

Article

The Formation and Development of the Chinese Karmavācanā Texts: Structure, Transmission, and Localization—Centering on No. 1432 and No. 1433 of the Cao Wei Period in the Taishō Tripitaka

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Abstract

The karmavācanā are ritual texts found in the Vinaya Piṭaka's Khandhaka sections and standalone translations, regulating the conduct of monks and nuns. They include procedures for legitimate religious practices and penalties for disciplinary violations. The Taishō Tripitaka compiles five karmavācanā texts, structured into two systems. This study focuses on the *Tanwude lübu zajiemo* (曇無德律部雜羯磨, No. 1432), attributed to Kang Seng-kai (康僧鎧), who is from Tianzhu (India) during the Cao Wei period, and the *Jiemo yijuan* (羯磨一卷, No. 1433) by Tan di (曇諦), an Anxi (Parthian) śramaṇa of the Cao Wei period. This study addresses three key research questions: (1) the relationship between these two karmavācanā texts and the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (四分律, No. 1428); (2) whether the *Tanwude lübu zajiemo* and *Jiemo yijuan* are the earliest karmavācanā texts to have been translated; and (3) how to explain the process by which their textual structures were formed. By synthesizing extant karmavācanā versions in other languages and Dunhuang-Turpan manuscript fragments, the author argues that No. 1432 and No. 1433 cannot be directly identified as mechanically excerpted copies of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. In the formation of their respective structures, the influence of earlier karmavācanā translations—now no longer extant—cannot be ruled out. Judging from the karmavācanā manuscripts preserved at Dunhuang-Turpan, the two texts in question were most likely formed toward the end of the sixth century CE.

Keywords: karmavācanā; Dharmaguptaka Vinaya; nine-fold structure; Kang-Tan versions



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1. Introduction

Distinct from its more conventional, doctrinal denotation, *karma* (羯磨) in this study refers to a formalized Buddhist ritual procedure intended to regulate and discipline the conduct of monks and nuns. From the perspective of function, karma may be classified into two types: the ritual and the disciplinary. From the perspective of textual transmission, the genre of karma texts exist in two distinct forms: fragmentary *karmavācanā*—formulas embedded within the *Khandhaka*—and separately compiled karma manuals.¹

The separately compiled Chinese-translated karma ritual manuals fall into two major systems. The first is represented by the so-called “Kang version” (*Tanwude lübu zajiemo*, 曇無德律部雜羯磨, No. 1432) and the “Tan version” (*Jiemo yijuan*, 羯磨一卷, No. 1433)². These two versions are divided into nine main sections according to the content of the karmavācanā, with an additional section for *bhikṣuṇī* karma. The second system is represented

by the anonymous *Dashamen Baiyi jiemo* (大沙門百一羯磨, No. 1438) and Yijing's (義淨) *Baiyi jiemo of Mūlasarvāstivāda* (根本說一切有部百一羯磨, No. 1453), which are organized according to the threefold ritual structure of *jñāpti-karman* (白羯磨), *jñāpti-dvītiya karman* (白二羯磨), and *jñāpti-caturtha karman* (白四羯磨).

With respect to the textual translation history of these texts, previous scholars have generally concluded that, while the anonymous and Yijing versions are genuine translations, the Kang-Tan texts are, without exception, extracts or transcripts derived from the Chinese translation of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (hereafter abbreviated as DhV.).³ Given this brief survey, the following questions arise: Are the Kang-Tan versions truly derivative copies of the DhV? Could there have existed other, earlier Chinese translations of karma texts preceding them? And how did the textual structures of these two versions take shape? The present paper aims to address these issues by examining early karma manuscripts unearthed from Dunhuang-Turfan, in conjunction with comparative evidence from Sanskrit, Pāli, and other linguistic traditions, in order to clarify the formation of the Kang-Tan versions.

2. The Translation and Transcription of Chinese Karma Texts

The records concerning the translation of karma texts as found in the *Gaoseng zhuan* (高僧傳, No. 2059) and various Buddhist catalogues provide valuable information on the early transmission of Vinaya-related ritual texts in China.

According to the Biography of Dharmakāla (曇柯迦羅):

At that time, various monks collectively requested Dharmakāla to translate the Vinaya. However, Dharmakāla considered the specific regulations of the Vinaya divisions to be extensive and the language complex; since Buddhism had not yet flourished in the region, he felt it would certainly not be accepted or put into practice. He therefore only translated the “*Sengqi jiexin* (僧祇戒心),” which was sufficient for daily morning and evening practice. He further requested an Indian monk to establish the karmavācānā procedures for ordination. The Vinaya and precepts of China began with this. Dharmakāla's later life and final fate remain unknown.

At that time, there was also a foreign śramaṇa named Kang Sengkai (康僧鎧), who also arrived in Luoyang at the end of the Jiaping era and translated four scriptures, including the *Yujiazhangzhe jing* (郁伽長者經). Additionally, a śramaṇa from the Anxi Empire named Tan di (曇帝), who was also well-versed in Vinaya studies, arrived in Luoyang during the Zhengyuan era of the Wei dynasty and produced the *Tanmude jiemo* (曇無德羯磨).⁴

Furthermore, the Biography of Guṇavarman (求那跋摩, ?–431) records that:

Subsequently, Guṇavarman was again requested to translate the remaining sections, completing a total of thirteen fascicles. Together with the previously translated *Sifen jiemo* (四分羯磨), *Youposai wujie lüelun* (優婆塞五戒略論), and *Youposai ershierjie* (優婆塞二十二戒), the entire corpus comprised twenty-six fascicles. The texts were clear and coherent in meaning, exhibiting no discrepancy between the Sanskrit and Chinese.⁵

The *Gaoseng zhuan* not only records that Tan di and Guṇavarman translated karma texts belonging to the Dharmaguptaka system, but also that Fotuoshi (佛馱什), in the course of translating the Mahīśāsaka Vinaya, extracted and compiled precept manuals and karma texts from the larger Vinaya corpus. In addition, the Biography of the Faying (法穎) in the section *Minglü pian* (明律篇) notes that Faying himself composed the *Shisong jieben* (十誦戒本) and a karma text. This suggests that, from the very beginning of the transla-

tion of the larger Vinaya texts, there was already an established practice of transcribing or excerpting karma texts.

The persistence of this transcriptional practice, even when karma texts were available in translation, is best explained by the fact that Vinaya masters of the time were clearly aware of school distinctions. Because each Buddhist school maintained its own ritual procedures, and since independently transmitted karma manuals specific to each school had either not yet reached China or had already been lost, monks had to extract karma sections from the larger Vinaya collections as substitutes for practical use.

Chusanrang jiji (出三藏記集, No. 2145) makes no mention of Tan di's translation of a karma text, nor does the extant fragment of Bao chang's (寶唱) *Mingseng zhuan* (名僧傳) contain any such record. However, it does confirm that Guṇavarman translated a one-fascicle *Tanmude jiemo* (曇無德羯磨, also known as *Za jiemo* 雜羯磨), that Sengqu (僧瞿) composed a *Shisong jiemo* (十誦羯磨), and that Faying (法穎) compiled a one-fascicle *Shisonglü jiemo zashi* (十誦律羯磨雜事). In other words, both the *Gaosengzhuan* and *Chusanrang jiji* agree only on one point: that Guṇavarman translated a karma text belonging to the Dharmaguptaka school. Naturally, differences between the biographies and the catalogues are to be expected, as they were compiled from distinct perspectives and with different historiographical aims.

By the time of Huaisu (懷素, 634–707), the records concerning the Kang-Tan versions of the karma had developed as follows:

One text in one fascicle was compiled by the Vinaya master Kai of Cao Wei in Xudu, titled *Tanwude zajiemo*. It begins with the procedure for establishing the *sīmā-maṇḍala*...and the text contained numerous additions and subtractions that deviated from the original Vinaya passages.

One text in one fascicle was compiled by Tan di of Cao Wei in Luoyang, titled *Jiemo yijuan*, said to have been extracted from the Vinaya of the *Dharmaguptaka*. It begins with the procedure for establishing the *sīmā-maṇḍala*...The Vinaya master Li (礪) of Weijun received and transmitted this version. Though he sought to refine and amend [its ritual], despite removing certain faults, the work still failed to eliminate lingering minor errors. He later divided it into two fascicles and composed an interpretative commentary.

One text in one fascicle was compiled by the Vinaya master Guang (光) of Yuan Wei in Yexia. This version corresponds to the Tan di compilation, but its redaction and arrangement do not fully follow the canonical order of the original text...⁶

Furthermore, although both the *Gaoseng zhuan* and the *Chu sanzang jiji* consistently record that Guṇavarman translated the *Sifen jiemo* (四分羯磨, also known as *Tanmude jiemo* 曇無德羯磨), In the *Fajing lu* (法經錄), both the Tan version and Guṇavarman's translation are still listed side by side. However, by the time of the *Renshou lu* (仁壽錄), Guṇavarman's text had already been marked as "*que ben*" (闕本, missing), and in the *Lidai sanbao ji* (歷代三寶記), only one version remained, with the translator's name no longer indicated. Hirakawa Akira has suggested that the disappearance of Guṇavarman's version was likely due to inconsistencies between its ritual procedures and those found in the DhV, leading to its eventual abandonment (Hirakawa 1999, pp. 219–20).

3. Whether the Kang-Tan Versions Are Merely Copies

3.1. Structure of the Kang-Tan Versions

The content of the Kang-Tan versions consist of a nine-fold structure. These include: first, the establishment of the *sīmā* (結戒法第一); second, the ordination procedure (受戒法第二); third, the procedure for the removal of offences (除罪法第三); fourth, the pro-

cedure for the recitation of the *prātimokṣa* (說戒法第四); fifth, the procedure for the rains retreat (*varṣā*, 安居法第五); sixth, the *pravāraṇā* ceremony (自恣法第六); seventh, the distribution of robes (分衣法第七); eighth, the procedure that makes medicinal substances allowable (醫藥淨法第八); and ninth, miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings (房舍雜法第九). Hirakawa Akira, by comparing the translation of the first section with the corresponding passages in the DhV, concluded that these two versions are indeed mere copies of the DhV (Hirakawa 1999, pp. 213–16).

The structure of the Kang-Tan versions can be broadly divided into three sections. The first section, known as the nine-fold structure, extends from the first chapter on the establishment of the *sīmā* to the ninth chapter on miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings. This nine-fold structure exhibits a certain degree of similarity with the organizational structure of the Pāli Vinaya's Khandhaka, and it corresponds to the sequential order of a *bhikṣu*'s religious life and daily practice, such as the arrangement of *Varṣā*, *Pravāraṇa*, and *Kaṭhina*.

However, not all of these contents find direct counterparts in the DhV's *karmavācānā*. Three situations may be distinguished: (1) The *karmavācānā* in the DhV corresponds basically or approximately to the Kang-Tan versions. (2) The DhV contains a description of the relevant institutional practice but does not provide the *karmavācānā*, whereas the Tan version organizes it in the form of *karmavācānā*, as in the case of the seven-day medicinal ritual or the storage of *danḍaśikyaṇḍī* (杖絡囊). (3) Certain *karmavācānā* in the Tan version, such as the disbanding of the *sīmā*, are entirely absent from the DhV.⁷

Hirakawa Akira, in his comparison of the establishment of the *sīmā*, observed that due to the highly repetitive nature of *karmavācānā* expressions, substitution of key terms could generate other *karmavācānā*, which may result in the omission of certain formulaic passages (Hirakawa 1999, p. 214). In any case, these two versions cannot be simplistically regarded as mechanical copies of the DhV, as they incorporate deliberate adaptations and logical arrangements by their compilers.

The second section concerns the *bhikṣuṇī* *karmavācānā*, which likewise follows the nine-fold structure. Portions that are identical to the *bhikṣu* sections have been omitted. In the Taishō Tripiṭaka, one fascicle is attributed to Guṇavarman under the title *Sifen biqiuni jiemofa* (四分比丘尼羯磨法). The translation of the *bhikṣuṇī* karma by Guṇavarman is first recorded in the *Renshou lu* (仁壽錄). In reality, the extant content is entirely identical to the Tan version, with the same omissions, indicating that this is not an independent translation of a *bhikṣuṇī* karma text.

Yang Tingting discovered (Yang 2016), at Nanzen-ji in Kyoto, Japan, a version of Guṇavarman's *Sifen biqiuni jiemofa* that differs from the Taishō Tripiṭaka.⁸ According to the *Gaoliguo xindiao dazangjing bielu* (高麗國新雕大藏經校正別錄), during the compilation of the Korean Re-engraved Tripiṭaka, this version of the *Sifen biqiuni jiemofa* had already been replaced and differs from the versions found in the Initial Engraving Tripiṭaka, as well as in the Song Dynasty Tripiṭaka.⁹

Although the Nanzen-ji manuscript is titled as a *Ni jiemofa* (尼羯磨), its actual content comprises only two sections. The first section concerns the ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs*, covering the stages from *śrāmaṇerī* and *śikṣamāṇā* to the full ordination of *bhikṣuṇīs*, concluding with the formula for receiving the *civara-pātra*. The second section deals with the ordination of *bhikṣus* and includes twelve subsections: the ordination of *śrāmaṇas*, the request for *upādhyāya*, the ten-precept ordination for *śrāmaṇas*, including up to the request for *niśraya*.

The Nanzen-ji manuscript exhibits highly idiomatic translations, which do not appear in other Sutras or Vinaya texts—for example, the phrase “令汝出家, 不空福報, 世世不絕” (By ordaining you, your merit will not be wasted and will continue generation after generation). Although the manuscript only contains ordination instructions the title of this

part is “*chujia fa*” (出家法), clearly differing in structure from other extant versions. Combined with the uniqueness of its translation language, it is appropriate to regard this as an original translation and not a mere reproduction. If this manuscript indeed represents Guṇavarman’s authentic translation, it would constitute the earliest extant Chinese translation of both the *bhikṣuṇī* and *bhikṣu* ordination karma texts.¹⁰

The third section comprises the specific regulations of the Vinaya of individual schools. In the Tan version, the section titled “*neihukuangjiu sengzhong binfajiemofa*” (內護匡救僧眾擯罰羯磨法) ends with **pabbājanīyakarma* (滅擯羯磨), followed by the note “*jiemo yijuan*” (羯磨一卷). This observation suggests that, at least in the currently preserved edition, the content appears to have been transferred directly from a manuscript copy with a concluding colophon.

The final three sections, as noted by the scribe, enumerate the different formulations of the *shouri* (受日) procedures found in the Vinaya traditions of various schools, that is, the number of days during the rains retreat for which temporary absence is permitted for legitimate reasons. In the DhV, the allowable absences range from seven days, fifteen days, or even one month; in the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, the maximum is thirty-nine nights; whereas in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya, no fixed duration is specified.

The content in the Kang version entitled “*Varṣā Text for One Person in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya*” (僧祇律一人安居文) does not actually appear in the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya. Furthermore, the Kang version omits more material than the Tan version and exhibits irregular sentence divisions, rendering it a comparatively rougher karma text. Consequently, research on these texts predominantly relies on the nine-fold structure of the Tan version. Although the nine-fold structure clearly exhibits structural similarities with the Khandhaka of DhV, its sequence is entirely different, and the content is not copied sequentially. This divergence raises the question of whether there exist karmavācanā manuscripts in other languages that can serve as points of comparison for these texts.

3.2. Comparison of Karmavācanā Manuscripts in Other Languages with the Tan Version

Unlike prātimokṣa texts, karmavācanā manuscripts appear to be far less numerous; moreover, most survive only as fragments, which makes their identification comparatively difficult. Consequently, their utility in examining the formation of karma structure and content is limited. The Kang-Tan versions are clearly attributed to the Dharmaguptaka school; however, no relatively complete karmavācanā manuscripts in other languages from the Dharmaguptaka tradition have been discovered to date. Therefore, we can only further investigate the formation of the Kang-Tan versions’ structure by examining the structure and content of karmavācanā from other schools.

3.2.1. Pāli Karmavācanā Manuscripts of Myanmar

Western scholars first encountered karmavācanā manuscripts through continuous acquisitions from Myanmar, written in Pāli or bilingual, bitextual Pāli-Burmese *nissayas*, often in ornately crafted palm-leaf manuscripts. When H. Oldenberg and T.W. Rhys Davids translated the Pāli Vinaya, seven independent ritual texts were known.¹¹ With subsequent additions by Frankfurter and Baynes,¹² further independent ritual texts came to light. Although, in overall structure, these texts retain the karma procedures as set out in the Khandhaka section of the Vinaya, they differ considerably from the Pāli Vinaya in terms of detail and include substantial additions. These karma texts are not composed of a fixed number of ritual formulas, nor do they employ entirely uniform wording. They contain both material that corresponds to the Khandhaka of the Vinaya and elements that appear to be newly composed. This variation may reflect differences in actual ritual practice among different Buddhist schools in Myanmar.¹³

According to Herbert Baynes' *A Collection of Kammavācās* (1892), the first manuscript he described is an ornamental Myanmar ritual text, with six lines of writing on each side of every leaf. Its structure is as follows: (1) Buddhist ordination (*upasampadā*), (2) the bestowment of the kaṭhina robe (*kaṭhinadussam uppannam*), (3) the investiture of a bhikkhu with the three robes (*ticivarena avippavāsa*), (4) the fixing of a boundary for the performance of the *uposatha* (*sīmā-sammannitā samāna-samvāsā ekuposathā*), (5) the election of an elder (*thera-sammuti*), (6) naming a bhikkhu (*nāma-sammuti*), (7) the dedication of a *vihāra* (*vihāra-kappiyabhūmi-sammuti*), (8) fixing a site for a bhikkhu's residence (*kuṭivatthu-sammuti*), and (9) consent to a release from *nissaya* (*nissaya-mutta-sammuti*).

The second manuscript consists of fifty-eight Talipat, beginning again with *upasampadā*, followed by procedures for bhikṣus who have committed offences involving temporary separation from the *saṃgha*. The third manuscript comprises ten lacquered Talipat leaves, with five lines on each side, covering procedures of probation, penance and rehabilitation, specifying the number of days the offences have been concealed. The fourth manuscript's content closely mirrors that of the third.¹⁴

Compared with the Tan version, the Pāli karmavācanā manuscripts contain corresponding sections, particularly in the second, third and fourth manuscript, attesting to the procedure for removal of offences. From the perspective of the organization of the Khandhaka, material concerning offences entailing *saṃghāvaśeṣa* and subsequent confession in the Pāli Vinaya is distributed across the *Parivāsika-khandhaka* and the *Samuccaya-khandhaka*. In terms of the overall structure of the Khandhaka, these belong to the Cūlavagga and occur relatively late in the sequence. It is difficult to account for the insertion of the procedure for the removal of offences between ordination and the recitation of the prātimokṣa within the framework of the Khandhaka's structure and bhikṣus' daily liturgical routine. Yet the Pāli karmavācanā closely links the procedures for the removal of offences with ordination, in agreement with the Tan version, and this alignment can hardly be regarded as a mere coincidence.

3.2.2. Sanskrit Karmavācanā Manuscripts

Albert von Le Coq discovered Sanskrit manuscripts at Kizil, which Herbert Härtel compiled and published as his doctoral dissertation under the title *Karmavācanā, Formulare für den Gebrauch im buddhistischen Gemeindeleben aus ostturkistanischen Sanskrit-Handschriften*.¹⁵ This represents the largest known karmavācanā manuscript collection. The script is not uniform, suggesting that the original materials were not a single codex. Based on the Brahmi script, the manuscript collection is dated no earlier than the 7th century CE. Excavation sites include Murtuq, Sängim, and Šorčuq, with the largest portion discovered in the at "Red Domed" hall of Kizil Ming-oi (currently Cave 67). The manuscripts are severely damaged, and very few leaves preserve proper foliation.

The editor relied heavily on the Mahāvagga of the Pāli Vinaya, the Gilgit karmavācanā manuscripts, and Tibetan karmavācanā manuscripts to supplement the fragments. Härtel judged that most of these fragments belong to the Sarvāstivāda school, with a smaller portion attributable to the Mūlasarvāstivāda. Although Härtel attempted to compare the contents with the *Shisong jiemo biquyao Yong* (十誦羯磨比丘要用, No. 1439), it should be noted that this latter work was compiled by Sengqiu (僧璩) according to the Vinaya, and is not a translation.

Härtel set himself the task of rearranging the manuscripts. Although it does not reflect the full structure of the manuscript collection, it is still possible to discern certain portions that are connected with one another at the beginning and the end. Manuscript No. 241 (SHT No. I 46) is relatively complete. Härtel marked its recto and verso as *Posadha* and *Śayyādana*, respectively.¹⁶ In fact, the verso of No. 241 records the election of monks

responsible for distributing bedding within the monastic community. Härtel mistakenly classified this under the Śāyādāna, whereas it should in fact be identified as a karmavācanā text concerning the appointment of a monk to allocate lodgings during the Varṣā. From this, the structural arrangement of the Turfan karmavācanā manuscripts can be discerned: after the Poṣadha, the karmavācanā for the Varṣā follows.

Additionally, manuscript No. 225 (SHT No. I 45), discovered in the same Kizil “Red Domed” hall as No. 241, was reorganized by Heinrich Lüders. It contains karmavācanā related to the Varṣā and Pravāraṇā, demonstrating the close connection between these two sections (See Härtel 1956, p. 36).

The Schøyen Collection also preserves Sanskrit karmavācanā (Vol. III, pp. 177–87). According to Jin-il Chung (Chung 2006), the eight fragments consist of three palm-leaf manuscripts and one birch bark sheet. Among the three palm leaves, No. 2 (MS 2381/119 + 2382/137) contains different karmavācanā on its recto and verso: the instruction for bhikkhūnīs (*Ovādopasaṃkramaṇa*) and distribution of the property of a deceased monk (*Mṛtapariṣkāra*). Additionally, the birch bark fragment (MS 2382/85 + 69) preserves karmavācanā content not found in other Sanskrit fragments, including a probationary penance (*Mānatva*) and act of rehabilitation (*Āhvayana*).

In the Gilgit Manuscripts, discovered in 1931 and 1938 near Naurpur village in the Gilgit region, two karmavācanā manuscripts were found. Due to the deterioration and missing folios, as well as incomplete content, the original sequential structure cannot be fully reconstructed. For Karmavācanā Manuscript 1, Oskar von Hinüber divided it into nineteen sections, noting that the Kaṭhina and Pravāraṇā sections are closely related¹⁷, which aligns with the Kang-Tan versions. Though not structured after the Khandhaka framework, it ties to the *saṅgha*’s annual observance of Pravāraṇā and Kaṭhina rituals concluding the rains retreat, and thus follows the chronological order of routine monastic activities.

3.2.3. Gandhāran Karmavācanā Fragments

According to Ingo Strauch, the Bajaur Collection Manuscript 7 is a very small birch bark fragment, with text on both recto and verso. The content consists of karmavācanā: the recto contains the appointment of the distributor of sleeping and sitting equipment (*śayanāsanagrāhaka*), while the verso provides the karmavācanā ritual for the *saṅgha* taking residence in the monastery at the beginning of the rains retreat. This fragment aligns precisely with the No. 241 manuscript discovered at Kizil, representing part of the Varṣā.

Strauch comments: “To sum up, it is presently impossible to attribute the Gāndhārī text to any of the known versions of karmavācanā texts. It should be regarded as another independent variant of these formula texts—possible those used by the early *Dharmagup-taka* school—going back to a more ancient common source.” (Strauch 2008, p. 25).

3.2.4. Others

B. H. Bailey examined the Tumshuqese karmavācanā manuscripts brought back by Pelliot (Bailey 1950, pp. 649–70). Due to their severe damage, he reconstructed the content by comparing vocabulary with Sanskrit and Tocharian sources. The content was tentatively identified as including the threefold refuge (*triśaraṇa*), the precepts of a lay follower (*upāsaka saṃvara*), and the five precepts (*pañcaśīla*).¹⁸

Additionally, K.T. Schmidt worked on a birch bark fragment of Tocharian B karmavācanā (THT1102–1125), which was structured in two parts: *Pravrajyā* and *Upasampadā*.¹⁹ Hirotoshi Ogihara further supplemented five Tocharian B fragments from the Berlin collection (THT 2386 j + s, a + c + t), which contain the karmavācanā of upāsaka, and provided a comparative catalogue with the Turfan manuscripts and the Tumshuqese karmavācanā

texts.²⁰ Due to their fragmentary nature, the structural order of these manuscripts cannot be fully reconstructed, and they offer limited insight for our study.

In summary, from the fragments of karmavācanā in other languages, it is difficult to identify a complete structural pattern. However, several features can be observed: (1) upāsaka karmavācanā texts related to the *trīṣaṇa* are found alongside *bhikṣu* karmavācanā texts, as in the Kizil Ming-oi and Tocharian B fragments. These are absent in the Chinese translations. (2) The Upasampadā texts contain Pravrajyā content, i.e., procedures for becoming a *śrāmaṇera*, such as head-shaving and the acceptance of the ten precepts. In the canonical Khandhaka structure, *śrāmaṇera* appear only after the monastic community is established; thus, this arrangement reflects practical usage. (3) The content of the *sīmā* is mainly included within the *Poṣadha* procedures and is not treated as a separate section.

4. Examination of the Nine-Fold Structure

4.1. The Establishment of the *Sīmā* Is Placed at the Beginning of the *Karmavācanā*

From the perspective of contemporary monastic practice, placing the *sīmā* first is logical, as the establishment of the boundary constitutes a measure of the monastic community's integrity. However, aside from the Mahāsaṅghika Vinaya, which positions the *sīmā* in the second rule of the *Pācittiya*, other Vinaya traditions place the *sīmā* in the *Upasatha-khandhaka*. In most Vinaya schools, the *Upasatha-khandhaka* usually occupies the second position within the *Khandhaka* sequence. Therefore, placing the *sīmā* at the outset is not the result of a mechanical transcription following the *Khandhaka* order, but is a deliberate, creative decision of the author or compiler. Moreover, the Mahāsaṅghika, Mahīśāsaka, Sarvāstivāda, and the Pāli Vinaya use only the term *sīmā*, while Dharmaguptaka and Mūlasarvāstivāda distinguish between a small boundary and a large boundary²¹.

Akira Hirakawa compared the expression of the establishment of the *sīmā* in the Kang-Tan versions with the DhV and concluded that, aside from minor differences, they are largely identical, particularly in sentence structure. He argued that such a high degree of correspondence could hardly have arisen without direct transcription (Hirakawa 1999, p. 216). For elements not present in the DhV, Hirakawa suggested that the Kang-Tan versions may have adapted other karmavācanā sources into its fold.

However, it is not only the establishment of the *sīmā* that contains material absent from the DhV (the DhV does not contain karmavācanā formulas for disbanding the *sīmā* boundary or for establishing a small boundary); other sections, such as the procedure for the removal of offences, also include content not found in the DhV (including a confession formula requested from the saṅgha, a confession formula before the saṅgha and so on). It is therefore somewhat hasty to claim that all karmavācanās in the Kang-Tan versions amount to nothing more than mechanical reproductions produced only on account of overlapping or roughly consistent translational terminology. If, after the translation of the DhV, the karmavācanā texts were translated separately with reference to the Vinaya's terminology, such similarity or consistency could naturally occur. After all, compared with other sections of the Vinaya, the karmavācanā exhibits a high degree of repetition, a feature that even leads to omissions within the texts themselves.

In addition, in the Turfan manuscripts, the karmavācanā concerning the establishment of the *sīmā* appears within the *Poṣadha* section. Although the manuscript is severely damaged, terms such as *caturdiśasīmām* (four-direction boundary) can still be identified (Härtel 1956, p. 31). According to Härtel's reconstruction and analysis, this passage represents the *jñaptiḥ*—the formal motion—to collectively determine the area within which the *Poṣadha* ceremony is to be conducted. The subsequent manuscript, numbered 222, records the dissolution of that boundary. In other words, the structure that places the establishment of

the *sīmā* at the very beginning appears to be unique to the Chinese versions, with no comparable evidence currently found in manuscripts of other linguistic traditions.

4.2. Is *Pravrajyā* a Prerequisite for *Upasampadā*?

In *karmavācanā* manuscripts preserved in other languages, we find textual evidence for ritual formulas associated with the *upāsakas*.²² In the *Mahīśāsaka Vinaya*, the *Sarvāstivāda Vinaya*, and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*, *pravrajyāvastu*, the act of becoming an *upāsaka*, is prescribed as a preparatory stage prior to monastic ordination.

From the fragments discovered in the Kizil Ming-oi, it is apparent that the *upāsaka* texts form a continuous sequence with later *karmavācanā* materials. This corresponds to the *Sarvāstivāda* rule that taking refuge as an *upāsaka* precedes *pravrajyā* as a *śrāmaṇera*. The *Yaoyong* follows the sequence. The first step is the formula for taking the three refuges and five precepts (*triśaraṇa-pañcaśīla*) as an *upāsaka*. The second step is the formula for taking the Eight Precepts, ... the fourth step is the formula for taking the ten precepts as a *śrāmaṇera*, ... and the seventh step is the formula for entering the *Upasampadā* among the great *saṅgha*, with the sections for *bhikṣuṇī*-ordination omitted.

By contrast, in the DhV, becoming an *upāsaka* is not prescribed as a prerequisite for *pravrajyā*. Therefore, this structural feature in the Tan version should not be regarded as a deliberate innovation, but rather as a reflection of negotiating the preexisting differences among the schools.

4.3. The Particularity of the Procedure for the Removal of Offences

The content of the procedure for the removal of offences roughly corresponds to the **pracchādana-khandhaka* (覆藏犍度) of the DhV as well as various *Prātimokṣa* related confessional formulas scattered across both the *Prātimokṣa-vibhaṅga* and the *Khandhaka*. However, most of these items do not correspond precisely with those found in the DhV; rather, they resemble practical records summarizing actual monastic procedures.

For instance, in the DhV, when a *bhikṣu* commits a *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence and conceals it, the *karmavācana* sequence proceeds as follows: requesting *pracchādana karmavācanā* (乞覆藏羯磨文), granting *pracchādana karmavācanā* (與覆藏羯磨文), requesting *pracchādana mūlāya-pratiṣṭhāpana karmavācanā* (乞覆藏本日治羯磨), granting *pracchādana mūlāya-pratiṣṭhāpana karmavācanā* (與覆藏本日治羯磨), requesting *ṣaḍrātrika-mānatva karmavācanā* (乞六夜摩那埵羯磨), then granting *ṣaḍrātrika-mānatva karmavācanā* (與六夜摩那埵羯磨).

In the Kang-Tan versions, however, *mūlāya-pratiṣṭhāpana karma* is omitted. This may be because *mūlāya-pratiṣṭhāpana* applied specifically to cases of reoffending during concealment of a *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence—a secondary transgression—and was therefore not a necessary part of the expiation procedure. The expiation of a *saṃghāvaśeṣa* offence could be completed through only three steps: *pracchādana karma*, *mānatva karma*, and *āhvayana karma* (出罪羯磨).

It is worth noting that procedures for the removal of offences do not appear as an independent section in the Kizil Ming-oi manuscripts, whereas in the Pāli *karmavācanā* they are preserved as a separate textual unit.

4.4. The Connection Between the *Poṣadha* and *Varṣā*

The *Poṣadha* ritual, positioned as the fourth section, diverges significantly in content from the DhV. In the DhV, the *Poṣadha* merely describes procedures for *chanda-dāna* (與欲), reciting the *Prātimokṣa*, and addressing exceptional circumstances, but it does not include any *karmavācanā*. In contrast, the Tan version presents the *Poṣadha* section explicitly in *karmavācanā* form.

In both the Kang-Tan versions, the first *karmavācanā* following the *Poṣadha* recitation concerns appointing a monk to allocate dwellings and bedding. This corresponds

precisely with the Sanskrit karmavācanā fragments from Kizil (No. 241), in which the recto and verso contain, respectively, the conclusion of the Poṣadha and the beginning of the Varṣā procedure—the first item being the appointment of a monk to allocate dwellings and bedding. Similarly, both the Kang-Tan versions continue with the Varṣā karmavācanā, while the Gāndhārī karmavācanā fragments also describe monks entering the monastery to begin the rains retreat. This continuity of structure across different schools suggests a shared ritual framework, and it provides further counterevidence to the assumption that the Kang-Tan versions are mere reproductions.

4.5. The Kaṭhina Robe Ceremony

The Kaṭhina is not listed as an independent section in Kang-Tan versions but is instead incorporated into the Pravāraṇa. Following the conclusion of the Pravāraṇa, the ritual includes the presentation of Kaṭhina robes to both bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs, temporarily exempting them from five rules. Fragments of this section in Sanskrit have been found at Murtuq and Sängim. Notably, the verso of manuscript No. 217 from Sängim contains the formula: “[j]ñaptiṃ kṛtvā karma kartavyaṃ śṃotu” (Having made the motion, the karma is to be performed; listen!)—a typical formulaic expression of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Karmavācanā tradition. In the DhV, the Khandhaka section treats the Kaṭhina as an independent chapter, and it is not directly connected to the Varṣā-khandhaka. If the text were copied strictly in sequence, it would not yield the form found in the Kang-Tan versions. However, when the sequence of karmavācanā procedures performed at the conclusion of the Varṣā is taken into account, the structure of the Kang-Tan versions proves to be highly coherent.

4.6. The Others

The seventh distribution of robes corresponds to the Cīvara-khandhaka of the DhV, dealing with the disposal of robes belonging to deceased monks. Eight fragments relating to this topic have been discovered at Kizil Ming-oi, suggesting that this section held considerable importance as an independent component across multiple karmavācanā traditions. However, in the DhV the karmavācanā procedures related to robes are not limited to the disposal of the robes of deceased bhikṣus, but also include matters such as the distribution of robes during the rains retreat. Consequently, the fact that these materials are not fully copied, even when the DhV is taken as the source, is a point that deserves attention.

The same situation can be observed with regard to the eighth section on the procedure that makes medicinal substances allowable, and the ninth section on miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings. At present, there are no manuscript fragments in other languages with which these sections can be compared. From the perspective of the structure of the DhV, however, these chapters likewise bring together multiple topics within a single unit and exhibit clear signs of editorial organization. They appear to function as highly condensed summaries rather than as verbatim copies organized strictly according to individual contents.

5. The Structure of Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Karmavācanā Texts in the Dunhuang Manuscripts

5.1. Bhikṣu Karmavācanā Texts

The Chinese Buddhist understanding of the function of karma is clearly reflected in the repeated practice of extracting karmavācanā from the Vinaya Piṭaka. This demonstrates that karmavācanā served as practical manuals—concise compilations of essential procedural items regularly employed by monks and nuns in daily ecclesiastical life. Consequently, even if these texts were direct excerpts from the Vinaya, their structure inevitably mirrors the concrete ritual needs and organizational thinking of Chinese Buddhist monas-

tics at the time. However, such a structural formation must have been the result of gradual development rather than a single act of compilation. To clarify this process, it is necessary to examine additional karmavācanā manuscripts excavated from the Dunhuang caves.

Tsuchihashi Shuko conducted a statistical study of fifty-five karmavācanā manuscripts preserved in the British Library collection. Relying on Lionel Giles' catalogue, Tsuchihashi identified three early karmavācanā manuscript copies. The first, S.4636v, titled "*Baiyiwu*" (百一物), is not itself a karmavācanā text. Tsuchihashi included it, however, because the same "*Baiyiwu*" heading appears in S.4672, which he regarded as the most ancient karmavācana exemplar.

Manuscript S.4672 is a miscellaneous compilation, bearing the note "compiled by the bhikṣu Daoji (道集)," and is generally dated to around 550 CE. Tsuchihashi summarized the material into thirty-three items (Tsuchihashi 1980, pp. 431–32), in which bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas, and others are mixed together in a miscellaneous compilation, making it impossible to discern a clear karmavācanā structure. Accordingly, Tsuchihashi regarded the text as having been copied from the Vinaya or from early, non-standardized karmavācanā manuscripts.

By dating the composition relative to Sengqu's compilation *Yaoyong*, Tsuchihashi inferred that S.4672 must predate Sengqu's work. His reasoning was that the *Yaoyong* explicitly claims to have been excerpted from the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, whereas S.4672 mentions the "*Sapoduo fa*" (薩婆多法) but diverges in content from the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya and other extant versions. Given also the existence of early Sarvāstivāda manuscripts such as S.797, Tsuchihashi posited that S.4672 might have been copied from an older recension of the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya.

This reasoning, however, is weak. Tsuchihashi presupposes that any unstructured, miscellaneous compilation must necessarily predate the more organized forms of karmavācanā. If S.4672 is considered, under his framework, to represent a "standardized" stage immediately preceding the nine-fold structure seen in the Kang-Tan versions, then we find no discernible structural evolution between the two stages. Such miscellaneous compilations are better understood as excerpts copied from multiple sources for purposes of study, resembling anthologies or notebooks of extracts. In any case, they cannot be regarded as representing an ancient form of karmavācanā. Since a karmavācanā text is defined as the normative basis for the ritual acts performed by bhikṣus, it is unlikely that such texts would have emerged from the outset in a disordered or unsystematic form.

Moreover, since S.4672 contains passages from the *Youposai jiejing* (優婆塞戒經), accordingly, Tsuchihashi argued that in the early karmavācanā compilations edited in China, the perspective of layman was given particular importance, and the ritual formulas concerning the ordination and practices of laymen were organized into what were termed miscellaneous karmavācanā that included lay-related material. In the subsequent stage, represented by the Dharmaguptaka Karmavācanā, these were reorganized into karmavācanā texts concerned exclusively with monastic affairs (Tsuchihashi 1980, p. 347).

However, from the non-Chinese karmavācanā materials discussed above, we can observe that the three refuges and five precepts for upāsakas are incorporated into the stage of conferring ordination. Accordingly, even if S.4672 copies the *Youposai jiejing*, this incorporation is by no means unreasonable—especially when viewed from the Sarvāstivāda perspective—nor does such textual inclusion result from the omission of this portion during the Chinese redaction of karmavācanā texts; rather, the inclusion pattern originates from a disciplinary difference: the Dharmaguptaka did not position the upāsaka stage as a preliminary phase to monastic ordination.

Since S.4672 should not be defined as an archaic form of karmavācanā, we therefore classify the remaining bhikṣu karmavācanā texts into two types: one following the nine-

fold structure consistent with the Kang-Tan versions, and another with a structure that does not correspond to this version. On this basis, we seek to elucidate the developmental trajectory of karmavācanā textual structures.

Firstly, manuscripts whose structure and content are broadly similar to the Kang-Tan versions include:

S.1039—the codex is fragmentary at both beginning and end. Between the lines of the second folio, there is an inscription reading “Huiye ji” (惠業記). The identifiable entries indicate eleven numbered items, plus a bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā. In terms of its content, this manuscript appears to preserve karmavācanā material associated with the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya, but its internal ordering differs from that of the *Yaoyong*. Instead, S.1039 shows a structure more akin to the Kang-Tan versions, including: (a) robe distribution and the disposition of a deceased monk’s garments as item eight; (b) construction of lodgings and requesting daṇḍaśikyapraṭi as item nine; (c) the appointment of a *vaiyāpṛtyakara* (營事人) and the establishment of a pure ground as item ten; and (d) village and miscellaneous affairs as item eleven.

S.1039 subdivides the Kang-Tan versions on procedures that make medicinal substances allowable, and miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings into three separate items; the concrete formulations correspond closely to the Kang-Tan versions. Notably, where the Tan version cites the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya’s receiving thirty-nine-night karmavācanā and receiving **saptāha-karaṇīya dharma* (受殘夜法), S.1039 contains the authorized procedure for establishing a lay donor, such as *shouriwen* (受日文), and the Vinaya text in the prefatory section of the Ekottara division—features that distinguish the Sarvāstivāda system from other schools.

BD.1224—the recto is lost; the preserved content runs from the fourth section of reciting the prātimokṣa through to the ninth section on miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings, and it also contains the opening portion of a bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā.

BD.15283—a composite of bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā fragments; like the Kang-Tan versions, the extant fragments conform to the nine-fold structure.

Secondly, manuscript groups whose structure and content diverge from the Kang-Tan versions include:

S.2183—the opening title reads *Sifenlü jiemo yijuan* (四分律羯磨一卷); the codex tail is fragmentary. The prefatory remarks discuss sīmā regulations in the Mahāsāṃghika and Sarvāstivāda Vinaya traditions and set out a classification of karmavācanā forms. The text then proceeds to the first section of establishing the sīmā, where each item is explicitly labelled as a “single-motion karman” (*jñapti-karman*), e.g., the single-motion karman for establishing the sīmā boundary, the single-motion karman for dissolving the sīmā boundary, the single-motion karman for establishing the *mahā-sīmā* boundary, and the single-motion karman for establishing the *cūḷa-sīmā* boundary, among others.

The second section concerning ordination in the *Sifenlü jiemo*, including formulas for laypersons taking the Five Precepts and laypersons taking the Eight Precepts. The explicit tagging of each sīmā item as “single-motion karman” shows that S.2183 is similar to the anonymously translated *Baiyi Jiemo*, as it retains formal traces of translation based on karmavācanā procedures. Such inclusion within the ordination procedures of ritual formulas for administering the Five Precepts and the Eight Precepts to laypersons is not found in any extant Dharmaguptaka Karman text. Although only the two structural categories—sīmā establishment and ordination—are retained, the work is clearly not a complete reproduction of the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. It not only conflates classifications based on content and form, but also incorporates the Five and Eight Precepts for upāsakas.

BD.2787—this manuscript survives only in an incomplete form at the beginning, while the section following the material on confession and the removal of offence is struc-

tured as follows: the fourth section, reciting the prātimokṣa together with the procedure for *chanda*; the fifth section, the instruction of bhikṣuṇīs; the sixth section, regulations concerning dwellings and bedding; the seventh section, the pravāraṇā and receiving kaṭhina; the eighth section, distribution of robes and property of the deceased; the ninth section, the formal act for authorizing the construction of a dwelling and for requesting the storage of daṇḍasīkyapraṭi; and the tenth section, the procedure for establishing a purified ground. Notably, the section on instructing bhikṣuṇīs appears here as an independent item, whereas it does not occur as a separate section in other karma texts.

5.2. Bhikṣuṇī Karmavācanā

Since the bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā is largely revised on the structural model of the *bhikṣu* karmavācanā, investigating its structure and content is equally essential for clarifying the formation process of karmavācanā texts in early Chinese Buddhism. Among extant karmavācanā fragments preserved in Dunhuang manuscripts, those concerning bhikṣuṇīs are more numerous than those for bhikṣus. This phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā were not preserved as complete scrolls in the Buddhist canon, so ancient monks and nuns copied them separately for practical application.

Relatively complete bhikṣuṇī karmavācanā manuscripts include the following:

S.736—The final colophon states that the manuscript was copied by Bhikṣuṇī Xianyu (賢玉) in the ninth year of the Datong reign (543 CE), under the title *Dabiqiūni jiemo yijuan* (大比丘尼羯磨一卷). The text does not exhibit any clear structural divisions, although part of its sequence can be correlated with the nine-fold structure. Two items explicitly indicate their numerical position: the fourth section, after the reciting of the prātimokṣa and the purification procedure and the eighth section, distribution of robes and property of the deceased. Although the remaining sections do not specify their numerical order, their general sequence largely corresponds to that of the Kang-Tan versions. In terms of content, the text incorporates karma formulas drawn from the *Mahāsāṃghika* Vinaya, and at its conclusion it includes special provisions from the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya.

S.2935—This manuscript is damaged at the beginning, with a final title reading *Dabiqiūni jiemojing yijuan* (大比丘尼羯磨經一卷), copied by bhikṣu Qingxian (慶仙) in the fourth year of the Tianhe reign (569 CE). Both Jinyi (津藝) 250 titled *Biqiūni jiemo wen* (比丘尼羯磨文) and BD.2410 titled *Dajieni jiemo wen* (大戒尼羯磨文) preserve only the numbered sections “the fourth section, reciting the prātimokṣa and the purification procedure” and “the eighth section, distribution of robes and property of the deceased” suggesting that all three derive from the same archetype as S.736. BD.5278 and S.2935 represent further abridged exemplars, retaining only the section titled “the sixth section, distribution of robes and property of the deceased.”

Jinyi 251—Its colophon reads *Jiemo yijuan* (羯磨一卷), copied on the twelfth day of the fourth month in the ninth year of the Tianbao reign (558 CE) by bhikṣu Fahui (法慧). Although incomplete, it clearly belongs to the same system as the above exemplars, containing: the fourth section, reciting the prātimokṣa; the fifth section, varṣā; the sixth section, pravāraṇā; and the eighth section, distribution of robes and property of the deceased. Jinyi 28 preserves yet another parallel sequence: “the third section, reciting the prātimokṣa; the fourth section, varṣā; the fifth section, pravāraṇā, and the sixth section, receiving kaṭhina.” Although its numbering varies slightly, all these manuscripts represent the same textual family as the Kang-Tan versions’ nine-fold structure during its developmental phase.

S.754.—Its structure differs completely from that of the manuscripts discussed above, and the manuscript is fragmentary at both the beginning and the end. According to Fang Guangchang’s annotated catalogue of Dunhuang Manuscripts in the British Library, it dates to the fifth–sixth century and represents a karmavācanā compiled in accordance with

the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. It was never listed in later canonical catalogues. Although S.754 shows no explicit section ordering, in terms of content, it can also be correlated with the Kang-Tan versions, albeit with a different structure. In addition, the Beida (北大) D.170 preserves a section titled “the twelfth section, the procedure for the removal of offences,” evidently reflecting a different structural system.

6. Conclusions: Formation and Evolution of the Structure of Chinese Karmavācanā

From the preceding survey—covering monastic biographies, canonical catalogues, comparative fragments in other languages, and the Dunhuang-Turfan manuscripts—we may draw the following conclusions:

(1) The Kang-Tan versions are not mere copies. (A) Structurally, most of the Kang-Tan versions with a nine-fold structure have parallels in the Sanskrit karmavācanā fragments excavated at Kizil. Even where some transitional segments differ, they still correspond with Chinese karmavācanā sections. The chief peculiarity of this arrangement, in contrast to the Khandhaka structure, lies in the procedure for the removal of offences immediately after Ordination—a sequence also attested in the Pāli kammavācā tradition. (B) In terms of content, the Kang-Tan versions contain materials absent from the DhV. As Huaisu (懷素) already observed, the Kang version “often adds or omits passages and departs from the Vinaya text.” If these were merely transcriptions, the sources of these supplementary contents must be accounted for. (C) Monastic hagiographies and canonical catalogues alike attest to the translation and practical application of karmavācanā texts. Such early translations, although now lost, likely exerted an influence on later compilations.

Nevertheless, the Kang-Tan versions cannot be denied their linguistic affinity to the DhV and their structural distinctiveness. We have not found, in versions preserved in other languages, an arrangement in which the establishment of *sīmā* is placed at the beginning and the punitive *karman* procedures for *saṃghāvaśeṣa* are combined together with the confession procedures for other categories of transgressions under a single chapter entitled “*chuzui*” (除罪).

Accordingly, in accounting for the formation of the nine-fold structure, one can neither exclude the influence of karma practices and related textual traditions transmitted from India and even Central Asia, nor entirely dismiss the distinctively Chinese features reflected in its structural organization and editorial arrangement. Therefore, if the Kang-Tan versions that were incorporated into the canon are to be identified as formative editions of a karma text systematized in China, it would be most appropriate to regard them as products shaped both by foreign influences and by indigenous composition. Furthermore, the peculiar ordination karmavācanā for monks and nuns preserved in Japan’s Nanzen-ji deserves attention: though lacking subsequent sections, it does not begin with *sīmā* establishment and may represent the lost translation by Guṇavarman. Its absence among Dunhuang or Turfan copies further attests to its early disappearance.

(2) On the basis of the relatively complete manuscripts from Dunhuang and Turfan, we may outline the development of the structural formation of the karma texts as follows.

First, according to three dated *bhikṣuṇī* karma manuscripts from around the mid-sixth century—S.736, Jinyi 251, and S.2935—the karma formulas had already been classified and arranged in a certain sequence. This sequence is very close to the nine-fold structure found in the Kang-Tan versions and had already established the fixed order of the recitation of the *prātimokṣa*—*Varṣā*—*Pravāraṇā*. Only the sections on pure procedures and miscellaneous regulations following “distribution of the robes and property of the deceased” had not yet been fully systematized. This stage likely represents the phase immediately preceding the formation of the Kang-Tan versions.

The manuscripts BD.1224 and BD.15283 can be identified as copies produced after the structural framework of the Kang-Tan versions had already been established. Once the nine-fold structure had taken shape, it appears to have gained general acceptance within the Dharmaguptaka karma tradition. By the fourteenth year of the Kaihuang era (594 CE), as recorded in the *Fajing lu* (法經錄), the Tan version had been incorporated into the canon. This suggests that the formation of the nine-fold structure can be dated roughly to the end of the sixth century CE.

In addition, there are karma texts belonging to the Sarvāstivāda tradition that differ from the nine-fold structure. The karman manuscript unearthed in Kizil has been reasonably identified as Sarvāstivāda primarily on the basis of a distinctive feature: during the rains retreat, the Sarvāstivādins permitted monks to be absent for thirty-nine nights, a regulation that is highly unusual among the various Buddhist schools and thus serves as a reliable criterion for identifying Sarvāstivāda karma texts. Moreover, as noted above, the Sarvāstivāda tradition prescribes, prior to ordination, a formal procedure by which lay followers undertake the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts, as well as the Eight Precepts. This stands in clear contrast to the Dharmaguptaka tradition and provides an additional point of differentiation between the two systems.

S.754 and S.1039 both represent Sarvāstivāda karmavācanā, though differing from the *Yaoyong* (要用). While we cannot confirm the existence of Sarvāstivādin karmavācanā translations, their structures are parallel with nine-fold schema and even share affinities with the Kizil Sanskrit fragments.

The structure of the Kang-Tan versions became the basis of the *Sifenlü shanbu sui jiemo* (四分律刪補隨機羯磨). This work, expanding to ten sections, prefaced the *sīmā* chapter with a new prologue on the “origins of the karmavācanā compilation” edited by Daoxuan (道宣). Within its order, the procedure that makes medicinal substances allowable was elevated to the fourth position, and the procedure for the removal of offences was renamed *Chanliujufa* (懺六聚法) and placed ninth. From the Tang dynasty onward, this *Sifenlü shanbu sui jiemo* (四分律刪補隨機羯磨) gradually replaced earlier versions, becoming the dominant karmavācanā.

(3) On the relationship between the two Chinese systems, S.2138 is the only manuscript combining both content-based and form-based classifications of karmavācanā. No other language or Dunhuang-Turfan copy supports this format; it is therefore best seen as an individual scribe’s experiment. Nevertheless, the two systems were not wholly unrelated: both likely coexisted and circulated for a time. Yet as the very definition of karma shifted²³—and since a classification by ritual form proved impractical for monastic use—the form-based system quickly lost its functional value, leaving only the two Chinese translations.

With regard to the study of karma texts, Petra Kieffer-Pülz has advocated a comparative approach that examines the similarities and differences between the karma formulas embedded in a school’s Vinaya and those preserved in independent karma compilations, with the aim of clarifying the intermediate stages and minor developments that occurred in the course of their transmission and redaction (Kieffer-Pülz 2020–2021, p. 164).

However, such a comparison presupposes the existence of relatively complete karma texts within the different Vinaya traditions. At present, most of the Chinese karma texts have been shown to be copies rather than original translations; even those identified as translations are not complete versions. Furthermore, the karma materials preserved in other languages that can be attributed to specific schools, such as the Sarvāstivāda or the Mūlasarvāstivāda, survive only in highly fragmentary form, making it impossible to reconstruct their full structural framework. The difficulty this poses for comparative research is self-evident.

Nevertheless, the scholarly value of studying karma texts—particularly for understanding the development of monastic legal practice and textual formation—cannot be denied. The ritual formulas preserved in early Buddhist karmavācānā literature underwent repeated revision and adaptation across different historical and regional contexts. In response to changing practical and institutional needs, monastic communities either developed new liturgical texts modelled on earlier precedents or reconfigured existing ritual materials into alternative textual structures. Reconstructing the motivations, chronology, and patterns of these developments is of significant historical and philological value. Far from representing purely textual variation, modifications to ordination and disciplinary rituals often reveal broader transformations in social conditions, doctrinal perspectives, juridical and ethical understandings of monastic practice, and the institutional organization of the Buddhist saṅgha.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

T	Taishō shinshū daizōkyō 大正新脩大藏經. 100 vols. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡邊海旭 et al., eds. Tōkyō: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai 大正一切經刊行會, 1924–1934. Digitized in CBETA (https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/zh/ , accessed on 3 March 2026) and SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (https://21dzk.l.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/welcome_en.html , accessed on 3 March 2026).
Kang version	Tanwude lübu zaijimo (曇無德律部雜羯磨), CBETA 2025.R3, T22, no. 1432, pp. 1041a23–1051b18.
Tan version	Jiemo yijuan (羯磨一卷), CBETA 2025.R3, T22, no. 1433, pp. 1051b23–1065b10.
DhV	Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (四分律), CBETA 2025.R3, T22, no. 1428, pp. 567b22–1014b20.
Yaoyong	Shisong jiemo biqu yaoyong (十誦羯磨比丘要用), CBETA 2025.R3, T23, no. 1439, pp. 496a3–503c11.

Notes

- ¹ Ingo Strauch distinguishes between the “canonical formulae” and the “practical formulae” traditions of karma transmission. See (Strauch 2008, p. 25). Concerning their chronological relationship, Herbert Härtel has suggested that certain karma texts may in fact predate the Khandhaka itself. See (Härtel 1956, p. 16).
- ² The text examined here is attributed to Kang Sengkai (康僧鎧), who is from India active in the Cao Wei period, under the title *Tanwude lübu zaijimo* (曇無德律部雜羯磨), hereafter referred to as the Kang version; it was first incorporated into the canon in the *Kaiyuan lu* (開元錄). Another related work is attributed to the Parthian monk Tan di (曇諦) of the Cao Wei period, under the title *Jiemo yijuan* (羯磨一卷), hereafter referred to as the Tan version. As there is insufficient evidence to permit a more detailed investigation of the actual compilers of these two texts, the present author concurs with the view that neither Tan di nor Kang Sengkai can in fact have been the translators of these works.
- ³ Hirakawa Akira (平川彰) primarily examines the authenticity of the Tan di and Kang Sengkai versions from the perspective of translation terminology. See (Hirakawa 1999, pp. 210–16; Nishimoto 1955, p. 91; Ōchō 1958, p. 26).
- ⁴ CBETA 2023.Q4, T50, no. 2059, p. 325a1–9. This passage has often been regarded as marking the beginning of the Vinaya tradition in China, particularly because of Dharmakāla’s (曇柯迦羅) translation of the *Sengqi jiexin* (僧祇戒心). However, according to the

syntactic structure and phrasing of the Chinese text, it should be understood that Dharmakāla invited Indian monks to establish, for the first time in China, the ordination karma ritual procedure. This, therefore, represents the earliest record of the institutional introduction of karma in China. Whether this ritual practice was subsequently recorded in writing and transmitted as a text, or merely preserved as a performative tradition, remains uncertain. As the object of the phrase “the Vinaya of China began from this time,” the establishment of the ordination karma carries far greater significance, for it ensured the formation of a Chinese Buddhist monastic community governed in accordance with formal disciplinary procedure. The latest research concerning the initial transmission of the Buddhist Vinaya in China may be summarized as follows: Funayama Tōru (船山徹), in his article “*Truth and Falsehood in the Sengqi jixin: China’s First Translated Buddhist Vinaya in Chinese*” (中国初の漢訳律<僧祇戒心>の嘘とまこと) rejects the *Sengqi jixin* authenticity of the on three grounds. First, if the term *Sengqi* (僧祇) were an abbreviation of Mahāsaṃghika school, its use presupposes that the school was already known in China. Second, the name “*Mahāsaṃghika*” did not become known to Chinese Buddhists until around the early fifth century CE. Third, the *Tanwude jiemo* (曇無德羯磨), traditionally attributed to Tan di (曇諦), has been demonstrated by scholars such as Hirakawa Akira to be a pseudepigraphal work copied from the DhV. Therefore, the supposed *Dharmagupta* school could not have been known during the Cao Wei dynasty. See (Kishino 2024). In addition, *Chusanrang jiji* records that among the translations of An Shigao (安世高) there was a text titled *Yijuelü* (義決律), which some have regarded as the earliest Vinaya text transmitted in China. *Dasong sengshilüe* (大宋僧史略), fascicle 1, states: “In the third year of Jianning (建寧), Gengxu (庚戌) year, during the reign of Emperor Ling of the Han Dynasty, An Shigao first translated *YijueLü* in one scroll...” (CBETA 2025.R3, T54, no. 2126, p. 237c5-6) More recently, Associate Professor Li Can of Beijing Foreign Studies University has raised doubts regarding whether An Shigao’s *Yijuelü* is truly a Vinaya text. He argues that *YijueLü* may instead correspond to the *Arthaviniscaya-sūtra* rather than a disciplinary text proper. (Based on the author’s presentation at the 75th Annual Conference of the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies.)

⁵ CBETA 2025.Q4, T50, no. 2059, p. 341a25-28.

⁶ CBETA 2025.R1, T40, no. 1809, p. 511b20-24. Huaisu’s (懷素) use of the term “ji” (集, to compile) in this context may indicate that he no longer regarded the Kang-Tan versions as translations in the strict sense, but rather as compilations or assemblages of existing ritual materials. Moreover, Huaisu observed that Kang version contained discrepancies from the Vinaya text itself. If it were to be defined simply as a copy, then the phrase “diverges from the Vinaya text” would be difficult to explain. Hirakawa Akira proposed that the *Jiemo yijuan* (羯磨一卷) attributed to Tan di in the Taishō Tripiṭaka is actually the copy produced by the Vinaya master Guangtong (光統). However, Huaisu’s record states that Guangtong’s version “does not follow the order of the main text”. This suggests that although Guangtong’s work was based on Tan di’s text, the order of its entries differed from that of the “main text” (正文). See (Hirakawa 1999, p. 219). The present author infers that “main text” here refers to the nine-fold structure constituting Tan version. Yet, since the Tan version and Kang version share an identical structural arrangement in their main textual body, Hirakawa’s identification of No. 1433 as Guangtong’s copy appears doubtful.

⁷ In the *Upasampadā-khandhaka* of DhV, there is no karmavācānā for requesting the cīvara-pātra. In the section on the procedure for the removal of offences, the following are absent: the karmavācānā for requesting confession before the saṅgha; the karmavācānā for *nihsargika-pācittika* before three, two, or one monk; and the karmavācānā for confession before the saṅgha as a whole. In the procedure for the recitation of the prātimokṣa, there are no karmavācānā for: *chanda* and purification, receiving *chanda* and purification, transferring *chanda* and purification, and announcing purification and so on. In the rains retreat procedure, the karmavācānā for requesting the seven-day leave and the karmavācānā for requesting permission for absence exceeding seven days are missing, among others. In the section on the distribution of robes, there is no karmavācānā for distributing the robes of deceased monks, nor the procedure for handing over the cīvara-pātra of a deceased monk to a caretaker monk. In the medicinal allowance procedure, the karmavācānā for receiving seven-day medicines and for receiving lifetime medicines are absent. In the miscellaneous regulations concerning dwellings, there are no procedures for: requesting permission for a sick or elderly monk to carry a *daṇḍasīkyapratī*; granting such permission; or the karmavācānā for entering a village at improper times.

⁸ See (Yang 2016). According to the research by South Korean scholar Yoo Boo-hyun, the one-volume text of *Sifen biqiuni jiemo* was based on the Khitan Canon version. See (Yoo 2004).

⁹ Volume 68 of the Koryō Tripiṭaka, original manuscript preserved at Haeinsa Temple, South Korea, facsimile edition published by Xianzhuang Book Company, p. 407.

¹⁰ A Sanskrit Bhikṣuṇī Karmavācānā manuscript is held in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. According to the transcription by Michael Schmidt, this text is not a bhikṣuṇī karmavācānā proper: its opening narrative recounts Guṭamī petitioning the Buddha to allow women to be ordained, being initially refused, and then the Buddha, following Ānanda’s persuasion, establishing the Eight Respectful Practices for bhikṣuṇīs. If this were a proper bhikṣuṇī karmavācānā, the aforementioned origin story of the bhikṣuṇī ordination should not be present; therefore, this manuscript may likely represents the Bhikṣuṇī Skhandhaka. See (M. Schmidt 1993, pp. 239–88). Transcription source: https://gretil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/gretil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_bhikSuNikarmavAcanA.htm (accessed on 23 June 2025).

¹¹ See (Rhys Davids and Oldenberg 1881). Clough (1834), Spiegel (1841), Dickson (1875) all edited or translated the Pāli Upasampadā Karmavācā.

- ¹² See (Frankfurter 1883; Baynes 1892). For information on the discovery and preservation of Pāli karmavācanā manuscripts, see (Filliozat 1999).
- ¹³ Akira Hirakawa notes that in the fifth century, Buddhaghosa not mention Pāli karmavācanā manuscripts; therefore, their formation is relatively late and they hold limited reference value. See (Hirakawa 1999, p. 72).
- ¹⁴ See (Baynes 1892, pp. 53–75). In 1906, G.L.M. Clauson discovered a new Burmese Pāli karmavācanā manuscript (Bodleian Library, Oxford). Its content largely corresponds to Baynes' fourth manuscript, but T.W. Rhys Davids observed that the sequence differs from that in the khandhaka, reflecting the actual procedural order followed in Burmese monastic practice.
- ¹⁵ Herbert Härtel organized the manuscripts in the following sequence: A. Upāsaka, B. Pravrajyā and upasampadā, C. Poṣatha, D. Pravāraṇā, E. Varṣopagamana, F. miscellaneous (Civara vastu, Kaṭhina-vastu, Śayanāsana-vastu, Adhikaraṇa-vastu). These Karmavācanā manuscripts are preserved in SHT (Sanskrichandschriften aus den Turfanfunden) under the following volumes and numbers: I 29, 45, 46, I 120 + II 120, I 121–123, 124(?), 125–128, 129(?), 130(?), 131, 132, 133(?), 134(?), 135–138, 393, 395, 433, 435, 555, 570, 572, 651, 679 + III 854b + IX 2031(?) (rendering of all frgs. in IX), I 764; III 854(?), 858; V 1027, 1028(?), 1088a, 1215v2–6; VI 1484(?); VII 1655r4–6; IX 2441(?), 2567(?), 3135; X 3223, 4128, 4140, 4153; X 3765(?), 4152(?); XI 5777.
- ¹⁶ Transcriptions of the manuscripts can be found in (Härtel 1956, pp. 32–33).
- ¹⁷ See (Clarke 2014). From the page 78 to 79 is Manuscript I, which includes sixteen manuscripts, each with 7 to 9 lines. The text begins at folio 39 recto, line 1, and ends at folio 54 verso, line 2. Hinüber published a transcription of folios 39–42, which covers the Kaṭhina and Pravāraṇā (von Hinüber 1969, pp. 102–32). Folios 43–54 were edited by A. C. Banerjee and reprinted in 1977 (Banerjee 1977). In 2019, Masanori Shōno (生野昌範) published a revised edition of Gilgit Karmavācanā Manuscript I covering folios 43–54. See (Shōno 2019), pp. 57–106. This section corresponds to the Upasampadā karmavācanā. Manuscript II in the page of 79, consists of only three fragmentary manuscripts, with both beginning and end lost. Its content also pertains to the Upasampadā karmavācanā. For reference, see (Wille 1990, pp. 148–53).
- ¹⁸ Emmerick republished this Karmavācanā text, correctly analyzing several key nouns and pronouns crucial for understanding the Tumshuqese language, and identified that the ordinee in the text was a woman, indicating that this is a upāsikā Karmavācanā. See (Emmerick 1985).
- ¹⁹ K. T. Schmidt, in his unpublished doctoral dissertation titled (K. T. Schmidt 1986).
- ²⁰ See (Ogihara 2013, pp. 311–31). K. T. Schmidt argued that the Tumshuqese Karmavācanā was translated from Tocharian B, while Hirotohi Ogihara noted the close similarities between the Tumshuqese text and the Tocharian B *daśaśikṣāpadāni* 'ten precepts' (THT1102–1125), suggesting that both derive from the same Sanskrit original. Ogihara concluded that most Tocharian Karmavācanā versions align with the Sarvāstivāda tradition; however, some fragments show correspondences with the Mūlasarvāstivāda—for example, the allowance for leaving during the rains retreat differs slightly: forty nights in the Mūlasarvāstivāda versus thirty-nine nights in the Sarvāstivāda text.
- ²¹ For research on the Simā, see Kieffer-Pülz (1992).
- ²² Sasaki Shizuka (佐々木 閑), in his article "Oshō to Ajari", argues that prior to the formal establishment of the ordination sequence from layperson to Śrāmaṇera and then to fully ordained Bhikṣu, individuals over the age of twenty were permitted to become Bhikṣus directly. He identifies this as an archaic form of ordination. Shortly thereafter, however, this system underwent modification: even those over twenty years of age were required to temporarily assume the status of Śrāmaṇera before receiving full ordination. Nevertheless, Sasaki notes that in practice this change was largely formal, as the candidate, having just become a Śrāmaṇera, would immediately proceed to Upasampadā without any substantive interval—thus the essential nature of the process remained unchanged. See (Sasaki 1997).
- ²³ The author intends to discuss this issue in a separate paper.

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