

History of the Three Collective Pure Precepts

(compiled by Kokyo, based on Paul Groner's dissertation "Saicho and Bodhisattva Precepts" p.354-361)

Avatamsaka Sutra, Ten Dedications Chapter (Cleary translation, from Shikshananda, p.604)

Completed in Sanskrit ~300, translated into Chinese by Buddhahadra ~420 and Shikshananda ~700
T279.10.149b22 (Shikshananda):

"Extensively cultivating the practices of all enlightening beings, they treat beings with humanity and kindness, not acting in aggressive or harmful ways. They conceive the wonderful precious will to give peace to sentient beings, and establish profound determination for buddhahood; always abiding themselves by the three kinds of pure precepts (三種淨戒 in both translations), they also induce sentient beings to do the same... This is great enlightening beings' dedication of roots of goodness when abiding by the three bodies (collections) of pure precepts (三種淨戒 in Buddhahadra, 三聚淨戒 Shikshananda) and forever stopping slaughter, to cause sentient beings to attain the complete ten-powered knowledge of Buddhas."

(This is first use of 三聚淨戒, but no explanation of the three collective pure precepts is given)

Avatamsaka Sutra, Dashabhumika Sutra (Ten Stages Chapter), Second Bhumi (Cleary p.717)

T279.10.185a-c (Shikshananda):

"Having abandoned these ten bad ways of action, they live by the ten good ways of action and also lead others to them. Even more do the enlightening beings arouse toward all sentient beings desire for their welfare and happiness, with kindness, sympathy, compassion, and desire to care for them and protect them, thinking of all beings as equal to themselves, thinking of them as examples and teachers."

(These are not called three pure precepts, but are similar to later descriptions of them; ten bad ways of action in this chapter are the standard list of ten unwholesome actions of body, speech, and mind)

Bodhisattvabhumi Section, Yogacharabhumi Shastra by Asanga ~400 (T1579.30.0511a 瑜伽師地論)

Three precepts of Asanga, translated by Xuanzang ~650: 一律儀戒。二攝善法戒。三饒益有情戒

1. vinaya/standards of conduct precept (almost same characters as Shobogenzo Jukai & Kyojukaimon)
2. embracing/sustaining good dharmas precept (same characters as Shobogenzo Jukai & Kyojukaimon)
3. abundantly benefitting sentient beings precept (almost same characters as Shobogenzo Jukai)

Translation by Mark Tatz:

"What is complete ethics? Briefly, bodhisattva ethics is comprised by the lay side and the monastic side. This is known as "complete ethics." Furthermore, based upon the lay side and upon the monastic side there are, briefly, three sorts: the ethics of the vow (pratimoksha-samvara-shila), the ethics of collecting wholesome factors (kushaladharma-samgraha-shila), and the ethics of benefitting sentient beings (sattvartha-kriya-shila). The ethics of the vow (律儀戒) refers to undertaking the pratimoksha vow as one of the seven classes: monk, nun, nun-probationer, male and female novice, layman and laywoman (bhikshu, bhikshuni, shikshamana, shramanera, shramanerika, upasaka, upasika). Furthermore, it may be suitably understood as the householder (staying home) side plus the monastic (leaving home) side."

(This is the first extensive description of the three precepts, which seem to originate with Asanga)

Dashabhumika (Ten Stages) Sutra Upadesha by Vasubandhu, ~400 (T1522.26.0145c15: 十地經論)

Three kinds of precepts: 三種戒。一離戒淨。二攝善法戒淨。三利益衆生戒淨

Commenting on the passage above from the Ten Stages Sutra in the Avatamsaka Sutra, Vasubandhu uses the name "three kinds of precepts" from Ten Dedications Chapter of Avatamsaka, and defines them as:

1. freedom/detachment precept of purity
2. embracing/sustaining good dharmas precept of purity (same characters as Shobogenzo Jukai)
3. benefitting living beings precept of purity (almost same characters as Shobogenzo Jukai)

(Vasubandhu probably used his brother Asanga's three precepts to comment on Avatamsaka Sutra)

Bodhisattva Jewel Necklace Original Karma Sutra (Yoraku Kyo T1485.24.1020c 菩薩瓔珞本業經)
(Said to be) translated from Sanskrit into Chinese in the Later Qin Dynasty (384-417, time of Kumarajiva)
by the Shramana Zhu Fonian from China (probably really written in China, maybe around this time)
攝律儀戒。攝善法戒。攝衆生戒 (same characters as Kyojukaimon, first text in which these are used)
“Child of Buddha, to all bodhisattvas I now reveal the roots of all precepts. They are called the three
gates, namely (1: 攝律儀戒) the precept of embracing/sustaining vinaya/standards of conduct, which is
the ten parajikas (which, in this sutra, are the same as the ten major bodhisattva precepts of Brahmajala
Sutra – which also appeared at this time in China, translated or written by Kumarajiva); (2: 攝善法戒) the
precept of embracing/sustaining good dharmas, which is the 84,000 Dharma gates; (3: 攝衆生戒) the
precept of embracing/sustaining sentient beings, which is loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy,
and equanimity, to give all sentient beings ease and joy.”

(This is the first use of three precepts with same characters in Kyojukaimon, that we use today in Soto
Zen; this sutra, probably written in China, was probably based on Asanga’s Bodhisattvabhumi)

Bodhisattvabhumi Supporting/Sustaining Sutra (Jiji Kyo T1581.30.0910b07 菩薩地持經)

(Said to be) translated by Dharmaraksha in 418, but probably really written in China)

This sutra contains three precepts and other teachings excerpted from Asanga’s Bodhisattvabhumi, but
uses almost the same characters as Bodhisattva Jewel Necklace Sutra: 律儀戒。攝善法戒。攝衆生戒

By ~480 in China, there were two sets of bodhisattva precepts in use: “Yoga(chara) precepts (Yugakai 瑜
伽戒)” (three collective pure precepts, which were in use a bit earlier, based on Asanga’s
Yogacharabhumi, Bodhisattvabhumi Supporting Sutra, and Jewel Necklace Sutra) and “Brahmajala
(Sutra) precepts (Bonmokai 梵網戒)” (ten major precepts from Brahmajala Sutra 梵網經 and Jewel
Necklace Sutra, which became more popular over time). By the time of Zhanran’s Tiantai Bodhisattva
Ordination Manual (see below), these two sets were combined, as they are today in Soto Zen ordinations.

Zhanran’s Chinese Tiantai Bodhisattva Ordination Manual (~750)

This manual uses three collective pure precepts (攝律儀戒。攝善法戒。攝衆生戒) as the basis for
bodhisattva ordination ceremonies, and also includes an explanation of ten major precepts from the
Brahmajala Sutra.

Saicho’s Japanese Tendai Bodhisattva Ordination Manual: Peaceful Nation Book

(Wakokubon 和國本, ~800)

Almost identical to Chanjan’s manual, this manual uses three collective pure precepts (攝律儀戒。
攝善法戒。攝衆生戒) as the basis for bodhisattva ordination ceremonies, and also includes an
explanation of ten major precepts from the Brahmajala Sutra.

Dogen Zenji’s Shobogenzo Jukai (正法眼藏受, ~1250), Three Collective Pure Precepts (三聚清淨戒):

1. 攝律儀戒 Embracing/sustaining vinaya/standards of conduct precept (pratimoksha-samvara-shila)
2. 攝善法戒 Embracing/sustaining good dharmas/qualities precept (kushala-dharma-samgraha-shila)
3. 饒益衆生戒 Abundantly benefiting living beings precept (sattvartha-kriya-shila)

Dogen Zenji’s Kyojukaimon (教授戒文), also used in modern Sotoshu Gyoji Kihan (曹洞宗行持軌範)

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3. 攝衆生戒 Embracing/sustaining living beings precept (sattvartha-kriya-shila)

(These Soto Zen precepts texts and ordination manuals were directly based on Tendai ordination manuals)