

The Chinese Madhyama-āgama and the Pāli Majjhima-Nikāya – In the Footsteps of Thich Minh Chau

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Introduction

The comparative study of the discourses found in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and their counterparts in the Chinese *Āgamas* is probably one of the most promising areas in the field of early Buddhist studies. A significant contribution to this field emerged at the Nava Nalanda Mahāvihāra, founded in 1951 by Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap, who served as director from its inception until 1955 and again from 1965 to 1973. This contribution was a PhD dissertation submitted by Bhikṣu Thich Minh Chau, which compared selected discourses from the Chinese *Madhyama-āgama* with their counterparts in the Pāli *Majjhima-nikāya*. Originally published in the early 1960s in Vietnam, it was republished in 1991 by Motilal Banarsidass in India and thereby made readily available to an international readership.

The present article, written in commemoration of the centenary birth of the founder of the Nava Nalanda Mahāvihāra, Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap,¹ will review some of the findings of Thich Minh Chau.

In the history of Buddhist studies, the research by Thich Minh Chau appears to be the first comparative study between an entire *Āgama* collection and its Pāli counterpart. Thich Minh Chau's study offers a detailed comparison of those discourses from the *Madhyama-āgama* that, according to the listing of parallels by Chizen Akanuma, have counterparts in the *Majjhima-nikāya*.² Thich

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¹ As the present issue of the *Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* is dedicated to commemorating Bhikkhu Jagdish Kashyap, my study of the bodhisattva notion, announced in the last issue, will be published only in the next issue (2009).

² Akanuma 1990. For a revision of Akanuma's identification of parallels between the *Madhyama-āgama* and the *Majjhima-nikāya* cf. Anālayo 2006.

Minh Chau offers general observations on the two collections and explores their differences and similarities in relation to central topics of early Buddhism. He translated in their entirety a selection of fifteen discourses from the Chinese and juxtaposed them with their Pāli equivalents. In an appendix, Thich Minh Chau offers helpful information on the translator of the *Madhyama-āgama* and the terminology the latter employed for translation.

Thich Minh Chau's groundbreaking work has become a standard reference in scholarly circles and continues to be an inspiration for those interested in this field. As his research was completed in the early 1960s, with the rapid advance of Buddhist studies and research it is inevitable that some of his conclusions are no longer tenable. This is particularly true for his perspective on the degree of influence exercised by the early Buddhist schools on the texts they transmitted. Thich Minh Chau seems to perceive school affiliation as the central source of variations found between parallel versions of a discourse, without giving much room to the possibility of transmission errors.

In what follows, a few instances that betray this tendency will be taken up for examination, in an attempt to show that Thich Minh Chau's conclusions do not stand closer scrutiny. This examination, however, is in no way intended to diminish the importance of Thich Minh Chau's contribution. Rather, my observations are meant as a tribute to Thich Minh Chau's scholarship, continuing his research by developing an alternative perspective on the dynamics responsible for the formation of early Buddhist literature.

The instances that will be examined are:

1. The question of the degree to which the roles of Mahākassapa and Sāriputta in the discourses collections of the Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda traditions reflect the influence of the respective schools.

2. The hypothesis that descriptions of the Buddha taking a rest in front of the monks were deliberately omitted by the Theravādins.

3. The significance of the absence of Chinese *Āgama* parallels to Pāli discourses, in particular the relation of the lack of a Chinese version of the *Jīvaka-sutta* to vegetarianism.

4. The unusual conclusion of the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*, which reports that the monks did not delight in the discourse, and the probable reasons why this conclusion is not found in the *Madhyama-āgama* version.

5. The supposition that the Buddha's instruction to his son Rāhula in the *Madhyama-āgama* expresses decisively different perspectives on the significance of morality held by the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda traditions.

6. The question of how far the usage of the terms *bodhisatta* and *thera* in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and Chinese *Āgamas* should be understood as expressions of sectarian concerns.

1. The Role of Mahākassapa and Sāriputta

Thich Minh Chau examines various aspects of the *Madhyama-āgama* that, in his view, make it probable that this collection was transmitted by the Sarvāstivāda tradition. Having highlighted Mahākassapa's status as "the first and foremost ācariya of the Sarvāstivāda sect, while Sāriputta is considered to be the first ācariya of the Theravāda sect", Minh Chau (1991: 21) notes that the *Anupada-sutta*, which praises Sāriputta as the disciple who is born from the Blessed One's mouth and who keeps rolling the wheel of *Dhamma*, does not have a Chinese parallel. Thich Minh Chau then concludes that "as the Buddha ... extolled elder Sāriputta so highly, the Sarvāstivādins might drop this sutta from their Canon or it might be interpolated by the Theravādins in their Canon".

Yet, another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse also states that Sāriputta kept rolling the wheel of *Dhamma*.³ Even the long praise of Sāriputta's wisdom, found at the beginning of the *Anupada-sutta*, recurs in similar words in several *Madhyama-āgama* discourses.⁴ Thus the *Madhyama-āgama* does not seem to consistently underrate Sāriputta's status.

Moreover, a discourse in the *Samyutta-nikāya* reckons Mahākassapa as having been born from the Blessed One's mouth, employing exactly the same terms used to describe Sāriputta in the

³ MĀ 121 at T I 610b9: 舍梨子, 我所轉法輪, 汝復能轉.

⁴ MN 111 at MN III 25,5. MĀ 27 at T I 458b15; MĀ 28 at T I 461b10; MĀ 31 at T I 467b10; and MĀ 121 at T I 610b5.

Anupada-sutta.⁵ Thus this Pāli discourse shows quite a positive attitude towards Mahākassapa. Conversely, other Pāli discourses even present a critical perspective in regard to Sāriputta. One example is the *Cātumā-sutta* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, which records the Buddha explicitly voicing criticism of Sāriputta.⁶

A particularly telling case is the *Dhānañjāni-sutta* and its *Madhyama-āgama* parallel. Both discourses report that Sāriputta had given a teaching to the dying Brahmin Dhānañjāni due to which the latter was reborn in a Brahmā world. The two versions differ, however, in their evaluation of Sāriputta's teaching. According to the *Madhyama-āgama* version, the Buddha praised Sāriputta's wisdom and explained to the assembled monks that Sāriputta had successfully taught Dhānañjāni the path to the Brahmā world, adding that if he had continued to teach the Brahmin further, Dhānañjāni would have understood the Dharma.⁷

The Pāli version, however, gives a rather different evaluation. It points out that Sāriputta had left after establishing Dhānañjāni in the "inferior Brahmā world", even though "there still was more to be done by him".⁸ This criticism is voiced altogether three times in the Pāli discourse. At first the reciters themselves express this criticism as part of their narration of what happened.⁹ Then the Buddha makes the same point to the assembled monks, when Sāriputta is approaching them. Once Sāriputta arrives, the Buddha directly asks him why he had left after establishing Dhānañjāni only in the inferior Brahmā world, even though there was still more for him to do. Thus the present example almost gives

⁵ SN 16.11 at SN II 221,22: *Bhagavato putto oraso mukhato jāto dhammajo dhammanimmito dhammadāyādo*, which corresponds word by word to the praises of Sāriputta in MN 111 at MN III 29,11.

⁶ MN 67 at MN I 459,19, a criticism also reported in its parallel EĀ 45.2 at T II 771b6.

⁷ MĀ 27 at T I 458b17: 舍梨子比丘成就實慧, 此舍梨子比丘教化梵志 陀然, 為說梵 天法來, 若復上化者, 速知法如法。

⁸ MN 97 at MN II 195,20: *sati uttarikaraṇīye, hīne brahmaloke patitthāpetvā utthāy' āsanā pakkāmi*, a description repeated at MN II 195,25 and MN II 196,1.

⁹ For the reciters to include this criticism in their narrative description is particularly noteworthy, since in general the narrative voice in the discourses tends to simply relate circumstances without explicitly evaluating them.

the impression as if the Theravāda tradition had a less positive attitude towards Sāriputta than the Sarvāstivāda reciters.

The above variations reveal the lack of uniformity in the way the discourse collections of the Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda schools present Sāriputta and Mahākassapa. Thus the role assumed by these two disciples in various discourses need not be an expression of the influence of the school that transmitted the respective discourse. That is, the esteem in which Mahākassapa and Sāriputta were respectively held by the Sarvāstivāda and Theravāda schools may not have had such far-reaching consequences as to lead to the wholesale omission of discourses.

2. The Buddha's Deportment and the *Dhammadāyāda-sutta*

Thich Minh Chau points out that in the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel to the *Dhammadāyāda-sutta* the Buddha takes a rest by lying down in front of the monks, whereas the same is not recorded in the Pāli parallel.¹⁰ He also notes that a similar description is found in another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, which does not have a Pāli counterpart. From this he infers that "that the Pāli compilers were not happy over these attitudes of the Buddha and dropped" the corresponding passage in the former case and the whole discourse in the latter case (Minh Chau 1991: 30). In contrast, for the Sarvāstivādins "the dignified way which the Buddha adopted in lying down in front of the monks had nothing questionable", which "justified the Sarvāstivādins in preserving these details".

The *Dhammadāyāda-sutta* has another parallel in the *Ekottarika-āgama*, which also does not describe the Buddha lying down. Instead, it agrees with the Pāli version that the Buddha just retired to his dwelling.¹¹ Moreover, several Pāli discourses do describe the Buddha lying down to take a rest in front of the monks.¹² This makes it less probable that the absence of such a description in the *Dhammadāyāda-sutta* and the lack of a Pāli parallel to the other *Madhyama-āgama* discourse could be an

¹⁰ MĀ 88 at T I 570b22 and MN 3 at MN I 13,34.

¹¹ EĀ 18.3 at T II 588a25.

¹² DN 33 at DN III 209,18; MN 53 at MN I 354,25; SN 35.202 at SN IV 184,8; and AN 10.67 at AN V 123,1. Minh Chau (1991: 30) seems to have been aware of such instances, as he notes that "the Theravādins referred to these details very rarely", thus he did not base his argument on assuming a total absence of such descriptions in Pāli discourses.

expression of a wish of the compilers of the Pāli canon to erase such descriptions.

3. Vegetarianism and the *Jīvaka-sutta*

The hypothesis that certain discourses were dropped under the pressure of sectarian influence comes up again in relation to the *Jīvaka-sutta*. Minh Chau (1991: 31-2) reasons that "the dropping from all the Chinese Āgamas of the Pāli sutta N° 55, *Jīvaka-sutta*, in which the Buddha was reported to allow the monks to take three kinds of meat, confirms the Sarvāstivāda's attitude against meat-eating". "This difference in attitude towards meat-eating in the two versions serves to explain why now-a-days meat-eating is allowed for the monks of countries following the Theravāda tradition, while the monks of such countries as China, Korea, Vietnam observe vegetarianism faithfully".

Yet, to take the absence of a parallel to the *Jīvaka-sutta* to be an expression of Sarvāstivāda vegetarianism would not fit too well with the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*, which mentions the three instances when meat should not be consumed in the same way as the *Jīvaka-sutta*; both thereby indicating that, apart from the stipulated conditions, meat-eating is allowable.¹³ Had vegetarianism in the Sarvāstivāda tradition been strong enough to lead to a suppression of the *Jīvaka-sutta*, one would expect it to have exerted its influence also on the *Vinaya*.

In fact, the early texts of the different Buddhist schools seem to be in general agreement that meat-eating is allowable. The only recorded instance of vegetarianism being advocated appears to come from the schismatic Devadatta.¹⁴ According to Ruegg (1980: 236-7), it seems probable that "vegetarianism became established in Buddhism ... in close connection with ... the *tathāgatagarbha* doctrine", which would make it unlikely that the idea of

¹³ T 1435 at T XXIII 190b9 and T XXIII 264c27; corresponding to the description in MN 55 at MN I 369,4. Moreover, T 1435 at T XXIII 91b21 includes meat and fish in a listing of allowable food, and T 1435 at T XXIII 190b14 agrees with Vin I 238,8 on reckoning meat consumption apart from the prohibited three instances as "pure", 三種淨, *tikoṭiparisuddha*; cf. also Prasad (1979); Schmithausen (2005: 188-9) and Waldschmidt (1967: 104-5).

¹⁴ For a survey of the points raised by Devadatta according to the different *Vinayas* cf. Bareau (1991: 108) and Mukherjee (1966: 76-77).

vegetarianism could have exerted a determining influence on the compilation of the *Āgama* collections.

Independent of the exact time at which vegetarianism became a tenet of general importance in the history of Buddhism, the absence of a parallel to the *Jīvaka-sutta* in the Chinese *Āgamas* would not be related to such issues, as among Sanskrit fragments of the (Mūla-) sarvāstivāda *Dirgha-āgama* a counterpart to the *Jīvaka-sutta* has been found.¹⁵ These fragments have preserved the passage on the conditions for the consumption of meat that Thich Minh Chau assumes to be the reason for the absence of a version of this discourse in the Sarvāstivāda tradition.¹⁶

Thus the absence of a parallel to the *Jīvaka-sutta* among the discourses found in the Chinese *Āgamas* does not seem to be related to ideological issues, but rather appears to be an outcome of the circumstance that the four *Āgamas* belong to different schools. The *Madhyama-āgama* collection preserved in Chinese does not have a parallel to the *Jīvaka-sutta* because the Sarvāstivādins probably had a version of this discourse in their *Dirgha-āgama* collection, a collection not preserved in Chinese. The *Dirgha-āgama* preserved in Chinese translation is generally held to belong to the Dharmaguptaka tradition.¹⁷ This collection does not include a version of the *Jīvaka-sutta*, quite possibly because this discourse was found in another *Āgama* of the Dharmaguptaka tradition, perhaps in its *Madhyama-āgama*, similar to the placing given to this discourse in the Theravāda tradition.

The *Jīvaka-sutta* is not the only such instance of Pāli discourses that are without a counterpart in the Chinese *Āgamas*.

¹⁵ Cf. the survey in Hartmann (2004: 127) and the *uddāna* in Hartmann (2002: 138); cf. also fragment SHT VI 1525 V1-R2, which according to the identification in SHT IX p. 439 belongs to a version of the *Jīvaka-sutta*.

¹⁶ According to a personal communication from L.S. Cousins, based on a preliminary transcript prepared by L.S. Cousins and Somadeva Vasudeva of the relevant fragment from the newly discovered *Dirgha-āgama* collection, this fragment preserves parts of a description of the three instances when the consumption of meat is not appropriate, namely when it is seen, heard or can be inferred that the animal has been killed for the sake of providing food for the monk.

¹⁷ Bareau (1966: 50); Brough (2001: 50); Demiéville (1951: 252-253); Enomoto 1986: 25; Lü (1963: 242); Mayeda (1985: 97); Prasad (1993: 50); Waldschmidt (1980: 136); and Yin-shun (1983: 720).

Even in the same chapter of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, the *Gahapativagga*, several more such cases can be found.

One such case is the *Apaṇṇaka-sutta*, parts of which have similarly been preserved in Sanskrit fragments.¹⁸ Another example is the *Kukkuravatika-sutta*, which has no known parallel either in the Chinese *Āgamas* or in Sanskrit fragments. Nevertheless, an exposition that seems to stem from a version of this discourse can be found in a *sūtra* quotation preserved in Śamathadeva's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, extant in Tibetan.¹⁹ Moreover, the *Saṅgītiparyāya*'s comment on the four types of action treated in the *Kukkuravatika-sutta* explicitly refers to the protagonist of this discourse, Puṇṇa, who was observing the ascetic practice of behaving like a cow.²⁰ There can be little doubt that this passage has a version of the *Kukkuravatika-sutta* in mind.

A last example, still from the same *Gahapati-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya*, is the *Abhayarājakumāra-sutta*, which has no known parallel either in the Chinese *Āgamas* or in Śamathadeva's commentary. Nevertheless, parts of this discourse have been preserved in a *sūtra* quotation in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-(upadeśa)-śāstra*.²¹

Thus the *Gahapati-vagga* of the *Majjhima-nikāya* has a number of discourses that are without counterpart in the Chinese *Āgamas*, yet Sanskrit fragments or *sūtra* quotations preserved in

¹⁸ MN 60 at MN I 400-413 and the Sanskrit fragments SHT III 966 (identified in SHT VII p. 272); SHT IV 165 folio 32 and folio 37 (identified in SHT VI p. 212); SHT VI 1261; SHT VI 1579; Hoernle frag. 149/add. 135 and frag. bleu 190 of the Pelliot collection in Hartmann (1991: 62-64); frag. Or. 15003/44 from the Hoernle collection in Wille (2006: 79). The same is the case for the *Kandaraka-sutta*, MN 51 at MN I 339-349, though here it is uncertain if the relevant Sanskrit fragments are parallels to MN 51 or to one of the other Pāli discourses that expound the same theme; cf. SHT I 422; SHT III 879; SHT III 996; SHT IV 165 folio 27; SHT V 1153; and SHT V 1359. Other Pāli discourses that treat the same topic are DN 33 at DN III 232,21; MN 60 at MN I 411,28; MN 94 at MN II 159,5; and AN 4.198 at AN II 205,23.

¹⁹ Q *mngon pa tu* 193b8, translated in Skilling (1979).

²⁰ T 1536 at T XXVI 396a8 notes that the Buddha gave this exposition of the four types of action to 圓滿, the observer of the cow conduct, 牛戒, corresponding to *Puṇṇo govatiko* mentioned in MN 57 at MN I 387,9.

²¹ T 1509 at T XXV 321b15-25. On an as yet unpublished Sanskrit fragment parallel cf. Hartmann (1992: 28).

Chinese or Tibetan sources document the existence of parallel versions. This goes to show that the absence of a discourse from the *Āgamas* may well be due to differences in the distribution of discourses among the four discourse collections transmitted by various Buddhist schools. Since the four *Āgamas* translated into Chinese stem from different schools, such variations in distribution have affected the range of discourses preserved in Chinese translation.

4. The Conclusion of the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*

In relation to the unusual concluding section of the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*, according to which the monks did not delight in the Buddha's exposition, Minh Chau (1991: 204) notes that the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse identified by Chizen Akanuma as the parallel version instead employs the standard conclusion to a discourse, namely, that the monks were delighted with the Buddha's exposition.²² Thich Minh Chau then reasons that the negation *na* "might have been used to earmark its [the discourse's] expunging from the Pāli Tipiṭaka, but the later Pāli compilers forgot to do so". Yet, that the monks did not delight in the discourse is also recorded in an *Ekottarika-āgama* parallel to the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta*.²³

This rather unusual ending was also known to the Pāli commentators, who provide an explanation for it. They report that the Buddha had preached this discourse to humble the pride of a group of five-hundred monks.²⁴ The monks did not delight in the discourse, the commentary explains, because they were unable to understand what the Buddha had taught them. On this explanation, their unusual reaction could indeed have been part of the discourse right from its outset.²⁵

²² MĀ 106 at T I 596c14: 彼諸比丘聞佛所說，歡喜奉行。

²³ EĀ 44.6 at T II 766b15: "at that time, the monks did not accept that teaching [given to them by the Buddha]", 是時諸比丘不受其教。

²⁴ Ps I 56, cf. also Jā 245 at Jā II 260. The commentary continues by indicating that on a later occasion the same group of monks received a short discourse by the Buddha, at the conclusion of which all of them became *arahants*, cf. AN 3.123 at AN I 276,23. EĀ 44.6 at T II 766b18 continues with an additional instruction to the monks on practising meditation in seclusion, as a result of which the monks do delight in what the Buddha has told them.

²⁵ According to an alternative interpretation suggested by Bodhi (1992: 20), Ñāṇananda (2005: 286) and Thanissaro (2002: 156), the monks might also

The Pāli editions of the *Mūlapariyāya-sutta* do in fact vary, as according to the PTS edition the monks did delight in the exposition given by the Buddha on this occasion.²⁶ This difference between texts within the Theravāda tradition suggests an explanation that might also apply to the *Madhyama-āgama* version, in that the natural levelling tendency of oral transmission or else the influence of editors (in the case of the PTS edition) or translators (in the case of the *Madhyama-āgama* version) led to a 'correction' of the concluding section in accordance with the standard phrase employed at the end of all other discourses: the monks delighted in what the Buddha said. That is, the lack of delight of the monks as the more unusual reading, *lectio difficilior*, is likely to be the more original version and there seems to be no need to assume that it expresses a wish to erase the discourse from the *Majjhima-nikāya* collection.

5. The Instruction to Rāhula

In relation to the *Ambalatthikārāhulovāda-sutta*, Minh Chau (1991: 34) notes that the instructions given by the Buddha to his son Rāhula in the Chinese version differ from its Pāli counterpart. The *Madhyama-āgama* instructions refer to a bodily action that is "pure" but at the same time is unwholesome and results in suffering, while a bodily action that is "not pure" is wholesome and does not result in suffering.²⁷ The corresponding Pāli passage does not envisage that a bodily action could be simultaneously pure and unwholesome, but simply describes an unwholesome bodily deed as one that results in affliction.²⁸

In an attempt to make sense of the *Madhyama-āgama* passage, Thich Minh Chau interprets the expression "pure" (淨) to

have been unable to delight in this penetrative discourse because they did understand its thorough undermining of various concepts to which they were still attached.

²⁶ While the PTS edition at MN I 6,24 reports that the monks delighted, according to B^c-MN I 8,19, C^c-MN I 18,9 and S^c-MN I 11,6 they did not delight in the exposition given by the Buddha.

²⁷ MĀ 14 at T I 436c11 and c14: 彼身業淨 ... 不善與苦果受於苦報 and 彼身業不淨 ... 善與樂果受於樂報.

²⁸ MN 61 at MN I 415,29: *akusalaṃ idaṃ kāyakammaṃ dukkhudrayaṃ dukkhavipākam*.

mean "permissible" and comments that "by the term permissible, the Chinese means that it is approved by the Scriptures or it does not infringe the monastic rules". He then concludes that "in the Sarvāstivāda definition there is wide scope for a liberal attitude towards the interpretation of the monastic regulations. We might find ... in this difference an explanation of the rigid orthodoxy of the Theravāda monks who up to now-a-days would frown on any attempt to relax or to interpret differently the established rules, while the Sarvāstivāda and its offshoot schools adopted a more or less liberal attitude toward the observance of monastic rules".

A problem with applying Thich Minh Chau's interpretation, however, is that according to the instruction for a past bodily action in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse a "permissible" (淨) bodily deed should be confessed, while a "not permissible" (不淨) bodily deed leads to the arising of joy.²⁹ This makes little sense, since for a "permissible" bodily deed there would be no need for confession. In fact, the idea to give precedence to other's welfare over the requirements of moral conduct belongs to a later phase of Buddhist thought and does not seem to be reflected in the early discourses.

In addition to the *Madhyama-āgama* and *Majjhima-nikāya* versions, the instructions to Rāhula can be found in several other texts: in the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivāda *Vinayavibhaṅga*, preserved in Chinese and Tibetan;³⁰ in a *sūtra* quotation in the *Vyākhyāyukti-ṭīkā*, preserved in Tibetan;³¹ and in a paraphrase in the *Śrāvakabhūmi*.³² All of these parallels agree with the Pāli discourse that the instructions are to refrain from a bodily deed that is harmful and unwholesome, without envisaging that such a deed could be reckoned as pure.

Thus the most straightforward explanation of this part of the *Madhyama-āgama* version would be to assume the occurrence of a translation error. Such an error could have happened due to

²⁹ MĀ 14 at T I 436c27.

³⁰ T 1442 at T XXIII 761a11: 是不善事, 是苦惡業, 能於未來感苦異熟. Q 'dul ba je 201a6: *bdag dang gzhan la gnod par 'gyur ba mi dge ba sdug bsngal 'byung ba rnam par smin pa sdug bsngal ba*.

³¹ Q *sems tsam i* 71a5: *gnod pa dang ldan pa mi dge ba sdug bsngal 'byung ba dang*.

³² T 1579 at T XXX 405b5: 自損及以損他是不善; Shukla (1973: 55,16): *vyābhādhikam ... ātmano vā parasya vā akuśalam*.

misinterpreting a *sandhi* in the Indic original, assuming that a particular word has, or else does not have, the negative prefix *a-*.

This type of error does, in fact, occur in another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, which describes the behaviour of a monk who is investigated for some misdeed. According to the *Madhyama-āgama* description, this monk might either display anger and say that he wants to act in accordance with the wishes of the community that investigates him; or else he might not display anger and say that he does not want to act in accordance with the wishes of the community.³³ According to the Pāli parallel, however, the monk who displays anger is also unwilling to act in accordance with the wishes of the community; while the one who does not display anger wants to act in accordance with the wishes of the community.³⁴ This is certainly the more logical presentation and in this case, too, the mistaking of a *sandhi* by the translator(s) of the *Madhyama-āgama* appears to be the most probable reason for the wording in the Chinese discourse.³⁵ Thus, rather than reflecting decisively different perspectives on the significance of morality held by the Sarvāstivāda and the Theravāda traditions, the present *Madhyama-āgama* passage may simply be the result of a translation error.

6. The Terms *Bodhisatta* and *Thera*

Thich Minh Chau notes that discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama* do not use the term *bodhisatta* when referring to the Buddha before his awakening, while corresponding passages in Pāli discourses regularly have the expression "being a bodhisattva", *bodhisattass' eva sato*.³⁶

Minh Chau (1991: 34) then suggests that "when the doctrine of [the] *Bodhisatta* found currency among some Mahāyānic schools and threatened to supersede the supremacy of arahantship, the Theravāda compilers introduced the term *Bodhisatta* into their

³³ MĀ 194 at T I 748b28 and c18: 瞋恚憎嫉, 發怒廣惡 ... 作如是說, 我今當作令眾歡喜而可意, and 不瞋恚憎嫉, 發怒廣惡 ... 不如是說, 我今當作令眾歡喜而可意.

³⁴ MN 65 at MN I 442,31 and 443,10.

³⁵ Karashima (1992: 263) notes the occurrence of this type of error in Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Saddharmapūṇḍarika-sūtra*, thereby confirming that such mistakes were not uncommon.

³⁶ For example in MN 19 at MN I 114,25; cf. also Kajiyama (1982: 257).

piṭakas and gave it the special meaning of the Buddha before his enlightenment and thus discarded any other meaning attributed to it by the Mahāyānists".

Thich Minh Chau's suggestion that the expression *bodhisatta* could be a later introduction by the Theravāda tradition does not receive support from the other *Āgamas*, since the corresponding term 菩薩 recurs as a referent to the Buddha's pre-awakening experiences in discourses found in the *Dirgha-āgama* and in the *Ekottarika-āgama*.³⁷ Sanskrit fragments of the *Mahāvādāna-sūtra* similarly use the term *bodhisattva* to refer to the pre-awakening experiences of the Buddha Vipassī; as do Sanskrit fragments of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* in relation to the pre-awakening experiences of Buddha Gotama.³⁸

Sanskrit fragments of the *Nagara-sūtra*, however, do not use the term *bodhisattva* in a context where the Buddha refers to his pre-awakening experiences.³⁹ This suggests the absence of 菩薩 or *bodhisattva* as a referent to the Buddha before his awakening to be a peculiarity of some reciter traditions, perhaps more particularly of reciters within the Sarvāstivāda tradition(s).⁴⁰

³⁷ DĀ 3 at T I 31b20; EĀ 24.2 at T II 616b9; EĀ 31.1 at T II 665b23; EĀ 38.4 at T II 718a14; EĀ 40.3 at T II 739a12 and EĀ 44.7 at T II 766c26, instances that comprise also his experiences in former lives, as is also the case for the usage of the term *bodhisatta* in Pāli discourses, cf. e.g. MN 123 at MN III 119,20. The above listing does not include an occurrence in SĀ 604 at T II 166c23, as this section of the *Samyukta-āgama* collection is a later text that was apparently inserted by mistake into the collection.

³⁸ Fragment 420d R5 in Waldschmidt (1953: 45), cf. also Fukita (2003: 53). Fragment S 360 folio 176 R3 in Waldschmidt (1950: 20).

³⁹ Fragment Pelliot Rouge 14 (7) V3 in Bongard-Levin (1996: 38), Lévi (1910: 438) and Tripāthī (1962: 95), translated in Cooper (1980: 55). The corresponding Pāli passage, SN 12.65 at SN II 104,8, does employ the term *bodhisatta*. The Chinese parallel SĀ 287 at T II 80b25 differs from both in as much as it explicitly relates this former unawakened time to a previous life of the Buddha, 宿命, cf. also Lamotte (1980: 122).

⁴⁰ Minh Chau (1991: 34 note 1) records an alternative opinion by Bapat that the absence of the term *bodhisattva* in some texts could be a deliberate omission in order "to show greater respect to the Buddha by applying that term [i.e. 'Buddha'] even to the period of his life before his enlightenment". In fact, MĀ 32 at T I 469c24 refers to the Buddha in a previous life with the expression 世尊, an expression that elsewhere forms the counterpart to *bhagavant*. The parallel MN 123 at MN III 119,20 instead uses the term *bodhisatta*. Thus the

Besides, to assume that the Theravāda compilers felt a need to oppose the development of the *bodhisattva* ideal may not fully take into account that the Theravāda concept of a *bodhisattva* developed along lines not too different from Mahāyāna ideas. The Pāli commentaries distinguish between the *mahābodhisatta* (the Buddha before his awakening), a *paccekabodhisatta* and a *sāvakabodhisatta*.⁴¹ The first of these, a *bodhisattva* on his path to future Buddhahood, has played and still plays a considerable role throughout Theravāda history, being an ideal followed by kings, monks and laity.⁴² Even in present day Sri Lanka some of the most highly respected and influential monks, like the late Balangoda Ānanda Maitreya and Nauyane Ariyadhamma, are well known for having pledged themselves to follow the *bodhisattva* path.

As Skilling (2004: 143) explains, "available scriptures of the eighteen schools allow all three options: it is one's own decision whether [to] become an Arhat, a Pratyekabuddha, or a Buddha, and to practice accordingly. That is, the eighteen or four schools embrace the three *yānas*. At an uncertain point, let us say in the first century BCE, groups of monks, nuns and lay-followers began to devote themselves exclusively to the Bodhisattvayāna. Eventually some of them exalted this *yāna* to the point of asserting that everyone else should do the same. For them the Bodhisattvayāna became the Great Vehicle, the Mahāyāna. This ... was the origin of the Mahāyāna as a movement".

Hence, the *bodhisattva* ideal as such is certainly not a prerogative of the particular Buddhist schools. Only the positing of this ideal as the only apposite form of aspiration could be considered as a distinctly Mahāyāna characteristic. Though Theravādins might well have objected to the assumption that everyone should follow the path of the *bodhisattva*, there would have been little reason for them to oppose the notion as such. Several Theravāda texts are in fact closely related to the *bodhisattva* ideal, such as the *Buddhavaṃsa's* account of how the *bodhisattva* who was to become Gotama Buddha received predictions of his future Buddhahood from earlier Buddhas; or the *Cariyapitaka's* detailed treatment of the perfections, *pāramī*. In the case of the

absence of references to *bodhisattva* in some texts of the Sarvāstivāda tradition could indeed be due to reasons similar to those suggested by Bapat.

⁴¹ Th-a I 9; cf. also Endo (2002: 236).

⁴² Rahula (1971: 69); Ratnayaka (1985: 94-96) and Samuels (1997: 404-407).

Buddhāpadāna, Bechert (1992: 102) even goes so far as to speak of it as a "full-fledged Mahāyāna text". Thus occurrences of the term *bodhisatta* in Pāli discourses do not seem to be an expression of opposition to the *bodhisattva* ideal in Theravāda circles.

Just as occurrences of the term *bodhisatta* in the Pāli *Nikāyas* need not express Theravādin influence, similarly, the use of the term *thera* in the Chinese *Āgamas* need not be expressive of an anti-Theravāda bias. Minh Chau (1991: 33) quotes Anesaki (1901: 897) to the effect that the term *thera* "in the Chinese *Āgamas* ... occurs, as far as I know, only thrice – the title *Āyushman* being used otherwise. Can we conclude that the Chinese version is derived from traditions dating from an age in the history of Buddhism when the authority of *Theras* was not yet solidified, or it descended from a school antagonistic to the authority of the orthodox *Theras*?" This suggestion by Anesaki seems to be incorrect, as a counterpart to *thera* can be found in numerous *Āgama* discourses, which use the expression 長老, literally "elder", often additionally qualified as 上尊, "senior".⁴³

Conclusion

In regard to the points discussed above, it needs to be kept in mind that at the time when Thich Minh Chau was undertaking his research the study of the nature and dynamics of oral tradition was still in its beginnings.⁴⁴ Nowadays, awareness of the impact of orality on the actual shape of the discourses found in the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the Chinese *Āgamas* is constantly growing and it is becoming increasingly clear that a good number of variations are best understood in the light of the dynamics and vicissitudes of oral transmission.⁴⁵ Thus when Minh Chau (1991: 75) contrasts an "unmistakenly common source of the Chinese and the Pāli versions"

⁴³ Occurrences in the *Madhyama-āgama* alone are: MĀ 22 at T I 450a21; MĀ 26 at T I 455c7; MĀ 33 at T I 471c29; MĀ 38 at T I 481a9; MĀ 39 at T I 481b16; MĀ 82 at T I 557c25; MĀ 83 at T I 559b27 (in the discourse's title); MĀ 84 at T I 560b25; MĀ 88 at T I 569c26; MĀ 116 at T I 606c25; MĀ 142 at T I 649b20; and MĀ 196 at T I 754b16.

⁴⁴ For a study of oral features of Pāli discourses in more detail than possible within the context of the present article cf. Anālayo 2007.

⁴⁵ As Nattier 2003: 52 explains, "to assume a 'creative individual author' as the driving force behind interpolations in Buddhist scripture is to import a model that is foreign to most of the literary processes that have shaped the production of Indian religious texts".

to "differences in the details ... due either to the compilers' choice or to the characteristics of the schools they represented", it becomes clear that for him variations are necessarily the outcome of conscious manipulation by editors and compilers, influenced by the ideas and dogmas of the particular Buddhist school to which they belong. Therefore the oral nature of the material with which he was working was naturally not at the forefront of his attention.

Moreover, the digitalisation of the canonical texts facilitates checking particular passages or expressions to a considerable degree. With the computer technology nowadays at our disposal, it is a matter of seconds to test certain hypotheses that in earlier days could only be evaluated by extensive and time-consuming research.

In regard to conclusions drawn based on the absence of parallel versions, Banerjee (1957: 23) was still under the impression that "the four *Āgamas* ... almost all belong to the Sarvāstivāda or the Vaibhāṣika school" and even in a relatively recent article Prasad (1993: 45) comments that "it is commonly held that the Chinese *Āgamas* belong to the Sarvāstivāda tradition", an opinion that he then shows to be incorrect. Minh Chau (1991: 18) expresses his reservations about the suggestion made by Banerjee, indicating that he does not feel "so optimistic as to affirm that all the 4 *Āgamas* belong to the Sarvāstivāda school". Yet, lacking clear awareness of the differences in school affiliation among the four *Āgamas*, it is perhaps no surprise that he drew conclusions based on the absence of a Chinese *Āgama* parallel to a particular Pāli discourse.

In sum, then, my criticism mainly reflects the shift of perspective that has resulted from the progress of Buddhist studies and computer technology made during the nearly five decades that have gone by since Thich Minh Chau did his research. The overall perspective on the two collections provided by him is nevertheless of substantial importance. His work thus remains a major reference and an inspiration for all those engaged in this fascinating field in early Buddhist studies: comparative studies between discourses from the Pāli *Nikāyas* and the Chinese *Āgamas*, with their considerable potential to reveal the common core and the traces of change that affected the legacy of early Buddhist literature.

Abbreviations:

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^c	Burmese edition

C [°]	Ceylonese edition
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
EĀ	<i>Ekottarika-āgama</i> (T 125)
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
Q	Peking edition
SĀ	<i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 99)
SĀ ²	'other' <i>Samyukta-āgama</i> (T 100)
S [°]	Siamese edition
SHT	Sanskrihandschriften aus den Turfanfunden ⁴⁶
SN	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
T	Taishō
Th-a	<i>Theragāthā-aṭṭhakathā</i>
Vin	<i>Vinaya</i>
Vism	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>

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⁴⁶ Published by Franz Steiner Verlag, Germany, in (by now) 9 volumes from 1965 to 2004, ed. by Waldschmidt et al.; unless otherwise specified, references are to volume of the publication and number of the fragment.

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