Introduction: The following paper shares the findings of an ongoing study. The study is still not complete and therefore does not yet propose a final conclusion. An abstract pattern in relation to the evolution of Buddhist monasticism along a certain trajectory, through centuries of Chinese Buddhist evolutionary history, which the study has been able to identify, has been presented here.

This paper makes the proposition that fifth century CE was a distinctive period in the history of Buddhist monasticism in China, that it was a period in Chinese Buddhist history, which, owing to certain complex processes related to the gradual infiltration, permeation, adaptation, and assimilation of Buddhism into the foreign socio-cultural-political milieu of China, as against reactions over its interactions with the state and indigenous Chinese schools of thought, effected a re-orientation of the Chinese Buddhist monastic tradition and eventually redefined India-China Buddhist monastic relations.

The study proposes that fifth century Buddhist monastic culture in China was influenced by certain emerging issues of the time, namely popularization of the relic veneration cult, growing interactions between the imperial house and the Buddhist clergy, permeation of Buddhist teachings into immigrant Chinese gentry circles in the south, wide circulation of apologetic and propagandistic literature, rise of messianic figures influenced by Buddhist and Daoist eschatological ideas and most importantly the institutionalization of Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes (vinaya), some of which perhaps paved the trajectory along which monasticism in China evolved through the centuries that followed. Buddhist monasticism cannot and should not be perceived as a monolithic structure. It is a complex matrix with diverse component elements intricately intertwined. Varied issues have overtime fed into each other and offered Buddhist monasticism its structure.

The above mentioned issues are only a few among a whole variety of others, which the paper proposes, might have emerged around the fifth century and influenced Buddhist monastic tradition in China in the centuries that followed.

General Layout of the Work: The crucial points of reference upon which the study bases its investigations are the fifth century Chinese pilgrim-monk-scholar Shi Faxian’s travel narrative Fo guoji (佛國記), written after his return from a fourteen year long sojourn across the inhospitable terrains of central Asia, India, Sri Lanka and Java, and a few of his translated texts. However the study does not restrict itself to the above mentioned primary sources only, which I believe contain direct and indirect evidences hinting the emergence of the issues I have already talked about, but other relevant sources. More than just providing certain scattered clues on which we have built our proposition, these sources are in fact the first to draw my attention to the subject of Buddhist monastic culture in China and the need to probe into the evolutionary history of various components which have shaped Buddhist monastic tradition in China. It is important to note that these components are varied in nature, and are perhaps only distantly related to the other, which makes the study seem quite incoherent. The issues which the paper claims to have emerged in the fifth century and eventually influenced the structure of Buddhist monasticism in China, are like individual beads in a necklace, differently colored but tied to one string which holds them together. The study attempts to critically analyze evidences based on mainly textual sources, trace the nature of the influence of these issues upon the growth of monastic culture in China and bring out the significance of fifth century in the history of Buddhist monasticism in China.

The following study was stimulated by a passage recorded in the fifth century Eastern Jin dynasty pilgrim-monk-scholar Shi Faxian’s travel narrative, Gaoseng Faxian zhuan 高僧法顯傳 (alternately known as Fo guoji 佛國記). Basing itself upon Shi Faxian’s travelogue, the study
further moved on to his historical sojourn and finally to his scholarly contributions. It is important to mention here that the study does not limit itself to either Faxian’s sojourn, or his travel narrative, or his scholarly contributions only, but also studies other secondary relevant sources in order to contextualize the same.

This travel narrative, the first of its kind in Chinese secular and Buddhist literature, based on Faxian’s first hand experiences during his sojourn in the far west in the fifth century, has so far won scholarly attention, for being the first such primary source to portray vividly the state of fifth century Buddhism as prevalent in thirty different kingdoms in central Asia, India, and Sri Lanka. The study, however, sees the significance of this fifth century travel diary to lie elsewhere. Aside from being an authentic record on the socio-cultural-religious-political history and geography of thirty odd kingdoms visited by Shi Faxian, the travel diary more importantly draws attention to certain critical issues related to the state of Buddhism and particularly the state of Buddhist monasticism in fifth century China. The travelogue also raises questions regarding the state and nature of Buddhist monasticism in China prior to fifth century CE, helping us retrace the trajectory of evolution of Buddhist monasticism in China and then identifying the status of fifth century in relation to it. It was because of the aforementioned passage, that our attention was drawn to the issue of Buddhist monasticism in China.

The passage of concern reads as follows, “法显昔在长安，律藏残缺，於是遂以弘始元年岁在已亥，與慧景、道整、慧应、慧嵬同契，至天竺寻求戒律…” (While formerly residing at Chang’an, Faxian often regretted the deficient state of Buddhist codes of monastic discipline, most of which were then extant in rather fragmented, incomplete versions. Therefore during the first year of the Hongshi title of reign, upon reaching the fag end of his life, together with Huijing, Daozheng, Huiying and Huiwei, he proceeded towards India in quest of Buddhist scriptures).1

Two facts related in the passage are of prime concern here. First, that Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes which were known to be in use at Chang’an (modern day Xian) during the fifth century, in and around the time of Faxian’s journey to the western regions, were fragmentary in nature. Second, that Faxian’s sojourn in the far west, was not an isolated incident, driven by the independent will of a certain individual, but rather a sign of a growing need of the times to procure authentic texts of Buddhist monastic discipline for monastic communities in China at large, the passage therefore records not an individual but a collective call for Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes in fifth century China.

Observation: Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes (vinaya) is an integral part of Buddhist monasticism. As mentioned in the Dīrghāgama, in the absence of the historical Buddha, the prātimokṣa or list of precepts took up the position of ‘Dashī’ (大師 Great Master).2 Though Vinaya3 was central to the functioning of Buddhist monastic order, fifth century monastic communities in China (of which Faxian and his companions were members) were functioning without complete, authentic, well laid out versions of the codes. This deficiency of vinaya in fifth century China, therefore puts the credibilty of Buddhist monastic system into question.

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1 Gaoseng Faxian zhuan 高僧法顯傳 A Record of the Eminent Monk Faxian, T. (50) 2085. This is my personal rendering of the passage into Chinese.


3 Vinaya is the code of Buddhist monastic disciplinary rules that is meant to govern both an individual monk as well as the monastic institution at large. In India, emergence of various schools of Buddhist thought resulted from differences in the interpretation of vinaya rules. The structure of a full length vinaya text reveals its evolutionary character. The first section is the sutrabhibhanga, an explanation of rules and punishments formulated for individual monks and nuns based upon a list of precepts, the prātimokṣa. The second section is the skandhaka or vastu, a discussion on the daily monastic rituals based on the formulations of formal procedures or the karmavācanā. The third section is the appendices which summarized the contents of the first two preceding sections and provides general historical information.
What does a deficient state of vinaya signify in terms of evaluating the relevance of such Buddhist monastic communities in existence? Does then a deficient monastic disciplinary code in fifth century China suggest a corrupt Buddhist monastic system? Was this a feature of fifth century Buddhist monasticism in China or was it a legacy of the past? Did the situation ever change in the centuries that followed? What alternative was put to use, if at all, to supplement the need of the times? What was the nature and feature of such Buddhist monastic institutions that functioned in the absence of properly laid out rules of Buddhist vinaya? These are a few fundamental questions that the study probes into.

**Issues of Concern**: In order to relocate fifth century Chinese Buddhist monasticism within the larger framework of the historical development of Buddhism in China, the study first traces the evolutionary history of Chinese Buddhist monastic tradition from the first until the fifth century.

There is a limitation to the study. This investigation depends mostly on Buddhist textual sources. It needs to be borne in mind that such literary sources were written by and for a limited group of people. Very few extant Buddhist or secular sources in Chinese throw adequate light on early monasticism in China or even in early Buddhism in China.⁴

1. **Pre-Fifth Century State of Buddhist Monasticism in China**

1.a **Between the first and the third centuries CE - Simple Monasticism**

The first few historical references on the existence of some of the earliest Buddhist communities in China show them as being foreign Buddhist settlements with the occasional presence of Chinese lay people, located in some of the most flourishing urban commercial centers along the transcontinental silk route in and around the first century CE. The first few historical references to the existence of some of the earliest Buddhist communities in China show them as being foreign Buddhist settlements with the occasional presence of Chinese lay people, located in some of the most flourishing urban commercial centers along the transcontinental Silk Route in and around the first century CE.

During the first few decades of the Common Era, Buddhism had made its way into eastern Henan, southern Shandong and northern Jiangsu. One such place that we hear about in historical sources as having had one of the earliest Buddhist communities is Pengcheng. It was a prosperous commercial centre, strategically located on the highway from Luoyang to the southeast, which actually formed an eastern extension of the transcontinental silk route. It is reported to have had a community of foreign monks as well as of Chinese laymen, associated with the court of Liu Ying, the king of the kingdom of Chu.⁵ From the biography of King Liu Ying in the *Hou-Hanshu*, we gather he was deeply interested in the Huang-lao cult (Daoism)⁶ while offering sacrifices to the Buddha. The next reference to another prosperous Buddhist community at Pengcheng region towards the end of the second century (194 CE), is attested in a passage from *Sanguo zhi*, wherein the notorious warlord Zhai Rong is recorded to have built a large, lavishly adorned Buddhist temple, below which was a building that

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⁴ Our chief source of information remains to the extant biographical and bibliographical pieces of Buddhist literature, Huijiao’s *Gaoseng zhuang* (Biographies of Eminent Monks) and *Chu sanzang jiji* (Collection of Notes Concerning the Translation of Tripitaka) compiled by Sengyou (435-518).  
⁶ This is a kind of study and practice of Daoist arts which is supposed to lead to bodily immortality and which was very popular at the imperial court among feudal princes of the first century. The biography of King Liu Ying of Chu in the *Hou-Hanshu* corroborates his deep interest in the Huang-lao cult as well as in offering sacrifices to the Buddha. Tang Yongtong rightly identifies the Buddhist practice here as a variation of the then prevalent Daoist practices. This seems to be a kind of hybrid Buddha-Daoist form of worship. Neither Buddha nor the teachings of the dharma were recognized in their Indian context.
housed more than three thousand people who were well read in Buddhist scriptures. At the annual bathing ceremonies of the Buddha (yu fo 浴佛), Zhai Rong would always distribute wine and food. Of what nature this early state-clergy connection might have been, we have no substantial evidence.

Recent archaeological discoveries, mentioned by Sen in reference to a study by Wu Hung and Marilyn Rhea, have revealed the presence of sculpted Buddha images in standing, seated and parinirvāna postures on the boulders of Mount Kongwang, thirty miles from Pengcheng, dating back to the early few years of the first century. The presence of foreign donor figures, interspersed with indigenous Daoist motives, might be indicative of foreign as well as Chinese lay followers. There have also been excavations of early Han dynasty tombs where the Buddha seems to have been representative of a foreign deity capable of granting immortality to dead souls. As suggested by Wu Hung, this might have been an enriched representation of Chinese indigenous cults. Almost contemporaneous with the early Buddhist community in Pengcheng, was the one at Luoyang, the capital of Han China, and also one of the greatest urban centers of Buddhism. Random passages from Hou-Hanshu are found to have had terms like upāsaka and iramana featuring in the text of an imperial edict. The secular Han composition Xijing fu 西京賦 (The poetical description of the western capital) by Zhang Heng 張衡 (78-130 CE) in the Yongyuan reign-period (89-104 CE) relates in passing, the seductive beauty of the women in the imperial harem which could even captivate a iramana, thereby testifying to the presence of such monastic communities in Luoyang.

Sources speak about intensive translation activities undertaken by Buddhist masters of both Chinese and non-Chinese origin, whose work station remained the aforementioned few prosperous Buddhist settlements. The arrival of missionaries like the Parthians An Shigao 安是高 and An Xuan 安玄, the Indo-Scythian Zhi Loujiaqian 支盧迦錯, the Sogdian Kang Ju 康巨 to Luoyang marked the beginning of intensive activity in the newly emerging Buddhist community. The contents of translation ranged from issues on mental exercises as covered under Buddhist yoga, on the explanation of numerical categories such as six āyatana, the five skandha, the four rddhipida, on fundamental Buddhist dhyāna practices, to the more complicated teachings of the Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra and on the cult of Amitābha. There is no real mention of connections between the Buddhist community at Luoyang and the bureaucracy. However Zürcher defends the idea that such a flourishing Buddhist community in Luoyang, already making its mark as a cosmopolitan centre, could never have kept itself isolated from interactions with contemporary Chinese lay devotees.

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7 He ordered the Buddhist devotees (hao fozhe 好佛者) from that particular region as well as from adjacent areas to accept the doctrine (shou dao 受道)...the people coming from all remote corners to the monastery numbered more than five thousand.

8 Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China (Leiden: Brill), 2007, p. 28, n. 53. As Zürcher mentions this is the first such reference in any Chinese source of the annual festival of bathing the Buddha on the traditional day of the historical Buddha’s birthday. For the warlord to have been informed of the same and to have performed the ceremony is quite significant in the Chinese historical context of Buddhist dissemination. The lavish ceremony, the involvement of people well read in the teachings of the dharma do indicate the presence of such a Buddhist community as well some distant kind of imperial recognition of the same, though Zhai Rong was not the state aristocrat but one who was entrusted by the governor of Xu Zhou, Tao Qian with the transport of grains in the prefectures of Guangling, Xiasi and Pengcheng. There might have been Chinese adherents of the faith around but in view of having monks coming from afar, it might also suggest the presence of quite a few non-Chinese followers of the dharma or the frequent movement of such people in and out of Pengcheng. No further suggestions about their status, engagement in Chinese society or even for that matter the extent of their involvement with the dharma can be rightly determined.

9 Sen, Buddhism, Diplomacy and Trade, The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600-1400. (Delhi: Manohar), 2003, p. 5.


11 Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳, T. (50) 2059

Among the contents of translation undertaken from the mid-second century until the late third century, we find almost nothing substantial in the sources about Buddhist monastic disciplinary codes or vinaya. There are a few scattered references in the sources about monks. The official history of the Sui dynasty, Suishu 順書 mentions Weichao 華朝 the first Chinese monk to have been ordained in the Huangchu period (220-226 CE) of the Wei dynasty. This contradicts the more popular belief that Yan Fotiao 严佛調, alternately Futiao, a collaborator of An Shigao at the end of the second century was the first known Chinese monk. The Da Song Sengshi lue 大宋僧史略, a brief account of monastic history, compiled during the Great Song Dynasty, however refers to the earliest recorded monasteries as being the feudal prince Liu Jun and a woman named Apan. No codified versions of the vinaya have been reported to have been in circulation between the first and the third centuries. However keeping in view the presence of scattered Buddhist settlements across China, there is a possibility that some of the most fundamental rules of the vinaya code had been transmitted orally from itinerant monks arriving in China from the western regions.

1.2 Third to late fourth centuries CE- Simple to complex monasticism

This period in Buddhist history saw the emergence of some of the most distinguished masters of the Dharma like the Indo-Scythian upāsaka Zhi Qian 支謙, the Sogdian monk Kang Senghui 康僧會, and the two Indian masters Weiqinian 維祇難 (Vighna) and Zhu Jiangyan 竹将炎. Translation activity still remained a priority, but what changed over the course of three centuries was that the members of these later Buddhist communities seem to have been of more vibrant identity. From culturally isolated ācāryas, with their limited knowledge of Chinese language, the task of translation was taken up by ethnically non-Chinese people, born in foreign immigrant families on Chinese soil, with sound knowledge of Chinese literary texts. Translation became more complex, both in content as well as in modus operandi. The most distinctive feature characterizing translation activity during this late second century CE period was the spirit of synthesis. We have the classic example of Zhi Qian, an Indo-Scythian, whose scholarly endeavor did not end in producing faithful translations, but transcended it. He engaged in the task of re-editing and revising all the extant translations, creating streamlined versions of Lokakṣema’s Sunāgamasamādhi Sūtra and of the Aṣṭaśāhasrika Prajñāpāramitā, of Vighna’s Dharmapada and of Kang Mengxiang’s Xiuxing benqi jing. This was a continuum of the trend to present the teachings of the dharma in a more palatable form for it to be accepted by the literate public.

Between the great divide of North and South, the nature of Buddhist monastic engagement differed. While some Buddhist communities were engaged in translation activities, missionary and propagandistic activities motivated the others. Sources, though quite fragmentary in nature, speak of a congregation of Buddhists in the north, at Xiangguo (South west of Xingtai, Southern Hebei) and at Ye (Southern Hebei), the successive capitals of the Later Zhao. The most prominent and bizarre Buddhist personality that we encounter here at one of these centers of early Buddhism is Fotudeng 佛圖澄, known more for his charms and magic than for his knowledge of Buddhism. The most striking feature, as Zurcher mentions, of this Northern Buddhism was the pace at which the doctrine disseminated among the non-Chinese

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13 There have been mentioned names of few early monks or nuns. Sources speak sparsely on their monastic affiliation. No reference exits on vinaya transmission or translation, though there might have been oral dispositions on the same. However monastic communities did not clearly develop around any given vinaya system as in India, rather early Buddhist settlements engaged in the rendition of the teachings of the dharma into Chinese.


16 Zürcher, pp. 46-50.
aristocratic class as well as amidst their Chinese personnel. Between 312 and 322 CE, there was a massive focus on Buddhism. Within twenty years, under imperial orders, statues of the Buddha were installed, several temples were built, on the 8th day of the fourth month of every year the statue of the Buddha was bathed, and that Fotudeng was proclaimed “great jewel of the state”. As his biography stands today, we know that Fotudeng was one of the sole propagators of the dharma in the whole of north China, known for his remarkable missionary activity and propagandist zeal. He is recorded to have had a huge following among both the rulers and the ruled. There is, however, no clear information on issues such as the internal organization, the state of governance, the hierarchal structure, and the interpersonal relations between members of such communities.

1.3 Status of vinaya in pre-fifth century China

Between the third and the fourth centuries, sources indicate the circulation of a few of the vinaya codes in rather abbreviated versions across China.

Huijiao’s Gaoseng zhuang mentions the first such fragmented vinaya to be the Sengqijiexin 慈祇戒心, alternately titled Sengzhijiexin 慈志戒心, the Mahāsāṃghikavinayadāya (the prātimokṣa sūtra of the Mahāsāṃghikas). This was believed to have been translated by Dharmanāla, a native of central India who had reportedly arrived in China during the Jiaping reign-period (249-253 CE), Chao Wei, in Luoyang. As the title suggests, this was perhaps an attempt to introduce an elementary, fundamentally important section of a complete vinaya, the prātimokṣa, rather than forcing in all the complicated elements that followed. Though not attested by Sengyou’s Chu sanzang jiji, all the later catalogues mention it. Dharmanāla is believed to have introduced in China, the first ordination ceremony. Unfortunately there is neither any reference to the legal text that was employed during the ordination nor any clue about the nikaya affiliation of the Indian monks who were spoken of as having been part of it. There were two other fragmentary versions of the vinaya based on formal procedures or karmavācana. The first of the two texts titled Kṣudrakakarmavācana (Tanwude Lubu Zu Jiemo 毛兜德律部諸羯磨) was attributed to the Sogdian monk Samghavarman (Kang Sengkai) and most probably belonged to the Dharmaagupta school of Indian Buddhism, the second one titled karmavācana (Jiemo 羅磨) was attributed to the Parthian monk Dharmasatya (Tandi). The fact that the most reliable bibliographical literature Sengyou’s Chu sanzang jiji does not mention any of the aforementioned translations, puts the authenticity of such texts in to question. As the third century gave way to the fourth, there appeared quite a few more vinaya texts in translation which are no longer extant. These were the Biqiu dajie 比丘大戒 (Bhikṣuprātimokṣa), alternately titled as Shisong biqiu jieben 十漸比丘戒本 and Shisong da biqiu jie 十漸大比丘戒, recited by Tanmochi (Dharmadhī) and translated by Zhu Fonian, during the year of Chunhuo (370 CE), and the Biqium dajie 比丘尼大戒 or the Bhikṣunigrātimokṣa, obtained by the monk Sengchun in Kucha and rendered by Dharmarakṣa in the second

18 Gaoseng zhuang 高僧傳, T. 2059.50, 9.1, p. 383b.
21 Wang, Heirman, Hirakawa all provide extensive evidence on the latter two works based on Karmavācana to have been later redactions founded upon the Dharmaguptakavinayā T. 1498
half of the third century CE. Among the extant vinaya texts dating from around this period, there was the Binaiye (the Vinaya or the Jie Yinyuan jing, the Nidānas of the ākāṣapada), translated by Yaśas, a vinaya master from Kaśmīra and affiliated to the Sarvāstivādins.\textsuperscript{22}

Though a few of the aforementioned partial vinaya texts were in circulation across China, there was a noted tendency among Chinese Buddhist masters to draw up their own monastic regulatory codes in reference to whatever was available then in China, producing streamlined versions of vinaya, with the intention of making it palatable for the gradually growing Buddhist communities. Fotudeng himself introduced a complete set of monastic rules like never before and also initiated the establishment of an order of nuns on Chinese soil. Among Fotudeng’s followers, Shi Daoan is arguably the most prominent of those who carried forward the legacy of his master. Shi Daoan, edited the fragmentary codes of monastic discipline, lying scattered across the wide expanse of China, with the objective of making them readily adaptable to practical requirements in everyday monastic lives. His well formulated monastic codes earned him the title ‘pioneer of sangha regulations’ in China. Shi Daoan’s Sengni guifan fofo xianzheng (Standard for the Clergy and a Charter for Buddhism), stands out as the earliest sangha regulation. There were quite a few regulations that were typically designed by the master of vinaya, like the procedure for offering incense (xingxiang) while circumambulating the hall, the meal time ritual like chanting of the ten epithets of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas before meals, and the custom of bathing the Holy Ones before the congregation of monks could be enter the bath house.\textsuperscript{23}

An ever growing monastic community and a complicated state-clergy interaction made it clear that vinaya could no longer be downplayed. This was perhaps the first time in the history of Buddhism in China that an urgent need was felt to turn to the fountain head of the dharma for authentic versions of the vinaya, in order to address issues that were far more complicated than holding simple legitimate ordination ceremonies or upholding of precepts.

What we gather from the aforementioned facts is that monasticism in China, between the first and the fourth centuries, if viewed through the lens of vinaya (the core of Buddhist monasticism), was still evolving from a nascent stage. The early Buddhist communities that we hear of were more like foreign (ethnically non-Chinese) settlements, with foreign ācāryas (teachers or masters) heading such communities, engaging primarily in the translation of the fundamental teachings of the dharma as well as preaching to lay people of both Chinese and non-Chinese origin. Visible too was the spirit of synthesizing whatever heterogeneous teachings had made their way into China and creating an overview of the same. It is difficult to discern whether these early Buddhist communities were already full-fledged monastic institutions or not, as there is nothing mentioned about the monastic practices followed therein. It is probable that these early foreign settlements functioned more as flexible units of Buddhist dissemination where monks were not confined within the rigid parameters of vinaya culture. Monasticism had still not evolved out of the shadows of scholasticism.

Absence of vinaya from the agenda of translation all through the first four centuries might have been for the following few reasons. Practically speaking, it might have been due to the unavailability of masters well versed in the Indian vinaya tradition travelling into China from the western regions.

\textsuperscript{22} Wang, Bangwei. 1994, p. 167.

The most probable reason, however, might have been a strong anti-clerical state attitude towards the introduction of a new social order based on Buddhist principles, whereby members of the monastic order were not subservient to a state, accustomed to the age-old hierarchal system imposed upon by Confucian teachings.

2. Fifth century monasticism in China: Emerging issues of the times

This section of the paper deals with the proposition that fifth century had witnessed the emergence of the following issues, which eventually came to influence Buddhist monasticism in China and later shaped monastic culture in China in the following centuries to come.

2.a Dissemination of Buddhism Among Gentry Circles

Changes in the political, social and intellectual backdrop of a highly divided China, dating back to the later years of the fourth century was responsible for fifth century monastic tendencies. The Yongjia period of reign era (307-312 CE) was marked by the conquest of most of north China by ethnically non-Chinese tribes. With the downfall of the Western Jin, vast populations were massacred and famine ravaged the central provinces. The prominent cities of Luoyang and Chang’an surrendered to enemy troops. This was followed by a great exodus to the south. The highly volatile political situation brought about metamorphosis in the Chinese indigenous thought system. Confucianism, thoroughly impregnated with legalist notions which had once produced ‘scholars of wide learning’ had finally resulted in the rise of an orthodox Confucian cult, whereby the social and political Confucian system was reduced to a means to obtain official positions. With political turmoil, such scholar officials lost their positions and were driven to the point of questioning the legitimacy of the Confucian system of scholarship. The study of Confucianism was overshadowed by mere scholasticism. An intellectual movement, marked by the spirit of ‘escape from reality’, strongly characterized the intellectual atmosphere of this period. What emerged was a new trend, known as ‘Dark Learning’ (xuanxue). This philosophy was based on the ‘Book of Change’, mingled with ideas extracted from early Daoist thought of Laozi.\footnote{Laozi is alternatively spelled Laotzu, he is believed to have been the founder of the Daoist school of Chinese philosophy} Based on the philosophy of Dark Learning, there also rose to prominence, a special type of rhetorical discussion about metaphysical issues, called ‘Qingtan’ or ‘Pure Conversation’, one that most eligible government officials without a government post engaged in.\footnote{Zürcher. (Leiden: Brill) 2007, pp. 81-95.} Such retired scholar officials were members of the gentry or the intelligentsia, a new social class in China. It was after the shifting of the government apparatus from the north to the south that Buddhist thought and ideas started penetrating the higher strata of Chinese society. Avenues of free interactions between Buddhist monks from the north and Chinese gentry from the south opened up. The Chinese gentry, with their former experiences of classical study, engaged in serious exegetical study. Moving away from the dhyāna tradition of northern Buddhism, southern Buddhism, by means of serious discussions and debates, offered fresh insights into the whole body of Buddhist doctrines. For the first time in the history of Buddhism in China, monks took part in qingtan discussions, visited imperial houses and estates of Chinese aristocratic families as preachers, while maintaining regular correspondence with influential lay people. With the permeation of Buddhism at all levels of Chinese society, Buddhist monastic organizations began to be institutionalized, as much as vinaya studies did. Fragmented, piecemeal information on vinaya scattered all across China finally reached a high level of sophistication with distinguished masters of vinaya coming into China. This profound change in the intellectual atmosphere of fifth century China proved revolutionary in facilitating the progress of Buddhist monasticism towards maturity.\footnote{The idea of looking at the rise of gentry Buddhism in fifth century China has been influenced by Zürcher’s work. Somehow it seems to have played a crucial role in popularizing the monastic culture of Buddhism, in having helped it in its process of institutionalization. The}
products of fifth century southern Buddhism, engaging in the integration of Daoist xuanxue philosophy with Buddhist prajna thought. This also suggests the dissemination of Buddhism into the gentry circle who were already well versed with the Chinese indigenous systems of thought and might be seen to have been involved in systematic study of Buddhist teachings also in relation to vinaya.

2.b Rise of Apologetic and Propagandistic Literature: Rise of gentry Buddhism in fifth century China also resulted in the writing and large scale circulation of apologetic literature around the same time. For the first time ever, this period witnessed the involvement of Chinese intelligentsia, members of who were well trained in Chinese Classics, had had a strong foundation in Classical Chinese and yet unable to meet with certain expectations at the material, psychological and spiritual level, decided to study Buddhist doctrines. Such an intensive study by members of this new gentry class was in no way comparable to the intensive engagement of ethnically non-Chinese and later some Chinese Buddhist masters. Their consolidated effort to defend the cause of Buddhism against other indigenous systems of thought, especially against the state doctrine of Confucianism, perhaps played a role in the institutionalization of Buddhist Monastic Order in China after a span of four long centuries. By the end of the fifth century, Buddhist monastic organizations in China came to be supported by members of the Chinese upper class intelligentsia. Fifth century monasticism is therefore characterized by greater state-clergy contact and mutual interdependence.

(Further investigation of extant primary textual sources need to be carried out to prove that rise of gentry Buddhism and the involvement of the Chinese intelligentsia for the first time in the history of Chinese Buddhism determined the evolution of Buddhism from a foreign religion to a faith that gradually came to be at par with other indigenous Chinese systems of thought. It was through the permeation of Buddhism into the gentry circles, that scholar officials trained in Classics added a different dimension to the understanding of Buddhism. The journey of Buddhism to eventually become a monk’s religion perhaps started from here and therefore monasticism in a certain way walked towards maturity...this is what I can sense, but we need adequate evidence in this regard).

2.c Institutionalization of Vinaya

It was during the fifth century that four out of the five complete vinaya texts (guanglü), were introduced. The first was the Shisong lü 十論律 (T. 23 No. 1435, ‘Vinaya in Ten Recitations’, Daśadhyāya Vinaya of the Sarvāstivādins), between 404 and 409 CE, by Punyatṛtā, Kumārajīva, Dharmaruci and revised by Vimalākṣa.27 The second was the Sifen lü 四分律 (T. 1428, ‘Vinaya in Four Parts’, Caturvarga vinaya of the Dhamaguptaka) completed between 410-412 C.E. by the collaborative efforts of Buddhayaśas, a Dhamaguptaka Mahayana Tripiṭaka Master, Zhu Fonian of Liangzhou (present-day Gansu province) and Daohan. The third full length, authentic Indic vinaya version was the Mōhēshengqi lü 摩诃僧祇律 (T. 1425, Mahāsāṃghika vinaya), procured by Shi Faxian, and copied by him at a Mahāyāna monastery named Tianwang Jingshe, in the city of Pataliputra in Magadha. This vinaya was jointly translated by Shi Faxian and Buddhabhadra at

27 Zhi Dun (314-366) was one such vinaya master, who was a contemporary of Shi Daoan and engaged in the integration of xuanxue and prajna systems of thought, while stressing the importance of adhering to precepts. See Yifa. 2002, p. 18.

Jiankang (Nanjing), the capital of the Southern Song dynasty between 416-418 C.E. The *Wafen lai* 五分律 or the *Pañcavargikavinaya* of the Mahāsākas alternately titled *Mishasaiba huixi wafen lai* 畫沙基部和五分律, was the fourth of the five complete vinayas procured by Shi Faxian from Sri Lanka and rendered into Chinese between 423-424 C.E. by Buddhajīva, a Mahāsāka monk from Kṣāmīra and by Zhisheng a monk from Khotan. Apart from the aforementioned complete *vinaya* versions, there were also some other short full *vinaya* which helped the monastic community in China to have comprehensive knowledge about the various Indian *nikāyas*. These were the Sheiliu wenjing or the *Sāriputrapariprkarasūtra* (T. 24, No. 1465), the *Pininujing* or the *Vinayamārtya* (T.24, No. 1463), the *Dabiqué sanqian weiyi jing* (T. 24, No. 1470), the *Youpoli wenfo jing* or the *Upalipariprcchasutra* (T. 24, N0. 1466), the *Sanmindiye jing* or the *Sammatiyasutra* and many of the like. A less known translation of a Theravada *vinaya*, Tapili by the monk Mahayana, is mentioned in the catalogues but is no longer extant. Another text titled *Shanjian la Piposhu* (T. 1462), supposedly a partial translation of the Pāli *Samantapasadika*, a fourth or fifth century Mahāvihāra commentary by the monk Samghabhadra, around 488-489 C.E. was mentioned as being extant in the additional commentary on the *vinaya* masters in the *Gaoseng zhuau*. Apart from the rendition of *vinaya* texts, the fifth century also witnessed a rising interest and inclination towards the bodhisattva rules, meant to provide the growing Chinese Buddhist fraternity with a guide to Mahayana moral precepts, the most important genre in this context being the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (T. 1484), the *Brahmajīla Sutra*, which contains fifty eight precepts.

For the very first time in China in five hundred years there were authentic *vinaya* rules available to regulate monastic lives and to govern monastic institutions. Out of the four full length *vinaya* texts introduced in China, two were carried all the way from Central India and Sri Lanka by Shi Faxian. This added on to the process of institutionalization of *vinaya* during the fifth century. However institutionalization of *vinaya* in fifth century China created some unique features of Buddhist monasticism. The availability of four out of five complete authentic *vinayas* did not, like in the case of India, create distinct Chinese schools or sects of Buddhism. Rather the unique trend of adaptation and assimilation that was introduced during the absence of monastic codes was continued. Buddhist masters in China critically studied all of the available complete versions of *vinaya* texts, weighing them against each other, comparing and contrasting them, and then finally creating a synthesis of them all, before applying them for practical purposes. Fifth century Buddhist monasticism in China in relation to *vinaya* marked the emergence of *vinaya* masters (lūshi) who were well versed in all the extant Indian version of the *vinaya*, and could provide extensive commentaries on all of them while preparing a streamlined version of their own. There was Huiyuan’s *Fashe jiedu* (Regulations for the Dharma Association), *Waisiseng jiedu* (Regulation for monks from outside), Zhi Dun’s *Boretai zhongseng jiyi jiedu*, the *Sengni yaozi* (Major activities of the clergy) of Sengqu, the *samgha* rectifier of the Southern Court, and many more of such *vinaya* masters who drew up their own codes of monastic regulations based on a critical study of all the major works of *vinaya* transplanted from India to China. Clerical
regulations formulated by rulers also became a major trend of this period. Prince Wenxuan of the Qi dynasty (459-494 CE) who was interested in drawing up regulations for lay people and the clergy. The *Qingsin shinu fazhi* (Regulation for sincere and devoted laywomen), and the *Zaijia busayi* (The Model of Confession for lay people) were also products of the fifth century. Evolution of Chinese *vinaya* as an institution of Buddhist monastic culture proceeded along a different trajectory than in case of India. While in India, different schools or sects of Buddhism had arisen out of their varied interpretation of monastic disciplinary rules, China from the early centuries of Buddhist dissemination, followed a path of synthesizing all the *vinaya* codes which were then available, tailor-making them to suit the indigenous requirements of the monastic community.

An exemplary of this trend of continuous adaptation and assimilation is the *Chanyuan Qinggui*, the first and the most comprehensive monastic code of the Chan school of Buddhism in twelfth century Song China. This *vinaya* text bases itself on *vinaya* rules formulated by the *vinaya* master Shi Daoxuan, much along the lines of the previous generation *vinaya* master, Shi Daoan. In fifth and post-fifth century Chinese monastic tradition, there appears to be a tendency to study all extant *vinaya* codes, to prepare commentaries on them and use streamlined versions of the same to administer the institutional lives of Buddhist monastics. Fifth century witnessed the rise of *vinaya* masters (lü shi), from Shi Daoan’s disciple Huiyuan up through the time of Shi Daoxuan, the founder of the first Sino-Japanese *Vinaya* school, until the time of Zhiyi, the founder of the Tiantai school (538-597) and Zunshi (964-1032) his successor three centuries later. The establishment of full-fledged *vinaya* studies also replenished the undernourished monastic tradition in fifth century China, thereby creating a larger consciousness among Buddhist masters, as Chen opines, of having to combine exegetical studies with monastic practice and to bring them together as a regular feature in Buddhist monasticism.

2.d. Growing Connection between the Imperial House and the Buddhist Clergy

Another feature of fifth century monastic culture in China, was the growing connection between the imperial house and the monastic community. The involvement of the Chinese intelligentsia in the study and practice of Buddhism, from the late fourth and early fifth century onwards, might be seen as having played a crucial role in bridging the divide between the clergy and the bureaucracy. Clerical regulations formulated by rulers also became a recognizable tendency of this period. There is mention of Prince Wenxuan of the Qi dynasty (459-494 CE) who was interested in drawing up regulations for lay people and the clergy. *Qingsin shinu fazhi* (Regulation for sincere and devoted laywomen), *Zaijia busayi* (The Model of Confession for lay people) were also works on monastic disciplinary codes, attributed to members of the bureaucratic circle. Few questions arise. How could rulers formulate regulations for the Buddhist monastic community? In what capacity were they involved? How and why were they entitled to do so? (We need to have access to greater number of resources if we are to substantiate our argument in this regard, this is a proposition which requires further study).

Shi Faxian’s travelogue, *Fo Guoji* 佛國記 contains elaborate narration on the engagement of rulers in the Buddha’s image procession ceremony along with members of the Buddhist monastic community during his sojourn across the different kingdoms. Such portrayal could not have been without a reason. During Shi Faxian’s time, the Chinese ruling house had shifted base to the south and was still delineated from the Buddhist clerical circle. Confucianism prevailed as the official system of thought. Under such circumstances, it might have been

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34 Yifa 2002: 15-18.
35 Chen 2007: 18.
felt that the faith under the troubled political times could not survive without imperial patronage and hence Shi Faxian’s detailed depiction of the involvement of rulers with the veneration ceremony in the presence of the Buddhist clergy. Such connections shared between the court circles and the monastic community came to be an accepted feature of seventh and eighth century, and even after that for some time. There are records of fifth-sixth century Chinese monk-scholars who served as clerical officials at the court.\(^37\) (In the context of the Tang dynasty such connections were the most pronounced. There were rulers who decided upon which of the vinaya texts would be popularized in consultation with the Chinese clergy. The classic example remains to be the legitimization of the use of the Caturvargavinaya of the Dharmaguptakas\(^38\) by the formal decree issued by Emperor Zhong of the Tang (r. 684) under the influence of the vinaya master Huiguang (468-537 CE).

2.e. Popularization of the Relic Veneration Cult

One of the most important propositions of this study is that fifth century CE witnessed the popularization of the relic veneration cult, one which significantly influenced the state of Buddhism in China in the later years to come, and a feature which eventually transformed the fate of Buddhism in China as well as in far-east Asia. Though not directly related to vinaya studies, the popularization of the same was perhaps triggered by the historic sojourn of Faxian in the far off western regions in the fifth century, and through the vivid portrayal in his travelogue Gaoseng Faxian zhuán of lavish relic veneration ceremonies which he and his companions witnessed in most of the central Asian and northwestern Indian states. It is to be noted also that Shi Faxian upon his return to China translated the text Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra, which is believed to have introduced elements of relic veneration. We now trace the history of the relic veneration tradition in China since the time of the dissemination of the Dharma.

Legends of the Indian Mauryan King Aśoka of having collected the scattered relics of the Buddha following his cremation and building 84,000 stūpas within a span of one day created an impact on the popularization of the relic veneration cult. The story of Aśoka building 84,000 stūpas was already mentioned by the monk Sengyou in his catalogue Chu sanzang jìji (Collection of Records Regarding the Translation of the Chinese Tripitaka, T. 2145) in connection to it being known to the Chinese since the time of King Sun Quan (r. 222-252) of the Wu kingdom.\(^39\) However Sen brings out the opinion of other scholars as saying that this story was only popularized during the time of the composition of Sengyou’s catalogue, around the sixth century. Hagiographic accounts of King Aśoka’s life became popular in China from about the fourth century, says Sen.\(^40\) Despite such texts being in circulation, Shi Faxian’s contribution in this regard cannot be overlooked. His travelogue, we propose might have played a substantial role in popularizing the relic veneration cult. There is no such first-hand eye witness account recorded in the history of Chinese Buddhist literature prior to Shi Faxian’s travel account that has narrated with such precision relic veneration ceremonies. Shi Faxian must have had his readers in mind before he wrote his travel narrative and it might not have been without a purpose. His vivid portrayal of lavish relic veneration ceremonies witnessed in most of the Central Asian and northwestern Indian states must have played a decisive role in the popularization of the relic veneration cult. Faxian elaborately mentions the veneration of Buddha’s image in Khotan, of his spittoon, alms bowl and tooth relic in Kucha, of his shadow and his parietal bone in

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37 The monk Sengxian was appointed controller of clergy (shamen tong) and compiled Sengzhi sishi tiao.Yifa. 2002, p. 18.

38 Dharmaguptaka was the name of one of the eighteen schools of Indian Buddhism.


40 Ibid.
Uḍḍiyāna, of his alms bowl in Puruṣapura and of his tooth relic in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{41} Venerating relics associated with that of Gautama Śākyamuni and decorating stūpas in order to accumulate merit, have for long been attested to in the history of Buddhism, going as far back as the second century BCE.\textsuperscript{42} However, the portrayal of firsthand encounters with relic veneration ceremonies in the presence of imperial houses and clerical communities across thirty different kingdoms must have created a greater impact on the Chinese masses than what may have been achieved through the circulation of the \textit{Ayu wang jing}, the \textit{Lotus Sutra} and the \textit{Jinghuangming jing}. Faxian’s translation of the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra} might have come in at a time when the circumstances were right, and Buddhism in China was able to cast away its foreign label. In the following centuries relic veneration led to the export of sacred items from India to China. As Sen points out, the relic veneration cult subsequently led to the miraculous discovery of images and sacred remains in China, as also of stūpas and relics which were believed to have had the Aśokan connection\textsuperscript{43}, issues which drastically changed the status of China, from being a peripheral Buddhist borderland looking up to India as the fountain head of the dharma, to becoming a legitimate part of the Buddhist \textit{Jambudvīpa}. Following Sen’s argument that relic veneration in China served several purposes namely stimulating merit making activities, encouraging material transactions, propagating commemorative monuments, and contributing to the establishment of political links between state and the Buddhist monastic community\textsuperscript{44}, we might want to draw attention to the fact that Faxian’s portrayal of the relic veneration ceremonies by the aristocratic class and the clergy in close association might have acted towards establishing the first of such possible political connections in the Chinese context in the coming years. (Further research with primary sources is required in order to strengthen the argument. Was Shi Faxian’s travelogue powerful enough to have been able to popularize the relic veneration cult? Which were the other parallel Buddhist texts which might have been in circulation during the fifth century? What might have been the impact of such texts on the imperial house? These issues need to be studied further)

\textbf{Rise of messianic figures in fifth century China and their relation with a few of Shi Faxian’s translated texts-- This is still being studied, a few scattered clues are being taken into account} - Among other texts, we have the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra} which Shi Faxian translated after his return from the western regions. The study proposes that this text might have influenced the popularization of the ‘Mañjuśrī cult’ in the centuries following the fifth.\textsuperscript{45} It seems to be also too much of a coincidence that Shi Faxian’s collaborator Buddhabhadra translated the \textit{Avatamsaka Šūtra} (\textit{Da fangguang fohuayan jing}) which also introduced the ‘Mañjuśrī cult’ in China. The fact that the ‘Mañjuśrī cult’ was popularized in China around the fifth century, and also that the \textit{Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra} translated by Shi Faxian and the \textit{Avatamsaka Šūtra} translated by Buddhabhadra around the same time might have had connections. The rise of the Mañjuśrī cult in China and the belief in the presence of this Bodhisattva in Mt. Wutai promoted (primary sources to be studied further)

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Gaoseng Faxian zhuan} 高僧法顯傳 T. (50) 2085.
\textsuperscript{42} Sengyou’s \textit{Chu sanzang jiji} corroborates the dissemination of the idea of relic veneration among the Chinese audience as early as the third century during the reign of King Sun Quan (r. 222-252 C.E.) of the Wu dynasty through the circulation of the legend associated with King Asoka and his construction of 84,000 commemorative stūpa, though this has been contended as having been an interpolation of the sixth century. Sen., pp. 60-61.
\textsuperscript{43} Sen. 2003, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45} The study of the content of Shi Faxian’s \textit{Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra} is in progress. I am trying to see if the text contains reference to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva.
\end{quote}
Reviewing the Relevance of Fifth Century in the History of Chinese Buddhist Monastic Tradition

Fifth century witnessed the emergence of a few important features of Buddhist monastic culture which had not been present in the preceding centuries, and which this study proposes, to have perhaps contributed in shaping Buddhist monastic tradition in the centuries that followed the fifth.

First, in relation to the evolution of vinaya in the Buddhist monastic culture, there occurred for the first time in fifth century China, the institutionalization of vinaya. Four out of five complete vinaya texts were rendered into Chinese in the fifth century. Buddhist monastic institutions grew in size and number. Members started including an increasing number of ethnically Chinese people. Fifth century marked this transition of Buddhist monastic institutions from being mere scattered foreign settlements into well organized, complex monasteries, governed on the basis of authentic rules of vinaya. With the circulation of the four complete vinaya texts, there appeared in the following centuries what we might see as the emergence of ‘vinaya schools’ (lü zong) where all extant vinaya codes from different Buddhist schools were studied and synthesized to form streamlined versions of the same, under various generations of vinaya masters. While in the Indian tradition, schools of Buddhism differed in their varied interpretation of vinaya rules, in the Chinese tradition, different vinaya texts were simultaneously studied, irrespective of their nikāya affiliation, commented upon by vinaya masters (lü shi), and adapted to indigenous Chinese conditions.

We have already discussed that the earliest and the most comprehensive monastic code of the Chinese Chan school of Buddhism, did not arise as a monolithic structure\(^{46}\), wielding influence in twelfth century Song China. Rather Changlu Zongze, the compiler of the Chan monastic code depended on the vinaya regulations which were formulated by Shi Daoxuan (596-667), who in turn depended upon certain codes drawn up by Shi Daoan.\(^{47}\) Fifth century was an age of amalgamation of diverse tendencies, arising out of the social, political and economic conditions prevalent in China, and Buddhist monasticism progressed along the trajectory which was influenced by these very tendencies.

Fifth century marked the transition in China from simple monasticism to complex monasticism. Absence of complete vinaya texts before the fifth century hints at a monastic culture which was still evolving. Until the third century, there is no clear idea of what the monastic establishments looked like. From the third until the late fourth century, monasticism was gradually maturing along the rules laid down in fragmented vinaya texts in circulation. In the fifth century, with the institutionalization of vinaya, monasticism was firmly grounded. The fact that it took five centuries for monastic culture in China to be consolidated suggests that, the dissemination of Buddhism in China did not initially create a situation conducive to the acceptance of a new form of social organization which Buddhism was likely to weave into the foreign socio-cultural milieu of China.

Second, dissemination of Buddhism among members of the Chinese gentry circles was also an event of the fifth century. From the late fourth century onwards, Chinese intelligentsia in southern China, including scholar-officials, with a strong knowledge of Chinese Classics were engaging in free discussion and exchange of political and philosophical ideas with Buddhist clerics who had been immigrating to the south. Such open interactions led to the permeation of the Dharma teachings among the scholar-officials, brought about the tradition of elite Chinese intelligentsia engaging in exegetical studies, resulted in the amalgamation of the Mahāyāna wisdom (prajñā), void (śūnyata),

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\(^{46}\) Yifa uses this term.

\(^{47}\) By advocating the Vinayas and formulating his own clerical regulations, Shi Daoan established a long lasting model that were later adopted by monasteries across China. Daoxuan’s Xingshi chao and Zongze’s Chanyuan qinggui were drawn upon Shi Daoan’s personal monastic regulations. See Yifa. 2002, p. 15.
stillness (śānti), expediency (apāya) with ‘Dark Learning’ (xuanxue) and its speculation on saintliness (sheng), emptiness (wu), non-being (wu), tranquility (jing) and non-activity (wuwei)\(^48\). Fifth century in China, the study proposes, marks a crucial point in the history of Buddhism in China. Without the involvement of the Chinese intellectual class, Buddhism would always have lived on in China with its foreign status.

Third, the fifth century heralded the rise of apologetic literature in China. It was a joint creation of laymen and Chinese gentry-Buddhists\(^49\), to protect the rights of Buddhism against the state philosophy of Confucianism. Buddhism, during the initial years of its dissemination in China, was seen as an extension of certain Daoist practices, and therefore tolerated. When the rise of Buddhist monastic order was anticipated to challenge the authority of state Confucianism, it was severely condemned. Anti-clerical sentiments and rise of apologetic literature in reaction and counter reaction to each other in fifth century China, succeeded in firmly grounding the status of Buddhism. The growing popularity of the relic veneration cult, with its inputs from Faxian’s portrayal of the extravagant relic veneration ceremonies in central Asia and northwest India in his travelogue, his translation of the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra in the fifth century indirectly influenced the manipulation of Buddhist texts and the indiscriminate use of Buddhist paraphernalia. In the seventh and eighth centuries, the transformation of China from a borderland state into a legitimate Buddhist realm might be seen as having roots in the popularization of the relic veneration cult and the rise of the Mahājūra cult. Pilgrimages were now made by Indian, Korean and Japanese monks to Mount Wutai Shan, the abode of Mañjuśrī. There was a sharp decline in the dependence on Indian inputs for the first time in the history of Buddhism in China. China emerged as the new centre of Buddhist dissemination to the Far eastern regions of Korea and Japan.

The above-mentioned emerging issues in fifth century China might have shaped a few of the post fifth century Buddhist monastic traditions. The presence of too many vinaya texts, free borrowing from all the extant vinaya sources and the indiscriminate use of the same, was gradually starting to threaten the legitimacy of the Sangha. In order to ensure unity in legal procedure, there is required unity in the recitation of the prātimoksa. This in turn can be ensured through the use of a single vinaya pertaining to a single nikkhāya.\(^50\) In the Chinese context, from the fifth until the eighth century, the ‘purity’ of the vinaya was not maintained. In post-fifth century there rose a need to return to the use of a single, authentic vinaya from India. In seventh century, Yijing, a pilgrim-monk-scholar argued against the eclectic use of vinaya rules and travelled to India in search of the one original vinaya text in order to put an end to the state of confusion in China. The rise of the ‘Mañjuśrī cult’ and the popularization of the relic veneration tradition, in some ways contributed towards transforming the status of China from a Buddhist borderland into a legitimate centre of the Dharma in post-fifth century. Rise of ‘gentry Buddhism’ and the penetration of the Buddhist teachings in amalgamation with ‘xuanxue’ and ‘mingjiao’\(^51\) into the lives of the cultured elite in late fourth and


\(^{49}\) Refers to the intellectual clerical elite consisting of Chinese or naturalized foreign monks, creators and propagators of a completely Sinicized Buddhist doctrine which from the fourth century onwards started penetrating into the Chinese upper classes. See Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China, (Brill, 1959), p. 71.


\(^{51}\) ‘Xuanxue’ refers to the more abstract, unworldly philosophical thought in medieval China. ‘Mingjiao’ refers to an amalgamation of Confucian and Legalist notion which harmonized ‘ming’ (name) with ‘shi’ (reality). These were the two dominant trends of thought in the intellectual lives of the elite classes in medieval China. See Zürcher: 86-87.
early fifth century China contributed first, to the consolidation of the foreign religion and second, to the gradual involvement of the Chinese ruling class in the affairs of the clergy.

The emergence of the abovementioned issues, suggest the relevance of fifth century as a transition period in the history of Buddhism in China. The links between pre-fifth, fifth and post-fifth century monastic culture are less direct, and the connections are less explicit to be able to substantiate the claim of the study. More primary source readings are necessary to be able to concretize the abstract pattern of reorientation of Buddhist monasticism from the fifth to the post fifth century.

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