

SLAVERY

The definition of the word *slavery* and the identification of terms such as Sanskrit *dāsa* and corresponding vocabulary in other languages is contentious. If one understands the concept in terms of obligations, or power relations, however, slaves may be seen as those who owed obligations to many, but were owed few or none by others, thus avoiding the complications introduced by seeing slaves, as in classical law, as things (*res*). Of course, since the socioeconomic systems of different places and periods vary radically, it is impossible to generalize; in particular, the ties that many people in the premodern world had to the land meant that donations of property to Buddhist monasteries included the labor of those attached to that land. Whether or not such individuals are called *serfs*, their limited autonomy with respect to the state and to society is clear. In this sense, discussions of slavery can hardly be separated from those of land ownership or practices such as *corvée* labor, and in each case the whole complex must be investigated in light of the large-scale economic systems within which Buddhist institutions existed.

While it is important to distinguish actual practices within Buddhist institutions from attitudes toward these practices as found in Buddhist literature, what can be said clearly is that there is almost no indication in any premodern Buddhist source, scriptural or documentary, of opposition to, or reluctance to participate in, institutions of slavery. It is true that the Buddhist monastic codes (*VINAYA*) of all sects are unanimous in stipulating that it is not permissible to ordain a slave, but the reasons for doing so clearly lie not in any opposition to slavery but rather in the well-recognized reluctance of the Buddhist communities to interfere in previously established relations of social obligation, since it is also forbidden to ordain debtors, those in royal or military service, and so on. Again, when Buddhist texts speak of restrictions on the monastic ownership of slaves, they do so virtually without exception in the context of restrictions on individual rather than corporate ownership of wealth in general, and not with the intention of singling out slave ownership as somehow different from any other type of ownership. Indeed, in Buddhist literature of all varieties, stock descriptions of wealth, even that gifted to the Buddha, regularly include both male and female slaves along with silver, gold, fields, livestock, and so on. Some texts, emphasizing the moral obligation to

receive whatever is given in reverence, declare that it is an offense not to accept such offerings, the lists of which regularly include slaves.

Although there is a lack of sufficient sources to offer detailed proof, references in the accounts of Chinese pilgrims, as well as several inscriptional sources, make it clear that at least some Buddhist monasteries in India owned slaves. The sources are much better for other areas of the Buddhist world, and here too they are virtually unanimous. There is copious inscriptional and documentary evidence for the institutional monastic ownership of slaves from Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Burma, Thailand, Korea, China, and Japan; Central Asian documents frequently refer to slaves privately owned by individual monks. For example, in Koryŏ-period Korea (918–1392), the Buddhist monastic institution was one of the major slaveholders on the Korean peninsula during the late fourteenth century; the founders of the succeeding Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) transferred eighty-thousand monastery slaves to public ownership, leaving “only” one slave for every twenty monks. Slaves were also, however, owned by individual monks, and these remained unaffected by this legislation. Although it is worth stating that the general socioeconomic situation in theocratic Tibet was such that direct parallels are difficult to draw, there can be little doubt that comparable institutions existed there, whether or not the individuals in question were always called *bran* (slave).

Although the details of every circumstance are different, we are compelled to conclude that here, as in so many other cases, individual Buddhists and Buddhist institutions were, much more frequently than not, fully integrated into the societies in which they existed, not challenging the structures or customs of those societies, but on the contrary, often working to strengthen them.

See also: Economics; Monasticism; Persecutions

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SŌKA GAKKAI

Sōka Gakkai (Society for Value Creation), Japan's largest lay Buddhist organization, was founded by the educator Makiguchi Tsunesaburō (1871–1944) in 1930 and reestablished after World War II by its second president, Toda Jōsei (1900–1958). In 2002 it claimed 8.21 million member households; its worldwide umbrella organization, Sōka Gakkai International (SGI), headed by the Sōka Gakkai's spiritual leader and former third president Daisaku Ikeda (1928–), claimed more than twelve million members in 185 countries and territories. Beginning as a lay association of Nichiren Shōshū, a small sect within the NICHIREN SCHOOL, Sōka Gakkai became independent in 1991 after longstanding tensions with the Nichiren Shōshū priesthood. In ethos and organizational style, it bears more similarity to Japan's so-called New Religions than to traditional temple denominations.

Sōka Gakkai stresses faith, practice, and study of the teachings of NICHIREN (1222–1282) as the key to personal happiness and world peace. Members enshrine a copy of Nichiren's MAṄḌALA in their homes and twice daily recite portions of the LOTUS SŪTRA (SADDHARMAPUṄḌARĪKA-SŪTRA) and also chant the *Lotus Sūtra's* title, or DAIMOKU, *Namu Myōhō-rengyō*. (In Sōka Gakkai, as in some other Nichiren groups, "Namu" is usually pronounced "Nam" in actual recitation.) This practice is said to manifest innate buddhahood, bringing about a positive character transformation known as "human revolution," and to contribute directly to realizing an ideal society. To help implement its social vision, Sōka Gakkai established a political party, the Kōmeitō (Clean Government Party), in 1964, sparking controversy over religion–state relations. Sōka Gakkai officially separated from Kōmeitō in 1970 but remains the party's chief supporter. The organization encourages proselytizing, chiefly through personal contacts and neighborhood discussion meetings. Sōka Gakkai also undertakes a range of cultural, educational, and humanitarian activities and is an NGO (nongovernmental organization) member of the United Nations.

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SÖKKURAM

Sökkuram (Stone Grotto Hermitage) is a Buddhist shrine located in Korea on the slope of Mount T'oham in Kyōngju City in South Kyōngsang province. According to the SAMGUK YUSA (MEMORABILIA OF THE THREE KINGDOMS, 1279), Prime Minister Kim Tae-sōng (d. 774) constructed Sökkuram in 751 C.E. during the reign of King Kyōngdōk (r. 742–776) to honor his mother from a previous incarnation.

The manmade, keyhole-shaped, cavelike structure is constructed with granite blocks covered with earth. The inner sanctuary is circular with a hemispherical domed ceiling containing a lotus capstone and twenty-eight clump-stones representing the sun and the stars of the cosmos. The MAHĀYĀNA Buddhist iconographic program is mixed with esoteric elements. The main buddha, perhaps an image of Śākyamuni, seated in the *padmāsana* position with the earth-touching MUDRĀ, is a monumental sculpture in the round. Carved in relief on the sanctuary wall are fifteen standing deities: an eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, INDRA, Brahmā, and ten ARHAT disciples of Śākyamuni. The upper niches of the wall contain ten seated figures: Vimalakīrti, Kṣitigarbha, Avalokiteśvara, and other esoteric BODHISATTVAS, one of whom holds a three-prong *vajra*. Fourteen guardian deities are depicted in the front area: four heavenly kings, two Dvārapāla guardians, and the eight-set guardians, including Asura, Garuḍa, and Nāga.

The Buddha's full fleshy face is softly modeled with a benign spiritual expression. The *tribaṅga* (three-bending)-posed bodhisattvas are elegantly tall figures wearing three-plaque crowns with double-U pattern