Efficacious Space: An Introduction[1]

Anthony Lovenheim Irwin[2]

Abstract

Taking into account textual, theoretical, and material evidence, this article makes a case for understanding the power of *sīmā* space as being linked to the performative and ritual actions of the sangha, as opposed to cosmological or cosmogonic referents. This article uses this specific type of Theravadin spatial arrangement in order to broaden the study of religious space, and to make theoretical room for religious spaces that do not necessarily fit into dominant sacred-space theory. Specifically, this article argues for a new theoretical category of religious space, known as "efficacious space," which is space that is established according to specific criteria, which by virtue of those criteria, empowers people to effect transformation within that space

---

[2] Anthony Lovenheim Irwin is a PhD Candidate in the Department of Languages and Cultures of Asia at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who has secured Fulbright funding to conduct his PhD dissertation fieldwork in Chiang Rai, Thailand on the subject of new Buddhist building projects in Amphoe Muang Chiang Rai.

Introduction

The *Mahāvamsa,* a Lankan chronicle written in Pali, recounts the coming of Buddhism to the island after King Ashoka's third-century B.C. Buddhist Council. The chronicle recounts that after Ashoka's reformation, the missionary monk Mahinda is sent to Lanka in order to convert King Devānaṃpiyatissa and his subjects to Buddhism. After soaring through the air from his home in northern India to the island of Sri Lanka, Mahinda is met by the king, who with much celebration brings the monk into his capital city of Anurādhapura. The king allows Mahinda to reside in his Mahāmegha pleasure-park, located within the city. Over the next couple of days Mahinda preaches Dhamma to the inhabitants of the city and tours around with the king, visiting various holy sites, known as *mālaka*s, within the Mahāmegha Park. In one example, Mahinda and King Devānaṃpiyatissa go to the royal dwelling located inside the park, where Mahinda scatters eight handfuls of jasmine flowers around a tree standing outside of the structure. Upon completion of the jasmine-flower ritual, the earth quakes mightily. Excited, the king questions Mahinda about the earth-shaking power of his ritual, at which point the monk replies "Already in the lifetime of three Buddhas there has been here a mālaka for carrying out the duties of the brotherhood, O king, and now will it be so once more."[3]

The narrative continues with Mahinda identifying *mālaka* around the city, and explaining to the king that at each specific site, Buddhas of previous ages had relinquished pestilence, performed miraculous feats, received gifts of land from the reigning kings, brought scores of people to enlightenment, and transplanted cuttings of the sacred Bodhi trees.[4] At each *mālaka*, Mahinda calls for the construction of a specific element that will comprise the *Mahāvihāra* monastic complex – stupas, the ordination, or *uposatha*-hall, the Bodhi tree, places where gifts will be given, etc. With each pronouncement and identification of a new sacred site, the earth quakes again in affirmation.

The sacrality of these *mālaka* is validated by Mahinda's narrative, which links each location with the actions of previous

---

[3] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XV, 99.
[4] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XV, 11-177.

Buddhas. There is temporal significance to Mahinda's narrative in assigning sacredness to each site, which fuses the sites of the present with the miraculous actions of Buddha's of past ages. This narrative firmly establishes Lanka in the sacred geography of the Buddhist world and enforces a Buddhist model of temporal cosmology in which each age is defined by the birth of a Buddha who reveals the Dhamma. In this cosmology, space is endowed with sacrality when it is somehow significant in the biographies of Buddhas. This section of the *Mahāvamsa* reveals that place, sacrality, and the interaction between the elite and the sangha are intertwined into a narrative based in cosmology and temporality. All of the temporal and cosmological convergences that are represented by the sacredness of the Lankan *mālaka*, however, are not enough to fully establish Buddhism on the island – for that, a particular type of Buddhist space, known as *sīmā* space, must be demarcated and reserved for the performance of monastic ceremonies.

It becomes clear in the *Mahāvamsa* that sacred sites and cosmo-temporal significance are not enough to secure Buddhism on the island after Mahinda goes around and establishes all of the *mālaka*. The episode ends with Mahinda's acceptance of King Devānaṃpiyatissa donation of the Mahāmegha grove, which echoes the acceptance of this same garden by previous Buddhas in earlier ages. This act symbolically completes the cyclical temporality of Buddhist cosmology with Mahinda and King Devānaṃpiyatissa playing the typical parts of this temporally-telescopic Buddhist narrative. Once the Mahāmegha Park is donated, Mahinda causes the earth to shake simultaneously in the location of the sacred *mālaka*s he has identified, and then brings one thousand people to conversion through preaching.[5] All of these newly converted Anurādhapurans, earth-shakings, and cosmo-significant narrative parallels would seem to suggest that the teachings of the Buddha that Mahinda has been charged with establishing on the island have been firmly rooted in terms of sacred geography, cosmology, elite participation, and lay-conversion.

---

[5] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XV, 174-177. Specifically, he preaches the *Aggikkhandhopamā-sutta*. It is not clear if these people are enlightened or simply converted as it states these people became "partakers in the fruit of the path."

On the following day, however, after Mahinda's preaching converts another thousand locals, King Devānaṃpiyatissa asks "[d]oes the doctrine of the Conqueror stand, sir?" To which Mahinda replies "Not yet, O ruler of men, only, O lord of nations, when the boundaries [sīmā] are established here for the uposatha-ceremony and other acts (of religion), according to the command of the Conqueror, shall the doctrine stand."[6] Mahinda then instructs King Devānaṃpiyatissa to "mark out the course of the boundary [sīmā]."[7] After this, the monk establishes the necessary boundary signs in order to mark the *sīmā* as space for the performance of the monastic ceremonies. On the following day, the king ploughs a furrow encompassing the *mālaka* and Mahinda subsequently assigns the outer and inner boundary markers for the *sīmā*, as well as those specific to the *mālaka*s of the island, at which point again, the earth quakes.

This section of the text explicitly shows that even though the sacred character of the various *mālaka* is displayed through their connection to cyclic cosmological temporality embedded in the ontology of Mahinda's narrative, for all its earth-shaking power, this system of cosmology is not what ultimately establishes the doctrine in any given place. As Mahinda directly states, only when *sīmā* space has been established for monastic practices in the proper method will the *sāsana* be firmly established on the island. This insistence separates the function of *sīmā* space from the function of sacred space as it is commonly theorized in religious studies scholarship; while the latter are important due to their *a priori* role in the cyclic replaying of Buddhist cosmology and function in localizing cosmological realities, the former is produced, and indeed only relevant in the here-and-now.[8] The importance of *sīmā* space is derived not from the fantastic, mythic, or cosmologic, but the legalistic and performative aspects of is consecration and utilization, including the interaction between the Buddhist king and the sangha. *Sīmā* space, as the dedicated area in

---

[6] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XV, 180.

[7] *Mahāvaṃsa*, XV, 184.

[8] The *Mahāvaṃsa* displays this point through negation – while all other important sites of Anurādhapura are linked to previous ages, none of the previous kings of Mahinda's narrative are noted as establishing sīmā space in the city.

which monastic ceremonies such as the *upasampadā,* or full monastic ordination, and *Pāṭimokkha* recitation take place, functions to maintain the *sāsana* through the direct performative actions of the sangha.

Scriptural Account of *Sīmā* Space

I have used this section of the *Mahāvamsa* to theoretically separate *sīmā* space from classical understandings of sacred space in religious studies. Before elaborating on how the study of *sīmā* space can contribute to the theorization of certain types of religious space, I need to first give a solid definition of what *sīmā* space is, and how it has, on and off, proved central to the concerns of the Theravadin literati over last 1,500 years. After my brief survey of *sīmā* space in the Theravadin scriptures, I will return to the theoretical question of sacred space, and how this theoretical category must be expanded upon in order to encapsulate the realities of what *sīmā* space is and how it has been theorized by elite Theravadin thinkers. Working from sacred space theorists such as Mircea Eliade and Brian K. Smith, I elaborate sacred space theory into a specific type of religious space I call "efficacious space."

Sīmā is a Pali and Sanskrit word that simply means boundary. Throughout the Theravadin world, "*sīmā*" is a legal term that holds religious significance, and is used to classify a handful of different but related spaces that demarcate areas reserved for monastic ceremonies. Because doing so would be both boring and confusing, I will not go through all of the different types of *sīmā* spaces that have emerged throughout Theravadin history. For clarification, however, I will simply mention that in Thailand, the area located around the ordination hall within the bounds of a Buddhist temple is commonly known as *sīmā,* even though there exist more specific terms in Pali for this particular type of *sīmā* space. The ordination hall, also known as an *uposatha*-hall (*ubosot* in Thai) is where the monks meet to perform certain ceremonies. In Northeastern Thailand, the ordination hall itself is called the "*sim*" a term that is derived from the Pali "*sīmā.*"

In terms of scripture, the need for established, concrete *sīmā* space arises in the second section of the *Vinaya Piṭaka,* which is the

first section of the Theravada Pali canon. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains the regulations and specific rules of behavior and decorum that govern the community of monks known as the sangha, and includes various issues ranging from the legal procedures for fixing schisms within the sangha, to the type of robe and footwear allowed to the monks.

The *Vinaya* recounts the establishment of what is known as the *uposatha* ceremony, which is an assembly of the order of monks held twice a month for the recitation of the monastic law. The specifics of the ceremony develop piecemeal throughout the *Vinaya*, which covers the very basics of the ceremony – including the establishment of the *uposatha*-hall, which is a building or cave properly sanctioned off by means of establishing a *sīmā* in which the monastic ceremonies are to take place.

Within the *Vinaya*, the need for a specialized building and boundary for monastic ceremonies arises due to the fact that the Buddha prescribes that the *uposatha* ceremony is to be held before the complete fraternity of monks who reside within one residence (*ekāvasāso*).[9] The bhikkhus, however, unsure of the exact bounds of one residence, ask the Buddha how far one residence extends, to which he replies:

> I prescribe, O Bhikkhus, that you determine a boundary [sīmā]. And it ought to be determined, O Bhikkhus, in this way: First the landmarks are to be proclaimed: a landmark consisting in a mountain, in a rock, in a wood, in a tree, in a path, in an ant-hill, in a river, in a piece of water. The landmarks having been proclaimed, let a learned, competent Bhikkhu proclaim the following ñatti [pronouncement] before the Saṃgha: "Let the Saṃgha, reverend sirs, hear me. If the Saṃgha is ready, let the Saṃgha, as the landmarks have been proclaimed all around, by these landmarks determine the boundary for common residence and communion of Uposatha….Thus I understand.[10]

---

[9] *Mahāvagga,* II, 5, 1-2.
[10] *Mahāvagga,* II, 9, 2.

The rituals performed today that establish *sīmā* space have evolved out of this scriptural model and have taken many forms throughout time, but the basic elements remain. However elaborate or drawn out a *sīmā* consecration ceremony may be, to establish a *sīmā* space, a group of monks use the Pali pronouncement found here in the *Vinaya*. They will identify the markers of the boundary (which now in Thailand are buried beneath the ground) and agree upon them in succession, reciting the appropriate pronouncement at each individual marker. This ritual process delineates the extent of the *sīmā* boundary and separates the *sīmā* space from the surrounding area.

Sīmā Space and Sacred Space Theory

On one level, the ritual that consecrates *sīmā* space, and *sīmā* spatial quality fits well into Mircea Eliade's theory of sacred space. The simple act of cordoning off an area for ritual action correlates with Eliade's assertion that, for what he calls "religious man", space is not homogeneous. Instead, he argues, space is interrupted by sites of specific importance that are endowed with sacrality. First and foremost in Eliade's scheme, sacred space is separated from the formless expanse of space that surrounds it.[11] These special enclosures, which are often encompassed by a marking wall or circle of stones, allow for kratophany and hierophany within their confines.[12] Certainly *sīmā* space fits this qualification of sacred space as well – the enclosed space is where the sangha is empowered to perform certain rituals that it is not able to otherwise. There is a sort of kratophany present in the ritual of *upasampadā* ordination that can only be performed within *sīmā* space; however, the source of the kratophany that manifests within *sīmā* space is something that is not covered by current sacred space theory. Kratophany and hierophany, as they are used by Eliade, imply sacred power as a manifestation of divine force and/or cosmological relationship between a particular space and transcendent reality.[13] The force present in *sīmā* space that empowers the monastic community to

---

[11] Eliade, *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, 20.
[12] Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 370.
[13] Eliade, *The Sacred*, 34.

effect change within specific rituals, however, is not dependent on, or in relationship to, cosmological/cosmogonical referents.

Sacred space theory has mostly focused on the cosmological and cosmogonic implications of sacred space construction and the ritual power exercised within such space. Eliade argues that the elaborate techniques for the construction of sacred space are not merely the work of humans. "In reality," Eliade argues, "the ritual by which [humans] construct a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which *it reproduces the work of the gods.*"[14] In reproducing the work of the gods, the consecration of sacred space mimics the creation of the cosmos – Eliade argues, along with others, that the construction of sacred space is a symbolic act of cosmogony that reproduces on a microcosmic scale the whole of creation.[15]

Brian K. Smith's work on Vedic ritual space, like Eliade's, also depends on the separation of ritual space from the nonritual realm, as well as ritual space being a model of cosmological reality. Smith identifies that:

> According to the Veda, the ritual realm is to be spatially and conceptually set apart from the nonritual realm. Spatially, this is achieved by the demarcation of a distinct space for the ritual…thereby creating a visually recognizable enclosure for the ritual activity. The ritual arena is thus made to be a world unto itself, a delimited realm where activities are focused and controlled.[16]

Similar to Eliade's sacred space, Vedic ritual space is constructed as something distinct from the space surrounding it. This distinction allows the Vedic priests to become "human gods" who act on behalf of, and within the realm of the gods while engaged in ritual.[17] Vedic ritual space gains its efficacy through its simultaneous mirroring of, and attempt to reconcile the chaotic cosmogonic act of Vedic creation.

---

[14] Eliade, *The Sacred*, 29. Emphasis his.
[15] Eliade, *The Sacred*, 30-31.
[16] Smith, "Ritual Perfection", 287.
[17] Smith, "Ritual Perfection".

In the Veda, the creator god Prajāpati manifested the multiple realms of existence through an event of cosmogonic emission – the stuff of the cosmos is literally comprised of Prajāpati's godly semen. Unpacking this Vedic myth, Smith explains that this generative autoerotic act was a form of self-sacrifice and that all Vedic ritual sacrifices performed in the world of men both mimic and seek to reconcile this initial chaos-producing event. Smith articulates that in Vedic sacrifice rituals:

> Prajāpati is reconstructed [after his cosmic emission] in a secondary cosmogonic act of ritual construction which also shapes into form the discontinuous creatures of the cosmic emission. Unlike all the kings horses and all the king's men, the gods and men, deploying the formative an connective power of ritual, *can* put the shattered god and his creation back together again – an operation of ritually productive reintegration…[18]

In replicating and ameliorating Prajāpati's cosmogonic sacrifice, Vedic ritual operates within the divine world and is therefore set apart from mundane reality. Within sacrificial space, matter regains its connection to its material essence, i.e., Prajāpati's generative semen. The mechanics of Vedic ritual help in understanding the power and importance of the Anurādhapuran *mālaka* discussed above. The *mālaka* are enlivened due to their connection with Buddhist cosmology. Unlike the cosmologically charged *mālaka*s, the force that sacralizes *sīmā* space is not connected to cosmological or cosmogonic realities.

The language used in the ritual pronouncement that consecrates *sīmā* space supports an understanding of *sīmā* space efficacy as non-cosmological, instead of as a space consecrated purely by the efforts of the sangha. The Pali term used in the ritual pronouncement given in the *Vinaya* above is *sīmāya sammuti*, meaning "establish the boundary." "*Sammuti*" is best translated in this phrase as "establish," however, it also can mean "common consent," "general opinion," and

---

[18] Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion,* 66.

"convention."[19] The linguistic components that make up the word "*sammuti*" point to the idea of collective imagining. "*Sammuti*" is constructed from the prefix *saŋ*, meaning "together,"[20] and *man* meaning "to think", "to be of opinion", "to imagine."[21] "*Sammuti*" then can be read as meaning "to make of one mind," or "to collectively imagine."

The use of the word "*sammuti*" suggests that unlike the Lankan *mālaka* identified in the Mahāvamsa, whose sacrality is ensured by their connection to Buddhist cosmological time, *sīmā* space is something collectively imagined by the sangha, hewn out from the mundane surroundings (trees, rocks, ant-hills), but given efficacy by the collective imagination of the community of monks. *Sīmā* space consecration, then, does not fit into Eliade's statement that "the ritual by which [humans] construct a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which *it reproduces the work of the gods*."[22] In order to understand why "the work of the gods" has no bearing over *sīmā* space efficacy, it is helpful to briefly touch on how *sammuti* is used in the Theravadin theory of dual reality, sometimes called Two Truths.

In the Abhidhammic theory of Two Truths, which has developed over the course of Theravadin history, two types of truth are theorized – ultimate truth, known as *paramattha-sacca*, and conventional truth, known as *sammuti-sacca*.[23] On the one hand, *paramattha-sacca* contains the irreducible mechanisms of Buddhist reality, such as impermanence, suffering, the aggregates of the empiric individuality, and so on.[24] *Sammuti-sacca*, on the other hand, contains the conventional manifestations of these mechanics – tangible matter, beings, gods, the world of humans, etc.[25] Karunadasa explains that in the Theravada system, neither realm of truth is superior nor subordinate to the other, but merely different ways of expressing the

---

[19] Rhys Davids, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 696.

[20] Rhys Davids, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 655.

[21] Rhys Davids, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 515.

[22] Rhys Davids, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, 29.

[23] Karunadasa, "Theravada Version of the Two Truths," 2.

[24] Karunadasa, "Theravada Version of the Two Truths," 10.

[25] Karunadasa, "Theravada Version of the Two Truths".

condition of existence. He clarifies that *paramattha-sacca* is "truth expressed by using the technical terms expressive of the ultimate elements of existence. In like manner, *sammuti-sacca* or conventional truth means the truth expressed by using conventional terms in common parlance."[26]

The use of *sammuti* in Abhidhammic theory reveals that in Theravadin understandings of existence, the worlds of the gods and the world of men are both contained within the realm of *sammuti-sacca*, they are both manifestations of ultimate irreducible realities in conventional terms. While Abhidammic theory is often separate from ritual action, I argue that the implications of *sammuti* in the *sīmā* consecration ritual are similar to its use in Abhidhammic theory. Karunadasa explains that "[s]ammuti is a mental construction superimposed on things per se and as such possessing no objective counterpart. As a product of the synthesizing function of the mind, it exists by virtue of mind."[27] After being established, *sīmā* space exists by virtue of the collective mind of the sangha, and as space, it refers only to the sangha's ability to create efficacious space.

The conventionality of *sammuti* as it exists in *sīmā* space consecration calls for a theoretical augmentation of Eliade's sacred and the profane dichotomy. The consecration of *sīmā* space is not merely an act of separating what is sacred from what is mundane, but also is a phenomenological exercise focused on the creation of space at a fundamental level. Its power lies not in its modeling of cosmogony and cosmological time, but in its being functionally true and extant in the conventional sense – a quality bestowed on it through the collective imagination of the sangha.

All of the textual and ritual material concerning *sīmā* space we have explored thus far works to connect *sīmā* efficacy with the actions of the sangha. The above analysis of the Mahāvamsa suggests that the efficacy of *sīmā* space is not tied to the cosmo-temporal cycles of Buddhist history, but instead is established through the performative and ritual actions of the sangha in the here-and-now. The excerpts from

---

[26] Karunadasa, "Theravada Version of the Two Truths", 17.
[27] Karunadasa, "Theravada Version of the Two Truths", 5.

the *Vinaya* concerning *sīmā* space consecration outline the specific ritual behavior necessary for the sangha to establish *sīmā* space and provide the exact pronouncement (*ñatti*) with which the sangha collectively consecrates the space. Furthermore, the glossing of the term *sammuti* in this pronouncement as "to collectively imagine", linked with the Abhidhammic theory of Two Truths explored above, supports an understanding of *sīmā* space efficacy as emanating from the power of the sangha as a collective entity and not cosmological or cosmogonic referents.

In addition to the textual and theoretical evidence explored above that positions *sīmā* space as a form of efficacious space, the *sīmā* space of Wat Phra Sing, a third level royal temple located in Chiang Rai, provides material evidence that links *sīmā* space's efficacy to the performative action of the sangha. The *uposatha*-hall of Wat Phra Sing is consecrated in the typical Thai fashion, with eight *sīmā* markers positioned at the cardinal and semi-cardinal directions around the building and a ninth marker buried in the center of the uposatha-hall. What makes this *sīmā* space unique, however, is the inclusion of eight images of important monks stationed directly across from each respective outer *sīmā* marker (Figure 1). These eight monastic images have their hands folded in a *wai* gesture and their eyes downcast directly at each of their corresponding *sīmā* markers (Figure 2). The presence of these monastic characters makes the *sīmā* consecration ceremony perpetually present on the grounds of the temple, and serves as a material manifestation of the connection between the collective imagination of the sangha and the efficacy of *sīmā* space.

Figure 1: *Uposatha*-**hall at Wat Phra Singh**. This image features the northern *sīmā* marker in the foreground and the northeastern marker in the background with their corresponding monastic images frozen in a pose of constant consecration. The image positioned at the northern *sīmā* marker is Maha Moggallana. (Image: Irwin, 2012)

Figure 2: Detail of Monastic Image at Wat Phra Singh *Sīmā*: The *wai* gesture and downcast eyes are visible in this shot. (Image: Irwin, 2012)

Sīmā Space as Efficacious Space

Regardless of the differences between sacred space theory and *sīma* space realities, there are important similarities between the function of *sīma* space, and sacred space as it exists in classical religious studies scholarship. Brian K. Smith resolves that in the Vedic system, "[t]he whole point of the ritual as a whole and nearly every rite in it was to effect change on the subjects undergoing the process and on the world outside the domain of ritual activity."[28] Furthermore, Smith articulates that the space of Vedic ritual is "the domain where, by virtue of its distinction from the limitations of activities performed in the real world, control over the world could be most efficiently exercised."[29]

Smith's focus on efficacy in Vedic ritual informs my classification of *sīma* space as efficacious space. As I define it, efficacious space is space that is established according to specific criteria, which by virtue of those criteria, empowers people to effect change within that space. *Sīma* space is the place in which the work of monasticism is carried out, where individuals are transformed into monks, and where existing monks gather to perpetuate monastic law. If the criteria by which *sīma* space is established is not valid, then all of that monastic work is invalid. However, the criteria by which *sīma* space is established has undergone extreme change and controversy throughout history.[30]

Smith argues that in order for Vedic rituals to be efficacious, the ritual agents involved must strive for perfection in both performative and material specifics. He clarifies that "the quest for perfection, for control of each and every detail, necessarily entailed anxiety about what would happen if mistakes were made."[31] The obsession with ritual perfection is similar to how *sīma* consecration specifics have been theorized by Theravadin thinkers throughout time. In Smith's Vedic case, the inability to match material and performative details

---

[28] Smith, "Ritual Perfection", 293.

[29] Smith, "Ritual Perfection".

[30] For detailed description of the divergent methods of *sīma* space construction see: Irwin, "Imagining Boundaries".

[31] Smith, "Ritual Perfection", 294.

could lead to unwanted outcomes in the extra-ritual world, or result in complete lack of efficacy altogether. So too is the case in *sīmā* consecration. If a *sīmā* space is not properly constructed, then the rituals performed within that space will be invalid. Unlike the Vedic case, however, the prototype for *sīmā* consecration criteria is not found in cosmogonic myth, but in the material and performative specifics given in the *Vinaya* and exegetical Theravadin texts.

The lack of cosmological modeling for the establishment of *sīmā* space, and the fact that properly established *sīmā* space is one of the five requirements necessary for monastic ordination to be considered valid, has led to a large amount of anxiety over the proper methods and materials necessary for the consecration of *sīmā* space.

Throughout Theravadin history, numerous exegetical texts have sought to codify the specific criteria necessary for the production of valid *sīmā* space by articulating material and performative elements upon which proper *sīmā* consecration depends. Buddhaghosa's 4-5th century *Samantapāsādikā* and the Mon King Dhammaceti's 15th century *Kalyānī* inscription have proved the most influential in terms of *sīmā* space standards. The methods and criteria found in these texts are not unified, and sometimes contradict each other, even though they all attempt to accord with the original criteria given in the *Vinaya*. In addition to this, all of the ink spilled on the subject of *sīmā* consecration methods and criteria in these orthodox texts seek to solve a specific problem – that if a *sīmā* space is not properly established, the monastic *upasampadā* ordinations and other ceremonies that occur within that space are invalid.

This problem, and the subsequent Theravadin obsession over *sīmā* space criteria, has informed my definition of efficacious space. If a *sīmā* space is not properly established (both in terms of material and ritual) then the sangha is unable to change a novice or lay-person into a monk through the act of ordination. In other words, the sangha is only able to effect change within *sīmā* space when the criteria of that space are infallibly adhered to.

My focus on efficacy is derived from the debates concerning valid and invalid *sīmā* spaces that exist in the Theravada texts themselves, which are singularly occupied with determining the proper methods for

the establishment of *sīmā* space so that they conform with the guidelines delineated in the *Vinaya* and are therefore able to empower the sangha to effect change. None of the texts that I have investigated cite cosmological precedents or models as dictating proper (or improper) *sīmā* consecration. On the contrary, according to the orthodox texts, *sīmā* validity is predicated on its conformity to the material and spatial requirements given in the *Vinaya*, and actuated by the group of monks who establish (imagine) the *sīmā* into existence, or *sīmāya sammuti*.

Anxiety over how to ensure the perfection of *sīmā* became a growing concern throughout Theravada history as one of the means by which to prevent the decline of the *sāsana*. This concern drove some of the more well known Buddhist reformations of Southeast Asia, such as the *Kalyānī* reformation and later, the nineteenth-century Thammayut reformation. These reformations, which saw large changes to the practice and understanding of Buddhism in South and Southeast Asia, were predicated on questions of space, and whether or not the criteria by which particular *sīmā* spaces were constructed were valid enough to confer upon those spaces the efficacy necessary to effect change within the world.

Classifying *sīmā* space as efficacious space, as opposed to merely sacred space, allows for a theorization of religious space that does not depend on cosmological modeling for its efficacy. Inquiries concerning *sīmā* space efficacy are tailored to the Theravadin texts themselves, and invite subsequent questions about space, efficacy, power, and change in religious studies more generally. I argue that we begin looking at how space in the context of religion is constructed in order to empower people to do certain things without having to be a reflection or recreation of cosmological models. I believe that efficacious space as a theoretical category can be used broadly across religious studies to further understand the link between the material, and ritual aspects of religious spatialization, and how space empowers people to perpetuate religious meaning and reality in the world.

References

Eliade, Mircea. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Trans. Rosemary Sheed. New York: Sheed & Ward, Inc., 1958.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Trans. Willard R. Trask. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Velag GmbH, 1957; San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1987.

Irwin, Anthony Lovenheim. "Imagining Boundaries: *Sīmā* Space, Lineage Trails, and Trans-Regional Theravada Buddhism." MA Thesis. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2011.

Karunadasa, Y. "Theravada Version of the Two Truths." Paper given at the Korean Conference of Buddhist Studies, 2008.

Kieffer-Pülz, Petra. "Ceremonial Boundaries in Sri Lankā." *Wilhelm Geiger and the Study of the History and Culture of Sri Lanka*. Eds. Ulrich Everding and Asanga Tilakaratne. Colombo: Goethe Institute & Postgraduate Institute of Pāli and Buddhist Studies, 2000. 43-90.

Kieffer-Pülz, Petra. "Rules for the *sīmā* Regulation in the *Vinaya* and its Commentaries and their Application in Thailand." *Journal of the International Institute of Asian Studies* vol. 20, no. 2 (1997): 141-153.

Mahāvagga. Vinaya Texts. Trans. T. W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg. Vol. 1 of *Sacred Books of the East*. Ed. F. Max Muller. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1965, first published 1881 by Oxford University Press.

The Mahāvaṃsa, or the Great Chronicle of Ceylon. Trans. Wilhelm Geiger. London: Pāli Text Society, 1958.

Rhys Davids, T. W. and William Stede, eds. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*. London: The Pali Text Society, 1972, first published 1921.

Sein-Ko, Taw. A Preliminary Study of the Kalyani Inscription of Dhammazeti, 1476 AD. Bombay: Education Society's Steam Press, 1893, first published by Indian Antiquary.

Smith, Brian K. *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Smith, Brian K. "Ritual Perfection and Ritual Sabotage in the Veda." *History of Religions* 35 no. 4 (May, 1996): 285-306.

Vinaya Piṭakaṃ, vol. 1. Ed. Herman Oldenberg. London: Williams and Norgate, 1879. Reprint, Pāli Text Society, 1929, 1964. Citations refer to the 1964 Pāli Text Society edition.