

# Mahāsāṃghika and Mahāyāna: An Analysis of Faxian and the Translation of the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya* (Chin. *Mohe Sengqi Lü*)\*

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**Abstract:** Faxian's purpose in going to India in search of the Dharma was to bring back the material missing from the Vinaya canon. He brought back three Vinaya texts to China in total, namely, the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 [*Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*] (hereafter abbreviated to *Sengqi lü*), the *Sapoduozhong lü chao* 薩婆多眾律抄 [Annotation to the Sarvāstivādin Vinaya] and the *Mishasai wufen lü* 彌沙塞五分律 [Five-Part Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka School] (hereafter abbreviated as *Wufen lü*), respectively. Why did he choose to translate the *Sengqi lü*? Did it have something to do with the features of Sectarian Buddhist thought? Was it related to Buddhist thought of the time? This article raises and attempts tentative answers to these questions.

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## Introduction

The beginning of the *Faxian zhuān* 法顯傳 [Account of Faxian] states, ‘In the past, Faxian was in Chang’an and lamented that there was material missing from the *Vinaya* canon.’<sup>1</sup> This statement reveals his purpose for travelling to India. The scriptures which he translated after returning to China have had a far-reaching impact. Among them, the Buddha nature doctrine in the *Da bānni huan jīng* 大般泥洹經 [*Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*] played a critical role in shaping the intellectual trends of the time. Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 remarked in his *Wei Jin Nanbei chao Fojiao shi* 魏晉南北朝佛教史 [History of Buddhism during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties] that, ‘[He] was an important figure in the establishment of a school of Chinese Buddhism.’<sup>2</sup> Faxian’s purpose in going to India in search of the Dharma was to bring back the material missing from the *Vinaya* canon. He brought back three *Vinaya* texts to China in total, namely, the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律 [*Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*] (hereafter abbreviated to *Sengqi lü*), the *Sapoduozhong lü chao* 薩婆多眾律抄 [Annotation to the Sarvāstivādin *Vinaya*] and the *Mishasai wufen lü* 彌沙塞五分律 [Five-Part *Vinaya* of the Mahīśāsaka School] (hereafter abbreviated as *Wufen lü*), respectively.<sup>3</sup> Why did he choose to translate the *Sengqi lü*? Did

<sup>1</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuān*, T no. 2085, 51: 1.857a6: 法顯昔在長安，慨律藏殘缺。

<sup>2</sup> Tang, *Fojiao shi*, 267: 開中國佛理之一派，至為重要。

<sup>3</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuān*, T no. 2085, 51: 1.864b17–25:

When Faxian first went in search of the *Vinaya* in the countries of northern India, there were no written texts as they were passed orally from master to disciple. He had to travel as far as Central India, where he obtained a *Vinaya* at a Mahāyāna monastery, the *Mohe sengqizhong lü*. It was the version practiced by the first great community when the Buddha was in the world, the text of which had been passed down from the Jetavana Vihāra. Each of the eighteen sects had their own traditions, which were the same in general but differing in various minor details, some being more lenient and others stricter. However, this text was the most extensive and complete among them. He also obtained a written copy of another *Vinaya*

it have something to do with the features of Sectarian Buddhist thought? Was it related to Buddhist thought of the time?

There have been many studies on Faxian. In terms of scripture translation, he was recognised as an essential middleman in disseminating Sanskrit scriptures to Chinese Buddhism. Jin Shenghe 靳生禾 indicates in his 1981 article that there are three noteworthy points related to this. First, there were no important *Vinaya* texts in China at the time. Second, Sanskrit texts were held as authoritative from Faxian's time onwards, as opposed to the Central Asian texts held previously. Third, Faxian made written records of many orally transmitted scriptures.<sup>4</sup> The 1985 work, *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中國佛教史 [A History of Chinese Buddhism], edited by Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 et al., contains a section discussing the purpose and experience of Faxian's travels to India in search of the Dharma, as well as the scriptures that he translated.<sup>5</sup> In Zhang Fenglei's 張風雷 2005 paper, the author proposes that the translation of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* brought back by Faxian directly promoted the integration of Mahāyāna *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Parinirvāṇa* studies by Zhu Daosheng 竺道生 (355–434) and others. This in turn laid down the foundational theoretical framework for the development of the entirety of subsequent Chinese Buddhist thought. This was of important and epoch-making significance in the history of the development of Chinese Buddhist thought.<sup>6</sup> Jiang Daren 降大任 argues in his 2008 article that Faxian's translations marked the beginning of the

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in seven thousand verses, the *Sapoduozhong lü*, which was practiced by the monastic community in this land of Qin. It was also orally transmitted from master to disciple, and not written down as a text. 法顯本求戒律，而北天竺諸國，皆師師口傳，無本可寫，是以遠涉乃至中天竺，於此摩訶衍僧伽藍得一部律，是《摩訶僧祇眾律》。佛在世時最初大眾所行也，於祇洹精舍傳其本，自餘十八部，各有師資，大歸不異，然小小不同，或用開塞，但此最是廣說備悉者。復得一部抄律，可七千偈，是薩婆多眾律，即此秦地眾僧所行者也。亦皆師師口相傳授，不書之於文字。

<sup>4</sup> Jin, 'Shilun Faxian'.

<sup>5</sup> Ren, *Zhongguo fojiao shi*, 585–603.

<sup>6</sup> Zhang, 'Faxian'.

end of translating scriptures from Central Asian sources for use in Chinese Buddhism. The direct injection of Indian Buddhist culture strengthened Chinese Buddhism in terms of its systematisation and completeness.<sup>7</sup> Dong Yonggang 董永剛 opines in his 2010 paper that the *Vinaya* texts brought back by Faxian helped to further complete Chinese *Vinaya* studies and played a vital role in the construction of monastic precepts and discipline in China.<sup>8</sup> Wen Jinyu 溫金玉 presented a paper in the same year, where he examined the purpose and significance of Faxian's travel to India in search of the Dharma, as well as the state of monastic precepts and discipline in China at the time.<sup>9</sup> In his 2013 paper, Wang Bangwei 王邦維 discussed the state of the transmission of monastic precepts and discipline in China before Faxian's journey to India and after he brought the scriptures back, as well as studied details concerning the transmission of the *Sengqi lü* and *Wufen lü* in China.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, being an early translation, the *Sengqi lü* has been regarded as a valuable philological source, and many in the field have paid due attention to its linguistic value.<sup>11</sup> In addition, there have been studies focusing on features found in the *Sengqi lü*. Long Yan 龍延 and Chen Kaiyong 陳開勇 published their 2001 paper from a literary perspective, in which they examined the literary value of the *Sengqi lü*.<sup>12</sup> Long Yan further examined this in his 2003 paper, commenting that the *Sengqi lü* contains more stories of the Buddha's past lives, and although the accounts found in the various *Vinaya* texts are essentially the same, descriptions from the *Sengqi lü* are more concise and vivid.<sup>13</sup>

The above-mentioned studies indicate that Faxian's historical contributions and significance have been positively recognised by scholars.

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<sup>7</sup> Jiang, 'Faxian'.

<sup>8</sup> Dong, 'Faxian'.

<sup>9</sup> Wen, 'Faxian'.

<sup>10</sup> Wang, 'Faxian'.

<sup>11</sup> Zhou, *Mohe sengqi lü*; Hu, *Mohe sengqi lü*; Zhang, *Mohe sengqi lü*; Wang, *Mohe sengqi lü*; and Gu, *Mohe sengqi lü*.

<sup>12</sup> Long and Chen, 'Mohe sengqi lü'.

<sup>13</sup> Long, 'Mohe sengqi lü'.

These studies also provide a solid basis for the present paper to further study in detail Faxian's translation activities and his reasons for doing these translations.

### 1. The most complete: Faxian's reasons for translating the *Sengqi lü*

In 'Faxian yü fojiao jielü zai handi de chuancheng', Wang Bangwei mentions that although various precept texts had been transmitted to China one after another before Faxian, they were all incomplete. This was why Faxian travelled to the West in search of the Dharma.<sup>14</sup> According to records in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 [Compilation of Notes on the Translation of the *Tripitaka*], Faxian brought back three *Vinaya* texts.<sup>15</sup> So, why did Faxian only translate the *Sengqi lü*?

<sup>14</sup> Wang, 'Faxian', 85.

<sup>15</sup> *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 2.11c25–12a8:

The *Bannihuan*, in six fascicles (translated at Daochang Monastery on the first day of the eleventh month of the thirteenth year of Yixi, during the Jin) 般泥洹六卷晉(義熙十三年十一月一日道場寺譯出);

The *Fandeng nihuan jing*, in two fascicles (presently lost) 方等泥洹經二卷(今闕);

The *Mobe sengqi lü*, in forty fascicles (already included in the *Vinaya* catalogue) 摩訶僧祇律, 四十卷(已入律錄);

The *Sengqi biqiu jieben*, in one fascicle (presently lost) 僧祇比丘戒本一卷(今闕);

The *Za apitan xin*, in thirteen fascicles (presently lost) 雜阿毘曇心十三卷(今闕);

The *Zazang jing*, in one fascicle 雜藏經一卷;

The *Yan jing* (Sanskrit, not translated) 延經(梵文未譯出);

The *Chang aban jing* (Sanskrit, not translated) 長阿鎧經(梵文未譯);

The *Za aban jing* (Sanskrit, not translated) 雜阿鎧經(梵文未譯);

The *Mishasai lü* (Sanskrit, not translated) 彌沙塞律(梵文未譯);

The *Sapoduo lü chao* (Sanskrit, not translated) 薩婆多律抄(梵文未譯).

The *Fo lü tianzhu ji* in one fascicle 佛遊天竺記一卷.

The ‘Shi Lao zhi’ 釋老志 [Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism] from the *Wei shu* 魏書 [Book of Wei] has the following passage:

The *Vinaya* texts he obtained were translated, but were unable to be completely accurate. Arriving in Jiangnan, he then discussed and edited them with the Indian meditation master Buddhahadra. It was the *Sengqi lü* which was the most complete, and which was received and is upheld by *śramaṇas* of the present day.

其所得律，通譯未能盡正。至江南，更與天竺禪師跋陀羅辯定之，謂之《僧祇律》，大備於前，為今沙門所持受。<sup>16</sup>

Before starting his translation work at Daochang Monastery, Faxian had already done some rough translations. In addition, he conducted a careful examination with Buddhahadra and came to the conclusion that the *Sengqi lü* was the most complete. Does ‘the most complete’ 大備於前 refer to the *Sengqi lü* as a better text than the *Shisong lü* 十誦律 [Ten-Recitations Vinaya] and *Sifen lü* 四分律 [Four-Part Vinaya]? Based on Akira Hirakawa’s *Ritsuzō no kenkyū* 律藏の研究 [Vinaya Studies], we can give a timeline for the translations of various *Vinaya* texts in China and the course of Faxian’s travel to India in search of the Dharma, as follows:<sup>17</sup>

Year	Event
399 CE	Faxian set out from Chang’an in search of the Dharma
404 CE	Kumārajīva began translating the <i>Shisong lü</i>
405 CE	Faxian obtained the <i>Mobe sengqi lü</i> and <i>Sapoduo lü chao</i> in Pataliputra
409 CE	The translation of the <i>Shisong lü</i> was completed Faxian received the <i>Mishasai lü</i> at Abhayagiri in the Kingdom of Sinhala [Mount Fearless in Sri Lanka]
410 CE	Buddhayaśas began translating the <i>Sifen lü</i>

<sup>16</sup> *Wei shu* 114.1764.

<sup>17</sup> Hirakawa, *Ritsuzō no kenkyū*, 133–58.

412 CE	Translation of the <i>Sifen lü</i> was completed Faxian returned to China
416 CE	Faxian began translating the <i>Sengqi lü</i>
420 CE	Faxian passed away
422 CE	Huiyan 慧嚴 and Zhu Daosheng translated the <i>Wufen lü</i>

Buddhabhadra played an important role in the evaluation of monastic precepts and disciple. Looking at accounts of his life, one story in particular stands out that makes his evaluation very interesting. Buddhabhadra was expelled from Kumārajīva's Sangha in Chang'an around 410 or 411 CE, and there are many theories concerning his expulsion. Kohō Chisan 孤峰智璨 thought that there was opposition between the two of them. Lü Cheng 呂澂 proposed that there was conflict between their respective disciples. Tang Yongtong further argued that it was not only due to their disciples but also differences in their theories.<sup>18</sup> Liu Xuejun 劉學軍 suggested that relevant factors include the struggle between imperial and monastic power.<sup>19</sup> Buddhabhadra should have seen the completed translation of the *Shisong lü* in 409. If it was true that his theories were different to Kumārajīva's, then it would be reasonable to conclude that Buddhabhadra considered the *Shisong lü* incomplete. The *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* states, 'the *Sapoduo zhong lü* was practiced by the monastic community in this land of Qin'.<sup>20</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* was composed after Faxian had returned to China. *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 [Biographies of Eminent Monks] records that the bearer of the *Shisong lü*, Puṇyātara, 'entered the central area in his travels during the middle of the Hongshi period of the pseudo-Qin'.<sup>21</sup> Since Faxian set out for

<sup>18</sup> Liu, 'Fotuobatuoluo', 106; Tang, *Fojiao shi*, 216–20; Lü, *Zhongguo foxue yuanliu xuejiang*, 76–77.

<sup>19</sup> Liu, 'Fotuobatuoluo', 123.

<sup>20</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T no. 2085, 51: 864b23–24: 是薩婆多眾律, 即此秦地眾僧所行者也。

<sup>21</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 2.333a16–17: 偽秦弘始中, 振錫入關。

India in the first year of Hongshi 弘始, he did not meet Puṇyatara. Because of this, he thought that the *Sapoduo lü chao* was not available in China and therefore brought it back with him. It was only after he had returned to China that he learned about the already completed translation of the *Shisong lü*. Hence the statement that ‘the *vinaya* was practiced by the monastic community in this land of Qin’.<sup>22</sup> This should be the main reason for Faxian’s decision to not translate the *Sapoduo lü chao* after bringing it back to China. As for the question of whether Buddhahadra had previously seen the *Sifen lü*, since the date of his expulsion is uncertain, this cannot be determined. However, considering that the translation of the *Sifen lü* was completed in 412, it was highly possible that Faxian and Buddhahadra had seen the *Sifen lü* in 416.

Apart from the *Sapoduo lü chao*, the *Wufen lü* was also brought back by Faxian. Therefore, it is clear that Faxian’s statement of ‘the most complete’ was with reference to the *Sifen lü*, *Wufen lü* and *Shisong lü*.

## 2. The Five *Vinaya* Texts: The Relationship between the Four *Vinaya* Texts and the Sects

Faxian’s evaluation of the *Sengqi lü* is seen from the statement, ‘Each of the eighteen sects had their own traditions, which were the same in general but differing in various minor details, with some more lenient and others more strict. However, this text was the most extensive and complete among them.’<sup>23</sup> It is clear that Faxian regarded the *Sengqi lü* as the most complete text among the sectarian *Vinaya* texts. Why did he have this view? *Faxian zhuan* contains the following passage concerning this *Vinaya*:

<sup>22</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T no. 2085, 51: 864b24: 秦地眾僧所行者也。

<sup>23</sup> T no. 2085, 51:864b21–23: 自餘十八部, 各有師資, 大歸不異, 然小小不同, 或用開塞, 但此最是廣說備悉者。



One hundred years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, some Vaiśālī *bhikṣus* were incorrectly practicing the *Vinaya*. They made statements concerning ten matters, saying that it was taught by the Buddha. At that time, some *arhats* and *bhikṣus* who upheld the *Vinaya*, a total of seven hundred monastics, made a revision of the *Vinaya* canon.

佛般泥洹後百年，有毘舍離比丘，錯行戒律，十事證言，佛說如是，爾時諸羅漢，及持律比丘，凡有七百僧，更檢按律藏。<sup>24</sup>

Faxian knew that in the traditions of the *Vinaya* texts of each sect, during the Council of Vaiśālī it was recorded that the Mahāsāṃghikas incorrectly practiced the *Vinaya*, and so seven hundred monastics made a new revision of the *Vinaya* canon. Furthermore, fascicle 33 of the *Sengqi lü* clearly indicates that the Mahāsāṃghika sect came about as a result of the Council of Seven Hundred. Fascicle 40 of the *Sengqi lü siji* 僧祇律私記 [Private Notes on the *Mahāsāṃghika Vinaya*] explains that the term ‘Mohe sengqi’ just means Mahāsāṃghika.<sup>25</sup> It is apparent that Faxian knew that this *Vinaya* was a Mahāsāṃghika *Vinaya*. Faxian and Buddhahadra’s evaluation of the monastic precepts and discipline was based on contrasting it with the other *Vinaya* texts. What criteria did Faxian use to conclude that the *Sengqi lü*, which came from the ‘Vaiśālī *bhikṣus* [who] were incorrectly practicing the *Vinaya*’, was more suitable for the monastics of his time? The following section examines each *Vinaya* in turn, utilising the *Yibu zonglun lun* 異部宗輪論 [Treatise on the Tenets of the Sects] and other texts. This analysis will be conducted from the perspective of each *Vinaya*’s sectarian

<sup>24</sup> *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, T no. 2085, 51: 862a9–12.

<sup>25</sup> *Mohe sengqi lü*, T no. 1425, 22: 40.548b23–25:

Then they held a vote. There were a great many votes for this community, and because there were a great many members of that community they were named ‘Mahāsāṃghika’. Mahāsāṃghika means ‘great community’. 於是行籌，取本眾籌者甚多，以眾多故，故名‘摩訶僧祇’。摩訶僧祇者，大眾名也。

affiliation in order to discover why Faxian regarded the *Sengqi lü* as the most complete.

The *Shisong lü* belongs to the Sarvāstivāda sect and it branched out from the Sthaviras three hundred years after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*. The *Wufen lü* belongs to the Mahīśāsaka sect, branching out from the Sarvāstivāda three hundred years [after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*]. Belonging to the Dharmagupta sect, the *Sifen lü* branched out from the Mahīśāsaka three hundred years [after the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*]. The *Mahāvamsa* differs as to the division of these sects, and states that the Mahīśāsaka branched out from the Sthavira, and that the Sarvāstivāda and the Dharmagupta then branched out from the Mahīśāsaka.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of which record we accept, it is evident that the *Shisong lü*, *Sifen lü* and *Wufen lü* came from the same line of transmission and that their differences are subtle. The sectarian basis of these three *Vinaya* texts is the Sarvāstivāda, which held the position that all conditioned and unconditioned dharmas really exist.<sup>27</sup> The Mahīśāsaka held the position that 'past and future dharmas are not existent, while present and unconditioned dharmas are existent'.<sup>28</sup> Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) states in his commentary that, 'Those who do not construct the sign of earth, or the signs of water, fire, wind, or the signs of space or consciousness, are called the Mahīśāsaka. It means non-attachment to contemplation of existents or non-existents.'<sup>29</sup> They focused more on the practice of contemplative methods. Although the Dharmagupta held the position that all dharmas

<sup>26</sup> Hirakawa, *Yindu Fojiao shi*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Yibu zonglun lun*, T no. 2031, 49: 1.16a25–26:

That is, in the Sarvāstivāda, all existents can be subsumed into two categories: one, name; two, form. Past and future entities also really exist. 謂一切有部諸是有者, 皆二所攝, 一名、二色。過去未來體亦實有。

<sup>28</sup> *Yibu zonglun lun*, T no. 2031, 49: 1.16c26–27:

That is, past and future dharmas are not existent, while present and unconditioned dharmas are existent. 謂過去未來是無, 現在無為是有。

<sup>29</sup> *Sifen lü hanzhu jieben shu xingzong ji*, X no. 714, 39: 1.727a16–17: 不作地相, 水、火、風相, 虛空識相, 名《彌沙塞》。此云《不著有無觀》。

exist, they still emphasised the Mantra and Bodhisattva canons, and also included Hīnayāna teachings. The *Yibu zonglun lun* contains the following statement on this sect's viewpoint: 'Although the liberation of the buddhas and those of the two vehicles is the same, their holy path is different.'<sup>30</sup> Nāgārjuna's *Shizhu piposha lun* 十住毗婆沙論 [*Daśabhūmika Vibhāṣā*] states that the liberation of buddhas and pratyekabuddhas is the same, but their meditative concentrations are different.<sup>31</sup> Theories in the Dharmagupta sect and *Prajñāpāramitā* thought are mutually compatible, and this is why Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414) highly praised the *Sifen lü* in the preface he wrote for the text. He thought that the terminology in the *Shisong lü* was incomplete and caused confusion among scholars. He commented that, 'Now, the *Vinaya* canon is clear, the right teachings are lucid, they can benefit the spirit and can remove perplexity.'<sup>32</sup> In addition, Daoxuan stated in his commentary that, 'The Four-Part *Vinaya* thoroughly elucidates the Buddha vehicle',<sup>33</sup> and that this text is

<sup>30</sup> *Yibu zonglun lun*, T no. 2031, 49: 1.17a25: 佛與二乘, 解脫雖一, 而聖道異.

<sup>31</sup> *Shizhu piposha lun*, T no. 1521, 26: 1.20b9–15:

Question: The *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas* and buddhas all reach the other shore. Are there any differences in their liberation? 問曰: 聲聞、辟支佛、佛, 俱到彼岸, 於解脫中有差別不?

Answer: This matter should be given an analytical answer. In terms of being liberated from afflictions, there is no difference. Because of this liberation they enter into *nirvāṇa* without any remainder. With respect to this there is also no difference, as there is no characteristic. However, the buddhas are liberated from the profound obstructions to *dhyāna*, and liberated from the obstructions to all *dharma*s, which is different from the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. This cannot be fully described, and they are indescribable by any metaphor. 答曰: 是事應當分別, 於諸煩惱得解脫, 是中無差別, 因是解脫, 入無餘涅槃, 是中亦無差別, 無有相故。但諸佛甚深禪定障解脫, 一切法障解脫, 於諸聲聞辟支佛, 有差別, 非說所盡, 亦不可以譬喻為比。

<sup>32</sup> '*Sifen lü xu*', T no. 1428, 22: 1.567b14–15: 今律藏盡然, 正教明白、可以濟神、可以無惑。

<sup>33</sup> *Sifen lü shanbu sui ji jimo shu jiyuan ji*, X no. 728, 41: 3. 261a22: 四分通明佛乘。

superior as it contains the doctrines of both Hīnayāna existence and Mahāyāna emptiness.

In chapter six of his *Ritsuzō no kenkyū*, Akira Hirakawa 平川彰 (1915–2002) compared the *Sengqi lü* with other *Vinaya* texts from the Sthavira tradition by conducting a comprehensive analysis of their compositional structure and content. He concluded that the most prominent feature of the *Sengqi lü* is that, unlike the *Sifen lü*, *Wufen lü* and *Shifen lü*, it contains a large amount of scriptural quotations and past life stories of the Buddha. Hence, the *Sengqi lü* is more interesting and engaging to read than the others. Long Yan comments that descriptions of the accounts in the *Sengqi lü* are more concise and vivid in comparison to the *Sifen lü*.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that by having more narrative content and less admonishing sermons, the *Sengqi lü* was more easily accepted by the Chinese monastics. In her article on the *Sengqi lü*, Longlian 隆蓮 (1909–2006) mentioned that this *Vinaya* text was upheld by the Mahāsāṃghika, and its Dharma teachings are the same as that of the Mahāsāṃghika point of view. Its content has the same flavour of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* and reflects the nascent formation of the Mahāyāna Dharma teachings.<sup>35</sup> In terms of what is permitted and prohibited in the monastic precepts and discipline, the *Sengqi lü* is clearly more lenient.

From the perspective of examining the features of sectarian Buddhism, in contrast with the other three *Vinaya* texts, the *Sengqi lü* has a closer association with the Mahāyāna, is more literary, is more lenient in terms of what is permitted and prohibited in the monastic precepts and discipline, and was more easily accepted by Chinese monastics. These should be the reasons why Faxian regarded the *Sengqi lü* as the more complete text.

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<sup>34</sup> Long, 'Mobe sengqi lü', 56.

<sup>35</sup> Longlian, 'Sengqi lü', 226.

### 3. Teaching according to Circumstances: The Transmission and Practice of Chinese Monastic Precepts and Discipline

The above section briefly discussed the sectarian affiliations of each of the *Vinaya* texts and their respective viewpoints. Although the *Sengqi lü* has more associations with the Mahāyāna, if it was not able to adapt to Chinese Buddhism, then Faxian would not have said that it ‘was received and is upheld by *śramaṇas* of the time’. So, what was the climate for Chinese Buddhism at the time?

According to monastic records, during the Jiaping 嘉平 era (254–253) of the Cao Wei 曹魏 state (220–266), Dharmakāla translated the *Sengqi jixin* 僧祇戒心 [Heart of the *Mahāsāṃghika* Precepts] at Luoyang. Later he translated the Dharmaguptaka sect’s procedures for receiving precepts, in Zhengyuan 正元 era (254–255).<sup>36</sup> This was the beginning of monastic precepts and discipline in China. The *Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳 [Biographies of Bhikṣuṇīs] records that the *Sengqi ni jiemo* 僧祇尼羯磨 [*Mahāsāṃghika Bhikṣuṇī Karman*] and the *Jieben* 戒本 [Precept Text] were translated at Luoyang in the first year of Shengping 升平 (357).<sup>37</sup> According to the *Chu sanzang ji ji*, the *Shisong lü biqiu jieben* 十誦律比丘戒本 [Ten-Recitations *Vinaya Bhikṣu* Precept Text] and the *Biqiuni jieben* 比丘尼戒本 [*Bhikṣuṇī* Precept Text] were translated in Guanzhong 關中 during the reign of Emperor Jianwen of the Eastern Jin (371–372).<sup>38</sup> Also, the *Binaiye* 鼻奈耶 [*Vinaya*] was translated at Chang’an in the nineteenth year of Jianyuan 建元 during the Eastern Jin (383).

By observing the translations of Precept Texts, we can see that

<sup>36</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 50: 1.324c15: ‘Dharmakāla’ means ‘Dharma time’ 曇柯迦羅, 此云法時.

<sup>37</sup> *Biqiuni zhuan*, T no. 2063, 50: 1.934c22–23.

<sup>38</sup> *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 2.10a23–29:

The *Shisong biqiu jieben*, in one fascicle (also known as the *Shisong dabiqiu jie*). One text in the right is of one fascicle. During the time of Jin Emperor Jianwen, the Western *śramaṇa* Dharma held and recited the foreign text, and Zhu Fonian translated it. 十誦比丘戒本一卷 (或云十誦大比丘戒). 右一部. 凡一卷. 晉簡文帝時. 西域沙門曇摩. 持誦胡本. 竺佛念譯出.

the system of monastic precepts and discipline in China at the time was chaotic. However, they all fall under the two systems of the *Shisong lü* and *Sengqi lü*, whereas the *Sifen lü* had only transmitted methods for receiving the precepts, and the *Wufen lü* was not yet in circulation. From the perspective of traditions, propagating the *Sengqi lü* and *Shisong lü* would have been more easily accepted by Chinese monastics at the time. This point was further confirmed later on in Buddhist history. For a period of time after its translation, the *Shisong lü* became the most widespread *Vinaya*. Tang Yongtong commented that, 'Apart from the *Shisong lü*, there were effectively no other *Vinaya* studies in the South during the Song period. This was even more so during the Qiliang period.'<sup>39</sup> Even up until the Qi and Liang dynasties, Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) still wrote about the *Shisong lü* and praised it highly. Daoxuan stated in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 [Extended Biographies of Eminent Monks] that, 'At the time, the most highly regarded was the *Sengqi*, but the *Sifen* was occasionally practiced.'<sup>40</sup> During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the *Sengqi lü* was once widespread. It was only after three generations of propagation by Daoyün 道雲 (d.u.), Zhishou 智首 (567–635) and Daoxuan during the Tang dynasty that the *Sifen lü* became popular, replacing the *Sengqi lü*.

In order to explain them, the propagation and transmission of monastic precepts and discipline required mutually compatible scriptural thought. For instance, when Daoxuan was propagating the

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The *Biqiuni dajie*, in one fascicle. One text in the right is of one fascicle. During the time of Emperor Jianwen of the Jin, the *śramaṇa* Shi Sengchun received the foreign text in Kuśinagara of the Western Regions of. He brought it to Guanzhong and had Zhu Fonian, Dharmadhī and Huichang translate it together. 《十誦比丘戒本》一卷，或云《十誦大比丘戒》，右一部。凡一卷，晉簡文帝時，西域沙門曇摩，持誦胡本，竺佛念譯出。《比丘尼大戒》一卷，右一部，凡一卷，晉簡文帝時，沙門釋僧純，於西域拘夷國得胡本，到關中令竺佛念、曇摩持、慧常共譯出。

<sup>39</sup> Tang, *Fojiao shi*, 455: 南方在宋代除《十誦》外，已幾無律學，齊梁更然。

<sup>40</sup> *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2060, 50: 22.621a3–4: 於時世尚《僧祇》，而能間行《四分》。

*Sifen lü*, he adopted the ‘Consciousness-Only Perfect Teaching’ (唯實圓教) viewpoint to explain the contents in the *Vinaya* texts, resolving various problems found in the *Vinaya* texts. What was the trend of Chinese Buddhist thought at the time?

At that time in China, there were two main Buddhist groups in the Later Qin and Eastern Jin. Kumārajīva (344–413) established the Xiaoyao yuan 逍遙園 in the Later Qin for translating scriptures, disseminating Mahāyāna *Prajñāpāramitā* studies and propagating Nāgārjuna’s Madyamaka doctrine. Before Kumārajīva, *Prajñāpāramitā* studies had already started to flourish in China, forming the ‘six houses and seven schools.’ Kumārajīva ‘brought about new systems of interpretation and arguments for doctrines, such as dharmas being empty of nature’.<sup>41</sup> This established a solid foundation for later Chinese Buddhism. Through society, profound discussions were a popular trend, and *Prajñāpāramitā* studies developed rapidly and also brought up many questions. These questions can be seen from a series of letters exchanged between Huiyuan 慧遠 (334–416) and Kumārajīva: Huiyuan consulted Kumārajīva on issues relating to nirvāṇa, such as the dharma body, dharma nature and so on. However, it was clear that Kumārajīva’s replies did not satisfy Huiyuan.<sup>42</sup> This indicates that Huiyuan, as a native Chinese thinker, had begun to reflect on the problems brought about by *Prajñāpāramitā* studies.<sup>43</sup> In the thirteenth year of Yixi 義熙 (417), Faxian translated the *Da bannihuan jing*.<sup>44</sup> This had a tremendous impact in Buddhist circles in China. A group of eminent monks in Jiankang 建康 rapidly shifted from the doctrine of ‘emptiness of nature in the *Prajñāpāramitā*’, to ‘wondrous existence in the *Nir-*

<sup>41</sup> Ren, *Zhongguo fojiao shi*, 324.

<sup>42</sup> *Jiumoluoshi fashi dayi* 鳩摩羅什法師大義 [The Grand Teachings of Kumārajīva], 3 fascicles, T no. 1856, vol. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Zhang, ‘Huiyuan Jiumoluoshi zhizheng’, 74.

<sup>44</sup> *Lidai sanbao ji*, T no. 2034, 49: 7.71b7:

The *Da bannihuan jing* in six fascicles was translated in the thirteenth year of Yixi at Lord Xie Sikong’s Xie Shi Daochang Monastery. 《大般泥洹經》六卷，義熙十三年，於謝司空公謝石道場寺出。

*vāna Sūtra*'. Zhang Fenglei remarks that, 'Those who had previously paid particular attention to problems concerning Dharma nature, the Dharma body and so on, for instance, Daosheng, Huirui 慧叡 (355–439), Huiyan, Huiguan 慧觀 (366–436) and others, quickly shifted from *Prajñāpāramitā* studies to *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* studies, and they became the earliest masters of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.'<sup>45</sup>

During the time when the doctrine of emptiness of nature in the *Prajñāpāramitā* was so prominent, the *Shisong lü*, a *Vinaya* that tends towards real existence in the three periods of time, was clearly incompatible with Chinese thought. Meanwhile in the land of Jin, what were Huiyuan and others' viewpoints on the monastic precepts and discipline? Qu Dacheng 屈大成 points out that Huiyuan 'understood the spirit and essence of the monastic precepts and discipline, not only in regulating behaviour and speech, but also benefiting practice. Hence, he responded to disciples' questions by inferring from this principle.'<sup>46</sup> Huiyuan's view on monastic precepts and discipline should have mainly been based on actual practices, rather than being confined by the letter of the precepts alone. What standards did Huiyuan use for his practice of the monastic precepts and discipline?

In the early Eastern Jin, monks specialising in meditation, like Zhu Sengxian 竺僧顯 (222?–321), Zhu Tanyou 竺曇猷 (285?–383), Zhi Tanlan 支曇蘭 (341–423) and others, fled to the south to avoid warfare, and began disseminating meditation teachings in the south.<sup>47</sup> Huiyuan, the leader of Buddhism in the land of Jin, began to deemphasise meditative contemplation. In the 'Lushan chu *Xiuxing fangbian chan jing tongxü*' 廬山出修行方便禪經統序 [A General Preface to the *Sūtra of the Cultivation of Expedient Meditations* Translated on Mount Lu], Huiyuan notes,

Every time he regretted the transmission of the great teaching to the East, the art of meditation was neglected, the three karmas were unsystematic, and this path was abandoned. Just now Kumārajīva has

<sup>45</sup> Zhang, 'Faxian'.

<sup>46</sup> Qu, 'Lushan Huiyuan', 68.

<sup>47</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*, 'Xichan pian' 習禪篇 [Section on Cultivating Meditation].



propagated the teaching of Aśvaghōṣa, which has this task. Although this path is not yet integrated, it is like a holding a mountain in a bushel.

每慨大教東流，禪數尤寡，三業無統，斯道殆廢，頃鳩摩者婆宣馬鳴所述，乃有此業，雖其道未融，蓋是為山於一簣。<sup>48</sup>

After all, Kumārajīva was not a meditation specialist, and his meditation teachings tended toward the theoretical. Buddhahadra was ‘well-known for meditation and *Vinaya*’,<sup>49</sup> and because of this Huiyuan invited him to Lushan to translate the *Vinaya* texts. A year later, he went to Daochang Monastery 道場寺 to assist Faxian in translating scriptures. It is clear that Huiyuan’s practice was centred on meditative cultivation. Pan Guiming 潘桂明 even went as far as to say, ‘Huiyuan can be credited with the establishment of advocating cultivation with equal emphasis on calm and insight.’<sup>50</sup> Faxian and Huiyuan had met once before.<sup>51</sup> Qu Dacheng believes that Huiyuan was also an influencing factor in Faxian’s choice of translating the *Sengqi lü*.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, we could say that practicality was Faxian’s guiding principle for which text to translate. It is clear that the *Sengqi lü* was more compatible with the circumstances of the time.

At the time, *Prajñāpāramitā* studies were unable to fully resolve

<sup>48</sup> *Chu sanzang ji ji*, T no. 2145, 55: 9.65c28–66a2.

<sup>49</sup> *Gaoseng zhuàn*, T no. 2059, 50: 2.334c7: 以禪律馳名.

<sup>50</sup> Pan, *Zhongguo Fojiao sixiang shi*, 213.

<sup>51</sup> *Guang hongming ji*, T no. 2103, 52: 15.199b10–12:

When the monk Faxian went to Jetavana, he said that the shadow of the Buddha was particularly mystical. On a cliff wall in a deep canyon, it appeared as if the image was still there, stately, dignified and majestic, complete in all its marks and secondary features. It is not known when it began or when it will end, as it is always bright and clear. When the Dharma master of Lushan heard of this he was delighted. 法顯道人至自祇洹，具說佛影偏為靈奇，幽巖嵒壁，若有存形，容儀端莊，相好具足，莫知始終，常自湛然，廬山法師聞風而悅。

<sup>52</sup> Qu, ‘Lushan Huiyuan’, 62.

many questions raised by Chinese monastics, and under such circumstances *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* studies grew rapidly. Huiyuan was the chief among the group of eminent monks who tended towards the practice of meditation. In comparison with other *Vinaya* texts, the *Sengqi lü* had already been transmitted to China, and was also more practical. These should be why Faxian said that it was ‘upheld by *śramaṇas* of the present day.’

## Conclusion

Faxian chose to translate the *Sengqi lü* instead of the other two *Vinaya* texts because, in comparison to the other two, it had distinct Mahāyāna qualities. The *Sapoduo lü chao* was a *Vinaya* text belonging to the Sarvāstivāda school, which holds the position of real existence in the three periods of time. This was clearly incompatible with the *Prajñāpāramitā* studies trend at the time. Furthermore, Kumārajīva and others had already fully translated the *Shisong lü*. Therefore, Faxian gave up the opportunity of translating the *Sapoduo lü chao*. Looking at the transmission of monastic precepts and discipline in China, the *Sengqi lü* was implemented early on, and was more easily accepted by the Chinese than the *Wufen lü*. Buddhahadra and Huiyuan’s emphasis on practicality was an important factor in Faxian’s choice to translate the *Sengqi lü*. All in all, Faxian’s choice of translating the *Sengqi lü* instead of the *Wufen lü* was based upon the transmission of Buddhism at the time and the emphasis on practice, therefore he chose a more practical *Vinaya*, the *Sengqi lü*. This *Vinaya* was disseminated widely before the early Tang dynasty. It also reflected the characteristics of Chinese Buddhism at the time, when monastic precepts and discipline were initially transmitted, by not being confined to complex terminology and taking practicality as the primary criterion.

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### Abbreviations

- T*            *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, Takakusu and Watanabe, eds.
- X*            *Wanzi Xuzang jing* 卍字續藏經. See Bibliography, Secondary Sources, *Wanzi Xuzang jing*.

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