

TIME SCHEDULE OF THE *KATHINA* PERIOD

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In early Buddhist monasteries, the end of the rain retreat is the starting point of the robe season. This season lasts one month. During this month, lay people offer robes and robe material to the Buddhist community. The community can lengthen this period by holding the *kathina*¹ ceremony. It is the start of the *kathina* period, during which monks and nuns also enjoy several privileges. In this article, the time schedule of this most important period for the Buddhist community is examined referring to the extant Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese sources. This study provides a new comparative table of the lunar year, and allows us to outline a general time schedule of the *kathina* period, as well as to point out some remarkable differences.

Key words: *kathina*, Buddhist ceremony, Buddhist community.

1. Introduction

The Indian rainy season lasts four months (*Śrāvaṇa*, *Bhādrapada*, *Āśvayuja* and *Kārttika* months²). The Buddhist disciplinary texts (*lū* 律, *vinaya*)³ all state that during three of these months, monks (*biqiu* 比丘, *bhikṣu*) and nuns (*biqiuni* 比丘尼,

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¹ Chin. 迦絺那 *jiachina*; 羯恥那 *jiechina*, phonetic renderings of *kathina*, the ceremonial cloth that during the *kathina* ceremony is spread out to make clear that the *kathina* period has come. Another Chinese term for this ceremonial cloth is 功德衣 *gongde yi*, ‘cloth of merit’. The term 功德 could either refer to a kind of merit that is linked to the five privileges (see further) that one obtains during the *kathina* period (cf. Daoxuan, T.1804: 44c13), or to the five privileges themselves. For more details see Heirman (2002, Part II, p. 733, note 185).

² See the table at the end of this article.

³ Five *vinayas* survive in a Chinese translation: the *Mahīśāsakavinaya* (T.1421), the *Mahā-sāṃghikavinaya* (T.1425), the *Dharmaguptakavinaya* (T.1428), the *Sarvāstivādinavinaya* (T.1435) and the *Mūlasarvāstivādinavinaya* (T.1442 up to and including T.1451). Of the latter *vinaya*, there is also a Tibetan translation. Apart from these texts, the *vinaya* transmitted by the Theravāda School survives in the Pāli language. In addition, several Sanskrit fragments have been found (see Yuyama 1979).

bhikṣuṇī) should not travel around the country, but should remain in a fixed residence. These three months generally coincide with the first three months of the rainy season. The monks or nuns then observe the early rain retreat. Sometimes, monks or nuns enter the rain retreat one month later. They then observe a late rain retreat. The Indian rainy season coincides with the summer months of China. Therefore, the Chinese translators call the rain retreat the ‘summer retreat’, *xia anju* 夏安居. This period is concluded by the ‘invitation’ (*zizi* 自恣, *pravāraṇā*)⁴ ceremony. On this occasion, every monk (nun) invites his (her) fellow monks (nuns) to point out his (her) wrongs, if any, whether seen, or heard, or suspected. The invitation ceremony following the early rain retreat is the starting point of the robe season.⁵ This season lasts one month (the *Kārttika* month). During this month, lay people offer robes and robe material to the Buddhist community (*saṃgha*).

Although the robe season may only last one month, the community can lengthen this period by holding the *kaṭhina* ceremony. Originally, during this ceremony, a ceremonial robe (called *kaṭhina*) was most probably spread out near the monastery to inform the lay people that the period for the donation of robes and of robe material had come (see Härtel 1956, pp. 142–144, §107; Bechert 1968, p. 324). It is the start of the *kaṭhina* period. During this period, monks and nuns not only receive robes and robe material, but they also are granted five privileges. In most *vinayas* (see Chang 1957, pp. 20–22; Chung 1998b, p. 263, Table I) these are:

1. one may have an extra robe (or extra robe material);
2. one may spend the night separated from his (her) robes;
3. one may eat in a group, separated from the community;
4. one may eat in one place and then again in another;
5. one may enter a village before and after mealtime, without informing the other *bhikṣus/bhikṣuṇīs*.

2. The time schedule

In this article, I examine when, according to the several *vinayas*, the *kaṭhina* period exactly starts and how long it lasts. Although the *vinayas* largely agree, thus allowing us to outline a general time schedule, we also notice some remarkable differences:

- The Pāli *vinaya*, H. Oldenberg, *Vin*, Vol. I (*Mahāvagga*), p. 254, says that the *kaṭhina* is spread after the monks have completed the rain retreat (= the first three months of the rainy season);⁶ Vol. V (*Parivāra*), p. 176 adds that the

⁴ The term *pravāraṇā* is related to the causative form of *pra-*√*vr* (‘to invite’). The Chinese translation *zizi* 自恣 (lit. ‘as you wish’) points to the fact that one invites others to speak freely (Chung 1998a, p. 36; Heirman 2002, Part I, pp. 232–233, note 34).

⁵ *cīvarakālasamaya*.

⁶ According to the Pāli *vinaya*, the early rain retreat starts immediately after the full moon of the *Āsāḷhā* (Skt. *Āṣāḍha*) lunar month, i.e. on the first day of the *Sāvāṇa* (Skt. *Śrāvāṇa*) lunar month; it lasts three months (*Vin*, Vol. I, p. 137; Upasak 1975, p. 198, s.v. *vassāvāsa*). There is also the possibility of observing a later rain retreat, i.e. a rain retreat that starts one month later than the

kaṭhina is spread during the last month of the rainy season (= the *Kattika*, Skt. *Kārttika*, month). Still according to the Pāli tradition, the robe season starts after the full moon of the *Assayuja* (Skt. *Āśvayuja*) month, i.e. at the start of the *Kattika* month (*Vin*, Vol. III, p. 261; *BD*, Vol. II, p. 153). If one spreads the *kaṭhina*, the robe season lasts five months (*Vin*, Vol. IV, pp. 286–287); if not, it only lasts one month. Thus the *Kattika* month is the first month of the robe season (after the early rain retreat), and, at the same time, the last month of the rainy season.⁷

- *Mahī*, p. 153c11–16: if one observes the early summer retreat,⁸ the *kaṭhina* period can, at the earliest, start on the 16th day of the 7th month and, at the latest, on the 15th day of the 8th month.⁹ Consequently, there is a margin of one month. The *kaṭhina* period lasts four months and can, at the earliest, end on the 15th day of the 11th month and, at the latest, on the 14th day of the 12th month. If one observes the late summer retreat, the *kaṭhina* period starts on the 16th day of the 8th month and ends on the 15th day of the 12th month.
- *Mahā*, p. 452a17–20 and p. 453a29–b2: one can receive (spread)¹⁰ the *kaṭhina* cloth between the 16th day of the 7th month and the 15th day of the 8th month.¹¹ The *kaṭhina* period ends not later than the 15th day of the 12th month.
- The *Dharma* mentions that the *kaṭhina* period starts after the summer retreat – in my view, at the latest, one month after the summer retreat – and finishes at the end of the winter (*Dharma*, p. 878c21–27), i.e. five months after the end of the (early) summer retreat.¹² Cf. *Dharma*, p. 878c17–18: “聽自恣竟不受功德衣一月受功德衣五月”, “I allow¹³ that, after the ‘invitation’ (i.e.

early retreat (*Vin*, Vol. I, p. 137). In that case, the rain retreat takes place during the last three months of the rainy season instead of during the first three months.

⁷ See also Upasak 1975, p. 60, s.v. *kaṭhina* II.

⁸ The *Mahī* mentions that the early summer retreat coincides with the first three months of the summer (*Mahī*, p. 129a20–22) [the *Mahī* (p. 129a9) divides the year in three seasons]. Apart from the early summer retreat, there is also the possibility of a late summer retreat (*Mahī*, p. 129b21–22), presumably one month later.

⁹ The period of the 16th day of the 7th month until the 15th day of the 8th month coincides with the *Kārttika* month, i.e. the first month after the early summer retreat (cf. *Mahī*, p. 319c20–22) (see further).

¹⁰ 受, ‘to receive,’ followed by 功德衣/迦絺那衣, usually renders *ā-√str/āstarāṇa*, ‘to spread/the spreading of [the *kaṭhina*]’ (see Härtel 1956, p. 144; *SWTF*, Lieferung 9, p. 9, s.v. *kaṭhināstāra*).

¹¹ I.e. the *Kārttika* month, the first month after the early summer retreat (apart from the early summer retreat, there is also the possibility of a summer retreat that starts one month later, *Mahā*, p. 451b10–12). See also note 16.

¹² Between the end of the early summer retreat and the end of the winter, there are five months. If, however, one observes the late summer retreat (cf. *Dharma*, p. 832a23–25), the *kaṭhina* period most probably lasts four months, equally until the end of the winter. Generally, the *Dharma* divides the year in three seasons (spring, summer and winter; cf. *Dharma*, p. 830b12); exceptionally, the year is divided in four seasons (cf. *Dharma*, p. 805c29).

¹³ In many places, the term 聽 (Skt. *anujānāmi*) has to be interpreted as ‘I order that’ (Bechert 1968, p. 321; 1982, p. 63). In that case, *Dharma*, p. 878c17–18, should, to my view, be interpreted in the following way: ‘I order that, after the invitation, the not receiving of the robe ma-

after the *pravāraṇā*), one does not receive (spread) the robe material/robe(s) of merit (i.e. the *kaṭhina* robe material/robe(s)) for one month, and that, [after the ‘invitation’], one receives the robe material/robe(s) of merit for five months.” Given the details provided by the other *vinayas*, I think that this passage has to be interpreted as ‘the *kaṭhina* period starts, at the latest, one month after the (early) summer retreat’, ‘the *kaṭhina* period ends [at the latest]¹⁴ five months after the (early) summer retreat’.

- *Sarva*, p. 206c20–24: the *kaṭhina* ceremony is carried out after the *pravāraṇā* ceremony. One has one month to receive (spread) the *kaṭhina* cloth. This has to happen, at the latest,¹⁵ on the 15th day of the 8th month. This one month time is the *Kārttika* month.¹⁶ Compare a short Skt. fragment mentioned by H. Härtel in 1956 (p. 145) and – given the fact that the content is closely related to the Chinese *Sarva* – attributed to the Sarvāstivāda School: “||| āyāṃ yadi vā kārt(t)ikyām paurṇamāsyām tāvad eva samagre saṃghe saṃ |||”. It indicates that one may spread the *kaṭhina* until the full moon of the *Kārttika* month. Consequently, since the Chinese *Sarva* says that the *kaṭhina* has to be spread, at the latest, on the 15th day of the 8th month, it is clear that in the *Sarva* (and, in all probability, also in the *Mahī*, in the *Mahā*, and in the *Dharma*), the 15th day of the 8th month coincides with the full moon of the *Kārttika* month. This implies that the *Kārttika* month coincides with the period between the 16th day of the 7th month and the 15th day of the 8th month. This period is, in the *Mahī*, in the *Mahā*, in the *Dharma* and in the *Sarva*, the month that follows the early summer retreat. It is the month during which the *kaṭhina* is spread.
- The *Mūla*, T.1449, p. 97b27, p. 98a14–16 and p. 98b4–5, says that a *kaṭhina* period lasts five months, i.e. the period lasting from halfway through the eighth month until halfway through the first month of the next year, i.e. from the beginning of the *Kārttika* month until the end of the *Phālguna* month, at the end

terial/robe(s) of merit [can] last one month, and that, [after the invitation], the receiving of the robe material/robe(s) of merit [can] last five months.’

¹⁴ The *kaṭhina* period ends at the end of the winter (*Dharma*, p. 878c21–27). For individual *bhikṣus*, however, the period can also end at an earlier date (*Dharma*, pp. 878c27–879a16) (see further).

¹⁵ Cf. *Sarva*, p. 206c23–24: “若月一日得衣即日受若二日若三日乃至八月十五日亦如是”, “if, on the first day of the month, one gets robe material (or robe(s)), one has to receive (i.e. spread: see note 10) it (these) on that day; if one gets it on the second day, or on the third, and so on until the fifteenth day of the eighth month, it is also like that”. This passage reveals that the *bhikṣus* do not determine themselves when they spread the *kaṭhina*, but that they depend on a donation offered by the lay community. The above interpretation is based upon a comparison with the other *vinayas*, that – if they permit a margin for the spreading of the *kaṭhina* – always mention a margin of one month. I thus do not agree with H. Härtel (1956, p. 145), who interprets ‘月一日’ as ‘the first day of the (eighth) month’ and thus concludes that one may spread the *kaṭhina* between the first and the fifteenth day of the eighth month (the *Kārttika* month). Just as in the *Dharma*, however, also in the *Sarva*, a summer retreat or a *kaṭhina* period starts immediately after a full moon and ends with a full moon, i.e. it starts on the 16th day of a (Chinese) month and ends on the 15th.

¹⁶ The first month after the early summer retreat (in addition, there is also the possibility of a late summer retreat starting one month later, *Sarva*, p. 173c9).

of the winter (see also Chang 1957, p. 42). This is confirmed by the Skt. Mūlasarvāstivāda *kaṭhina* edited by H. Matsumura (1996, p. 192), and by a Skt. Mūlasarvāstivāda fragment edited by H. Härtel (1956, p. 156, §112.4). These Skt. passages say that the *kaṭhina* period coincides with the period between the *Kārttika* month and *Phālguna* month. The *Kārttika* month is the first month after the early summer retreat.¹⁷ This implies that of all the *vinaya* texts, only the Chinese *Mūla* relates the *Kārttika* month to the period between the 16th day of the 8th month and the 15th day of the 9th month. We equally find this time schedule in the Chinese version of the *Samantapāsādikā*, i.e. *Shan-jian lü piposha* 善見律毘婆沙 (T.1462), completed around 489 AD (see Bapat and Hirakawa 1970, pp. xlvi–xlvii and lix). It has been adopted also by Xuanzang, *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域紀 (T.2087), pp. 875c15–876a20 and p. 918c17–23.¹⁸

After the *kaṭhina* period, the *saṃgha* removes the *kaṭhina*. This removal is valid for all the *bhikṣus/bhikṣuṇīs*, even for those who are not present. According to H. Bechert (1968, p. 326), one originally took away the ceremonial *kaṭhina* cloth in order to indicate that the *kaṭhina* period had come to an end (see also Härtel 1956, p. 144). For individual *bhikṣus/bhikṣuṇīs*, however, the *kaṭhina* could be removed at an earlier time. This happens

1) if a *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* leaves the district (*jie* 界, *sīmā*)¹⁹ and does not return anymore (during the *kaṭhina* period),

2) and if he/she does no longer want a part of the robes or robe material that are distributed (because he/she already has robes enough; because his/her new robes are lost and he/she is not entitled to receive more; or because he/she has given up all hope of receiving new robes or robe material) (see also Heirman 2002, Part I, pp. 221–226).

3. Conclusion

Given the above data, we can conclude that after the early summer retreat, one may wait for a maximum of one month to carry out the *kaṭhina* ceremony. It has to be carried out during the *Kārttika* month, i.e. the period between the 16th day of the 7th (Chinese) month and the 15th day of the 8th month. If one carries out a *kaṭhina* cere-

¹⁷ In addition, there is the possibility of a late summer retreat (T.1445, p. 1042b3–4).

¹⁸ Translated by Beal (1969² [1884], Vol. I, pp. 71–73; Vol. II, p. 136). K. Chang (1957, p. 42) copies Xuanzang's theory and, equally, relates the *Kārttika* month to the period between the 16th day of the 8th month and the 15th day of the 9th month. Consequently, his chart of the lunar year is valid only for the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. He wrongly expands it to the whole of China. Similarly also Matsumura (1996, p. 169).

¹⁹ Any formal act has to be carried out within a well delimited district (*jie* 界, *sīmā*). In order to have a legally valid formal act, every monk or nun present in that district has to attend the ceremony. See Kieffer-Pülz (1992, pp. 27–28; 115–116).

mony, the ‘robe season’ lasts until the end of the winter, i.e. during a period of five months at most. Two *vinaya* traditions contain some deviating information:

- According to the *Mahī*, the *kaṭhina* period only lasts four months.
- The Chinese *Mūlasarvāstivāda* tradition relates the *Kārttika* month to the period between the 16th day of the 8th month and the 15th day of the 9th month.²⁰

This brings us to the following schedule:²¹

<i>Pakṣa</i> (= half-month)	<i>Month</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Mūla</i>
1 (cold season)	1 <i>Mārgaśīrṣa</i>	16th day of the 8th month	16th day of the 9th month
2			
3	2 <i>Puṣya</i>		
4			
5	3 <i>Māgha</i>		
6			
7	4 <i>Phālguna</i>		
8			
1 (hot season)	5 <i>Caitra</i>	16th day of the 12th month	16th day of the first month
2			
3	6 <i>Vaiśākha</i>		
4			
5	7 <i>Jyeṣṭha</i>		
6			
7	8 <i>Āṣāḍha</i>		
8			
1 (rainy season)	9 <i>Śrāvaṇa</i>	16th day of the 4th month	16th day of the 5th month
2			
3	10 <i>Bhādrapada</i>		
4			
5	11 <i>Āśvayuja</i>		
6			
7	12 <i>Kārttika</i>	16th day of the 7th month	16th day of the 8th month
8			

²⁰ This difference of one month is also pointed out by the monk Yijing (義淨; 635–713), the Chinese translator of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda*vinaya. In his travel account on India and Southeast Asia (*Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, T.2125, p. 220a6–8), he indicates that the 17th day of the 6th moon of China corresponds to the 17th day of the 5th moon in the old practice (*jiu xing* 舊行).

²¹ On the Indian tradition, see also von Hinüber (1970, p. 126); Vogel (1997, pp. 673–687).

Abbreviations

<i>BD</i>	Horner, I. B.: <i>The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya-Piṭaka)</i> .
<i>Dharma</i>	<i>Dharmaguptakavinaya</i>
<i>Mahī</i>	<i>Mahīśāsakavinaya</i>
<i>Mahā</i>	<i>Mahāsāṃghikavinaya</i>
<i>Mūla</i>	<i>Mūlasarvāstivādinavinaya</i>
<i>Sarva</i>	<i>Sarvāstivādinavinaya</i>
<i>SWTF</i>	Bechert, H. in collaboration with M. Schmidt and S. Dietz: <i>Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden und der kanonischen Literatur der Sarvāstivāda-Schule</i> .
<i>T.</i>	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i> 大正新修大藏經
<i>Vin</i>	Oldenberg, H.: <i>The Vinaya Piṭakam</i> .

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- No.1425 摩訶僧祇律 *Mohesengqi lü*, trans. Buddhābhadda and 法顯 Faxian (*Mahāsāṃghikavinaya*).
- No.1428 四分律 *Sifen lü*, trans. Buddhayaśas and 竺佛念 Zhu Fonian (*Dharmaguptakavinaya*).

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- No.1435 十誦律 *Shisong lü*, trans. Punyatrāta/Punyatara, Kumārajīva, Dharmaruci and Vimalākṣa (*Sarvāstivādinavinaya*).
- No.1445 根本說一切有部毘奈耶安居事 *Genbenshuoyiqieyou bu pinaiye anju shi*, trans. 義淨 Yijing (*varṣāvastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādins*).

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- No.1449 根本說一切有部毘奈耶羯恥那衣事 *Genbenshuoyiqieyou pu pinaiye jiechinayi shi*, trans. 義淨 Yijing (*kaṭhinavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādins*).
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