

POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF PĀLI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES

**An Analytical Study of the Buddhist
Concept of Food (*Āhāra*) with Reference to
Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Traditions**

By
Kim han sang
(2011/PhD/2153)

Supervisor's Endorsement

THIS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF PĀLI
AND BUDDHIST STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA, IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIRMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY IN BUDDHIST STUDIES 2012

Abstract

The common proposition that “one cannot live without eating” is expressed as “all beings subsist on food (*sabbe sattā āhāraṭṭhitikā*)” in the Buddhist texts. Its various aspects cover the entire field of the Buddhism, namely, the Four Noble Truths (*ariya-sacca*), the Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), the three characteristics (*ti-lakkhaṇa*), etc.

The most common Pāli and Sanskrit term for food is ‘*āhāra*’. In the Buddhist texts the term *āhāra* has both narrow and broad meanings: In its narrow sense, food refers to material food alone which belongs to derived elements (*upādāya-rūpa*). In its broad sense, however, it refers to one of the twenty-four conditions (*paccaya*) and is used to denote the four kinds of food (*cattāro-āhāra*), which govern both biological and mental life. In this way, food is given much wider meaning, being applied to physical and psychological aspects of life. The four kinds of food are enumerated from gross to fine in what follows:

- i. Material food (*kabalīṅkārāhāra*)
- ii. Contact-food (*phassāhāra*)
- iii. Volition-food (*manosañcetanāhāra*)
- iv. Consciousness-food (*viññāṇāhāra*)

Material food sustains the physical body; contact-food sustains feeling (*vedanā*); volition-food sustains rebirth (*jāti*) in the three realms of existence (*ti-loka*) and consciousness-food sustains the mind-and-body (*nāma-rūpa*). In this way, each

food performs its own unique tasks in its respective domains, and as a group these coordinate the collective task of supporting a human being. This process of nutrition goes on so long as one remains in the conditioned world (*saṅkhāra-loka*).

Under the title “An Analytical Study of the Buddhist Concept of Food (*Āhāra*) with Reference to Both Theravāda and Mahāyāna Traditions”, we intend to trace the development of the philosophical, and especially the psychological aspects of food from the Theravāda tradition into the Mahāyāna tradition. In doing so, we argue that the two traditions, despite their differences, have striking similarities, and that the Buddha’s spiritual message expressed as “all beings subsist on food.” has been well preserved in both traditions.