

The Significance of the Southern Tradition *Tipiṭaka* to Chinese Buddhism

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Layman Wu Laoze mentioned that Venerable Pumiao at Kaoshiung City is leading a project to translate the Southern Tradition's *Tipiṭaka* into Chinese. This is a major event in Chinese Buddhism. Venerable Pumiao's great undertaking and superior insight deserves our praise and rejoicing.

The Southern Tradition's *Tipiṭaka* will be translated from a Japanese version of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*. Pali is a language that originated from the Ganges river region and spread into the Southwestern regions of India. It was the local dialect of the Ujjayainī district.

The gradual transmission of the *Tipiṭaka* through oral recitation into Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in modern times) began during the reign of King Asoka (third century, B.C.E.). It was not until the end of the first century B.C.E. that the Pali scriptures were recorded in writing in order to preserve the teachings. After a prolonged period of transmission some of the scriptures were translated into the local Ceylonese language. At the beginning of the fifth century, the *Tipiṭaka* Master Buddhaghosa from Magadha traveled south to Ceylon. He was deeply learned in the *Tipiṭaka* and the commentaries of various Buddhist sects. He not only wrote commentaries on the *Sutta*, *Vinaya* and *Abhidhamma* but also wrote a compendium of the Dhamma—the *Visuddhimagga*. He recompiled the *Tipiṭaka* and recorded everything in the Pali language, thus ensuring the transmission of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*.

Of the extant Buddhist scriptures, the Pali *Tipiṭaka* could be regarded as the most ancient. (By comparison, the extant hybrid Sanskrit scriptures were written around the beginning of the seventh century.) Based on the principle of human equality, the Buddha instructed that his teachings be taught in local dialects. For this reason, it is believed that there were four languages used in the transmissions of Buddhism in India, of which Pali is one. Yet in modern times the Pali texts are particularly emphasized by Buddhist scholars for the reason that this language originated from India and thus represents Early Buddhism.

The Pali *Tipiṭaka* belongs to the Sthaviravāda (a.k.a. Theravāda) school. Sthaviravāda separated into two branches: Vibhajyavāda and Sarvāstivāda. The Vibhajyavādins further subdivided into four sects: Mahīśāsaka, Dharmaguptaka, Kāśyapīya and Tāmraśāṭīya. The Pali *Tipiṭaka* belongs to the Tāmraśāṭīya sect of the Vibhajyavāda branch and it is regarded as such in Vasubandhu's *Karmasiddhi-prakaraṇa* (成業論). Thus Sri Lankan Buddhists refer themselves as Theravādins or Vibhajyavādins, or that they belong to the Tāmraśāṭīya sect.

Although the Pali *Tipiṭaka* is a sectarian text, nevertheless its *Sutta* and *Vinaya Piṭakas* are preserved in the ancient Indian dialect from the middle period of Indian Buddhism, which was not too distant from the Buddha's time. Its study is beneficial to those investigating Early Buddhism so that they can fully grasp the unique characteristics of the

Dharma and thus transform such understanding into Buddhist conviction and practice. The importance of the Pali texts cannot be overstated.

The *Vinaya Piṭaka* in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* is similar to (i.e. sharing the same sectarian origin with) the *Four-Section Vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka sect.

The *Sutta Piṭaka* in the Pali *Tipiṭaka* consists of five texts. The first four are equivalent to the *Āgamas* in the Chinese *Tripitaka*. The fifth is the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (小品部)—referred by the other sects as the “Miscellaneous *Piṭaka*” (雜藏).

The *Khuddaka Nikāya* consists of fifteen texts, some developed later than the others (there also exist slight variations in pronunciation). The *Khuddaka Nikāya*'s *Apadāna* mentions the congregation of buddhas from all ten different directions. The *Buddhavaṃsa* and the *Cariyā-piṭaka* explain the perfections (*pāramitās*) of the bodhisattvas. The *Jātaka* consists of 548 stories in which the exploits serve to demonstrate the virtues and personality of a bodhisattva.

Some Buddhist sects established an independent collection called the Bodhisattva Piṭaka based on the *Miscellaneous Piṭaka*, so one can see there is a relationship between the two.

The *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* consists of seven parts, six of which are *Abhidhammas*, and the seventh is the *Kathāvatthu* allegedly authored by Moggaliputta-tissa during the reign of King Asoka. Some of the *Kathāvatthu*'s contents are from a later period. It is a collection of critiques on the diverging doctrines in various sects.

While the Pali *Abhidhamma Piṭaka* consists of seven texts, the Sarvāstivāda school that proclaimed, “within one body there are six components” also has seven texts in their transmission. The Tāmraśāṭīya sect has a legend of having five sequential masters after the Buddha's passing—similar to the belief of the Sarvāstivādins. This seems to be a legend shared by the ancient sects.

The proposed translation of the Pali *Tipiṭaka* into Chinese is extremely important for the following reasons:

[1] To expand and enrich the content of Buddhism in the Chinese language:

Chinese Buddhism comprises mainly scriptures from the Early Mahāyāna period. At the same time it preserved the *Tripitaka* of Early Buddhism and also scriptures from the Esoteric Mahāyāna period.

The *Tripitaka* of Early Buddhism was transmitted into China mainly through the northern silk routes. Through the southern sea routes around the Song (宋), Qi (齊) and Liang (梁) dynasties (424-518 C.E.) there were the Buddhist nuns from Ceylon who transmitted the *bhikṣuṇī* precepts according to the Vinaya (i.e. witnessed by the two parties—*bhikṣus* and *bhikṣuṇīs*). Elsewhere in Canton (Guangzhou City) the *Five-Hundred Jataka Stories* and the *Sthavira Vinaya* were translated (both of these were lost). In the city of Jiankang

(modern Nanjing) emerged two translations: the *Samantapāsādikā* and the *Vimokṣamārga Śāstra* (the latter is the text from which Buddhaghosa based and revised his *Visuddhimagga*).

All these translated texts originated from the Pali *Tipiṭaka* but were overlooked by Chinese Buddhists at the time. With a complete translation from the Pali text, a vacancy in the Chinese canon will be filled.

[2] To correctly understand Early Buddhism through comparative studies:

The ancient Chinese translations of the Early Buddhist *Tripitaka* were based on the texts of multiple sects. While there are numerous versions and variations, the Pali *Tipiṭaka* is missing. If the Pali texts were made available in Chinese and [subsequently] used for impartial comparative studies, our understanding of the Dharma would certainly be improved.

For example, the Chinese *Vinaya Piṭaka* includes five detailed Vinayas: the *Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya* of the Mahāsaṅghika sect, the *Five-Section Vinaya* of the Mahīśāsaka sect, the *Four-Section Vinaya* of the Dharmaguptaka sect, the *Ten-Recitation Vinaya* of the Sarvāstivāda sect and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya* of the orthodox Sarvāstivāda sect. There is also the *Prātimokṣa* of the Kāśyapīya sect and the Vinaya commentaries of the Sammatīya sect.

If we are able to compare these Vinaya translations done in the past to the *Tāmrāśāṭīya Vinaya*, we will better understand the process undertaken in establishing the Vinaya through the study of their organizational structure, as well as discover the Buddha's practical principle of "unifying the Sangha with the Dharma". Furthermore, we could appreciate how different sects adapted different practices in response to changing regional cultures and traditions.

[3] To investigate the connection bridging Early Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism:

All Buddhist doctrines originated from the same source. They are One-flavored. The variations stem from the response to different dispositions of the followers, changing times, lineage, etc. Chinese Buddhism focused on Mahāyāna (great vehicle) doctrines and traditionally regarded the teachings from the Pali *Tipiṭaka* as the Hīnayāna (small vehicle) teachings. Yet if we delve deeper into the profound doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism, we find that they originated from the four *Āgamas*, especially the *Samyukta Āgama* (the equivalent of the *Samyutta Nikāya*). Moreover, the idea that there are worlds in all ten directions with their own Buddhas, and the great deeds and perfections of the bodhisattvas, all these can be traced to the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (the equivalent of the *Miscellaneous Piṭaka*).

Chinese Buddhists should investigate how Early Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism are connected by undertaking comparative studies with the Chinese translation of the Pali

Tipiṭaka. This will bring mutual respect between the different traditions. After all, Buddhism has officially entered the global era!

The Pali *Tipiṭaka* was transmitted into Ceylon and in turn spread to the surrounding regions of Myanmar, Siam (Thailand) and Khmer (present-day Cambodia), etc. While the Pali language had well defined phonetic pronunciation it had no standardized written script. For this reason each country used their local script to write down the Pali *Tipiṭaka*. In modern times there are English, Burmese and Japanese translations of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*. The Chinese *Southern Tradition Tipiṭaka* will be based on the Japanese translation published by the *Dr. Takakusu Memorial Foundation* (1935-1941).

Some forty years ago, there was an effort in China to compile a “Pu Hui *Tripitaka*” (普慧大藏經) that included selected translations from the Japanese *Southern Tradition Tipiṭaka*. At the victorious conclusion of the Sino-Japanese war, Master Taixu returned to eastern China and proposed renaming it the “Republic of China *Tripitaka*” (民國大藏經). He suggested that the selected translations from the Japanese source be revised based on the Pali texts from Sri Lanka while consulting their English translations. Unfortunately, due to the rapidly changing political situation this proposal to translate and publish a complete version was never realized. It was most regrettable to Chinese Buddhism. What wonderful news to hear that Venerable Pumiao is reviving this project to translate and publish the *Southern Tradition Tipiṭaka*!

I wholeheartedly wish for the perfect execution and smooth completion of this *Tipiṭaka* translation project.

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