

Arhats Who Became Bodhisattvas

Piṇḍola and the Post-Buddha Arhats
Theme: Tale and truth in Buddhist literature
A survey by Piya Tan ©2009

[This study continues from SD 27.6a (1-2) on Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja.]

3 Piṇḍola in comparative hagiography

3.1 COMPARATIVE ACCOUNTS OF PIṆḌOLA.

3.1.1 Common accounts. Of all the early arhats, Piṇḍola is clearly the most popular across the major Buddhist traditions. As we have noted, a whole discourse—the **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Sutta** (S 35.127) [1.1]—is dedicated to Piṇḍola’s teaching. He is listed as no 52 of the 80 great disciples (ThaA 3:205), and as the foremost of those who receive almsfood (A 1:24) [1.1]. The story of his gratuitous public display of a supernatural feat is recounted in the Vinayas of at least five different schools¹ [1.4] and in the Pali Commentaries [1.1]. We will here briefly survey Sanskrit sources on Piṇḍola.

All sources generally agree with the Vinaya story [1.4], but **the Sanskrit sources** name the Rājagrha seth as Jyotiṣka, who makes a bowl from a block of sandalwood, and wishing to see if there are still arhats (that is, accomplished saints in a general sense), places it on the top of a very high bamboo pole. Whoever is able to bring down the bowl with magical power keeps it.

Different outside masters (*tīrthika*) try to retrieve the bowl, but their pretensions and devious ploys fail to impress the seth. Now Maudgalyāyana and Piṇḍola, while preparing for their alms-round, overhear some gamblers speak about the challenge [4.1.3]. Piṇḍola urges his senior, the foremost of monks accomplished in psychic power, to take up the challenge, but he instructs Piṇḍola himself to go ahead. So in full public view, Piṇḍola flies up into the air and after circling the city a few times, collects the bowl. The seth is impressed and honours Piṇḍola. When the Buddha learns of this, says the Vinaya, he introduces the rule that makes a public display of psychic power (that is, before the laity) an offence entailing “wrong-doing” (*duṣkṛta*)² [1.4].

Although the details of Piṇḍola’s psychic display vary amongst the traditions, one account is common in the Sanskrit sources, that is, he flies through the air on a huge boulder.³ Thus **the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya** account tells how from his flying boulder, he grabs the bowl.⁴ The Mahīśāsaka Vinaya expands the story and has Piṇḍola convert a stingy woman of Rājagrha who refuses to offer him any cakes⁵ in a manner reminiscent of how Moggallāna converts Kosiya the miserly seth,⁶ and goes on to record the Buddha’s reprimand and promulgation of the Vinaya rule.⁷ The main difference is that while Moggallāna fills the seth’s house with smoke, Piṇḍola hovers a huge flat rock over the woman’s house.

As in **the Pali Vinaya** (V 2:112), the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, too, records the Buddha as comparing Piṇḍola’s act to a woman displaying her shame for money, that is, he should not cheaply display what is

¹ All five Vinayas are mentioned in Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 233-247. On accounts of Piṇḍola in **Mūla,sarvāstivāda** Vinaya see: **Nalinaksha Dutt** (ed), *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies no 71(E) 3,1, Srinagar, 1947: 183 f; **Heinz Bechert**, *Bruchstücke buddhistischer Versammlungen: die Anavataptaḡāthā und die Sthaviraḡāthā*, Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden nr 6, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1961: 130-133; **Marcel Hofinger**, *Le congrès du Lac Anavatapta (vies de saints bouddhiques) Extrait du Vinaya des Mūlasarvāstivādin Bhaiṣajyavastu*, Bibliothèque du Muséon 34, Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1954: 212-215.

² The various accounts are given in Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 233-247. A fuller version is found at DhA 3:199-203 (DhA:B 3:35-380. A summary is given in Strong 1979: 71-75.

³ For the Pali Comy account, see **Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja Vatthu** (DhA 14.2.2a/3:199-203) = SD 27.6b.

⁴ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 237.

⁵ Ray 1994: 154 f.

⁶ DhA 4.5/1:367-376.

⁷ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 242 f.

meant to be hidden or a special ability for the sake of a mere bowl.⁸ Did the Buddha himself actually introduce such a rule? Is there really a need to introduce it? Was this rule introduced much later (after the Buddha)?

3.1.2 Contradictions. But first, what can we make of all these stories and their bewildering variants? From the prototype story itself,⁹ it appears, albeit at first glance, that Piṇḍola displays his psychic powers publicly merely for the sake of the bowl. However, the context, it should be remembered, is that of a tournament of sorts, organized by an unbiased but curious seth who wishes to know if there are still arhats in the world. In fact, it was Moggallāna, upon hearing some passing gamblers' remarks that since no one, even after seven days, could retrieve the bowl, that there are no more arhats in the world. Taking this as "challenging" (*pariggaṇhanta*) the Buddha's Teaching (in which there *are* arhats), Moggallāna urges Piṇḍola to take up the challenge, and who agrees to it out of deference. **John Strong**, however, adds this note:

It is, of course, possible to agree that such proofs of arhatship distract rather than attract the faith of the masses. And the Theravāda Vinaya does add that such magical displays do not develop faith among unbelievers.¹⁰ But this view flies in the face of countless Buddhist stories in which magical displays are common features and not only greatly stimulate the faith of the masses, but often occasion their arhatship as well. (Strong 1979: 73)

And his conclusion is insightful, as he continues:

One can only conclude that in the formal Vinaya ordinance against the performance of magical feats, we have an attempt to cover up the fact that we have reached the time *when ordinary monks simply cannot perform these feats anymore*. In this the Buddhists were cleverer, perhaps, but ultimately not very different from the heretic masters who, while pretending to have magical powers, instructed his disciples to forcibly hold him down just as he was making as if to leap up into the air, and to say to him, "Teacher, what are you doing? Do not reveal powers of Arhatship to the multitude for the sake a wooden bowl!" [DhA 3:301; cf DhA:B 3:36]

(Strong 19: 73; emphasis added)

So we have a glaring contradiction here: on the one side, we have Moggallāna and Piṇḍola who are simply trying to protect the Teaching's good name and prove that there are still true arhats around. Furthermore, the narrators take so much trouble to discredit and ridicule the outside teachers. But in the end, it is Piṇḍola who is rebuked for his psychic display, instead of being praised for it. It is as if he is criticized simply because he is "a saint in the classical mold."¹¹ This is even more confusing, when the Piṇḍola story continues with *the Buddha himself* claiming that he is above rules, and then performing the twin wonder. This is what we will examine next.

3.1.3 The Sumāgadhāvadāna. **John Strong**, in his article on Piṇḍola, "The legend of the lion-roarer" (1979), notes that

the Buddhist[s] themselves were aware of the lameness of their position is reflected in a number of stories in which they try to reinforce the rationale for the interdiction of supernatural displays.

(Strong 1979:74)

Strong points as an example to **the Sumāgadhāvadāna**¹² by **Kṣemendra**, a layman, polymath and prolific writer of 11th-century Kashmir. His writings are of astonishing fertility, yet "he is distinguished not so much by genius and taste, but by an iron determination," and he has "[t]he huge collection of

⁸ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 235, 237.

⁹ See **Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja Vatthu** (DhA 14.2.2a/3:199-203) = SD 27.6b.

¹⁰ V 2:111 f; also Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 235; Strong 1979: 73.

¹¹ Strong 1979: 76; Ray 1994: 158 & 176 n26.

¹² Strong refers to the 4 Chinese versions in a study & tr by **Tsuru-Matsu Tokiwai**, 1898. On Sumāgadhāvadāna, see M Winternitz, *History of Indian Literature* [1933] (tr Ketkar & Kohn) 1972: 292 f; see also Biblio below.

legends, too, in which Kṣemendra has recast the Buddhist Avadānas in the style of ornate court poetry, contains more edifying stories than skillfully and tastefully narrated ones.”¹³

The Sumāgadhāvadāna (forming a part of the Bodhisattvāvadāna, kalpalatā, completed in 1052) contains (in prose and verse) legends of Sumāgadhā, the daughter of Buddhism’s most famous seth Anāthapiṇḍada, who cleverly shields her husband from the Jain monks, and by a miracle, converts the whole town to the Buddha’s teaching.

As an example of an effort to recast the Piṇḍola story, Strong points to one of its Chinese translations of the Sumāgadhāvadāna, where “a variation [a bit different from the Vinaya version] on the tale of Piṇḍola’s magical feat is developed in such a way that a cogent ethical reason is presented for the interdiction: supernatural displays are shown to lead possibly to the loss of life.” Kṣemendra’s story is summarized as follows:

Piṇḍola is late for an assembly which is being held by Sumāgadhā, the daughter of Anāthapiṇḍada in the far away city of Puṇḍavardhana. He is sitting on a mountain top mending his robe. When he finishes, he plants the needle into the ground with the thread still attached to his hem. Then, in his haste to get to the reunion, he forgets about this and flies away, breaking off the whole mountain top and dragging it along behind him through the air, still attached to the thread and the needle. Only after 8,000 *li* does he realize what has happened, and he tosses the mountain back into its place. Unfortunately, in the meantime a woman who happened to be in the area and happened to be pregnant saw the huge mountain-boulder flying overhead and became so frightened that she miscarried. The Buddha then forbids the performance of such acts in front of the laity, pointing out that they caused the death of a living being.

(Strong 1979: 74 quoting Tsuru-Matsu 1898: 49)

3.1.4 The magic of rationalization. The story of Piṇḍola’s public psychic display is a prelude to a more dramatic psychic display on an even grander scale: the Buddha’s performance of the twin wonder (*yamaka pāṭihāriya*).¹⁴ Ironically, this following story clearly vindicates Piṇḍola, that he is *not* wrong in publicly giving a psychic display as a testimony that there are still arhats—*Buddhist* arhats—in the world. In fact, this subsequent story seems to put the Buddha in a spot, as it were. Since he has promulgated the rule that no monastic should make a public show of psychic power, some outside religionists claim, they cannot duel psychically with them. So now they will challenge *the Buddha himself* to a psychic duel!

As the story goes, the Buddha uncharacteristically takes up the challenge, and decides to break his own rule! The Dhammapada Commentary story puts these words into the Buddha’s mouth, as explaining to the rajah Bimbisāra: “Maharajah, I have not laid down the training rule for myself, but it is laid down for my disciples” (DhA 3:204). Its significance is obvious: the Buddha does not need any training-rule, as he is fully awakened, and using an analogy, he explains that just as no one may partake of the fruits of the royal garden, except the king, even so he makes the laws but is above them.

This sentiment is, of course, curious as it is *not* found in the suttas: we could question whether or not this goes against the Buddha’s well known statement, “As I say, so I do; as I do, so I say” (*yathā, vādī tathā, kārī, yathā, kārī tathā, vādī*).¹⁵ Considering the context, we can say that the commentarial apologists are justified in their sentiment, as they are answering the challenge of non-Buddhists in relation to miracles.

There is another important point to note: since Bimbisāra is still alive, the story refers to an early period of the ministry, probably before the institutional Pāṭimokkha was introduced, that is, during the first 20 years. Yet another point to consider is that, even without the monastic rules, the Buddha and the arhats would, by nature, never commit a disciplinary breach. It is also significant that this is not an issue discussed in the Milinda, pañha, which however does state that “while an arhat is incapable of deliberately transgressing what is blamable by the world, he would never unknowingly fall into a defilement that is blama-

¹³ M Winternitz 1972: 293,

¹⁴ DhA 2.1/1:161-231 = DhA:B (*Buddhist Legends*) 1:247-293: see **Miraculous Stories** = SD 27.5b (3.1.4-7).

¹⁵ D 2:224, 229, 3:135; M 1:108, 109; A 2:24; It 122; Sn 357 (Nigrodha, kappa); J 326/3:89.

ble by regulation (that is, the Vinaya) (*loka,vajjam abhabbo khīṇāsavo tam ajjhācaritum, yaṃ kilesaṃ paṇṇatti,vajjam tam ajānanto āpajjeyya*, Miln 267), and adds that he may not know everything (like a person's name), but he knows liberation (Miln 268).

Piṇḍola gives a public psychic display to rid the speculation that there are no more arhats in the world: he is blamed for this. But the Buddha himself performs the greatest of psychic displays—the twin wonder—in public, and he is said to be above the law! **Strong** gives us some insights here

There is, then, a real ambivalence in the Buddhist attitude towards the use of magical powers. On the one hand, their importance is denigrated; men on the path should not be preoccupied by such trivialities. On the other hand, the possession of such powers is seen to be a visible sign of enlightenment and a connection to the figure of the Buddha when he continues to exhibit them. They are thus real tools in defeating heretics as well as in overcoming doubts of the crowd.

The figure of Piṇḍola is closely caught up in this ambivalence. He is, in a sense, the last man of the golden age of miracles. His act marks a transition point—at least in retrospect—in the mythology of popular Buddhism in India. It is the beginning of our present profane age in which ordinary persons no longer exhibit or witness extraordinary powers, at least not blatantly.

To this extent, Piṇḍola takes on the role of a scapegoat; he is blamed for the present profane situation. And yet it is clear that he, like the Buddha, was an arhat; he had and has the capacity to perform such supernatural feats, even though the Vinaya does not permit him to exhibit them. In a sense, then, he like all enlightened beings, is above the Vinaya—a fact which, it might be pointed out, also puts gluttony in a different perspective.

In the end, both the Vinaya rule and the story of Piṇḍola and the bowl, which occasioned it, operate in much the same way as the traditions about his gluttony; their intent is to combat the doubts of those who, in this profane age, would question the qualities of the bhikṣu. For the interdiction on the monk's display of supernatural powers in no way denies their ability to perform but in fact, hints at it; and the final claim is that despite appearances, Piṇḍola (and Buddhist monks after him) are possibly already powerful enlightened individuals and hence fit foci for devotion.

(Strong 1979: 75)

3.2 MONASTIC ROLES OF PIṆḌOLA

3.2.1 The domestication of a forest monk

3.2.1.1 During the first year of the Buddha's ministry, the rajah Bimbisāra donates the Bamboo Grove (*Veḷu,vana*) to the Buddha and his order. And in due course, a number of other monastery-parks (*ārāma*) are donated to the order. The best known of such monastery-parks are as follows:¹⁶

<u>Translated name</u>	<u>Pāli name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Donor</u>	<u>Date</u>
Bamboo Grove	Veḷu,vana	Rāja.gaha	The rajah Bimbisāra	1 st year
Nigrodha's Park	Nigrodh'ārāma	Kapilavatthu	The kshatriya Nigrodha	1 st year
Anāthapiṇḍika's Park	Anāthapiṇḍik'ārāma	Sāvathī	The seth Anāthapiṇḍika	1 st year
Jīvaka's Mango Grove	Jīvak'amba,vana	Rāja,gaha	The physician Jīvaka	[] ¹⁷
Ghosita's Park	Ghosit'ārāma	Kosambī	The seth Ghosita/Ghosaka	9 th year
Migāra's mother's mansion	Migāra,mātu,pāsāda	Pubbārāma	The lady Visākhā	[] ¹⁸
Amba,pālī's Grove	Ambapālī,vana	Vesālī	The courtesan Ambapālī	40 th year
Hall of the Gabled House	Kūṭ'āgāra,sālā	Vesālī		

¹⁶ On early Indian Buddhism monasticism, see S Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries in India*, London, 1962.

¹⁷ After becoming a streamwinner, Jīvaka, finding that Jeta,vana is a bit too far away from him, donates his mango grove to the Buddha and the order (DA 1:132; MA 3:45). This is at a time when Bimbisāra is still alive, and whose doctor he is. Bimbisāra ruled for 52 years (c465-413 BCE), dying 8 years before the Buddha (c485-405 BCE). On Bimbi,sāra, see Soṇa,daṇḍa S (D 2) = SD 30.5 Intro (3.2) n.

¹⁸ The Migāra,mātu,pāsāda is erected in the Pubb'ārāma (the Eastern Park), east of Sāvathī.

3.2.1.2 Ever since the Buddha has sent forth the first 60 monks on their individual missions to spread the Dharma (V 1:21), he himself spends much of the year wandering about the Middle Gangetic plain or “the Middle Country” (*majjhima desa*), teaching the Dharma. The Commentaries says that the Buddha makes two kinds of Dharma-tours, the short tour and the long tour.

The short Dharma-tour (*turita carika*) refers to incidental outreaches of the Buddha (often via teleportation) to admonish or convert certain individuals who are spiritually ready (*bhabba, puggala*, SnA 440).¹⁹ The long (or slow) Dharma-tour (*aturita carika*) may take up to 9-month but not more, because three months of the year are spent in the rains-retreat. This 9-month long tour is said to cover a “great circle” (*mahā maṇḍala*) of about 900 *yojanas* around the Middle Country. A middling tour, taking about 6 months, may cover a distance of about 600 *yojana-s* covering a “middle circle” (*majjhima maṇḍala*). An “inner circle” (*anto maṇḍala*) tour, taking about one to four months, covers about 300 *yojanas*.²⁰

3.2.1.3 During his tours, the Buddha and his following would usually stay in a forest outside the city or village, such as follows:

<u>Forest</u>	<u>Pāli name</u>	<u>Located outside</u>	<u>Residence</u>
The Dark Forest	Andha, vana	south of Sāvattihī	a tree
The Cool Forest	Sīta, vana	Rājagaha, Magadha	a tree
The Great Wood	Mahā, vana	Kapilavatthu, Sakya	a tree
Bhesakalā Forest	Bhesakalā, vana	Bhagga country	Sumsumara, giri (hill)
Pārileyya Forest	Pārileyyaka	Kosambī	a tree
Sal grove	Sāla, vana	north of Opasāda, Kosala	Deva, vana; a tree
Shrine of Many Sons	Bahu, puttaka Cetiya	north of Vesālī	a tree

3.2.1.4 All such details of the Buddha’s regular wanderings and forest residences, reflect the time when the monastic community is mostly *eremitic* or wandering ascetics and forest monks. After the Buddha’s time, with the greater lay patronage and routinization of monastic life, it became more *cœnobitic* or settled. In fact, the figure of Piṇḍola represents a tension between the two historical developments in early Buddhism, that is, forest asceticism and the monastic settlement. **Reginald R Ray**, in his *Buddhist Saints in India* (1994), notes, “On the one side is Piṇḍola, the forest renunciant, for whom asceticism, intensive meditation, attainment, and magical powers are the norm. On the other is the monastic renunciation here defined by a communal lifestyle and behavioral purity.” (1994: 158)

3.2.1.5 **Ray** further gives an interesting theory of how the settled monks *domesticated* the Piṇḍola figure by a process of “monasticization.” He insightfully explains:

The Vinaya story reflects, in fact, a process of monasticization, wherein Piṇḍola, the revered forest saint of the Theragāthā, Udāna, Saṃyuttanikāya, and Aṅguttaranikāya, is appropriated by the Vinaya and brought into its sphere. A similar process of monasticization was evident in the case of Mahākāśyapa who came to function as chief disciple in the Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra and president of the first council in the Vinaya. In different Vinayas, the process of monasticization was more or less intense: in the Northern sources, Mahākāśyapa as leader of the *saṅgha* retains much of his forest-saintly character, whereas in the Pāli Vinaya his monasticization is more thorough and he becomes little more than a primus inter pares with little of the dominating charisma visible elsewhere in the early texts. The same kind of process was visible in the case of Śāriputra, whose monasticization, particularly as it gains momentum in the Pāli sources, leads to the almost entire elimination of the forest elements of his personality. (Ray 1994: 159)

¹⁹ Eg, the Buddha travels 3 *gavutas* to meet Mahā Kassapa, 30 *yojanas* to convert Āḷvaka and Aṅgulimāla, 45 *yojanas* to meet Pukkusāti, 150 *yojanas* for the benefit of Mahā Kappina, and 700 *yojanas* to meet the herdsman Dhanīya (SnA 440). A *gavuta* is about 3 km; 4 *gavuta-s* make a *yojana*, which is about 7 mi or 11.25 km (DhA 2:13).

²⁰ DA 1:241 f; MA 2:151; ApA 362.

Here, Ray obviously used “monasticization” to refer to the process of the monks settling down as *cœnobites*, as opposed the wandering forest ascetics or *eremites*. However, if we take the word “monk” or “monastic” as deriving from the Greek μοναχός, *monachos* (“single, solitary, unique”) and μοναστικός, *monastikos* (lit, “pertaining to the solitary life”), then it is a blanket term for all monastics, cœnobites and eremites, settled or wandering. As such, the terms *cœnobitization* or *domestication*²¹ better describe the dynamics of the monastics becoming a more settled and organized community.

3.2.2 Piṇḍola as monastic provider. Of all the monks who have *psychic power*, Moggallāna is declared to be the foremost (A 1:23). But it is Piṇḍola who is better known and remembered for his *psychic displays*, to the extent that a Vinaya rule is introduced to stop such displays [1.4]. The famous Vinaya account of Piṇḍola’s psychic display records how he publicly gives a psychic display to retrieve a bowl from the top of a very high bamboo pole. The early accounts of Piṇḍola stop right here, but in later (that is, commentarial and Mahāyāna) accounts, great significance is given to the bowl. It becomes a *totem*, that is, it is both a *symbol* (representing Piṇḍola goodness and power) and also manifesting *magical power* in its own right.

The story of **Piṇḍola and his alms-bowl** has two threads of significance, that is, of *generosity to the order*, and of *his psychic powers*. The first thread starts off by highlighting his “gluttony”: he becomes a monk for the sake of good meals [1.3]. As Piṇḍola reforms, his gluttony in due course sublimates into a strong connection with the laity, who is on the other end of the gluttony, as it were. They are the givers and Piṇḍola is the receiver. As an arhat, Piṇḍola, is both selfless and a supreme field of merit, which gives a powerful meaning to the saying that it is better to give than to receive.²² The name Piṇḍola, meaning “abode of almsfood” (*piṇḍ’ālaya*) [1.3.1], alludes to his being an appropriator and consumer, somewhat like Mahā Kassapa,²³ that is to say great merits accrue to those who give alms to such a “storehouse of merit.” Through Piṇḍola, the laity thus forges a strong bond with the monastic order, that is, one centering around almsgiving.

The story of **Piṇḍola the glutton** serves two important purposes for the order in the world. First, it *sublimates* him into a great and worthy saint who reforms himself from being a glutton into an exemplary monk, a role model for unawakened monastic. On the level of the laity, the story *domesticates* him into a great saint who bestows immense merits onto the laity who offer alms to him, that is, effectively to the order. Any monastic, whether worthy or not, even a glutton, like Piṇḍola could reform. Furthermore, it is difficult for the unawakened to know the awakened: we could be offering alms to Piṇḍola himself! Piṇḍola has thus become a supreme provider for the order.

3.2.3 Deterrent against laicization. The *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya* adds an interesting detail to the Piṇḍola story that is not found in the other Vinaya texts. At the end of its account of Piṇḍola and the sandalwood bowl, it says that the Buddha, having rebuked Piṇḍola and promulgated the rule against the public display of psychic power by monks, *then punishes Piṇḍola further by banishing him from Jambudvīpa*²⁴ (*India*).²⁵

Accepting his punishment, he takes leave of the Buddha, returns to his cell, enters into samadhi, and departs for the “western continent” of Aparā, godāniya.²⁶ There, with a thousand followers, he lives as an

²¹ The term “domestication” in connection with monkhood is found in Carrithers (1979), where he argues that “it is the play between ascetic reforms and domestication which creates the pattern of Sangha history [arising as a result of the agrarian economy].” (1979). See also Ivan Strenski 1983.

²² There are various versions of this saying: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35); “Betre is to yive than to take” (c1390, Gower, *Confessio Amantis* v 7725); “It is better to gyue than to take, for he that takethe a gyfte of another is bonde to quyte [repay] it, so that his lyberte is gone” (c1527, T Berthelet tr *Erasmus’ Sayings of Wise Men*, B2).

²³ See **Beggars Can Be Choosers** = SD 30.14.

²⁴ The *jambu* here is the black plum of jambul of India: see **Kosala S 1** (A 10.29/5:59-65) @ SD 16.15 (3).

²⁵ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 245.

²⁶ Aparā, godāniya or Aparā, godanī (Pali *Aparā, goyāna*). In the Pali tradition, **Aparā, goyāna** is one of the 4 great continents into which the earth was divided. It is located west of Mt Sineru (the axis mundi, but here clearly refers to the Himalayas), and is 7000 *yojana*-s wide. (A *yojana* is about 7 mi or 11.25 km.) The Dīgha Comy says that when

exemplary arhat, teaching the Dharma, converting many, building monasteries and protecting the Teaching.²⁷ [4.1.2].

There is another interesting detail not found in the **Sarvāstivāda** Vinaya, but found in a number of the later indigenous works: that is, Piṇḍola is *also forbidden from entering nirvana until the advent of the next Buddha, Maitreya*. 慧簡 Huijiǎn's **Method of Inviting Piṇḍola** (請賓頭盧法 *Qǐng Bīntóulú fǎ*) [3.4.1] states that

Because [Piṇḍola] manifested supernatural faculties in front of the lay notable Jyotiṣka, the Buddha banished him and did not authorize him to enter Nirvāṇa. He ordered him to become a field of merit for the four types of faithful in the final period of the Law.

(T1689 = T32.2151.363a2; Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 216)

In the **Aśokāvadāna**, too, we find a similar detail: Piṇḍola is punished for his psychic display, where he declares:

When the Blessed One was invited by Sumāgadhā, the daughter of Anāthapiṇḍada to go to Puṇḍavardhana, I, at that time, using magical means, grabbed a mountain-top and flew with it to Puṇḍavardhana. On account of that, the Blessed One ordered me not to enter parinirvana.

(*Aśokāvadāna* 1963: 99; cf Burnouf 1876: 355)

The same detail is found in two Chinese versions of the **Aśokāvadāna**: 雜阿含經 *Zà'āhán Jīng* (Saṃyukta Āgama)²⁸ and 阿育王經 *Āyù wáng jīng* (T50.2043),²⁹ but not in 阿育王傳 *Āyùwáng zhuàn* (T50.-2042).³⁰ The Sumāgadhāvadāna tells the same story but adds that Piṇḍola is instructed to remain in this world until the advent of the Buddha Maitreya, and only then is he allowed to enter parinirvana.³¹

Apara,godanī, according to Nandimitra's *Record of Dharma Abiding*,³² is also the realm of the sixteen arhats [4.2]. Effectively, we see here in the ideology of the 16 Arhats a mahayanization of the ancient arhats: *the arhat ideal* was merged with *the bodhisattva ideal*.³³ These living arhats are like the Mahāyāna bodhisattvas in their accessibility for almsgiving and responses to supplications.

However, unlike the bodhisattvas, these arhats, do not remain in samsara “out of compassion” for the world, but have been instructed by the Buddha to do so. Piṇḍola himself is given a “life sentence” to serve as a bodhisattva for the rest of Sakyamuni's dispensation. And this, legend says, is the result of his own indiscreet public display of psychic power [3.1.1]. Yet, like a bodhisattva, in serving the sentence, he becomes a field of merit and defender of the Dharma. **Strong** makes an insightful observation here:

Mahāyāna attitudes towards the notion of arhatship are, of course, well known. What we have here, however, may be the obverse—a rare expression of Hīnayāna sentiments towards the notion of the bodhisattva ideal; or perhaps more specifically—a monastic counter to the laicization implicit in the bodhisattva ideal. For unlike the many bodhisattvas, Piṇḍola remains above

it is sunrise in Jambu,dīpa, it is the middle watch (10 pm-2 am) in Aparā,goyāna; when it is sunset in Aparā,goyāna, it is midnight in Jambu,dīpa. So they are about 12 hrs apart. When it is sunrise in Aparā,goyāna, it is noon in Jambu,dīpa, sunset in Pubba,vidēha, and midnight in Uttara,kuru (DA 3:868). Interestingly, India is always referred to as Jambu,dīpa (Jambul Continent) in the scripture. We have here prob a collective memory of a palaeogeography of primordial times, perhaps of Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. See **Kosala S 1** (A 10/29) = SD 126.15 Intro (3).

^{27 27} Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 105-107; Ray 1994: 155..

²⁸ 雜阿含經卷第二十三 *Zà'āhán Jīng juǎn dì èr shí sān*, 雜阿含經卷第二十五 *Zà'āhán Jīng juǎn dì èr shí wǔ sān*.

²⁹ Tr by Saṅghabhadra (512).

³⁰ See Przyluski (Aśokāvadāna tr) 1923: 266; Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 261.

³¹ See 三國吳·天竺沙門竺律炎譯。《佛說三摩竭經》(T2.129) *Fó shuō sānmójié jīng* (T2.129.845a4-845a20). See also Tsuru-matsu (Sumāgadhāvadāna tr) 1898: 50.

³² See Biblio: sv Nandimitra 654.

³³ See eg Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 271.

all a monk, a member of the Sangha.... Moreover, because he does not enter Nirvāṇa, Piṇḍola remains, in a sense, a “monk for all times”—the embodiment and guarantee of the bhikṣu ideal.

(Strong 1979: 77)



Fig 3.3.1 Piṇḍola with book and bowl. Tibetan.

3.3 PIṆḌOLA THE CULT FIGURE

3.3.1 Appearances of Piṇḍola.

3.3.1.1 BOWL AND BOOK. An early Sutta records that Piṇḍola is declared by the Buddha to be the foremost of monks who are *lion-roarers* [1.2, 1.5], that is, those who make exceptional public declarations of faith. Piṇḍola’s lion-roar is this: “Let those who have any doubt in the path and fruition [the stages of sainthood] question me!” (ApA 300). He is ever ready to clear any doubt that anyone might have regarding the teaching. For this reason, in China and Tibet, Piṇḍola is often depicted not only with his ubiquitous bowl in his left hand, but also with a *book* in his right.³⁴

Piṇḍola is also sometimes depicted in Chinese iconography as *taming a tiger*. While Piṇḍola and his book represent the clearing of our doubts and the arising of wisdom, the tiger-taming represents the self-discipline and transcending of our animal nature that follows such a realization.

3.3.1.2 DÀO’ÀN’S DREAM. So famous and esteemed was Piṇḍola to the ancient Chinese Buddhists, that the Chinese Vinaya master, Dào’àn 道岸 (654-717),³⁵ wrote, in the mid-7th century, a special article on him, recounting the story of the bowl and his banishment from Jambu,dvīpa.

This work was followed by an even more interesting sequel. When Dào’àn was heavy with doubt about annotating the scriptures, it is said that Piṇḍola visits him in a dream as “an Indian man of Tao who had white hair and long eyebrow,”³⁶ and not only clears his doubt, but declares that he would assist Dào’àn in propagating the Dharma.³⁷

Piṇḍola then rightfully requests as from one monk to another, “From time to time, you may make an offering of food.” Thenceforth, we are told, “they established a seat to make food offerings to him and everywhere this became the rule.”³⁸

A number of Dào’àn’s disciples expressed their desire to be able to see Piṇḍola again, since the Buddha had authorized Piṇḍola to return “occasionally and to take his seat when invited.”³⁹ Serendipitously, Piṇḍola’s banishment means that is also available to anyone outside of Jambu,dvīpa, certainly to those to invoke and invite him.

3.3.1.3 HOSPITALITY RITE. Chinese hagiography gives great prominence to the cult of Piṇḍola, testifying to his unflinching and mysterious visitations to assemblies of the faithful. The cult is essentially *a rite of hospitality*, and consists of inviting Piṇḍola to the monastic assembly and offering him two things or either of them: food and a bath.⁴⁰ Piṇḍola, of course, might or might not accept the invitation: it depends on the purity of the heart with which it is extended.

And if he does accept, he comes either in disguise as an old man, as a wandering stranger, or perhaps in some other mysterious manner. His presence, as such, is not always easy to detect. The two following stories (summaries) from Huijiǎn’s “Method of Inviting Piṇḍola” will illustrate this.

³⁴ Pander 1890: 86; Grunwedel 1900: 7; Roerich 1929-30: 98; Tucci 1949: 569.

³⁵ See **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b (2.3.4); not to be confused with the early master, Dào’àn 道安 (312-385) [2.3.3].

³⁶ Piṇḍola’s face (esp his eyes) become more significant in his meeting with Aśoka [3.3.2].

³⁷ Link 1958: 35. See Strong 1979: 70.

³⁸ Link 1958: 35-37. See Strong 1979: 82 n113 for a summary of Piṇḍola’s appearance to Dào’àn in 385 (the year he died). Like Dào’àn, as we shall see below, Aśoka, too, meets Piṇḍola [3.3.2].

³⁹ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 208.

⁴⁰ Besides Huijiǎn’s 請賓頭盧法 *Qǐng Bīntóulú fǎ* (“Method of Inviting Piṇḍola”), there is record of a 請聖僧浴文 *Qǐng shèngsēng yùwén* (“Prayer inviting the saintly monk [Piṇḍola] for a bath”) (listed at T49.2034.91a16 & T55.2151.362a26), tr by Saṅghavarman in 434, but is no longer extant. See Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 215.

A wealthy and faithful houselord held a feast thrice, each time fervently inviting Piṇḍola to come, but he did not appear. Finally, the houselord invited over a hundred elderly monks and asked them what he did wrong. One of them, whom he had not seen before, replied:

You invited me to your three assemblies and each time I accepted your invitation. But you had posted a servant at the door and he prevented me from entering. Since I am old and my clothes are torn, he thought I was a good-for-nothing śramaṇa who had been expelled from the community and refused to let me enter. (Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 218)

The elder went on to describe how the servant beat him with a stick, and charges the houselord with niggardliness, and then suddenly disappeared. The lesson here is clear: Laypersons should make sure that they never turn away any monk, no matter how ragged or disreputable—from their feasts. (ib 219)⁴¹

In the second case, Huijiān’s “Method of Inviting Piṇḍola” specifies that whenever a monk is going for a bath, he should first invite Piṇḍola by saying “We pray you accept our invitation to bathe in such and such a place.” Then, having prepared all the bath requisites—clean water, perfumes, unguents, willow branches, etc—the bathhouse door should be left open and Piṇḍola invited to enter. The door is then closed. After a while, the monks could go in and bathe.⁴²

3.3.1.4 DÀOSHÌ ON DETECTING PIṆḌOLA’S PRESENCE. The monk 道世 **Dàoshì** (?-683) [3.4.1] lists some of ways whereby Piṇḍola’s presence could be detected even when he is invisible:

- In the dining hall, his footprints appear in between pillars;
- A mark of his pilgrim’s staff could be left on the well-swept ground of the courtyard;⁴³
- On opening the bathroom door, one finds that the water has been used and splashed around;⁴⁴
- After a meal, one sees an imprint on the soft cushion on the empty seat in the refectory.⁴⁵

Dàoshì makes an interesting claim that from the marks left by Piṇḍola, one is supposed to be able to deduce whether Piṇḍola has come in his “bliss body” (*sambhoga kāya*) or his “projected body” (*nirmāna kāya*), that is, spiritually or physically. This fine treatment as if he were a Buddha is not found anywhere else.

3.3.1.5 FAITH AND PROPRIETY. “Whether or not Piṇḍola comes to take his seat when invited is, then, a positive sign of the merit maker’s own degree of ritual correctness and faith.” (Strong 1979: 80 f). Piṇḍola here still functions as the lion-roarer, by his silent presence, overcoming the doubt of the faithful and endorsing his faith. That his presence is seen or sensed is proof of the effectiveness of the giving.

Yet Piṇḍola is always treated as a monk, in fact, even as a member of the monastery’s community. As such, not only is *an empty seat*⁴⁶ always reserved for him, but he is given the morning and forenoon meal offerings *like other monks*, and these offerings (and other offerings appropriate for a monk) are placed in his alms-bowl.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Qu at Strong 1979: 79 f.

⁴² Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 217. Qu at Strong 1979: 80.

⁴³ These two ways: Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 206. Qu at Strong 1979: 80.

⁴⁴ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 219. Qu at Strong 1979: 80.

⁴⁵ At the height of the cult’s popularity, many elaborate tests were used to detect Piṇḍola’s presence. These tests mostly focused on *the empty seat* prepared for him in the refectory. Lévi & Chavannes 1916 fail to note that in east Asia, Piṇḍola is the patron saint of the refectory. See Mochizuki 1954: 4334; Kenneth Ch’en 1964: 101. See also Strong 1979: 56 f.

⁴⁶ The seat must be kept empty, not even an image of himself is to be placed there; for, then how would he move it aside? (Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 211).

⁴⁷ This practice is also found in Japan, as attested in the 10th-cent *Taketori monogatari* (Jap 竹取物語 **The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter**) in which Piṇḍola’s bowl, set up in a Buddhist temple, becomes the focus of a romantic folk-tale, also known as *Kaguya-hime no Monogatari* (かぐや姫の物語 *The Tale of Princess Kaguya*). It is considered the oldest extant Japanese narrative. *The Tale of Genji* (ch 17) refers to it as “the ancestor of all romances.” See Donald Keene (tr), “The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 11 1956: 334.

From all this, we can say that the Piṇḍola cult is not only *a rite of hospitality*, but one whose agenda is that of *encouraging the laity's open hospitality to monastics*. In this spirit, the Piṇḍola cult as it developed in China is a continuation of themes familiarly found in the Pali accounts [2]. In both traditions, Piṇḍola is presented as one who affirms the faith of believers “by his capacity to receive food-offerings as an ideal monk.” (Strong 1979: 81)

3.3.2 Pindola and Asoka. Like Dào'àn [3.3.1.2], we are told in **the Aśokāvadāna**⁴⁸ that the emperor Aśoka, too, meets with Piṇḍola. As pointed out by **John Strong**, the Aśoka legend bridges both aspects of the Piṇḍola legend, that is, the Buddha-era Piṇḍola and the post-Buddha Piṇḍola. Moreover, throughout the Aśokāvadāna, the Piṇḍola that we see is *a cult figure*, that is, one is closely related to ritual and magic.

The Piṇḍola story in the Aśokāvadāna significantly opens with Aśoka's undertaking of the *pañca-vārṣika*, a quinquennial grand alms-offering, that is, the offering of foods, robes and other allowables to the monastic order. When all the monks, including their leader, Yaśas, have assembled, the central seat is still empty. When Aśoka asks whose seat it is, he is told it is Piṇḍola's.⁴⁹

Almost as soon as Aśoka asks when Piṇḍola would arrive, he is seen in the sky, flying in like royal geese in a crescent formation of several thousands arhats. Having alighted, he takes his seat, his white hair flowing and his long white brows hanging down over his eyes. His presence is a clear signal that Aśoka's *pañca-vārṣika* has been properly organized, but Aśoka does not really see him, just as a Buddha image whose eyes have not been “opened” is not yet consecrated.⁵⁰

However, as soon as Aśoka bows down to him, Piṇḍola lifts up his eyebrows and gazes straight at the king. “Lifting up his long eyebrows and looking straight at the king,” says **the Aśokāvadāna**, he tells of the times he face to face saw

that great incomparable sage
whose brilliance matched that of the best polished gold
whose body bore the thirty-two marks
whose face was like the autumn moon
whose voice carried more authority than Brahmā's
who dwelt ever free from passion.

(Strong, *The Legend of Aśoka*, 1983: 63)

Now Piṇḍola has seen the Buddha himself—eye to eye, just as he now gazes at Aśoka—on a number of important occasions:

- when the Buddha performs the twin wonder at Śrāvastī;
- when the Buddha descends from Trāyastriṃśa with the gods after the rains retreat (which is after the promulgation of the Vinaya rule against public psychic display);
- he spends a rains retreat at Rājagrha with the Buddha and 500 other monks;
- when he flies through the air with a mountain peak trailing behind him, heading for Puṇḍavardhana, and the Buddha instructs him not to enter into final nirvana until Maitreya's advent.

The most significant occasion of these Buddha-darshans—the fifth—is in fact when, in a past life, Aśoka, *as a boy, having nothing to offer the Buddha, scoops a handful of dirt and offers it to the Buddha*: Piṇḍola was there to witness this crucial event after which the Buddha prophesized that in a hundred years' time, this boy would become a world monarch. (Aśokāvadāna (tr Strong) 1983b: 98)

Piṇḍola, in other words, has truly seen the Buddha himself, and now Aśoka, in seeing Piṇḍola, is effectively seeing the Buddha, too! Aśoka exults: “When I destroyed the enemy host and put the whole earth...as far as the oceans under a single rule, then my joy was not what it is upon seeing you today. *Seeing you now, I see the Tathāgata*, and by this sight my faith has been doubled.” (ib). Significantly,

⁴⁸ The **Aśokāvadāna** (The Narrative of Aśoka) is a 2nd-cent CE text and legend relating to the first Maurya emperor, Aśoka (r c269-c232 BCE), India's greatest emperor. It was tr into Chinese by 法顯 Fāxiān (c337-c422).

⁴⁹ Aśokāvadāna (tr Strong) 1983b: 96; cf Burnouf 1876: 353.

⁵⁰ See Donald K Swearer, *Becoming the Buddha*, Princeton: Princeton Univ Press, 2004: 8, 72, 88, 94-107, 189, 212-214, 230, 290 n3.

Piṇḍola, by his presence, makes the Buddha who has entered parinirvana relevant to a faithful even in a post-Buddha age.

3.3.3 Pindola as a latter-day saint. As east Asian Buddhists matured in their understanding of Buddhism, and in response to social crises and other challenges, one desperate measure taken by their elite was to turn to the eschatological teachings of Indian Buddhism and to *indigenize* them, that is, they re-wrote the Buddhist end-of-days or “latter-day teachings” (末法 *mòfǎ*)⁵¹ to reflect their own cultural context [4.1.2].⁵²

These latter-day teachings were recorded as the Buddha’s deathbed pronouncements on the Dharma-ending age, the practice of charity, the asceticism (*dhutaṅga*) of the true monk, the “lion-roar” of unimpeachable truth that allays doubts about the teaching during the long years of decline, and “especially to the idea that a seemingly corrupt monk might actually be an enlightened being, all concerns found in the San-chieh [三階 *Sānjiē*] teachings.”⁵³ Understandably, the arhat Piṇḍola, who embodies all these qualities, was a very popular saint related to the pre-modern Chinese eschatological and millenarian traditions.

The figure of Piṇḍola understandably appealed to 三階教 **the Sānjiē jiào**, a millenarian school of Chinese Buddhism formed during the Sui dynasty by the monk 信行 *Xinxing* (Hsin-hsing, 540-594). This school held the view that Buddhist and world history, including the present world itself, were divided into three periods: those of the True Dharma, the Counterfeit Dharma, and the Final Dharma (that is, the Dharma-ending Age). That Piṇḍola continues to be available in the world until end-times, means that he continues to be a supreme field of merit for the world to invest their merits in the Sangha. In other words, the Dharma persists in Piṇḍola even during the final days, much as the Lotus Sutra claims to uphold the Dharma even during the Dharma-ending age.⁵⁴

⁵¹ The Chinese Buddhists inherited the Indian eschatological conceptions of the “True Dharma” (*saddhamma*) = 正法 *zhèngfǎ* and of “counterfeit Dharma” (*paṭirūpaka dhamma*) = 像法 *xiàngfǎ*. From this, the Chinese genius linked to the indigenous term 末世 *mòshì* (“world-ending, final age”), which spawned the neologism 末法 *mòfǎ* (“dharma-ending, final dharma”) around the beginning of the 5th cent, and from the 6th cent onward, Chinese commentators interpreted *mòfǎ* as the name of the 3rd and final period in Buddhist history. See Jan Nattier 1991: 90-118; see also **The Three Roots Inc** = SD 31.12 (6.4.3).

⁵² On how Nichiren used this idea to found his own Buddhism, see Piyasilo, *Nichiren, the New Buddhism of Japan*, 1988d. Free download at http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/charisma6.pdf.

⁵³ Jamie Hubbard 2001: 139. See *Dà āluóhàn nántímìduōluó suǒshuō fǎ zhù jì* (T2030 = 49.13a–13c) (see Biblio: sv Nandimitra 654) and the *Qǐng Bīntóulú fǎ* (T1689 = 32.784b) (see Biblio: sv Huijian). Hubbard 2001 is a monograph on the Sānjiē jiào.

⁵⁴ See Jamie Hubbard 2001: 138. The “three stages” of the sect were:

1. The capacity for practice of the 一乘 *yīshèng* (*ekayāna*, “one vehicle”) teachings for those of superior capacity,
2. The capacity for practice of the 三乘 *sānshèng* (*triyāna*, “three vehicles”) for those who, while not of the superior capacity of the *ekayāna* bodhisattvas, are yet capable of accurate discernment and discrimination of truth from falsity, and
3. Those with no capacity, or the lowest capacity, the capacity for breaking the precepts and holding false views.

The first two categories are called 別法 *biéfǎ* (“separate or distinct teachings”), teachings which distinguish or separate truth from falsity, and the last category, the teachings for the beings of the third level capacity, are referred to as 普法 *pǔfǎ* (“universal teachings”), the teachings based on the universal truth of all things as 法身 *fǎshēn* (*dharmakāya*), appropriate for those who, being 生盲 *shēngmáng*, “blind from birth,” are unable to tell true from false. See [Digital Dictionary of Buddhism](http://www.dharmafarer.org), sv 三階教 (For user-name & password, use “guest”).

One reason for the popularity of 三階教 **the Sānjiē jiào** (San-chieh-chiao) was that it advocated the universality of Buddha-nature, and its members would prostrate before all people and other beings to honour them as Buddhas. During the 7th cent, their advocacy of almsgiving led to the establishment of the Inexhaustible Treasury at the Hua-tu Temple, Chang’an. This treasury functioned as a sort of lending-house, and as alms came in and loans were repaid, its wealth grew until its accumulated funds made it a potential source of economic power that alarmed the court.

Piṇḍola is almost always depicted as holding his alms-bowl, and his *omnipresence or accessibility* (or invocability) is represented by an empty seat reserved for him in the monastic refectory [3.4.1], and recounted in his role in the quinquennial alms-offering (*pañca, vārṣika*) sponsored by Aśoka [3.3.2].⁵⁵

Piṇḍola is *the personalization of the begging bowl*, which, as it were, represents his “gluttony” for offerings and his role as an “alms storehouse” (*piṇḍ’ālaya*) of immense merit for those who offer [3.2.2].⁵⁶ The story of his display of magical powers where he flies up into the air to seize the begging bowl from the top of a pole [3.2.2]⁵⁷ “also calls to mind the tradition that associates the destruction or disappearance of the Buddha’s begging bowl with the disappearance of the teaching.”⁵⁸

That Piṇḍola is disallowed by the Buddha (according to Mahāyāna) from “entering” nirvana until the advent of Maitreya Buddha [3.2.3] means that Piṇḍola is the “walking Dharma”: he is often represented as holding a scroll or book. “In other words,” says Hubbard, “the dharma persists in Piṇḍola even during the latter teaching, much as the *Lotus* [Saddharma, puṇḍarīka Sūtra] allows continued access even in the time of the destruction of the dharma.” (2001: 138)

3.4 PIṆḌOLA IN EAST ASIA.

3.4.1 Pindola in China. Piṇḍola is especially popular in Mahāyāna, especially east Asian Buddhism. In Mahāyāna hagiology, Piṇḍola is regarded as *the first or leader of the sixteen or eighteen arhats* [4.2-3]. Piṇḍola is not only mentioned in the early suttas, but also in various lists of the Buddha’s disciples found in well known Mahāyāna works, such as:⁵⁹

Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Sūtra	tr H Kern, Sacred Books of the East 21, 1884 :2;
Sukhā.vati,vyūha	ed F Max Muller & B Nanjio, Oxford, 1883: 92; <i>The Smaller Sukhāvātī-vyūha</i> , SBE 49, 1894: 1969;
Karuṇa,puṇḍarīka	ed Yamada Isshi, London, 1968 2:2;
Karma,vibhaṅga	ed & tr S Levi, Paris, 1932: 62 (text), 131 (tr);
Mañjuśrī,mūla.kalpa	<i>Āryamañjuśrīmūlakalpa</i> , ed T Gaṇapati Sāstrī, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series vol 70, 76, 84, 1920-25 1: 111.

In east Asian Mahāyāna, Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja is called 寶頭盧頗羅墮 *Bīntólú pōluóduò* or 寶頭盧頗羅墮誓 *Bīntólú pōluóduòshì*,⁶⁰ and commands a personal cult primarily as the guardian arhat of the monastic refectory.⁶¹ This tradition, as we have seen, goes as far back as to the time of **Dào’àn** 道岸 (654-717) [3.3.1.2],⁶² and was fully formed by the mid-5th century, when 請寶頭盧法 the *Qǐng Bīntólú*

Moreover, it made claims of the depravity of the times and the illegitimacy of the ruling power. Empress 武則天 Wǔ Zétiān then banned the sect and seized its assets in 713. See [San-chieh-chiao](#), sv Damien Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism*, Oxford, 2003.

⁵⁵ See JS Strong 1979: 82-86; J Hubbard 2001: 138.

⁵⁶ See JS Strong 1979: 66.

⁵⁷ See JS Strong 1979: 74-78.

⁵⁸ See J Hubbard 2001: 63 n26; see also 138 f; cf *Lien hua mien ching*, T386; *Fa yüan chu lin*, T2122 = 53.1007b ff; Michel Strickmann, “The *Consecration Sūtra*” 1990: 113 n33; P Mus, “Hiuan-tsang et ses ‘stōpas d’Aśoka’,” *Actes du XIXe Congrès International des Orientalistes*, Rome, 1935: 356-358; E Zürcher, “Eschatology and Messianism,” 1981: 47; Zürcher, “Prince Moonlight,” 1982: 21 n37, 25, 29-32.

⁵⁹ For biblio details, see JS Strong 1979: 55 f n22. All these works probably have updated editions and translations, for which you can google or look up in specialized biblios.

⁶⁰ Also spelt as 寶頭盧頗羅墮誓 *Bīntólú pōluóduòshì*, 寶頭盧跋羅墮閣 *Bīntólú báluóduòshé*, or 寶度羅跋羅惰閣 *Bīndùluó báluóduòshé*; abbrev as 寶頭盧 *Bīntólú* or 寶頭 *Bīntóu*: see 翻梵語 *Fānfānyǔ* ([T2130 = T54.994a-10](#)). In Korean, 빈두로파라타 (*Binduro parata*); Jap ビンズルハラダ (*Binzuru harada*, also *Bindora baradaja*); Viet Tân đầu lô phá la đọa.

⁶¹ Mochizuki 1954: 4334; Kenneth Ch’en 1964: 101.

⁶² On Dào’ān, see **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD SD 40b.2 (.3.3.1).

fǎ (Method of Inviting Piṇḍola)⁶³ [3.3] was said to have been “translated” by 慧簡 **Huìjiǎn** of the Liú Sòng dynasty (劉宋 457).⁶⁴

In east Asian Mahāyāna, Piṇḍola is almost always depicted as *holding his alms-bowl*, and his constant presence or availability is represented by *an empty central seat* reserved for him in the monastic refectory. If the arhat Sīvalī⁶⁵ is the “kitchen saint” of Theravāda (south Asian Buddhism), then Piṇḍola is the “kitchen god” or refectory guardian of East Asian Buddhism.⁶⁶

In 490, it is said, emperor Wǔ (武) of the soon to be created Liáng dynasty (梁) was reportedly cured of a serious illness as a result of great offerings made to Piṇḍola, and the monk 道世 **Dào shì** of 長安 Cháng’ān wrote a long article on this in 668 [3.3.1].⁶⁷ Despite some opposition from the politically powerful Tantric master Amogha, vajra (705-774)⁶⁸ who, in 769, petitioned the emperor requesting that Piṇḍola’s image be replaced in all the refectories of the empire by that of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.⁶⁹

The strength of the story of Piṇḍola’s reputed gluttony is that it does not seek to deny the possibility that such doubts may exist, but, having noted them, it seeks to quell them. It recognizes, often humorously, that some monks may have, in fact, joined the Sangha because they saw that its members were readily given food offerings—a point which, at the same time, shows the Buddhist community as a whole to be more highly regarded than other “heretical” groups. But it insists that once in the Sangha those monks overcome their bad habits and are actually ideals of disciplined renunciation. The thrust of the story as a whole, then, is to enjoin the making of offerings to monks who, whatever their reputation or appearance, are actually worthy of recipients of *dāna*.

(John Strong 1979: 67 f)

⁶³ T1689 = T32.2151.363a2; Tripiṭaka Koreana K1042 (30:673) = case 盡 437; carved 1245; *Han'gul taejang-gyong kanhaeng mo*, H 1415; *Han'gul-dae-jang-kyong*, HDJK vol 139; Nanjiio, *Catalogue* 1348; Ono Gemmy (ed), *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten*, 5:399a. Accessible at http://ccbs.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/sutra/chi_pdf/sutra15/T32n1689.pdf.

⁶⁴ On Huìjiǎn (Hui-chien), see Michel Strickman, “The Consecration Sūtra,” 1990: 86-93.

⁶⁵ Due to various acts of generosity, the arhat **Sīvalī** enjoys the karmic fruit of getting almsfood, even in difficult times (U 2.8; AA 1:227 f, 243-248; DhA 2:192 f, 196, 200; J 1:408 f; ThaA 1:144-150; ApA 520-528). He is declared by the Buddha as the foremost amongst monks who receive almsfood (A 1:24). It is said that when the Buddha visits Khadira, vaniya Revata, he takes Sīvalī with him because the path is difficult and food scarce (ThaA 1:149; Ap 2:495; AA 1:227). In homes of traditional Sinhalese Buddhists, we often see an image of Sīvalī, usu hanging in the kitchen. In Thailand, he is depicted as a forest monk, standing with his almsbowl and umbrella, reflecting his fame as a forest-monk.

⁶⁶ In Myanmar, Piṇḍola (known as Peindola there), is one of the 4 most worshipped “living” saints, ie, Shin Upagok (Upagupta), Shin Thiwali (Sīvalī), Shin Aṅgulimāla, and Shin Peindola. See Duroiselle 1922-23: 174; Dowling 1982; Strong 1992: 241 f.

⁶⁷ This article is incorporated into his *Fǎyuànzhūlin* (法苑珠林 668) [4.4.1 n] and tr in Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 205-213.

⁶⁸ 不空金剛 (simplified 不空金剛) Bùkòng jīngāng, who worked in China, 723-774, was a prolific translator who became one of the most politically powerful Buddhist monks in Chinese history, and acknowledged as one of the 8 patriarchs of the doctrine in Shingon (Jap Tantric) lineages.

⁶⁹ This petition is found at T2120 = 52.837ab, and is recounted in Vajrabodhi’s biography where, however, Piṇḍola is confused with the arhat Kauṇḍinya (Koṇḍañña). Although the petition was granted, it was not fully implemented: see Chou Ti-liang, “Tantrism in China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 8, 1944-45: 297 n63. The change was prob implemented mostly in the larger monasteries. The Japanese pilgrim, **Ennin** (圓仁 or 円仁, 793/-794-864), for example, in his 入唐求法巡禮行記 *Nittō guhō junreikōki* (on his travels in 唐 Táng China, 838-847), records this on his visit to a temple on Wútái shān (五台山): “At noon we went to the dining hall for our forenoon meal. We saw an image of Monju [Mañjuśrī] placed in the seat of the head monk but did not see Binzuru [Piṇḍola] in any seat. Surprised at this we asked the monks, and they said the various paintings [sic] in the mountains were like this.” See Edwin O Reischauer, *Ennin’s Diary: The record of a pilgrimage to China in search of the Law*, NY: Ronald Press, 1955: 226 f. See JS Strong 1979: 56.

3.4.2 Piṇḍola in Japan. In Japan, too, Piṇḍola—where he is called Binzuru or Bindora⁷⁰—is the most popular of the Buddhist saints, and is worshipped as the refectory guardian. The monastery refectory near the Todaiji⁷¹ at Nara has a large wooden statue of Binzuru seated in the lotus posture. As in Chinese Buddhism, Piṇḍola is regarded as the leader of the “living” arhats, usually numbering sixteen or eighteen.

In Japan, however, Piṇḍola is also reputed to have *the gift of healing*. Devotees with ailments would pray before an image of Piṇḍola, then rub the part of it corresponding to the sick area of the body.⁷² One of the best known of such magical healing images of Piṇḍola is found in the Sensōji in Tokyo.⁷³

In Japan, he is also often offered red and white bibs and children’s caps as votive offerings to invoke his watching over the health of babies, so that his statues are often decked in rags. He is usually depicted in paintings as an old man with long bushy eyebrows seated on a rock (outdoors) or on a high-backed chair (indoors), holding a *shaku* (a flat wooden sceptre), or a sutra box and a feather fan. The Japanese regard Piṇḍola as embodying all the other arhats, and often worship him in that capacity.⁷⁴

4 The traditional groups of arhats

4.1 THE MAHĀYĀNA ARHATS.

4.1.1 Dealing with the Buddha’s death. One common view of Piṇḍola in east Asian Buddhism, is that Piṇḍola is *a living saint*. It is this east Asian Mahāyāna belief in “living” arhats that we turn to. The main reason for such a belief, I think, has to do with *the Chinese attitude towards the Buddha* (an attitude which profoundly influenced east Asian Buddhism as a whole). The post-Buddha Buddhists, both the Mahayanists and the non-Mahāyāna Buddhists, have to contend with *the death of their Teacher*. The *eremites* (recluses) of the forest tradition, whose lives centre around moral virtue, meditation and present-life awakening, have no problem whatsoever with the Teacher’s parinirvana. The more world-engaged *cœnobites* (settled monks), especially the scholastics, generally have difficulty accepting the Buddha’s death.⁷⁵

The more socially engaged these scholastics (mostly urbanized and economically secure monastics) are, the more likely they would see the urgency of keeping a lucrative flock of followers and supporters, that is, commanding sufficient funds and influence. At the same time, these monastics (and sometimes their followers, too) are apprehensive of the distractions and challenges on account of other Buddhist systems, other religions, and the growing availability of and access to Buddhist information and greater independence of the laity from the cloth. To worsen things, the growing laicization of such monastics encourage diluting and breaches of their monastic discipline (*vinaya*), which further alienate them from the informed and concerned laity.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ More fully, Jap ビンズルハラダ (*Binzuru harada*, also *Bindora baradaja*).

⁷¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Todaiji>.

⁷² Minakata 1899: 123; Mochizuki 1954: 4334.

⁷³ See Basil Hall Chamberlain (British Japanologist & professor at Tokyo Imperial Univ), 1907: 44, 132; also *Things Japanese*, 6 eds, 1890-1936: 132), quoted in GJ Younghusband, “On short leave to Japan,” London, 1894: 80. Accessible at http://www.archive.org/stream/onshortleavetoja00youunrich/onshortleavetoja00youunrich_djvu.txt.

⁷⁴ See <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/rakan-arhat-lohan.shtml>.

⁷⁵ On the significance of such a denial of the Buddha’s death, see **How Buddhism Became Chinese** = SD 40b.3 (3.2).

⁷⁶ See Gethin 1998: 95-100.

Such developments are sometimes construed as signs of the Dharma-ending age.⁷⁷ The more resourceful monastics actually encourage such an apocalyptic idea to spur their followers into being more religious and committed to their faith. Such ideas however tend to be philosophical or theological, and as such do not always have a widespread or desired impact.

The most successful skillful means that these monastics have introduced is the *transcendentalization* of the Buddha: *that the Buddha did not actually die!* After all, the Buddha is not an ordinary human being; he is not even human: he is Buddha; he is omniscient, and so on. So we have transcendental or cosmic Buddhas (like Amitābha) who transcend space and time. Various qualities of the Buddha are hypostatized into bodhisattvas and deities: the Buddha’s wisdom evolved into Mañjuśrī, his compassion Avalokiteśvara (and then into Tāra, Guanyin, etc), the four noble truths into Bhaiṣajya, guru Buddha, and so on.

Besides apotheosizing the Buddhas and the cosmic bodhisattvas, the Mahāyāna Buddhists also transcendentalized the arhats. The Mahāyāna Buddhists generally reject the *Hīnayāna* (“inferior vehicle”) arhats of early Buddhism, or *mahayanized* them. Like cosmic bodhisattvas, the Mahāyāna arhats, too, are able to postpone their “entering nirvana” and prolong their lives indefinitely. If the cosmic Buddhas and bodhisattvas are *salvific* figures (capable of saving beings by their grace), the transcendental arhats are *apotropaic* beings, who can be called upon for succour in times of difficulty and who are protectors of the Teaching. In fact, some of them are said to be spiritually accessible to the faithful even in the Dharma-ending or Dharma-ended ages, that is, until the advent of the next Buddha.

4.1.2 Piṇḍola’s “punishment.” The post-Buddha stories of Piṇḍola invariably relate that he is effectively *punished* for his gluttony and public display of psychic power. Curiously, he is punished by *not* being allowed to pass into nirvana, but to remain in this world until the Buddha Maitreya’s advent. Now let us examine this curious aspect of the Piṇḍola story.

After the Buddha’s passing, it is said that **Mahā Kassapa** (Skt Mahā Kaśyapa) continues to purify and perpetuate the Teaching. Kaśyapa, on the Buddha’s instruction, postpones passing away into nirvana, goes into a state of prolonged self-hibernation or suspended animation (technically known as the “cessation of feeling and perception,” *nirodha, samāpatti*) in the depths of Mt Kukkuṭa, pāda, waiting to arise in the time of Maitreya Buddha, hand him Śākyamuni’s robe, and only then pass into final nirvana.

Mahāyāna hagiography adds that a number of other eminent monks—such as Piṇḍola Bhāra, dvāja, Pūrṇa Kuṇḍopadhānīya, and Rāhula (the Buddha’s own son)—are instructed by the Buddha to prolong their lives, and not enter nirvana so that the Teaching does not end. Only when the future Buddha Maitreya has arisen, would they pass into nirvana. [4.2]

The Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, as already mentioned [3.2.3], adds an interesting detail to the Piṇḍola story not found in the other Vinayas. The Buddha banishes him from Jambu, dīpa (India), and he departs for the western continent of Aparā, godāniya (Pali *Aparā, goyāna*). There he lives as an exemplary arhat, teaching the Dharma, converting many, building monasteries and protecting the Teaching.⁷⁸

Like a number of famous Buddhist parables—such as the walking over water, and the multiplying of the loaves—that have found their way into the Christian Bible, the story of Piṇḍola instructed not to enter nirvana but to wander the world through the ages has been noted by various scholars as having been wandered into Christian sacred history, too. Scholars like Minakata Kumagusu and Albert J Edmunds have separately compared Piṇḍola to the figure of **the Wandering Jew**, whom Jesus was said to have condemned on his way to the Crucifixion to remain in this world until his Second Coming, and who

⁷⁷ 法苑珠林 卷第九十八 *Fāyuànzhūlín juǎn dìjiūshíbā* (T53 = 2122.98.1005) 釋道世撰 *Shidàoshì zhuàn* (compiled by Shi Dàoshi) (668: see biblio), which quotes 大五濁經 *Dà wǔ zhuó jīng* (The sutra on the five great turbidities). The 5 types of *chaos* (亂 *luàn*) are (paraphrased): (1) monks learn the Dharma from white-clad householders; (2) householders are seated above and the monks below them; (3) monks do not practise what they preach, while householders regard what they teach as being supreme; (4) Māras (evil ones) appear in the world as monks and the world regard their teachings as the True Dharma; (5) monks have wives and servants, earn a living, and do not keep to the precepts, so that they are no different from the householders. This appears to be a rehash of **Anāgata, bhaya S 4** (A 5.80/3:108-110): see **The Dharma-ending Age** = SD 1.10 (3.4).

⁷⁸ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 245 f; J Strong 1979a: 76 f.

during the interim wandered for centuries throughout western Europe, a living witness of the Christian Holy Week.⁷⁹

4.2 THE 16 ARHATS

4.2.1 The arhats are willing and able. The popularity of Piṇḍola in central and east Asia and Tibet is attested by the fact that he is there regarded as *the leader or the most important of the 16 Arhats*. His image or picture is found in numerous Buddhist sanctuaries in these areas.⁸⁰ As **John Strong** states, there are three salient features of the 16 Arhats that are noteworthy. (1992: 237 f)

Firstly, they are Dharma protectors, and as such, they—or at least four of them—are assigned to each of the four cardinal points, taking their tutelary quarters on each of the four continents. Thus, Piṇḍola is said to reside in the west, in *Apara, godānīya*; *Kanaka, paridhvaja* in the east, in *Pūrva, videha*; *Subinda* in the north, in *Uttara, kuru*; and *Nakula* in the south, in *Jambu, dvīpa*.⁸¹ In this role, they are similar to the world-protectors (*loka, pāla*).⁸² [3.3.1.2]

Secondly, they are bodhisattva-like arhats who can appear mysteriously in person in our world when needed or summoned, such as in times of crises. In other words, they are, like the bodhisattvas, capable of actively intervening in human affairs. [3.3.1.5]

Thirdly, when summoned, these arhats act not only as Dharma-protectors, but also as supreme fields of merit, available to the faithful desirous of merit by making offerings to them.⁸³ However, unlike the bodhisattvas, who are *mythical* in origin, these arhats are *divinized* human and historical saints. As such, they are exemplary figures whose virtues we can emulate.

4.2.2 Source of the 16-arhat cult. The notion of the 16 Arhats probably arose in Mahāyāna as a pious response to the 16 bodhisattvas of Indian origin, who, known as “the sixteen true individuals” (*ṣoḍaśa sat-puruṣa*), served the same function.⁸⁴ These bodhisattvas—such as the vaishya *Bhadra, pāla* of *Rājgrha*, the prince *Ratnākara* of *Vaiśālī*, the merchant’s son *Subha, gupta* of *Campā*, the vaishya *Sārtha, vāha* of *Śrāvastī*, and the brahmin *Nara, data* of *Mithilā*⁸⁵—led by *Bhadra, pāla*, precede the countless host of bodhisattvas who come from the Buddha-fields in distant universes, and who are led by *Maitreya*, *Avalokiteśvara*, *Mañjuśrī*, and others.

Unlike these constellations of countless and majestically impersonal cosmic bodhisattvas who come from distant and mythical universes, the 16 Arhats are historical figures and direct disciples of the Buddha. As such, we see here an intersecting of *the majestic compassion* of the Mahāyāna bodhisattva with *the ascetic wisdom* of the Hīnayāna arhats. Their devotees have the best of both worlds.

The sixteen arhats are as follows.⁸⁶



Fig 4.2 Piṇḍola as leader of the 16 arhats. Modern.

⁷⁹ The legend of the Wandering Jew arose in mediaeval western Europe, and peaked in its popularity during the 17th and 18th cents. See **Minakata Kumagusu** 1899; the study was picked up by **Albert J Edmunds** 1902 2:264-267. See also **George K Anderson** 1965.

⁸⁰ For descriptions & pictures of Piṇḍola and the 16 or 18 arhats, see: T Watters 1898: 329-347; GN Roerich 1929/30: 94-100; G Tucci 1949: 550-570 + pl 166; E Pander 1890: 83 ff; A Grünwedel 1900: 7, 35 ff; & esp Loden Sherap Dagzab 1977: 102-105. See also J Edkins 1893: 242; BH Chamberlain 1907: 44, 132; Mochizuki 1954: 4334. For Piṇḍola in Vietnam, see L Bezacier 1974: 32.

⁸¹ See T2030 = 49.13a (tr Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 10). Some texts associate Piṇḍola with other places.

⁸² Strong 1997a: 77; Lessing 1954.

⁸³ Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 8 f.

⁸⁴ *Mahā, ratna, kūṭa*, T310.17.91c14-15, T310.111.623b.13-14; *Aparimit’āyuh Sūtra*, T360.1.265c16; *Mañjuśrī, -parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, T463.480b.7; *Viśeṣa, cintā, brahma, pariṣṛcchā*, T 585.1.1a.14, T586.1.33b.9, T587.1.62b.12; *Sad-dharma, puṇḍarīka* 3.1.10. See Lamotte 1988a: 694 f.

⁸⁵ Cf *Upadeśa*, T1509.7.111a.

⁸⁶ For images and notes, see <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/history/lohans.htm>.

<u>Sanskrit</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Pinyin</u>	<u>Japanese</u>
1. Piṇḍola Bhāra,dvāja	賓度羅跋羅惰闍	Bīndùluó báluóduòshé	Bindora baradaja
2. Kanaka Vatsa	迦諾迦伐蹉	Jiānuòjiā fácuō	Kanaka bassa
3. Kanaka Pari,dhvaja	迦諾迦跋釐隳闍	Jiānuòjiā bálíduòshé	Kanaka baradaja
4. Subinda	蘇頻陀	Sūpíntuó	Subinda
5. Nakula	諾距羅	Nuòjùluó	Nakora
6. Bhadra	跋陀羅	Bátuóluó	Badara
7. Kālika	迦哩迦	Jiālǐjiā	Karika
8. Vajra,putra	伐闍羅弗多羅	Fáshéluó fúduōluó	Bajara putara
9. Śvapāka	戌博迦	Xūbójiā	Jubaka
10. Panthaka	半託迦	Bàntuōjiā	Hantaka
11. Rāhula	羅怙羅	Luóhùluó	Ragora
12. Nāga,sena	那伽犀那	Nǎjiāxīnà	Nagasena
13. Inḡada	因揭陀	Yīnjiētúó	Ingada
14. Vana,vāsi	伐那波斯	Fánǎ bōsi	Banabasu
15. Ajita	阿氏多	Āshǐduō	Ajita
16. Cūḡa Panthaka	注荼半託迦	Zhùtú bàntuōjiā	Chuda hantaka

To these sixteen living saints are later added the following two—China’s most famous monk, 玄奘 Xuán-zàng, and the future Buddha, 彌勒 Mìlè—so that there is a total of eighteen Chinese arhats. [4.3]

A largely different group of Sixteen *Luóhàn* (羅漢 *arhant*) is mentioned in the Amitābha Sūtra (阿彌陀經 the *Āmítuó jīng*), with Bīndùluó (Piṇḍola) and Zhùtú bàntuōjiā (Cūḡa Panthaka) as identical.

The literary roots of the Chinese Piṇḍola along with the earliest mention of the sixteen arhats are in *The Great Arhat Nandi, mitra’s Record of Dharma Abiding*,⁸⁷ translated into Chinese by 玄奘 Xuánzàng (602-664). According to the text, “eight hundred years after the Buddha’s parinirvana,” the arhat **Nandi-mitra**, when he was about to die, summoned all the monks of Lanka to his death-bed and consoled them with a Dharma talk. The Buddha, he claimed, just before passing away, entrusted the safeguard of the True Dharma to sixteen great arhats, instructing them to protect it until the end of days. To carry out the Buddha’s instruction, these arhats all extended their life-spans by means of psychic power. So even today they are wandering the world acting as ready fields of merit, upholding moral virtue and protecting the Dharma.

When Sakya,muni’s Dharma age finally ends, they will assemble all the relics of the Buddha’s body in a great stupa of the seven gems⁸⁸ which will then sink and disappear into the earth. At that moment, Sakya,muni’s dispensation finally ends, preparing the way for the coming of Maitreya.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ 大阿羅漢難提蜜多羅所說法住記 *Dà āluóhàn nántimìduōluó suǒshuō fǎ zhù jì*, more briefly, 法住記 *Fǎzhùjì* (T2030.49.13a). The Skt orig is lost. Complete trs may be found in French in Lévi & Chavannes, “Les seize arhat protecteurs de la loi,” 1916: 6-24, and in Eng in Shan Shih Buddhist Institute (comp), *The Sixteen and the Eighteen Arhats*, 1961. Excerpts may be found in MW De Visser, 1922-23: 60-64. See Strong 1979: 53 f.

⁸⁸ The seven gems (Skt *sapta ratna* 七寶) are *suvarṇa* 金 gold; *rūpya* 銀 silver; *vaidūrya* 鑽璃 lapis lazuli; *sphaṭika* 玻璃 crystal; *musāragalva* 砮磬 agate; *rohita,mukta* 赤珠 rubies or red pearls; and *aśma,garbha* 瑪瑙 cornelian. These seven precious stones amongst the valued commodities traded along the ancient Silk Road, than ran from Rome in the west to Chang’an, and on to Korea and Japan. See Xinru LIU, *Ancient India and Ancient China: Trade and Religious Exchanges AD 1-600*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997: 114 f.

⁸⁹ See T125 = 2.789a (French tr Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 192 f); T1465 = 24.902a (French tr Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 193 f); T453 = 14.422b (German tr Leumann 1919: 250). See also Lévi & Chavannes 1916: 13; De Visser 1922-23: 64; Lamotte 1988a: 693 f n & Strong 1992: 237.

4.2.3 Representations of the 16 Arhats. In general, Chinese *luóhàn* paintings can be divided into two stylistic types which influenced the development of two painting traditions in Japan. **The orthodox-style** paintings of the 16 Arhats are known to date from the Táng dynasty (8th century), and were produced frequently in China throughout the Sòng period (12th century), often as wall-paintings or sets of hanging scrolls.⁹⁰ The orthodox style features careful attention to detail, rich colour, and gold, and is associated with the Northern Song painter, 李龍眠 Lǐ Lóngmián (Jap: Ri Ryūmin, also known as 李公麟 Lǐ Gōnglín, Jap: Ri Kourin, 1049?-1106). These works are known as 李龍眠樣羅漢 (*Lǐlóngmiányàng luóhàn*; Jap *riryūminyō rakan*).

In contrast, the Five Dynasties (五朝 *wǔcháo*) monk Guànxīū 貫休 (Jap: Kankyū, 832-912) created a distinctive **ink monochrome style** of rendering the 16 Arhats, known as 禪月樣羅漢 (*chányuèyàng luóhàn*; Jap *zengetsuyō rakan*). In Japan, the subject is said to have been introduced from China in 982 by the monk 喬然 Diāorán (Jap: Chouren ?-1016).

Several sets of Chinese paintings extant in Japanese collections attest to the early popularity of the subject in Japanese temples. The Japanese versions, like their Chinese prototypes, were typically done as a set of sixteen hanging scrolls or with the *rakan* (羅漢) grouped in one or two hanging scrolls. In both countries, because of the relative humanity of the subjects and their “foreignness,” paintings of the 16 Arhats became “exercises in grotesquerie or realism,” so that commissioned artists have the latitude to explore distortions of form or to display their masterly control of the brush.



Fig 4.3 The Arhat Garden, Hsilai Temple, Hacienda Heights, California, USA

The arhat theme was particularly popular in Japanese 禪 Zen temples, where polychrome wood sculptures of the *jūroku rakan* (“Sixteen Arhats”) were often placed in the second floor chamber of the temple gates (三門 *sanmon*), such as the Tōfukuji 東福寺 and the Nanzenji 南禪寺, Myōshinji 妙心寺). In the Edo period, the *jūroku rakan* images were usually created by artists not associated with temples, and their paintings were often used in secular contexts. The *jūroku rakan* were even popularly caricatured by *ukiyo-e* (浮世絵 “floating-world picture”) artists.⁹¹ Edo-period gardens sometimes feature a set of 16 stones representing the *jūroku rakan*.⁹²

4.3 THE 18 ARHATS. The cult of the 18 Arhats (十八羅漢 *shíbā luóhàn*) of China probably arose in response to popular Daoist cult of the Eight Immortals.⁹³ Unlike the antisocial and Dionysian character of these Daoist sages, the 18 Arhats are more restrained, refined and engaging with their devotees. The 18 Arhats comprises the Sixteen Arhats [4.2.] and the following two, namely, China’s most famous monk, 玄奘 Xuánzàng, and the future Buddha, 彌勒 Mílè.

⁹⁰ See eg those of [the Tianhou Temple](#), Chiwan, Shekou, Nanshan, Shenzhen, in Guangdong. China.

⁹¹ Hokusai (1760-1849) See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ukiyo-e>.

⁹² For Chinese and Tibetan style line drawing of the 16 Arhats, see Louis Frédéric, *Buddhism: Flammarion Iconographic Guides*, Paris & NY, 1995: 101-106.

⁹³ The 8 immortals are: Immortal Woman He (何仙姑 Hé Xiāngū), Royal Uncle Cao (曹國舅 Cáo Guójiù), Iron-Crutch Li (李鐵拐 Lǐ Tiěguǎi), Lan Caihe (藍采和 Lán Cǎihé), Lü Dongbin (呂洞賓 Lǚ Dòngbīn), philosopher Han Xiang (韓湘子 Hán Xiāngzi), Elder Zhang Guo (張果老 Zhāng Guǒ Lǎo) and Zhongli Quan (鐘離權 Zhōnglí Quán). See W Perceval Yetts, “The eight immortals,” JRAS 21, 1916: <http://emeagwali.com/books/journals/jras/-1916-21.shtml>.

<u>Sanskrit</u>	<u>Chinese</u>	<u>Pinvin</u>	<u>Japanese</u>
17. Xuanzang (602?-664)	玄奘	Xuánzàng	Genjō
18. Maitreya	彌勒	Mílè	Miroku

The traditional order of the 18 *Luóhàn* (Arhats) is based on the order in which they appeared in the dreams of the monk 貫休 Guànxīū [4.2.3], not on the strength of their seniority or power. The order is: Deer Sitting, Happy, Raised Bowl, Raised Pagoda, Meditating, Oversea, Elephant Riding, Laughing Lion, Open Heart, Raised Hand, Thinking, Scratched Ear, Calico Bag, Plantain, Long Eyebrow, Doorman, Taming Dragon and Taming Tiger *Luóhàn*.

Since then, Chinese artists, be they painters, sculptors or potters, have sought to give flesh and blood to these essentially mythical figures. Often they would base their portrayals of the *Luóhàn* on Guan Xiu's paintings. Numerous legends have served to provide attributes and dispositions, from which the artists draw their inspiration. As each artist has his own method of expression, the portrayals of the *Luóhàn* differ from dynasty to dynasty and from place to place.

4.4 THE 500 ARHATS. There is also the tradition of the Five Hundred Arhats (五百羅漢 *wǔbǎi luóhàn*). The numbers are not exactly 500, but vary, such 526⁹⁴ or 538.⁹⁵ The tradition of the 500 Arhats is clearly based on the account of the elders of the First Buddhist Council held in the cave of the Seven Leaves (Sapta,parṃī Guhā), near Rāj-grha, as recorded in chapter 11 of the Culla,vagga of the Vinaya (V 2:285). The early discourses, too, often say that the Buddha, during his Dharma-tours or teachings, is accompanied by 500 monks.

Depictions of the 500 Arhats are common enough in China, and often special halls are used to house them. Each of the arhats has his own posture, gesture and artefact. Sometimes these arhats are installed in a beautiful garden. Due to the large number of figures, they are usually smaller than life-size, usually over a metre high each. They could be made of wood, stone (usually marble), or metal (such as copper). Of the multiple-arhat traditions in Buddhist art, the 500-arhat group is the latest, the main reason being the various difficulties attending their creation or depiction.



Fig 4.4 Statues of the 500 *Luóhàn* in the Lónghua Sì (龙华寺), Shanghai, China (2004).
Photo by: Rolf Müller.

5 The Significance of Piṇḍola and his stories

5.1 PIṆḌOLA'S QUALITIES. As **John Strong** has done,⁹⁶ we can conveniently speak of two traditions regarding Piṇḍola, *the first* is that of a disciple living in the time of the Buddha while *the second*, that of a fabulous long-lived magical saint. However, Strong's first category too conveniently lumps together "the stories of his reputation for gluttony, his lion's roar, his display of supernatural powers." (ib). But the early Suttas only know Piṇḍola as an exemplary forest monk who is teacher, meditator and lion-roarer [2].

⁹⁴ At the Yeongsanjeon of the Gejo Hermitage, a branch of the Eunhae Temple on Mt Palgong, SE Korea. See http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/art/2008/03/135_20665.html.

⁹⁵ Such as the *gohyaku rakan* in the Nihon-ji, Chiba prefecture, Japan: <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/rakan-arhat-lohan.shtml#500>.

⁹⁶ Strong 1979: 82.

Piṇḍola, as we know him in the early texts, is an arhat, and a great exemplary forest saint, accomplished as a meditator and teacher. The Piṇḍola we see in the Suttas is the foremost amongst the monks who are lion-roarers [1.2.2], that is, those who openly, jubilantly and courageously declare their faith in the Teaching. In the case of Piṇḍola, he declares, “Let those who have any doubt in the path and fruition [the stages of sainthood] question me!” [1.5]. Piṇḍola, in other words, is a very exemplary forest monk of early Buddhism.

In the early texts, there is no mention of his having been a glutton, nor having performed any psychic display, nor even having any psychic power. Stories of Piṇḍola’s gluttony, psychic display and colourful life first appear in the Vinaya [1.4] and are elaborated in the Commentaries [1.3], and later works.

5.2 THE POST-BUDDHA PIṆḌOLA. The Piṇḍola of the post-Buddha era is a creation of the Mahāyāna imagination, a fabulously long-lived wonder-working saint who, with a bodhisattva-like presence, dispels the doubts of the faithful [3.1.4] and inspires the laity to practise generosity and support the Sangha. [3.2.2]

Two interesting dynamics operate in the Mahāyāna depiction of the post-Buddha Piṇḍola. Firstly, on a somewhat dark note, *he is blamed for being careless with his psychic powers* so that no monastics are allowed to public display their psychic powers. This is a very convenient story for those monastics, who for various reasons are unable to perform them anyway. So Piṇḍola is made the scapegoat. [3.1.4]

Secondly, Piṇḍola is depicted as *being available to the world*, especially the monastery, where with the proper conditions and rituals, he can be summoned for the merit-making and blessing of his devotees. The forest monk Piṇḍola of the Buddha’s days has been monasticized and domesticated into a household saint, as it were [3.2.3].

The arhat Piṇḍola is turned into a bodhisattva-like figure in Mahāyāna; this is its term of endearment, as it were. However, while bodhisattvas are generally *sacralized lay individuals* (only the bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha is known to be a monk), the arhat-bodhisattva Piṇḍola remains a monk: he is *not* laicized [3.2.3]. After all, Piṇḍola is the refectory guardian and provider of monastic welfare [3.2.2]. Above all, during the Dharma-ending age, at a time when true sanghins are difficult to come by and the True Dharma not so accessible, the genial saint, Piṇḍola, is always available [3.3.2].

5.3 STORY AND TRUTH. Undeniably, the Piṇḍola stories are amongst the most instructive, dramatic, inspiring and endearing of religious stories. That is the key point: *they are stories*. And here we need to carefully reflect on the teachings of **the Neyy’attha Nī’tattha Sutta** (A 2.3.4), a succinct and important discourse here quoted in full:

1 Bhikshus, there are these two who misrepresent the Tathagata. What are the two?

(1) Those who explain the Sutta teaching whose sense is explicit to be implicit. [Those who explain the Sutta teaching that has been drawn out (*nīta*) as one to be drawn out (*neyya*).]

(2) Those who explain the Sutta teaching whose sense is implicit to be explicit. [Those who explain the Sutta teaching that is to be drawn out (*neyya*) as one that has been drawn out (*nīta*).]

These, bhikshus, are the two who misrepresent the Tathagata.

2 Bhikshus, there are these two who do not misrepresent the Tathagata. What are the two?

(1) Those who explain a sutta whose sense is *explicit* (*nī’tattha*) explicit [whose sense has been drawn out].

(2) Those who explain the sutta whose sense is *implicit* (*neyy’attha*) as implicit [whose sense is to be drawn out].

These, bhikshus, are the two who do not misrepresent the Tathagata.

(A 2.3.4-5/1:60) = SD 2.6b

As in any human discourse, indeed, as in any religion, the Buddha, too, discourses on two levels: the level of *stories* or *persons* (*puggalādhiṭṭhāna*) that delight the audience, and the level of *truth* or *ideas* (*dhammādhiṭṭhāna*) that informs.⁹⁷ Stories are media for the message, that is, the truth. As such, stories

⁹⁷ Nett 164 f; MA 1:24; PmA 449.

are sugar-coated medicines for the disease of ignorance, and the use and misuse of medicine need to be pointed out (*neyya*), and often their benefits must be explained (*neyy'attha*).

Stories and language should be signposts *pointing in the direction of* personal growth, inner stillness and spiritual liberation. For those who have understood the stories, and who are experts in reading maps for the journey: they have drawn out (*nīta*) the message of these media. They *directly immerse themselves* in personal growth, inner stillness and spiritual liberation: they have drawn out the benefits (*nīt'attha*) of these teachings.

5.4 LEARNING FROM PIṄḌOLA. In many ways, Piṅḍola is still with us, that is, he has much to teach us, the faithful today, at a time when our distance from the historical Buddha is growing rapidly. We often know the arhat Piṅḍola from the *later* stories of his great miracles and visitations, but we must also remember the older *canonical* accounts of his being an exemplary forest monk, wise teacher and, above all, an arhat.

After the Buddha, when the scholastic monks of the great viharas place academic learning above spirituality, where dogmas define and differentiate the various Buddhisms, and monastics are neither keen nor able to really meditate (that is, to gain inner calm and clarity), they have effectively lost touch with their higher meditative powers.

Piṅḍola was conveniently made the scapegoat. In an inspiring but self-contradicting tale and their various versions, Piṅḍola was blamed for “public display” of what is meant to be hidden from the laity’s eyes. The point is that the domesticated monastics then—and now—have lost their magical powers, and the Piṅḍola stories are used to legitimize this lack and loss.

This is not to assert that psychic powers are essential for spirituality and arhathood. Nothing could be more false, as many early teachings, such as those of **the Kevaḍḍha Sutta** (D 11) and **the (Pāṭihāriya) Saṅgārava Sutta** (A 3.60),⁹⁸ attest. What is really the heart of the issue is that the “supreme miracle” of *Dharma practice* has effectively been sidelined by much of our monastics, monasteries and institutions today, and the “highest miracle” of *spiritual instruction* has been overwhelmed by sophisticated modernism, abstruse scholasticism and religious materialism.

Despite all this sea-change, perhaps because of it, Piṅḍola evokes the immanence of the Dharma. It is not the issue whether or not Piṅḍola really comes when invited, but that *the Dharma is always available when we invoke it*. We are reminded that, for the purpose of spiritual liberation at least, the teaching must always be *above* the teacher.⁹⁹

The liberating truth is *not* out there, but *in here*, in our inner stillness—where the true Piṅḍola really resides. We are that Piṅḍola, or we *can* become him; for, he is not a material individual, but an *arhat*, an exemplar of spiritual perfection and liberation.

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⁹⁸ D 11./1:211-223 = SD 1.7 & A 360/1:168-173 = SD 16.10 respectively.

⁹⁹ See eg **Gārava S** (S 6.2/1:138-140) = **Uruvelā S 1** (A 4.21/2:20 f) = SD 12.3.

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