

'Mūlasarvāstivādin and Sarvāstivādin':
Oral Transmission Lineages of *Āgama* Texts

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Abstract

This article argues for the meaningfulness of distinguishing between Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda oral transmission lineages of *Āgama* texts. It begins by taking up relevant observations by Hartmann (2020) and Enomoto (2000). This leads on to exploring the significance of the term *nikāya* and its relation to the recital of the monastic code of rules. Next the relationship in general between *Vinaya* and *Āgama* texts comes into view, followed by an examination of differences between *Madhyama-āgama* discourses and their parallels in quotations in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. A brief consideration of the term Theravāda serves to provide an additional perspective on the question of oral transmission lineages vis-à-vis *nikāyas*, and the apparent provenance of the *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99) from Sri Lanka. The overall conclusions are that differences between the *Madhyama-āgama* and the *Samyukta-āgama* extant in Chinese translation point to distinct transmission lineages. The identification of such distinct transmission lineages makes it reasonable to employ the term Mūlasarvāstivāda to refer to the *Samyukta-āgama* extant in Chinese translation as T 99, as its transmission lineage appears to be close to quotations in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

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I. Introduction

The present paper was stimulated by reflections offered by Jens-Uwe Hartmann (2020) during the *Samyukta-āgama* seminar held in Buenos Aires in October 2018, which also led me to reconsider the well-known contribution by Enomoto Fumio 榎本文雄 (2000) on the topic of “Mūlasarvāstivādin and Sarvāstivādin”. In the course of my exploration, I argue in more detail the position I took during the seminar, which is that the distinction between Mūlasarvāstivāda and Sarvāstivāda is meaningful when employed for transmission lineages of *Āgama* texts, in particular in relation to the *Madhyama-āgama* (T 26) and the *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99).

II. Problems with the Term 'Mūlasarvāstivāda'

Hartmann (2020: 362) expresses his “grave doubts about the heuristic value of terms like Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda with regard to texts from the Sūtrapiṭaka”, querying (p. 263):

What then do they denote in present usage apart from the underlying implication that an *Āgama* text thus referred to is in Sanskrit and follows certain conventions in the diction and the stock phrases?

The tendency in previous scholarship to use the two terms to set apart bodies of texts based on formal differences in diction and stock phrases is indeed problematic. Hence Hartmann (2020: 371) is quite right in suggesting

a possible alternative understanding of phenomena that we are used to explaining as school-specific distinctions. They may equally well represent regional differences ...

Directing attention to the impact of regional differences on diction and stock phrases is indeed commendable and meaningful. Yet, in my view it does not follow from this that, in relation to *sūtra* material, “the endeavor of distinguishing Sarvāstivāda from Mūlasarvāstivāda texts loses its foundation” (Hartmann 2020: 371). This would follow only if this distinction were just about conventions in diction and phrasing, which does not appear to be the case.

I also venture to disagree with Hartmann (2020: 380) when he reasons that

provided that Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins used different *Prātimokṣa-sūtras* and different formulas for their *vinayakarmas*, the respective ordination is never of any discernible relevance in the context of the *Sūtrapiṭaka*.

I contend that ordination tradition can be of relevance, since it tends to be related to distinct transmission lineages. Before exploring this in more detail, however, I first need to take up the seminal contribution by Enomoto (2000) on “Mūlasarvāstivādin and Sarvāstivādin”.

III. Yijing 義淨 and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*

Enomoto (2000: 239) prefaces his study with the following queries:

are the Sarvāstivādins and the Mūlasarvāstivādins really different? In other words, do the textual words ‘Sarvāsti-

vādin (Sarvāstivāda)’ and ‘Mūlasarvāstivādin (Mūlasarvāstivāda)’ or their Tibetan and Chinese translations indicate different sects?

Here the employment of the term ‘sect’ as a reference to Buddhist *nikāyas* seems problematic. In a survey of different nuances of the English term ‘sect’, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1971: 361) offers the following definition:

a body of persons who unite in holding certain views differing from those of others who are recounted to be of the same religion; a party or school among the professors of a religion; sometimes applied *spec.* to parties that are regarded as heretical, or as least as deviating from the general tradition.

However, as pointed out by Heinz Bechert (1982: 67–68),¹

the use of a rather inadequate translation for the term *nikāya*, i.e. “sect”, has obscured the facts [just discussed]. A *nikāya* has nothing in common with a “sect” in the accepted understanding of this word, if used in the context of the history of Christianity. A *nikāya* is a group of monks who mutually acknowledge the validity of their *upasampadā*, and consequently, if staying within the same *sīmā*, can commonly perform *vinayakarmas*. The early *nikāyas*, therefore, represent groups of monks who had accepted identical interpretation[s] of the rules of *vinaya*. It was

¹ Bechert 1973 still employed the term “sect”, which goes to show that the clarification he offers in his 1982 contribution required a rethinking of the terminology inherited from his predecessors. See also below note 14 for the need to step out of this long-established type of terminology.

only in the course of subsequent developments that certain dogmatic opinions were associated with particular *nikāyas* ... however, many *nikāyas* of Indian Buddhism remained communities defined on the ground of *vinaya*.

In the same vein, Lambert Schmithausen (1987: 305) clarifies that his employment of the term “school” refers primarily to a monastic unit that recognizes the same canon, in particular the *Vinaya*, and not, or at least not primarily, to a group of followers of the same dogmatic position.² Again, Daniel Boucher (2005: 292 note 10) comments that

the word “sect” is used among sociologists of religion to denote a movement that has broken from its parent body (the “church”) and remains in tension with it, often with overt hostility to existing social institutions with which the church has accommodated itself. Buddhist *nikāyas* are monastic ordination lineages which overlap hardly, if at all, with such a definition.

Keeping in mind the significance of *nikāyas* as *Vinaya* ordination lineages is helpful for assessing a passage from the travel records of Yijing, the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳, in which the eventual translator of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* into Chinese offers the following assessment:³

² “Den Begriff ‘Schule’ verstehe ich natürlich hier primär im Sinne einer monastischen Einheit, die ein- und dieselbe Fassung des Kanons, besonders des *Vinaya*, anerkennt, nicht oder jedenfalls nicht primär als Gruppe von Vertretern gleicher dogmatischer Positionen.”

³ T 2125 at T LIV 206c3.

然十誦律亦不是根本有部也。

However, the ‘*Vinaya* in Ten Recitations’ is also not of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*.

Enomoto (2000: 243) considers this statement to imply that “the ‘Mūlasarvāstivāda’ sect does not exist apart from the ‘Sarvāstivāda’ sect.” Now the ‘*Vinaya* in Ten Recitations’ (*Shisong lü* 十誦律, T 1435), is clearly different from Yijing’s translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (or from the version of this *Vinaya* extant in Tibetan translation).⁴ This leaves little ground for Enomoto (2000: 244) to conclude that

the *Vinaya* of the ‘Mūlasarvāstivāda’ sect translated by Yijing is nothing but the *Vinaya* of the ‘Sarvāstivāda’ sect.

As already noted by Alexander Wynne (2008: 246), the formulation in the passage translated above rather shows that Yijing

was aware of a Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* that did not belong to the Mūlasarvāstivādin sect ... [his] statement, properly understood, provides no support for the identification of Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin.⁵

⁴ See the survey in Clarke 2015.

⁵ The observation that the statement by Yijing in T 2125 implies that the ‘*Vinaya* in Ten Recitations’ (T 1435) is *not* Mūlasarvāstivāda has already been made by Yao 2007 (I am indebted to the author for a summary of the article, as my inability to read Japanese prevents me from consulting it myself); see also Skilling 2002: 375, who comments that Enomoto’s position in this respect “seems forced”.

IV. Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda *Nikāyas*

It seems to me that Yijing's statement in the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* can be understood better if we keep in mind that connotations carried by the term "sect" do not necessarily reflect what is implied by the corresponding term *nikāya*. Here the sharing of doctrinal beliefs between Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins needs to be distinguished from ordination lineages.

The same distinction might also provide a solution to the problem identified by Hartmann (2020), in that a doctrinal background (or regional preferences in diction and stock phrases) need not be the sole rationale for distinguishing Sarvāstivādins and Mūlasarvāstivādins from each other. The distinction is first of all about *nikāyas* as monastic communities with distinct ordination lineages.

These might at times correspond to doctrinal differences and even to regional conventions in diction and stock phrases. But such differences and conventions are secondary derivatives of the phenomenon in question and not in themselves decisive.⁶ Instead, ordination lineage is decisive. From the normative viewpoint of *Vinaya* law, monastics ordained according to the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* would not perform legal acts together with monastics ordained according to the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (or any other *Vinaya*), however much they might be holding the same doctrinal view.

The situation could perhaps be illustrated with the example of public prosecutors from different countries. Although this example

⁶ The lack of relevance of differences in diction could be illustrated by the examples given by Pāsādika 1994: 129 of quotations in Sarvāstivāda/Mūlasarvāstivāda Abhidharma texts that exhibit variations in this respect, which obviously do not reflect doctrinal divergences.

involves secular law and a different time and place, inasmuch as the basic functioning of law is concerned, it might help to illustrate aspects to be born in mind when evaluating the impact of ordination lineages on the oral transmission of texts in ancient India.

Even though public prosecutors from different countries might hold the same political view, they are only able to take action in cases in their own respective country, not elsewhere.

In order to take into account the issue of regional language variations as well, the simile could be applied to prosecutors in different countries in Latin America. A prosecutor from Mexico, for example, will differ from a prosecutor from Argentina in the pronunciation of Spanish and the use of certain indigenous terms. Yet, just as with their respective political opinions, this is only a secondary aspect of the situation. What counts is the legal dimension. If someone born in Mexico should migrate to Argentina and become a prosecutor there, the legal sphere of action would now be within the confines of Argentina, no matter how much this prosecutor still speaks Spanish with a Mexican accent and independent of any political opinion he or she may hold.

Similarly, the question of *nikāya* affiliation is primarily a legal and an institutional one. Doctrinal opinions or the use of certain linguistic features are a result of that. Different *nikāyas* can share doctrinal opinions and linguistic usages; conversely, even within a single *nikāya* these can differ, especially if its members are spread over different regional areas.

V. The Recital of the Code of Rules

One of the legal acts to be undertaken regularly every fortnight is the recital of the code of rules (*prātimokṣa*). The performing of such

recitation by a group of monastics requires having basically the same text as its foundation. Moreover, the concluding sections of the different codes of the monastic rules enjoy that all of the assembled monastics should train in concord in these rules.⁷ This requires having the same rules.

Substantial differences in sequence and formulation of the main rules will conflict with the harmonious carrying out of such recital and impede training in them in concord, thereby jeopardising the perception of intra-group homogeneity that is so crucial to the very continuation of the institution of textual transmission itself.

A central purpose of the recitation of the code of rules is precisely to serve as an affirmation of communal harmony and institutional identity. In the words of Richard Gombrich (1988: 110), “the *pātimokkha* ritual’s *communal* function ... was the one thing which held the Sangha together.” The recital of the code of rules shares this feature with group recitation in general.⁸ For example, the *Saṅgīti-sutta*, in agreement with its Sanskrit fragment and Chinese *Dīrgha-āgama* parallels, accompanies a list of doctrinal terms and categories with an emphasis on the function of agreement on such a listing to

⁷ Dharmaguptaka, T 1429 at T XXII 1022b11, Kāśyapīya, T 1460 at T XXIV 665a19, Mahāsāṅghika-Lokottaravāda, Tatia 1975: 36,2, Mahīśāsaka, T 1422 at T XXII 199c19, Mūlasarvāstivāda, Schmidt 1989: 92,9 (fol. 37R, this part has been omitted by Banerjee 1977), Sarvāstivāda, von Simson 2000: 258,9, and Theravāda, Pruitt and Norman 2001: 110,9; see also Pachow 1955: 214 and Schmidt 1989: 34–35.

⁸ Allon 2018: 234 reasons that “group recitation requires that the wording of the text and the arrangement of the textual units within a collection be fixed; otherwise you would have complete chaos ... a text — a *sūtra*, verse or textual unit or a collection of them — is fixed as long as it is memorized, repeated and communally recited without being intentionally changed, which of course allows for unintentional change.”

ensure communal harmony.⁹ Asanga Tilakaratne (2000: 175) explains that

the fundamental purpose of ... events described as *saṅgīti* is the assurance of the unity of the Buddhist monastic organization ... the key activity was to recite together the Dhamma and the Vinaya ... [which], first and foremost, was meant to be a public expression of one's allegiance to the organisation which was represented by the Dhamma and the Vinaya.

VI. Different Code of Rules

Actual instances of recital need not always comprise the entire code, but can focus just on the main rules. As a recital of the entire code of rules takes a long time, such time-saving modalities of recital can confidently be assumed to have been resorted to regularly, even though from a normative perspective they are not the ideal way to proceed.

This in turn means that variations among minor rules, especially the *śaikṣa* rules, would have less repercussions on such a recital, simply because they will not invariably be recited.¹⁰ But at least the main rules of the *pārājika* and *saṅghāvaśeṣa/saṅghādisesa* type would

⁹ DN 33 at DN III 211,17: *tattha sabbeḥ' eva saṅgāyitabbaṃ na vivaditabbaṃ*; Stache-Rosen 1968: 45 (I.1): *taṃ v(a)yaṃ saṃhitāḥ samagrāḥ saṃmodamānā bhūtvā saṃśayā(ya na vivadā)m(a)h(e)*; DĀ 9 at T I 49c22: 當共集之, 以防諍訟. The statement quoted occurs after the first item in the list has been mentioned. Another parallel, T 12, does not have a comparable formulation.

¹⁰ For variations among minor rules in the *Prātimokṣa-sūtras* from Gilgit see Emms 2012.

need to be the same in order for a group of monastics, ordained in the same *Vinaya* tradition, to perform the fortnightly recital of the code of rules together.

In fact, had legal acts by those ordained in *Vinaya* traditions with different codes of rules been a regular occurrence, the obsession evident in the different *Vinayas* to regulate the most minor details can safely be expected to have led to providing guidelines for such situations. At the time of the recital of the code of rules, which version should be recited? The one known to the most senior monastic in the assembly? Or rather the one followed by the majority of monastics in the assembly?

Suppose a monastic participates in the recital of a code of rules that contains a regulation this monastic hears now for the first time, because it is not part of the code of rules of the *Vinaya* tradition in which this monastic ordained. What behavior should be adopted if the monastic has not kept this particular rule? Is it appropriate for this monastic to ignore this rule, even though the whole idea of participating in the recital of the code or rules is to express one's maintenance of conduct in accordance with the rules that are being recited? Or should the monastic acknowledge a breach of this rule, even though a breach requires in principle that one has first undertaken to observe the rule in question?

Or else suppose a monastic has broken a rule that is part of the code of rules in this monastic's ordination lineage. Participating in the recital of a different code of rules that does not contain this rule, is the monastic still under an obligation to acknowledge this breach to a fellow monastic? If so, how does the fellow monastic accept the acknowledgement of a breach that, from the viewpoint of the fellow monastic, is not a breach at all?

All such questions would have provided excellent occasions for the promulgation of additional regulations, had it been a regular oc-

currence that legal acts were carried out across different ordination traditions. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no such regulations are found in Indian texts. Moreover, individual *Vinaya* traditions even do not explicitly recognize the existence of other *Vinaya* traditions with a different set of rules.

The ability to afford such ignoring makes it rather improbable that mixing of different *Vinaya* traditions for legal acts was a common occurrence, otherwise the conceit that one's own *Vinaya* tradition is “the *Vinaya*”, in the sense of being the only one to be taken explicitly into account, could hardly have been kept up.

This of course does not mean that cross-tradition legal acts never happened at all. The situation on the ground, especially when different Buddhist traditions spread to new areas, might well have led to all kind of idiosyncrasies. But such exceptions to the norm need to be distinguished from what with reasonable probability can be assumed to have been the regular situation in the ancient Indian setting, as far as the evidence at our disposal allows us to judge.

The need to have basically the same rules in order to be able to function as a legal body is fundamental to *Vinaya* law and practice and therefore relevant to evaluating variations between *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* texts.¹¹ In addition to examining philological and palaeographical features, it can be helpful to keep in mind the function of this type of text as well. An example in case is the Bajaur *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* manuscript studied by Ingo Strauch (2014).

In this case, apparently the same scribe used a piece of birch bark to record one version of the *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* on the one side and another on the other side. As noted by Strauch (2014: 824), the overall impression is that “the scribe conducted a comparative analysis

¹¹ For examples of such variations see von Simson 2000: 2–15 and Wille 2009: 49–51.

of both versions.” Given that according to Strauch (2014: 821) “both versions follow different orthographical conventions and represent phonologically distinct versions”, it seems fair to assume that dearth of writing material led to reuse and explains the current state of the manuscript.

This is a phenomenon well-known from other Gandhari manuscripts, where at times different texts are written on the same piece of birch bark.¹² Once “manuscripts with blank verso sides were recycled by later scribes who used them to record other texts, unrelated to the original one on the recto”, as observed by Salomon (2018: 81), it would not be surprising if the same procedure was adopted by the scribe of the fragment in question. In other words, finding two different texts on the two sides of a manuscript might only reflect the constraints of the medium, in terms of dearth of writing material, and need not imply that these two texts were actually employed in the same oral performance by the same reciters.¹³

¹² See, for example, the combination of *Dharmapada* verses with *pūrvavāyoga* texts, written down by different scribes using the same manuscript, studied by Lenz 2003.

¹³ The same holds in my view for an error of omission that apparently occurred during writing, where according to Strauch 2014: 824 “the scribe noticed this blunder. But instead of inserting the missing text where it was missing, he inserted it into the parallel rule on the obverse, probably mainly due to the fact that there was sufficient space on the top of the manuscript.” The procedure adopted by the scribe gives the impression that the manuscript was meant for personal study and not to serve as the basis for the *uposatha* ceremony. Such insertion in the ‘wrong’ place could have been motivated by a lack of writing space and hardly justifies the query by Strauch 2014: 825: “does this also mean that the monastic community had changed its school affiliation?” From a legal viewpoint, this would require a re-ordination of all of its mem-

Whatever may be the last word on the significance of this intriguing manuscript, its textual idiosyncrasies do not imply that it can be suspected that “mainly the writing down of these texts paved the ground for a harmonized and coherent *Prātimokṣasūtra* text tradition within one school”, *pace* Strauch (2014: 820). It seems to me that such a suggestion underestimates the significance of oral tradition and the need for the members of a monastic community to avail themselves of a coherent *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* during the centuries that preceded the writing down of the texts.

VII. *Vinaya* and *Āgama* Texts

The function and purposes of group recitation is one of several features shared by *Vinaya* and *Āgama* texts. These cannot be completely separated from each other, simply because they were transmitted by the same body of monastic reciters.

Monastic ordination lineages, *nikāyas*, naturally stand in a close relationship to oral transmission lineages. In fact, different ordination lineages quite probably came into existence due to the accumulation of regional variations during the oral transmission of the *Vinaya* texts.¹⁴ Once such variations had built up sufficiently to become a critical mass, so to say, in the sense that a few minor ‘corrections’ were no longer sufficient to enable group recitation, differ-

bers, a rather improbable scenario.

¹⁴ Wynne 2008 and Sasaki 2018 discuss the impact of regional differentiation on the formation of *Mūlasarvāstivāda* and *Sarvāstivāda Vinayas*. Both keep speaking of “sects”, however, which leaves me with the impression that the implications of the clarification proposed by Bechert 1982 have not yet been fully taken on board. For a critical reply to Sakaki 2018 in particular see Dhammadinnā 2021.

ent recitation lineages and therewith different ordination lineages would have come into existence.

Needless to say, the manifestation of variations is not a one-time event, but something that must have kept occurring during successive stages of oral transmission. Hence to some degree such variations can be expected to have manifested continuously even within a particular ordination lineage, once this had formed. These would not have conflicted with group recitation as long as they occurred only regionally. This would help to explain differences among *Prātimokṣa-sūtra* fragments apparently pertaining to the same *nikāya*.

Once distinct ordination lineages had come into being, differences between their respective corpus of orally transmitted texts would have tended to increase, due to a substantial diminishing of opportunities for 'correction' during group recital. Reciters ordained in a particular *nikāya* will perform the recitation of the *prātimokṣa* with their peers and thereby naturally be prone to do the same also for other texts. In this way, distinct monastic ordination lineages are likely to be related to different oral transmission lineages.

Or course, this does not result in a rigid and impenetrable separation of transmission lineages according to *Vinaya* ordination. Such is hardly possible, given the fluidity of oral transmission. In fact the whole question of distinguishing between Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda is not meant to promote the idea of a watertight distinction between two exclusive entities. It is more about using such terms as orientation points for recognizing different currents of oral transmission.

It also does not mean that monastics of one *Vinaya* tradition might not at times have approached a famous teacher ordained in a different *Vinaya* tradition to receive Dharma teachings. But it does imply general trends of collections of texts to be orally transmitted by groups of reciters who belong to the same ordination tradition.

Understood in this way, the so-called ‘school-affiliation’ of *Āgama* texts, besides not just originating from doctrinal dissents pertaining to ‘sects’, is perhaps best viewed as the somewhat accidental result of transmission lineages forming themselves regionally and along the lines of ordination lineages.

Notably, concern with the ‘school-affiliation’ of *Āgama* texts is, to the best of my knowledge, not attested for the period of their oral transmission.¹⁵ From the viewpoint of oral transmission, it is hardly surprising that *Āgama* texts are not identified by way of the *nikāya* of their reciters. The oral performance of an *Āgama* text will begin with the recitation of the introductory formula ‘thus have I heard’.¹⁶ The implicit claim is that the oral recitation is based on a text that has been passed on ‘thus’, that is, in exactly the way it is presently being recited, by successive generations of reciters. In this way, the oral performance begins with an assurance that what is about to be recited is an accurate reflection of what the Buddha (or his chief disciples) originally said.

In light of this core textual dimension, it would to some degree become self-defeating if the reciters were to acknowledge explicitly that the text is much rather the product of a particular *nikāya* (Dhammā-dinnā 2021). It would run counter to the whole thrust of the oral performance of a text ‘thus heard’ (rather than ‘thus revised’), as the reciters would in this way divest themselves of the advantage derived

¹⁵ The same pattern can also be seen in the case of *Vinaya* manuscripts. As noted by Skilling 2010: 9, “when we describe the Sanskrit *vinaya* recovered from Gilgit as ‘the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya*’, or the Turfan manuscripts as ‘Sarvāstivādin’, we should remember that we are voicing hypotheses. The manuscripts do not identify themselves ... only certain translations into Tibetan or Chinese specify the school of the text.”

¹⁶ For a survey of scholarship on the significance of this phrase and its relation to what comes next in the standard formula at the outset of a discourse see Anālayo 2014a: 41–45.

from the strategies of authentication adopted by all of their predecessors.

A tendency not to perceive *Āgamas* in terms of *nikāya* affiliation extends even to the early centuries of translation activities in China. The circumstance that the *Dīrgha-āgama* brought by Faxian 法顯 from Sri Lanka was not translated into Chinese is quite probably due to a lack of awareness on the side of the Chinese that this collection differed substantially – precisely because of having been transmitted by reciters of a different *nikāya* – from the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* that had already been translated into Chinese (Anālayo 2010: 69–74).

Although the four *Āgamas* presently included in the Chinese canon stem from distinct lineages of reciters, these *Āgama* translations have generally been considered by Chinese Buddhists to be a homogeneous textual set, an idea already expressed by Dao'an 道安 as early as the fourth century (Zacchetti 2016: 82–83). This demonstrates the traditional perception of the *Āgamas* as a textual corpus independent of 'school affiliation', not only in India but also in China.

The significance of a lack of explicit recognition of *nikāya* affiliation of an *Āgama* could be illustrated with the example of a lack of public disclosure of hidden motivations by someone in a political leadership position, which does not imply that such motivations never influence the actual performance. Similarly, due to the nature of oral transmission, it seems reasonable to assume that *nikāya* affiliation had an impact on the oral performance and hence the transmission of *Āgama* texts, even though this is not publicly disclosed.

Closer inspection shows in fact a considerable degree of interrelation between *Vinaya* and *Āgama* texts. This is evident, for example, in the fact that *Āgama* texts regularly contain *Vinaya*-related material (Anālayo 2014b: 27–30), and that some *Vinayas* in turn provide cross-references to *sūtras* (Yao 2020).

VIII. Mūlasarvāstivāda *Āgamas*

In an article dedicated to the *Sūtrapiṭaka* of the Sarvāstivādins and the Mūlasarvāstivādins, Jan Willem de Jong (1968 [1979]) notes a difference between the way *sūtra* quotations are given in the Chinese and Sanskrit Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* and how they appear in their Tibetan counterpart. Whereas the Chinese and Sanskrit versions provide cross-references, the Tibetan text incorporates the respective text. This led de Jong to the idea that the reciters of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* drew on the *Āgama* collections of the Sarvāstivādins, since if the Mūlasarvāstivādins had their own collections, there would have been no need for the texts at some time to become absorbed in the *Vinaya*.¹⁷

Yet, the very existence of Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* suggests that the Mūlasarvāstivādins must have had access to their own *Āgama* collections. Whether such access was to their own independent transmission or to collections copied from the Sarvāstivādins, it seems improbable that lack of availability motivated the absorption of *sūtra* material in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. In fact the *Dharmacakrapravartana-sūtra* is found more than once in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (Anālayo 2015: 348–349),¹⁸ and that holds for its Chinese as well as its Tibetan versions. This could hardly have been motivated by the lack of availability of the respective *Āgama* collection only.

¹⁷ After surveying such cases, de Jong 1968 [1979]: 235 reasons that “cet exemple suggère que les *Āgama* auxquels le *Vinaya* des Mūlasarvāstivādin renvoie faisaient partie du *Sūtrapiṭaka* des Sarvāstivādin. Probablement ces *Āgama* n'auraient pas été absorbés par le *Vinaya* des Mūlasarvāstivādin si ces derniers avaient possédé leur propre *Sūtrapiṭaka*.”

¹⁸ See also the discussion in Yao 2020: 460–463.

Instead, the absorption of *sūtra* material seems part of a general trend of textual growth of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* by incorporating a range of narrative material, a development probably best considered on a par with the example provided by the *Mahāvastu* as quite definitely a '*Vinaya*' text (Tournier 2012).

Actually, de Jong presents his suggestion only as a supposition that is open to being rejected if there is evidence for a different *Sūtra-piṭaka* among Mūlasarvāstivādins.¹⁹ To such evidence I turn next.

IX. The Parallels to the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*

Based on a comparative study of the Chinese and Tibetan parallels to the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* (MN 44) and several other textual comparisons, Schmithausen (1987: 379) concludes that, contrary to the position taken by de Jong (1968 [1979]):

the Mūlasarvāstivādins not only had a Vinayapiṭaka but also a Sūtra- and a Kṣudrapaṭaka peculiar to them and different not only from those of the Central Asian Sarvāstivādins but also from those of the Indian Vaibhāṣikas.

The existence of a distinctly Mūlasarvāstivāda *Āgama* transmission can be conveniently illustrated by placing side by side the two parallels to the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta*, found in the *Madhyama-āgama* (MĀ 210) and in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* (Up 1005).

¹⁹ de Jong 1968 [1979]: 231: "on peut supposer que les Mūlasarvāstivādin aient adopté le *Sūtrapiṭaka* des Sarvāstivādin tant que l'on ne dispose pas de témoignages qui démontrent l'existence d'un *Sūtrapiṭaka* différent chez les Mūlasarvāstivādin."

Since to do so would go well beyond the confines of the present chapter, I have shifted such detailed comparison to a separately published article, which provides English translations of both parallel versions to enable a direct assessment of the degree of similarity and difference between them (Anālayo 2019). In what follows, I just sum up the main points that emerge from that study.

From a structural viewpoint, the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse and the quotation in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* agree closely, whereas the *Cūḷavedalla-sutta* proceeds quite differently. This points to a close relationship between the former two. Nevertheless, leaving aside a few cases of apparent textual displacement within the respective discourse, several substantial differences can also be identified between the *Madhyama-āgama* version and the discourse quotation in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*.

The latter stipulates the need for tranquillity and insight in order to enter cessation attainment and takes up not only the first, but also the second and third absorption in a discussion of pleasant feeling. Both instances stand in contrast to the presentation found in the *Madhyama-āgama* and *Majjhima-nikāya* versions.

The *Madhyama-āgama* version differs from its two parallels on the identity of both protagonists of the discourse, as here the interlocutor has become a female and the respondent has a different name. The *Madhyama-āgama* discourse also stands alone in taking up the four bases of supernormal power in a discussion of aspects of concentration, in discussing the difference between the attainment of cessation and of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and in turning from the three feeling tones to the topic of contact.

The same version lacks a discussion of the three formations (bodily, verbal, and mental), which the other two versions explain in detail. It also does not investigate how these relate to entry and emergence from cessation attainment, and what type of contact is experienced

on such emergence, topics discussed in the *Majjhima-nikāya* discourse and the quotation in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*. Yet another difference is that the *Madhyama-āgama* version attributes emergence from cessation to the existence of the body, the six sense, and the life faculty, whereas according to the two parallels such emergence is due to previous cultivation of the mind.²⁰

In this way, the versions in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* and the *Madhyama-āgama* differ substantially from each other, and in a number of such cases the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* is closer to the Pali version. The differences that emerge in this way corroborate the observation by Peter Skilling (2002: 375) that

the Chinese *Madhyamāgama* and the *Madhyamāgama* cited by Śamathadeva in his *Upāyikā-ṭīkā* on the *Abhidharma-kośa* are intimately related but differ, sometimes significantly, in order of texts, in contents, and titles.

X. The *Madhyama-āgama* and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*

By way of complementing the above survey of differences between the *Madhyama-āgama* and discourse quotations in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā*, in what follows I briefly survey a few cases where relevant discourse quotations are instead found in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

²⁰ See Dhammadinnā 2021 for a further discussion of the Sarvāstivāda affiliation of the *Madhyama-āgama* quotations in the *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* and references to earlier Japanese scholarship reaching the same conclusion.

Differences between *Madhyama-āgama* discourses and their parallels in quotations in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* can take a variety of forms. One possibility manifests in a different title. The *Bhaiṣajya-vastu* gives a reference to the *Velāma-sūtra* found in the *Brāhmaṇa-nipāta*.²¹ The corresponding discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama* extant in Chinese is indeed found in its section on Brahmins, but has instead the title ‘Discourse to Sudatta’.²² Although the relevant Pali parallel occurs rather among the Nines of the *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, its title is *Velāma-sutta*,²³ corresponding to the title given in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*.

Another such reference in the *Bhaiṣajya-vastu* speaks of the *Māndhātṛ-sūtra* in the *Rājasamyuktaka-nipāta*.²⁴ The counterpart in the section of the *Madhyama-āgama* on kings has the title ‘Discourse on the Four Continents’.²⁵ In this case, the Pali parallel occurs in the *Jātaka* collection and is entitled the *Mandhātu-jātaka*.²⁶

Another type of difference concerns narrative details. According to the *Dhammacetiya-sutta* and its parallel in the *Kṣudraka-vastu*, on a certain occasion the two courtiers of King Pasenadi spent part of the night in discussion,²⁷ whereas according to the *Madhyama-*

²¹ Dutt 1984: 98,15: *velāmasūtre madhyamāgame brāhmaṇanipāte*.

²² MĀ 155 at T I 677a8: 梵志品須達哆經 (the correspondence of this and the subsequently mentioned *Madhyama-āgama* discourse to references in the *Bhaiṣajya-vastu* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* has already been noted by Waldschmidt 1980: 142).

²³ In the PTS edition, the title of the discourse AN 9.20 is reflected in the *uddāna* at AN IV 396,6; the Burmese and Ceylonese editions have the title as a header for the discourse.

²⁴ Dutt 1984: 93,10: *māndhātṛsūtraṃ madhyamāgame rājasamyuktakani-pāte*.

²⁵ MĀ 60 at T I 494b9: 王相應品四洲經.

²⁶ Jā 258 at Jā II 310,20.

²⁷ MN 89 at MN II 124,5 and T 1451 at T XXIV 238b10, with the Tibetan

āgama version they rather sat in silent meditation.²⁸ The same Pali discourse and its Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya* parallel report that on another occasion a disciple was coughing during a talk given by the Buddha,²⁹ whereas in the *Madhyama-āgama* version this disciple had rather fallen asleep and was snoring.³⁰

More substantial differences emerge in the case of the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*, which in agreement with the *Saṅghabheda-vastu* reports the future Buddha setting out to emulate his two teachers and attain the immaterial spheres that formed the basis of their teaching. According to both versions, he felt confident in doing so since he had the same five spiritual faculties, *indriya*, they also possessed.³¹ The *Madhyama-āgama* version, however, speaks of only three spiritual faculties, leaving out of count the faculties of mindfulness and concentration.³² Although one might be inclined to consider this a simple transmission or even translation error, since mindfulness and concentration are certainly required for achieving such lofty attainments, also the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya* mentions only these three spiritual faculties.³³

counterpart in D 6, 'dul ba, tha 85b6 or P 1035, 'dul ba, de 82b2.

²⁸ MĀ 213 at T I 797b5.

²⁹ MN 89 at MN II 122,12 and T 1451 at T XXIV 238a26, with the Tibetan counterpart in D 6, 'dul ba, tha 85a5 or P 1035, 'dul ba, de 82a2 (according to which the disciple also sneezed).

³⁰ MĀ 213 at T I 797a18.

³¹ MN 26 at MN I 164,16 and Gnoli 1977: 97,11.

³² MĀ 204 at T I 776b15; see also Bronkhorst 1993 [2000]: 75.

³³ T 1428 at T XXII 780b11, a reference that involves a translation error, as here the future Buddha reflects that his teachers are *bereft* of the three spiritual faculties. Bareau 1963: 18 reasons that the translator probably misunderstood a reference to 'not only' (*na kho*) the teacher having these qualities as implying that the teacher did not have them, 無有.

A still more substantial difference emerges in relation to the well-known intervention of Brahmā to convince the recently awakened Buddha to teach his discovery of the path to liberation to others. Reported in the *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta* and the corresponding section of the *Saṅghabhedā-vastu*, the entire episode is absent from the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.³⁴ In this case, too, the presentation in the *Madhyama-āgama* discourse does not appear to be simply the result of a loss of text, as an individual translation parallel to the *Mahāvādāna-sutta*, which reports the same intervention in the case of a previous Buddha, also does not have the entire episode.³⁵

The above cases are just a few examples selected somewhat at random, insufficient to draw definite conclusions. Moreover, when evaluating such differences, it needs to be born in mind that at times the *Madhyama-āgama* also disagrees with the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*; in fact even the *Majjhima-nikāya* can disagree with the Theravāda *Vinaya* (Anālayo 2017). Some degree of variation is only natural in view of the oral nature of these texts.

Nevertheless, at some point the amount of variation reaches a critical mass. This does not yet seem to be the case for the *Madhyama-āgama* and the Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya* (nor of course for the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the Theravāda *Vinaya*). But the divergences between the *Madhyama-āgama* and the Mūlasarvāstivāda texts surveyed here do appear to reach such a critical mass and it seems fair to conclude that their respective transmission lineages were distinct.

Proposing that there is therefore a heuristic value in making such a distinction is not meant to encourage artificial divisions between

³⁴ MN 26 at MN I 168,13 and Gnoli 1977: 128,30.

³⁵ T 3 at T I 156c14, parallel to DN 14 at DN II 36,22. Notably, in this case the Sanskrit fragment parallel also has not preserved this episode, see Waldschmidt 1956: 148 note 2.

entirely separate entities or to promote obsession with the identification of 'school affiliations'. In other words, the desirability of avoiding the positing of 'the Mūlasarvāstivāda school' (let alone 'sect') in total contrast to 'the Sarvāstivāda school' need not prevent us from pragmatically distinguishing between 'a' Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage of oral transmission and 'a' Sarvāstivāda lineage of oral transmission.

XI. Theravāda *Nikāya* and Theravāda Oral Transmission

The lack of total correspondence between the *Majjhima-nikāya* and the Theravāda *Vinaya* leads me to a problem similar to some extent to the topic of 'Mūlasarvāstivāda' versus 'Sarvāstivāda', namely the academic problematization of the term Theravāda.³⁶ It seems to me that at times such problematization can involve the same conflation of a 'sect' as a political or ideological body with the existence of a monastic ordination lineage, *nikāya*, and its relation to an oral transmission lineage.

The discourse collections extant in Pali have been transmitted by Theravāda reciters. Yet, they are not the product of the Theravāda 'sect', as there are number of differences, some quite substantial, between Theravāda doctrine and the position taken in the Pali discourses. This does not mean that the term Theravāda can no longer be used to distinguish the discourses found in the *Dīgha-nikāya*, for example, from those found in the *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese translation (T 1). The former has been transmitted by monastic reciters who were ordained according to Theravāda law and the latter by monastic reciters who were ordained according to Dharmaguptaka law. Hence there is heuristic value in employing these two terms to

³⁶ For my reasons to continue using the term 'Theravāda' see Anālayo 2013.

reflect the difference in the corresponding ordination lineages.

In the case of the *Dīgha-nikāya* and *Dīrgha-āgama*, the difference between the two collections extant now also involves languages. Yet, this is only an accidental result of the vagaries of transmission and less apt for drawing clear distinctions. It would hardly be helpful to identify a particular *Āgama* only by reference to the language in which it has been preserved.

The reciters of the *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese appear to belong to the same transmission lineage, broadly speaking, as the reciters of the ‘*Vinaya* in Four Sections’ (*Sifen lü* 四分律, T 1428), and some of the material extant in Gandhari fragments.³⁷ Here, again, speaking of the “same transmission lineage” does not imply complete correspondence, but only that, alongside minor differences that naturally occur even within a particular lineage of reciters (Anālayo 2017: 58–63), there is in general a fair degree of correspondence.

Given that here we have different languages for what appear to be testimonies of the basically same transmission lineage, and that the Chinese language in which the *Dīrgha-āgama* is now extant is shared with other *Āgamas* which clearly stem from different transmission lineages, it becomes clear that the use of the name of a language does not furnish an appropriate means of identification. Nor would it be possible to refer to these texts always by way of the name of a particular location, something that is more feasible in the case of fragments whose provenance is known. For this reason, it seems to me meaningful to refer to the body of texts that comprises the *Dīrgha-āgama*, the ‘*Vinaya* in Four Sections’, and some Gandhari fragments as Dharmaguptaka, in the sense of an oral transmission lineage.

³⁷ See Salomon 1999: 166–178, Cox 2014: 36–39 and Salomon 2014: 13.

XII. The *Samyukta-āgama* and Sri Lanka

What emerges on considering the Theravāda *Dīgha-nikāya* and the Dharmaguptaka *Dīrgha-āgama* can in turn be applied to the *Madhyama-āgama* and the *Samyukta-āgama*. As shown by Bhikkhunī Dhamma-dinnā (2020 and 2021), the *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99) corresponds closely to *sūtra* quotations in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā-ṭīkā* and in the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Vinaya*. Hence it is indeed meaningful to refer to this *Samyukta-āgama* as representative of a Mūlasarvāstivāda transmission lineage in contrast to the *Madhyama-āgama* as representative of a Sarvāstivāda transmission lineage. I contend that the usage of such terminology is justified by the circumstance that the respective monastic reciter lineages can be distinguished based on the *Vinaya* used for their ordination.

In the case of the *Samyukta-āgama*, the employment of the designation Mūlasarvāstivāda might appear questionable since the original used for translation into Chinese seems to have been acquired by Faxian in Sri Lanka.³⁸ Andrew Glass (2010) offers several significant arguments in favour of assuming that his manuscript was indeed the original used for the *Samyukta-āgama* translation now extant as Taishō no. 99.

This translation involved Guṇabhadra in the role of reading out the text and Baoyun 寶雲 as the translator. Glass points out that

³⁸ The *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, T 2034 at XLIX 91a24, reports that the *Samyukta-āgama* translated by Guṇabhadra and Baoyun was the text that had been brought by Faxian. Although this catalogue is known for being in general rather unreliable, according to de Jong 1981: 108 “there is no valid reason to doubt the information” given in the *Lidai sanbao ji* regarding the translation of T 99.

Baoyun was a travel companion of Faxian; the two had experienced much hardship together and must have become close friends. In fact, after Faxian's return to China, the two lived together at the same temple. During this time, Baoyun would have had access to Faxian's manuscripts. Moreover, there was a concerted effort to translate the manuscripts that Faxian had brought back to China. By the time Guṇabhadra arrived in China, only three of these manuscripts had not yet been translated, one of them being the *Samyukta-āgama*. Glass (2010: 197) explains:

When Guṇabhadra arrived in Jiānkāng, the *Samyuktāgama* would have been the most important work in the collection of Fāxiān's manuscripts that had not yet been translated. As shown above, Bǎoyún would have had access to this manuscript, and further, he may well have had an interest in seeing this manuscript translated out of a sense of loyalty to his former travelling companion and colleague. It is easy to imagine that Bǎoyún could have persuaded Guṇabhadra, a man eighteen years his junior, to recite the *Samyuktāgama* for him to translate when the latter had only just arrived from India.

In considering how a *Mūlasarvāstivāda* text could stem from Sri Lanka, it seems that the actual presence of *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monastics in Sri Lanka would not be an indispensable condition for the library of the Abhayagiri monastery to have manuscripts of *Mūlasarvāstivāda Āgamas* (or *Vinaya* for that matter). Due to the good contacts between the Abhayagiri monastery and India, such manuscripts could have been brought from India for the sake of study and consultation and then been kept in the monastic library.

Moreover, there is some evidence, although from later times, for the actual presence of *Mūlasarvāstivāda* monastics in Sri Lanka.

This is the Jetavanārāma inscription, which documents that monastics from four *Nikāyas* had taken up residence in Sri Lanka. Bechert (1998: 3) considers it likely that this inscription refers to

the very four *nikāyas* which prevailed in mainland India at that period, viz. the Mūlasarvāstivādins, the Mahāsāṅghikas, the Sammatīyas and the Sthaviras.³⁹

The Jetavanārāma inscription is dated on paleographic grounds to the ninth century (de Zilva Wickremasinghe 1904–1912: 1–2), thus it is later than Faxian's time. Testifying to an earlier time, however, is an inscription from Bodhgayā, issued by the Sinhalese monk Mahānāman and dated to the second half of the sixth century. According to Vincent Tournier (2014: 24–26), this inscription points to a community of Sinhalese *Samyukta-āgama* transmitters in Bodhgayā who were in contact with Sarvāstivāda or Mūlasarvāstivāda communities in their homeland as well as in Magadha. The inscription suggests an active transmission of a Sarvāstivāda or Mūlasarvāstivāda *Samyukta-āgama* in Sri Lanka already in the sixth century. This would make it seem less improbable that Faxian could indeed have acquired a Mūlasarvāstivāda *Samyukta-āgama* in Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The expression 'Mūlasarvāstivāda sect' is indeed problematic, but the problem appears to be not just the first, but more particularly the second of the two terms: the idea of a 'sect'. Hence a solution to the justified misgivings expressed by Hartmann (2020) and others is in my

³⁹ See also Gunawardana 1966 and 1979: 253, Hazra 1982 [1981]: 54 and Gethin 2012: 53–54.

view not achieved by employing expressions like ‘(Mūla-)sarvāstivāda’ (earlier used by myself as well) or by dropping the term completely and replacing it with ‘Sarvāstivāda’. The suggestion of such replacement risks becoming a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. As I hope to have shown in the foregoing, the term Mūla-sarvāstivāda can serve a purpose as a designation for a specific, identifiable *Āgama* lineage of textual transmission.

I contend that the solution lies in simply clarifying in what sense the term is used, rather than discarding the term itself. From a doctrinal viewpoint, Sarvāstivādin and Mūlasarvāstivādin are indeed closely similar. From a legal viewpoint, however, they differ in much more substantial ways, as they refer to distinct *Vinayas* and hence to different ordination lineages.

Due to the nature of oral tradition, different ordination lineages tend to encourage the formation of separate communities of reciters and thus distinct lineages of textual transmission (which at times might coincide with the regional use of certain conventions in diction and stock phrases). These lineages in turn also impact *Āgama* texts. For this reason, it is meaningful to refer to *Āgama* texts by the name of the *nikāya* in which the respective reciters appear to have been ordained and within whose institutional container the recitation and transmission of the texts would have predominantly, though not exclusively, taken place.

I am indebted to observations made during the discussion at the Samyukta-āgama seminar in Buenos Aires by Mark Allon, which have helped me, after further reflection, to gain a clearer understanding of the problems involved, and to Mark Allon, Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā, Jens-Uwe Hartmann and Yao Fumi 八尾史 for commenting on a draft version of this article.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Anguttara-nikāya</i>
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association
DĀ	<i>Dīrgha-āgama</i> (T 1)
DN	<i>Dīrgha-nikāya</i>
Jā	<i>Jātaka</i>
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i> (T 26)
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
P	Peking edition
T	Taishō 大正 edition (CBETA)
Up	<i>Abhidharmakośopāyikā-tīkā</i>

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