

Quotations from the early translations in anthologies of the 6th century

Hubert Durt,
International College for
Advanced Buddhist Studies, Tokyo

The two early sixth century's anthologies researched here, the Shijiapu (T. 2040) of Sengyou, and the Jinglüyixiang (T.2141) of Baochang, are centered on the Buddhist narrative literature. They do not include doctrinal texts.

Sengyou has been the compiler of both the oldest extant Catalogue of the Buddhist Scriptures (T. 2145) and of the Shijiapu, an anthology / encyclopedia on the life of the Buddha. In one section of his Catalogue (j. 12), he described his own achievements. We may compare the table of content of his Shijiapu in 34 chapters (with chapter 4 existing in two versions), and the table of content of a more ambitious compilation, the Fayuanji, which has been lost. For both works, the title of each chapter is followed by a reference to a scriptural source which is sometimes the only source used in the chapter and, more often, one of the numerous sources from which Sengyou quoted extracts.

Sengyou selected mostly extracts from the Āgamas and from the Vinayas. These Canonical texts had been translated into Chinese at a comparatively recent date. But he also selected many other texts. Some of them had just been translated at the time of the issue of the Shijiapu. Others were archaic translations. These extracts are generally drastically shortened but in these abstracts Sengyou took care of keeping the vocabulary of the original quotations.

In the short critical notes appearing at the end of each chapter of the Shijiapu, Sengyou never refers to the age of the translations. He faced problems of differing transcriptions and problems of adjustment of different traditions, especially when there were Mahayanic influences.

From the standpoint of a 6th century's approach to early translations, I will look here on a few examples of texts quoted by Sengyou: 1) the Puyaojing (T.186), a translation attributed to Dharmarakṣa on the birth of the Buddha, as quoted in chapter 4 (first version) of the Shijiapu;

2) the Zhongbenqijing (T.196), a translation attributed to Dharmaphala (?) and Kang Mongxiang, as quoted in chapter 10, on Devadatta;

3) a few early narratives of the Nirvāṇa story, as quoted in chapter 27 on the Parinirvāṇa.