

REFLECTIONS ON THE *MAITRAKANYAKA-AVADANA* AT CANDI BOROBUDUR: THE TEACHING OF EXCHANGING AND EQUALIZING

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Abstrak, Refleksi tentang Maitrakanyaka-avadana di Candi Borobudur: Ajaran “Menukar dan Menyamakan”. Tulisan ini mengeksplorasi ajaran-ajaran berlapis dalam cerita Maitrakanyaka yang tergambar pada relief Candi Borobudur, dengan fokus pada praktik “menukar dan menyamakan” (*parivartana*). Melalui analisis dialogis relief dan perbandingan dengan versi naskah Sanskerta, Tionghoa, Tibet, dan Pali, penelitian ini mengungkap unsur-unsur didaktik yang kaya. Narasi ini berpuncak pada ajaran mendalam tentang *parivartana* (atau *tonglen*), yang menekankan keberanian untuk mengambil alih penderitaan orang lain. Praktik yang dimotivasi oleh *bodhicitta* ini yang dipahat di Borobudur, merupakan bagian dari ajaran-ajaran terkenal dalam Buddhadharma mengenai budidaya pikiran. Relief-relief tersebut yang kemungkinan terinspirasi oleh berbagai versi naskah, juga menunjukkan proses seleksi, interpretasi, dan adaptasi yang terampil dari para perancang dan pemahat Borobudur dalam menciptakan narasi visual, sekaligus berfungsi sebagai bukti penguasaan literasi yang luas pada masanya. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana relief Borobudur secara efektif menyampaikan ajaran yang mengakar kuat yang masih relevan dan masih dipraktikkan hingga sekarang.

Kata kunci: Ajaran Borobudur, Cerita Maitrakanyaka, Parivartana, Relief naratif, Tonglen

Abstract, This paper explores the multi-layered teachings within the Maitrakanyaka story as depicted in the Borobudur reliefs, focusing on the practice of “exchanging and equalizing” (*parivartana*). Employing dialogical analysis of the reliefs and comparing them with Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali manuscript versions, the study reveals rich didactic elements. The narrative culminates in a profound teaching on *parivartana* (or *tonglen*), emphasizing the courageous act of taking on the suffering of others. This *bodhicitta*-motivated teaching, carved at Borobudur, is part of the celebrated teachings within Buddhadharma regarding mind cultivation. The reliefs, likely inspired by various manuscript versions, also demonstrate the Borobudur designers’ and sculptors’ process of selection, interpretation, and adaptation in creating a visual narrative, while simultaneously serving as evidence of the extensive literary mastery of their time. Ultimately, this study highlights how Borobudur’s reliefs continue to convey these enduring teachings, which remain relevant and practiced today.

Keywords: Borobudur teachings, *Maitrakanyaka-avadana*, Narrative relief, *Parivartana*, *Tonglen*



1. Introduction

The *Jataka* and *Avadana* stories remain perpetually captivating due to their multi-layered messages. Within them lie layers of teachings, ranging from fundamental ethics for daily life to the cultivation of *bodhicitta* (the mind of awakening) for the attainment of liberation and complete awakening. These stories serve as didactic tools, exploring the repercussions of actions. As a literary genre, the *Jatakas* and *Avadanas* often offer insights into the societal norms and conditions of their era, contextualizing the narratives within specific temporal and spatial domain.

At Candi Borobudur, the *Jataka* and *Avadana* stories are carved on 720 panels, comprising nearly half of the monument's narrative reliefs, as confirmed by various collections of witness manuscripts. The *Jataka* and *Avadana* series occupies four rows on the balustrades and inner walls: level I of the upper row of the balustrade (IBa) with 372 panels, level I of the lower row of the balustrade (IBb) with 128 panels, level I of the inner wall in the lower row (Ib) with 120 panels, and level II of the balustrade (IIB) with 100 panels. These narrative depictions are corroborated by written Buddhist manuscripts, including *Jatakamala* by Aryasurya, *Divyavadana*, *Avadanasataka*, *Avadanasarasmuccaya*, and *Jatakathavannana* (Krom 1927, 230–478). Some stories appear in multiple collections. In other words, various manuscripts or collections contain *Jataka* and *Avadana* stories, displaying similar or partially parallel content. Within Buddhist literature, it is common to find certain teachings, or

parts of them documented across different manuscripts or collections.

The second-to-last story in the *Avadana* series at Candi Borobudur, the *Maitrakanyaka-avadana*, appears to represent key spiritual training within the *Buddhadharma*. The story concludes with the character's rebirth in Tusita (the Heaven of Joy), the same heavenly realm where the *Lalitavistara* begins. Its placement near the end of the *Jataka* and *Avadana* series, just before the *Lalitavistara*, suggests its significance. The *Maitrakanyaka-avadana* contains teachings on “exchanging and equalizing” oneself with others as a practice of *bodhicitta* (the awakening mind), teachings that were prominent in the archipelago and have contributed to Indonesia's recognition within the Buddhist world.

Over a century ago, Alfred Foucher (1909) examined the *Maitrakanyaka-avadana* reliefs at Candi Borobudur, as documented in Krom's work (1927, 239–240). N.J. Krom (1927, 304–311) later provided a more detailed study of these reliefs. Krom noted that while the Candi Borobudur *Maitrakanyaka-avadana* generally resembles the narrative in the *Avadanasataka* collection, the depicted scenes differ somewhat from that version (1927, 239, 246). A recent study of the *Maitrakanyaka* reliefs was conducted by Douglas Andrew Inglis (2014, 183–195) as part of his thesis on the ship carvings at Candi Borobudur.

Textual studies of the *Maitrakanyaka-avadana* have been conducted since the early 20th century, drawing from Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan sources. J.S. Speyer (1902–1909)

and P.L. Vaidya (1958) published Sanskrit editions of the *Avadanasataka*, which contains 100 *Avadanas*. Klaus Wille (2005) later consolidated the two Sanskrit editions by Speyer and Vaidya. Regarding translations, Konrad Klaus (1983) translated the Maitrakanyaka story from the *Divyavadana* collection into German, while Charles Willemen (1994) translated the Chinese Taisho Tripitaka no. 203 (T203) version into English, which includes a parallel story of *Maitrakanyaka*. Naomi Appleton (2013, 2014) translated 40 of the 100 stories from the *Avadanasataka* into English, including the *Maitrakanyaka* story. Bruno Galasek-Hul and Lama Kunga Thartse Rinpoche (2024) translated *The Exposition of Karma (Karmavibhanga)*, primarily based on the Tibetan Tohoku no. 338 (Toh 338), which includes the *Maitrakanyaka* episode.

This paper builds upon previous studies, emphasizing the teaching aspects and didactic messages of the stories depicted at Candi Borobudur. This paper employs information from the reliefs and witness manuscripts in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali to examine the different layers of teachings. It focuses on the main teaching of “exchanging and equalizing” (Sanskrit: *parivartana*; Tibetan: *gtong len, tonglen*, “taking and giving”), which takes root in the *Buddhadharma* of Nusantara.

2. Method

The primary data for this study consists of the narrative reliefs carved at Candi Borobudur and

the *Maitrakanyaka* manuscripts from various textual collections. The study employs narrative analysis, specifically dialogical analysis. This approach involves examining the narrative reliefs alongside their corresponding *Maitrakanyaka* versions in Buddhist texts.

According to Brett Smith (2016, 210, 215), the dialogical approach is specifically designed for complex narrative genres, which include characters, plotlines, and the expression of a point of view. In this study, the approach involves examining the attributes depicted in the reliefs, which may carry significant meaning. These attributes include gestures and objects held by key figures, the number of figures (which may have symbolic implications), interactions between figures, and environmental ambience.

Dialogical narrative analysis, as described by Smith (2016, 208), emphasizes the narrative’s content, functions, and conveyed messages, which in this study focus on pedagogical messages. A crucial aspect of this method, as outlined by Smith, is the process of “theming” the data. This step involves identifying narrative themes and establishing thematic relationships, which includes observing patterns, highlighting key sentences, and key phrases (Smith 2016, 216–217). This step is executed by analyzing the storyline, the relationships between different parts, and exploring the teachings emphasized in both visual and textual materials. A comparative analysis is also conducted by juxtaposing depictions in the reliefs with multiple versions of the witness manuscripts. In addition to

comparing and correlating the depictions of the relief scenes (artefactual) with the manuscripts (textual), this study also examines the parallels and variations in the narrative elements found across multiple versions of the manuscripts.

3. Results and Discussion

The *Maitrakanyaka* story is sometimes referred to as an *Avadana*, as seen in works like the Sanskrit *Avadanasataka* and *Divyavadana*. At other times, it is treated as a *Jataka*, as found in Pali sources. The term *Jataka* literally means “birth stories,” while *Avadana* translates as “a great or glorious act,” “achievement [object of a legend],” or “heroic deed” (Monier-Williams 2005, 99; Wisdom Library n.d.). Sometimes, *Jataka* is also known as *Bodhisattva-avadana*, indicating that it is a subcategory of *Avadana* with the bodhisattva as the main character. Many parallel stories exist in collections of *Jataka* or *Avadana*, or both, and they are not always treated distinctly.

3.1 Collection of Manuscripts on Maitrakanyaka

Maitrakanyaka’s stories are documented in several major classical languages, including Sanskrit, Classical Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali. In Sanskrit, various collections preserve this tale, such as the *Avadanasataka* (story no. 36; Appleton 2014, 12–18), the *Divyavadana* (story no. 38; Cowell & Neil 1886, 586–609; Vaidya 1959), and the *Jatakamala* by Gopadatta (story no. 5; Hahn 2007, 1049). Additionally, it appears in versions entirely in verse, such as the *Avadanakalpalata/Bodhisattva-avadanakal-*

palata by Ksemendra (story no. 92; Tripathi 1989) and the *Bhadrakalpa-avadana* (story no. 28; Brough 1957, 111). Among these textual sources, the *Avadanasataka* version is considered the oldest. The *Avadanasataka* may have been composed in the 1st or 2nd century CE, as its Chinese translation was completed as early as the 3rd century CE (Speyer 1902–1909, v).

In Chinese, four versions of the *Maitrakanyaka* story (Brough 1957, 117) are documented in the Taisho Tripitaka collection as sutras. These sutras include: (1) Taisho Tripitaka no. 152 (T152) *Liuduji jing* or *The Collection of the Six Perfections Sutra*, the fourth fascicle, story no. 39, titled *Milan jing* (*The Sutra About Milan*) (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021a10–0021c07); (2) Taisho Tripitaka no. 190 (T190) *Fobenxingji jing* (*Abhiniskramana Sutra*), 50th fascicle (Jnanagupta n.d., 0884c20–0887a24; Beal 1875, 342–346); (3) Taisho Tripitaka no. 203 (T203) *Zabaozang jing* (*Samyukta-ratna-pitaka Sutra*), first fascicle, story no. 7, titled *Citungnu yuan* (*The Vow of the Compassionate Maiden*) (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0450c19–0451c08; Willemen 1994, 21–24); and (4) Taisho Tripitaka no. 2121 (T2121) *Jinglu yixiang* (*Remarkable Things from Sutra and Vinaya*), 43rd fascicle, story no. 4 (Sengmin, Baochang, et al. n.d., 0223b16–0223c24). In one of the Tibetan sources, although recorded in the *Karmavibhanga* instead of the *Jataka* and *Avadana* collections, the story of *Maitrakanyaka* is mentioned as a primary example of actions leading to the karmic result of being born in a “foreign” country or abroad (Fontein 1981,

96; Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.55–1.90). In the Pali *Jataka* collection, *Jatakathavannana*, there are five versions that partially parallel Maitrakanyaka's story: no. 439 *Catu-Dvara-Jataka*, no. 41 *Losaka-Jataka*, and three brief versions, i.e., no. 82, no. 104, and no. 369, entitled *Mittavinda-Jataka* (Fausbøll 1877–1896; Cowell 1895, 1897, 1901).

The similarities and differences in specific segments of the story across different manuscript versions are analyzed comparatively. This analysis follows the discussion of its portrayal at Candi Borobudur.

3.2 The Story of Maitrakanyaka and Its Depictions at Candi Borobudur

The following story summary of Maitrakanyaka (*Maitrakanyaka-avadana*) is based on the core structure found in the *Avadanasataka* collection, story no. 36.

In the bustling city of Varanasi (Benares), there lived a wealthy merchant named Mitra. Despite his affluence, tragedy struck when his newborn son died prematurely. Determined to break this cycle of misfortune, Mitra's friend suggested that if blessed with another son, he should give the child a feminine name to ensure longevity. When Mitra's wife gave birth to a baby boy, they named him Maitrakanyaka—a name meaning “daughter (*kanya*) of Mitra.” Shortly thereafter, Maitrakanyaka's father perished at sea.

As Maitrakanyaka grew, he expressed a keen interest in his late father's profession, yearning to follow in his footsteps. Knowing the dangers of a life at sea, his apprehensive mother concealed the truth about her late husband's occupation, telling Maitrakanyaka that his father had been an *okkarika* tradesman. Maitrakanyaka

embarked on his own entrepreneurial venture, opening an *okkarika* shop. On his first day of business, he earned four *karshapanas*. He immediately gave his entire earnings to his mother to distribute among *sramanas*, brahmins, the impoverished, and beggars.

Later, Maitrakanyaka learned that his father had been a perfume merchant. Inspired, he opened a perfume shop. He earned eight *karshapanas* on his first day, giving them all to his mother. Later still, he heard that his father had been a goldsmith. Maitrakanyaka set up a goldsmith shop, earning 16 *karshapanas* on his first day, which he gave to his mother. He repeated this the following day, earning 32 *karshapanas*, which he again gave to his mother.

Maitrakanyaka's success aroused envy among rival goldsmiths, who revealed that his father had been a prosperous sea-merchant and caravan leader. His mother, questioned by Maitrakanyaka, could no longer conceal the truth. Undeterred, Maitrakanyaka resolved to embark on a maritime voyage. He gathered five hundred merchants, carts, carriers, bags, baskets, and livestock for the journey. Despite his mother's pleas, fearing a repeat of his father's fate, Maitrakanyaka remained determined. With tears in her eyes, his mother clasped his feet, begging him not to go. Though moved, Maitrakanyaka pushed her away with his foot and left. Despite her grief, his mother prayed, “O, my son, may the consequences of this action not befall you!” Traveling through villages and towns, Maitrakanyaka reached the ocean. Procuring a vessel and assembling a crew, they set sail.

Misfortune struck when their ship was attacked by a *makara* fish. Fortunately, Maitrakanyaka clung to a plank of wood and reached the shore. He walked until he reached the city of Ramanaka, where he was welcomed by four beautiful



Figure 1. Maitrakanyaka presents four *karshapanas* to his mother (Ib. 106) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)

apsaras. They invited him to stay with them, enjoying pleasures like someone reaping the rewards of virtuous deeds, for several years. Despite their pleas, Maitrakanyaka's curiosity to explore the southern lands grew. He traveled on to Sadamatta, where eight even more enchanting *apsaras* awaited him. Again, he reveled in their company for several years, despite their warnings against venturing further south.

Maitrakanyaka continued until he reached Nandana, where sixteen captivating *apsaras* greeted him. After years in their delightful company, Maitrakanyaka resumed his journey south. He encountered the palace of Brahmottara and was welcomed by thirty-two *apsaras*. Despite their attempts to dissuade him, Maitrakanyaka remained resolute.

Continuing southward, he reached the city of iron. Upon entering, the gate abruptly closed behind him. He encountered a man whose head was being torn apart by a rotating, blazing wheel, who revealed that his suffering resulted from injuring his mother's head. Hearing this, Maitrakanyaka recalled his own actions toward his mother and realized that his present circumstances were a consequence of those actions.

Suddenly, the wheel detached from the man's head and approached Maitrakanyaka's. The man informed him that another who had committed a similar deed would take his place.

Maitrakanyaka, despite his anguish, felt compassion for those who would endure similar torment. With selfless resolve, he offered to bear the wheel for all beings, so others might be spared. Immediately, the wheel lifted from his head and ascended into the air. Ultimately, Maitrakanyaka was reborn among the *devas* in Tusita heaven (Appleton 2014, 12–18).

The Maitrakanyaka story at Candi Borobudur is carved in seven consecutive panels, i.e. Ib.106–112 on the lower row of the main wall of the first level (I = first level; b = lower row/series) (Krom 1927, 304–311). On the right side of the first panel (Figure 1), Maitrakanyaka is depicted handing over the earnings from his *okkarika* shop to his mother, who is seated beside him in an open-air *pendapa*. His mother extends her right hand to accept the money bag on a flower-adorned tray in front of her. Maitrakanyaka respectfully offers his earnings while seated on the floor. Four money bags, symbolizing four *karshapanas* (coins that varied in value according to whether they were made of gold, silver, or copper), are depicted beneath his mother's seat. Among the audience in the center of the relief are two bearded men, who usually represent brahmins at Candi Borobudur. On the



Figure 2. Maitrakanyaka as a goldsmith, and his mother pleading with him not to embark on a sea voyage (Ib. 107)
(Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)



Figure 3. The ship in a storm, and Maitrakanyaka's arrival at Ramanaka (Ib. 108) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)

left side is a building adorned with *kalamakara* ornaments, featuring stairs and an entrance, possibly suggesting a town atmosphere (Krom 1927, 306), although depicted rather simplistically compared to the following panel.

According to the *Avadanasataka* version, Maitrakanyaka transitioned to the profession of a perfume seller (*gandhika*), earning eight *karshapanas*. However, this occupation is not depicted at Candi Borobudur; the subsequent panel illustrates his role as a goldsmith.

The panel in Figure 2 comprises at least two scenes. Maitrakanyaka appears on the right side, serving a customer in his shop as a goldsmith. He gestures with his right hand, likely negotiating with a female customer holding a pair of scales—

one side bearing a ring, the other possibly a bag of money. Between them lies a bound bundle of small bars, possibly gold, and a money bag (Krom 1927, 306–307). According to the text, Maitrakanyaka earned 16 *karshapanas* on his first day as a goldsmith, followed by 32 *karshapanas* on the second, all of which he gave to his mother. Behind the seated figures stands a bearded man leaning on a stick, symbolizing acts of charity toward brahmins. At the center stands a two-story building, larger than the one in the previous panel, adorned with *kalamakara* ornaments at the entrance and a row of pots on the roof, typically symbolizing wealth. Maitrakanyaka and another merchant appear on the left side, seemingly prepared to leave. His mother kneels, her left hand



Figure 4. Maitrakanyaka arrives at Sadamatta and is greeted by eight *apsaras* (Ib. 109) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)



Figure 5. Maitrakanyaka arrives at Nandana (Ib. 110) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)

resting on the ground, her right hand touching Maitrakanyaka's leg, pleading with him to stay. She fears he might meet the same fate as his father, who perished at sea. Maitrakanyaka's left hand is raised, and he appears to look away from his mother, possibly indicating his disapproval. The text mentions that Maitrakanyaka kicked his mother on the head.

The following panel (Figure 3) depicts two scenes. However, on the relief, the *makara* is barely discernible; only a small sea creature with an open mouth is visible on the lower right. The depiction also features a smaller sloop, which appears to be heading in a different direction from the larger ship, potentially signifying evacuation efforts. Therefore, this panel likely portrays the

ship caught in a storm (Inglis 2014, 112, 115) rather than being specifically struck by a *makara*. On the left, four beautiful *apsaras* (celestial maidens), each holding flowers, welcome Maitrakanyaka to Ramanaka. Maitrakanyaka raises his right hand in greeting. He stayed with them for several years, indulging in sensory delights. Despite their attempts to dissuade him from traveling south, his determination only intensifies.

In Figure 4, Maitrakanyaka, continuing his journey south, arrives at Sadamatta and is greeted by eight *apsaras*. In this forest-themed relief, filled with trees and animals, Maitrakanyaka stands on the right. His left hand holds a flower, and his right arm is extended toward the eight *apsaras* who



Figure 6. Maitrakanyaka arrives at Brahmottara (Ib. 111) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)



Figure 7. Maitrakanyaka conversing with the *yaksha/rakshasa*, followed by his rebirth in Tusita Heaven (Ib. 112) (Source: Bumi Borobudur 2022)

welcome him. Again, he enjoys their company for several years, and despite their pleas not to go south, he continues his journey.

Figure 5 illustrates Maitrakanyaka's arrival at Nandana. The relief's backdrop showcases lush trees adorned with leaves, flowers, and fruit, with wild animals in the lower right corner. Maitrakanyaka, facing right, is welcomed by eleven *apsaras*—four standing, the rest seated. Although the text mentions sixteen *apsaras* greeting him in this city, only eleven are depicted. Among the *apsaras*, four carrying floweres, and one holds a dish of blossoms (Krom 1927, 309).

In Figure 6, depicting trees emerging from rocky terrain, Maitrakanyaka holds a flower in his right hand and clasps the hand of one of

the *apsaras* with his left. The remaining thirteen *apsaras* are on the left, depicted in various natural poses (Krom 1927, 309). Although the text states that Maitrakanyaka was greeted by thirty-two *apsaras* in Brahmottara, only fourteen are shown in this final encounter. With this farewell, Maitrakanyaka departs.

The final panel of this story (Figure 7) consists of three scenes. In the center, Maitrakanyaka speaks with a *yaksha* (a class of nonhuman beings who inhabit forests, mountainous areas, and other natural spaces, often depicted with a fierce face and bulging eyes)—the gatekeeper of the iron city (Ayomaya). This *yaksha* or *rakshasa* (a class of nonhuman beings often depicted with a

large body and a frightening face) is shown with large round earrings, leaning on his club with both hands, while a snake raises its head near his foot (Krom 1927, 310). On the right, a man stands with an iron wheel rotating above his head. According to Krom (1927, 310), following Foucher's interpretation, this man bearing the wheel is likely the individual encountered by Maitrakanyaka upon entering the inner city, not Maitrakanyaka himself. On the left, Maitrakanyaka's compassionate act are shown: he willingly takes on the suffering of others. Here, Maitrakanyaka appears as a bodhisattva, seated majestically on a throne adorned with a *makara*. A woman kneels reverently at his left, holding his hand, while another woman stands nearby, holding a whisk. Next to the standing woman, a pair of *kinaras* (mythological beings often portrayed as half-human, half-bird) are depicted beneath a *kalpavriksha* tree (wish-fulfilling tree). Both the *kalpavriksha* and the *kinaras* symbolize the celestial realm in Candi Borobudur's iconography.

3.3 Notes on the Various Versions of the Manuscript

While the *Maitrakanyaka* story at Candi Borobudur generally aligns with the Sanskrit *Avadanasataka* version, there are notable differences in the details. A comprehensive, section-by-section analysis, covering character names, backgrounds, professions, incidents with the mother, the shipwreck, encounters with *apsaras*, cities visited, interactions with the gatekeeper, the wheel incident, and the resulting

altruistic resolve leading to rebirth in Tusita Heaven, is presented below.

3.3.1 The Character Name, Background, and Profession

In the Sanskrit *Avadanasataka*, the character's name is Maitrakanyaka. In the Chinese versions, the character is known by different names: Cizhe, or "the compassionate one" (in T190); Citongnu, or "the compassionate maiden" (in T203); Milan (in T152); and Milian (in T2121). In the Tibetan *Karmavibhanga* (Toh 338; Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.56–1.96) and two Sanskrit *Karmavibhanga* manuscripts from Nepal (Kudo 2004, 88–89, 251–252), which share similar content with the *Avadanasataka*, the character's name is Maitrayajna.

In the Pali *Jatakas*, the character is consistently named Mittavindaka, although the stories have diverse titles: *Jataka* no. 439 titled *Catu-dvara-jataka*; *Jataka* no. 41 titled *Losaka-jataka*; and three others—*Jataka* no. 82, 104, and 369—are titled *Mittavinda-jataka*. Among these, *Jataka* no. 439 offers a more comprehensive narrative, although it differs from the *Avadanasataka* in several respects. *Jataka* no. 41 shares only a few parallels, while the remaining three *Jatakas*—no. 82, 104, and 369—are brief summaries.

The characters' backgrounds differ in the *Avadanasataka* and the Pali *Jatakas*. In the *Avadanasataka*, Maitrakanyaka's father, Mitra, is affluent, and Maitrakanyaka himself is generous and filial, offering his earnings to his mother for charity. In Pali *Jataka* no. 41 (Cowell 1895, 108–109), Mittavindaka's backstory is different. In a

previous life, as a monk, he was jealous of an Arhat and committing negative acts such as discarding and burning the Arhat's food. These wicked deeds, motivated by depriving others of food, led to repeated rebirths in lower realms until he was born into a destitute beggar family. His parents abandoned Mittavindaka as his family's poverty worsened after his birth, considering him a bringer of misfortune. Constantly struggling with food scarcity, he earned the name Mittavindaka, which, according to Brough (1957, 112), translates as "he who causes only a little to be obtained." In Pali *Jataka* no. 439, Mittavindaka's parents have better socioeconomic status; his father is a merchant, and his mother encourages him to give alms and attend Dharma teachings. However, Mittavindaka is ignorant of virtuous behavior and consumed by greed (Cowell 1901, 1–2).

The *Avadanasataka* recounts Maitrakanyaka's transitions through various professions: *okkarika*, perfume dealer (*gandhika*), goldsmith (*hairanyika*), and finally, sea-merchant (Fontein 1981, 97). Brough suggests that "*okkarika*" or "*aukarika*" denotes a small wares dealer (1957, 125–128). Among the Chinese versions, only T203 specifies Maitrakanyaka's initial occupation as selling firewood, gradually increasing his earnings from two to sixteen cash per day, all of which he dutifully gave to his mother (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0450c21; Willemen 1994, 22). At Candi Borobudur, three professions are depicted: *okkarika* (shown by the four money bags, possibly representing four *karshapanas*; Ib. 106 right), goldsmith (Ib. 107 right), and sea-merchant (Ib. 108 right).

The conclusion reveals the identities of the main characters. Two Chinese versions i.e. T203 (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451b28; Willemen 1994, 25) and T2121 (Sengmin, Baochang, et al. n.d., 0223b16), the Sanskrit *Avadanasataka*, and the Tibetan Toh 338 (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.90), show that the Buddha was Maitrakanyaka in a past life. However, in the four Pali *Jatakas* (no. 439, 369, 104, and 82), the bodhisattva is narrated as a divine being or the king of the *devas*, explaining Mittavindaka's experiences. Additionally, in Pali *Jataka* no. 41, the bodhisattva is a teacher who requests Mittavindaka's release after he is apprehended by goatherds.

3.3.2 Incident with the Mother Before His Departure

The incident between Maitrakanyaka and his mother varies slightly among versions. In *Avadanasataka* no. 36, when Maitrakanyaka's mother clung to his feet, begging him not to embark on the sea voyage, he kicked her on the head before departing (Appleton 2014, 16). Similarly, in T190, when Cizhe ("the compassionate one," Maitra, or Maitri) sought his mother's permission to set sail, he was enraged by her refusal. He forcefully pulled his mother to the ground, kicked her head, and left (Jnanagupta n.d., 0884c28, 0885a11; Beal 1875, 342–343). In T203, as his mother desperately clung to his feet, begging him not to leave, Citongnu ("the compassionate maiden") forcefully pulled her away, causing her to lose clumps of hair, until she relented out of fear that he might commit a serious offense (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0450c27; Willemen 1994, 22–23). In

the Tibetan Toh 338, when his mother clung to his feet, Maitrayajna, out of anger, stepped on his mother's head and departed (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.63). In Pali *Jataka* no. 439, his mother tried to restrain him by holding his hand, but he forcefully pushed her away, knocking her down before departing (Cowell 1901, 3). At Candi Borobudur, on the left side of panel Ib. 107, his mother is shown kneeling before him, her left hand on the ground and her right hand grasping his leg.

3.3.3 Devastation on the Ship

While the carvings at Candi Borobudur generally align with the *Avadanasataka* narrative, there is a notable variation on the right side of Ib. 108. In the *Avadanasataka*, Maitrakanyaka's ship is attacked mid-voyage by a *makara* fish, and Maitrakanyaka survives by clinging to a plank and reaching land (Appleton 2014, 16). Similarly, in the Chinese versions T152 (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021a16) and T2121 (Sengmin, Baochang, et al. n.d., 0223b16), a group of five hundred merchants face peril at sea when their vessel is attacked by a divine fish named Mojie. All perish except Milan/Milian, who survives by riding a plank to shore. However, at Candi Borobudur, despite an image of what appears to be a gaping fish head on the lower right side of Ib. 108, the carving is of a small, barely discernible fish.

In two Chinese versions, T190 and T203, the narrative diverges when the ship encounters a storm. In T190, the vessel is ravaged by the storm and breaks apart. There is no mention of a fish attack; Cizhe reaches an island by clinging to a plank (Jnanagupta n.d., 0885a11; Beal 1875, 343).

In T203, during a stormy night, the merchants inadvertently leave Citongnu behind. In this region, a custom dictates that even if bandits plunder all the goods, they must return everything if they fail to capture the leader. As the leader, Citongnu was arranged to stay elsewhere overnight to safeguard the group's possessions. Forgotten in the morning, Citongnu sets out on foot and eventually encounters the cities (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451a14; Willemsen 1994, 23). This version suggests that after acquiring valuable treasures from the sea, the merchants choose an overland return instead of the sea route.

The two Pali sources, *Jataka* no. 439 and no. 41, recount Mittavindaka's expulsion from the ship. On the seventh day of their voyage, the vessel suddenly becomes immobilized. Casting lots multiple times, the merchants continually identify Mittavindaka as the cause, leading to his expulsion from the ship onto a raft (Cowell 1895, 110; 1901, 3). However, the Candi Borobudur depictions diverge from these narratives. Contrary to the accounts of a stranded ship, the relief portrays a fully functional vessel with billowing flags and tumultuous waves, suggesting a storm (Ib. 108 right). Therefore, the imagery likely represents the ship caught in a violent storm or shipwreck. Notably, the sculptors creatively included a sloop next to the main vessel, suggesting a lifeboat used for emergency evacuation, adding depth to the narrative.

3.3.4 Cities Visited

The names of the cities visited vary among Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali sources. However, the Chinese versions are largely

consistent, with one exception. In the *Avadanasataka*, Maitrakanyaka journeys through distinct cities: Ramanaka (Charming), Sadamatta (Constant Revelry), Nandana (Beautiful), a magnificent palace named Brahmottara (Highest Brahma), and a city forged from iron (Ayomaya) (Appleton 2014, 16–17; Vaidya 1958). Three Chinese versions—T152, T190, and T2121—agree on the sequence and names of these cities: the silver city (four celestial maidens), the golden city (eight *apsaras*), the crystal city (sixteen celestial beings), the lapis lazuli city (thirty-two *apsaras*), and finally, the iron city (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021b12; Jnanagupta n.d., 0885a11–0886c07; Beal 1875, 343–345; Sengmin, Baochang et al. n.d., 0223b16). However, T203 (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451a14, 0451b08; Willemen 1994, 23–24) presents a slightly different order: the city of lapis lazuli or dark lapis lazuli, the crystal-like town, the silver-colored town, the golden city, and finally, the iron city. In the Tibetan Toh 338, the cities are the city with a golden city wall, the city with a silvery city wall, the city with a lapis lazuli city wall, the city with a rock-crystal city wall, and finally, the city with a black iron city wall (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.65–1.69).

In Pali *Jataka* no. 439 (Cowell 1901, 2–3), the narrative shifts from naming cities to highlighting palaces on each island visited by Mittavindaka: the crystal palace (four female spirits), the silver palace (eight), the palace of all jewels (sixteen), and the golden hall (thirty-two). Pali *Jataka* no. 82 (Cowell 1895, 209) simply mentions Mittavinda-ka's departure from the palaces of crystal, silver, or sparkling

gems. Both Pali *Jatakas* no. 439 (Cowell 1901, 3) and 369 (Cowell 1897, 136) reveal that Mittavindaka ventures into the iron city, which appears beautiful but is actually Ussada Hell.

3.3.5 *Yaksha/Rakshasa* the Gatekeeper and the Wheel

Another notable difference lies in the depiction of the iron city's guardian. The *Avadanasataka* does not mention a guardian at the city's gate, yet at Candi Borobudur, a *yaksha/rakshasa* figure is prominent in the middle of panel Ib. 112, seemingly conversing with Maitrakanyaka. In the *Avadanasataka* narrative, upon entering the city, the gate swiftly closes, revealing a tortured man with a wheel on his head. Maitrakanyaka converses with this man, not a gatekeeper. Three Chinese versions—T152 (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021b12), T190 (Jnanagupta n.d., 0886c04, 0886c07, 0886c23; Beal 1875, 345–346), and T2121 (Sengmin, Baochang, et al. n.d., 0223b16)—mention a *yaksha* or ghost guarding the iron city's gate. Therefore, the *yaksha/rakshasa* in the relief may be inspired by these Chinese versions. Regarding the Pali version, *Jataka* no. 439 briefly mentions a “goblin” in the verses, but not in the prose.

The type of wheel varies slightly across different versions. Both the Sanskrit *Avadanasataka* and the Chinese versions describe it as a “fiery iron wheel” or a “blazing wheel.” The Tibetan Toh 338 mentions “a wheel made of sword blades” (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.69). Both Pali *Jatakas* no. 439

(Cowell 1901, 3) and 369 (Cowell 1897, 136) mention a “razor-wheel” (*khuracakka*), emphasizing its sharpness. Additionally, *Jataka* no. 104 states that Mittavindaka bore “a circlet,” enduring hell’s tortures, while no. 82 (Cowell 1985, 209, 246) describes a “headgear” causing grievous torment.

Another noteworthy observation is the variation in how the wheel appears on Maitrakanyaka’s head. In the *Avadanasataka*, as Maitrakanyaka contemplates his actions and hears a voice signaling the time, the wheel detaches from the other person’s head and lands on his. In two Chinese versions, a *yaksha* or a ghost places the wheel on Maitrakanyaka’s head. In T152, a ghost opens the city gate, removes the iron wheel from the man’s head, and sets it atop Milan’s (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021b12). Similarly, in T190, Cizhe sees a merchant named Qupintuo wearing the fiery iron wheel, and a *yaksha* named Poliuja, the city’s guardian, transfers the burning wheel to Cizhe’s head (Jnanagupta n.d., 0886b18, 0886c04; Beal 1875, 345–346). However, T203 recounts that as the gate closes, Citongnu sees a person inside with a rotating, flaming wheel on his head. This person removes the wheel and places it on Citongnu’s head (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451b08; Willemen 1994, 24). In Pali *Jataka* no. 439 (Cowell 1901, 3), Mittavindaka mistakes the wheel for a lotus flower, realizing its true nature as a razor-wheel only after it is handed to him. *Jataka* no. 369 (Cowell 1897, 136) simply states that Mittavindaka acquires a razor-sharp wheel upon entering Ussada Hell.

3.3.6 The Wish to Take the Suffering of Others

The concluding scene on the right side of panel Ib. 112, depicting Maitrakanyaka’s rebirth in Tusita Heaven, aligns closely with the *Avadanasataka* narrative and Chinese version T203. In the *Avadanasataka*, Maitrakanyaka, driven by compassion, resolves to bear the wheel himself, leading to his rebirth in Tusita. Similarly, T203 presents a comparable conclusion, where Maitrakanyaka’s determination to alleviate others’ suffering results in his higher rebirth. His proclamation, “I wish that all who must endure suffering would place their entire burden upon me!” precedes the iron wheel falling to the ground. However, T203 includes an additional detail: a man angrily strikes Citongnu on the head with an iron prong, yet upon his death, he is reborn in Tusita Heaven (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451b28; Willemen 1994, 25). In the Tibetan Toh 338, Maitrayajna’s strong aspiration to take on the suffering of others is accompanied by his mother’s prayer dedicating her virtuous merits to his happiness and well-being (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.84, 1.87).

In summary, key scenes from Maitrakanyaka’s narrative—kicking his mother, traveling to various cities and meeting *apsaras*, and enduring the crushing wheel—are consistent across one or more manuscript versions in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali. However, the episodes depicting his altruistic decision to bear the suffering of others are mentioned particularly in the *Avadanasataka*, Chinese T203, and Tibetan Toh 338. Additionally, his subsequent rebirth in Tusita Heaven, portrayed

at Candi Borobudur, is uniquely described in the *Avadanasataka* and Chinese T203.

3.4 The Multi-layered Meaning in the Story

Based on the analysis of various manuscript versions, the story of Maitrakanyaka carries multiple layers of meaning. The narratives emphasize caution against excessive indulgence in sensory pleasures, the importance of filial piety, the repercussions of disregarding parental or mentor advice, and the infallibility of karma.

With regards to indulging in sense pleasures, the T152 version serves as a cautionary tale, highlighting the dangers of pursuing the five senses—form, sound, scent, flavor, and touch. It underscores the risks of becoming ensnared in sensory delights, as depicted by the character's immersion in pleasures with the *apsaras* (Kang Senghui n.d., 0021a10). Similarly, T2121 concludes that humanity's pursuit of the five desires is boundless. In the Pali *Jataka*, both no. 439 (Cowell 1901, 3–4) and no. 104 (Cowell 1895, 246) shed light on the repercussions of insatiable desires.

Another profound layer of meaning within the story revolves around the efficacy of parental prayers and the intricate workings of karma. In *Avadanasataka*, the narrative underscores the result of Maitrakanyaka's selfless act of giving his earnings to his mother, leading him to encounter four *apsaras*, then eight, and so forth. Moreover, the power of his mother's heartfelt prayer, "O my son, may this karma not come to ripen upon you!" might have taken form when the *apsaras* endeavored to dissuade Maitrakanyaka from embarking on his journey southward. The story

in *Avadanasataka* commences with Buddha praising the virtue of filial piety, emphasizing the reverence and care owed to one's parents. Reflecting on his own past transgressions, Buddha recalls how he, too, succumbed to greed (*raga*), aversion (*dvesha*), and delusion (*moha*), resulting in harm inflicted upon his own mother.

In T203, the man explains to Citongnu that supporting his mother earned him merits, leading to his encounters with the magnificent cities and the attentive care of the *apsaras*. However, pulling his mother's hair resulted in bearing a burning iron wheel on his head (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451b18; Willemen 1994, 24–25). Furthermore, T203 emphasizes the repercussions of actions toward parents, highlighting that even seemingly insignificant unwholesome acts yield significant, unpleasant outcomes. Conversely, the merit accrued from caring for one's parents underscores the importance of wholehearted service to them (Ji Jiaye & Tan Yao n.d., 0451c06; Willemen 1994, 25). The Tibetan Toh 338 highlights that Maitrayajna enjoyed living with *apsaras* in four cities as a result of obeying his mother four times, although he eventually sailed anyway (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.79).

Version T190 underscores the inescapable workings of karma, illustrating how Cizhe's impulsive act of kicking his mother's head led to bearing the blazing iron wheel (Jnanagupta n.d., 0887a12; Beal 1875, 346). This version concludes with a reminder that sentient beings inevitably reap the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, in T190, the Buddha introduces the story with an incident involving a monk who disregarded his teacher's counsel and faced adversity. Thus, the

narrative serves as a cautionary tale for monastics, emphasizing the importance of seeking guidance before journeys (Jnanagupta n.d., 0884b21, 0884c15, 0887a12). The Tibetan Toh 338 also emphasizes reverence to one's parents, preceptors, and teachers (Galasek-Hul & Kunga Thartse 2024, 1.90).

3.5 The Teaching of Exchanging and Equalizing

While various versions of the story emphasize different ethical lessons, one often-overlooked aspect is the message of courageous responsibility. Maitrakanyaka, having harmed his mother, felt genuine remorse for his actions and understood the inevitable consequences. Yet, driven by compassion for others who might commit similar acts, he courageously chose to bear the burden alone. Through the transformative power of his compassionate resolve, imbued with *bodhicitta*, the wheel released its grip, leading to his rebirth in Tusita.

While the generic themes in the *Jatakas* and *Avadanas* include a way of life that avoids harming others and, conversely, benefits them, for example, through the practices of the “perfections” (*paramitas*) (Lee et al. 2025, 9), the story of Maitrakanyaka offers a specific technique on how compassion is demonstrated.

Practices such as “exchanging and equalizing” (Sanskrit: *parivartana*; Tibetan: *gtong len*, *tonglen* “taking and giving”), originating with Master Nagarjuna and flourishing under Master Shantideva in the 8th century CE, are based on the fundamental equality between oneself and other beings—

namely, the shared desire for happiness and the freedom from suffering. Here, the relationship with others occurs at a more fundamental level: just as one desires happiness and freedom from suffering and struggle, so do others. In this technique, one's compassion, or perspective, is independent of how others treat them (Newland 2012, 108–109, 111).

The *parivartana* teaching continues to be practiced today, notably as the “*tonglen*” (“taking and giving”) practice, particularly within Tibetan *Buddhadharma*. At its core, *tonglen* involves taking on the sufferings of others and giving them one's own happiness, cultivating a willingness to exchange the suffering of others for one's own well-being. This training aims to open the heart, shift perspectives, and reverse habitual reactive patterns of thought. Through this practice, one undergoes a transformation from a conventional self-centered mindset to one focused on the welfare of others.

This training forms part of teachings aimed at “cultivation of mind” (Sanskrit: *matyabhāysodhana*; Tibetan: *lojong*, *blo sbyong*). *Mati* (Sanskrit) or *blo/lo* (Tibetan) denotes “mind” or “consciousness,” while *sodhana* (Sanskrit) or *sbyong/jong* (Tibetan) signifies “training” or “purification.” This training seeks to cultivate the mind and purify hindrances, thereby elevating it to its optimal state. This is aptly compared to refining raw gold ore into pure gold.

Bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to attain full awakening for the sake of all sentient beings, is the essence of the “cultivation of mind” (*matyabhāysodhana* or *lojong*) and *parivartana* teachings. *Bodhicitta* motivates practitioners to

continually develop their wisdom and skills until they achieve full awakening, while simultaneously teaching and guiding others toward the same state.

4. Conclusion

The story of Maitrakanyaka, found in numerous manuscript versions and languages, demonstrates its widespread popularity in the Buddhist world. This discovery highlights the awareness of Candi Borobudur's architects and sculptors regarding the multiple existing versions of these texts. A practical approach would most likely be to identify witness manuscripts to gain insight into the versions that most closely parallel those carved within its walls. This is likely more realistic than searching for the "source" manuscript—the version that might have served as the master text for the Borobudur artists. The creation of the reliefs was not simply a copying of texts but a creative process involving the selection, interpretation, and adaptation of various resources. Thus, the sculptors were able to present the key messages of the texts while exercising their creativity in the form of a visual narrative.

The story of Maitrakanyaka contains multiple layers of teachings and profound meanings, addressing fundamental ethical principles, particularly the importance of vigilance regarding one's actions. While the consequences of past deeds do not simply vanish, taking responsibility with courage brings forth the transformative power of antidotes. These antidotes include genuine remorse for one's misdeeds, earnest effort to rectify past unskillful actions, and cultivating sincere compassion for others. This practice, known as "exchanging and equalizing"

(*parivartana*), emphasizes an altruistic mindset focused on the welfare of others. The findings of this study underscore how Candi Borobudur, through its intricate stone carvings, continues to convey these significant teachings, which remain revered and practiced today, offering timeless guidance for ethical living.

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