Kumārajīva and Prajñāpāramitā in China∗

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Introduction

As the carrier of ideas and religious values, sacred texts provide the religious institution identity as well as continuity and are thus of great importance. In the case of Buddhism which flourished outside its homeland, the translation of the Buddhist scriptures played a particularly important role. Kumārajīva’s Chinese translation of the Prajñāpāramitā (PP) texts is one of such examples, of which many had surpassied their parallel translations/retranslations. Some of his works such as the Chinese translations of the Lotus Sūtra and the Diamond Sūtra are recited daily by East Asian Buddhists up to this day, over 1500 years after their creation. These works have taken an incredibly strong root in the East Asian cultures and continue to show vitality not only as translations transmitting religious ideas, but also as works of great philosophical as well as literary values.

In this paper, I would like to examine the relationship between Kumārajīva, the PP texts and their Chinese translations during the crucial and formative period of East Asian Buddhism, namely the Six Dynasties from 3rd to 6th century C.E. By examining the circumstances in which Kumārajīva produced these important translations, I hope to answer the following questions - What motivated Kumārajīva to undertake the retranslation of such voluminous texts which occupied nearly half of the translator’s total output? And furthermore, what are the reasons which make these translations last for such a great span of time up to the modern age?

1 I thank Prof. Funayama Tōru for his valuable comments and corrections while I was preparing a draft of this paper. Needless to say all errors remain mine.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


* Bodhi dharmā (in China ca. 479 to died ca. 534 A.D.), is said to be from Xiangzi 孝子. Gandhavrat, i.e. Gandhāra, in the Zutang ji 祖塔藏 (Sūlō shō) of 952 A.D. and in the Jinge chuandeng lu 聚會傳燈錄 (Kōjika denro roku), T. 11 2076: 2174, of 1004 A.D. He is said to be the third son of royalty from Gandhāra, in southern India. As is widely known, his practice is closely linked with the Lai kānatā sūtra. Here I would like to mention that the mice from Sri Lanka, who arrived in southern China early in the fifth century, may well have been Mahāvīrakāriya monks who left their homeland for a welcoming South China. The Mahāvīrakāriya monks were very powerful at the time, antagonizing i.e. Mahāvīrakāriya.
1.0 Prajñāpāramitā in China prior to Kumārajīva

1.1 The translations of Smaller and Larger PP and other philological works

By the designation ‘Prajñāpāramitā texts’, we refer to a body of texts which took up Prajñāpāramitā, one of the six pāramitās or Perfections in Mahāyāna Buddhism, as its main subject-matter, reflected through their titles as well as their contents. Though there are no clear evidences as to when and where these texts were composed and/or compiled, archeological findings suggest that Prajñāpāramitā texts were in circulation in Northwest India and subsequently in Central Asia by the 1st century C.E.2 During the 1st and 2nd century when Buddhist missionaries from India and Central Asia entered China, PP texts were amongst the earliest Buddhist texts introduced to the Chinese. In 179 C.E., the Yuezhi monk Lokakṣema 洛若幹葉, known later as the Smaller PP. Subsequently, a number of retranslations were made on the same text, each time supposedly an improvement of the previous ones in terms of accuracy or style.3 As Lokakṣema’s translation was the first and had apparently the widest circulation, never supplanted by other retranslations before Kumārajīva’s arrival in Chi’ang-an, Daxing became synonymous with the Smaller PP.

Despite the apparent success of Lokakṣema’s Daxing, Chinese Buddhists from a very early age were well aware of the existence of a “larger” PP text of which the Smaller PP was believed to be an abridgement. Demands for a “true” and more complete PP manuscript in the legendary “West” continued to grow.4

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1 For the most comprehensive, though somewhat outdated, survey of PP literature, see Conze 1978. Amongst Kumārajīva’s PP-related outputs are the Larger PP 大品般若, the Smaller PP 小品般若, the Diamond Sūtra 金剛般若波羅蜜多經, the Hevajra Sūtra 舍利佛摩訶薩怛谶, the Sūtra of the Great Perfection of the Three Marks-sūtra 三相般若波羅蜜多經 (Prajñātattvāvatāpaśāla), and the Commentary to the Larger PP 大品般若論 (The commentary “Prajñātattvāvatāpaleśa” attributed to Nāgārjuna. Furthermore, the Mādhyamaka treatises translated by Kumārajīva belong also to the PP system of thought.

2 According to the Indian tradition as it was known to Kumārajīva through his translation of *Prajñāpāramitāśāstra (Dazhidào lun)*, PP was preached by the Buddha himself in the second turning of the Dharma Wheel. 然而，在印度，PP literature is attributed to the Buddha himself, as is reflected in the text’s name *Prajñāpāramitā* (the ‘Great Perfection’). The text was compiled under the auspices of the Indian emperor Ashoka, and it contains the earliest recorded use of the term ‘Buddha’. The text was widely distributed in the Mahāyāna movement which emerged gradually out of the older Original Buddhism. Conze gave the date of “the elaboration of a basic text” of PP as “ca. 100 B.C. to A.D.” (Conze 1978:113). The earliest fragments of PP manuscripts date to the 1st and 2nd century C.E. in the Gandhāra region in the “split-collection”, carbon-dated to 1st or early 2nd century (Falk 2009:7).

3 The Daxing jiù 興傳經 was the first retranslation of the same text based on the manuscript in the Sānshìlún 與什論, which was translated by Zhān Qian 澶撰 in 225 C.E. According to the Zhu yanzhu jiù三藏足論 (CSZJ), at least three more translations of the Smaller PP, none of which antedate, were made by Zhān Shou 鍾秀, Wei Shīduō 魏寺多, and Dhammarakkha 三勒迦.

4 One should bear in mind that to the Chinese mind of 2nd or 3rd century C.E., the idea of the “West” was still somewhat nebulous despite Zhāng Qian’s 賈島 renowned exploration of Central Asia in the 2nd century B.C.E. Beyond the Jade Gate 玉門 (near today’s Dunhuang), the entire landsmass of Eurasia together with India was known as the Xiyou 西域 or the Western Region. The idea of a sacred text in the “West” had undoubtedly inspired dedicated Chinese Buddhist to seek out the true text as well as stimulated public imagination.

In 257 C.E., the Chinese monk Zhu Shixing 朱士行 obtained the Larger PP in Khotan, which was eventually partially translated by Dharmaśrama as Guangze jing 光照經 in 286 C.E.5 Five years later, in 291 C.E., the text was translated in its entirety by Mokṣaḷa 末訶梨 as Fangguang jing 伏光經, which was extremely well received and was widely preached by Chinese monks in the subsequent decades. Fangguang jing, more expansive in contents, was believed to be a more complete version of the shorter Daxing jing, which was often criticized for its obscure, and by then archaic language.6 The availability of the translations of the Larger PP together with the older Smaller PP translations in the early years of the 4th century offered the opportunity of comparative analyses.7 In 382 C.E., a translation team consisting of Dharmaśrama, Buddhaśrama and Zhu Fonian prepared a “critical edition” of the Larger PP through comparison of the Sanskrit manuscript with the two, by then most authoritative PP texts, viz., Lokakṣema’s Daxing and Mokṣaḷa’s Fangguang.8 The result was essentially a retranslation of the parts which were found missing or different, together with notes on variations. Such meticulous philological works reflected the intense interest in these texts leading up to the end of the 4th century.9 Yet the ultimate solution would be a complete retranslation of the two texts, a task which awaited Kumārajīva seventeen years later when he was brought to the capital of China in 402 C.E.10

1.2 Popularization and indigenization of Prajñāpāramitā thoughts

To fully appreciate the atmosphere of the Buddhist community in Chang’an before Kumārajīva’s arrival in 402 C.E., one should bear in mind that starting from the early 4th century, Chinese Buddhism underwent rapid indigenization through a process known as géyì 格義. Though often criticized as misconstruction of Buddhist ideas as a result of misreading translation, and that the discussion contained therein was driven by concerns of indigenous ideas, such as the Confucian emphasis on social harmony, the Taoist emphasis on harmony with nature, and the Buddhist emphasis on karma and rebirth. However, these concerns coalesced to form the Chinese Buddhist tradition, which is characterized by a unique interpretation of Buddhist teachings that emphasized the importance of ethical conduct, the cultivation of wisdom, and the development of compassion. This tradition was further enriched by the contributions of Chinese thinkers such as Zhuangzi and Laozi, who were revered alongside the Buddha in Chinese Buddhism. As a result, Chinese Buddhism became a unique synthesis of the Indian Buddhist traditions and the Chinese cultural context, leading to the development of a number of distinctive concepts and practices.
scholars of Dark Learning 玄学 rather than genuine Buddhist concerns,11 geyi was nonetheless an important bridge that connected the Chinese intellectuals to the foreign religious philosophy. With respect to the PP, this transitional stage of indigenization was evidenced by the emergence of the so-called Six Branches and Seven Schools 六家七宗 who proposed different interpretations of the philosophy of the PP.12 As the Buddhist community continued to mature, geyi gradually phased out, and there was a greater desire to understand the original texts and what they truly meant, thus demanding a more sophisticated way of reading the texts. Amongst the most influential proponents of this idea was Dao’an 道安, who besides being a seminal figure in the history of Chinese Buddhism, was also a lifetime preacher of PP texts. Dao’an was remembered in particular for his observations through his long career working with the translations of PP texts, of the “five losses and three things ought not to be changed” 五失三不改.13 Up to the end of Dao’an’s life (c. 385), there was a feeling within the Buddhist community that there was still much to be desired with regards to the Chinese translation of PP texts. Besides the lingering problems of geyi, the relation among the texts of different Buddhist schools was never clear to the early Chinese Buddhist, in particular, the position of Mahāyāna. In that regard, the obscure language of the early PP translations certainly did not help. Doctrinally speaking, many of Kumārajīva’s translations have a clear Mahāyāna orientation, which laid the foundation as well as some of the subsequent development of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China.14

2.0 Kumārajīva and Prajñāpāramitā

According to his biography in Huijiào 慧聚’s Guosong zhuàn 会僧传 (CSZ), Kumārajīva, who had an illustrious career as a learned monk and preacher prior to his arrival in China, was well trained in the Agamas and Abhidharma during his stay at various monasteries in Kashmir and Kashgar. Sometime during his teenage years (c. 355-365 C.E.), Kumārajīva was converted to Mahāyāna after his encounter with the monk Sūryasoma, a prince of Shache � ===================================================================

12 On the doctrines of the various indigenous schools, see Tang 1958:229-277.
13 For a long time, this set of observations noted in his preface to Lokottara’s Daring was understood by both traditional Chinese and Western scholars as the “Five Losses and Three Difficulties.” I have adopted Och’s suggestion that yǐ 耳 should be interpreted verbally as “change” (Ōchō 1958:281; see discussion in Hurburgh 1976:426) since it fits better to the context of the preface.
14 One of the main contributions of Kumārajīva’s translations from a doctrinal point of view is that for the first time, Chinese Buddhists saw the difference between the Mahāyāna and the Theravādins from the point of view of the former. Subsequently, Buddhist polemics no longer followed the indigenous paradigm of the Dark Learning but rather directly from the Buddhist perspective (Zhou 1990).
15 Shache 莎車 was first mentioned in Han records and has been identified by scholars as Yarkhānd. Pelliot reconstructed Shache as “Saka/Shaka (Pelliot 1963:679).

[After being prompted by his mother to preach in China prior to her departure to India, Kumārajīva] rested in Kucha, staying at “Navahivāra. Later, inside a former palace next to the vihāra, he received Fangguang jing [i.e., the Larger PP] for the first time. As soon as he started reading it, the Māra concealed the text, causing him to see only a blank manuscript. Kumārajīva knew that it was the doing of Māra, resolved to overcome the challenge. The letters appeared after Māra departed, and he continued to study and recite it. [Some time later] again he heard a voice from the sky saying, “You are a genius. Why you need to read this?” Kumārajīva answered, “You pettish Māra, begone without delay. My mind is imperturbable like the earth!” During his sojourn of two years, he extensively preached the Mahāyāna sūtras and commentaries, making their mysterious and profound meanings clear. The King of Kucha made a Lion’s Seat in gold, covered with fine Roman textile and made him ascend on it to preach.16

With regard to the actual source of Kumārajīva’s PP manuscripts, there is very little we can say for certain since they were apparently already in circulation

16 While we do not doubt that the account given in CSZ was based on elements of historical veracity, Sengill’s CSZII offered us a slightly different reading: Sengill’s passage presented to us a number of key differences: Firstly, the passage preceding the miraculous event recounting Kumārajīva’s mother’s bidding to his son is missing; secondly, the miraculous event consists in fact of two parts which took place in two different places; thirdly, the laudatory passage following the miracles is also missing. Though CSZII and CSZ were composed roughly at the same time in early 6th century, considering Huijiào was still in his twenties when he worked on CSZ while Sengill was fifty two years older than the former, CSZ is likely the one to have borrowed its materials from CSZII. As CSZII was a work concerning translations and their translators while CSZ focused on the monks as eminent figures, it is understandable that CSZ would want to highlight to its readers the remarkable events concerning the individual. If this was indeed the case, CSZ had very likely deliberately concealed the events presented in CSZII and turned them into a dramatic series of interconnected events, showing the connection between Kumārajīva, PP and the arrival of both China. In conjunction with Kumārajīva, it may also be noted that miracles were associated not only with the Larger PP, but also the Smaller PP (T2655.55.54c; Chen 2001:53). For further remarks on the difference between the two narratives, see Lu 2004:18-21.
in Central Asia in the early 2nd century C.E., particularly in places like Khotan where Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished as a new religious movement.7 From a textual point of view, great interest and importance was Kumārajīva’s translation of *Mañjūśrī Prāṇāmārtikapadopāda* / *Dhātudhāvāna* (DZDL), a commentary to the Larger PP attributed to Nāgārjuna. According to Senguṣi and also an anonymous postscript in the tenth fascicle of CSZJ, the hundred fascicles of Kumārajīva’s translation of DZDL amounted only to less than a tenth of original of 100,000 *dūkas.*8 The extentiveness of this commentary suggested a strong tradition of PP scholarship up to 4th century C.E. in India.9

3.0 Kumārajīva’s translation of Prājñāpāramitā Texts

On 8th February, 402 C.E., through the arrangement of Yao Xing 美興, the later Qin King, Kumārajīva arrived in Ch’ang-an, after having been captured by Lū Guang 魯光 almost twenty years earlier when Fu Jian 馮讎 attacked Kucha. Kumārajīva was in his late fifties then and was almost immediately sent to work as the chief translator at Ximinggō 行冥閣 (Xiaoyaoyuan 蝗鳴園) in the capital Ch’ang-an. Kumārajīva examined the existing Chinese translations of various Buddhist texts against the Sanskrit texts he had access to. The result was that many discrepancies were found and new translations were deemed urgently needed.

During the first year of his stay in Ch’ang-an, Kumārajīva was apparently still improving his Chinese.10 As much as he wanted to be engaged in the translation of more challenging works, he compiled only a handful of shorter texts, including Zuochuan sanmei jing 坐禪三昧經, Anituto jing 阿羅陀經 and Xianjue jing ("Bhadraśakypaśamādhi-sūtra") 賢喻經, before he started translating the monumental DZDL of a hundred fascicles in the summer of the same year. The translation lasted three and a half years and was completed toward the end of 405 C.E. Shortly after the translation of DZDL began, Kumārajīva started translating the Larger PP (403-404 C.E.) concurrently, revising it against DZDL in tandem. During all this time, Kumārajīva was engaged in the translation of other texts as well, most notably the Sarvavīrāṇa vinaya and Āryadeva’s Sūtatsāra (402-404 C.E.). After completion of the content of DZDL and the Larger PP, Kumārajīva translated a number of shorter, but important sūtras, namely the Vimalakīrti-nirdesa 頌摩所說經 of three fascicles and the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka 法華蓮華經 of eight fascicles. He then made a revision of the meditation text Zuochuan sanmei jing before he spent about three months in 408 C.E. retranslating the Smaller PP. According to CSZJ, Kumārajīva completed in total the translation of thirty-five titles, amounting to 294 fascicles, almost half of which were the PP or related commentaries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year (C.E.)</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>No. of fasc.</th>
<th>Translation (months)</th>
<th>Revision (months)</th>
<th>Team members</th>
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<td>402-404</td>
<td>Sūtatsāra</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>402-405</td>
<td>DZDL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>c. 500</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>403-404</td>
<td>Larger PP</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>408</td>
<td>Smaller PP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>c. 700</td>
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<td>Dvādasāmukha-Sūtra</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>409-407</td>
<td>Mūlamādyāmakā-kārikā</td>
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<tr>
<td>407</td>
<td>Vajr. PP</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

Kumārajīva’s translation of PP texts and other Mādhyamika commentaries

One should bear in mind that PP was, by far, not Kumārajīva’s only specialization as demonstrated by the great variety of texts he had translated, encompassing the entire range of Buddhist literature - sūtra, vinaya and

7 As pointed out earlier, Khotan was where Zhu Shixing found a copy Larger PP. For the development of Mahāyāna in Central Asia, see Hirakawa 699-704.
8 See Senguṣi’s preface to DZDL. T214555.76c. For a detailed studies on this preface as well as its background, see Sih 1983.
9 Amongst the most widely accepted theory concerning the authorship of DZDL was Lamotte’s claim - “D’après les indications fournies par l’auteur, il semble avoir exercé son activité au début du IVe siècle de notre ère, dans le Nord-Ouest de l’Inde... en égard à son époque et aux sources qu’il utilise, il semble que l’auteur du Traité fut un sarvāstivāda qui peut-être tardivement au Mahāyāna.” (Lamotte 1970:15-XIV). For an alternative viewpoint which disputed the concept of authorship and suggested to approach the issue as a “historical event”, see Chou 2004.
10 Senguṣi’s account of Kumārajīva’s Sūtatsāra suggested that an earlier translation (402 C.E. or before) was deemed unsatisfactory due to his lack of mastery of Chinese, but by 404 C.E. Kumārajīva and his team were able to revise the text to make satisfactory T214555.77b. The account suggested the rapid improvement of Kumārajīva’s Chinese and/or the proficiency of his translation team. See also Jiazhāng’s 甲志賬 account T82723a.
11 In three fascicles by *Sanghāraksha*. According to LDSB, Kumārajīva’s translation was completed on the 5th day of the 1st month of Honggōi 鴻鳴 (402 C.E.) - T2023449.78a.
12 In three fascicles by *Vimalakīrti*. Also known as Wulangzhi shāng jīng 無量智上行經 in one fascicle. According to LDSB, it was translated by Kumārajīva on the 8th day of the 2nd month of Honggōi 鴻鳴 (402 C.E.) and was thought to be the same text as translated by Sanghāvanarman in the 4th year of Jiaping 慈平 252 - T2023449.78a.
13 First translated by Dhammarāja as Xianjue jing 賢喻經 in seven fascicles in the 1st year of Yuanlong 元隆 (500 C.E.) - T214555.76b. According to LDSB, the Kumārajīva’s retranslation of Xianjue jing in seven fascicles was completed in the 5th day of the 3rd month of 4th year of Honggōi 鴻鳴 (402 C.E.) - T2023449.48a. By the time of Senguṣi’s account (c. 510 C.E.), this retranslation, which was marked as having only seven fascicles, was no longer extant - T214535.10c.
14 One may expect the translation team of these smaller works be significantly reduced. In 408 C.E., Kumārajīva moved from Xiaoyaoyuan to Dashi to continue his translation work. In that year, according to Senguṣi’s account the Lotus Sūtra was translated with the help of General Yao Song 窮卓 and preached to over 800 monks.
To examine the characteristics of Kumārajīva’s translation of PP texts, I would like to follow the tripartite standard of translation, viz., 1) Faithfulness 信; 2) Intelligibility 意; 3) Style 韵. 21

4.1 Faithfulness

A large part of what motivated the retranslation of PP texts during Kumārajīva’s time was the inadequacy deemed of the earlier translations. Other attempts at retranslating the Larger and Smaller PP texts were made but were either considered unsuccessful or unable to reach a wide audience and subsequently became lost. Decades before Kumārajīva’s arrival in Ch’ang-an, as summarized by his view of the “five losses and three changes—ought-not-be”, Dao’an’s advice to his disciples concerning the need for better and more accurate translations was undoubtedly a response to not only Dao’an’s personal conviction, but also to the demands of a growingly sophisticated audience. 22 At any rate, the conditions where these new translations were produced were by far more favorable than before. To start with, Kumārajīva himself had an excellent training in Buddhist texts of different schools and even non-Buddhist texts in Sanskrit. Secondly, Kumārajīva was able to make use of the extensive commentary of DZDL to verify and edit the content of the Larger PP, which in turn served as a basis to his later translation of the Smaller PP. Thirdly, with a large team of collaborators who served to cross check the translations against the old ones, Kumārajīva strived to clear all possible doubts which might arise from discrepancies with either the Indic original or the earlier translation. Thus, according to Sengru, his disciple:

[Text in Chinese]

The Dhrama Master [Kumārajīva] with the Indic text held in his hand, spoke in Chinese. Going back and forth between the two languages, he examined the meaning of the text. The King of Qin [Yao Xing] read the old [translation of the] sūtra to determine its merits and demerits. By inquiring its way of interpretation, its meanings were made plain. Together with over five hundred people, including those senior śramaṇas who were experienced with doctrinal matters, such as Shi Huigong, Senglue, Senggian, Baodu, Huijing, Faqin, Daolui, Sengru, Daohui, Daobiao, Daoheng, Daozong, [Kumārajīva]

21 Though considered by many as diciṣṭ among Chinese scholars, the three difficulties in translation (即非三難) proposed by Ynm Fu 易緯 (1854-1921) in the preface of his Chinese translation of Evolution and Ethics in fact overlaps with the concerns of Dao’an and Kumārajīva without the specific religious ones.

Given our knowledge of the Indic PP texts, the textual variants contained in Kumārājīva’s manuscripts must be considerable, as shown by the fact that Kumārājīva himself found it necessary to modify his translation of the Larger PP on the basis of the commentary DZDL.28

4.2 Intelligibility

One of the greatest criticisms Dao’an directed toward the older translations, Dāoqing and Guanqian, was their awkward phrasing and obscure choice of words. Kumārājīva was undoubtedly trained in traditional Indian linguistics and was thus made aware of the importance of the unity of word (śabda) and meaning (artha). His concern with faithfulness was nonetheless predicated upon this belief in word-meaning unity and that the ultimate acid test being the intelligibility of the final product:

其事事各異也，皆是法師以義正之者也，如俗入骨等，名義異詳，故鑒像改之，即為誤入，入為導，持為性，解脫為背也。[1]1入為誤入，意為著解，豈能為著解。uit. 2.第云者云，正之以異同，異同之異，定之以字立。[2]第云者名，定之以字立，不可改矣，即用善之，是以異名異然，[3]第云者，名言言之公理，筆受之重情也。[CSZJ]

Although the text was roughly set with, when it was examined with the commentary, there were still places requiring improvement. Therefore, as one translated the commentary, one corrected the translation of the stūtra at the same time (CSZJ). As far as I can tell, abhirghāvāyatanā and abhirghāvāyatanā were either not translated or not found in the manuscript which Guanqian and Fengguang were based on. Senyushis understanding could therefore possibly be incorrect.

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29 In the current Chinese canon, however, heading titles are given to each chapter, which according to this description, could only be a later addition.
wrong, one corrected it with the [actual] meaning of the word. Those which could not be changed were written out [as it sounded]. Therefore new words appeared in great number, over half of which were of Indic phonetic origin. That was in fact due to the strictness of the craftsman and the consideration of the scribe.

The examples given in Sengyō’s Preface illustrated Kumārājīva’s organic approach toward intelligible translation delivering the intended meaning: *yin* 聲 (shade, “hidden”). In the older translations should not be considered wrong, for Kumārājīva, *zhông* 篇 (“collection”, “aggregate”) accorded better to the doctrinal interpretation. In the case of proper names, phonetic transcriptions were chosen for *ananda*, Gaṅgadeva, Akṣobhya, while translation was given *Suvannapūṣpa.* As for technical terms, phonetic transcription was given to *anuttara* sanyāsabodhī, while literal translation was preferred in the case of *āryāmārga.* These examples reveal that Kumārājīva did not have a single strategy to achieve his goal of intelligibility; instead he carefully evaluated his choice of words on a case-by-case basis as any translator would do under the best circumstances.

4.3 Style

With a highly qualified translation team supporting Kumārājīva’s work, his translations strove to be not only faithful and intelligible representation of Buddha’s words, but also products of literary merit. Given the highly affected formalism (e.g., *piṇḍi* 僧伽) which dominated the literary world during Kumārājīva’s time, his translation free of stylistic verbiage must have been perceived as a major innovation. As the main purpose of religious texts in a foreign land is to proselytize and is therefore functional, the main criterion for the success of Kumārājīva’s translations is their intelligibility. Prior to Kumārājīva, Dao’an in his observation of “five losses”, had noted that Chinese translations turned the prosaicsness of the Indic text into something elaborate, resulting in some inevitable “loss.” Kumārājīva was aware of his limitation and took a pragmatic approach by striking a balance between literality and artistry.

At any rate, the translation was a collaborative effort and the final products, in particular, his translation of the PP texts turned out to be highly successful due to their stylistic traits. Despite the prosaicsness of these translations, they were readily received by the Chinese readers for a number of reasons as pointed out by earlier scholars including Chen Yinke, Hu Shih and Jin Kemu. First, the largely dialogical framework adopted by the PP texts was analogous to didactic works like Analokes and Mencius which had a long tradition in China. Secondly, it reminded the Chinese audience of a form of dramatic prose known as *fu* 賦 which the literate Chinese were already familiar with. Such works contained distinct elements such as characters, dialogues, setting and a plot, dramatic elements not unlike the PP texts. In particular, this literary form contained a lot of repetition as narrative effects, a noteworthy trait of Mahāyāna literature in general as well. Finally, the content of Mahāyāna texts themselves was fascinating to the Chinese readers - drama filled with witty dialogues interspersed with miraculous episodes. Thus, with literary prototypes to model upon and contents which captivated the imagination of...
the audience, Kumārajīva's new translations must have struck the audience at that time as something both new and strangely familiar. Unremarkable as they are in the vast world of Indian narrative literature, the translations of Mahāyāna texts, especially those of Kumārajīva’s, opened up a new genre in Chinese literature characterized by romantic fantasy, dramatic plots and dialogue and elegant prose - a genre which continued to thrive throughout the subsequent ages, harking back constantly to their foreign prototypes.40

5.0 Legacy and Influences

Due to the great fame and achievement of Kumārajīva, his translations had undoubtedly gained popularity even during his lifetime, and had spread through his disciples to the rest of China. A further thrust of the popularization of these works took place a century later when Emperor Liang (reigned 502-549 C.E.) converted practically his entire kingdom into Buddhism. Amongst the Mahāyāna texts which Emperor Liang preached personally was the PP, to which he wrote a lengthy preface. By the time of the Tang Period, Kumārajīva’s translation of Vajracchedikā PP had become widely popular among the Chinese gentry.41 Like his predecessors, Xuanzang found discrepancies between the older translations and the latest Sanskrit manuscripts he brought with him from India and justified to the emperor of the reason he needed to translate it.42 Despite Xuanzang and his contemporaries having the opinion that Kumārajīva sacrificed accuracy for the sake of style, Xuanzang’s retranslations never superseded Kumārajīva’s with the sole exception of his retranslation of the Heart Sūtra which remains probably the only widely known translation of Xuanzang.

40 Cf. classic...tastic works such as...9th century, Xihuo ji (西窓記) and Fengsho zhuan (封神傳) (Hua 1928:248).

41 The traditional account of Huineng the Sixth Patriarch of Chan attaining Enlightenment through hearing Kumārajīva’s translation of the Vajraçchedikā-PP attests to the popularity as well as sanctity attributed to his works.

42 Xuanzang’s criticism toward Kumārajīva’s translation of the Vajraçchedikā PP as noted in his biography Datong dao’er xianning fo shi zuo (大唐第二聖人佛師作) is mainly toward the missing words/phrases. Emperor Tai’s criticism of “distortion of meaning through embellishment” is also part of interest and such sentiment was also echoed in other supporter of Xuanzang’s new translation (see next note). For example, The Comparison of the Three Methods of the Western Treasures (Fo jiao fang jing san fa cong cong) of 536 C.E. notes: “The translation of the Vajraçchedikā Sūtra is the only one that is properly translated.”

43 After Kumārajīva had passed away, his three thousand disciples, including Sengzhao 僧超 and others continued to preach Mādhyamaka philosophies based on Kumārajīva’s translation of PP texts and commentaries. Subsequent to the political turmoil toward the end of the Six Dynasties Period, Mādhyamaka teachings continued to spread throughout China and in the Sui Dynasty, the School of Three Treatises 三論宗 was founded by Vajra 華嚴 (549-623 C.E.) with the support of various emperors. The school continued to grow throughout the Tang Dynasty until Emperor Wu’s destruction of Buddhism (841-846 C.E.). Nonetheless, Kumārajīva’s translations became firmly established as part of the tradition, absorbed into all indigenous Buddhist schools including Tiantai, Pure Land and Ch’an.

Conclusion

Though Kumārajīva’s contribution to Chinese Buddhism was multifaceted and the Buddhist texts he brought to China were of a great variety, ranging from śūtra to vinaya, and from dhāraya-texts to abhidharma, PP and Mādhyamika texts held a special position in terms of his personal history, his career as a translator, as well as a legacy to Chinese Buddhism and society. The large success of Kumārajīva’s translation of PP texts was closely connected to the development of Chinese Buddhism when new translations of PP texts and a more refined hermeneutical language were urgently sought after by the increasingly sophisticated Chinese converts and gentry audience. With royal patronage, Kumārajīva and his large team of collaborators produced some of the finest prose translations of his time, half of which turned out to be PP-related texts and Mādhyamika commentaries.

From a more personal point of view, Kumārajīva from a very early age took a keen interest in Mādhyamaka commentaries as a basis of his Mahāyāna faith and philosophy. The miraculous incident associated with Larger PP and not other texts during Kumārajīva’s earlier years in Kucha, though somewhat exaggerated in the hands of Chinese writers, pointed nonetheless to his close relationship with the PP. Kumārajīva’s new translations, done in an innovative, colloquial yet artistic style, were well received by the Chinese readers and remained unrivaled by the successive retranslations. These texts were subsequently absorbed into all schools of Chinese Buddhism in the following 1500 years and became part of not only Chinese Buddhist tradition, but also the wider Chinese literary tradition whose impact continues to be felt.
ABBREVIATIONS

AP   Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā
AdP  Aṣṭadasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā
CSZJ  Chuanzang jiji (The Sōzan Zenji) by Sengyou 俊裕 (T2145). Early 6th c. (517 C.E)
DDJ  Daedjing (迦薩崛"
DZDL  Dazhiduhan (大智慧論) attributed to Nāgārjuna, trans. by Kumārajīva (T1509)
GSZ  Gaosengzhuàn (佛傳記) by Huijiao 惠礽 (T2059). Early 6th c. (519 C.E.+
KYK  Kokuyaku 伽羅鉾 出版一切経
KYSJL  Katsuyan shijiaoj luo (曹元朗校) by Zhisheng 知澄 (T2154). 730 C.E.
LDSJI  Lidai sanbao ji (歷代三寶記) by Fei Changfang 非長方 (T2034). 597 C.E.
PP  Prājñāpāramitā
T  Taihō shinshū daizōkōyō 金正新著大正藏
X  Wanruanzu 法護藏
XCSZ  Xu gaosengzhuàn (佛傳卷中) by Daoxuan 道宣 (T2060). Mid 7th c. (645 C.E.+
Z  Zürcher (see below)
ZZML  Zhongjing múlu (雑聚目錄) by Fajing et al. 法鏡等 (T2146). 594 C.E.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


## APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Mokșala T221</td>
<td>弟是真知愚是行者。</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kumarrāja T223</td>
<td>今世是善法。有其所得，故尔云云。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xuanzang T202-2</td>
<td>且当是说彼善法也。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Sanskrit (Kimura ed.)</td>
<td>(cf. T220-3/T202-4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Sanskrit (Kimura ed.)</td>
<td>言有之者。及所应说财施等，假名等。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Lokagepa T224</td>
<td>1）此世为善。</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhi Qian T225</td>
<td>且于今世为善，与善信之故，今于今世为善。</td>
</tr>
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<td>与善信之故，今于今世为善。</td>
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**Note:** The provided text appears to be a mixture of Chinese and Pali/Sanskrit, with annotations in English. The content is not entirely coherent and may require further context or translation to be fully understood.