

Guṇabhadra, Bǎoyún, and the Saṃyuktāgama

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It has been almost one hundred years since Anesaki Masaharu 姉崎正治 published his study “The Four Buddhist Āgamas in Chinese” (1908). This publication marks the beginning of a productive area of research in the field of Buddhist studies. In the case of the Saṃyuktāgama, scholars have been concerned with identifying the school affiliation of the extant translations and identifying parallel versions for the many sūtras they contain in Pāli, Tibetan, and Sanskrit as well as other languages. Another important pursuit with respect to translation of the Saṃyuktāgama attributed to Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (T no. 99) has been the reconstruction of the original sequence which was disrupted early on in the transmission of this text.

In the course of these investigations a particular problem connected with the transmission of this text from India has surfaced now and again, namely: was the source text for this translation brought to China by Fǎxiǎn 法顯 from Sri Lanka, or was it brought by someone else, perhaps Guṇabhadra? This problem has been examined in detail by J. W. de Jong (1981) and Enomoto Fumio 榎本文雄 (2001) with contrasting results. I will present the results of a new investigation using a variety of evidence not previously considered in connection with this problem. This evidence focuses on the pivotal role of Bǎoyún 寶雲 in the making of this translation. This will involve a journey through Central Asia to Gandhāra, copying and transmitting Sanskrit and Chinese manuscripts, political turmoil, reunion, recitation, and of course translation. As a result of which I hope to show that the source of Guṇabhadra’s Saṃyuktāgama was Fǎxiǎn’s manuscript, which would mean that Sarvāstivāda literature must have been present in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the fifth century.