

Hāritī Notebook. Slide 23, [Condensed Visual Classroom Guide to Daikokuten Iconography in Japan](#). Copyright Mark Schumacher. 2016.

Why did Hāritī become a kitchen god?

Hāritī was among the most popular deities of Buddhism in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Artwork of her and consort Pāñcika is abundant. In most traditions, Hāritī/Pāñcika are said to have bred 500 powerful children. By the 7th-century CE, Hāritī is also paired with Jambhala (Pāñcika's double) and with Mahākāla (aka Daikokuten). The latter pair was installed in India's monastery kitchens to ensure the food supply. Why Hāritī?

Hāritī is a composite deity of Buddhist origin, but she actually represents an amalgamation of thousands of village goddesses from India's local traditions. In nearly all cases, these village goddesses were goddesses of fertility, motherhood/children and of smallpox. They guarded the borders of the village from disease, pestilence and even human enemies – just like a mother protects her own children. In many cases, these village goddesses were simply referred to affectionately as “mother.”

Hāritī's evil child-eating ways may be read as a direct reference to her role as the smallpox deity. Until the discovery of vaccinations, smallpox was the most serious of deadly diseases. Children were the first victims of the disease, and thus the people considered the goddess as a terrible mother, the devourer of their children. At the same time, ample evidence shows that many of these goddesses were the spirits of women who died during their pregnancies or when delivering their children. People began to approach these goddesses with offerings and prayers as a means to protect their own children. It is interesting to note that, in the Taisho canon, #1451, the pregnant Hāritī is urged to dance at a local feast and loses her pregnancy as a result. Out of revenge, she vows to eat the children of the village in her next rebirth.

Jumping forward.....to cure Hāritī of her evil child-eating ways, the Buddha hides her youngest and most favored child. After looking high and low for her lost child, without success, Hāritī turns to the Buddha in despair and agony, and finally awakens to the pain and suffering she has caused countless parents and children. She repents her sins, embraces Buddha's teachings, and transforms herself into a protector of children.

However, asks Hāritī: “How shall my five hundred children subsist hereafter?” The Buddha replied: “In every monastery, where my devotees dwell, thy family shall partake of sufficient food, offered by them [the monks] every day.” For this reason, says Yijing in his 7th-century text [T2125.54.0209 b21]: “The image of Hāritī is found either in the porch or in a corner of the dining-hall of all Indian monasteries depicting her as holding a babe in her arms, and round her knees three or five children. “

Yijing's relevant passage [English trans.] is shown on the next seven pages. Also see:

- [Hāritī: Village Origins, Buddhist Elaborations, and Saivite Accommodations](#), by Sree Padma. *Asian and African Area Studies*, 11 (1): 1-17, 2011.
- [Praying for Heirs: The Diffusion and Transformation of Hāritī in East and Southeast Asia](#), by Yuan Quan. *Chinese Society of History Studies 中國史學會*, Oct. 2011, vol., no.74, pp. 117-205 (89 pages).



A RECORD

OF

THE BUDDHIST RELIGION

AS PRACTISED IN

INDIA AND THE MALAY ARCHIPELAGO

(A.D. 671-695)

BY I-TSING

TRANSLATED BY J. TAKAKUSU, B.A., PH.D.

WITH A LETTER FROM THE RIGHT HON. PROFESSOR F. MAX MÜLLER

WITH A MAP

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adopted by Bodhisattva Nâgârguna. If this be too hard to put in practice, to drink water is also good. When a man gets used to these practices he is less attacked by sickness. The dirt at the roots of the teeth hardened by time must all be cleaned away. Washed with warm water, the teeth will be freed from the dirt for the whole of life. Tooth-ache is very rare in India owing to their chewing the tooth-wood.

It is wrong to identify the tooth-wood with a willow-branch. Willow-trees are very scarce in India. Though translators have generally used this name, yet, in fact, the Buddha's tooth-wood-tree (for instance) which I have personally seen in the Nâlanda monastery, is not the willow. Now I require no more trustworthy proof from others *than this*, and my readers need not doubt it. Moreover, we read in the Sanskrit text of the Nirvâṇa-sûtra thus: 'The time when they were chewing tooth-woods.'

Some in China use small sticks of willow which they chew completely in their mouth without knowing how to rinse the mouth and remove the juice. Sometimes it is held that one can cure a sickness by drinking the juice of the tooth-wood. They become impure, in so doing, contrary to their desire for purification. Though desirous of being released from a disease, they fall into a greater sickness. Are they not already aware of this fact? Any argument would be in vain! It is quite common among the people of the five parts of India to chew the tooth-wood. Even infants of three years old are taught how to do it.

The teaching of the Buddha and the custom of the people correspond on this point, and help each other. I have thus far explained the comparative merit of the use of the tooth-wood in China and India. Each must judge for himself as to whether he will adopt or reject the custom.

CHAPTER IX.

RULES ABOUT THE RECEPTION AT THE UPAVASATHA-DAY¹.

I SHALL briefly describe the ceremony of inviting priests, in India as well as in the islands of the Southern Sea. In India the host comes

¹ I. e. the fast-day; it is a day of religious observance and celebration for laymen and priests, and is a weekly festival when laymen see a priest and take upon themselves the Upavasatha-vows, i. e. to keep the eight Silas during the day.

previously to the priests, and, after a salutation, invites them to the festival. On the Upavasatha-day he informs them, saying, 'It is the time.'

The preparation of the utensils and seats for the priests is made according to circumstances. Necessaries may be carried (from the monastery) by some of the monastic servants; or provided by the host. Only copper utensils as a rule are used, which are cleansed by being rubbed with fine ashes. Each priest sits on a small chair placed at such a distance that one person may not touch another. The shape of the chair has been already described in chap. iii. It is not wrong, however, to use earthenware utensils once, if they have not been used before. When they have been already used, they should be thrown away into a ditch, for used vessels (lit. 'touched') should not be preserved at all. Consequently in India, at almsgiving places at the side of the road, there are heaps of discarded utensils which are never used again. Earthenware (of superior quality) such as is manufactured at Siang-yang (in China) may be kept after having been employed, and after having been thrown away may be cleansed properly. In India there were not originally porcelain and lacquer works. Porcelain, if enamelled, is, no doubt, clean. Lacquered articles are sometimes brought to India by traders; people of the islands of the Southern Sea do not use them as eating utensils, because food placed in them receives an oily smell. But they occasionally make use of them when new, after washing the oily smell away with pure ashes. Wooden articles are scarcely ever employed as eating utensils yet, if new, they may be used once, but never twice, this being prohibited in the Vinaya.

The ground of the dining-hall at the host's house is strewn over with cow-dung, and small chairs are placed at regular intervals; and a large quantity of water is prepared in a clean jar. When the priests arrive they untie the fastenings of their cloaks. All have clean jars placed before them: they examine the water, and if there are no insects in it, they wash their feet with it, then they sit down on the small chairs. When they have rested awhile, the host, having observed the time and finding that the sun is nearly at the zenith, makes this announcement: 'It is the time.' Then each priest, folding his cloak by its two corners, ties them in front, and taking up the right corner of his skirt, holds it by the girdle at his left side. The priests cleanse their hands with powder made of *peas* or earth-dust; and either the host pours water, or the

priests themselves use water out of the *Kundi* (i.e. jars); this is done according as they find one way or the other more convenient. Then they return to their seats. Next eating-utensils are distributed *to the guests*, which they wash slightly so that water does not flow over them. It is never customary to say a prayer before meals. The host, having cleansed his hands and feet (by this time), makes an offering to saints (images of arhats) at the upper end of the row of seats; then he distributes food to the priests. At the lowest end of the row an offering of food is made to the mother, Hâritî.

At the former birth of this mother, she from some cause or other, made a vow to devour all babes at Râgagrîha. In consequence of this wicked vow, she forfeited her life, and was reborn as a Yakshî; and gave birth to five hundred children. Every day she ate some babes at Râgagrîha, and the people informed the Buddha of this fact. He took and concealed one of her own children, which she called Her Beloved Child. She sought for it from place to place, and at last happened to find it near the Buddha. 'Art thou so sorry,' said the World-honoured One to her, 'for thy lost child, thy beloved? Thou lamentest for only one lost out of five hundred; how much more grieved are those who have lost their only one or two children on account of thy cruel vow?' Soon converted by the Buddha, she received the five precepts and became an Upâsikâ¹. 'How shall my five hundred children subsist hereafter?' the new convert asked the Buddha. 'In every monastery,' replied the Buddha, 'where Bhikshus dwell, thy family shall partake of sufficient food, offered by them every day.' For this reason, the image of Hâritî is found either in the porch or in a corner of the dining-hall of all Indian monasteries depicting her as holding a babe in her arms, and round her knees three or five children. Every day an abundant offering of food is made before this image. Hâritî is one of the subjects of the four heavenly kings². She has a power of giving wealth. If those who are childless on account of their bodily weakness (pray to her for children), making offerings of food, their wish is always fulfilled. A full account of her is given in the

¹ The conversion of the mythical monster is said to have occurred in the sixteenth year of the Buddha's ministry; see Rhys Davids, *Buddhism*, p. 73.

² *Katûrmahârâgadevâs* (*Kâtummahârâgikâ devâ*), *Mahâvâgga* I, 6, 30.

Vinaya¹; so I have only given it in brief. The portrait of 'the demon mother of the children' (Kuei-tze-mu) has already been found in China.

There is likewise in great monasteries in India, at the side of a pillar in the kitchen, or before the porch, a figure of a deity carved in wood, two or three feet high, holding a golden bag, and seated on a small chair, with one foot hanging down towards the ground. Being always wiped with oil its countenance is blackened, and the deity is called Mahākāla or the great black deity. The ancient tradition asserts that he belonged to the beings (in the heaven) of the Great god (or Mahesvara). He naturally loves the Three Jewels, and protects the five assemblies² from misfortune. Those who offer prayers to him have their desires fulfilled. At meal-times those who serve in the kitchen offer light and incense, and arrange all kinds of prepared food before the deity. I once visited the Pan-da-na monastery (Bandhana)³, a spot where the great Nirvāna was preached (by the Buddha). There, usually more than a hundred monks dine. In spring and autumn, the best seasons for pilgrimages, the monastery is sometimes unexpectedly visited by a multitude (of travellers). Once five hundred priests suddenly arrived there, about midday. There was no time to prepare food for them exactly before noon. The managing priest said to the cooks: 'How shall we provide for this sudden increase?' An old woman, the mother of a monastic servant, replied: 'Be not perplexed, it is quite a usual occurrence.' Immediately she burnt abundant incense, and offered food before the black deity; and invoked him, saying: 'Though the Great Sage has gone to Nirvāna, yet beings like thyself still exist. Now (a multitude of) priests from every quarter has arrived here to worship the holy spot. Let not our food be deficient for supplying them; for this is within thy power. May thou observe the time.'

¹ The *Samyuktavastu*, chap. xxxi; *Samyuktaratna-sūtra* VII, 106.

² The five Parishads are: (1) Bhikshus, (2) Bhikshunîs, (3) Sikshamânâs, (4) Sramaneras, (5) Sramanerîs. For four Parishads see Childers, s. v. parisâ (f), where Sikshamânâs, i. e. the women who are under instruction with the view of becoming Sramanerîs, are included in the Sramanerîs.

³ This is no doubt a monastery in Makuṭa-bandhana in Kusinagara, see Mahāparinibbāna-sutta VI, 45, S. B. E., vol. xi, p. 129.

Then all the priests were asked to take seats. The food, provided for only the priests in residence at the monastery, when supplied was sufficient for that great multitude of priests, and there was as much remaining over as usual. All shouted 'Good!' and applauded the power of that deity. I myself went there to worship the spot; consequently I saw the image of that black deity before which abundant offerings of food were made. I asked the reason, and the above account was related to me. In China the image of that deity has often been found in the districts of Kiang-nan, though not in Huai-poh. Those who ask him (for a boon) find their wishes fulfilled. The efficacy of that deity is undeniable. The Nâga (snake) Mahâmuḥilinda¹ of the Mahâbodhi monastery (near Gayâ) has also a similar miraculous power.

The following is the manner of serving food. First, one or two pieces of ginger about the size of the thumb are served (to every guest), as well as a spoonful or half of salt on a leaf. He who serves the salt, stretching forth his folded hands and kneeling before the head priest, mutters 'Samprâgatam' (well come!). This is translated by 'good arrival.' The old rendering of it is Sam-ba² which is erroneous. Now the head priest says: 'Serve food equally.'

This word (*Samprâgatam*) conveys the idea that the entertainment is well provided, and that the time of the meal has just arrived. This is what is understood according to the sense of the word. But when the Buddha with his disciples once received poisoned food from some one, he taught them to mutter 'Samprâgatam;' then they all ate it. As much poison as was in the food was changed into nourishment. Considering the word from this point of view, we see that not only does it mean 'well-arrived,' but that it is also a mystic formula. In either language, whether of the East or of the West (i.e. in Chinese or in Sanskrit), one may utter this word as one likes. In the Ping and Fan³ districts (in China) some pronounce Shi-chi, or 'the time has arrived,' which has a great deal of the original character.

He who serves food, standing before the guests, whose feet are in a

¹ Muḥilinda, in Mahāvagga I, 3, comes to protect the Buddha, and even to hear the sermon; see S. B. E., vol. xiii, p. 80.

² 僧跋.

³ 并汾.

line, bows respectfully, while holding plates, cakes, and fruits in his hands, serves them about one span away from (or above) the priest's hands; every other utensil or food must be offered one or two inches above the guest's hands. If anything be served otherwise, the guests should not receive it. The guests begin to eat as soon as the food is served; they should not trouble themselves to wait till the food has been served all round.

That they should wait till the food has been served equally all round is not a correct interpretation. Nor is it according to the Buddha's instruction that one should do as one likes after a meal.

Next some gruel made of dried rice and bean soup is served with hot butter sauce as flavouring, which is to be mixed with the other food with the fingers. They (the guests) eat with the right hand, which they do not raise up higher than the middle part of the belly. Now cakes and fruits are served; ghee and also some sugar. If any guest feels thirsty, he drinks cold water, whether in winter or summer. The above is a brief account of the eating of the priests in daily life as well as at a reception.

The ceremony of the Upavasatha-day is observed on a scale so grand that all the trays and plates are full of the cakes and rice remaining over; and melted butter and cream can be partaken of to any extent.

In the Buddha's time king Prasenagit¹ invited the members of the Buddha's Order, in order to offer them a feast, when drink, food, ghee, cream, &c., were served to such an extent that they overflowed profusely on the ground. There is some reference to this in the Vinaya texts. When I first arrived in Tâmrâlipti, in Eastern India, I wished to invite the priests on a small scale one fast-day. But people hindered me, saying: 'It is not impossible to prepare just enough food for the guests, but according to the traditional custom of olden times it is necessary to have an abundant supply. It is feared that men may smile, if the food supplied be only just sufficient to satisfy the stomach. We hear that you come from a great country in which every place is rich and prosperous; if you cannot prepare food in abundance you had better give up the idea.' Therefore I followed their custom, which is not at all unreasonable, for if the intention of giving food be generous the reward obtained *for the good work* will be correspondingly abundant.

¹ Or Pasenadi, king of Kosala.