

Psychologists Kristeller (2003) and Taylor (2003) illustrate their discovering Buddhism through reading and also their understanding of psychology through the mediation of psychologizing Buddhist interpretations.

‘This means that the Lamrim should be learned under the tutelage of a qualified teacher and not merely by trying to read English translations of the instruction on one’s own’ (Engle, 2009, p. 25).

Some of these guidebooks (e.g., Brasington, 2015, p. 145-147) set out this idea while also acknowledging that some individuals (in this example Brasington’s teacher, Ayya Khema) learned meditation solely through reading some suttas and the Visuddhimagga, being able to access the jhānas, her own teacher only confirming her achievement later.

Hakuin makes explicit reference to the benefit of reading his instructions: ‘I have already written of the essentials of introspection in my Yasen kanna, a book designed for the use of all Zen monks everywhere. I don’t know exactly how many have been cured of their Zen sickness by reading what I have written there, but I do know of eight or nine, seriously ill and near to death, who were cured by following my instructions’ (Hakuin, in Yampolski, 1971, p. 50-51).

The following exegetical works are accorded authoritative status as descriptions of the path by different Buddhist traditions: Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhimagga, Chih-i’s Mo-ho chih-kuan (The Great Calming and Contemplation), Asanga’s Bodhisattvatvabhūmi (Stages of the Bodhisattva’s Path), Kamalāśīla’s Bhāvanākrama (Course of Practice), Tsongkhapa’s Lam rim chen mo (Great Book on the Stages of the Path) or Maitreyanātha’s Abisamayālāṃkāra (Ornament of Realizations), among others.

This book has three purposes. First, it serves as a course in Buddhist meditation. Meditators who read the book carefully and carry out its instructions conscientiously will receive a progressive and complete course in meditation, one ultimately based on the traditions and sometimes even the actual words of the Buddha himself. These profound, time-honored teachings are presented here in a manner that is compatible with Western thought (Brahm, 2006b, p. 4). Another example: ‘If you can read this book and follow the instructions, you have more than enough intelligence to learn to meditate. For that matter, even if you don’t understand some of what you read here, by just following the basic instructions for each Stage, you will succeed’ (Culadasa, Immegurut and Graves, 2015, p. 74). Ogyn Trinley Dorje says this of Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā: ‘Finally, it is important that anyone reading this text bears in mind that it is a highly regarded practice book, through which many people have attained direct realization, and, as such, is not to be treated lightly. It is my aspiration that all who read it will be inspired to follow the mahāmudrā path practiced by these great masters diligently’ (in Tashi Namgyal, 2019, xxiii, xxiv).

‘Though you recite much scripture, / if you are unaware and do not act according / you are like a cowherd counting other people’s cattle, / not a sharer in the wonderer’s life’ (Dhp 19). Several metaphors are issued to illustrate this point: ‘reading about Buddhism is like if a warrior entered battle according to what they have read’ (Chah, 2018, p. 95); ‘reading about Enlightenment is like scratching an itchy foot through your shoe’ (Kapleau,
‘Reading about enlightenment is like reading about nutrition when you’re hungry’ (Kapleau, 2000b, p. 22); ‘Expecting intellectual understanding of Buddhist texts alone to solve our problems is like a sick person hoping to cure his or her illness through merely reading medical instructions without actually taking the medicine’ (Kelsang Gyatso, 2013, x); ‘Buddha gave Dharma instructions as supreme medicine to cure the inner disease of our delusions, but we cannot cure this disease just by reading or studying Dharma books’ (Kelsang Gyatso, 2016); ‘Painted food does not allay hunger’ (Hsiang-yen Chih-hsien, in Seizan and Sasaki, 1972, p. 73n8).

Hongren makes the same point when he says that the picture of food does not make a meal, as he portrays scholars as those counting other people’s wealth (Van Schaik, 2018, p. 17); ‘A rice cake that is painted in a picture cannot stave off hunger’ (Kyogen, in Sbgz.1 Keisei-Sanshiki 217, Shin-Fukutoku 80). Khema (1987, p. 22) says, ‘The Buddha said that we are all sick and that the Dhamma is the medicine. He was sometimes called the Great Physician. But just as with any medicine, it is of no use just knowing about or merely reading the label’. For Sumedho (2014b, p. 111-112) reading without practicing is ‘like reading maps all the time without going anywhere’ or ‘like reading cookbooks without preparing meals.’ For Khyatse (2007, p. 124), ‘You might read about these four truths for the sake of entertainment or mental exercise, but if you don’t practice them, you are like a sick person reading the label on a medicine bottle but never taking the medicine.’

102 ‘It is better to search your own Mind devotedly than to read and recite innumerable sūtras and dhārāṇi every day for countless years’ (Kapleau, 2000a, p. 180).

103 ‘The day after I called on you I was riding home on the train with my wife. I was reading a book on Zen by Son-o, who, you may recall, was a master of Soto Zen living in Sendai during the Genroku period [1688–1703]. As the train was nearing Ofuna station I ran across this line: “I came to realize clearly that Mind is no other than mountains and rivers and the great wide earth, the sun and the moon and the stars.” I had read this before, but this time it impressed itself upon me so vividly that I was startled. I said to myself: “After seven or eight years of zazen I have finally perceived the essence of this statement,” and couldn’t suppress the tears that began to well up. Somewhat ashamed to find myself crying among the crowd, I averted my face and dabbed at my eyes with my handkerchief’ (in Kapleau, 2000a, p. 228).

104 However, the library at Amaravati Buddhist Monastery (UK) carries poetry and novels as they are quite popular genres among visitors and some staff, whereas Throssel Hole Buddhist Abbey (UK) allows the reading of poetry and novels when monastics feel unwell (Personal communications, February 2015).

105 Masefield (1986, Table 4) includes a list of all recorded instances of conversion in the Pāli canon by hearing discourses, progressive talks, overhearing talks, exhortations, Dharma verses, or just verbs. The Fa-chü p’i-yü ching (p. 41) records: ‘When King Pukkaṣati received the scriptural text, he read and reflected on it again and again, and quickly became zealously devoted. He sighed deeply and said: “My conversion to the Path is truly wonderful.”’

106 Self-guided books on spirituality often assume readers are in this stage. For instance, Ruthven and Medbh-Mara (2001, p. 4): ‘Why are you reading this book? Possibly because you need some help with your quest and probably because you want answers to some very pertinent questions.’

107 ‘Certain inner anxiety is needed in religious life. It is a necessary precursor to make one understand and appreciate religious truth. Without any inner anguish, simply listening to sermons, merely reading religious writings, and trying to get something out of them, is futile. Whatever we get is only a superficial shell’ (Suzuki, 1998, Chapter 5).

108 For instance, many women’s conversion to Buddhism have been attributed to the reading of Korean nun Kim Ir’yŏp’s books where she narrates her love affairs (Park, 2010, p. 110).

109 Candamitto (1972) contains several accounts of self-converted Buddhists after having read Buddhist literature.

110 For instance, British nun Tenzin Palmo, after first learning about Theravāda, came across Tibetan Buddhism and decided to engage in traditional yogic Tibetan practices after having read Evans-Wentz’s translation of Milarepa (Ray, 2002, p. 442).

111 Realizing one is the reincarnation of a bodhisattva, becoming aware of one’s dreams, perceiving one’s body as a manḍala for a length of time, or seeing all objects as rainbows, to name a few (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 7, 44). Olcott claimed knowledge of Buddhism after having read 10,000 pages of Buddhist books (in English and French translations) (Olcott, Old Diary Leaves, Second series p. 299). By the time the 36th edition of his Buddhist Catechism was published (1903), he had read 15,000 pages (Catechism, xv) (in Trainor, 1997, p. 15n41).

112 For instance, British scientist Allan Bennet, upon reading Arnold’s The Light of Asia, travelled to Burma to study Buddhism, opened a Buddhist bookshop next to the British Museum in 1907, and helped organize the first Buddhist mission to the UK (Bell, 1991, p. 36-37; Bell, 2001, p. 6-7). Sangharakshita’s interest in Buddhism
developed through reading (Sangharakshita, 1988, Chapter 2; Sangharakshita, 1993, Introduction; Sangharakshita, 1996, Chapter 3), and Sumedho was introduced to Buddhism by reading books by D. T. Suzuki while serving in the Korean War (Bell, 1991, p. 69, 86; Sumedho, 2014d, p. 196).

114 ‘I have never valued or studied the mere sophistry of word-knowledge, set down in books in conventionalized form of questions and answers to be committed to memory (and fired off at one’s opponents); these lead but to mental confusion and not to such practice as bringeth actual realization of Truth. Of such word-knowledge I am ignorant; and if ever I did know it, I have forgotten it long ago. I pray that thou wilt give ear to the song which I am about to sing, to show my reasons for forgetting book-learning’ (Milarepa, in Heruka, 2000, p. 245).

115 Vism iii 29 lists books among several impediments to concentration, either because one is too busy with textual roles (Vism iii 51); Tiradhhammo expresses one such obstacle: ‘The main difficulty, I find, is with people who have read about Buddhism, but who have never meditated. They attach to certain philosophical positions such as soulessness, atheism, pessimism (dukkha) etc., and are unable to accept that these are merely subjects for meditative reflection and not beliefs’ (in Bell, 1991, p. 156). Another example: ‘Having read many books about Zen prior to enlightenment, I had the illusory notion that if I could attain enlightenment I would acquire supernatural powers, or develop an outstanding personality all at once, or become a great sage, or that all suffering would be annihilated and the world become heavenlike. These false ideas of mine, I now see, hindered the master in guiding me’ (Kapleau, 2000a, p. 258). Mahā Boowa (in Tambiah, p. 151-152) also expresses how reading and study can give rise to defilements and attachment.

116 Ruthven and Medbh-Mara (2001, p. 41) say this about commodified spirituality: ‘Much of what we read today (...) oversimplifies the pursuit of spiritual development by trivialising it for the mass-consumer market. If we believe what we read in such publications, we come away with the impression that our hidden spiritual self can be discovered on the shelf at the supermarket and paid for by a credit card!’

117 Sŏn master Daehaeng (in Go, 2010, p. 238) suggests the following: ‘I never say to throw away books, but I do suggest not to read books that can cause attachments to outside things. Read those books that focus on the inside, read them while you do not read.’

118 Huiyuan (d. 416) while on his deathbed refused medicine and died while awaiting having the Vinaya read to him to confirm whether he was allowed to take it (Zürcher, in Brook, 2005, p. 155-156; Adamek, 2007, p. 48).

119 The monk Tao-ch’ìn warned a noblewoman of the danger of becoming attached to reading scripture and performing other devotional actions as they can become and obstacle towards liberation (Shūdō, 2004, p. 228).

120 Doherty (1983); Berling (1987); Allon (1997); Cole (2005); Flores (2008); Chaturvedi (2010); Collins (2010).

121 ‘Busily studying Dhamma in the Tipitaka from the linguistic or literary viewpoint is no way to come to know the true nature of things’ (Buddhadasa, 1996, p. 30).

122 Lopez (1998, Chapter 3) offers an analysis of Rampa’s books, their content and reception.

123 Lopez (1998, p. 12n23) includes some popular fiction works on Tibet.

124 ‘Chatralwa read the biography of Milarepa and for five days he experienced having no reference points in his mind, and since then his mind rested at ease’ (Thondup, 2002, p. 261). ‘Labs-sgron (...) She was an expert reader, and for a considerable time acted as reader of the Prajñāpāramitā for Gra-pa. As a result of reading the Prajñāpāramitā a clear vision of the Void (Śūnyatā) was produced in her’ (BA p. 983).

125 The nineteenth-century Korean monk Yongsŏng intended to produce awakening experiences by means such as dharāṇi recitation and scripture reading. One such experience occurred while reading The Transmission of the Lamp (Huh, 2010, p. 22, 24). Sŏn master Hanam had several enlightened experiences, including final awakening, by reading without a teacher (Uhlmann, 2010, p. 172). Hakuin’s awakening upon hearing a cricket chirring occurred while reading the Lotus Sūtra (Waddell, 1994, xviii). Tsongkhapa experienced realization of absolute reality and experienced perfect understanding of Madhyamika while reading (Truman, 2006, p. 106).

126 ‘One day when reading scripture, suddenly I lost a sense of the world of physical and mental phenomena. In a state of emptiness, I experienced a spiritual brightness. The innumerable worldly defilements became completely luminous, like pure images floating in the air. Although I sat there with the scriptures for several hours, it seemed to be only an instant. Several days later, my body and mind were still light-hearted and contented. Within the next several days, I read the rest of the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures, as well as the Avatamsaka Sūtra, and immediately I had insight into the nature of all things (...) This was for me the sloughing off of all the defilements of the world and achieving the beginning of my new life in Buddhism’ (Taixu, in Pittman, 2001, p. 213-214).

127 ‘(...) the ācārya being convinced said: “You must recite the Prajñāpāramitā”. When he read the sentence “the nature of the sphere of Heaven in limitless”, an extraordinary trance was produced on him (...) He constantly practiced fasting and recitation (of sacred texts). At that time, he and others saw countless holy visions’ (BA p. 1010-1011)
Chinese Ch’an monk Taixu reports in his autobiography having visions of Buddha fields and realizations of emptiness as result of reading the *Perfection of Wisdom* and the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* (in Goodell, 2008, p. 94-95). Sōn master Chûnul elaborated the principles of his school following a series of enlightened experiences produced by his scriptural reading (Buswell, 1986).

Age 16, Sot’aesan had an enlightenment experience during absorption. He went on to read the *Diamond Sūtra* after it appeared to him in a dream and realized that was consonant with his experience (Chung, 2010, p. 62, 64; Pacey, 2016, p. 99).

‘Xuanjue said, “From whom did you attain the Dharma?” [Xuanjue] said, “I heard that there is a succession of teachers for the Mahāyāna sutras and sāstras. Later I became enlightened to the central doctrine of the mind of the Buddha [by reading] the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*. As yet, no one has verified [my realization].”’ (Plat, p. 67)

Tiyavanich (1997) argues the need to analyse popular magazines features the biographies of Thai mediator forest monks given the popularity enjoyed by these narratives.

Some research has been done on the availability of Buddhist titles in national markets, e.g. Diez-Velasco (2018) on Spain and Borup (2016, p. 48-49) on Denmark. Wuthnow and Cadge (2004, p. 367) suggest that some readers might have been exposed to Buddhist ideas and practices by means of New Age reading material.

For instance, the *Upāyakauśalya Sūtra* explicitly declares: ‘Son of the family: this [explanation of the teaching of skill in means] is to be kept secret. Do not [speak of it, teach it,] explain it [or recite it] in the presence of inferior sentient beings whose store of merit is small’ (Up 174).


Lopez (1998, Chapter 6) reviews the importance of Tibetan literature publishing enterprises in Europe and America; Diez de Velasco (2018) survey Buddhist publishing activities in Spain. As a comparison to the current availability, Waterhouse (1997, p. 221) reckons that in a town like Bath, UK, in 1996, the largest bookshop stocked about 90 books on Buddhism, only a minority of which were translations of scripture. Odiseos (2020) surveys the effects of publishing activities in the US and the effect of the availability of texts.

Coleman (2001, p. 199) reports that 47% of his informants were introduced to Buddhism via books or lectures.

Gordon-Finlayson (2012, p. 172) includes the case of one informant who had been reading about Zen Buddhism for twenty years but who never fully engaged in any formal practice. In another case (p. 189) another informant narrates that reading about Buddhism confirmed her intuition, so she felt no other involvement with practice was needed. Another (p. 191) presents a self-identifying Zen Buddhist with no formal affiliation or practice whose reading veers more towards Taoism and Confucianism than Buddhism. Kapleau (2000b, p. 227) has one example of an individual engaged in reading for years as his commitment to work and family did not allow for more involvement with the practice.

Tweed (2000, p. 44; 2002, p. 21) would include individuals such as Paul Carus, John Cage, William Wiley, or Andrew Carnegie as Buddhist sympathizers.

Spiritual but not religious and spiritual but not affiliated. Bond (1988, p. 183) includes the case of a Sri Lankan convert from Catholicism who instructed herself to meditate mainly through reading and for whom reading remain the main source of information on Buddhism.

Modern translations of that sort of material increasingly warn the reader of the benefits and dangers of reading these texts and prompt readers to seek a qualified teacher to follow the practices described in the texts. For instance, Trulshik Rinpoche (2006, p. 9) writes: ‘The path of Secret Mantra is one of both great profit and danger. Therefore, anyone who practices these texts should receive the empowerments, reading transmissions, and instructions from an authentic spiritual teacher, doing so in the correct manner.’ Another example is Shinran’s teachings, once prohibited reading for the uninitiated, now widely published and read (Rambelli, 2006, p. 54). Ray (2002, p. 278) suggests that unsupervised reading on Mahāmudra literature before engaging in the practice can be dangerous as ‘Westerners (...) live in a culture where thoughts and concepts are taken as real’.

Apart from older figures like D. T. Suzuki, the following authors could be included: Shunryu Suzuki, Sangharakshita, Watts, Thich Nhat Hanh, Trungpa, and the Dalai Lama (McMahen, 2008, p. 8).

List of Facebook Groups: Buddhism for All (Discussion & Learning); Theravada Buddhism; Secular Buddhism; Buddhism Taught Simply; Buddhism; Western Buddhism; Buddhist philosophy; and Mahayana Buddhism (English) group.

*Dhammapada; What the Buddha Taught* by Walpola Rahula; *Zen Mind Beginner's Mind* by Shunryu Suzuki; *The Heart of the Buddha’s Teaching* by Thich Nhat Hanh; *Buddhism Plain and Simple* by Steven Hagen; *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* by Sogyal Rinpoche; *When Things Fall Apart* by Pema Chödrön; *The Art of Happiness* by Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler; *Awakening the Buddha Within* by Surya Das; and *Buddhist Boot Camp* by Timber Hawkeye.
When he was five or six, his father related to him the sufferings of Hell, he reflected over it and being frightened, asked his father: ‘What would help?’ The father replied: ‘The worship and circumambulation of gods’ (meaning prostrations before holy images and circumambulation of holy objects). The boy spent days and nights worshipping in front of the sacred books, which had formerly belonged to his ancestors’ (BA, p. 712).

The *Nandimitrāvadāna* names fifty Mahāyāna sutras emphasizing these textual tasks (Ray, 1994, p. 184).

Maitreya’s *Madhyāntavibhāṅga* describes the following ten *Dharma* activities: ‘To transcribe letters, make offerings / Give generously, listen, read, / Memorize, explain, recite, / Reflect, and meditate’ (Mav, p.131).

The *Hastikākṣya sutra* mentions twenty such benefits (Apple, 2014, p. 41).

If anyone preaches the *Dharma* / in an empty, secluded place, or in a quiet place where no human voice is heard, / and reads and recites this sūtra there, / then I will appear to them with a pure and radiant body’ (Sdp Chap. 10, p. 233).

Ajahn Chah writes: ‘Recollect the Buddha and incline your mind to his Dhamma. In it you will see the Buddha himself – where else could he be? Just look at his Dhamma. Read the teachings. Can you find anything faulty? Focus your attention on the Buddha’s teaching and you will see him’ (Chah, 2001, p. 735).

Patrul Rinpoche writes: ‘For it is the representation of the speech of the Buddha, rather than that of his body or mind, that teaches us what to do and what not to do and also ensures the continuity of the doctrine. The scriptures are therefore no different from the Buddha himself, and are particularly sacred’ (Padmakara Translation Group, 1994, p. 187).

Ajahn Chah also says, ‘So the volumes of the Sūtra are the whole body of the Tathāgata. To do prostrations to volumes of the Sūtra is to do prostrations to the Tathāgata. To have met volumes of the Sūtra is to be meeting the Tathāgata. The volumes of the Sūtra are the bones of the Tathāgata.’

Scripture veneration can be assimilated to attending to the Buddha’s needs: ‘Again, during this life we should produce [copies of] the Sūtra of the Flower of *Dharma*. We should write them, should print them, and should retain them. Constantly we should receive them upon the head in reverence, make prostrations to them, and offer them flowers, incense, lights, food and drink, and clothing. Constantly keeping the head clean, we should humbly receive them upon the head’ (Sbgz. 4 Doshin 200).

The metaphor of embodiment extends so that some monastics are referred as walking libraries (Humphreys, 1962, p. 133) who thesaurize merit (Loveday, 2000).

Ss 57 includes the possibility of being reborn as an object which a monastic has desecrated.

Practitioners are discouraged to read books by other teachers and traditions (Waterhouse, 1997, p. 153; Kay, 2004, p. 94). Books by Kelsang Gyatso often include study guides and the order in which his book should be read.

For instance, Pali regained popularity in Sri Lanka in the second half of the eighteenth century and its study was emphasized with the development of Protestant Buddhism (Blackburn, 2001, p. 198-199).

Trân (2018, p. 107-110) describes thus the content of premodern Vietnamese temple libraries: scriptures, precepts, rituals, Confucian classics, Daoist classics, genealogies, Buddhist literature, medicine, and histories of temples, masters and schools.

Some of these curricula have been studied: see Blackburn (2001, p. 55-56) and Samuels (2004) on Sri Lanka; Dreyfus (2003); Veidlinger (2007) on Thailand; or McDaniel (2008) on Laos and Thailand.

Seeger (2014, p. 167-169) references several instances of printed texts praising the benefits of memorizing the text.

Rather than ‘read’, the Thai word used to study *Dharma* texts is ‘fang’ (‘to listen’) (Seeger, 2014, p. 162).

Bluck (2006) offers a good overview of attitudes towards learning and reading in relation to authority in several tradition of Buddhism in Britain. For instance, the Triratna Community favours Sangharakshita and Subhuti as interpretative standards (Bell, 1991, p. 368).
An example comes from the translation of Vinaya in Five Parts of the Mahiśāsakas (T1421), translated by Buddhajīva, Zhisheng, Daosheng and Huiyuan (423-424): ‘The translation team worked in Jiankang. Buddhajīva held the text, the Khotanese monk Zhisheng translated it into Chinese, while Daosheng and Huiyuan wrote down the translation and revised it. The task of Buddhajīva thus seems to have been to read the basic text aloud. This is in all probability the text that Faxian had obtained in Sri Lanka’ (Heirman, 2007, p. 177).

Tsongkhapa (in Truman, 2006, p. 80) recommends: ‘Thus we should read, for example, the accounts of how Buddha developed renunciation, compassion and Bodhicitta in his previous lives’.

Milarepa recommends reading biographies of saints before moving onto studying sūtras (Chang, 1962, p. 256): ‘The first thing one should remember is the transiency of life; Then one should read the lives of holy Saints. / Next, he should study the simple or comprehensive Sutras, / Choosing them to meet his own / requirements. Then he should contemplate on the Instructions.’

For instance, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal recommends that ‘From time to time, read the vajra songs and biographies of the previous masters of the practice tradition to see how they underwent hardships with fortitude and established their practice’ (Tashi Namgyal, 2019, p. 454). The Dalai Lama recommends reading the biographies of the Buddha and his disciples as guides of behaviour (Gyatso and Chodron, 2018, p. 100).

Brahma’s Net; Treatise on the Perfection of Great Wisdom. Kūkai writes, ‘From now on we will observe faithfully your teaching with our whole beings—by writing it on the paper of our skins, with pens of bone, ink of blood, and the inkstone of the skull’ (in Hakeda, 1972, p. 139).

The Hevajra Tantra can only be copied using human bones as pens (Hvt, Chap. vii).

The merit accrued by printing texts extends to include the materials used during the printing process. For instance, staff at the Derge Printing House in Kham relate how pilgrims would collect the run-off water used to wash the printing blocks carrying Dharma-texts from a trough in the entrance courtyard to presumably bathe as a meritorious act in lieu of ‘reading’ the texts (Swann, personal communication, January 2021).

Ennin argues that shrines containing rich collection of printed scripture were meant to be read not by humans, but by gods (Fischer, 2003, p. 106).

‘Sabbadāna dhammadānaṁ jināti’ (The gift of Dhamma surpasses of other gifts) (Chah, 2018, back of title page).

For instance, the colophon of a Saddharmapuṇḍarīka from Gilgit has a list of forty-four donors, mostly laypeople, a few senior monastics, and one mahādharmaḥbāṇaka (De Simini, 2016, p. 6).

This is the methodology used by Veidlinger (2007) to show that writing was not current in Lan Na for the purpose of transmitting Buddhism until the thirteenth-century, which implies all prior transmission was mainly, if not absolutely, oral in nature. Trân (2010) analyses the content of premodern Vietnamese temple libraries to suggest possible reading habits.

Tāranātha has it that the first Mahāyāna sūtra in the human realm was a text deposited in a private house (Schopen, 2008, p. 54).

‘As for venerating the holy scriptures, one should place the Amida Sutra and the other Pure Land sutras in a covering of the five colors and should read them oneself and teach them to others. One should enshrine these images and sutras in a room and there one should come six times a day and bow to them, repent one’s sins before them, and, offering flowers and incense, specially esteem them’ (Senchakushū p. 88).

Buddhabalādhānaprātiḥāryavikurvāṇonīrdeśa.

For instance, following Geshe Kelsang’s discouraging his followers from reading books others than those authorised by him, the Majushri Kadampa Meditation Centre Library purged a comprehensive collection of over 3,000 volumes on a variety of subjects (Kay, 2004, p. 76; Bluck, 2006, p. 138). The collection now only comprises about 100 volumes.

There is a mention to an eleventh-century revolving bookcase in the temple of Holy Khasarpaṇa (Avālokiteśvara) where a Prajñāpāramitāḥ revolved continually (Schopen, 2005, p. 5).

For instance, Dōgen writes: ‘While we are in the Hall we should not read the words of even Zen texts. In the Hall we should realize the principles and pursue the state of truth. When we are before a bright window, we can enlighten the mind [read] with the teachings of the ancients’ (Sbgz.1 Ju-Undo-Shiki 114).

‘[Brom] While he was grinding flour, he used to keep his books nearby, and study them. In this manner he pursued his studies with great diligence’ (BA p. 252). Sōnām Gyatso read and memorized Nāgārjuna’s Letter to a friend while on horseback (BA, p. 808; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 129).

Chinese monastic reformer Taixu entered a three-year confinement period in which he mostly read Buddhist scriptures, as well as Chinese classics, modern literature, and western history, philosophy, and science (Pittman, 2001, p. 83).
After the true. According to Van Schai (2011) but also to ideological control. For instance, book learning was thought to help train and instruct monks as well as to aid in the preservation of monastic discipline. The practice of reading by royal command in China was for the protection of the estate (Seeger, 2014, p. 243). In Sri Lanka, Mahāyāna texts were destroyed and the sangha expurgated of corrupting influences (Harvey, 2013, p. 197-198). Ippen, convinced that all the teaching could be summarised in ‘Namu-amida-butsu’, destroyed all his books: ‘Tenth day, morning [a month before death]. Ippen gave a few of the sūtras he possessed to a monk from Mount Shosha. He had always said, “My propagation is for this lifetime only,” and now, while chanting the Amida Sutra, he burned the writings he possessed with his own hands’ (Hirota, 1997, xiv).

For instance, the Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1950 suppressed the subsequent destruction of monasteries, libraries, and their contents (Van Schai, 2011, p. 244-245; Harvey, 2013, p. 414; Cabezón and Dorjee, 2019, p. 434).

Many non-conforming manuscripts were destroyed in Thailand in the early twentieth century when the National Library in Bangkok was being formed (Crosby, 2020, p. 84-85). Patrul Rinpoche writes, ‘To place books containing scriptures directly on the floor, to step over them, to west your fingers with saliva to turn the pages and similar disrespectful behaviours are serious mistakes as well’ (Padmakara Translation Group, 1994, p. 186).

The monk Shi Faxian’s personal copy of the Parinirvāṇa sūtra was spared in a fire (Bumbacher, 2007, p. 231). See Wright (2003, p. 266) for some examples.

Huineng allegedly torn up sūtras (Harvey, 2013, p. 217). ‘Zen Master Chikan of Kyogen [temple], while cultivating the state of truth under Dai-I, tried several times to express the truth in a phrase, but in the end he could not say anything. Out of regret for this, he burnt his books and became the monk who served the gruel and rice.’ (Sbgz. 2 Gyoji-l 169). Kyōgen Oshō burnt all his books and papers when unable to find an answer to Isan’s question in them, and gave up the study of Buddhism (Mumonkan Case 5). Miaoxi broke up the woodblocks of The Blue Cliff Record on finding monastics too dependent on this text (CB Lesson 184). He entrusted the book containing the precepts of the 54 male and female siddhas to (his mother) Śūd-ṣa-ma-gron, but she damaged the book, and in this manner (the precepts) of eight Lineages were lost. Other were then discovered giving minute details, probably written down by So-chun-ba himself (BA, p. 878).

Buton (p. 212) comments: ‘The Vajra Cutter Discourse: A Commentary states: The complete destruction of the sacred doctrine entails the decline of devotion, reading, recitation of prayers, receiving reading transmission, teaching, study, reflection, and so on’. According to The Prophecy of Arhat Sanghayavardhana and the Story of Arhat Nandimitra (in Buton, p. 272, 274), scripture will become corrupt at this time of decline and eventually disappear. The Nirvana Sutra (Nirvana-S., p. 113) has ‘After the true-Dharma has disappeared, during a period of counterfeit Dharma there will be bhikṣus who will imitate upholding the precepts and will read and recite the sutras to some degree’.

This is due not only to literacy levels but also to ideological control. For instance, book learning was thought unsuitable for girls in Thailand until early in the twentieth century (Seeger, 2014, p. 154).

‘Listen to me attentively, as it produces rapture (pīti) and delight (pāmojja), should arouse serene joy (pasādeyya), is beautiful, and is endowed with various forms. Carefully received these faultless and beneficial words and exalted thoughts, being glad (pasādeyya), is beautiful, and is endowed with various forms. Carefully received these faultless and beneficial words and exalted thoughts, being glad (pasādeyya), is beautiful, and is endowed with various forms.

This is illustrated by Khyantse Rinpoche’s (in Ray, 2002, p. 440) description of his own retreat practice: ‘I practiced from the early hours before dawn until noon, and from afternoon late into the night. At midday, I read from my books, reciting the texts aloud to learn them by heart.’ In relation to this, Wijayarathna (1979, p. 68-75) cites some titles popular among the Sinhala laity: Jātaka Pota, SadDharmaratnāvaliya, Dhammapada, Tun Surane, Buddha Adahilla.

In Tibet, for instance, The Jonangpa school was suppressed by the fifth Dalai Lama, their monasteries destroyed, monastics forced to convert to the Gelup, and some of their texts burnt (Harvey, 2013, p. 208). The Gelup is also alleged with destroying statues of Padmasambhava and discarding Nyingma texts into rivers (Van Schai, 2011, p. 202).

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Early in the third century, kings in Sri Lanka ordered the public reading of an Ariyavamsa narrating the life of eminent Buddhist individuals for the edification of the people (Malalasekera, 2013, p. 44-45). Other kings read Jātaka, translated them into Sinhala, and had them read throughout (Malalasekera, 2013, p. 191). Public readings by royal command in China were for the protection of the estate (Zürcher, 2013, p. 98).

Kublai Khan ordered monastics in Beijing in 1272 to read/recite nine times the whole canon (Wu, 2016b, p. 62).

When the Taklung leader fell ill, he ordered all books in the library to be dusted and recited. It took two hundred and fifty monks three years to accomplish that task (BA p. 643; Schaeffer, 2014, p. 124).

The Buddha recites or make others recite the seven factors of Enlightenment to aid their recovery from illness (S v 80-81).
During our lifetimes, we may never learn or be able to assess the
tions [where verses occur], he found that [the verses of the dream]
Gupta and treasure chambers of letters, and to
gandh (he)
remain
he
he
in Stevenson, 2007a, p. 319).

An expression of this is the repetition of the Daimoku by Sokka Gakkai followers (Obadia, 2013, p. 178). The Chinese Tien T’ai monk Miaolo justifies this practice as follows: ‘To read and recite the Lotus Sutra refers to one who reads and recites the eight volumes, or one volume, or on letter, or one stanza, or one verse, or its title (daimoku), to one in whom arises a single moment of rejoicing (at hearing even on verse of the Sutra) (...) even to read only one letter is by that very act also to include eighty thousand treasure chambers of letters, and to receive the merits of all the Buddhas’ (in Habito, 1999, p. 288).

Stein and Zangpo (2013, p. 364) say that ‘During our lifetimes, we may never learn or be able to assess the contents of most of those texts, but even reading their titles in clumsy translation can create a meaningful connection between us in our tiny linguistic and conceptual confines and the ineffable mysteries of speech and minds of enlightened beings.’

Having been transformed by the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren considered himself to be its embodiment (Anesaki, 1916, p. 32).

Pratyutpanna sūtra (13 vv8-9) (Benton, 1995, p. 251).

Nichiren Buddhists would activate images not just by placing scriptural fragments inside but also by ritually reading the Lotus Sutra to the image ‘so that the image will be invested with the Buddha’s six sense faculties and become the living teacher Śākyamuni, master of teachings, whom you may revere’ (Nichiren, in Stone, 2006, p. 183).

A text on Dependent Origination found in Paticcassamuppāda sutta appears commonly inside stūpas and other implements (Benton, 1995, p. 251).

In 1957, 4,000 stone slabs carrying the Chinese canon were excavated in a monastery near Beijing. After they were recorded by scholars, the monastery decided to bury the slabs again (Strong, 2015, p. 174).

Tāranātha (1970, p. 171) says that Vasubhandu was able to read the equivalent of one year’s worth of scripture in fifteen days and nights by placing himself in a tub of til-oil, as well as being able to read the whole of the Prajñāpāramitā-aṣṭa-sāhasrikā in one or two hours.

‘Kha-che pañ-chen (...) of Chos-’dzin (...) at the age of nine or ten, he was able to understand the various scriptures of the Buddha after glancing them over’ (BA p. 485).

‘Rinpoche-Grags-ye (...) He became known as a very wise man, because he was able to learn by heart every morning texts of the length of the Prajñāpāramitā-saṁcayagāthā after reading them only once’ (BA p. 582).

’On his way to Phag-mo-gru at bSam-yas he had a vision of a blue woman who placed inside his mouth a volume. Then he understood the meaning of the books seen by him, and having obtained the dākini’s permissions, he wrote several expositions of the Tantra’ (BA p. 663). In another instance, ‘He used to relate that, while he was residing at Śrī-ri, he saw a red woman placing a book into his mouth, and that after that there did not exist a single doctrine, translated into Tibetan, which he did not understand’ (BA, p. 686).

Lama Zopa argues that Lama Yeshe used his subtle body to read the open volumes surrounding him during his sleep (Paine, 2004, 73).

‘He kept many books around himself, and was able to read them in his dream, and grasp their meaning’ (BA p. 499).

‘Later You moved to Mount Xian, with the intention of reading through the Avatamsaka Sutra. Repeatedly he experienced a dream in which someone would come and teach him to recite the verses [of the [Lotus] sutra]. Whenever he reached the point in his recitation [where verses occur], he found that [the verses of the dream] corresponded perfectly with the written text of the scripture’ (Accounts in Dissemination and Praise of the Lotus, in Stevenson, 2007a, p. 319).

A shepherd boy, having borrowed a copy of the Diamond Sūtra, went to a field. There, he wanted to make a copy of it. Not having paper, he decided he could not write it on the ground as this would mean that animals
stepping on it would not suffer bad rebirths. He then decided to make his copy against the sky, which no human however would be able to read (Schaeffer, 2014, p. 146).

227 The Tibetan practice of printing on the surface of the water in rivers and streams consists in slapping woodblocks of ‘printing’ formulas written for merit-making purposes without intending to create a permanent record of the text (Ekvall, 1964, p. 114).

228 ‘Vairochana wrote down the eighteen tantras of Semde on white cotton with the milk of a white cow in order that people should not see the texts. When he wanted the manuscript to be read, he held it over smoke and the text became visible’ (Thondup, 2002, p. 103).

229 ‘[Nyoshül Longtong Tenpe Nyigma] wrote a detailed instruction on Trekcho meditation for Nyakla Rangrik, who was then in Central Tibet, and he asked him to burn it after reading it.’

230 Drinking the water from the well in which Chandragomi threw in and later drew out a treatise he had written is said to produce great intelligence (Butön, p. 235).

231 http://prayerwheel.org/ ; http://www.theinternetprayerwheel.info/

232 ‘Just walking under this once can purify a thousand aeons of sins’ (Martin, 2007, p. 211).

233 In Nepal, Dharma-volumes are taken out of temples and paraded onto the fields to bless them (Diemberger, 2012, p. 21).

234 In Korea, ‘bearing the canon on the crown of the head’ is a ceremony to enact the talismanic power of the canon (Wu and Wilkinson, 2017, Introduction).

235 Dharma-texts were read for the dead at Zen monasteries (Sbgz.1 Kankin 208). Arnold’s The Light of Asia was read around Australian Buddhist Theosophical societies during the 1890s after Madame Blavatsky’s passing (Croucher, 1989, p. 12). This text, among others, was customarily read aloud by Theosophists during their meetings (Tweed, 2000, p. 49).

236 Lopez (1998, Chapter 2) surveys the publication, content, reception, and critical fortune of this title in several editions in the West.

237 Flores (2008, p. 164) analyses its reception in the West.

238 Kornfield read texts in a variety of contexts, ‘I have read them [the teachings of The Tibetan Book of the Dead] to friends who were dying, to friends in the midst of a divorce, to those on vision quests, and to students in retreat’ (Kornfield, 1993, p. 155).


240 Sheep knelt and listen to Yen-Shou (China, 10th CE) read the Lotus Sutra, which he had memorised by reading seven verses a day for sixty days (Chung-yuan, 1971, p. 250; Welter, 2004, p. 168).

241 The Japanese tale Uji shōi monogatari has a monastic reading the Lotus Sutra. Whenever this occurs, Indra, Brahma, and other superior deities attend to listen to the sutra being read. Once, when the monk did not perform purifications before reading, the gods did not attend, so instead minor deities had an opportunity to listen (Fauré, 2003, p. 270).

242 ‘He retired for meditation to ‘Chims-phu of bSam-yas. There, after having prepared a copy of the bKa’-‘gyur and bStTan-‘gyur, and having performed the rite of consecration, he got a vision of the recital of these Scriptures by many Bodhisattvas’ (BA p. 492).

243 ‘A dākini known as the “Mad-One of Lha-sa” uttered a prediction, following which the Master was able to extract the history of Lha-sa from inside a beam (in the Jo-khan), but she did not allow him to keep it for more than one day. All his disciples shared the manuscript and prepared copies of it. In the evening of the same day, the manuscript was again hidden inside the beam’ (BA 258). Another example: ‘His [Longchenpa’s] collected works are famous in that he wrote a teaching manual for each of these traditions; the majority of these works, however, were reclaimed by the dākas and dākinis’ (Jamyang Dorje, 2005, p. 131-132).

244 Nāgārjuna is said to have acquired the Prajñāpāramitā from a Nāga chief who took him to his sea realm, where Nāgārjuna noticed the available scriptures were at least ten times more numerous than those available to him. He was allowed to take some away with him (Taranâtha, 1970, p. 384). Saṅgharāṣṭra-avatāra (Dā 23) has the story of Saṅgharāṣṭra being taken by the nāgas to establish the āgamas in the Nāga realm.

245 ‘All these bodhisattvas live in the empty space beneath this world, where they read, recite, gain insight into, ponder over, and analyse various sutras, and remember them correctly’ (Sdp Chap. xv, p. 286).
Bibliography

[NB: This includes references found in this dissertation and in ‘Appendix E: Corpus’]


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