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Any Chinese Translation of Theravāda Pāli ?

Charles Willemen*

In India a school has its own *Vinaya*, monastic rules. A schism, *saṅghabheda*, can only happen when there is a *Vinaya* disagreement. But such disagreement often is the result of doctrinal disagreements. In China a school is doctrinal, called *Zong* 宗. The term used for a *Vinaya* school is *Bu* 部, division. The *Vinaya* in China is mainly Dharmaguptaka, *Si Fen Lü* 四分律 (T.1428, 410 – 412 AD), *Vinaya in Four Parts*, for exoteric schools, and (Mūla)sarvāstivāda (*Genben*)*shuoyiqieyou Bu Pinaiye* 根本说一切有部毗奈耶 (T.1442, 702 AD) for esoteric schools. It may be mentioned that the *Mahāsāṅghika Vinaya*, 摩訶僧祇律 *Mohesengzhi Lü* (T.1425, 416-418 AD), the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, *Vinaya in Five Parts*, 五分律 *Wu Fen Lü* (T.1425, 422 -423 AD), and the *Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, *Vinaya in Ten Recitations*, 十诵律 *Shi Song Lü* (T.1435, 404 – 409 AD), *Daśābhāṇavāra*, were translated in China too.

Immediately after the Buddha's life (ca. 563 – 483 BC) had ended, at the age of approximately eighty years of age, the *saṅgha*, monastic community, held a synod, laying down the religious law, the doctrine, *Dharma*, and also the monastic law, *Vinaya*. Synod means chanting together. It has the same meaning as *saṅgīti*, although one often sees the term council for *saṅgīti*. The Buddhist order did not have a special name for itself. When the first schism occurred, ca. 340 BC, in the time of King Mahāpadma Nanda, shortly after the second synod, the Vaiśālī synod (ca. 380 BC), the

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traditional order did not have a special name for itself. They were just the *saṅgha*, in Pāṭaliputra, Magadha, wanting to bring a bit more discipline, as opposed to the majority, the *mahāsaṅgha*. After the personalist Vātsīputrīyas had left, ca. 280 BC, in the time of King Aśoka (264 – 227 BC) a third synod was held in Pāṭaliputra and a school branched off, namely the Sarvāstivādins. From that time on the traditional order used the term *Vibhajyavāda*, analyst, distinctionist, for itself. This was an excellent term, used by the Buddha for himself. He had used this term in *Aṅguttaranikāya* (*Numerical Discourses*), *Dasakanipāta* (*Book of Tens*), *Sutta* 94. He had said that one should understand before believing. Ignorance, *avidyā*, or delusion, *moha*, was the worst of the three fundamental afflictions. Because of this there are the two opposites of anger, *dveṣa*, and desire, *rāga*, too. Sarvāstivādins, who had their own *Vinaya*, agreed that everything exists (*sarvam asti*), but they did not agree what that actually meant. All factors, *dharmas*? If so, how many? Seventy – five? A hundred? Or are all aggregates, *skandhas*, meant? Etc.. So, even among traditional Sarvāstivādins there were doctrinal discussions, differences.

In Aśoka's time the majority, the *mahāsaṅgha* and its members, *mahāsāṅghikas*, also knew developments. The term Bahuśrutīya, learned one, started. This term was as intellectual as *Vibhajyavāda*. In Aśoka's days Prajñaptivādins, who were a branch of Mahāsāṅghikas, distinguished themselves saying exactly the opposite of what Sarvāstivādins were saying, but they apparently did not have their own, separate *Vinaya*.

In Chinese Buddhism a school was doctrinal, called *Zong* 宗. A group within a *Zong* was called *Pai*, 派 Group. E.g. Madhyamaka was a Group, *Pai*, within the Prajñaptivāda Mahāsāṅghikas, saying in the South what was the opposite of what Sarvāstivādins were saying in Kaśmīra to the North. In the second century AD the new *Vaibhāṣika* Sarvāstivādins, having a Sanskrit *Abhidharma* in Kaśmīra spoken by the Buddha, were the opposite of Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka group. All Mahāsāṅghikas, except the Lokottaravādins in Gandhāra, far from Magadha, seem to have kept their original *Vinaya*. The majority, the *mahāsaṅgha*, had not wanted any change to the *Vinaya* from the beginning.

The traditional order split up several times, each time because of the *Vinaya*, but this was actually the result of doctrinal

disagreements. Their development was quite different from the Mahāsāṅghikas. The members of the *mahāsaṅgha*, the majority, Mahāsāṅghikas, used the term *Mahāyāna*, *Great Vehicle*, for their own kind of Buddhism. The term appears for the first time in writing in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*^o, probably first century BC. This text was translated to Chinese as *Daoxing Bore Jing* 道行般若经 T.224, the work of Loujia Chen 娄迦讖, Lokakṣema or Laukākṣiṇa, who was working in Luoyang 洛阳 between 167 and 186 AD. He gave the text the explanatory title of *Yogācāra* (*Daoxing* 道行) and *Prajñā* (*Bore* 般). In this text Mahāsāṅghika emptiness – wisdom is developed in the yogic practice, not knowledge, *jñāna*, as the traditional schools did. In the second century AD in China the original Indian language was most likely Prakrit. So, the Chinese pronunciation for 般若 must have sounded like *banre*. After ca. 400 AD, when the main Indian language had become Sanskrit, the same Chinese characters were used to phonetically render *pra(jñā)*. Sometimes this phonetic rendering was even written *bore* 波若. They developed emptiness – wisdom, *prajñā*, not knowledge, *jñāna*, as the traditional schools did. For traditional schools *prajñā*, which is normally translated as wisdom in English, means *dharmapracaya*. One namely discerns the different factors or *dharmas*. Another important difference between the two families was that the Mahāsāṅghikas wanted to become bodhisattva, in ten stages, and then Buddha. The traditional schools wanted to become arhat, also in ten stages : Realm of desire, *kāmadhātu*, and a path of preparatory application, *prayogamārga*; Four stages in the realm of form, *rūpadhātu*; Four stages in the realm without form, *ārūpyadhātu*; Stage of an arhat is tenth, although e.g. Sarvāstivādins distinguished six kinds of arhats, the highest arhat being called *akopya*, immovable. He could not fall back to a lower stage. When the traditional order adopted an idea, a practice of their antagonists, they called the result *Mahāyāna* too. E.g. when Asaṅga, a Mahīśāsaka monk end of the fourth century, takes in Madhyamaka emptiness, which is *Mahāyāna*, in his yogic practice, *yogācāra*, the result is called *Mahāyāna* too. Sarvāstivādins also took in yogic practices of their antagonists. They finally even took in Hindu yoga (Bhairava, Durgā). This explains esoteric Buddhism, called *Mantrayāna*. This then developed to *Vajrayāna*. The development of initiation, *abhiṣeka*, makes this very clear.

Furthermore, some traditional Sarvāstivādins believed that actions plant karmic seeds, *bīja*, in the mind. The next step then is belief in a Tathāgata embryo, *Tathāgatagarbha*. Mahāsāṅghikas had always wanted to become completely awakened. So, they immediately took in this development. When Mahāsāṅghikas take in an idea or a practice of their antagonists, the result is called *Ekayāna*, *Unique Vehicle*, *Weiyi Cheng* 唯一乘. Actually this is a special kind of *Mahāyāna*. A fine example is the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*^o. The text may have originated in Bactria, which was mainly Sarvāstivāda. Avalokiteśvara most likely was a Bactrian, keeping trade routes safe. When Mahāsāṅghikas take this text and bring their changes to it, the result is called *Ekayāna*, *Unique Vehicle*. The belief in a Tathāgata embryo, with which Mahāsāṅghikas had immediately agreed, became a core belief for them, to the extent that they considered it a basic Mahāsāṅghika belief. This can be seen in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*. This text was translated twice in China: T. 374 *Da Banniepan Jing* 大般涅槃经, the work of Dharmarḍdhin, Tanwu Chen 昙无讖, in 416 – 423 AD; T. 376 *Da Bannihuan Jing* 大般泥洹经, the work of Faxian 法显 and Buddhahadra in 416 – 418 AD. Based on Chinese translations one can say that the main Buddhist language in India had become Sanskrit ca. 400 AD. Kumārajīva, surname Jiumo 鸠摩, given name Luoshi 罗什, who arrived in Chang'an 长安 in February 402 AD, is at the beginning of so-called old translations (*jiuyi* 旧译), based on Sanskrit. Before him, from the second century AD on, Chinese translations were mainly based on Prakrit, called ancient translations (*guyi* 古译). An example is offered by the work of An Shigao 安世高, a phonetic rendering of *Ashkani*, Parthian. In the seventh century Xuanzang 玄奘 initiated new translations (*xinyi* 新译), still based on Sanskrit. The development of Chinese terminology gives an idea about the original Indian language. The common Indian language before 400 AD may have been Prakrit, but, of course, there were exceptions, such as the new Sanskrit Sarvāstivāda “orthodoxy” in the second century AD in Kaśmīra. One may also mention the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa, end of the first century AD. The complete Chinese version was translated to English in 2009 with the title *In Praise of (i.e. Kāvya) Buddha's Acts*. There never was a prohibition to use Sanskrit.

The traditional *saṅgha*, known as *Vibhajyavāda* ever since Aśoka's days in Magadha, spread all over the Indian cultural area, i.e. the earth, *mahī*, in the immediate post – Aśokan period. When they were all over the 'earth', i.e. all over the Indian cultural area, from Gandhāra to Śrī Laṅkā, they could rightly be called Mahīśāsaka, instructing the earth. Their language was influenced by the local languages along the way. The language of their sacred texts became a mixed Prakrit, not only in Śrī Laṅkā. *Vibhajyavāda* further developed. In Gandhāra Dharmaguptakas split off. There was a dispute about the giving of offerings, *dāna*, liberality. Dharmaguptakas, who were still *Vibhajyavāda*, wanted offerings to be given to the *stūpa*, not to the *saṅgha*. The traditional *Vibhajyavādins*, the Mahīśāsakas, wanted offerings to be given to the *saṅgha*, as usual. In the Himalayan region Kāśyapīya *Vibhajyavādins* branched off. Not much is known about them.

The northwestern Indian cultural area was known in Chinese as *Jibin* 罽宾, a term older than Buddhism in China. *Ji* means *kambala*, a warm cloth for which Uḍḍiyāna was famous, and *bin* means foreigner or guest. The area from where those foreigners came originally was Uḍḍiyāna, the area of the Suvastu, the Swat River, i.e. northern Pakistan today. In that area there were *Vibhajyavādins* too. In the second century AD Kaśmīra was part of *Jibin* too, when Kanīška (r. 155 – 179 AD) saw it as a new cultural centre. In Gandhāra proper most Buddhists were Mahāsāṅghikas. Across the Khyber Pass, between Puruṣapura (Peshawar) and Nagarāhāra (Jalalabad), in today's northern Afghanistan, was the western part of the Gandhāran cultural area. The area there was known as Bactria, *Daxia* 大夏, *Greater Xia*. Chinese thought that when a dynasty such as the Xia fell in China, it moved West, to Central Asia. This area also was the westernmost part of the Western Regions, *Xiyu* 西域, as Central Asia was known in China. Bactria was mainly Sarvāstivāda.

Around 35 BC a conservative *Vibhajyavāda* 'orthodoxy' was written down in Śrī Laṅkā. It had seven *Abhidhamma* texts, spoken by the Buddha in heaven, not on earth. In such case their antagonists used the term *Hīnayāna*, *Lesser Vehicle*, for them. The text which shows this 'orthodoxy' best is the *Kathāvatthu*, *Points of Controversy*. It is quite likely that all seven *Abhidhamma* texts were written down at that time. This 'orthodoxy' returned to

Aśoka's Magadhan *Vibhajyavāda*. We know it as Theravāda. They reacted against Mahīśāsaka *Vibhajyavāda*, which had experienced some developments between the time of Aśoka, ca. 240 BC, and ca. 35 BC. Mahīśāsakas were on the island of Śrī Lāṅkā too, and also in southern India, and also in Uḍḍiyāna, the Gandhāran area, etc. Everywhere they were a minority, which is why they eventually lost out. Aśaṅga, half-brother of Vasubandhu (ca. 350 – 430 AD? or a bit later) was a Mahīśāsaka monk in Puruṣapura, Peshawar. There and then Mahīśāsakas were doctrinally near to the majority, to traditional, non-*Vaibhāṣika* Sarvāstivādins, such as Vasubandhu. It is quite possible that Buddhaghosa (early fifth century?) was a Mahīśāsaka monk from southern India who went to join the new Theravāda 'orthodoxy'. That would explain why he had to pass an 'examination'. He wrote the *Visuddhimagga*, *Path of Purification*, using the *Vimuttimagga*, *Path of Liberation*, a text which may well have been Mahīśāsaka.

Affiliation of Four Chinese 'Theravāda' Texts

1. The Chinese *Faju Jing* 法句经 (T. IV 210), *Verses of the Doctrine*, *Dharmapada*, is a composite text. Its core is a southern Mahīśāsaka *Dharmapada*, enlarged with stanzas from a traditional Sarvāstivāda *Dharmapada*. The Sarvāstivāda text was used to establish an *aṅga Udāna*, one of the twelve Sarvāstivāda *aṅgas*, members of Buddha's teaching. We have a Chinese *Udāna*, *Chuyao Jing* 出曜经, T.212, the work of a Dharmatrāta. Sarvāstivādins added three members to the nine traditional ones, namely *Nidāna* and *Udāna*, narrative literature, for which they were known. Traditional Sarvāstivādins had a long *Vinaya*, with many stories, *dr̥ṣṭāntas*, illustrating the rules. So they were also known as Dār̥ṣṭāntikas. Because they believed that the *Sūtras*, not the *Abhidharmaśāstras* were spoken by the Buddha, they are also known as Sautrāntikas. They further added *Upadeśa*, *Explanatory Discourse*, *Lun* 论, the Mahāsāṅghika equivalent of *Śāstra*, *Teaching*, *Lun* 论, to the list of members, *aṅgas*, establishing a total of twelve members. The three additions may have taken place at the end of the second century or in the beginning of the third century, when the *Vinaya* was abbreviated to ten recitations, to the *Daśabhāṇavāra*, *Shi Song Lü* 十诵律 T.XXIII 1435, leaving out many of the stories illustrating the rules. Sarvāstivādins were going

through a period of intensive *Tripitaka* formation at the time. The new *Vaibhāsika* “orthodoxy” in Kaśmīra developed within traditional Sarvāstivāda circles, reacting to them. From the member, *aṅga*, *Udāna* the stanzas were collected again, forming an *Udānavarga*. This text became well known as a *Dharmapada* of traditional Sarvāstivādins, from the end of the seventh century in India also called Mūlasarvāstivādins. One should keep in mind that traditional Sarvāstivādins were quite diverse, both before and after they were called Mūlasarvāstivādins. It was even accepted to change one’s mind and to become a Mahāsāṅghika supporter. This can be seen in Harivarman’s *Chengshi lun*, 成实论 (*Jñānakāya*) *Prodbhūtopadeśa*, often mistakenly called *Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. Zhi Qian 支谦 (first half of the third century AD, in South China) is known to be responsible for the final version of the *Faju Jing* 法句经, *Dharmapada*. Parts added in front of the central Mahīśāsaka core mostly come from a Sarvāstivāda *Dharmapada*. Parts added after the central core seem to come from Mahīśāsaka chanted verses. So, the Chinese text is quite different from the Theravāda *Dhammapada*.

2. The Chinese *Yizu Jing* 义足经 T. IV 198, actually means *Arthapada*. The Chinese translator, Zhi Qian, seems to have given this title to link it with his *Dharmapada*. *Dharma*, religious law, and *artha*, meaning (fulness), go together. There is an *Aṭṭhakavagga* in the *Suttanipāta*. Sanskrit literature has *Arthavargīya*. Again, there is a high probability that the Indian original may have been Mahīśāsaka. 5

3. Authorship of the *Jietuo Dao Lun* 解脱道论 T. XXXII 1648, *Vimuktimārga*, *Path of Liberation*, is attributed to Upaṭiṣya (Śāriputra?). The text was translated in 515 AD in Yangdu 扬都, i.e. modern Nanjing 南京, by *Sengqie Poluo* 僧伽婆罗 (460 – 524 AD). This phonetic rendering offers a surname and a given name, both limited to two syllables, Chinese characters. Chinese phonetic renderings of Indian names offer surname and given name too. In this case the Chinese phonetic rendering means Saṅghavarman, *Sengkai* 僧铠. He came from *Funan* 扶南, Cambodia, the lower reaches of the Mekong River. *Funan* phonetically renders *Bnam*, hill, a term still seen as the first part of Phnom Penh today. P. Demiéville has convincingly stated in 1953 that the Chinese *Vimuktimārga* does not have a Singhalese origin. He says the

Indian text was introduced in Śrī Laṅkā and used by the Abhayagirivāsins. Buddhaghosa used this text, enlarged and changed it, to write his *Visuddhimagga*, thus proving that he was an “orthodox” Mahāvihāravāsin. The *Jietuo Dao Lun*, *Vimuktīmārga*, may well have been Mahīśāsaka. Mahīśāsakas were in Śrī Laṅkā too, where Faxian 法显 (340 – 420 AD) obtained their *Vinaya*. The *Jietuo Dao Lun* is a *yogācāra* manual, about the practice of yoga. Circumstances show that the original of the Chinese *Jietuo Dao Lun* is Mahīśāsaka, coming from Cambodia.

4. The *Shanjian (Lü) Piposha* 善见 (律) 毗婆沙 T. XXIV 1462, related to the *Samantapāsādikā*, was translated in 488 AD by Saṅghabhadra in Guangzhou 广州. *Shanjian* means *Pāsādikā*, *lū vinaya*, and *piposha vibhāṣā*. *Vibhāṣā* points to the Gandhāran cultural area. Sengyi 僧猗, who was a Chinese co-translator, thought that the text was a commentary on the Dharmaguptaka *Vinaya*. Dharmaguptakas were *Vibhajyavādins* too. They were influenced by Mahāsāṅghika ideas. The Chinese text mentions five *āgamas*. Mahīśāsakas had five, the fifth being called *Kṣudraka*. Saṅghabhadra came from the Western Regions (Bactria?). He then went South, eventually ending up in Guangzhou. Mahīśāsakas were in the Gandhāran area, and also in Śrī Laṅkā. It is quite reasonable to assume that the Chinese text had a Mahīśāsaka original.

Concluding one can say that it is very likely that no Chinese text was translated from Theravāda Pāli. Because the language of Mahīśāsakas, who were not only in Śrī Laṅkā, was quite similar to Pāli there, confusion is easy to understand. *Vibhajyavāda* had started in the time of Aśoka, but as it spread all over the Indian cultural area, its language developed and adapted to the local situation. “Orthodox” *Vibhajyavādins* wanted to return to Aśoka’s *Vibhajyavāda*. Ca. 35 BC an “orthodoxy” was written down. The language was known as Pāli. Reputed European buddhologists, such as É. Lamotte in his *History of Indian Buddhism*, Leuven 1988, p. 566, etc., believe, on linguistic grounds, that the origin of the Pāli language can be situated in the Avanti area, up to the Kāthiāwār Peninsula, starting in the post – Aśokan era. The reaction against Mahīśāsakas, who spread all over the Indian cultural area and who were the original *Vibhajyavādins* in Magadha in the time of Aśoka, may have been strong in the

mentioned area, but the new Theravāda “orthodoxy” “was written down in the mixed Prakrit called Pāli in Śrī Laṅkā. The four mentioned Chinese texts are most likely Mahīśāsaka, not Theravāda.

I am aware of the fact that I may have given rise to more questions, but I also know that I give a solution, an answer, to some long standing questions.⁶

For more information about the views expressed in this text, one may consult the literature in the bibliography.

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236 *The Indian International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 22, 2021-22

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