

SOME PALI DISCOURSES IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR CHINESE PARALLELS

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Most of the discourses found in the four Pali Nikāyas have one or more parallels in the Chinese Āgamas. These Chinese parallels tend to be often quite close to the Pali discourse, thereby reconfirming the overall picture of early Buddhism gained through familiarity with the Pali Nikāyas. In some instances, the Chinese parallels are moreover able to clarify or provide additional information in relation to a passage found in the Pali text. It is this potential of the Chinese Āgamas as a supplement to the Pali discourses to which I would like to draw attention with the present article, taking up a few examples from the *Mūlapaññāsa*, the first group of fifty discourses in the Majjhima Nikāya.

One example for this potential of the Āgamas can be found in relation to a passage in the *Sabbāsava Sutta*, concerned with proper use of the requisites of a monk or a nun. The Pali version of this discourse instructs that alms food should not be used for, among other things, ‘ornament’ and ‘adornment’.¹ On considering this stipulation, one might wonder how food could be misused for ornament and adornment. The *Visuddhimagga* explains these two expressions as referring to not taking food in order to become plump or to have a clear skin, as harem women or actors might do.²

Yet in other Pali passages the words ‘ornament’ and ‘adornment’ refer to external embellishment, such as wearing garlands, bracelets, decorated sandals, jewellery and long-fringed clothes, etc.³ The same meaning also underlies the injunction to refrain from adornment as

¹ M 2 at M 1 10,9: *na maṇḍanāya na vibhūsanāya*.

² *Vism* 32,1.

³ D 1 at D 1 7,20 lists among others *mālā*, *hatthabandha*, *citruṇṇāhana*, *maṇi*, and *vattha dīghadasa* as instances of *maṇḍana-vibhūsanatthānyoga*.

part of the eight precepts undertaken on full moon days by Buddhist lay followers, an occasion where one is to abstain from wearing such external forms of beautification.⁴

In view of this it would be more natural for the problem of ‘ornament’ or ‘adornment’ to arise in relation to robes rather than food. An example of such misuse of robes can be found in a discourse in the Saṃyutta Nikāya and in its parallel in the Saṃyukta Āgama, which describe how the monk Nanda incurred the Buddha’s reproach for wearing ironed robes.⁵ Thus it comes as a confirmation of the information provided by other Pali passages when one finds that the Madhyama Āgama parallel to the *Sabbāsava Sutta* does not mention ‘ornament’ and ‘adornment’ in relation to food, but instead speaks of the need to avoid adornment in relation to robes.⁶

Another example for an alternative perspective offered by a Chinese parallel can be found in the case of the *Bhayaberava Sutta*, a discourse depicting the Buddha in conversation with the brahmin Jāṇussoṇī on the difficulties of living in seclusion. The Pali version reports the Buddha referring to some recluses and brahmins who mistake day for night, or night for day.⁷ In contrast to these, the Buddha knows day for being day and night for being night, for which he rightly deserves praise as a being free from delusion, arisen for the benefit and welfare of gods and men.

On considering this statement, it seems difficult to imagine someone mistaking day for night or night for day, and it seems even more peculiar to propose that someone able to recognize day for being day should for this reason be considered as a being free from delusion, arisen for the benefit of gods and men.

The Pali commentary explains this statement by describing how someone who has attained *jhāna* with a white *kaṣiṇa* object emerges unexpectedly from this *jhāna* during the night and, due to the after effect of the *kaṣiṇa*, mistakes night for being day time. Or else some birds usu-

⁴ Corresponding to the eighth of the ten precepts of a novice, Khp 1: *mālā-gandha-vilepāna-dhāraṇa-mañḍana-vibhūsanatthānā veramaṇī*.

⁵ S 21:8 at S II 281,3 and SĀ 1067 at T II 277a12.

⁶ MĀ 10 at T I 432b23.

⁷ M 4 at M I 21,20.

ally active only during the day may chirp at night and cause someone who hears them from inside a dwelling to mistake night for day.⁸

These explanations appear somewhat contrived and do not fit this passage from the *Bhayaberava Sutta* very well, since the Buddha's statement does not seem to be concerned with only a momentary mistaking of day for night or night for day.

The Ekottara Āgama parallel to the *Bhayaberava Sutta* presents the Buddha's statement differently. It reports the Buddha instead explaining that some recluses and brahmins, whether it be day or night, do not understand the path of the *Dhamma*. In contrast to these the Buddha, whether day or night, does understand the path of the *Dhamma*.⁹ This way of presenting the Buddha's statement seems more straightforward than its Pali counterpart.

Though the Ekottara Āgama presentation reads more straightforward, this may not necessarily imply that it represents the more original version, since a Sanskrit fragment supports the Pali reading.¹⁰ Hence this could be an instance where the Chinese translators rendered a knotty passage in such a way as to make it comprehensible to their readers. If the Buddha's statement should originally indeed have been that he recognised day for day and night for night, this could refer to other recluses and brahmins mistaking what is impermanent, unsatisfactory and not self for being the opposite, a misunderstanding similar to mistaking day for night or night for day.

An alternative perspective on a particular passage can also be found in the Chinese parallel to the *Vatthūpama Sutta*. The Pali version enumerates a set of mental imperfections and then turns to perfect confidence in the three jewels. Before taking up the development of the divine abodes (*brahmavihāra*) and the achievement of liberation, the *Vatth-*

⁸ Ps I 121. The commentary works out both examples in the opposite way as well, with someone attaining *jhāna* with a dark *kaṣiṇa* and emerging at day time, and someone hearing a night bird during day time.

⁹ EĀ 31.1 at T II 666b11: 日夜之中解於道法.

¹⁰ Cat. no. 32 fragm. 37 v2 in E. Waldschmidt, (ed.), *Sanskriithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden*, Teil IV (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1980), p. 131 reads *(saṃ)jñ[o] divaṃse ca [d](i)vasa [sa]*, which would seem to be similar in meaning to M 4 at M I 21,24: *divā yeva samānaṃ divā ti sañjānāmi*.

ūpama Sutta has a passage about taking delicious food. According to this passage, for a monk of ‘such virtue’ even taking delicious food will not become an obstruction. This passage comes as a bit of a surprise at this point, in between perfect confidence in the three jewels and the development of the divine abodes, and its implications remain obscure.

The Pali commentary explains this statement as representing the achievement of non-return, since taking delicious food will not obstruct a non-returner from progress to full awakening.¹¹ Though delicious food will indeed not affect a non-returner or an arahant, it does not follow that to be beyond the attraction of delicious food necessarily means that one is at least a non-returner, as it is possible to remain unaffected by delicious food even if one has not yet gained such a lofty level of realization.

The *Vatthūpama Sutta* at this point speaks of aloofness from the attraction of food for one who is of ‘such virtue, such nature and such wisdom’.¹² Since the preceding passage spoke about perfect confidence in the three jewels, representative of stream-entry, the introductory reference to ‘such virtue, such nature and such wisdom’ can only refer to the same level of awakening. Hence the formulation in the *Vatthūpama Sutta* does not lend support to the commentarial explanation.

A similar passage occurs also in the Ekottara Āgama parallel to the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, where it comes after the achievement of liberation, at the end of an otherwise quite similar exposition.¹³ Unlike the *Vatthūpama Sutta*, the Ekottara Āgama discourse provides some background to the setting of the discourse, reporting that the arrival of the brahmin Sundarika Bhāradvāja formed the occasion for the Buddha to deliver this discourse. The same brahmin appears in the final part of the Pali and the Chinese versions, questioning the Buddha about purification through bathing in sacred rivers.

According to the Ekottara Āgama account, this brahmin felt quite confident of his own spiritual purity compared to the Buddha, as he only took simple food, while the Buddha sometimes partook of succu-

¹¹ Ps I 174.

¹² M 7 at M I 38,10: *evaṃ sīlo evaṃ dhammo evaṃ pañño*.

¹³ EĀ 13.5 at T II 574c5.

lent and rich food.¹⁴ The Buddha had become aware of this thought of the brahmin and thereupon delivered the *Vatthūpama Sutta*. With this background information in mind, the passage on taking delicious food, found in both versions, becomes more easily understandable, as it was just such taking of delicious food by the Buddha that had caused the brahmin to underestimate the degree of purification the Buddha had reached. By pointing out that eating delectable food does not constitute an obstruction, the Buddha apparently replied to the misconception of the brahmin, a misconception that according to the Chinese version had motivated the Buddha to deliver the entire discourse.

At times the absence of a particular statement or passage in the Chinese version helps to highlight that its occurrence in the Pali version does not fit the context very well. Such a case occurs in the *Sammāditthi Sutta*, a discourse expounding various ways of having right view. This discourse has parallels in the Madhyama Āgama, the Saṃyukta Āgama and in a Sanskrit fragment.¹⁵

The Pali version of this discourse concludes each exposition of how to have right view by bringing up the abandoning of the underlying tendencies to lust, irritation, and the conceited view ‘I am’, together with overcoming ignorance and making an end of *dukkha*.¹⁶ This passage does not occur at all in the Chinese and Sanskrit versions.

A closer consideration shows this statement to be out of context, since to overcome ignorance and to make an end of *dukkha* represent full awakening, whereas the topic of having right view is concerned with stream-entry.¹⁷ The Pali discourse follows each reference to overcoming ignorance and making an end of *dukkha* by declaring that ‘to that extent’ (*ettāvatā*) a noble disciple is endowed with right view and has gained perfect confidence in the teaching.¹⁸ Yet such right view and

¹⁴ EĀ 13.5 at T II 573c6.

¹⁵ MĀ 29 at T I 461b–464b; SĀ 344 at T II 94b–95c; and the Sanskrit fragments in C. Tripāṭhī, *Fünfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidānasamyyukta*, Sanskrittexte aus den Turfanfunden (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1962), pp. 187–197.

¹⁶ M 9 at M I 47,22, 48,14, 49,10,34; 50,14,29, 51,8,23, 52,3,21, 53,2,21, 54,1,16,33, 55,18.

¹⁷ M 9 at M I 46,22 speaks of being ‘endowed with perfect confidence in the *Dhammā*’ (*dhamme aveccappasādena samannāgato*) and of having ‘arrived at the true *Dhammā*’ (*āgato imam saddhammam*), expressions indicating that the reference is to stream-entry.

¹⁸ Adopting the translation for the occurrence of *ettāvatā* in the present passage given in

perfect confidence are already gained with stream-entry, at which stage the underlying tendencies are far from being abandoned, ignorance has not yet been fully overcome and the making an end of *dukkha* is still to be accomplished. Hence the expression ‘to that extent’ does not tally with the content of the passage to which it refers. This suggests that the Chinese and Sanskrit versions of this discourse, which do not have this passage at all, present a more convincing reading in this instance.

Once in a while a Chinese parallel may differ only slightly, yet even such small variations can set a different tone to a particular statement. Such a case occurs in relation to the *Cūḷasīhanāda Sutta*, a discourse which begins with the Buddha encouraging his monks to roar the lion’s roar that the four grades of (true) recluses can be found only in his dispensation, other teachings being devoid of (true) recluses.¹⁹ A parallel to this discourse, found in the Ekottara Āgama, has this statement in a slightly different manner.

While in the Pali version the lion’s roar occurs right at the beginning of the discourse, its rationale being an imaginary meeting with outside wanderers, the Ekottara Āgama discourse reports an actual encounter and challenge by other wanderers and comes to the lion’s roar only at the end of its exposition. According to the Ekottara Āgama version of this lion’s roar, the Buddha simply pointed out that the four grades of (true) recluses found among the monks cannot be surpassed by anyone else, without however proclaiming that the teachings of others are devoid of (true) recluses.²⁰

Compared to the Pali presentation, the Ekottara Āgama version of the lion’s roar comes as a natural climax at the end of its exposition and moreover does not make a disparaging statement about other teachings, circumstances which make its version of the lion’s roar breathe a less competitive spirit. Such would be more in harmony with the attitude recommended in the Pali and Chinese versions of the *Araṇāvibhaṅga Sutta*, according to which the Buddha advised his monks to teach the *Dhamma* without disparaging others. In both versions he explained that

CPD, s.v. *ettāvata*, II, p. 657.

¹⁹ M 11 at M 1 63,28.

²⁰ EĀ 27.2 at T 11 644b15. Another parallel, MĀ 103 at T 1 590b7, corresponds more closely to the Pali version.

to disparage others instead of teaching the *Dhamma* occurs when a statement is made in such a way as to belittle others.²¹ Taking a lead from the two versions of the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta*, to proclaim the superiority of the four types of true recluse found among the Buddhist monks would fall under ‘teaching the *Dhamma*’, but to then declare that all other teachings are devoid of (true) recluses might seem to be moving to some extent in the direction of what the *Araṇavibhaṅga Sutta* considers as ‘disparagement’.

Though the Buddha could at times be quite outspoken, his general attitude towards other contemporary teachers was never competitive. This non-contentious attitude can be seen in the Pali and Chinese versions of the *Upāli Sutta*, when a well-known and influential supporter of the Jains became a follower of the Buddha. Upāli expressed his pleasant surprise when the Buddha, instead of using Upāli’s conversion for propaganda purposes, advised him to carefully consider what he was about to do, even asking him to continue supporting the Jaina monks with alms, as he had done earlier.²² Such a magnanimous attitude in regard to other recluses and wanderers would fit the Buddha better than the competitive tone of the lion’s roar attributed to him in the Pali version of the *Cūlasihanāda Sutta*.

Taking into account the Chinese discourses may sometimes help to enhance the force of a simile. Such a case occurs in relation to the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*, a penetrative analysis of the perceptual process by Mahākaccāna. The Pali version of this discourse concludes with Ānanda delivering the simile of the honey ball after which the discourse takes its name, comparing the delight to be gained on examining this instruction to a man who, exhausted by hunger, comes upon a ball of honey.²³ According to the Madhyama Āgama version of this discourse, however,

²¹ M 139 at M III 231,27 and its parallel MĀ 169 at T I 701c17.

²² M 56 at M I 379,3–16. The Chinese parallel to the *Upāli Sutta*, MĀ 133 at T I 630a25, even reports the Buddha advising Upāli not to proclaim his conversion at all, in addition to recommending him to continue supporting the *Jaina* monks. A similar instance of the Buddha’s non-contentious attitude can be found in the *Siha Sutta*, A 8:12 at A IV 185,9 (= Vin I 236,14). In the case of A 8:12, however, the Chinese parallel MĀ 18 at T I 442b14 does not report the Buddha’s magnanimous attitude.

²³ M 18 at M I 114,9.

the Buddha himself came out with this simile, indicating that just as from any morsel of a ball of honey one will get a sweet taste, so too one can get the taste of this instruction by contemplating any of the six sense doors, be it the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, or the mind door.²⁴

Compared to the Madhyama Āgama presentation of this simile, the Pali version's image of a man exhausted by hunger seems less persuasive, since someone exhausted by hunger would probably prefer substantial food to something sweet. The Madhyama Āgama version brings out the simile of the honey ball with increased clarity, indicating that the penetrative analysis of the perceptual process offered in this discourse can lead to realization when applied to any sense-door, just as a honey ball is sweet wherever one may bite it.

At times, the Pali and Chinese versions of a discourse may proceed quite similarly but then differ in their respective concluding sections. This happens in the case of the *Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta*, a discourse describing five methods for overcoming unwholesome thoughts. The Pali and Chinese versions of this discourse conclude by indicating that practice of these five methods will lead to mastery over one's thoughts. The Pali version continues by proclaiming that in this way an end of *dukkha* has been made and craving has been eradicated, a proclamation not found in its Chinese counterpart. On reading this statement in the Pali version, one might wonder if mere control of thoughts has on its own already led to full awakening.

A closer inspection of this Pali passage reveals that the overcoming of craving and the making an end of *dukkha* are formulated in the past tense, whereas the previously mentioned mastery over one's thoughts stands in the future tense.²⁵ For freedom from *dukkha* and craving to stand in a meaningful relationship to mastery of thoughts, the usage of the tenses should be the opposite way. This suggests the reference to

²⁴ MĀ 115 at T 1 604c22. Another parallel, EĀ 40.10 at T 11 743c23, agrees however with the Pali version on attributing the simile to *Ānanda*.

²⁵ M 20 at M 1 122,2 reads *yaṃ vitakkaṃ ākaṅkhiṣṣati, taṃ vitakkaṃ vitakkessati*, but then continues with *acchecchi taṅhaṃ, vāvattayi saṃyojanaṃ, sammā mānābhisaṃmayā antam akāsi dukhassa*. The relevant Chinese passage is in MĀ 101 at T 1 589a6.

full awakening to be out of place in the Pali version, as indicated by its absence from the parallel Chinese version.

Sometimes the Chinese and the Pali versions disagree about the identity of the speaker of a particular statement. Such a disagreement occurs in relation to the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta*, a discourse in which the great disciples extol their personal qualities in a poetic contest on a moonlit night. The Pali version of the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta* reports Mahāmoggallāna as speaking in praise of the ability to reply to questions on the *Abhidhamma* without faltering.²⁶ Judging from what can be known about Mahāmoggallāna from other discourses, this kind of ability does not appear to be a typical trait of this particular great disciple. According to the list of eminent disciples found in the Aṅguttara Nikāya and in its parallel in the Ekottara Āgama, a typical trait of Mahāmoggallāna would rather be the exercise of supernormal powers.²⁷ Hence it comes as no surprise that the three Chinese versions of the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta* and a Sanskrit fragment all report him speaking in praise of supernormal powers instead.²⁸

Regarding the statement extolling the ability to answer questions on deeper aspects of the Dhamma, according to the Madhyama Āgama parallel to the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta* its authorship should be attributed to Mahākaccāna instead.²⁹ The Pali version of the *Mahāgosiṅga Sutta*, however, does not report his presence at this meeting of great disciples at all.

At times the Pali and Chinese versions do not differ on the identity of the speaker, but on the context within which a particular statement was made. Such a disagreement occurs between the *Cūlasaccaka Sutta* and its parallel in the Saṃyukta Āgama. The topic of these two discourses is an

²⁶ M 32 at M I 214,24: *dve bhikkhū abhidhammakathaṃ kathenti ... aññamaññassa pañhaṃ puttā vīssajjenti no ca saṃsādentī.*

²⁷ A 1:14 at A I 23,17 and EĀ 4.2 at T II 557b6.

²⁸ MĀ 184 at T I 727c16; EĀ 37.3 at T II 711a18; T 154 at T III 81b29; and the Sanskrit fragment cat. no. 1346 v3–6 in E. Waldschmidt (ed.), *Sanskrithandschriften aus den Turfanfunden*, Teil v (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1985), p. 233.

²⁹ MĀ 184 at T I 727b23. On this passage in MĀ 184 cf. also M. Anesaki, 'The Four Buddhist Āgamas in Chinese', *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan* 35 (1908), pp. 1–149 (57), and T. Minh Chau, *The Chinese Madhyama Āgama and the Pali Majjhima Nikāya* (Delhi: Motilal, 1991), p. 76.

encounter between the Buddha and the debater Saccaka. Before meeting the Buddha, Saccaka had publicly boasted that he was going to floor the Buddha with his debating skills, a boast which turned into utter defeat during their actual meeting. Once defeated, Saccaka publicly admitted the foolishness of his attempt to challenge the Buddha. Saccaka then invited the Buddha and the monks for a meal, requesting the Licchavi householders to help out by providing the food required for this meal.

According to the Pali account, when the meal was over Saccaka wanted to dedicate the merit of the food offering to the Licchavi householders.³⁰ The Buddha thereupon told him that the Licchavi householders will only receive the merit to be gained by giving to Saccaka, who was not free from lust, hate and delusion, while Saccaka himself will receive the merit to be gained by giving to the Buddha, who was free from lust, hate and delusion. Since according to the same Pali discourse Saccaka was considered a saint by his contemporaries, the Buddha's public declaration must have appeared to Saccaka as insulting and offensive. One would not expect the Buddha to make such a statement when Saccaka had publicly admitted the foolishness of his earlier attempt to challenge the Buddha, had just provided him with a meal and was formulating an aspiration to share the merit acquired by this food offering.

The Saṃyukta Āgama discourse reports the Buddha making a similar statement, but in a different context.³¹ According to its account, once the meal was over and the monks were on their way back to the monastery, a discussion arose among them about the merit gained by Saccaka and the Licchavis respectively. Back at the monastery, the monks posed this question to the Buddha, who then gave the same explanation as in the Pali version. With the Buddha making this statement to the monks in private and not publicly to Saccaka, the Chinese version avoids presenting the Buddha in the almost resentful attitude attributed to him by the Pali version.

³⁰ M 35 at M I 236,34.

³¹ SĀ 110 at T II 37b22.

Often enough the differences between the Pali and the Chinese version of a particular discourse are of relatively little consequence for our understanding of the essentials of the early Buddhist teachings. Nevertheless, such differences can help to clarify the details of a particular setting. Such a case occurs in relation to a visit paid by Mahāmoggallāna to Sakka, the king of the gods. According to the account of this visit found in the *Cūḷataṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*, at the moment of Mahāmoggallāna's arrival Sakka was endowed with 'five hundred (types of) heavenly music'.³² When Sakka took Mahāmoggallāna to see his palace, the celestial maidens inhabiting this palace felt embarrassed on seeing Mahāmoggallāna approach and retired into their rooms, comparable to the embarrassment experienced by a married woman on seeing her father-in-law.

A few aspects of this description are not entirely clear in the Pali account, such as what the nature of these five hundred types of music might be and why the celestial maidens in Sakka's palace should feel ashamed comparable to a married woman when seeing her father-in-law. Since according to Indian custom a woman had to go to live with her husband's family, one may wonder why she should feel ashamed whenever she meets her father-in-law. In view of the sometimes rather crowded housing conditions in India this would put her into a state of continuous embarrassment.

According to a Chinese parallel of the *Cūḷataṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*, found in the Saṃyukta Āgama, at the time of Mahāmoggallāna's arrival Sakka was in the company of five hundred celestial maidens, who were singing.³³ This helps to clarify the nature of the 'five hundred types of music'. The same Chinese version narrates that when seeing Sakka approach the palace from afar, the celestial maidens inhabiting the palace came forward dancing and singing.³⁴ On coming closer they realized that he was in the company of a monk, which caused them to withdraw in embarrassment. That is, they were embarrassed because

³² M 37 at M I 252,18: *dibbehi pañcahi turīyasatehi samappito*.

³³ SĀ 505 at T II 133c2+4.

³⁴ SĀ 505 at T II 133c16.

they had acted in the presence of a monk in a way they felt to be improper.

The simile illustrating their embarrassment recurs in another Chinese discourse, which specifies that the woman embarrassed on meeting her father-in-law had recently married.³⁵ This additional qualification helps to bring out the simile more clearly, since according to a discourse found in the Aṅguttara Nikāya a newly married woman will at first be abashed and ashamed in the presence of her in-laws, but as time goes on she acquires more self-confidence until finally she may even order them around.³⁶ These few additional details round off the description of Mahāmoggallāna's visit to the king of the gods.

As a last example I would like to take up the final two discourses of the *Mūlapaṇṇāsa*, both of which have *Māra* as one of their protagonists. The first of these two discourses is the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta*, a discourse narrating that *Māra* had 'taken possession' of a member of Brahmā's assembly, causing this member of the *Brahmā* world to reprimand the Buddha.³⁷ According to the same discourse, on this occasion *Māra* had been able to extend his control even over Brahmā himself.³⁸ This is remarkable, since according to other discourses the *jhānas* and therewith the corresponding realms of the Brahmā world are clearly outside *Māra*'s range of control.³⁹ Hence one would not expect *Māra* to be able to exercise control over the Brahmā world, or be able to take possession of one of its members.

The second of these two discourses is the *Māratajjanīya Sutta*, which reports a previous *Māra* harassing the monk disciples of Buddha Kaku-sandha. The Pali version of the *Māratajjanīya Sutta* describes how, because of being 'possessed' by *Māra*, a group of householders reviled and abused monks. A boy, similarly 'possessed' by *Māra*, even struck an *arahant* monk on the head, shedding his blood.

³⁵ MĀ 30 at T I 465a18: 初迎新婦.

³⁶ A 4:74 at A II 78,20.

³⁷ M 49 at M I 326,34: *Māro ... aññataraṃ Brahmaṃpārisajjaṃ anvāvisitvā.*

³⁸ M 49 at M I 327,30: *yo e' eva pāpīma Brahmā yā ca Brahmaṃpārisā ... sabbe va tava vasagatā.*

³⁹ Cf. e.g. M 25 at M I 159,10 and its Chinese parallel MĀ 178 at T I 720a9; or A 9:39 at A IV 434,1.

The Pali discourse reports that, because of abusing the monks the householders were reborn in hell, while the boy's harming of the *arahant* monk caused Māra to be reborn in hell. This is puzzling, since Māra had 'possessed' both the householders and the boy,⁴⁰ yet in the first case the householders had to undergo the karmic retribution themselves, while in the second case Māra reaped the karmic fruits.

The Chinese versions of these two discourses present the situation differently. According to them, in none of these cases did *Māra* actually 'take possession' of someone. In relation to the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta*, according to the Chinese parallel *Māra* himself reprimanded the Buddha, pretending to be one of the members of Brahmā's assembly.⁴¹ Regarding the events in the *Māratajjanīya Sutta*, altogether three Chinese parallels agree that Māra only instigated the householders to pour abuse on the monks,⁴² whereas *Māra* himself was responsible for physically harming the *arahant* disciple, an act he undertook by manifesting himself in a human form.⁴³ The Chinese versions agree with the *Māratajjanīya Sutta* on the householders' having to suffer the retribution for the abuse and on Māra himself being reborn in hell, undergoing the dire fruits of harming an *arahant*. In this way the Chinese presentation of the role Māra plays in the *Brahmanimantanika Sutta* and in the *Māratajjanīya Sutta* seems to better accord with the range of his power and with the principle of karma and its fruit.

With these few selected examples I hope to have been able to show how the Chinese Āgamas can enhance our understanding of a particular Pali discourse. Since the purpose of the present article is to highlight the potential of the Chinese Āgamas as a complement to the Pali Nikāyas, I have concentrated on cases where the Chinese discourses help to clarify the Pali versions. The same applies certainly also the other way round, in fact many a passage in the Chinese Āgamas remains obscure until one turns to its Pali parallel for help and clarification.

⁴⁰ M 50 at M I 334,11: *māro brāhmaṇagahapatike anvāvisi*, and at M I 336,33: *māro aññataraṇ kumāraṇ anvāvisitvā*.

⁴¹ MĀ 78 at T I 547b24.

⁴² MĀ 131 at T I 621a21; T 66 at T I 865a19; and T 67 at T I 867b14.

⁴³ MĀ 131 at T I 622a7; T 66 at T I 866a8; and T 67 at T I 868a11.

In the end, the discourses found in the Pali Nikāyas and in the Chinese Āgamas are both but products of an oral tradition. Due to the inevitable inconsistencies resulting from oral transmission, these two collections are probably best made use of in conjunction in order to fully explore the legacy of early Buddhism.

Abbreviations

- A *Aṅguttara Nikāya*
 CPD V. Trenckner, et al., *A Critical Pali Dictionary* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Academy, 1924–)
 EĀ *Ekottara Āgama*
 Khp *Khuddakapāṭha*
 M *Majjhima Nikāya*
 MĀ *Madhyama Āgama*
 Ps *Paṭṭhañcasūdanī*
 S *Samyutta Nikāya*
 SĀ *Samyukta Āgama*
 T Taishō
 Vism *Visuddhimagga*

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