

A Comparison of the Pāli and Chinese Versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*, a Collection of Early Buddhist Discourses on Brahmās, the Exalted Gods

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ABSTRACT

This article first briefly examines the textual structure of the *Brahma Saṃyutta* of the Pāli *Saṃyutta-nikāya* in conjunction with two other versions preserved in Chinese translation in Taishō vol. 2, nos 99 and 100. Then it compares the main teachings contained in the three versions. This comparative study of these three different versions focuses on some shared images of Brahmās and on disagreements of some teachings presented in the three versions. It reveals similarities and significant differences in structure and doctrinal content, thus advancing the historical/critical study of early Buddhist doctrine in this area.

Keywords

Brahmā, *Fantian* 梵天, *Samyukta*, *Saṃyutta*, *Xiangyings* 相應, *Sagātha-vagga*, *Bazhong Song* 八眾誦, *geya-aṅga*, *geyya-aṅga*

Introduction

The *Brahma Saṃyutta*, the sixth *saṃyutta* of the Pāli *Saṃyutta-nikāya* (abbreviated S), is represented in Chinese by two versions, one in the *Za Ahan Jing* 雜阿含經 (*Samyuktāgama*, abbreviated SA, Taishō vol. 2, no. 99), the other in the *Bieyi Za Ahan Jing* 別譯雜阿含經 (*Additional Translation of Samyuktāgama*, abbreviated ASA, Taishō vol. 2, no. 100). This *saṃyutta/xiangying* 相應 is a collection of various discourses on the subject of Brahmās. In the late Vedic tradition, Brahmā is the creator of the universe, belonging to one particular class of Indian divine beings (*devas*). However, in the three versions this idea of a singular Brahmā has given way to the idea of a plurality of Brahmās, individual exalted gods existing in the universe. The discourses contained in the Pāli and Chinese versions of the *Brahma*

Samyutta reflect the early Buddhist adaptation of general Indian religious beliefs about Brahmā as it was at the time of the Buddha.

In this article I first briefly examine the textual structure of the three versions. Then I compare the main teachings contained in them, making use of new editions of the *Samyuktāgama*: Yin Shun's *Za Ahan Jing Lun Huibian* 雜阿含經論會編 [Combined Edition of *Sūtra and Śāstra of the Samyuktāgama*] (abbreviated CSA) and the Foguang *Tripiṭaka Za Ahan Jing* (abbreviated FSA).¹ This will reveal similarities and significant differences in structure and doctrinal content, thus advancing the study of early Buddhist teachings in this area.

Textual structure

The Pāli *Brahma Samyutta* is the sixth of the eleven *samyuttas* comprised in the *Sagātha Vagga* of the *Samyutta-nikāya*. The two corresponding Chinese versions, one in Taishō vol. 2, no. 99 (*Samyuktāgama*) and the other in Taishō vol. 2, no. 100 (*Additional Translation of Samyuktāgama*), do not have any title of the collections, including the section title, *Sagātha Vagga*. They were translated from now lost Indic-language originals. In the *Combined Edition of Sūtra and Śāstra of the Samyuktāgama* version, the *Samyuktāgama* text bears the title *Fantian Xiangying* 梵天相應 (*Brahma Samyukta*, Connected with Brahmās) comprised in the title Eight Assemblies Section (the *Ba zhong*² *Song* 八眾誦) supplied by the editor, Yin Shun.³ The *Fantian Xiangying* is the counterpart of the Pāli *Brahma Samyutta*. It is also the sixth of the eleven *xiangyings* 相應/*samyuktas* in the Eight Assemblies Section of the reconstructed *Samyuktāgama* version (Choong 2000, 20, 247). The same location — the sixth of the eleven *samyuktas* — applies also to the reconstructed *Additional Translation of Samyuktāgama* version.⁴ In earlier editions of *Samyuktāgama*, *samyukta* titles are lacking and the beginning and end of each *samyukta* have to be inferred from the *sūtra* contents. The *Sagātha Vagga*/Eight Assemblies Section pertains to the *geya-aṅga* (P. *geyya-aṅga*) portion of *Samyutta-nikāya*/*Samyuktāgama*.⁵

1. These two new editions incorporate textual corrections, modern Chinese punctuation, comments, and up-to-date information on Pāli and other textual counterparts, including different Chinese versions of the text.
2. Skt *aṣṭau pariśadaḥ*; P. *aṭṭha parisā*.
3. The section title, 八眾誦 *Bazhong Song*, is not found in the T vol. 2 of the SA version (no. 99) and the ASA version (no. 100). See CSA i 48–49 (in 'Za Ahan Jing Bulei zhi Zhengbian 雜阿含經部類之整編 [Re-edition of the Grouped Structure of SA]'), and iii 219. T 30, no. 1579 (*Yogācārabhūmi śāstra*), 294a, 772c: 八眾. T 24, no. 1451 (the Mūla-Sarvāstivāda *Vinaya*), 407 on the title *Sagāthā Vagga*. Cf. also Bucknell (2007) for a discussion on the sequence of the *Sagātha-vagga* and the Eight Assemblies. The author considers that the sequence of the *Sagātha-vagga* derives from the Eight Assemblies. See also CSA i 7–9, 22–3, 44–5, 64–5, and Choong (2010).
4. Yin Shun (1971, 670–672); CSA i 23, n. 10.
5. Choong (2000, 20, n. 12, 247–249; 2010, 59; 2012, n. 5). *Geya* is one of the three *aṅgas* represented in the structure of S/SA: *sūtra* (P. *sutta*) 'discourse' (short, simple prose), *geya* (P. *geyya*) 'stanza' (verse mixed with prose), and *vyākaraṇa* (P. *veyyākaraṇa*) 'exposition'. These three *aṅgas* are the first three of nine types of early Buddhist text (*navāṅga*) classified according to their style and form. They are regarded by some scholars as historically the earliest ones to have appeared, in sequence, in the formation of the early Buddhist texts (Choong 2000, 9–11; 2010, 55–61). Also, only these three *aṅgas* are mentioned in M 122 (*Mahāsuññatā-sutta*) III 115 and its Chinese counterpart, MA 191 T 1 739c. This suggests the possibility that only these three *aṅgas* existed in the period of Early (or pre-sectarian) Buddhism. Rupert

The Pāli *Brahma Saṃyutta* belongs to the Tāmraśāṭiya/Vibhajyavāda school (often called Theravāda),⁶ the SA version belongs to the Sarvāstivāda school, and the ASA version may belong to the Kāśyapīya school (or to an unidentified school).⁷

The Pāli *Brahma Saṃyutta* comprises fifteen discourses (S 6.1–15). Of its Chinese counterparts, both the SA and ASA versions have ten discourses (SA 1188–1197; ASA 101–110). The Pāli *Brahma Saṃyutta* therefore has five more discourses than the two Chinese versions.

All discourses in the SA and ASA versions have Pāli counterparts. Two discourses in the SA and ASA versions have their Pāli counterparts located in other collections than in *Brahma Saṃyutta* (SA 1189 = ASA 102 = S 47 *Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta* 18; SA 1192 = ASA 105 = S 1 *Devatā Saṃyutta* 37). On the other hand, three discourses in the Pāli version (S 6. 1, 12, 14) have no SA and ASA counterparts. Two discourses in the Pāli version have their Chinese counterparts in the *Brahma Saṃyutta* and the *Devatā Saṃyutta* (S 6.3 = 婆羅門相應 *Poluomen Xiangying* SA 99 = ASA 265; S 6.10 = 諸天相應 *Zhutian Xiangying* SA 1278 = ASA 276). The full set of Chinese-Pāli and Pāli-Chinese counterparts is shown in Tables 1 and 2.

The identification of the Chinese-Pāli and Pāli-Chinese counterparts shown in these tables is open to discussion. As is indicated in Table 1, the discourses of both the SA and ASA versions are completely in accord with regard to their structural arrangement. As is evident in the two tables, the discourses in the Pāli version match up very loosely with the discourses of the two Chinese versions as regards sequence, whereas the two Chinese versions match up with each other entirely in the sequence of the discourses. The SA and ASA versions are therefore structurally much closer to each other than to the S version.

Fragmentary Sanskrit counterparts of segments of the Chinese SA version (and the ASA version) were published by Fumio Enomoto (1994).⁸ The published Sanskrit counterparts of the discourses on the subject of Brahmās consists of six fragments, corresponding to SA 1188, 1189, 1192, 1194, 1196, 1197 (= ASA 101, 102, 105, 107, 109, 110). These fragmentary Sanskrit texts are useful for confirming certain Chinese technical terms.

Gethin on the H-Buddhism Discussion Network suggests that the PTS reading '*suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇassa hetu'* (M 122: III 115) should be corrected to '*suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇaṃ tassa hetu'*', following the Burmese/Ceylonese version's reading: '*no kho Ānanda arahati sāvako satthāraṃ anubandhituṃ yadidaṃ suttaṃ geyyaṃ veyyākaraṇaṃ tassa hetu'* ('It is not right, Ānanda, that a disciple should seek the Teacher's company for this reason, namely *sutta*, *geyya*, *veyyākaraṇa*.'). This Pāli version's reading is clearly supported by the Chinese version (T 1, 739c04): '佛言。阿難。不其正經。歌詠。記說故。信弟子隨世尊行奉事至命盡也。' ('The Buddha said: Ānanda, it is not for this reason, namely *sūtra*, *geya*, *vyākaraṇa*, that a disciple follows the World Honoured One with respect until the end of life.'). See the discussions on H-Buddhism posted on 21–23, 31 October 2011 under this subject: Disagreement in Readings of *Sutra/Geya/Vyakarana*.

6. Cf. Cousins (2001, 168; 2010), and Cheng (2012) on the discussion of the terms, Tāmraśāṭiya and Tāmrāparāṇiya (P. Tambapaṇṇiya). Anālayo (2013, 228) considers 'the expression Theravāda — being the term that is evidently considered acceptable by the tradition it refers to — is about the best choice one could make'.
7. Choong (2011, 62, n. 6). Yin Shun (1971, 804–807). Both Bingenheimer (2009) and Bucknell (2011) argue that the ASA version should belong to the Sarvāstivāda school. This issue is discussed by Choong (2011, 62, n. 6).
8. Enomoto (1982, 38–42). Cf. also Chung (2008, 226–228).

<i>SA (Chinese)</i>	<i>ASA (Chinese)</i>	<i>S (Pali)</i>
1188	101	6.2 (cf. A 4.21)
1189	102 (cf. SA-u 4)	47.18 (in <i>Satipatṭhāna Saṃyutta</i>)
1190	103	6.11
1191	104	6.13
1192	105	1.37 (in <i>Devatā Saṃyutta</i>)
1193	106 (cf. SA-u 5)	6.7–9 ⁹
1194	107	6.6 ¹⁰
1195	108	6.4
1196	109	6.5
1197	110	6.15

Table 1. Chinese-Pāli correspondences of the *Fantian Xiangying (Brahma Saṃyukta)*.

<i>S (Pali)</i>	<i>SA (Chinese)</i>	<i>ASA (Chinese)</i>
6.1	None	None (cf. EA 19.1)
6.2 (cf. A 4.21)	1188	101
6.3	99 (in <i>Poluomen Xiangying</i> 婆羅門相應, <i>Brāhmaṇa Saṃyukta</i>)	265
6.4	1195	108
6.5	1196	109
6.6	1194	107
6.7–9	1193	106 (cf. SA-u 5)
6.10	1278 (in <i>Zhutian Xiangying</i> 諸天相應, <i>Devatā Saṃyukta</i>)	276 (cf. EA 21.5)
6.11	1190	103
6.12	None	None
6.13	1191	104
6.14	None	None
6.15	1197	110

Table 2. Pāli-Chinese correspondences of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*.

Several individual Brahmās inconsistently recorded in the three versions of *Brahma Saṃyukta*

The name, Brahmā, originates in the late Vedic tradition, in which Brahmā (also identified as Puruṣa, the cosmic Man or primal Person) is one way of referring

9. Different from CSA iii 180, n. 11.

10. Different from CSA iii 180, n. 14.

to the highest-ranking god. He is conceived of as the creator of the universe and is venerated with sacrifices and rituals by the Brahmins (*Brāhmaṇas*).¹¹ By contrast, the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta* (P. *Brahma Saṃyutta*) record in common that there are in the universe several individual Brahmās. They are not undying, everlasting beings but are regarded as exalted gods dwelling within the continuous cycle of death and rebirth (*saṃsāra*). Their functions, myths and characteristics described in the three versions of *Brahma Saṃyutta* are entirely absent from the Vedic tradition. These several individual Brahmās presented in the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta* are named, but not always consistently, as the following examples show.

(I) Individual names of Brahmās consistently shown in the three versions:

- Brahmā Sahāmpati¹² (P. Brahmā Sahampati, SA: Shaposhijiezhu Fantianwang 娑婆世界主梵天王, Fantianwang 梵天王, ASA: Fanzhutianwang 梵主天王, Fanzhutian 梵主天, Fanwang 梵王) in SA 1188 = ASA 101 = S 6.2 (cf. A 4.21); SA 1189 = ASA 102 (cf. SA-u 4) = S 47.18 (in *Satipatṭhāna Saṃyutta*); SA 1191 = ASA 104 = S 6.13; SA 1197 = ASA 110 = S 6.15. (Note: Sahāmpati in Skt, Sahampati in the Pāli version of *Brahma Saṃyutta*)
- Brahmā Baka (= Skt, SA: Poju Fantian 婆句梵天, ASA: Pojia Fan 婆迦梵) in SA 1195 = ASA 108 = S 6.4.
- An unnamed Brahmā: 'A certain Brahmā (*aññatara brahmā*) in the Brahmā world' (*Brahmaloka*, Fantian 梵天, *Fantiangong* 梵天宮13) in SA 1196 = ASA 109 = S 6.5.

(II) Individual names of Brahmās (in the grammatical form in which they appear) inconsistently shown in the three versions:

- Brahmā Sahāmpati in SA 1190 = ASA 103, but Brahmā Sanañkumāra in the counterpart S 6.11.
- Catasro brahmakāyikā devatā¹⁴ (Four gods of the hosts of Brahmās, SA and ASA: Si Fanshentian 四梵身天) in SA 1192 = ASA 105, but Catunnaṃ Suddhāvāsa-kāyikānaṃ devatānaṃ ((to) Four gods of the hosts of the Pure Abodes) in S 1.37 (in the *Devatā Saṃyutta*).
- Brahmā Sahāmpati in SA 1193 = ASA 106, but Subrahmā paccekabrahmā, Suddhāvāso paccekabrahmā and Tudu paccekabrahmā in S 6.7–9.
- Brahmā Sahāmpati, Brahmā Baka, Bie Fantian 別梵天, Shanbibie Fantian 善臂別梵天, and Shan Fantian 善梵天 in SA 1194, Brahmā Baka, Xianshengshanbi Fan 小勝善閉梵, and Xianshengguang Fan 小勝光梵 in ASA 107, but Subrahmā paccekabrahmā and Suddhāvāso paccekabrahmā in S 6.6.¹⁵

11. Cf. Hopkins (1971, 22–25, 32, 37, 40–1, 100–101); Bailey (1983); McGovern (2011).

12. About this Skt term corresponding to the Chinese term, see Enomoto (1994, 42).

13. 梵天宮, literally the Brahmā palace, refers here to the Brahmā world. 梵世界 (*Brahmaloka* 梵天) is also used in ASA 101 (counterpart of S 6.2 = SA 1188). See also Enomoto (1994, 39), which shows both 梵世 and 梵天 in SA 1192 for *Brahmaloka*.

14. About this Skt term corresponding to the Chinese term, 四梵身天, see Enomoto (1994, 39–40).

15. Note: SA 1194 at the end of this discourse adds a long verse (T2, 324a20–29: '時。彼梵天為迦吒務陀低沙比丘故。說偈言。… 口意惡願故。'), which is not found in ASA 107 and S 6.6.

- Brahmā Sahampati in S 6.1, but Brahmā (Fantian梵天) in EA 19.1.
- Brahmā Sahampati in S 6.3, but Vessavaṇa (Beishamen Tianwang 毘沙門天王) in SA 99, ASA 265 (in *Poluomen Xiangying* 婆羅門相應, *Brāhmaṇa Saṃyukta*).
- Brahmā Sahampati in S 6.10, but Santianzi 三天子 in SA 1278, Santian 三天 in ASA 276 (in *Zhutian Xiangying* 諸天相應, *Devatā Saṃyukta*).
- Brahmā Sahampati in S 6.12, but no SA and ASA counterparts.
- Brahmā, Brahmaṇḍapārisāya and Brahmaṇḍapārisajja in S 6.14, but no SA and ASA counterparts.

Thus, only these two individual Brahmās, Brahmā Sahāmpati and Brahmā Baka, are consistently found in the three versions. Of these two Brahmās, Brahmā Sahāmpati is the only individual Brahmā found frequently and consistently in the three versions. Brahmā Baka and ‘a certain Brahmā in the Brahmā world’ are found consistently in just one discourse in the three versions.

The other individual Brahmās or groups of them in the S version are Brahmā Sanaṅkumāra, catunnaṃ Suddhāvāsa-kāyikānaṃ devatānaṃ, Subrahmā paccekabrahmā, Suddhāvāso paccekabrahmā, Tudu paccekabrahmā, Brahmaṇḍapārisāya and Brahmaṇḍapārisajja. But, these all are not found in the Chinese counterparts. On the other hand, in the Chinese versions *Catasro brahmakāyikā devatā*, Vessavaṇa, 三天子/三天 (in SA and ASA), 別梵天, 善臂別梵天, 善梵天 (in SA only) 小勝善閉梵 and 小勝光梵 (in ASA only), are not found in the S counterpart. Here the Pāli version obviously has more specified Brahmās than the Chinese versions. Also, how to place these individual Brahmās or groups of them in the universe is not clearly presented in all three versions.¹⁶

Accordingly, this suggests that the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyukta* are still at an early stage of adapting the Indic god, Brahmā, inherited from the Vedic mythology, but they clearly transform and reinterpret the high-ranking creator god, Brahmā, into several individual Brahmās, dwelling in a still not clearly identified location or locations within the saṃsāric universe. Also, the Pāli version evidently has listed more individual Brahmās than the Chinese versions.

The shared images of Brahmā Sahāmpati and Brahmā Baka contained in the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyukta*

As mentioned above, only these two individual Brahmās — Brahmā Sahāmpati and Brahmā Baka — are consistently found in the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyukta*, and only Brahmā Sahāmpati is presented frequently and consistently in the three versions. Another Brahmā is unnamed, which is the so-called ‘a certain Brahmā in the Brahmā world’ mentioned consistently in just one discourse in the three versions. Thus, some shared images of these Brahmās in the litera-

16. Both Brahmā Sahāmpati and Brahmā Baka are located in the so-called Brahmā world (Brahmaloka 梵天) indicated in the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyukta*. But, according to the developed cosmology of the Pāli Abhidhamma, the term *brahmā* can refer to any of the gods of the *Rūpadhātu* and of the *Ārūpadhātu*, but the lowest *brahmās* (of the First *Jhāna*) are still called Brahmā’s Retinue (*brama-pārisajja*), Brahmā’s Ministers (*brama-purohita*) and Great Brahmā (*mahābrahmā*) (Gethin 1998, 118–119). However, this is not the same in Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*, in which the term Brahmā only refers to the gods of the First *Dhyāna* (*Brahma-pārisadya/kāyika*, *Brahma-purohita* and *Mahābrahmā*) of the *Rūpadhātu* (Sadakata 1997, 20, 63–67).

ture will be discussed here.

(1) The term, *Sahāmpati*, together with *Brahmā*, is always presented in the SA version as 娑婆世界主梵天王 (Lord of the *Sahā lokadhātu*, King of *Brahmās*), 梵天王 (King of *Brahmās*), and in the ASA version as 梵主天王, 梵主天, 梵王 (King/Lord of *Brahmās*). According to the Buddhist Sanskrit tradition,¹⁷ *Sahā* (娑婆) is the name of the world-system (*lokadhātu*) in which we live (or perhaps a division of it), and *Sahāmpati* means 'Lord of the *Sahā* (or *Saha*) *lokadhātu*' (娑婆世界主). Thus, the term *Sahāmpati* can mean Lord of the *Saha* world. However, according to Rhys Davids and Bodhi's English translations of the Pāli version of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*, the term *Sahāmpati* seems to be used just for an individual name of a *Brahmā*.¹⁸ It does not have any meaning indicated in the translations. Here, I will consider that the term *Sahāmpati* is used for all three versions in both ways, Lord of the *Saha* world and a name for an individual *Brahmā* who is the most senior of *Brahmās* in the *Brahmā* world.

(2) *Brahmā Sahāmpati* in the three versions presents two main characteristics. He has the capability to read the Buddha's mind and is a supporter of the Buddha and of his Dharma. Two examples from the texts will now be mentioned and discussed.¹⁹

S 6.2 (cf. A 4.21) = SA 1188 = ASA 101²⁰ record in common that just after the Buddha has become fully enlightened, he considers that he should respect the Dharma to which he has fully awakened. Then, having known the reflection in the Buddha's mind, *Brahmā Sahāmpati* from the *Brahmā* world appears before the Buddha, and shows his appreciation for the Buddha's reverence for the Dharma itself.

Another example is S 47.18 = SA 1189 = ASA 102 (cf. SA-u 4).²¹ The S version is located in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Saṃyutta*, whereas the two Chinese versions are placed within the *Brahma Saṃyutta*. These discourses report in common that just after the Buddha has become fully enlightened, he regards the four stations of mindfulness (P. *cattāro satipaṭṭhānā*, *si nianchu* 四念處) as the one-way path (P. *ekāyana magga*, SA: *yoyichengdao* 有一乘道, ASA: *weiyoyidao* 唯有一道) for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, and for the elimination of pain and affliction. Then, having known the reflection in the Buddha's mind, *Brahmā Sahāmpati* from the *Brahmā* world appears before the Buddha, and applauds the Buddha's thoughts on the four stations of mindfulness as the one-way path for the cessation of suffering, and for the achievement of *Nirvāṇa*.²²

17. Cf. Edgerton (1953, 588); Williams (1899, 1193); Nakamura (1981, 603–604, 1273).

18. Rhys Davids (1917, 172 'Chapter VI, The *Brahmā Suttas*'); Bodhi (2000, 232 'Chapter VI, 6 *Brahmasaṃyutta*, Connected Discourses with *Brahmās*').

19. Cf. Anālayo (2011) on the *Brahmā*'s invitation recorded in M 26 *Ariyapariyesanā-sutta*. But, its Chinese counterpart MA 204 does not contain the episode of the *Brahmā*'s invitation.

20. S I 1998, 303–306; 1884, 138–140 (cf. A II 20–21) (Rhys Davids 1917, 174–176; Bodhi 2000, 233–235; Woodward 1933, 20–22). SA: CSA iii 167–168; FSA 4, 1919–1920; T 2, 321c–322a. ASA: T 2, 410a–c.

21. S V 167–168 (Woodward 1930, 147–148; Bodhi 2000, 1647–1648). SA: CSA iii 168–169; FSA 4, 1920–1923; T 2, 322a–c. ASA: T 2, 410b–c. Cf. T 2, no. 101, 494a–b. At *Saṃyutta-nikāya* V 233, *Brahmā Sahāmpati* says that he had in the past been a disciple of *Kassapa Buddha*, under whom he had eliminated desire for sensual pleasures (i.e. he had become a non-returner).

22. The SA, ASA and SA-u versions also mention this term, *ganlu* 甘露 (Skt *amṛta*, P. *amata*), meaning *Nirvāṇa*.

These two stories shared by all three versions clearly indicate both Brahmā Sahāmpati's ability to know the Buddha's mind and his respect for the Buddha and his Dharma. Brahmā Sahāmpati is here recognized not only as an exalted god in the universe but also as a supporter of the Buddha, particularly respecting his Dharma.

(3) Brahmā Baka is mentioned in only one discourse in the three versions, S 6.4 = SA 1195 = ASA 108.²³ In these, he presents one main characteristic: he considers himself immortal, his Brahmā world eternal, and no others superior to his Brahmā world. His thinking is regarded as an imaginative 'evil view' (P. *pāpa-ditthi*, SA: *exie jian* 惡邪見, ASA: *xie jian* 邪見) by the Buddha. Having known the reflection in Brahmā Baka's mind, the Buddha then disappears from Jetavana (in the S and ASA versions) or from Veṇuvana (in the SA version), and reappears in the Brahmā world in order to teach Brahmā Baka that his view of himself and of his Brahmā world is not correct and is based on ignorance. The three versions record in common that the Buddha has the ability to explain Brahmā Baka's present situation by reference to the Brahmā's past lives. Brahmā Baka is finally convinced that his view is wrong. The conversations between the Buddha and Brahmā Baka are in verse.

This story shared by all three versions indicates that Brahmā Baka's view — believing his Brahmā world is permanent, without decay, with no worlds higher than his, and that he is immortal — needs to be corrected by the Buddha himself. Also, the Buddha in the texts has the ability to read Brahmā Baka's mind, to appear in person in that Brahmā's world, and to know the Brahmā's past lives.²⁴

(4) Finally, in S 6.5 = SA 1196 = ASA 109,²⁵ an unnamed Brahmā, having a similar mentality to the above-mentioned Brahmā Baka, considers that he and his Brahmā world is superior to others. The Buddha and his four great disciples²⁶ visit his Brahmā world to make him revise his views. Having appeared in that Brahmā world, the Buddha sits cross-legged in meditation²⁷ in the air above that Brahmā. The other four great disciples of the Buddha also sit cross-legged in meditation in the air above the Brahmā, but at a lower level than the Buddha. This story shared in common in the three versions indicates that not only the Buddha but also his great disciples (who are Arhants) are superior to the Brahmā himself and to his Brahmā world.

23. S I 1998, 310–314; 1884, 142–144 (Rhys Davids 1917, 179–182; Bodhi 2000, 237–239). SA: CSA iii 175–176; FSA 4, 1934–1938; T 2, 324b–c. ASA: T 2, 412b–c.

24. Note: The S version mentions in verse that the Buddha was in the past Brahmā Baka's disciple, whose name was Kappa (S I 1998, 313; 1884, 144. Rhys Davids 1917, 181; Bodhi 2000, 239). This is not found in the SA and ASA versions.

25. S I 1998, 314–318; 1884, 144–146 (Rhys Davids 1917, 182–184; Bodhi 2000, 239–241). SA: CSA iii 177–178; FSA 4, 1938–1940; T 2, 324c–325b. ASA: T 2, 412c–413a.

26. The names of the four great disciples are not the same in the three versions. In the S version they are Mahāmoggallāna, Mahākassapa, Mahākappina, and Anuruddha; in the SA version they are Ajña-kaundinya (阿若俱隣, P. Añña-kondañña), Mahākāśyapa (摩訶迦葉, P. Mahākassapa), Śāriputra (舍利弗, P. Śāriputta), and Mahāmaudgalyāyāna (大目犍連, P. Mahāmoggallāna); and in the ASA version they are Ajña-kaundinya (僑陳如 = 阿若俱隣 in SA), Mahākāśyapa, Maudgalyāyāna (目連 = 大目犍連 in SA), and Aniruddha (阿那律, P. Anuruddha).

27. In the S version it is meditation on the fire element (*tejodhātum samāpannaṃ/samāpajjitvā*). This is not found in the SA and ASA counterparts.

To conclude, the shared images of Brahmā Sahāṃpati, Brahmā Baka and an unnamed Brahmā (who has a similar mindset to Brahmā Baka) that appear in the three versions are:

- *Brahmā Sahāṃpati has the capability to read the Buddha's mind. He is clearly recognized as an exalted god in the universe.*
- *Brahmā Sahāṃpati is a supporter of the Buddha, particularly respecting the Buddha's Dharma.*
- *Brahmā Baka and an unnamed Brahmā mistakenly consider themselves immortal and their Brahmā world as superior to all other worlds. However, in the discourses their worlds are regarded as not permanent, as not without decay, as not the highest world, and they are not seen as immortal.*
- *The Buddha has the ability to read Brahmā Baka's mind, to present himself in that Brahmā's world, and to know the Brahmā's past lives.*
- *The great disciples of the Buddha are superior to the unnamed Brahmā and his Brahmā world.*

Accordingly, the individual Brahmās (Brahmā Sahāṃpati, Brahmā Baka and an unnamed Brahmā) have different characters presented in the three versions of the *Brahma Saṃyutta*. They are also presented in the three versions as a class of exalted gods, but lower than the Buddha and his great disciples in a unique story style. Their individual names are a new design, not shared in the Vedic tradition of Brahmanism. These reflect not only ethical messages of early Buddhism, but also early Buddhist adaptation of general Vedic religious beliefs about deities, and their application to one particular type of deities — Brahmā.²⁸

The request by Brahmā Sahāṃpati to teach (S 6.1; no SA and ASA counterparts; cf. EA 19.1)

S 6.1²⁹ reports that just after the Buddha becomes fully enlightened, he considers whether it would be better for him not to teach others the Dharma (P. Dhamma) he has discovered. This is because he regards the Dharma he has discovered as profound, hard to see and understand for those who delight in *ālaya* (i.e. attachments of sensual pleasure by craving). The Dharma indicated in the S discourse refers to both conditioned arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) and *Nirvāṇa* (P. *Nibbāna*). Brahmā Sahāṃpati, at that time, knowing the thoughts of the Buddha, comes to request him to teach the Dharma to the world. The Buddha accepts the Brahmā's request, out of compassion for the world.

This story is not found in the SA and ASA versions. The counterpart of this S 6.1 discourse is instead found in another *Āgama* collection, *Ekottarikāgama* — EA 19.1. The content of the story recorded in this EA discourse is simpler than the S version. For example, the EA discourse mentions neither *ālaya* nor the two Dharmas

28. Other classes of deity, and individual ones, such as *devatā*, *devaputta*, *Māra*, *vana*, *yakkha* and *Sakka*, are also featured in the *Sagātha-vagga* of S and SA. They are closely relevant to the notion of the Eight Assembles (Skt *aṣṭau pariśadaḥ*; P. *aṭṭha parisā*). Cf. Yin Shun (1971, 13, 806); CSA i 31–32.

29. S I 1998, 298–303; 1884, 136–138 (Rhys Davids 1917, 171–174; Bodhi 2000, 231–233). Cf. M 26, which contains also the episode of Brahmā Sahāṃpati's request to teach; however, this is not found in its Chinese counterpart MA 204.

that are profound, hard for the world to see and understand: conditioned arising and *Nirvāṇa*. Also, the EA discourse does not record the individual name, Brahmā Sahāṃpati; instead it just speaks of a Brahmā (梵天).

Thus, one may consider that the antiquity of the pieces of doctrine and the entire story of the Brahmā's request found only in the S version is in question. The discourse of the story may be additionally edited later into the collection of Brahmās. It is also a question whether the historical Buddha really needs the Brahmā's request in order to be willing to teach the Dharma to the world, out of compassion.³⁰

Final *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha (SA 1197 = S 6.15 = ASA 110)

SA 1197 = S 6.15 = ASA 110³¹ is the last discourse of the collection in all three versions. It is named *Parinibbāna* (Final *Nirvāṇa*) in the S version. These discourses are all about the Buddha's death at Kuśinagara (P. Kusinārā), while lying between two śāla trees, and the subsequent comments made by a few of his disciples and devotees, including the supportive gods, Brahmā Sahāṃpati and Śākya (P. Sakka). The reason why this discourse is edited into this collection of *Brahma Saṃyukta* is only a verse made by Brahmā Sahāṃpati. The story of final *Nirvāṇa* of the Buddha recorded in the three versions is not entirely the same, as the following shows.

In S 6.15, it begins to record the Buddha as giving his last words to his monks:

Now, monks, I address you: Transient are all compounded things, strive on with diligence! (*vayadhammā saṅkhārā appamādena sampādehā ti*).

Then, the Buddha attains various states of concentrative meditation, step by step, from the first *dhyāna* (P. *jhāna*) to the final fourth *dhyāna*; then from the fourth *dhyāna*, further up to the first formless *āyatana* to the final fourth *āyatana*; then from the fourth *āyatana* further up to the cessation of perception-and-feeling; then from the cessation of perception-and-feeling by stages back to the first *dhyāna*. Then, having emerged from the first *dhyāna*, the Buddha attains the second *dhyāna*, up to the final fourth *dhyāna*. Then, having emerged from the fourth *dhyāna*, the Buddha attains final *Nirvāṇa* (*Parinibbāna*), i.e. he physically dies. After the Buddha dies, the subsequent comments in verse are made by the Buddha's two supportive gods, Brahmā Sahāṃpati and Śākya, and by his two monk disciples, Ānanda and Anuruddha (P. Anuruddha).

However, the counterparts, SA 1197 and ASA 110, have different accounts from the above-mentioned S version. Both SA 1197 and ASA 110 do not record the Buddha as giving his final words (see the above quotation) to the monks as the S version does. They also do not state that the Buddha attains various gradual states of concentrative meditation, step by step, before attaining final *Nirvāṇa* as does the S version. The two Chinese versions, however, do record the subsequent comments made by, in sequence, a certain unnamed monk, then two gods, Śākya and Brahmā Sahāṃpati, and then by two monk disciples, Anuruddha and Ānanda.

30. For a discussion 'Hesitation to Teach and Brahmā's Encouragement', see Nakamura (2000, 212–213, 227–235). For the issue of why the Buddha would need Brahmā Sahāṃpati's request to teach, cf. also Bailey (1983, 175–186); Jones (2009); Nichols (2009).

31. S I 1998, 340–342; 1884, 157–159 (Rhys Davids 1917, 196–198; Bodhi 2000, 251–253). SA: CSA iii 178–179; FSA 4, 1940–1943; T 2, 325b–c. ASA: T 2, 413a–414a.

The SA and ASA versions, nevertheless, do not entirely record the same story as each other. SA 1197 records that the Buddha asks Ānanda to prepare a bed-mat for him between two śāla trees. The head of the bed-mat should face north. The Buddha says to Ānanda that today he will attain final *Nirvāṇa* in the middle watch of the night. After Ānanda prepares the bed-mat, the Buddha then goes and lies down on it on his right side, with his head facing north, with one foot on the other, and mindful and aware. The Buddha then attains final *Nirvāṇa* in the middle watch of the night. The counterpart ASA 110 has a similar record to that of the SA version. However, from this point the ASA version adds an extra story which is not found in the SA version. The story is about the Buddha's last monk disciple, Subhadra (Xubatuoluo, 須跋陀羅, P. Subhadda). According to this ASA version, Subhadra, who at that time is already aged one hundred and twenty, goes to visit the Buddha. After hearing the Buddha's responses to his questions, he is delighted, and asks to be accepted as a monk in his Dharma and Vinaya. After being fully ordained as a monk under the Buddha, he immediately attains Arhantship. Because Subhadra does not want to see the Buddha's death, he then purposely goes to death (attaining final *Nirvāṇa*) first, before the Buddha. Just how he dies the discourse does not mention.³²

After this story presented in the ASA version, the rest is similar between the two Chinese versions. That is, as mentioned above, the subsequent comments in verse are made by a certain unnamed monk, by the two gods, Śākya and Brahmā Sahāṃpati, and then by the Buddha's two monk disciples, Aniruddha and Ānanda. The SA and ASA versions record in common that the comment in verse by Ānanda is made after seven days from the Buddha's death. In the SA version Ānanda's comments in verse are made to a funeral monument (*jiti* 枝提, Skt *caitya*, P. *cetiya*) of the Buddha.

Consequently, after comparing these three different versions of the same discourse, it is uncertain which one is a more original and earlier version. The shared contents of these three versions are then only that the Buddha's death at Kuśinagara, lying down in between two śāla trees, and the subsequent comments made by his two monk disciples, Ānanda and Aniruddha, and his two supportive gods, Brahmā Sahāṃpati and Śākya.³³

Emptiness (SA 1191 = S 6.13 = ASA 103)

SA 1191 records these words:

At that time the Buddha teaches monks the Dharma in accord with the forest (*alianruo* 阿練若, Skt *araṇya*, P. *arañña*). ... Then, Lord of the Sahā lokadhātu, King of Brahmās had this thought ... now the Buddha ... teaches the assembly [of monks] the Dharma in accord with emptiness (*kong* 空, Skt *śūnyatā*). I should go there to

32. Cf. Akanuma (1967, 637), on different sources of the story; Nyanaponika and Hecker (2003, 175–176), based on the Pāli tradition of the story. The ASA 110 discourse records the full story at T 2, 413b–c: ‘爾時拘尸那竭國。有一梵志。名須跋陀羅。... 如來於後亦入涅槃。’

33. It is possible that D 16 *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* and its Chinese counterpart DA 2 遊行經 (T 1, no. 1) are developed on the basis of this discourse (SA 1197 = S 6.15 = ASA 110). English translations of D 16 *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* are by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids (1959), and by Maurice Walshe (1987).

give support and praise.³⁴

Here, the SA version has both expressions, ‘the Dharma in accord with the forest (*suishun alianruo fa* 隨順阿練若法)³⁵ and ‘the Dharma in accord with emptiness’ (*suishun kong fa* 隨順空法).

However, its counterpart, ASA 104, states only that the Buddha teaches monks ‘the Dharma of living in the forest’ (*alianruo zhuchufa* 阿蘭若住處法), without mentioning the expression ‘the Dharma in accord with emptiness’ by Brahmā Sahāṃpati.³⁶ The corresponding S 6.13 does not mention any of these expressions. However, like the SA and ASA versions, it does state that Brahmā Sahāṃpati addresses the Buddha in verse about living in remote lodgings (*pañṭāni senāsanāni*),³⁷ which amounts to the same as dwelling in a forest.

Thus, only the SA version has the term, ‘emptiness’. The use of the term, emptiness, may indicate the characteristic of the SA tradition that it places more emphasis on the notion of emptiness,³⁸ though this sometimes means simply a forest’s emptiness of (i.e. lack of) villages and people.³⁹ It is also noteworthy that this attention to the notion of emptiness is not shared with the ASA counterpart.

Conclusion

Structurally *Samyuktāgama* and *Additional Translation of Samyuktāgama* versions of the *Brahma Samyukta* agree completely regarding the sequence and arrangement of the discourses, whereas the Pāli version matches up very loosely with the Chinese versions. Also, the Pāli version of the *Brahma Samyutta* has five more discourses than the two Chinese versions. Thus, the two Chinese versions are structurally much closer to each other than to the Pāli version.

As for the contents, this comparative study of these three different versions has focused on some shared images of Brahmās and on some disagreements presented in the three versions. The comparison has revealed the following main points:

1. *Several Brahmās are given with their individual names, but they are inconsistently recorded in the three versions of the Brahma Samyukta.*
2. *Only Brahmā Sahāṃpati and Brahmā Baka are consistently found in the three versions, and Brahmā Sahāṃpati of these two individual Brahmās is found more frequently and consistently presented in the three versions.*
3. *Brahmā Sahāṃpati and Brahmā Baka have different characteristics in the three versions. Brahmā Sahāṃpati can read the Buddha’s mind and is a supporter of the Buddha and of his Dharma. By contrast, Brahmā Baka considers himself as immortal and his Brahmā world as eternal and the highest.*

34. ‘爾時。世尊為諸比丘說隨順阿練若法。時。娑婆世界主梵天王作是念。今者世尊 ... 為諸大眾說隨順空法。我今當往隨順讚嘆。’ CSA iii 170; FSA 4, 1924; T 2, 322c.

35. This refers to the practice of the forest-dweller.

36. T 2, 411a.

37. S I 1998, 333–335; 1884, 154 (Rhys Davids 1917, 193–194; Bodhi 2000, 248).

38. Cf. Choong (2000, 183, 199).

39. The notion of ‘emptiness’ in early Buddhism has a variety of meanings (Choong 1999, 10, 68–69, 85–88).

4. *Brahmās are presented in the three versions as a class of exalted gods, but they are lower than the Buddha and even are lower than his great disciples who are portrayed as Arhants in a unique story style.*
5. *The Pāli version has listed more individual Brahmās than the Chinese versions.*
6. *The individual names of Brahmās are a new creation, not shared with the Vedic tradition. These changes reflect not only the ethical messages of early Buddhism, but also the early Buddhist adaptation of Vedic religious beliefs about deities (devas) in general, and their application to one particular type of deities — Brahmā.*
7. *How to situate these individual Brahmās in the universe is not clearly presented in the three versions.*
8. *The three versions of the Brahma Saṃyukta are still at an early stage of adapting the singular, high-ranking creator god of the world, Brahmā, inherited from the Vedic mythology.*
9. *The story of Brahmā Sahāmpati's requesting the Buddha to teach his Dharma to the world recorded in the Pāli version (S 6.1) is not found in the corresponding Saṃyuktāgama and Additional Translation of Saṃyuktāgama counterparts. Thus, the antiquity of both the pieces of doctrine and the entire story is in question. It is also a question whether the historical Buddha needs the Brahmā's request for willingly teaching his Dharma to the world, out of compassion.*
10. *Regarding the story of final Nirvāṇa of the Buddha, the only shared contents of the three versions (SA 1197 = S 6.15 = ASA 110) are: the Buddha's death at Kuśinagara, lying between two śāla trees, and the subsequent comments in verse made by his monk disciples, Ānanda and Aniruddha, and by his supportive gods, Brahmā Sahāmpati and Śākya.*
11. *The use of the term, 'Dharma according to emptiness (隨順空法)', is not found in the Additional Translation of Saṃyuktāgama and Saṃyutta-nikāya versions (ASA 103, S 6.13). It is found only in the Saṃyuktāgama version (SA 1191), indicating the Saṃyuktāgama tradition's characteristic of placing more emphasis on the notion of emptiness, one meaning of which is a forest's emptiness of people and villages.*

Overall, this study has revealed some substantial disagreements in the major teachings on Brahmās between the three versions.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Rod Bucknell for his constructive comments and corrections on a draft of this article. I am also grateful to Peter Harvey and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments and corrections.

Abbreviations

- A *Āṅguttara-nikāya*
 ASA *Bieyi Za Ahan Jing* 別譯雜阿含經 [Additional Translation of Saṃyuktāgama] (T 2, no. 100)

- CSA *Za Ahan Jing Lun Huibian* 雜阿含經論會編 [Combined Edition of Sūtra and Śāstra of the Saṃyuktāgama]. 3 vols Ed. Yin Shun 印順, 1983.
- DA *Dīrghāgama* 長阿含經 (T 1, no. 1)
- D *Dīgha-nikāya*
- EA *Ekottarikāgama* 增一阿含經 (T 2, no. 125)
- FSA *Foguang dazangjing ahan zang: Za ahan jing* 佛光大藏經阿含藏：雜阿含經 [Foguang Tripitaka Saṃyukta-āgama]. 4 vols. Ed. Foguang Dazangjing Bianxiu Weiyuanhui 佛光大藏經編修委員會. Dashu, Gaoxiang: Foguangshan Zongwu Weiyuanhui, 1983.
- MA *Madhyamāgama* 中阿含經 (T 1, no.26)
- M *Majjhima-nikāya*
- PTS Pali Text Society
- SA *Saṃyuktāgama* 雜阿含經 (T 2, no. 99)
- SA-u Un-attributed SA (T 2, no. 101) (The author and school of this collection are unidentified. An Shigao (fl. 148-170) is considered the translator by some. Harrison 2002, 2).
- S *Saṃyutta-nikāya*
- T Taishō Chinese *Tripitaka* (The standard edition for most scholarly purposes) *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 100 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924-34.

A, D and S references are to PTS editions.

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