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Review of Shohei Ichimura, *_The Canonical Book of the Buddha's Lengthy Discourses_*

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REVIEWS

Ichimura Shohei, *The Canonical Book of the Buddha's Lengthy Discourses* [BDK English Tripiṭaka Series] (Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, 2015, 2016, and 2018). Volume 1, 375pp., \$60, ISBN 9781886439559; volume 2, 209pp., \$60, ISBN 9781886439610; volume 3, 341pp., \$60. ISBN 9781886439689).

This is the first full English translation of a Chinese *Āgama*. In an introduction found similarly in each of the three volumes, the translator Ichimura Shohei introduces his text as the “Sanskrit *Dirgha Āgama*”, being one of “the four Dharmaguptaka Āgamas originally in Sanskrit” (Ichimura 2015: xv, 2016: xv, and 2018: xv). This formulation conveys the impression of a lack of awareness of the research on the original language of the Chinese *Dirgha-āgama* by Karashima (1994).¹ Consultation of this work would have precluded the use of the expression “Sanskrit *Dirgha-āgama*” for the collection extant in Chinese (nor are the other *Āgamas* necessarily based on a Sanskrit original).

The use of “Sanskrit *Dirgha-āgama*” for the Chinese collection also diverges from current academic usage of this phrase to refer to a quite different discourse collection, extant in Central Asian fragments.² Moreover, the reference to “the four Dharmaguptaka Āgamas” appears to reflect a position taken in the distant past by some Japanese scholars, to the best of my knowledge no longer currently held, according to which all four Chinese *Āgamas* were transmitted by members of the same Dharmaguptaka tradition.

The impression that current academic knowledge has not had much impact on Ichimura’s translation finds confirmation on consulting his bibliography, which shows that most relevant scholarly publications from the past fifty years have not been

¹ 辛嶋静志 1994: *Jō-agonkyō no gengo no kenkyū — Onshago bunseki o chūshin tosite* 「長阿含經」の原語の研究—音写語分析を中心として. Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppansha 平河出版社.

² See, e.g., Jens-Uwe Hartmann: “Contents and Structure of the *Dirghāgama* of the (Mūla-)Sarvāstivādin”, *Annual Report of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, 7 (2004), 119–137.

consulted. This includes existing translations of *Dīrgha-āgama* discourses by various scholars; in particular a complete translation of the entire collection into Japanese does not seem to have been taken into consideration at all, namely by Karashima et al. (1996–2000).³ Consulting this much-acclaimed work would have made it considerably easier for Ichimura to produce an accurate English translation.

In another part of the introduction, also shared by the three volumes, Ichimura (2015, xxv, 2016, xxv, and 2018, xxv) states that “this translation has been produced totally based on my own understanding of Buddhism accrued through my lifelong study and practice of the religion”, in addition to which “I have relied on the English version of the *Dīgha Nikāya* presented in scholarly translations of the text.” The English translations referred to here are the three volumes by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids of *Dialogues of the Buddha* (London, 1899, 1910, and 1921). The more recent translation of the *Dīgha-nikāya* by Walshe (1987) is not mentioned,⁴ in line with the pattern of not consulting works that are more up to date.

Moving from the introduction to the actual translation, in what follows I will note a few selected examples of misunderstandings and unwarranted additions, a comprehensive survey of which is not possible within the confines of this review. My procedure is to summarize briefly the context and then give my rendition of the phrase in question, followed by providing in brackets the original Chinese text and its location in the first volume of the Taishō edition, after which I turn to Ichimura’s translation.

The Buddha’s disciples should train in concord, “blending [like] water and milk” (16c₁₃: 同一水乳), which Ichimura (2015: 96) takes to mean that “all of you receive the same water and milk.” The Chinese does not convey the idea of a reception; the passage involves a simile and does not describe an actual reception of milk and water.

³ 辛嶋静志, 丘山新, 神塚淑子, 菅野博史, 末木文美士, 引田弘道, and 松村巧 1996–2000: *Gendaigo yaku agon kyōten: Jōagongyo* 現代語訳「阿含經典」. Tokyo: Hirakawa Shuppansha 平河出版社.

⁴ Walshe, Maurice 1987: *Thus Have I Heard; The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. London: Wisdom Publications.

A listing of views as forms of bondage proposes that the notion “the self shall not exist’ is a bondage” (141b₁₂: 我當無為縛). Ichimura (2018: 270) translates this as “believing that the self does not exist is bondage.” Besides adding a “believing” not found in the original, the rendering turns the Buddhist teaching of not self into a form of bondage.

An exposition of the doctrine of dependent arising shows the conditional building up of the different links up to “birth conditions old age and death” (61b₂₂: 生緣老死). Ichimura (2016: 32) translates this as “birth depends on old age, death.” This fails to make sense, since it is due to being born that one experience old age and death, not that one needs to become old in order to be born. The rendering adopted by Ichimura here in fact stands in direct contradiction to an earlier passage in the same discourse, rendered by Ichimura (2016: 25) as “depending on the condition of birth, there arises the effect of old age and death.”

A commendable way in which a husband should treat his wife is: “[providing] her with clothes and food at the appropriate time” (71c₂₈: 衣食隨時). Ichimura (2016: 88) understands this to mean “accompanying her during times of changing clothes and dining.” This misconstrues 隨時; the passage describes what a husband should give to his wife.

One out of several improper ways for recluses and Brahmins to gain a living involves the following activity: “with hands folded they worship the sun and the moon” (89b₂₉: 叉手向日月). Ichimura (2018: 9) translated this as follows: “they may be seen facing the sun or moon, holding it in both hands.” The original does not imply that the sun or the moon is being held in the hands. The same misunderstanding recurs in relation to another passage describing a supernatural ability that enables one “to stroke the sun and the moon with one’s hand and immediately reach the Brahmā heavens” (78c₃: 以手捫日月, 立至梵天). Ichimura (2016: 129) takes this to mean “supporting the sun and the moon in one’s hands; or standing up so as to reach the heaven of the god Brahmā.” This fails to convey the nature of this particular supernatural ability.

Another supernatural ability, the divine eye, enables one “to contemplate living beings passing away and being reborn” (78b₁₈: 觀諸眾生死者). According to the rendering by Ichimura (2016: 128), this passage conveys that the practitioners “perceive various persons

thoroughly and exhaustively as either dead or alive.” This fails to capture that the point of the description is the witnessing of their rebirth.

Ānanda reflects upon the profundity of dependent arising, which nevertheless seems plain to him, in the following manner: “The teaching on the twelve conditions, declared by the Blessed One, is brilliant, profound, and difficult to understand. [Yet], as I contemplate it in my mind, it is as if right in front of my eyes” (60b₂: 世尊所說十二因緣法之光明，甚深，難解，如我意觀，猶如目前). Ichimura (2016: 23) translates this as follows: “The insight that is imbedded in the doctrine of twelve-limbed causality (*pratītya-samutpāda*) is so profound that I cannot fathom it. [In contrast,] my insight, accomplished in applying mental awareness to the function of intellect, is but a [simple] event before my eyes.” This rendition does not reflect 世尊所說 and adds a part on applying mental awareness to the function of the intellect which is not found in the original. It also fails to appreciate that Ānanda is actually claiming to have understood the teaching, rather than expressing that he cannot fathom it. When the Buddha then replies: “Stop, stop, do not say this!” (60b₉: 止! 止! 勿作此言), in Ichimura (2016: 23) this becomes: “You should not give up, Ānanda.” This misconstrues the fairly self-evident implications of the original.

During a visit to a group of non-Buddhist practitioners, the Buddha forgoes an opportunity to expound his own teachings and instead proposes to discuss theirs. The members of the assembly express their amazement at this magnanimous gesture: “the recluse Gautama is of great might and great power. Being asked about his own doctrine, he thereupon asks about the doctrine of others” (47c₁₀: 瞿曇沙門有大威勢，有大神力。他問己義，乃問他義; adopting the variant 問 instead of 開 in the last phrase). In Ichimura (2015: 272) this becomes: “O *śramaṇa* Gautama, you boast of your greatness and supernormal power, to the extent that when you are asked about your teaching, you set aside [the question (sic)] and instead challenge us to explain our teaching!” The original has no reference to “boasting”, “setting aside”, and “challenging”; the translation does not capture the meaning of the Chinese text.

A reference to becoming a lay disciple indicates that “the disciples take the three refuges and the five precepts” (95b₆: 弟子受三自歸五戒), which Ichimura (2018: 39) understands to imply that the Buddha “granted his disciples the higher ordination that consists of

taking refuge in the Three Treasures and adhering to the five precepts.” The idea of a “higher ordination” is without support in the original and is misleading; becoming a Buddhist lay disciple does not require taking a “higher ordination” (*upasampadā*).

An account of the gradual path indicates that “one who has such noble virtue gains noble [restraint] of the faculties” (84c₁₉: 彼有如是聖戒, 得聖諸根; adopting the variant 諸根 instead of 眼根). Ichimura (2016: 157) takes this to imply that “on the basis of such sacred disciplines, he has acquired the [sense] faculties transcendent [from the objects and defilements], and thus they are sacred.” The idea that the sense faculties become sacred in some way does not accurately reflect the original.

A listing of the eight deliverances has as its third item: “liberation by purity is the third deliverance” (62b₂₁: 淨解脫, 三解脫), which Ichimura (2016: 38) renders as “when one has thus terminated all defilements, this is the third deliverance.” The idea of terminating all defilements is not found in the original and is misleading, as the third deliverance is not about the eradication of defilements.

The standard description of the attainment of stream-entry indicates that the mind of one who goes through such an experience is at that time “without dust and free from stain, attaining the purity of the eye of Dharma” (88a₂₀: 遠塵離垢, 得法眼淨), which Ichimura (2016: 176) takes to convey that the person in question “exhausted all defilements and thus acquired genuine insight into the nature of the Dharma.” Besides not reflecting the original particularly well, the problem is that stream-entry does not correspond to an eradication of all defilements. In the type of thought reflected in the *Āgamas*, such exhaustion is only acquired by becoming an arhat.

Arhats are considered to be completely beyond desire, which finds expression in the statement that, “having understanding of sensual pleasures and discernment of sensual pleasures, they have no lust for sensual pleasures and their minds do not abide in sensual pleasures” (54c₁₁: 知欲, 見欲, 不貪於欲, 心不住欲). Ichimura (2015, 321) renders this as “though he knows the arising of desire and sees it, he is not attached to it nor does he abide in it.” The inaccurate translation gives the misleading impression that arhats still experience sensual desire but without attachment to it.

A reference to sensual pleasures indicates that “the five [kinds of] sensual pleasures can clearly be much liked and desired”

(105c₂₈: 五欲潔淨甚可愛樂), which in Ichimura (2018: 98) becomes “the five kinds of desirable sense objects are [fundamentally] undefiled and can be enjoyed [in ordinary life].” The original does not imply an endorsement of sensual enjoyment as something that is undefiled and therefore can be enjoyed. The same passage continues with the indication that for one “in my noble teaching these become attachments, bondages, and shackles indeed” (106a₁: 於我賢聖法為著, 為縛, 為是拘鎖), which Ichimura (2018: 99) then renders as “the subjective agent or ‘self’, however, brings about attachment, bondage, and entrapment.” This fails to capture the meaning of the original, which is not about a subjective agent or self, but rather about problematizing what Ichimura’s translation risks to endorse, namely enjoyment of sensual pleasures.

As mentioned above, instead of consulting recent scholarly publications that would have been relevant to producing a reliable translation of the Chinese *Dīrgha-āgama*, Ichimura has relied only on the outdated translations by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids of the corresponding discourses in the *Dīgha-nikāya*. Several of the errors surveyed above show that even these works have not been properly consulted, as the misunderstandings are less probable to have occurred if the relevant Pāli parallel had been examined. In what follows I will list these misunderstandings briefly and provide in brackets the publication year and page of the translation of the *Dīgha-nikāya* whose consultation could have clarified the situation in the Pāli version and thereby led to a reconsideration of the Chinese counterpart.

A husband should make gifts to his wife rather than accompany her whenever she changes clothes (1921: 182). The sun and moon are not to be held in one’s hands (1899: 24 and 1921: 107), and the divine eye is not about seeing whether someone is dead or alive (1921: 105). Ānanda did not consider himself to be unable to fathom dependent arising and the Buddha did not encourage him not to give up (1910: 50). The Buddha’s magnanimous attitude is not a form of boasting (1921: 37). Taking refuge is an expression of faith and trust, not a form of higher ordination (1899: 150). Sense restraint is not considered in itself sacred (1899: 124 and 80), and the third deliverance does not involve a termination of defilements (1910: 69). The reference to being free of dust in descriptions of stream-entry is metaphorical (1899: 135). Arhats no longer experience defilements

(1921: 259), and enjoyment of the five sensual pleasures is not considered commendable (1899: 312).

Each of these errors could have been avoided if the translations by T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys Davids had indeed been taken into account, as announced in the introduction to each of the three volumes of Ichimura's translation.

Another type of problem manifests in the addition of words and whole phrases that, though having no basis in the Chinese original, are not marked as supplementations. In quoting Ichimura's translation, here and below I place in italics the parts which have no basis in the Chinese.

The four types of nutriment are listed as “first, the nutriment of soft edible food; second, the nutriment of contact; third, the nutriment of attention; and fourth, the nutriment of consciousness (133b₁₈: 搏細滑食為第一，觸食為第二，念食為第三，識食為第). Ichimura (2018, 232) renders this passage as follows: “(1) regular food *served by hand and with utensils with [proper] hygiene through washing, bathing, and [wearing clean] clothing*; (2) food *created by* contact; (3) food *created by* recollection; and (4) food *created by* consciousness” (italics added). Besides misunderstanding the last three as modes of food production, rather than as types of nutriment that are unrelated to physical food, the translation also contains an unwarranted reference to the use of utensils and hygiene through washing, etc. It is noteworthy that this wholesale expansion comes with a partial use of square brackets, even though the entire addition should have been included in them. The same also happens elsewhere, showing that the translator was aware of the possibility of employing square brackets to mark off additions but did not use them consistently.

A reference to the “six cravings” (58a₂₃: 六愛) becomes in Ichimura (2016, 8): “the six kinds of craving desire *that are directed to external bases of cognition respectively*” (italics added). The unmarked supplementation of “directed to external bases of cognition respectively” is incorrect. One of the six cravings manifests in relation to mental objects (58a₂₃: 法愛), which is of course not related to “external bases of cognition”.

A reference to “the four establishments of mindfulness” (35c₂₇: 四念處) becomes in Ichimura (2015: 205) “the *set of* four applications of mental awareness *on four conditions of existence*”

through an efficient analytical method” (italics added). The unwarranted reference to four conditions of existence fails to make sense in relation to the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness.

A listing of the awakening factors presents the second and third as follows: “(2) cultivating the awakening factor of [investigation of] *dharmas*, (3) cultivating the awakening factor of energy” (12a₃: 二者修法覺意, 三者修精進覺意). This takes the following form in Ichimura (2015, 69): “second, *the principle of differentiation of psychophysical elements (skandhas) retained in memory with regard to their truthfulness or falsity*; third, *the principle of exertion in the pursuit of critically discerning right dharmas from false ones*” (italics added). The parts in italics have no basis in the original; moreover, the translation fails to reflect the two occurrences of 覺意, “awakening factor”; it also mistakes 法, *dharma*, to reflect *skandha*.

An enumeration of the three influxes (*āsrava*) mentions “the influx of sensuality, the influx of existence, and the influx of ignorance” (50a₂₂: 欲漏, 有漏, 無明漏). Ichimura (2015: 286) translates this as “defilement *derived* from desire, defilement *derived from attachment* to existence, and defilement *derived from ignorance of the Four Noble Truths*” (italics added). The Chinese original does not refer to “derived”, to “attachment”, or to the “Four Noble Truths”. A similar addition of the four noble truths can be seen in another discourse in relation to references to “ignorance” and “knowledge” (57c₉: 無明 and 57c₁₀: 明). Ichimura (2016: 4) translates these as “ignorance *of the Four Noble Truths*” and “*acquisition of insight on (sic) the Four Noble Truths*”. In spite of the undeniable importance of the four noble truths in *Āgama* texts, it would be preferable for the reader to know that the passage speaks just of ignorance and knowledge on their own, rather than relating these to the four noble truths.

A reference in the same context to “name and form” (57c₉: 名與色) becomes in Ichimura (2016: 4): “the (*noetic*) *category of name, i.e. the four mental skandhas*, and the (corporeal) *category of form, i.e., the one material skandha*” (italics added). Besides introducing material not found in the original, this is also not correct, since “name” in early Buddhist thought does not invariably correspond to the four mental aggregates. For a proper appreciation of this doctrinal aspect, the fact that the present passage does not

equate name with the four mental aggregates is of considerable importance, making the unmarked addition by the translator rather regrettable.

When setting aside certain speculative views, the position of the Buddha is that “in the teaching proclaimed by me, there is what I have definitely declared and what I have not definitely declared (111b₂₀: 我所說法, 有決定記, 不決定記). Ichimura (2018: 133) presents this as follows: “In my teaching *I distinguish between two types of truth*: (1) absolutely determined truth and (2) indeterminate truth” (italics added). The original has no reference to two types of truth; in fact, the distinction between two truths is a later development not attested in the early discourses. It would be preferable for the reader to know that the original does not contain a reference to two types of truth.

A critical review of certain teachings promulgated by others qualifies these as “not being what is taught by a Perfectly Awakened One” (73a₁₁: 非是三耶三佛所說), which Ichimura (2016: 95) renders as “*any doctrine, other than the teaching imparted by the Perfectly Enlightened One, cannot be altered*” (italics added). The same type of supplementation recurs a little later in relation to another reference to “what is taught by a Perfectly Awakened One” (73a₁₈: 三耶三佛所說), where Ichimura (2016: 95) adds that such teaching “can easily be modified”. The addition of this phrase, just as the earlier reference to other teachings that “cannot be altered”, gives the misleading impression that the Buddha presented his own teaching as something that can easily be modified.

Ichimura (2015: 96) translates a listing of the twelve *aṅgas* (16c₁₅: 貫經, 祇夜經, 受記經, 偈經, 法句經, 相應經, 本緣經, 天本經, 廣經, 未曾有經, 證喻經, 大教經) in this way: “(1) the sūtra collection, *the sacred discourses in prose*; (2) the geya collection, *the sacred discourses in prose and verse*; (3) the vyākaraṇa collection, *the doctrines and destinies of religious fulfilment*; (4) the gāthā collection, *the literature in verse*; (5) the udāna collection, *the Buddha’s solemn and joyous utterances in prose and verse*; (6) the nidāna collection, *the doctrinal and Vinaya discourses on motives and occasions*; (7) the jātaka collection, *stories of past lives and experiences as a bodhisattva*; (8) the itivṛttaka collection, *stories of past events*; (9) the vaipulya collection, *extensive doctrinal studies*; (10) the adbhuta or adbhuta-dharma collection, *descriptions of supernormal events and mysteries*; (11) the avadāna collection,

moral instructions consisting of heroic stories and moral retributions; and (12) the upadeśa collection, *detailed and extensive expositions and interpretations*” (italics changed). The translation gives the mistaken impression that the *Dirgha-āgama* discourse in question provides various explanations of each *aṅga*, when in actual fact these glosses are only personal ideas of the translator, who has failed to mark these as additions. In view of the debated nature of these *aṅgas*, it would have been important to convey to the reader that the specifications given are not found in the original.

A description of the attainment of non-return indicates that on “eradicating the five lower fetters, with their extinction, one does not return to this world” (78a₁₅: 盡五下結，於彼滅度，不還此世). Ichimura (2016: 126) takes this to mean that the person in question “eradicating the five kinds of defilement that *bind sentient beings to the lower realm of desire, i.e., the heretical belief in a self, attachment to practices and observances other than those approved by the Buddha, doubt, sexual desire, and malice, realized the state of non-returner to be reborn [among the gods at the end of their life] and will not return to this world*” (italics added). The entire italicized passage is without a counterpart in the original. The addition involves also a misunderstanding, as the fetter of dogmatic adherence to rules and observances is not necessarily confined to those outside of the Buddha’s dispensation.

The Buddha is without equal; hence his disciples can proclaim: “I personally heard from the Buddha that wishing in turn for the existence at the present time of a Perfectly Awakened One who is equal to the Tathāgata is [wishing for] what is impossible” (79a₂: 我躬從佛聞，欲使現在有三耶三佛與如來等者，無有是處; the translation is based on emending to 使 to 便). Ichimura (2016: 131) takes this to mean that “I have learned from the Buddha himself that *despite His Holiness’ wishes and efforts, the perfectly enlightened Buddha of the present time has not been able to introduce any other equally [qualified] buddha into this world*” (italics added). The idea that the Buddha had been trying to introduce another Buddha into this world turns the original statement on its head.

As part of a set of verses, the following statement can be found: “Śākyamuni aroused the mind of awakening, certainly wanting to accomplish full awakening” (62c₂₇: 能仁發道心，必欲成正覺), which Ichimura (2016: 40) renders as “Śākyamuni also gave rise within himself the aspiration (sic) to pursue the path of realizing

supreme enlightenment. *He still proceeds upon that career path even now*” (italics added). The last part has no basis in the Chinese and is also misconceived, since with awakening attained the Buddha was no longer proceeding on the “career path” towards awakening.

One of the qualities of the first absorption is the experience of “joy and happiness born of seclusion” (93b₂₁: 離生喜樂), which Ichimura (2018: 29) renders as “the sense of joy (*prīti*) and bliss (*sukha*) that removes *the cause of birth*” (italics added). The unwarranted introduction of a cause of birth is misleading insofar as the early Buddhist discourses do not present absorption attainment as in itself leading beyond future birth. The same problem recurs in relation to other descriptions of the first absorption. In the case of one of these, which involves the same phrase (23c₁₉: 離生喜樂), the translation by Ichimura (2015: 134) mistakenly conveys that this implies some supramundane achievement, as it reads: “the sense of joy and bliss increase through removal *of the cause of birth, thus reaching the supramundane sphere*” (italics added).

On the verge of his passing away, the Buddha is described as having proceeded through various levels of meditative absorption up to the attainment of cessation, at which point he “entered the concentration on the cessation of perception” (26b₂₆: 入滅想定). Ichimura (2015: 151) translates this as “he then entered the final state of cessation, transcendent from senses and ideation, *equivalent to third saintly state of an anāgāmin*” (italics added). This addition, made regularly by Ichimura to description of the attainment of cessation, has in the present case the accidental result of turning the Buddha, on the eve of his passing away, into a non-returner.

Besides adding material in various ways, at times the translation has hardly any relation to the original. An example is a listing of “worldly right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration” (60a₂: 世正見, 正志, 正語, 正業, 正命, 正方便, 正念, 正定). Ichimura (2016: 20) translates this as: “*the eight criteria of the secular world: gain and loss; infamy and fame; praise and blame; and suffering and happiness*” (italics added). Here only a single Chinese character, 世, has made it into the translation.

In sum, the translation of the Chinese *Āgama* produced by Ichimura (2015, 2016, and 2018) is unreliable. Besides misunderstandings that could have been rectified by consulting

already-existing translations of the respective *Dīrgha-āgama* discourse, the tendency to add glosses and personal opinions without marking these off as additions not found in the original is rather problematic. A reader unable to consult the Chinese original could be misled into drawing unwarranted conclusions regarding the contents of the *Dīrgha-āgama*, such as, for example, that it considers the Buddha to have still been on the path to awakening and to have passed away as only a non-returner; and that he even tried to introduce another Buddha into this world. Moreover, the impression could be that, whereas the Buddha himself apparently had difficulties reaching full awakening, the same would not appear to be the case for his disciples, as even the attainment of stream-entry equals the eradication of all defilements and alternatively they could achieve the same goal through attainment of the first absorption.

The translation by Ichimura clearly fails to meet the objective, mentioned in the publisher's foreword to each of the three volumes, of producing "accurate and readable English translations of the Buddhist canon". The *Dīrgha-āgama* extant in Chinese needs to be translated anew into English.

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