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The *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University* (ARIRIAB), published annually since 1997, contains papers on a wide range of Buddhist studies, from philological research on Buddhist texts and manuscripts in various languages to studies on Buddhist art and archaeological finds. Also, by publishing and introducing newly-discovered manuscripts and artefacts, we aim to make them available to a wider public so as to foster further research.

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Abbreviation in the *Madhyama-āgama*

Bhikkhu ANĀLAYO

Abstract:

The present article surveys the general employment of textual abbreviation in the first five fascicles of the *Madhyama-āgama* extant in Chinese translation (T 26) and the more specific case of abbreviations of expositions of the gradual path in the remainder of the collection.

Keywords:

Abbreviation, Gradual Path, Oral Transmission, *peyyāla*, *peyyāla*.

Introduction

In what follows I intend to complement my study of abbreviations in the first five fascicles of the *Samyukta-āgama* (T 99), published in Anālayo (2020).¹ In pursuing this topic, I take inspiration from remarks by Skilling (2013: 122n17 and 2017: 292) to the effect that the employment of abbreviation calls for research. Although being a relatively rarely studied phenomenon,² the employment of abbreviation is actually quite significant for deepening our understanding of the formation and transmission of Buddhist texts.

My first foray into the employment of abbreviation in the *Samyukta-āgama* was limited to the first five fascicles, which together make up the *Skandha-samyukta* of this collection. In order to cover a comparable portion of text in the *Madhyama-āgama*, in the first part of the present article I survey selected instances of abbreviation found in its first five fascicles. Needless to say, in both cases it would in principle have been preferable to survey the entire collection. Yet, such an undertaking is not really feasible within the confines of an article. Due to the limited amount of material surveyed in this way, however, the conclusions drawn are necessarily of a similarly limited nature. By way of counterbalancing at least to some extent such limitations, in the second part of this article I turn to one specific case of abbreviation of a topic covered only in the remainder of the collection, which is the description of the gradual path of practice that ranges from the emergence of a Tathāgata as the teacher to a disciple's attainment of awakening.

I. Abbreviation in the First Five Fascicles

Developing a typology of abbreviations can rely on the distinction between “internal” and “external” instances. An abbreviation can be reckoned internal if it relies on text found within the same discourse, such that, even if this discourse were to occur in isolation from the rest of

¹ See also Dhammadinnā 2020: 568–571.

² See, however, the stimulating studies of the closely related topic of repetition by Gethin 2007 and 2020a.

the collection, it would be clear in what way the abbreviated part is to be supplemented. An external abbreviation, in contrast, relies on text found elsewhere in the same collection, usually, but not invariably, in a discourse that occurs earlier.

I.1 Lack of Abbreviation in the First Few Discourses

A somewhat unexpected feature of the first few discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama* collection is the absence of internal abbreviation. Although this is not surprising for external abbreviations, as standard doctrinal items that could be abbreviated in this way have so far not been introduced, the material in question leaves ample scope for internal abbreviation, in the sense that a passage given in full once could easily have been abbreviated on subsequent occurrences in the same discourse.

An example illustrating this feature is the first discourse in the collection, which lists seven wholesome qualities. In the case of the first quality of knowing the teachings, for example, the significance of the teachings finds explanation in listing the twelve *aṅgas*.³ This is followed by describing in the same words the case of one who does not know and the case of one who knows these *aṅgas*. All of these three similarly worded passages give the list of twelve *aṅgas* in full, rather than abbreviating it.⁴ The same pattern of refraining from internal abbreviation continues throughout the exposition of other qualities in this *Madhyama-āgama* discourse.

The case of the first quality of knowing the teachings can be compared with the situation in the PTS edition of the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* parallel,⁵ which abbreviates the corresponding second and third reference to what in this version is the list of nine *aṅgas*.⁶ The evident difference in abbreviation policy, if it can be called such, is not just a matter of Chinese translation as against Pāli text, as other parallels to the same *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, extant in Chinese translation, also abbreviate, after having listed the twelve *aṅgas* once.⁷

After the first fascicle of the collection, however, this pattern gradually changes.⁸ This can be seen in the ninth discourse, found in the second fascicle of the *Madhyama-āgama*, which begins with the Buddha inquiring from a group of visitors if they knew a monastic endowed with a series of good qualities. The reply to that question repeats the whole long list of qualities, which is once again repeated as part of a reflection of someone who has just heard this reply.⁹ The PTS edition of the Pāli parallel gives the full list only once and abbreviates its recurrence.¹⁰ The remainder of this *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, however, does employ

³ For a discussion of the significance of such listings of *aṅgas* see Anālayo 2016a and Travagnin and Anālayo 2020: 983–997.

⁴ MĀ 1 at T I 421a₁₈, 421a₂₁, and 421a₂₃.

⁵ Whereas the B^c and S^c editions agree with the PTS edition in abbreviating the second and third occurrences, the C^c edition only abbreviates the third.

⁶ AN 7.64 at AN IV 113₁₃ (full), followed by AN IV 113₁₆ and 113₁₈ (abbreviated).

⁷ T 27 at T I 810a₁₁ first lists the twelve *aṅgas* and then at 810a₁₅ refers to them summarily with the same expression used earlier to introduce their detailed listing: 十二部經. EĀ 39.1 at T II 728c₃ lists the twelve *aṅgas* and then just refers to them summarily at 728c₆, using the same expression 十二部經, also found in T 27, which in this case, however, has not been employed previously to introduce the detailed listing.

⁸ See below notes 28 and 29 for abbreviations in MĀ 7.

⁹ MĀ 9 at T I 430a₁₀, 430a₁₅, and 430a₂₂.

¹⁰ MN 24 at MN I 145₁₉ and 146_{3,5}; the reflection by the listener in MN 24 does not repeat the list of qualities. The B^c and S^c editions agree with the PTS edition in abbreviating the second occurrence (though in different ways); C^c does not abbreviate it.

abbreviation.¹¹

The apparent reluctance to abbreviate, evident in the first few discourses of the collection, can be contrasted with its final discourse, which testifies to a remarkable proliferation of abbreviations.¹² The discourse combines an abbreviated account of the gradual path (a topic to which I will return in the second part of this article) with a list of ten practices, which serve the purpose of overcoming ignorance. The list of ten practices is again combined with another list, which gives synonyms for the task of overcoming. Moreover, the mention of ignorance leads on to a listing of the ensuing links in the standard presentation of dependent arising as something to be overcome. The discourse resulting from the combination of these different lists could hardly have ever been recited in full, as on supplementing all the abbreviations it would become more than twice as long as the entire *Madhyama-āgama*.¹³ In other words, it can safely be assumed that the received discourse came into existence in abbreviated form. This goes to show that the apparent reluctance in the first few discourses of the *Madhyama-āgama* to employ abbreviation is not a persistent trait of the remainder of the collection.

I.2 The Abbreviation Marker “In the same way” (如是)

One way of signalling abbreviation in the *Madhyama-āgama* takes the form of indicating “in the same way” (如是) or more literally “like this.” The phrase itself can find employment in a variety of ways in the discourses, which are not necessarily related to abbreviation. An instance where it does serve such a function occurs in an exposition of sense restraint, which explains the practice in full for the first sense organ of the eye and then abbreviates for the remaining sense organs:¹⁴

In the same way for the ear ... nose ... tongue ... body ... and the mind cognizing mental states.
如是耳, 鼻, 舌, 身, 意知法.

As will become clear with another example to be taken up later,¹⁵ an abbreviated list of the six sense organs can also be given without a marker, as it is already fairly obvious that an abbreviation has occurred. In the present case of marked abbreviation, the text mentions just the ensuing physical sense organs and in the case of the sixth and last sense organ also the corresponding object. The last then leads on to a repetition of the full exposition given earlier for the eye. This corresponds to a standard pattern of abbreviation, which is to give at least the first and last item in full and abbreviate those that come in between. This pattern reflects the oral medium, where the repetition of the full treatment in relation to the last item ensures that the main message is kept in mind. In the written medium, this last item could just as easily have been abbreviated as well.

A comparable usage can be found in relation to the three doors of action. A detailed instruction regarding what should be done if an impure bodily action has been committed continues by indicating:¹⁶

¹¹ See below notes 30 and 31.

¹² MĀ 222 at T I 805c₁₁ to 809a₂₅.

¹³ Anālayo 2014: 44–47.

¹⁴ MĀ 10 at T I 432b₉.

¹⁵ See below note 35.

¹⁶ MĀ 14 at T I 437a₅.

Verbal action is also in the same way.
口業亦復如是。

The three doors of action are another topic that can also be abbreviated without employing a marker.¹⁷ The type of marked abbreviation used above can also be employed for the four divine abodes or the five hindrances, where in each case the full exposition for the first member is followed by indicating that the same applies to the other members of this list:¹⁸

In the same way for compassion ... sympathetic joy ... and a mind endowed with equanimity.
如是悲, 喜, 心與捨俱。

In the same way for ill will ... sloth-and-torpor ... restlessness-and-worry ... and for abandoning doubt.
如是瞋恚, 睡眠, 掉悔, 斷疑。

In such cases, the last member of the list will usually receive the same full treatment as given to its first member.

L3 The Abbreviation Marker “Up to” (至 & 乃至)

The employment of the alternative marker “up to” can serve to abbreviate the standard description of the attainment of the four absorptions, which begins by referring to seclusion from detrimental mental states and culminates in the attainment of the fourth absorption:¹⁹

Secluded from sensual desires, secluded from bad and unwholesome states ... up to ... one dwells attaining the accomplishment of the fourth absorption.
離欲, 離惡不善之法, 至得第四禪成就遊。

This abbreviation differs from those surveyed so far, as the full formula to be supplied does not occur in the same discourse. In terms of the taxonomy suggested above, it is thus an external abbreviation. For filling out the abbreviated parts, the full description given in another discourse found previously in the same collection needs to be consulted.²⁰

A similar case involves a listing of the ten unwholesome courses of action, which mentions first the killing of living beings and then abbreviates the remainder of this list in the following manner:²¹

Taking what is not given ... sexual misconduct ... false speech ... up to ... wrong view.
不與取, 邪淫, 妄言, 乃至邪見。

Notably, in this case it is only a subsequent discourse in the same chapter that provides the textual material needed to flesh out this abbreviation, which requires supplementing the terms divisive speech, harsh speech, frivolous speech, covetousness, and ill will.²² In itself, such

¹⁷ See below note 38.

¹⁸ MĀ 15 at T I 438a₂₄ and MĀ 19 at T I 444c₃.

¹⁹ MĀ 19 at T I 444c₆.

²⁰ MĀ 2 at T I 422b₁₁.

²¹ MĀ 13 at T I 435b₉.

²² MĀ 15 at T I 437c₁₄ lists the unwholesome ways of action that have been abbreviated in MĀ 13. It also

later occurrence is not necessarily problematic. As long as the full version is found somewhere in the same collection, the reciters who had memorized it would know how a particular abbreviated instance should be supplemented, if required. A later positioning of the full text is less cumbersome in the oral medium compared to a written version of the collection, in which case there is a greater need to locate the place where the template can be found, making it preferable to position the complete version first in order to be able to identify it more easily.

At the same time, however, even in oral recitation it would seem somewhat more natural to give the full version first and abbreviate subsequently. Perhaps departures from this pattern reflect a shifting around of discourses within the collection, which comparative study suggests to be a pervasive pattern of the different *Āgama* collections.²³ If these two considerations are combined, the proposed hypothesis would be as follows: A departure from the more natural pattern of having the full text first, due to a shifting around of discourses, was not perceived as sufficiently problematic to motivate those responsible for the transmission of the collection to adjust by giving the full account in what, by then, had become the first occurrence of the topic in question and abbreviating the discourse that, up to then, had the full account.

Another case of abbreviation involves the members of the eightfold path, which are presented in this way:²⁴

Right view ... up to ... right concentration.
正見乃至正定。

In this case as well, a full listing of the eight path factors occurs only in a subsequent discourse, as part of an exposition of the fourth noble truth.²⁵ This shows that the above case of giving the full exposition at a later juncture is not unique in this respect.

The employment of marked abbreviation is not confined to doctrinal lists and can similarly be used for numerals. Here is an example:²⁶

Either they eat one mouthful and are contented by one mouthful, or else two mouthfuls ... three ... four ... up to ... seven mouthfuls.
或噉一口, 以一口為足, 或二口, 三, 四, 乃至七口。

The same pattern of giving the numbers two, three, and four, but then not even mentioning the numbers five and six, before reaching the final number seven, occurs elsewhere in a description of a discussion that might range from one to seven days and nights.²⁷

provides a detailed explanation of each.

²³ See the survey of discourse parallels in Akanuma 1929/1990 and Bucknell 2014 and 2017 on the apparent shifting around of whole groups of discourses.

²⁴ MĀ 13 at T I 436a₅.

²⁵ MĀ 31 at T I 469a₁₄. In the comparable case of an abbreviation of a standard doctrinal term, in this case the exposition of dependent arising (found in a discourse that falls outside of the scope of the present survey of the first five fascicles), MĀ 62 at T I 498b₂₇, a complete coverage of the twelve links occurs previous to this abbreviation in MĀ 55 at T I 491a₅.

²⁶ MĀ 18 at T I 441c₂₄.

²⁷ MĀ 23 at T I 452a₂₅.

I.4 Lack of an Abbreviation Marker

Madhyama-āgama discourses often abbreviate without employing an explicit marker to signal what has taken place. One example is a listing of seven ways to acquire worldly merits, which gives the first three cases in full, each time concluding with the statement that this is the first, second, and third of these seven worldly merits. The remaining four are presented together, followed by the statement that this is the seventh way to acquire worldly merits. This statement obviously intends only the last part of the preceding passage. As a result of adopting this mode of presentation, the exposition comes without any explicit reference to the fourth, fifth, and sixth worldly merits.²⁸

The same discourse continues by expounding seven ways to acquire world-transcending merits. In this case, only the first two and the seventh are explicitly designated as such, so that this exposition lacks explicit references to the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth ways to acquire world-transcending merits.²⁹

Another example concerns an inquiry into the purpose of living the life of a monastic under the guidance of the Buddha:³⁰

“How is it, friend, are you cultivating the holy life under the recluse Gautama for the sake of purification of virtue?” He replied: “No.”

“Are you cultivating the holy life under the recluse Gautama for the sake of purification of the mind, for the sake of purification of view, for the sake of purification from the hindrance of doubt, for the sake of purification of knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path, for the sake of purification of knowledge and vision of the way, for the sake of purification of knowledge of the way of abandoning?” He replied: “No.”

云何, 賢者, 以戒淨故從沙門瞿曇修梵行耶? 答曰: 不也。以心淨故, 以見淨故, 以疑蓋淨故, 以道非道知見淨故, 以道跡知見淨故, 以道跡斷智淨故, 從沙門瞿曇修梵行耶? 答曰: 不也。

The idea is evidently that each of these different purifications formed the topic of an individual question that met with a rejection. When asked to explain this matter further, the protagonist who had been rejecting the different proposals illustrates the situation with the example of a relay of seven chariots used one after the other to reach a particular goal. The queries posed by the other person are similar to asking someone who used the whole relay of chariots if the journey had been accomplished by means of the first chariot, or rather by means of the second, or by means of the third, or by means of the seventh.³¹ In this way, here again a series of numbers from one to seven are not given in full, as the fourth, fifth, and sixth chariots are not explicitly mentioned:

Did you ride on the second chariot, did you ride on the third chariot ... up to ... the seventh chariot?

乘第二車, 乘第三車, 至第七車?

Even though the reference to the actual journey accomplished in this way has been abbreviated without being marked, the dropping of a reference to the fourth, fifth, and sixth chariots is signaled with the help of the abbreviation marker “up to.”

²⁸ MĀ 7 at T I 428a₃: 是謂第一, 428a₇: 是謂第二, 428a₁₀: 是謂第三, and 428a₁₆: 是謂第七.

²⁹ MĀ 7 at T I 428b₁: 謂第一, 428b₅: 是謂第二, and 428b₁₀: 是謂第七.

³⁰ MĀ 9 at T I 430b₂₇; on this list see also Anālayo 2005.

³¹ MĀ 9 at T I 431a₁₈.

A minor abbreviation occurs in the context of a description of insight into the four noble truths, which takes the following form:³²

One understands *duḥkha* as it really is, understands the arising of *duḥkha*, understands the cessation of *duḥkha*, and understands the path to the cessation of *duḥkha* as it really is.
知苦如真, 知苦習, 知苦滅, 知苦滅道如真.

The presentation obviously does not intend to convey that the understanding of the second and third truths is not “as it really is” (如真). In other words, the phrase employed for the first and last items should be applied to those that come in between. A similar pattern occurs in the same discourse in relation to a long list of various things that one should better avoid, where the full formulation is only found for the first and last items, with the remainder taking the form of a list of such things without explicitly mentioning that these should be avoided, which is of course implied by the context.³³ The same discourse also applies the pattern of giving only the first and the last items in full to the three types of unwholesome thoughts and the seven awakening factors, where each time only the first and last are treated in full, and the others are given only in an abbreviated manner.³⁴

The pattern of giving the first and last item in full and then abbreviating those that come in between continues throughout the remainder of the section under study. An example concerns the six sense organs, which already came up above among abbreviations that do involve a marker. The present case shows that the same topic can also be covered without a marker.³⁵

The sphere of the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body, the sphere of the mind.
眼處, 耳, 鼻, 舌, 身, 意處.

In the case taken up earlier,³⁶ it seems that perhaps a marker was used because the sense organ of the eye came with a detailed statement, which would have made it appear appropriate to introduce the other sense organs with the marker “in the same way.” In the present case, however, the six sense organs are part of a fairly short and straightforward list, presumably obviating the need to mark that an abbreviation has taken place.

A particularly frequent occurrence of abbreviation involves the three doors of action. As also seen above, these can come with a marker.³⁷ Often, however, this is not the case and the reference to verbal actions is simply not given in full.³⁸

Impure bodily actions, verbal, impure mental actions.
身不淨行, 口, 意不淨行.

I have chosen this particular example because the discourse begins its examination with the case of someone who has impure bodily actions but pure verbal actions (身不淨行, 口淨行).

³² MĀ 10 at T I 432a₂₉.

³³ MĀ 10 at T I 432b₁₄.

³⁴ MĀ 10 at T I 432c₁₃ and 432c₁₇.

³⁵ MĀ 13 at T I 435c₁₉.

³⁶ See above note 14.

³⁷ See above note 16.

³⁸ MĀ 25 at T I 454b₂₆.

The formulation confirms what anyway could hardly be doubted, namely that verbal actions were considered an alternative in their own right. That is, the passage quoted above indeed involves an abbreviation.

These instances of abbreviation without a marker have in common that they are fairly unambiguous in nature and can be supplemented from the immediately preceding part of the same discourse. In terms of the taxonomy suggested above, these are all “internal” abbreviations.

II. The Gradual Path

Another perspective on the practice of abbreviation in the *Madhyama-āgama* emerges with research by Gethin (2020b) of accounts of the gradual path of training, which lead via a range of practices from the emergence of a Tathāgata (= the Buddha) and the going forth of a disciple under him all the way up to the latter’s attainment of full awakening.³⁹ Accounts of the gradual path have not come up in the survey above, as relevant instances occur only in *Madhyama-āgama* discourses found subsequent to the first five fascicles taken up for study here. As a way of counterbalancing possible shortcomings due to the restricted amount of text surveyed in the first part of this article, in this second part I follow the lead provided by Gethin (2020b) and examine relevant instances in detail.

Several descriptions of the gradual path in the *Madhyama-āgama* involve a somewhat abrupt shift from a reference to the arising of a Tathāgata, described with a standard set of epithets,⁴⁰ to the abandoning of the five hindrances as a precondition for the attainment of the four absorptions. Right after the last of the epithets used to describe the Tathāgata, the next sentence starts with “he” (彼), which can also convey the sense “that one.” Although it would be natural to take this Chinese character to refer back to the Tathāgata, the context makes it clear that the abandoning of the five hindrances is much rather done by a practitioner of the gradual path. Gethin (2020b) considers such instances to involve “silent abbreviation,” in the sense of an intentional abbreviation of the account of the gradual path that would provide the transition from the last in the standard set of epithets that describe the Tathāgata to the disciple’s overcoming of the hindrances. Since such an abbreviation could only be supplemented by relying on another discourse, this would constitute an external abbreviation of a substantial portion of text without any marker. Such a procedure would amount to a substantial departure from the pattern of employing abbreviation described above.

II.1 Similar Passages

A first step in an attempt to understand such an unexpected finding would be to explore related usages in the remainder of the same collection, as a way of getting an impression of the type of usage typical of this particular textual tradition. In the present case, this could be done by surveying other passages in the *Madhyama-āgama* collection that also involve the same listing of epithets of the Tathāgata followed by a reference to “he” (彼). Several relevant instances begin with a reference just to the Tathāgata, without mentioning his

³⁹ For studies of the gradual path account see, e.g., Franke 1917: 50–80, Eimer 1976: 26–34, Bucknell 1984, Meisig 1987: 35–80, Crangle 1994: 149–152, Manné 1995, Ramers 1996, Freiberger 2000: 71–86, Yit 2004, Melzer 2006: 12–24, Anālayo 2016b, and Gethin 2020b.

⁴⁰ For a study of these epithets in translations by Zhi Qian (支謙) see Nattier 2003.

emergence in the world,⁴¹ followed by listing the epithets and then describing his realization as follows:

He, in this world with its celestials, Māras, Brahmās, recluses, and brahmins, from humans to celestials, has understood himself, awakened himself, and dwells having himself accomplished realization.

彼於此世, 天及魔, 梵, 沙門, 梵志, 從人至天, 自知, 自覺, 自作證成就遊.

In the context of this formulaic description of the Tathāgata’s realization, the employment of “he” (彼) clearly refers back to the Tathāgata. This passage is then followed by indicating that “he” (彼) teaches the Dharma, which again clearly intends the Tathāgata himself.

Several other instances that do combine a reference to the Tathāgata with his emerging in the world are formulated in the first person singular. Thus the Tathāgata, i.e. the Buddha, first states: “I have now emerged in the world, a Tathāgata” (我今出世, 如來), followed by giving the list of epithets and then stating: “I am now” (我今) benefitting myself and also benefitting others.⁴² This confirms the pattern that the person mentioned right after the last epithet is the Tathāgata himself. The same holds for another relevant instance, which has a disciple as the speaker, in which case the phrase that follows the list of epithets is “he is my teacher” (彼是我師).⁴³

A description of the Tathāgata’s realization in the third person singular, in the way given in the passage translated above, can also be preceded by an explicit reference to his emergence in the world (如來出世).⁴⁴ The same explicit reference in another passage follows the last epithet by indicating that “he stays in secluded places” (彼住無事處).⁴⁵ This instance still intends the Tathāgata’s own practice, as evident from the ensuing question: “For what purpose does the Tathāgata stay in secluded places?” (如來以何義故, 住無事處).⁴⁶

II.2 Marked Abbreviations of the Gradual Path

With this fairly pervasive pattern of following the last epithet after a mention of the Tathāgata with a reference to the Tathāgata himself, the stage is set for examining accounts of the gradual path. The full version of such an account features as yet another instance where the emergence of the Tathāgata, followed by the list of epithets, leads over to a description of the Tathāgata’s realization, beginning with “he has in this world” (彼於此世).⁴⁷ Next comes a reference indicating that “he teaches the Dharma” (彼說法), which also clearly intends the Tathāgata. Later on, however, the same “he” (彼) will instead designate a disciple who is inspired by the Tathāgata’s teachings. “At a later time, he” leaves behind the household life

^{41.} MĀ 16 at T I 438b₂₀, MĀ 20 at T I 445b₃, MĀ 132 at T I 623a₁₈, and MĀ 161 at T I 685a₁₈.

^{42.} Examples are MĀ 63 at T I 503a₁₁, MĀ 67 at T I 515a₁₇, MĀ 68 at T I 518b₁₄, MĀ 155 at T I 678a₁₄, and MĀ 160 at T I 684b₁₆.

^{43.} MĀ 162 at T I 690b₁₅; this case does not explicitly mention the Tathāgata’s emergence in the world.

^{44.} MĀ 198 at T I 758a₁₈.

^{45.} MĀ 191 at T I 740a₅.

^{46.} MĀ 191 at T I 740a₇.

^{47.} MĀ 146 at T I 656c₂₉. Considerable parts of this description occur also in MĀ 80 at T I 552b₁₃, with the difference of lacking a reference to the emergence of the Tathāgata and of being worded in the first person singular, so that the reference to the five hindrances at T I 553b₂ takes the form: 我已斷此五蓋. In particular the first of these differences makes it clear that MĀ 146 provides the template for abbreviated versions of the gradual path, in line with the standard pattern for abbreviations of first quoting part of the full exposition, in this case the Tathāgata’s emergence in the world and his epithets, and only then abbreviating.

(彼於後時) and undertakes various practices until eventually “he abandons these five hindrances” (彼斷此五蓋).⁴⁸

This full account provides the template for three abbreviated accounts of the gradual path, found in the final recitation section of the *Madhyama-āgama*, which continue, after the last epithet that concludes the description of the arising of the Tathāgata, with the following formulation:⁴⁹

He abandons ... up to ... the five hindrances.
彼斷乃至五蓋.

This reference could at best only be taken to abbreviate the part of the gradual path that starts with the first instance of something being actually abandoned by the disciple, which in the full account is the abandoning of killing.⁵⁰ Such an abbreviation would omit the first part of the gradual path account, which describes how someone hears the teachings, gains faith, aspires to go forth, and eventually does so.

Moreover, strictly speaking even this reference to killing does not seem to be the appropriate choice, as it reads “he abstains from killing and abandons killing” (彼離殺, 斷殺). If the abbreviation had intended this reference, it would have been more natural to phrase it as “he *abstains* ... up to” (彼離乃至), rather than “he *abandons* ... up to” (彼斷乃至).

On this reasoning, then, the first phrase to which the above abbreviation could indeed refer, in the sense of involving exactly the same expression “he abandons” (彼斷), is the reference to “he abandons these five hindrances” (彼斷此五蓋).⁵¹ This reference, however, quite obviously could not be what the abbreviation “he abandons ... up to ... the five hindrances” (彼斷乃至五蓋) has in mind.

Clearly, the above reference is problematic. A possible explanation could be developed based on envisaging that this formulation may involve a minor error in the positioning of the abbreviation. Such a shift in position could easily have occurred, even just as a scribal error, in one of the three instances and then influenced the others. On this assumption, the formulation could be emended as follows:

He ... up to ... abandons the five hindrances.
彼乃至斷五蓋.

The proposed emendation only involves having the abbreviation “up to” (乃至) one character earlier. On the suggested emendation, the first reference to “he” (彼) would still intend the Tathāgata, in the sense of referring to the Tathāgata’s realization, beginning with “he has in this world” (彼於此世). This would be in line with the recurrent pattern in the passages surveyed above, where such a reference, found right after the list of epithets, indeed intends the Tathāgata. In view of this pattern, it would have been natural for the reciters to abbreviate at this point.

⁴⁸. MĀ 146 at T I 657a₂, 657a₉, and 657c₂₁.

⁴⁹. MĀ 204 at T I 778b₁₃, MĀ 208 at T I 785c₂₆, and MĀ 222 at T I 805c₁₇ (followed by numerous recurrences in the same discourse).

⁵⁰. MĀ 146 at T I 657a₁₄.

⁵¹. MĀ 146 at T I 657c₂₁.

The emended version thereby fulfils the purpose of the abbreviation required at this juncture, since it covers the whole description of the gradual path from the Tathāgata’s realization up to the disciple’s abandoning of the five hindrances. Such abandoning would be what the later part of the above emendation refers to. In the full account, this reads “he abandons *these* five hindrances” (斷此五蓋). The employment of “these” (此) in the full account reflects the fact that the hindrances have just been individually listed, something that in the abbreviated version has naturally been dropped, resulting in a reference to just “the five hindrances” (五蓋).

Based on these considerations, it seems fair to conclude that the three accounts of the gradual path in question involve an abbreviation whose positioning appears to have suffered from an error, as a result of which the marker would have shifted place by one Chinese character. Whereas the formulation found in the original fails to fulfil its purpose properly, the whole problem can be solved with the proposed emendation.

The conclusion that these three accounts are not instances of major portions of text being abbreviated without an explicit marker would also be in line with findings from my research on abbreviations in the first five fascicles of the *Samyukta-āgama* collection, which showed “that what at times appears to be an abbreviation at first sight, might on closer inspection turn out to be a loss of text” (Anālayo 2020: 85). The only difference is that the present instance is not even a loss of text, but instead an apparent shift of placement by one Chinese character.

II.3 A Gradual Path Account Without an Abbreviation Marker

The possibility of a loss of text is more relevant to another instance to be examined, which occurs in a discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama* collection before its full account of the gradual path. After the last epithet, the formulation employed is as follows:⁵²

[The Tathāgata] emerges in the world. He relinquishes the five hindrances.
出於世間. 彼捨五蓋.

This version differs from the standard formulation by having the reference to the Tathāgata “emerging in the world” only after the last epithet, rather than at the outset.⁵³ Moreover, the use of the formulation 出於世間 to qualify the emergence of a Tathāgata seems to be unique to this discourse, being elsewhere in the collection rather used for mental qualities.⁵⁴ For designating the emergence of the Tathāgata in the world, *Madhyama-āgama* discourses generally, though not invariably, tend to use just the phrase 出世.

The above passage also employs the verb “relinquish” (捨), which differs from the standard verb “abandon” (斷) used elsewhere in *Madhyama-āgama* discourses in reference to “the five hindrances.” In relation to such variations, it needs to be kept in mind that the *Madhyama-āgama* differs from other Chinese *Āgamas* in having a comparably high consistency of terms and phrases, not following the general penchant of Chinese translators to introduce some variations for aesthetic reasons, evident in other *Āgama* collections.⁵⁵ For

⁵² MĀ 104 at T 595a₈.

⁵³ A to some extent comparable instance is MĀ 124 at T I 613b₄, which follows the listing of epithets with the statement that he “has emerged in the world and teaches the Dharma,” 出世說法. This phrasing thereby dispenses with a reference to “he” (彼).

⁵⁴ MĀ 7 at T I 428a₂₇ and MĀ 58 at T I 493a₁₇.

⁵⁵ See Radich and Anālayo 2017: 218.

this reason, such irregularities do give the impression that some textual corruption could have occurred.

The verb “abandon” has been used in a closely similar context in the immediately preceding discourse. This is yet another instance referring to the Tathāgata’s emergence in the world. After the last epithet, this version proceeds by indicating that “he declares the abandoning of clinging.”⁵⁶ This refers to the Tathāgata teaching how to abandon all types of clinging. Perhaps the fact that here the use of “he” for the Tathāgata comes together with the verb “abandon” has in some way impacted the phrasing in the next discourse, although it remains unclear in exactly what way this could have happened. Whatever may be the final word on this somewhat obscure case, it seems obvious that the present passage does not conform to the general usage in the *Madhyama-āgama*. It follows that its formulation is not a reliable guide to identifying patterns of usages employed in the rest of the collection.

In sum, then, the idea that gradual path accounts show “silent abbreviation” to be a characteristic of *Madhyama-āgama* discourses is not corroborated by the instances surveyed above, with the possible exception of the last and rather uncertain instance. The absence of substantial evidence for abbreviations that are not marked and need to be supplemented from outside the discourse in question is another finding in line with what emerges on surveying abbreviations in the *Samyukta-āgama*. Quantitative analysis shows such cases to be so rare in the first part of this collection as to be statistically insignificant (Anālayo 2020: 92). This makes it “less probable that unmarked abbreviation can be taken as a ready-at-hand explanation for substantially different passages in parallel versions of a discourse” (p. 95).

II.4 The Need for Caution

In general terms, it would indeed seem preferable to be cautious before concluding too readily that unmarked or silent abbreviation of a substantial amount of text not found in the same discourse is characteristic of the *Madhyama-āgama* collection. The need for such caution can be illustrated with the example of a few *Madhyama-āgama* discourses which differ from their Pāli parallels in relation to the account of the gradual path of training.

One such *Madhyama-āgama* discourse proceeds only up to the fourth absorption, without mentioning the gaining of awakening.⁵⁷ In evaluating this situation, it needs to be kept in mind that the standard procedure for abbreviation within a discourse is to quote a beginning part in full and then doing the same for a concluding part. As evident in the examples surveyed above, such abbreviation is usually not open-ended but instead tends to mention explicitly the first and last items in a particular list as the endpoints within which abbreviation has occurred. In the present case, however, no final item can be identified. In other words, had an abbreviation occurred, the final words of the standard description of awakening would have been required. The absence of any such reference makes it rather improbable that this is a case of intentional abbreviation.

Moreover, in the Pāli version the abbreviated account of the gradual path occurs after a description of the fourth absorption has been presented as the realization of an entirely pleasant world. This results in an incoherent presentation. The account of the gradual path

⁵⁶ MĀ 103 at T I 591b₈: 彼施設斷受.

⁵⁷ MĀ 208 at T I 786b₁, on which Gethin 2020b: 27n55 comments that “the omission of the knowledge of the destruction of the *āsavas* ... might be regarded as a silent abbreviation.”

covers the four absorptions, each of which is in this particular context individually qualified as a state superior to the entirely pleasant world discussed earlier. In this way, the first absorption discussed in the gradual path ends up being presented as superior to the fourth absorption mentioned earlier.⁵⁸ This patently fails to make sense. The existence of such problems makes it advisable not to rely on the Pāli version for reconstructing the *Madhyama-āgama* parallel.

A similar case involves another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, which also proceeds only up to the attainment of the fourth absorption.⁵⁹ In this case, again, the presentation in this discourse appears to provide a viable alternative to the full account of the gradual path given (in abbreviated form) in its Pāli parallel.⁶⁰

The same holds for yet another *Madhyama-āgama* discourse, which proceeds from the arising of a Tathāgata to a description of freedom from likes and dislikes in relation to objects experienced through the sense organs.⁶¹ To assume that the gradual path up to the attainment of the fourth absorption should be supplemented conflicts with the same principle already mentioned, in that an abbreviation should lead up to a phrase actually found in the full account. Yet, the description of freedom from likes and dislikes in the present case has no counterpart in the full account of the gradual path. The closest this full account comes to the present passage is its description of sense restraint. However, this occurs much earlier than the attainment of the four absorptions, so that an abbreviation leading up to this description would not cover absorption attainment. Moreover, the formulations regarding the sense organs in the two versions are markedly different, making it highly improbable that they can be taken to refer to each other.⁶² Apart from the description of sense restraint, however, the full version of the gradual path in the *Madhyama-āgama* does not take up the topic of the six sense organs. Besides, in the present case the providing of a full account of the gradual path in the Pāli version also results in a presentation that is not without problems.⁶³ Once again, the *Madhyama-āgama* version is best read in its own right.

^{58.} MN 79 at MN II 38,8; see also the discussion in Anālayo 2011: 436.

^{59.} MĀ 198 at T I 758c₄, in which case Gethin 2020b: 28 also considers the possibility of silent abbreviation.

^{60.} MN 125 at MN III 136,30. As I noted in Anālayo 2006: 17, when “evaluating this particular difference, it needs to be born in mind that the topic of the two versions ... is how a disciple can, by dint of diligent practice, reach unification of the mind. From this perspective, an account of the disciple’s training until the attainment of the fourth *jhāna* would be sufficient, as with the fourth *jhāna* unification of the mind has indeed been accomplished.”

^{61.} MĀ 201 at T I 769c₁₅. Gethin 2020b: 28 reasons that it “seems likely that there is silent abbreviation here and that the gradual path up to the attainment of the fourth *dhyāna* is intended ... otherwise we have an account of how someone who is already awakened (the perfectly awakened Tathāgata) practises to become awakened, which makes little sense.” The proposed reasoning would fit the case of MĀ 204 at T I 778b₁₃, in relation to which Gethin 2020b: 26n55 rightly criticises me for having failed to realize that the mention of “he,” 彼, occurring right after the standard reference to the arising of the Tathāgata, should not be read as intending the Buddha (see Anālayo 2011: 186, where I have been misled by my familiarity with the standard pattern elsewhere in the *Madhyama-āgama* to continue with a reference to the Buddha and by the fact that this particular occurrence is preceded by an account of other pre-awakening experiences of the Buddha). In the present case, however, the reference to “he” (彼) is more ambiguous, as the ensuing text could alternatively be read as a description of an awakened one’s freedom from reacting with likes and dislikes. It does not seem to be the case that a supplementation of the gradual path up to the fourth absorption is required for the passage to make sense. Besides, even attainment of the four absorptions does not necessarily imply that “he” will subsequently always be able to stay free from likes and dislikes toward experiences through the senses.

^{62.} MĀ 146 at T I 657c₃: 若眼見色, 然不受相, 亦不味色, 謂忿靜故, 守護眼根 (adopting the variant 相 instead of 想), which differs from MĀ 201 at T I 769c₁₄: 彼眼見色, 於好色而不樂著, 於惡色而不憎惡.

^{63.} See the discussion in Anālayo 2011: 255–256.

In sum, it seems preferable to be circumspect with the idea of unmarked or silent abbreviation of the external type, in order to avoid succumbing to a perhaps quite natural tendency to harmonize in line with the much better known Pāli parallels. Although the Pāli version of a particular text will always be an important reference point, it would be better not turn it into a template to which parallel versions have to be made to conform. This has for quite some time been recognized among those working with Sanskrit and Gāndhārī fragments, and the same applies similarly to working with the Chinese *Āgamas* and discourses extant in Tibetan. Throughout, respecting the idiosyncrasies of a particular textual tradition is the most promising avenue for furthering our understanding.

Conclusion

Abbreviation in the first part of the *Madhyama-āgama* conforms to basic patterns also seen in the first part of the *Samyukta-āgama*. The two collections share a standard procedure of giving the first and last items in a list, abbreviating those in between. Such cases are often fairly self-evident, wherefore no marker is required. To signal abbreviation, the markers “in the same way” and “up to” can be relied on, which are particularly handy when the text to be supplemented is not found in the same discourse. This pattern appears to apply also to *Madhyama-āgama* accounts of the gradual path.

In the *Samyukta-āgama*, the first discourse immediately employs internal abbreviation by giving a full treatment only to the aggregates of form and consciousness, abbreviating the three aggregates that come between these two. The first few discourses in the *Madhyama-āgama* instead refrain from employing abbreviation. Another and more substantial difference between the two collections is the absence in the *Madhyama-āgama* of repetition series, in the sense that a discourse is followed by an indication that the same exposition should be repeated several times, with some usually minor variation in terminology. Such a procedure could have been used, for example, for two consecutive *Madhyama-āgama* discourses that share a single Pāli parallel.⁶⁴ This has not been done and the two fairly similar discourses are both given in full.

The employment of repetition series appears to be more characteristic of collections of short discourses, be these assembled topic-wise according to the *samyukta/samyutta* principle or by way of ascending numbers according to the *ekottarika/aṅguttara* principle. The basic feature of proliferating abbreviations that results from such repetition series is nevertheless also evident in the last discourse in the *Madhyama-āgama*. This shares with some of the repetition series found in collections of short discourses the feature of being mainly made up of abbreviations. In such cases, it often seems fairly probable that the respective text(s) were never recited in full. This in turn points to an intriguing feature, in that a principle that would have come into existence to facilitate transmission, by way of abbreviating portions of text, in the course of time has acquired a considerably more creative role.

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⁶⁴ MĀ 107 and MĀ 108 at T I 596c₂₅ and 597c₁₂, parallels to MN 17 at MN I 104_{,17}.

Abbreviations

AN	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
B ^c	Burmese edition
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association
C ^c	Ceylonese edition
MĀ	<i>Madhyama-āgama</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
PTS	Pali Text Society
S ^c	Siamese edition
T	Taishō (CBETA)

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