I wrote the following is a letter in the voice of Faxian (337-422CE) to monks at his monastery in China. He was a Chinese Buddhist monk who, in 399 during the reign of Chandragupta II, began travels on foot from Ancient China to Ancient India. He wanted to find sacred Buddhist texts, and it is said that he walked through icy, mountainous, and rugged conditions to find what he sought. He traveled throughout Asia and spent his entire life translating and editing texts he collected. He wrote a book about his travels - *A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms* - which focused on Buddhism, geography, and history. Scottish scholar James Legge translated this work in the late 19th-century. I based some my letter on Legge’s work, which gives a background of Faxian (“Fa-hein,” as Legge writes) and his travels, found at [http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/rbddh10.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/rbddh10.pdf).

The letter from Faxian to the monks would have been written on paper, as it was invented in the second century A.D. According to Matthew Battles in *Library: An Unquiet History*, silk was also used as a writing medium, and books were typically compiled of wood or bamboo and sewn together. “Each strip contained a single row of characters, read vertically; the thin vertical form of these early books helped to determine the flow of Chinese writing on paper…” (Battles 35)

和尚,

I hope my letter finds you safe and well. I promised I would keep you abreast of my travels while I am on my quest to acquire and copy the cherished Buddhist scriptures. This is a great task that will take much time, but I believe that in the end, we will have words that will sustain us for many generations to come.
I have met with others who are on a similar journey for scriptures, and we have gotten along well as we share a common goal. We have encountered harsh desert, but we forge ahead in hopes of preserving the sacred texts.

We traveled for weeks across deserts and rugged terrain and found other monks in India who have given up their worldly lives and families. We stayed with them for a short time, but we were unprepared for the strictness of their rules and regulations, so we headed southwest through uninhabited country. But, when we do come across people throughout the land, we find that they are welcoming to monks.

After a couple months of traveling together, my companions have set out on their own course, but I stayed behind with a group who possessed texts that I believe are of great importance and I wish to copy them. I am on a journey with a clear purpose.

As I made my way through India, I met some monks who asked me if it could be known when the Law of Buddha first went to the east. He said the laws were first passed by word of mouth from parents to children, then by laborers who crossed rivers carrying sutras and the Books of Discipline. The word grew from here - these words are the dream of Emperor Ming of Han coming to fruition. Our words have traveled so far, by the sweat and fortitude of so many, I must make it my work to see that they are passed down through my sweat and fortitude. I believe in this journey and I have become closer to knowing that the path that I have chosen as a monk is indeed what was meant for my life. When I was ten years old, my father died. My uncle, urged me to always stay close to my mother and not become a monk. I replied, "I did not quit the family in compliance with my father's wishes, but because I wished to be far from the dust and vulgar ways of life. This is why I chose monkhood."
I believe that when Buddha came to North India, he left the print of his foot, I am seeing the same things that Buddha saw, and I am following in his footsteps. The same is true in South India, where I see that Buddhism is flourishing.

When I finish this great pilgrimage, I hope to return to Nanking, full of promise, hope, courage, and information that will be passed down to those who wish to learn it. With help, I will translate all of the works of which I have found that pertain to our beliefs.

Fa-Hein
*Illustrious in the Law*
