THE LEGEND OF THE LION-ROARER:
A Study of the Buddhist Arhat Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja

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It was not long after the Buddha passed away into Parinirvāna in the fifth century B.C. that myths and legends began to multiply about him. Sites associated with the smallest incidents of his career soon became centers of pilgrimage, and centers of pilgrimage perhaps not previously connected to him soon became so, spawning new stories about his life. But Gautama Buddha was not the only one to receive the attention of the myth-makers of the tradition. In the centuries that followed, Buddhist preachers and specialist monks called avadānikas recounted and ornamented the lives and past lives of his disciples and successors as well. They created a vast literature of their legendary deeds (avadānas) and previous births (jātakas), and their stories were incorporated into canonical texts and commentaries and compiled into special collections.¹

Before long, many of the Buddha’s disciples came to be given set features, stereotypes that quickly become tradition and were then played out in limited variations but in countless legends and stories. One of the classic listings of these stereotypes occurs in the Thera-vāda Anguttara Nikāya, where the various prominent disciples of the Buddha are each described as being “foremost” in a particular quality or activity. Thus, Sariputta is “foremost of those of great wisdom”; Mahā Moggallāna is “foremost of those with supernormal powers,” and Mahā Kassapa of those “who maintain the meticulous observance of forms.”² The eighth place on this listing is occupied by a figure who forms the subject of this paper: Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja, a disciple whom the Buddha declared to be “foremost of lion-roarers.”³

¹ For a general survey of this literature, see Maurice Winternitz, A History of Indian Literature, trans. Mrs. S. Ketkar (Calcutta: University of Calcutta), vol. 2, pp. 277-94.
³ Ibid.
In what follows it is my intention to examine the full scope of the traditions and stories which surround this personage. I want to focus especially on his legend as it developed in India (since this has not been studied before to any great extent) and consider it in relation to his cult as it is found in China. In so doing I hope that two things will be accomplished. The first of these is that a contribution will be made to the study of Indian Buddhist hagiography. This field has been much neglected by Western scholars, perhaps because biography is not particularly featured in Indian Buddhist sources, a situation which, it might be pointed out, is the exact reverse of that found in China where our knowledge of the history and practice of Buddhism is virtually dominated by biographical information and the lives of eminent monks.

Secondly, it is hoped that some contribution will be made to the study of popular cultic activities in Buddhism, especially those involving meritorious acts of offering to members of the Buddhist community. We still know far too little about the popular practice of Buddhists in India, both lay and monastic, and about the ideologies and mythologies which accompany that practice. Doctrinal texts, manuals of meditation, the philosophies of various schools are all, of course, crucial sources for our study of Indian Buddhism, but to understand the everyday popular practices such as merit making and cultic acts, there is a crying need to keep turning to the sources which can most help us in this regard: the Sanskrit *avadānas* and the Pāli commentaries. In the case of Piṅḍola, it is only by comparing these materials with what we know of the development of his legend and cult in Chinese sources that it becomes possible to gain a better focus on the figure himself and on his overall significance in the popular mythology of Buddhism.

Piṅḍola's popularity in East Asia is well known and a number of studies have been devoted specifically to him. As the most important

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4 For the Chinese sources on Piṅḍola I will be heavily indebted to Sylvain Lévi and Edouard Chavannes, "Les seize arhat protecteurs de la loi," *Journal asiatique* 8 (1916): 205-75.