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Scholarship is comfortable with neat categories, and, by corollary, it is uncomfortable with ambiguity. In Buddhist studies, tradition divides Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna into discrete schools, or even opposing ‘churches’. Separate chapters are devoted to ‘Hīnayāna’ and ‘Mahāyāna’: narratives of Buddhist history start with the Buddha, the ‘rise of the sects’, and the ‘rise of Mahāyāna’. Our categories segregate schools and ideas, both synchronically and diachronically. Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna sleep in different beds, and dream different dreams.

That this is a caricature should be obvious. Mahāyāna and Śrāvakayāna grew up together, in dialogue and contention. They shared the same monasteries and the same refectories. Above all, partisans of Mahāyāna did not reject the Śrāvaka scriptures, or even their philosophies. Mahāyānists practiced the *Vinaya*, often quite earnestly, and studied the *Sūtras* and the *Abhidharma*. They shared the same vocabulary, and memorized and reflected upon similar *mātrkā*. It is true that Mahāyāna authors expanded the vocabulary by adding terms and categories—such as *puḍgalanairātmya* or *dharmasūnyatā*, or the three *svabhāva*, three *kāya*, or ten *bhūmi*. But so also did the Śrāvaka theorists, who introduced their own categories: the *cittaviprayukta-saṃskāra* of the Sarvāstivāda, for example, or the thirty *pāramī* and twenty-four conditions (*paṇḍarā*) of the Mahāvihāra. Linguistic and conceptual innovation is inevitable if a religion is to remain relevant.

Not only did the Mahāyānists read—and recite—Śrāvaka texts, but they also incorporated whole passages or similes into their own texts. Mahāyāna *sūtras* place these passages in new contexts, and reinterpret them to elaborate

the particular message of the particular *sūtra*. But there is not necessarily any real hermeneutical shift—the ideas, ethics, and inspirations are common, shared.

‘The benefits of listening’

An interesting example of the practice of incorporation is found in Chapter 11 of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*, a Mahāyāna *sūtra* belonging to the *Ratnakūṭa* collection. The *sūtra* does not survive in Sanskrit; for this study I use the Tibetan translation done by Surendrabodhi, Śīlendra, and Dharmatāśīla ca. CE 800 (there is also a Chinese translation done by Xuanzang in CE 645). Chapter 11 contains *gāthās* with counterparts in the *Śrutavarga* of the *Udānavarga*, the well-known anthology of verses, and in the *Gāndhārī Dharmapada*.¹

The table gives a synoptic edition of the verses. Spoken by the Buddha to Śāriputra, they form a distinct set, framed by prose narrative. The numbering of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* verses in the table is my own, for the purposes of this article only. Verses 1 to 5 have counterparts in the *gāthā* literature, and are the subject of my discussion. Verse 6 is unique to the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*. It may be said to appropriate the ideology of the preceding verses—on the benefits of listening—to apply them to the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* itself:

Having listened to the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*
 Dwelling in the nature of things (*dharmatā*)
 Becoming a light for the world (*loka*)

¹ *Byañ chub sems dpa'i sde snod z'es bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Otani Cat. no. 760. 12, Vol. 23, *dKon brtsegs*, vi, fol. 181b5 foll. See Pagel, *The Bodhisattvapiṭaka*, p. 341. Verses 3, 4, and 5 are repeated at vi 183a2 (Pagel p. 344), also as a set spoken by the Ten-Powered One to Śāriputra, framed by prose. The translation differs somewhat.

One practices the bodhisattva practice (*caryā*).

Verses 1, 2, 4, and 5 have counterparts in Chapter 15 of the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada*, where they occur in the same sequence, with one intervening verse (15: 11) not found in the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*. Verses 1, 2, and 3 of *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* have counterparts in the *Śrutavarga*, the ‘Chapter on Listening’, Chapter 22 of the *Udānavarga*. Of the five stanzas, only one—verse 4—has a Pāli counterpart, in the verses of Mahācunda in the *Theragāthā*. None of the other verses are found in Pāli.²

The correspondence between the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* set and the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* sequence is striking—but one key verse, verse 3, is missing. The verse reads:

Having listened, one discriminates moral states;
 Having listened, one turns away from wrong behaviour;
 Having listened, one rejects the harmful;
 Having listened, one obtains *nirvāṇa*.

The stanza is found, so far, only in the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* and the *Udānavarga*.³ It is not found in the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* or Pāli *Dhammapada*. The other correspondences suggest, however, that the source from which the compilers or authors of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka* drew the verses has some affiliation with the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* and *Udānavarga* or their sources, against the Pāli tradition.

Verse 3 is cited and interpreted by Vasubandhu in his *Gāthāsaṃgraha*

² Single lines of verse 5 do have partial parallels in Pāli: see Brough, p. 159.

³ The verse is also cited in Śamathadeva’s *Upāyikā-ṭīkā* on the *Abhidharmakośa*: Otani Cat. no. 5595, Vol. 118, reprint p. 118. 5. 1. To complicate things, the verse is not found in the Chinese *Udānavarga* and in some Central Asian manuscripts.

and in his *Vyākhyāyukti*.⁴ Further comments are provided by Guṇamati in his *Vyākhyāyuktiṭīkā*.⁵ The verse is also commented upon by Prajñāvarman in his *Udānavargavivaraṇa*, along with the other *Udānavarga* verses.⁶ In his *History of Buddhism*, Bu ston Rin chen grub cites the stanza as from the *Bodhisattvapīṭaka*.⁷

Verse 3 is instructive: important in some traditions (*Bodhisattvapīṭaka*, *Udānavarga*, the works of Vasubandhu), it is not even found in others (Pāli *Dhammapada*, Gāndhārī *Dharmapada*). Furthermore, we have exegetical comments, in the *Gāthāsamgrahasāstrārtha*, the *Vyākhyāyukti* and its *Ṭīkā*, and the *Udānavargavivaraṇa*—all preserved in Tibetan translation only—which can be profitably consulted and compared. The last line is especially interesting, in the light of the development of an ideology which promises that hearing or listening to a text, often a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, will bring innumerable benefits, including *nirvāṇa*. Vasubandhu's interpretations in the *Vyākhyāyukti* are more prosaic: the line refers to the training in higher wisdom (*adhiprajñāsīkṣā*) or the knowledge of the four truths (*satya*).

'The Buddhas are inconceivable'

That the range of a Buddha is inconceivable is a theme upon which Mahāyāna *sūtras* often wax eloquent. The idea is found in the *Āgamas* and *Nikāyas*, which list four inconceivabilities, one of which is that 'the Buddha-range (*buddha-viṣaya*) of Buddhas is inconceivable'.⁸

⁴ Lee, *Vyākhyāyukti*, 258. 25, *bcom ldan 'das kyis*. For the *Vyākhyāyukti* and related texts see Skilling, 'A Survey of the Vyākhyāyukti Literature'.

⁵ *rNam par bśad pa'i rigs pa'i bśad pa*, Otani Cat. no. 5570, Vol. 114, *sems tsam*, i, fol. 166a7 foll., especially fol. 169b2 foll.

⁶ Balk, *Prajñāvarman's Udānavargavivaraṇa*, Vol. II, pp. 628–631.

⁷ Bu ston Rin chen grub 1989, *Chos 'byun, ya*, fol. 3b6, *byan chub sems dpa'i sde snod las...*; Obermiller I 9. Bu ston's text is closer to *Udānavarga* than to *Bodhisattvapīṭaka*.

This inconceivability has many dimensions. The results of serene confidence in the inconceivable Buddhas are expressed in the following verse:⁹

*evam hy acintiyā buddhā buddhadharmā py acintiyāḥ
acintiye prasannānām vipākaś cāpy acintiyāḥ.*

The verse belongs to a set of stanzas praising the benefits of making offerings to *caityas* of the Buddha. They are found in the *Indranāmabrāhmaṇa Avadāna* (*Divyāvadāna* 6) and its parallel in the *Bhaiṣajyavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin Vinaya*;¹⁰ in the *Sudhanakumāra Avadāna* (*Divyāvadāna* 31); and in a text on the benefits of *caityas* preserved in Tibetan translation, the *Caityaṅpradakṣiṇa-gāthā*. In the latter, the *acintiyā* verse is translated as follows:¹¹

*de ltar sañgs rgyas bsam mi khyab, sañs rgyas chos kyañ bsam mi khyab,
bsam mi khyab la dad mams kyi, mam par smin pa'añ bsam mi khyab.*

A similar verse is cited alone as a 'gāthā' in the *Karmavibhaṅgopadeśa*.¹²

⁸ *acintyo hi buddhānām buddhaviśaya ity uktam bhagavatā: Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* ad 2: 62ab, Pradhan p. 99. 10; see also 7: 48c, Pradhan 425. 12. For Pāli see *Aṅguttaranikāya* II 80. 17 *buddhānaṃ bhikkhave buddhaviśayo acinteyyo na cintetabbo yaṃ cinteto ummāḍassa vighātassa bhāgī assa*. See also Śamathadeva 144. 1. 1.

⁹ Cowell and Neil, *The Divyāvadāna*, pp. 79. 10, 469. 5.

¹⁰ Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 78. 10. The verse that precedes our verse is also important, and is cited by Prajñākaramati in his *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (see Vaidya, *Bodhicaryāvatāra of Śāntideva*, p. 202. 2). The verse is an expression of an ideology that stresses the value of offerings to the Buddha after his passing (*nirvāna*).

¹¹ *mChod rten bskor ba'i tshigs su bcad pa*, Otani Cat. no. 987, Vol. 39, *mdo, śu*, 210a8; English translation in *Crystal Mirror* 12, p. 231.

¹² Lévi, *Mahākarmavibhaṅga*, p. 153. 14, *gāthā caktā*.

evam acintīyo buddho buddhadharmo' py acintīyaḥ
*[yadi dharmo nv acintyo buddho 'py acintyo]*¹³
acintyaḥprasannasya vipāko 'pi acintīyaḥ.

The verse is without context, although it comes at the end of a short citation of a *sūtra* from the *Ekottarika* (that is, the *Ekottarika-āgama*) which, in a Pāli parallel, the *Aggappasādasutta*, ends with a different set of verses, which are part of Siamese liturgy today.¹⁴

In a Sanskrit manuscript from Kutcha published by Lüders the verse occurs as follows:¹⁵

evam hy acittitā buddhā buddhadharmasya cittitā
acittite prasādyeha vipākaḥ syād acittitā.

In Pāli the verse concludes the first section of the *Aṭṭadāna*, which bears the title *Buddhāṭṭadāniyaṃ nāma dhammapariyāyaṃ*.¹⁶

evam acintīyā buddhā, buddhadhammā acintīyā
acintīye [var. acintīyesu] pasannānaṃ, vipāko hoti acintīyo.

Lévi notes two occurrences of the verse in the *Mahāvamsa* (XVII, 56 and XXXI, 125).

¹³ This unmetrical line may be an interpolation, a prose comment between the two lines of the verse: see Lévi, p. 154, n., 'l'incise: *yadi tava...* est probablement une réflexion ajoutée par le commentateur de *Karmavibhaṅgopadesā*'.

¹⁴ *Aṅguttaranikāya* II, 34.

¹⁵ I reproduce the verse from Lévi, who reproduces it 'sans correction' from 'Weitere Beiträge zur Geschichte und Geographie von Ost-Turkestan, Sitz. Ber. Pr. Ak. Wiss. Phil. Hist. Kl. 1930, I, p. 23' (not seen).

¹⁶ *Aṭṭadāna*, p. 6.

The texts cited so far belong to the Śrāvaka schools (with the exception, perhaps, of the manuscript from Kutch). The verse is also found in a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Mahākaruṇāpūṇḍarīka-sūtra*, as preserved in Tibetan translation:¹⁷

*de ltar saṅs rgyas bsam mi khyab, saṅs rgyas chos kyaṅ bsam mi khyab
bsam mi khyab la dad byas na, de yi mam smin bsam mi khyab.*

Lévi concludes that ‘évidemment le vers appartient à une tradition commune qui doit remonter assez haut; l’original s’en retrouvera sans doute dans les Āgamas. L’Up[adeśa], comme le Divyāv[adāna], a conservé une rédaction pracrite.’ We may also include the stanza among the verses that are shared with Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

‘Health is the supreme blessing’

Verses are not only shared by Śrāvaka and Mahāyāna texts—they are also shared by Tantras. In the *Vidyā-uttama-mahātantra*, an *udāna* is spoken by the Vidyā to the Bhagavat:¹⁸

*bcom ldan ’das la lan gsum bskor ba byas te, de’i tshes ched du brjod pa ’di
ched du rjod do:*

*nad med pa ni rñed pa’i mchog, chog śes pa ni nor gyi mchog
yid brtan pa ni gñen gyi mchog, mya ñan ’das pa bde ba’i mchog.*

¹⁷ *sNṅi rje chen po’i pad ma dkar po zes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo*, Tōhoku No. 111, *mdo sde, cha*, fol. 93a5.

¹⁸ *Rig pa mchog gi rgyud chen po*, Otani Cat. no. 402, Vol. 8, *rgyud, tsa*, fol. 331a5.

The verse has a counterpart in the *Udānavarga* (26: 6):

*ārogyaṣaramā lābhā, saṃtuṣṭiṣaramaṃ dhanam
viśvāsaṣaramaṃ mitraṃ, nirvāṇaṣaramaṃ sukham.*

The Tibetan translation of *Udānavarga* reads as follows:¹⁹

*nad med rñed pa'i dam pa ste, chog śes pa ni nor gyi dbyig
yid gcugs śes pa'i mchog yin te, mya nian 'das pa bde ba'i phul.*

The *Vidyā-uttama* verse was published and translated long ago in 'Analysis of the Gyut', by the worthy Hungarian scholar Alexander Csoma de Kőrös, published in *Asiatic Researches* in 1839:²⁰

Health is the chief acquirement.
Content is the best riches.
Firmness of mind is the best kinsmen.
Deliverance from pain is the chief happiness.

The stanza is also found in the Pāli *Dhammapada* (v. 204) and the Gāndhārī *Dharmapada* (XI. 1 [162]).

Conclusions

I do not suggest, for a moment, that there were no distinctions or conflicts

¹⁹ Dietz and Zongtse, *Udānavarga*, XXVI, 6.

²⁰ 'Analysis of the Sher-chin—P'hal-ch'hen—Dkon-séks—Do-dé—Nyáng-dás—and Gyut; Being the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, and 7th Divisions of the Tibetan Work, Entitled the Kah-Gyur', *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XX, Part II, p. 539, reprinted in Csoma de Kőrös, *Tibetan Studies*, p. 411.

between the Śrāvaka schools and the Mahāyāna. There were—and this is obvious from the polemic of many Mahāyāna *sūtras* and *śāstras*. Mahāyāna had its own self-consciousness. This is clearly expressed, for example, in the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra*:²¹

tena ca samayena tasmīṅ jambudvīpe dvidhādṛṣṭiḥ sattvānām abhūt, kecin mahāyānam abhiśraddhayanti, kecit kulśayanti.

At that time, in Jambudvīpa, there were two types of view for beings. Some had faith in the Mahāyāna. Some condemned it.

But can the study of the evolution of Buddhist thought and practice be framed in such broad, and essentially atemporal, strokes as Śrāvakayāna versus Mahāyāna? Does that not entail *a priori* judgements? At exactly what point does Śrāvakayāna end, and Mahāyāna begin? The verses cited here—and many other examples could be cited—show that the contents of ‘Mahāyāna’ *sūtras* are not exclusively ‘Mahāyāna’. There is a great deal of common ground, common *imaginaire*, and common ideology. Furthermore, given that Mahāyāna is not a monolith—and indeed not an institution or historical entity as such—we should pay close attention to the unique messages and values of individual Mahāyāna *sūtras*. The debates that they embody are not only with the Śrāvaka schools, but also with other trends within the mainstream of Mahāyāna.

²¹ Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra*, p. 192. 7; Emmerick, *The Sūtra of Golden Light*, p. 84.

Table. *Bodhisattvaṅgiṭaka* verses with parallels.

<i>Bodhisattvaṅgiṭaka</i> (<i>dhon brtsegs. wi.</i> 181b5)	<i>Udānavarga</i> Tib. (Chap. 22, <i>Thos pa'i tshoms</i>)	<i>Udānavarga</i> Skt. (Chap. 22, <i>Śrutavarga</i>)	<i>Gāndhārī Dharmapada</i> (Chap. 15)
[1] ji ltar mun pas khyab bsgribs pa'i khyim du žugs par gyur na ni yod par gyur pa'i gzugs rnams kyañ mig gis mthoñ bar mi 'gyur ro	ji ltar khyim ni legs g'yogs pa mun pas khebs pa'i nañ žugs na gzugs rnams yod par gyur kyañ ni mig ldan bžin du mi mthoñ ba	yathā hy agāraṃ succhannaṃ praviśi tamasaṃpuṭam vidyamānāni rūpāni cakṣuṣmāṃi hi na paśyati	yadha akara suchana praviśi tamasarpuṭu vijamaṇa vi ruveṣu cakkhūsuma vi na paśadi
[2] de bžin du ni 'di la yañ la la'i mi dag skyes gyur kyañ dge ba dañ ni sdiag pa'i chos ma thos par ni šes mi 'gyur	de bžin 'di ni rigs skyes pa'i mi ni blo gros ldan gyur kyañ sdiag pa dañ ni dge ba'i chos ma thos bar du šes mi 'gyur	tathaiveha naro nityam jñānavān api yo bhavet aśrutvā na vijānāti dharmāṃ kalyāṇapāpakān	emam eva idh=ekacu jadima vi ca yo naro aṣutva na vi'anađi dhama dhama kalana-pavaka
[3] thos nas chos rnams rnam par šes thos nas sdiag pa sten mi byed thos nas 'gnod pa spon bar byed thos nas mya ñan 'da' pa 'thob	thos pas chos rnams rnam par šes thos pas sdiag las ldog par 'gyur thos pas don med spon bar byed thos pas mya ñan 'das pa 'thob	śrutvā dharmāṃ vijānāti śrutvā pāpaṃ na sevate śrutvā hy anarthaṃ varjayate śrutvā prāpnoti nirvṛtim	[deest] [10]
[6]	[6]		

Gāthāsamgraha 13

thos pas chos ni bye brag śes
 thos pas sdig las ldog par byed
 thos pas don ma yin pa spon
 thos pas mya nan 'das pa thob

Themagāthā 141

[4] thos par 'dod pas thos pa 'phel thos pas śes rab 'phel par 'gyur byañ chub ¹ śes rab kyis ni don rnam sbyoñ [read: sbyoñ] don thob nas ni bde 'thob 'gyur	susūsā suta-vaḍḍhanī sutaṃ paññāya vaḍḍhanaṃ paññāya atthaṃ jānāti ñāto attho sukhāvaho	śūsuda śuda-vaḍḍhana śuda prañāya vaḍḍhadi prañā artha viśodhedi artha śudho suhava 'u [12] so artha-ladhu medhavi prañā-śīla-samahidu śuda-dhamu suyī-drakṣu panodi paramu suhu [13]
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[5] don thob de ni yid gzuñs te
 tshe 'di la ni mya nan 'das
 chos la sbyor 'ziñ gtsaṅ la
 mikhas
 śin tu bde ba thob par 'gyur

[6] byañ chub sems pa'i sde
 snod ni
 thos nas chos ñid la gnas te
 'jig rten gyi ni snañ gyur nas
 byañ chub sems dpa'i spyad pa
 spyod

¹ 'byañ chub' is an interpolation, to be deleted.

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