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THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

A strategic analysis Buddhist history in East Asia

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BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Tradition & Innovation
(2 lectures)

Lecture 3

RISE OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA



Fig 1. Xuanzang's triumphal return to China from India, 645.

SYLLABUS

- (1) Introduction of Buddhism into China and the Han dynasty.
- (2) Buddhism during the partition of China after the fall of Han.
- (3) Eminent monk translators Kumārajīva, Pāramārtha, Amoghavajra.
- (4) Xuanzang, Chinese pilgrim and translator.
- (5) Other Chinese pilgrims: Faxian, Yijing.
- (6) Translation of Indic texts into Chinese: problems and process.
- (7) Decline of Buddhism in China: what we can learn from it.

1. FAVOURABLE PRECONDITIONS

Historical & social conditions.

- (a) Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), Asoka and the merchants on the Silk Road.
- (b) Of all the religions of India, Buddhism alone succeeded in establishing itself in China and E. Asia.
- (c) During the time of **Asoka** (r. c.265-238, or 273-232 BCE), Buddhism had spread throughout India and beyond in all directions.
- (d) By the **2nd century BCE**, Buddhism was well established in the **Indo-Greek Bactrian kingdom** in the NW of India.

2. EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Dan Lusthaus in his 1998 entry on “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese.” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*¹ divides the development of Chinese Buddhism roughly into four periods:

- (1) Early introduction of Indian and Central Asian Buddhism (1st-4th centuries);
- (2) Formative development of Chinese versions of Indian and Central Asian Schools (5th-7th centuries);
- (3) The Emergence of distinctively Sinitic Buddhist schools (7th-12th centuries); and
- (4) The Continuance of Chinese Buddhism into the present day (13th century on).

When Buddhism first entered China from India and Central Asia over two thousand years ago, the Chinese who favoured it generally viewed it as an offshoot of the native Huang-Lao Daoist tradition, a form of Daoism rooted in texts and practices attributed to Huangdi 皇帝 (the Yellow Emperor) and Laozi. Others, less accommodating of this “foreign” intrusion from the “barbaric” western countries, viewed Buddhism as a dangerous challenge to the social and ethical Chinese civil order. For several centuries these two attitudes fashioned the Chinese understanding of Buddhism.

The situation remained unchanged even as more and more missionaries arrived (mostly from Central Asia) bringing new texts, concepts, rituals, meditative disciplines and other practices. Buddhists and Daoists borrowed ideas, terminology, disciplines, cosmologies, institutional structures, literary genres and soteric models from each other. This exchange sometimes was so profound that today it can be very difficult to determine whose original idea it was. Meanwhile, polemical and political attacks from hostile Chinese quarters (such as the Confucianists) forced Buddhists to respond with apologia and ultimately revise Buddhism into something the Chinese would find not acceptable and attractive.

In the fifth century Buddhism began to emerge from its quasi-Daoist label by clarifying definitive differences between Buddhist and Daoist thought. Daoist vocabulary and literary styles were shed and new distinctively Buddhist terminology and genres were developed. Even though Mahāyāna Buddhism was a minority school in India and had few followers in Central Asia, it became the dominant form of Buddhism in China to the extent that the ancient Chinese Buddhists would often polemically label non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism as *hīna,yāna* (literally “little vehicle”).

By the sixth century the Chinese had been introduced to a various Buddhist theories and practices representing a wide range of Indian Buddhist schools. As the Chinese struggled to master these doctrines it became evident that, despite the fact that these schools were all supposed to express the One Dharma (Buddha’s Teaching), their teachings were not homogenous, and were frequently incommensurate.

By the end of the sixth century the most pressing issue facing Chinese Buddhists was how to iron out the disparities between the various teachings. Responses to this issue produced the Sinitic Mahāyāna schools, ie, Buddhist schools that originated in China rather than India. The four Sinitic schools are Tiantai 天台, Huayan 華嚴, Chan 禪 and Pure Land (Qingtu 清土). Issues that these schools share in common include Buddha-nature, mind, emptiness, Tathāgata,garbha, skillful means (*upāya*), overcoming birth and death (*samsāra*), and enlightenment.

3. LATER DEVELOPMENTS

From the 4th through the 7th centuries, Buddhist scholars in China periodically realized that their Buddhist texts and notions were at often variance with their Indian antecedents. They tried to correct the problem either through the introduction of additional translations or by clarifying differences between Buddhist and native Chinese ideas.

By the 8th century the Chinese had apparently become satisfied with the types of Buddhism they had developed since, from that moment on they lost interest in Indian commentaries and treatises, and instead turned their attention toward Chinese commentaries on the texts—such as the Lotus Sutra and Huayan Sutra—that had assumed importance for the Chinese Buddhist traditions.

Moreover, even though Buddhist missionaries continued to arrive in China and new translations continued to be produced through the 13th century, none of the significant developments in Indian Buddhism (such as Buddhist syllogistic logic) from the 7th century on had any lasting impact on Chinese

¹ See biblio.

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Buddhism, and many important texts and thinkers (eg, Dharmakīrti, Candrakīrti, Śāntarakṣita) remained virtually unknown in East Asia until modern times.

4. EMPEROR HAN MINGDI'S DREAM

In 64 CE, the emperor **Han Mingdi** (r. 58-75 CE) had a dream of a golden deity. After being told that it was the Buddha, he sent a delegation to India. The delegation returned with a group of monks including Kaśyapa, mataṅga and Dharma, rakṣa (a Median), who together translated a number of works, including The Sutra in Forty-two Sections (jointly translated by Kaśyapa, mataṅga and Dharma-rakṣa). [But the current version we have, though fairly old, was probably made during the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280).]

According to Chinese tradition, Buddhism arrived in China in the middle of the **1st century BC**. By this time, the **Kushans**, former allies of China against the Huns, were well on their way to establishing a Buddhist dynasty in northern India and Central Asia.

5. SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN CHINA

From about the middle of 2nd century CE, certain social conditions in China favoured the rise of Buddhism there:

- (a) **Anomie**. China was passing through a period of cultural unrest, as the Han dynasty declined. Traditional moral and social structures were weakened. Many people were looking for some satisfactory way of life that would provide some meaning and significance in human existence,
- (b) **Adaptability**. Buddhism met just the needs of the people because, unlike Brahmanism and other Indian religions at that time, it is not rooted in local cults. It was more socially adaptable.
- (c) **Mission**. The Buddhist monks belong to a missionary tradition: Buddhism is India's (perhaps the world's) first missionary religion.

6. RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN CHINA

By the time Buddhism entered China, indeed, long before that, China was an ancient and well-established culture with its own indigenous philosophy and religion. As such, Buddhism faced **severe difficulties** following its introduction into China.

- (a) **Confucianism** emphasizes family values, obedience to authority and social stability. Confucian scholars constituted the most influential sector of society. They generally disapproved of "barbarian" religions. It was precisely because of the religious character of Buddhism that appealed to the Chinese masses. For Confucianism was by its nature incapable of having popular religious quality.
- (b) **Taoism** was China's own popular religion, but it did not have the rational and philosophical depth that gave Buddhism greater prestige.
- (c) **Discipline** and standard of morality of Buddhism which was exemplified in the Buddhist missionaries inspired the Chinese.
- (d) **Antecedents**. Confucianism and Taoism had long provided the Chinese people with a vocabulary and philosophy of something beyond the daily grind. The cultural and intellectual bedrock helped Buddhism tremendously to express itself by means of contextualization.
- (e) **Adaptation**. The Buddhist monks adapted themselves to the local conditions. It was mainly Mahayana Buddhism that grew in China. With its emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal, used various skilful means (e.g. adjustment of Vinaya rules) to spread Buddhism and gain local support.

7. TRANSLATIONS

The Chinese language is deeply sophisticated, as attested by the various indigenous schools of philosophy. An important early step the Buddhist missionaries took was the translation into Chinese of numerous Buddhist texts (mostly from the Mahayana tradition).

An Shigao (安世高 Parthian prince from Anxi (An-hsi), prince of the Iranian Arsacid dynasty who renounced). He arrived in China around 150 CE. He worked in Loyang (148-170 CE). First great

translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, he formed a translation team that produced rough translations² of some 35 texts (in 41 fascicles; 20 texts extant), most of them were Nikāya texts concerned primarily with meditation. He set the precedent for future missionaries. Anyway, these are the **oldest extant translations** we have.

Among other translators of Iranian origin were the layman **An Hsūan** (169-189) and the monk **An Fa Ch'in** (281-306).

Lokakṣema (147-185, a Kushan) arrived about about the same time as An Shigao. Translated 12 texts (27 fascicles), but only 9 works extant. Among them are the oldest extant translation of the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines (*aṣṭa,sahasrika prajñā,pāramitā sūtra*). His translation of the term “5 aggregates” is the same as that of An Shigao, but he has many unique transliterated terms, some of which do not correspond to the correct Sanskrit terms. It is therefore assumed, says Kōgen Mizuno,³ that the original version of Loka,kṣema’s translations were not in Sanskrit but in some Indic vernacular or Central Asian language.

Contrasts. In contrast to An Shigao’s translations, which were chiefly of Nikāya sutras, Loka-kṣema’s translations were mainly of Mahayana sutras. Therefore, concludes Mizuno, we can suppose that Nikaya Buddhism was practised in Parthia (Iran), An Shigao’s homeland, while Mahayana was popular in Kushan.

8. MOUZI

In addition to the translations by Central Asian monks, one Buddhist treatise, called **Mouzi** (Mou Tzu), written in Chinese by a Chinese author (of the same name), survives from the Han dynasty. It is an apologetical work, a defence of Buddhism against Confucian critics.

Among other things, Mouzi addresses the Confucian concerns regarding filial piety as opposed to the Buddhist monastic ideal of renunciation, and the Confucian accusations that Buddhism is of foreign origins. Most surprising is its defence of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth, where Mouzi asserts that when one dies one’s immortal soul lives on to be born again and again.

Mouzi’s preoccupation with Confucian criticism of Buddhism, and his misunderstanding of basic Buddhist doctrine, indicate how tenuous was Buddhism’s foothold in Han dynasty China. Nevertheless, from this foothold, Buddhism was to develop into the dominant religion of the empire.⁴

9. PARTITION OF CHINA

The Han dynasty collapsed in 220 as a result of both internal decay and continual warfare with nomadic tribes on its frontiers. This was followed by the period of the Three Kingdoms, from which the Jin (Chin) dynasty emerged victorious in 280.

But after 60 years of war, China was weakened. Then a non-Chinese tribal people, known to the Chinese as Xiongnu (Hsiung Nu), seized both the traditional capitals of imperial China: first Luoyang in 311 and then Chang An (modern Xian) in 316. The Chinese gentry and intelligentsia fled to southern China. As a result, China was divided between a **“barbarian” north and a Chinese south** that was ruled by a series of weak Chinese dynasties.

As it turned out, China’s loss was Buddhism’s gain. Before the southern exile, few ethnic Chinese became monks or even lay converts. After the exile, the number of Chinese Buddhists grew rapidly. In the south, too, Buddhism grew rapidly. There was great opposition from the Confucians but there was little that the weakened southern aristocracy could do. Eventually the Sangha grew into **a virtual state within a state.**

The situation for **Buddhism in northern China** was altogether different from the south. One of the initial disadvantages for Buddhism was its “barbarian”, non-Chinese origins. However, this was not to be a hindrance in the north, now ruled by a succession of “barbarian” dynasties comprising various non-Chinese peoples from beyond China.

² Rough translation: for example, *arya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*, tr, as Eightfold Right Practice.

³ *Buddhist Sutras; Origin, Development, Transmission*, Tokyo: Kōsei Press, 1982: 45 f.

⁴ Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History*. Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing, 1994: 139.

10. THE SECOND PARTITION

China unified

The **Sui dynasty** (581-618) was able to reunify China. Great monks, like Zhiyi (Chih I), founder of the Tiantai school flourished during this period. The brief Sui dynasty was overtaken by the **Dang (T'ang) dynasty** (618-906), which is said to be the classical period of Chinese Buddhism, whose brightest Buddhist luminary was the pilgrim scholar Xuanzang [16].

With the fall of the Dang, the **Song (Sung) dynasty** (960-1279) ruled, but not alone, as it had to compete with alien Mongol and Manchu dynasties. Effectively, China went through a second partition.

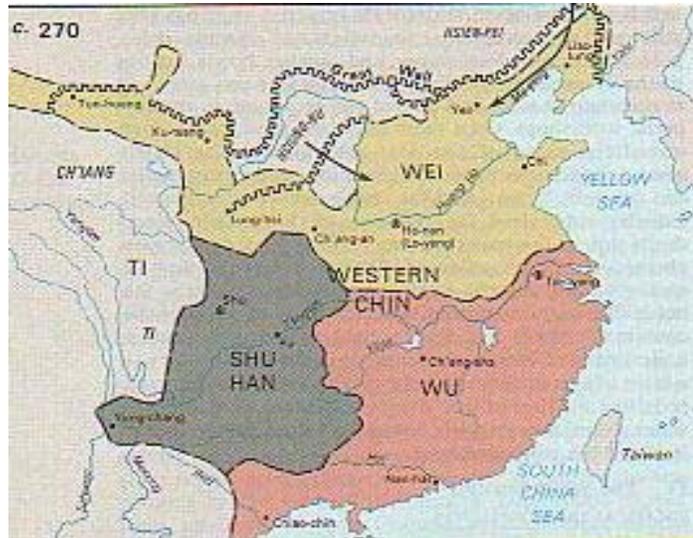


Fig 2. Partition of China, 3rd-4th cent.

Little is known of the fate of Buddhism under the Mongol **Liao dynasty** (907-1124) or the Manchurian **Jin (Chin) dynasty** (1115-1234). However, it appears to have fared rather well. For example, a Liao edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, printed in 1031-64, served as the primary basis for the Korean Tripiṭaka, which is now widely regarded as the best existing edition of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

Legitimization of power

These foreign dynasties understandably embraced the foreign religion Buddhism as the most appropriate religion to legitimize their rule in China. For this reason, Buddhism was both promoted and controlled by the northern imperial court. In order to control the Buddhists, a remarkable doctrine developed. The reigning emperor came to be regarded as a **living incarnation of the Buddha himself**.

The office of **National Preceptor (guoshi)**, the head of all the monks, was set up in the imperial bureaucracy, which brought Buddhism into very close relations with the government. As such, the Sangha was prevented from becoming a state within a state. The Buddhist monasteries were lavishly supported by the government.

In turn, the monasteries became administrative centres for the collection of taxes and depots for the storage of grain to be distributed to the peasantry during famines. The monasteries even served as low-security work farms for convict labour.

11. RELIGION OF THE MASSES

In theory, the taxes and grain collected by the monasteries remained the property of the emperor; but in practice, the Buddhist monasteries became the equivalent of **feudal estates**, administering large tracts of land and large pools of labour. These arrangements made the common people directly dependent on the local Buddhist monastery as their landlord and as their source of relief during periods of hardship and famine.

In order to reinforce the allegiance of the masses, the northern rulers carried out lavish Buddhist construction projects. These stunning monuments can still be witnessed in the enormous complexes of **man-made grotto sculpture** carved out of living rock at Datong (Ta T'ung) and Luoyang. They depict the legend of the Buddha and mythology of Buddhism in gigantic proportions designed to impress the simple, illiterate masses. Fortunately or unfortunately, the Datong and Luoyang sites were severely plundered by Western treasure-hunters in the 19th century, and many of the finest carvings may now be seen only in the museums of Europe and the US.

For the first time in China, **Buddhism became a religion of the masses**. As such, since Buddhism provided the ideological cement of the empire, it is understandable that the Buddhism that flourished was

popular, devotional Buddhism, as opposed to the intellectual Buddhism that generally gained acceptance in the south.

12. EMINENT MONKS

During the period of first partition, many eminent monks operated in both Chinas, north and south.

In the south, the meditation masters **Huiyuan** (慧苑 Hui Yüan) (1st patriarch of the Pure Land School), his disciple **Daosheng** (道生 Tao Sheng) (founder of the Nirvana School) and the Kashmiri monk **Buddha,bhadra**, all of whom were influential in the dialogue with neo-Daoism. **Bodhiruci** (菩提流志 P'u-t'i-liu-chih, arrived in China, 508). **Paramârtha** (波羅末陀 Chen-ti, c. 499-569) [20], an Indian monk and translator, was primarily responsible for the introduction of the Yogācāra or Vijñānavāda (Consciousness School) into China.

Such monks facilitated the development of Chinese counterparts to Indian exegetical systems, including San-lun (based on Indian Mādhyamika treatises). Ti-lun (based on the Daśa,bhūmika Sūtra Śāstra) and She-lun (based on the Mahā-yāna Saṅgraha). These schools evolved during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (c 317-c 589), “a period in which the more ascetic, devotional and thaumaturgic forms of Buddhism found a form in the ‘barbarian’ kingdoms of the north, while the more metaphysical and philosophical facets of Buddhism proved attractive to segments of the displaced Han elite in the south” (Sharf 2002:5).

13. KUMĀRAJĪVA

None of these southern monks, however, could compete with the Central Asian monk, **Kumārajīva** (344-413) and his team of translators in the northern capital of Chang An. Kumārajīva was a child prodigy, known from a very young age as a scholar of Buddhism. The northern emperor summoned him, but en route to Chang An, Kumārajīva was seized by a renegade warlord of Kucha in NW China and detained for 17 years. Although rendered inactive by this detention, Kumārajīva nevertheless used the time to master Chinese.

Finally, the emperor sent an army to liberate him but by the time he arrived in Chang An in 401, Kumārajīva was well over 50. Using the foundation laid by **Dao An** (Tao An), Kumārajīva organized a translation team on a grand scale, with hundreds of editors, subeditors, proofreaders and scribes.

Works of Kumārajīva

Between 401 and his death in 413, over just a decade, Kumārajīva translated 35 sutras and treatises (in 294 fascicles). Including:

- Prajñā,pāramita Śūtra (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras)
- Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Śūtra (The White Lotus Sutra)
- Sukhāvati,vyūha Śūtra (The Amitābha Sutra)
- Mahā,prajñā,pāramitā Upadeśa (The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom)
- Mūla,madhyamika Kārikā (The Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way)
- Śatika,śāstra (The Treatise in One Hundred Verses)

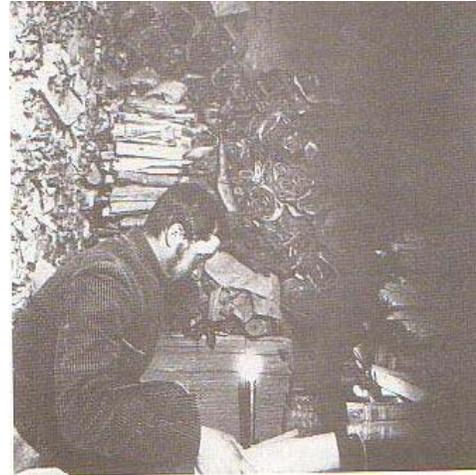


FIGURE 10.3
Photograph of Paul Pelliot, a French Sinologist, in Cave #17 at Dunhuang, examining by candlelight one of the thousands of manuscripts found there. Early twentieth century. (Archives Pelliot, Musée Guimet)

Fig 3. Paul Pelliot in Cave 17 at Dunhuang (early 19th cent)

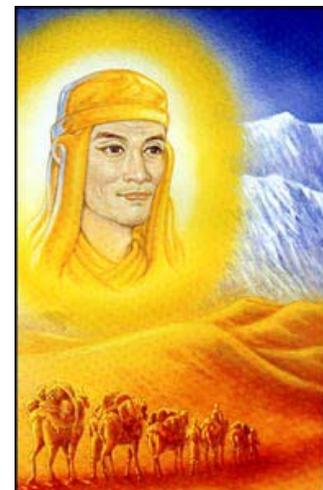


Fig 4. Kumārajīva

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Dvādaśa,mukha,śāstra (The Treatise on the Twelve Gates)
Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (The Ten-Category Vinaya).

Under Kumārajīva, **the language of Chinese Buddhism attained maturity**, finally liberated from the Daoist terminology that had distorted earlier translations. His translations contributed both to the development of true Buddhism in China and to the establishment of various Chinese Buddhist sects. For example:

Sanlun (Three Treatises) School

The Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way, the Treatise in One Hundred Verses, and the Treatise on the Twelve Gates.

Tiantai School

The White Lotus Sutra and the Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way.

Chinese monks, such as Dao-an 道安, felt there was an urgent need for a translation of the Buddhist **monastic precepts**, such as the Ten-Category Vinaya.

14. CHINESE PILGRIMS

From the 4th through the 7th centuries, Buddhist scholars in China periodically realized that their Buddhist texts and notions were at often variance with their Indian antecedents. They tried to correct the problem either through the introduction of additional translations or by clarifying differences between Buddhist and native Chinese ideas.

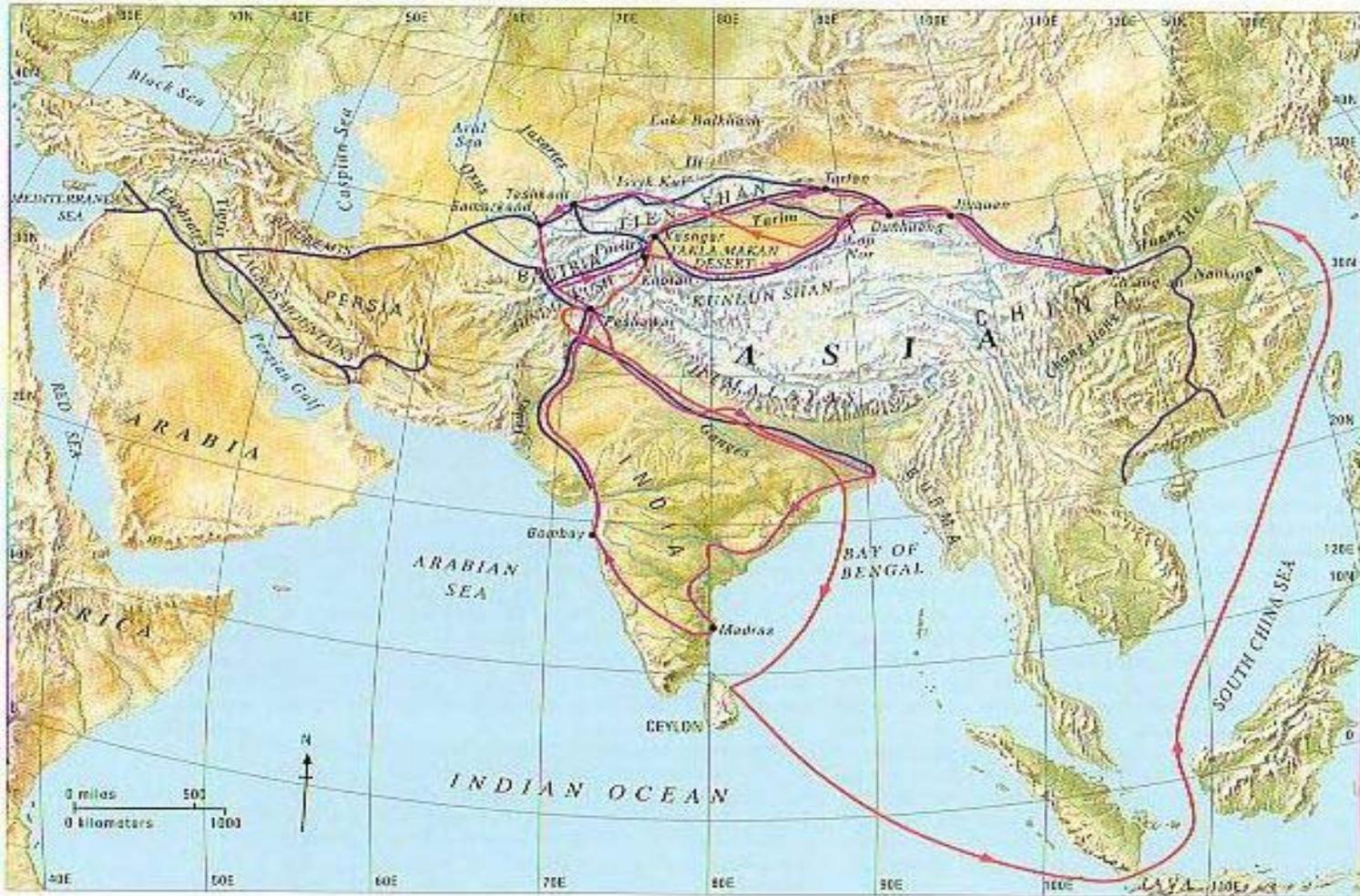
The early Chinese masters like Dao-an (312-385) and Sheng-yu (445-518) were aware of the profusion of inauthentic texts. They composed Chinese catalogues of Buddhist works⁵ “in large part precisely for the purpose of separating the dragons from the snakes and the jewels from the stones.”⁶ Most of the early translators of Buddhist texts were Central Asian or Indian monks, like Kumārajīva, who has taken the original sutras in China and translated them in order to transmit Buddhism to the Chinese.

At the end of the 4th century, there began an important new development: Chinese monks themselves travelled all the way to India to retrieve the Buddhist texts. The best known of these pilgrims were **Faxian** 法顯 (401-414), **Xuanzang** 玄奘 (627-645) and **Yijing** 義淨 (671-695) who made valuable records of their travels:

Faxian	<i>Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms</i> (India at the beginning of the 5 th century).
Xuanzang	<i>Record of the Western Regions</i> (Central Asia and India in the mid-7 th century).
Yijing	<i>Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms in the Southern Archipelago</i> (SE Asia and India in the late 7 th century).

⁵ Dao-an 道安 composed his catalogue in 374, Seng-you 僧祐 in 515 and Zhi-sheng 智昇 in 730.

⁶ Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮. Gikyou kenkyū 疑經研究 (Studies on Apocryphal Sutras). Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976:99. Quoted by Charles Muller, “East Asian Apocryphal Scriptures: Their origins and role in the development of Sinitic Buddhism,” http://www.tyg.jp/tgu/school_guidance/bulletin/k6.acmuller/acmuller.htm 2004:1.



KEY TO ROUTES	
	Trade routes
	Fu-Hsien AD 293-414
	Hsüan-Tsang AD 629-645

The Silk Road

15. FAXIAN (FA HSIEN) 法顯 (340?-420?)

During the time of Faxian (340?-420?), many Chinese monks had attempted to travel to Central Asia or India. However, Faxian was the first notable Chinese pilgrim to make the overland journey to India (via Central Asia) and return to China by sea (stopping for 2 years in Sri Lanka).

He left in 399, only two years before Kumārajīva arrived, and returned in 414, only two years after Kumārajīva died, to devote the rest of his life to translating the sutras he had brought back. One wonders if Faxian might have remained in China, avoiding all the hardships of the journey west to collect Buddha texts, had he known that Kumārajīva would be working in Chang An during his absence!

Faxian's courage and endeavour were to inspire more Chinese pilgrims to go west to study Buddhism and bring back Buddhist texts. All this efforts would contribute greatly to the maturing of Chinese Buddhism. Some of the important texts he himself translated or had translated were:

Vinaya of the Mahāsaṅghikas (T 1425)

Translated by Buddhahadra and Faxian at Nanjing in 416 from an original Faxian found in Pāṭaliputra, India.

Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka (T 1421)

Translated by Buddhajīva and his team, 423-424, in Nanjing from a MS discovered in Sri Lanka by Faxian. It is very close to the Pali Canon.

Mahā-parinirvāna Sūtra (Sutra of the Great Decease)

Translated by Faxian and Buddhahadra, 416-418

16. XUANZANG (HSÜAN TSANG) 玄奘 (c. 596-664)

Xuanzang (c. 596-664), who traveled during his 30s and 40s, was a **healthy and handsome young man**, charismatic features which people admired. Moreover, he had an excellent memory, great intelligence and linguistic ability. As such, he suffered almost no hardships wherever he went. Faxian, on the other hand, was weak with age, and his obstinacy prevented his being good at foreign languages. He stayed in Magadha for a few years to learn the local languages and Sanskrit, but could not manage to master them.

In his influence on later Buddhist thought and development, Xuanzang was second only to Kumārajīva, and Xuanzang translated more texts than any other translators. Of the 32 volumes of the **Taishō Daizōkyō**, the definitive collection of the Chinese canon, almost 7 full volumes, or one-fifth of all the surviving Chinese translations of sutras, are attributed to Xuanzang. In comparison, Kumārajīva's extant translations total only about a quarter of those attributed to Xuanzang. Despite being an ethnic Chinese translator, Xuanzang rendered more and better translations than any of the others, Indian or Central Asian.

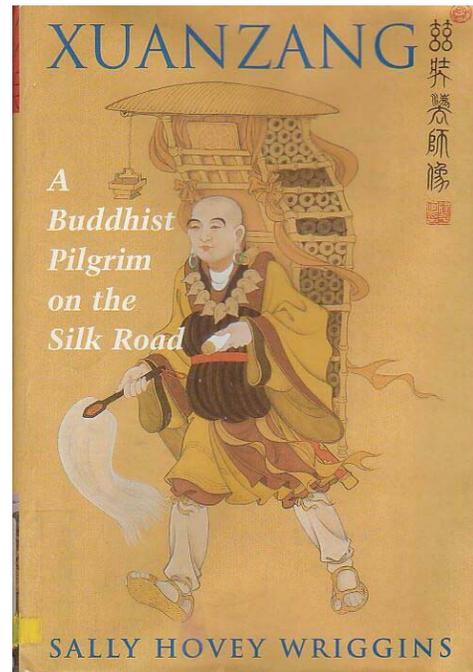


Fig 5. Xuanzang

Mahāyāna periods

Most of the texts brought to China by Kumārajīva belong to the **early-period Mahayana**, which presented Buddhism through the practice of faith. These texts contributed to the development of the doctrines of the Tiantai sect and the Sanlun school.

Middle-period Mahayana emphasized philosophical theory, such as the Vijñāna, vāda. However, even in India, different groups interpreted it differently, and when its texts came to China, local scholars added their own interpretations. As such, conflicting theories resulted. Pāramārtha [21] was the most outstanding translator of the middle-period Mahayana texts.

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By the time of Xuanzang's birth, the study of middle-period Mahayana Buddhism was still incomplete due to a lack of texts.

Life as a young monk

Xuanzang's father was a provincial governor, but not wanting to serve the new dynasty, he resigned his post. When the family experienced financial difficulties, Xuanzang's older brother joined the Sangha. When the situation worsened, he brought the young boy Xuanzang into his monastery in Luoyang to be ordained.

Even at an early age, Xuanzang showed a keen interest in the sutras. By 11, he was able to read the Vimāla, kīrti Sūtra, the Lotus Sutra and others with ease. By the time he was 15, he was studying advanced Buddhism. Then he moved to Chang'an in search of an able teacher.

When warfare and famine arose in that area, the two brothers fled to the west, eventually settling in the mountains of Szechuan, where he mastered Nikāya Buddhism. As such, Xuanzang became well-versed in both Nikāya and Mahayana Buddhism. However, while in India, he studied primarily the middle-period Mahayana doctrine of Vijñānavāda.

As a young monk in his 20s, Xuanzang wandered throughout China in search of capable teachers. When he was 29, the emperor, learning of his fame as a Buddhist scholar, invited him to reside in Chang An. Xuanzang refused because he was not confident in his understanding of Buddhism. It was then that he decided to go to India for firsthand study of Buddhism.

17. XUANZANG'S JOURNEY IN INDIA

His repeated requests were turned down by the emperor. In 629, when Xuanzang was about 30, severe frosts caused a famine in several cities, including Chang An and Luoyang. The government permitted and encouraged people to leave the stricken areas to search for food. Joining the hungry refugees, Xuanzang finally slipped away towards the west without the permission of the government.

For the next 16 years, Xuanzang, in his physical and mental prime, spent his time in travel and study. He mastered various Central Asian and Indic languages, and acquired a large store of Buddhist knowledge.

Xuanzang stayed in **Kashmir** for some time, studying both Nikāya and Mahāyāna treatises, such as the Abhidharma, mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra and the Abhidharma, kośa Śāstra, and also logic from Nikāya scholars, and Indic grammar. This was only a preparation by which time he had primed his linguistic ability and understanding of the texts.

Xuanzang in India

Xuanzang began serious study of Buddhist philosophy in **Mathura** (central India) and at the great **Nalanda** monastic university (to the east). At Nalanda, alongside 4000 monks and 2000 other scholars and students, he studied Madhyamaka and Yogācāra under prominent scholars. From the university's foremost scholar, Śīlabhadra he studied the Yogācāra, bhūmi Śāstra. Xuanzang studied both Nikāya Buddhism and Mahayana with Śīlabhadra for 5 years, at which point Śīlabhadra persuaded Xuanzang to return to China to propagate Buddhism.

While Xuanzang was in **Kamarupa** (modern Assam, in NE India), **emperor Harsha** (c. 590-607) invited him to the interreligious assembly which was held every 4 years and lasting 75 days. By then Xuanzang was already well-respected enough to be titled *Mahāyāna, deva*. Not surprisingly, he won the debate against India's foremost scholars at the assembly. Harsha and Xuanzang became good friends and in 641 sent an envoy to the Chinese emperor, establishing the first diplomatic relations between India and China.

18. XUANZANG'S RETURN JOURNEY

On his return journey, Xuanzang and his entourage journeyed through the NW Passage, crossed the Pamirs and into Central Asia. When he reached **Khotan**, he had lost the elephant that served as his vehicle. Xuanzang sent a messenger to the emperor of China asking for help. In the 1st moon of 645, when he was 46 years old, he arrived back in China.

When Xuanzang was ready to return home, he implored the Tang emperor Daizong (T'ai Tsung) (r. 626-649) for permission to bring into China the numerous texts and images he had collected. Although

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Xuanzang had left illegally, the emperor was delighted to receive him back. Hundreds of thousands of people lined the last 10 kilometres of the road into Chang'an, as if receiving a victorious general!

Impressed by Xuanzang's knowledge and character, the emperor urged him to leave the monkhood and accept a ministerial post. Xuanzang refused and was keen to translate the sutras he had brought back. The emperor, eager to learn from Xuanzang, constantly interrupted him to ask him about the western countries. Xuanzang might have written the *Record of the Western Regions* (Xiyouji) (containing descriptions of over 130 countries) and presented it to the emperor to prevent further interruptions!

Xuanzang's inventory

Xuanzang had brought back with him 150 grains of Buddha relic, gold and silver Buddha images, Buddha, 6 carved sandalwood Buddha images, and some 658 sutras and related writings. Of these, 224 sutras and 192 treatises were Mahayana works. He also had Nikāya writings (mostly sutras, vinayas and treatises): 15 Pali texts; 15 Mahāsaṅghika texts; 15 Saṃmitīya texts; 22 Mahiśāsaka texts; 17 Kaśyapiya works; 42 Dharmaguptaka texts; and 67 Sarvāstivādin texts. Furthermore, he obtained 36 general works on logic and 13 works on grammar. His translations include:

Yogācāra.bhūmi Śāstra (Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice) (646-648)

Abhidharma.kośa Śāstra (Treatise on the Treasure Store of the Abhidharma) (651-654)

Abhidharma.mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra (Treatise on the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma) (656-659), 2nd longest text, 1 full volume of the Taishō Daizōkyō.

Mahā.prajñā.pāramitā Sūtra (The Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) (660-663), the longest text, filling 3 full volumes of the Taishō Daizōkyō.

19. YIJING (I TSING) 義淨

Yijing (635-713) was born near modern and entered the monastery at 14. At that time, however, the monastic rules of his order were incomplete. Beijing Inspired by Xuanzang's experiences, Yijing (635-713) had already decided to go to India by the age of 15 to seek the complete Vinaya. With scores of other monks, Yijing left Canton in 671 (when he was 36), taking **the southern sea route**. The group decided to remain in Java, Sumatra and other islands along the way. In Śri,vijaya (modern Sumatra) Yijing studied Sanskrit, after which he alone left for India.

After visiting the holy places, Yijing studied at Nalanda. Yijing returned to China in 695 with almost 400 sutras, commentaries and other works. Of these, he eventually translated 46 works (in 230 fascicles):

Mūla.sarvāstivādin Vinaya (over 170 fascicles), which he regarded as the most important.

Suvarṇa.prabhāṣōttama.rāja Sūtra (Sutra of the Most Honoured King Golden Light), highly regarded in Japan.

The Sūtra on the Merit of Bathing the Buddha (710) (Taishō698 vol 16 pp 799c0800c).⁷

20. PARAMĀRTHA

There are altogether about 200 notable translators of several thousand Buddhist works in China in the 1100 years (2nd-13th centuries). Of these the most renowned are Kumārajīva, Paramārtha, Xuanzang and Amoghavajra. We have already looked at Kumārajīva and Xuanzang. Now let us spend some time studying the lives of Pāramārtha and Amoghavajra.

Paramārtha (499-569) was said to be the greatest translator in 6th century China. He was born in western India, where he mastered Buddhist doctrines. In his late 40s, he travelled to China by sea, arriving in Nanjing (the Liang dynasty capital) in 546. Soon after his arrival, a rebellion occurred.

In fact, Paramārtha had a difficult wandering life in China because of the situation then. Even after the Liang dynasty was succeeded by the Ch'en dynasty in 557, he was unable to find a permanent residence to do his work. Despite his difficulties, he managed to translate (in transit) a total of over 50 works (more than 120 fascicles), among which are:

⁷ See Daniel Boucher in Donald S Lopez Jr (ed), 1995:59-68 (ch 3).

Suvarna,prabhāsa Sūtra (Sutra of the Golden Light) (552)

Vajra-c,chedika,prajñā,pāramitā,hrdaya Sūtra (The Diamond Sutra) (558-569)

Samdhi,nirmocana Sūtra (Sutra on Emancipation) (557-589)

Sapta,daśa,bhūmika Śāstra (Treatise on the 17 Stages)

Treatise on Buddha Nature (557-569)

Abhidharma,kośa Śāstra (Treatise on the Treasure Store of the Abhidharma)

While translating, he also wrote commentaries for the use in lecturing to his pupils. Unfortunately, they have all been lost. If Paramārtha had had similar salutary conditions as Kumārajīva or Xuanzang, he could have produced several times the number of translations than that he actually did.

21. AMOGHA,VAJRA

Amogha,vajra (不空, more fully 不空金剛, 705-774) was a great translator and master of Vajrayana. He was a native of **Sri Lanka**. At the tender age of 14 he left for China and became a disciple of Vajrabodhi金剛智 (probably same as 金剛智三藏). He was ordained at the Guangfu Si in Luoyang at the age of 20.

When Vajrabodhi died in 741, Amoghavajra carried out his teacher's wishes and left for India and Sri Lanka. Amoghavajra was conversant in both Indic languages and Chinese, having lived in China for over 20 years. He returned to China in 746 with sutras and ritual implements. During the following 30 years, he served as the National Preceptor to three Tang (T'ang) emperors: Hsüan Tsung (r. 713-755), Su Tsung (r. 756-762) and Tai Tsung (r. 763-779).

22. PRINTING

Paper and printing are two Chinese inventions that have had an immeasurable effect upon Western culture, for without them the cheap and widespread circulation of books and knowledge that was one of the preconditions for the development of the modern world would have been impossible. (Denis Twitchett in Brian Hook (ed), 1991:340)

The oldest extant piece of **paper** in the world was discovered by archaeologists in 1957 in a tomb near Sian in Shensi Province, China. It is about 10 cm square and is dated between the years 140-87 BCE (Temple, 1991:81). **Woodblock printing** on paper and silk arose in China around the 7th century. It was the use of seals that in due course led to printing.⁸ By the 2nd century, stone was used to preserve permanent canonical versions of the Buddhist and other religious texts. Sometime between 605-617, a monk name Ching-wan of the Chih-ch'uan monastery of Yu'chou, began carving some of the texts of the Chinese Tripiṭaka on **stone slabs** in an effort to preserve some of the important sutras. The work continued for some centuries (the latest dated 1182), and today we have access to 14,620 stone slabs carved on both sides.⁹ From such stone records, the Chinese often produced (and still produce) **stone-rubbings**, which has become a Chinese expertise.

The entire Chinese Tripiṭaka (totalling 130,000 cut blocks) was first published in 971-983. The **metal type**, however, was developed in connection with the production of the Chinese Buddhist Canon during the Koryō period. This Korean invention is arguably the ancestor of the 15th century European development of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg and others [4.15].

⁸ Although seals were used amongst the Sumerians (3000 BCE) and the Babylonians (2000 BCE), the idea never led to printing (Temple, 1991:110).

⁹ "The rock cut canon in China: Findings at Fang-shan" by Lewis Lancaster, *The Buddhist Heritage*, ed Tadeusz Skorupski, Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989:143-156. Internet ed available.

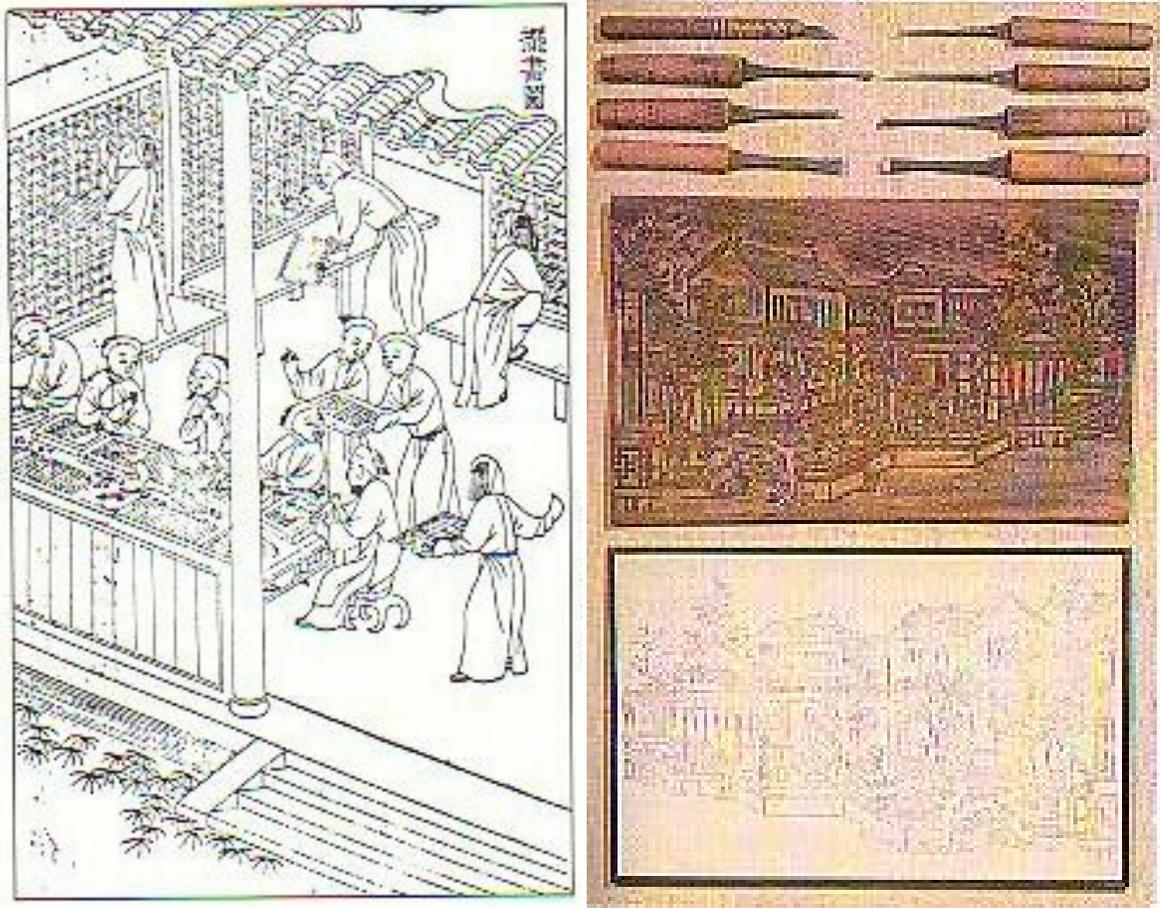


Fig 6. Printing was invented in China: (l) a printing workshop; (r) wood-carving tools for printing blocks. [Sources: (l) Merson, 1989:32; (r) Temple, 1991:111]

Oldest extant printed text

The oldest printed Chinese document is the Diamond Sutra (金剛經, or fully, 金剛能斷般若波羅蜜經, Vajracchedika Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra) discovered in Dunhuang by Sir Aurel Stein in 1907. The document, dated 868, is in the form of a roll with a total length of 5.3 m (17½ feet), printed from 7 separate blocks. The frontispiece (above) depicts the Buddha discoursing with his disciple, Subhūti, and surrounded by divine beings, monks and officials in Chinese dress. This is the earliest woodcut illustration in a printed book.

However, it is Korea that is the proud custodian of the world's oldest printed text. The oldest surviving printed work known to date is the **Dhāraṇī scroll** (dated between 704 and 751), discovered in the foundations of the Pulguk-sa pagoda at Kyongju, South Korea, in 1966 [4.9].

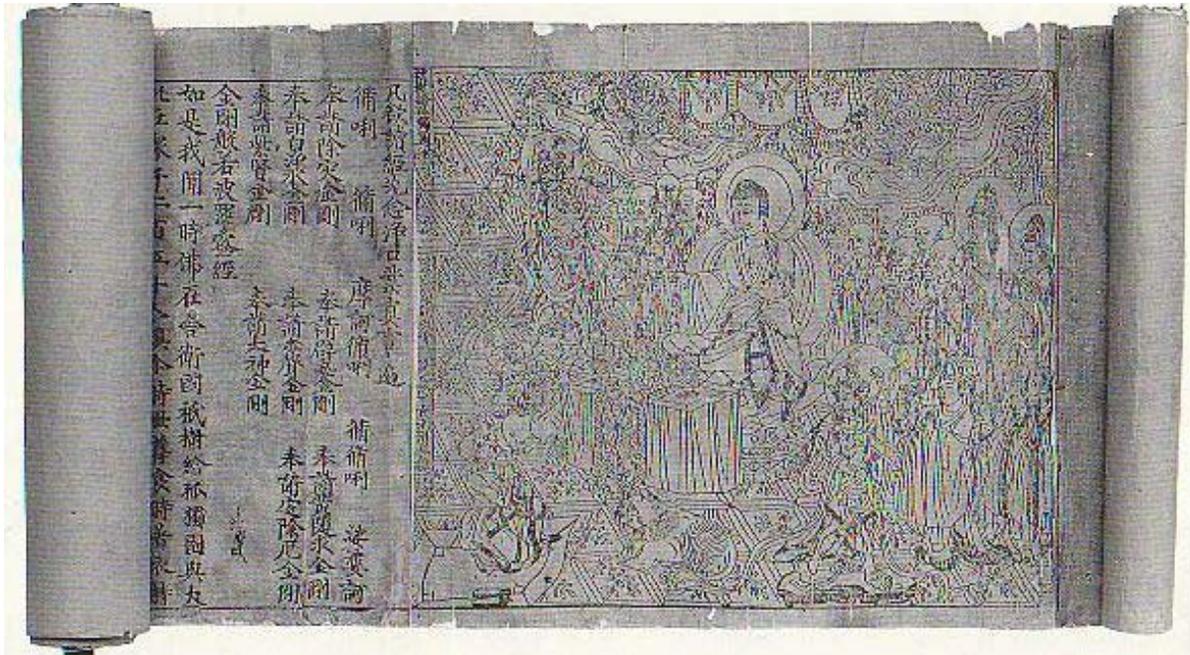


Fig 7. One of the oldest printed matter extant: the Diamond Sutra. [British Museum]

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Lecture 4 SUCCESS OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA

23. PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING SANSKRIT INTO CHINESE

Many difficulties attended the translating of Buddhist sutras from Indic languages into Chinese. Some of these problems were:

- (1) The two **languages** come from completely different language stocks. Sanskrit, Pali and other Indic languages belong to the Indo-Aryan family, while the Chinese language Sino-Tibetan family. The Indic languages are alphabetic while Chinese is monosyllabic.¹⁰
- (2) There is a vast difference between Chinese and Indian **cultures and philosophies**. Not only did translators discover it was nearly impossible to find synonyms or near-synonyms, or equivalent concepts for the scriptures in the Chinese language, but they also found a very basic difference between the ways of thinking and of expressing thoughts in the two languages.

24. FIVE LOSSES, THREE DIFFICULTIES

Even before Kumārajīva came to China, **Dao An** (312-385) had introduced the concept of “five losses and three difficulties” in translating Indic texts into Chinese. The great translator, Xuanzang, explained the “5 kinds of untranslatable words”.

Dao An’s theory of the “**five losses and three difficulties**” referred to five points in which the meaning of the original was lost through translation and to three things that were not easy to accomplish in translating.

¹⁰ Linguistically, Chinese is said to be an **analytic, isolating, or root** language, that is, one in which the words are invariable, and syntactic relationships are shown by word order. Indic languages, on the other hand, are said to be **synthetic, fusional, or inflecting** (also inflected or inflectional).

The 5 Losses

- (1) The **word order** in the Indic originals had to be reversed to conform to Chinese grammar.
For example, in Chinese the first of the Three Refuges is 自归依佛 *zì guī yī fó* (“I take refuge in the Buddha”), whereas in the Indic original it is expressed in the reverse word order as *Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (“To the Buddha for refuge I go.”)
- (2) The Indians preferred **simple, unadorned writing**, whereas the Chinese were fond of ornate, polished writing. When the translator gave priority to literary style to please the Chinese audience, the simplicity and accuracy of the original were lost.
For example, when Chih Ch’ien of the Wu dynasty (222-280) attempted to translate the Dharmapada in ornate Chinese style, the Indian monk, Wei-chi-nan—who had brought the original from India—cautioned him against shrouding the Buddha’s words in beautiful prose.
- (3) The Indic texts had many **repetitive** passages. To emphasize a point, they repeated a sentence or sentences several times, or in the case of the Nikāya texts, repetitions were a mark of the oral tradition. This textual style did not appeal to the Chinese, who deleted all repetitions when translating into Chinese.
- (4) The Indic texts often contained **nested sentences** (a sentence within a sentence). For example, it was not unusual to find a long explanatory passage of over a thousand characters introduced in the middle of a sentence so that it is difficult to trace the original point. These interpolations were generally deleted in the Chinese translations. As such, the complex meanings of the India originals were lost.
- (5) In Indic writing even after a point had been fully explained, the explanation was often repeated in a subsequent passage as **stock passages**. These repetitions were all deleted in the Chinese translations.

25. THE 3 DIFFICULTIES

- (1) The graceful and highly inflected ancient Sanskrit, for example, had to be translated into plain, clear Chinese.
- (2) Although Sanskrit sentences expressed very subtle nuances, in keeping with Indian thought of the Buddha’s time, the Chinese translations had to be palpable and clear to Chinese readers.
- (3) Although the 500 Arhats led by Mahā Kaśyapa had scrupulously compiled the texts by reconfirming the accuracy of each phrase, errors occurred in the course of their transmission. As such, the third difficulty actually referred to editorial skills and profound understanding of the Buddha Word that translators must have.

26. THE 5 KINDS OF UNTRANSLATABLE WORDS

Xuanzang’s theory of the “five kinds of untranslatable words” referred to five instances in which Indic words whose meanings were so profound that they defied a single, simple definition.

- (1) **Complex, pregnant Indic terms** that defied a single, simple definition. For example, *dhāraṇī* (formulaic incantation) were simply transliterated into Chinese (as “tuoloni”).
- (2) **Polysemic words** (word with multiple meanings). For example, the term *bhagavat*, Xuanzang pointed out, has six meanings, and all the meanings are integral to convey a complete understanding of the term.
- (3) **Indigenous words** for things that have no Chinese equivalents, such as the names of Indian plants, animals, minerals, places.
- (4) Words traditionally transliterated or **transcribed phonetically**. For example, *anuttara, samyak-sambuddha*. According to Xuanzang, such words had been transliterated ever since the time of Kaśyapa Mataṅga (1st century CE).
- (5) **Special terms** that would lose their flavour or special meanings in translated into Chinese. For example, although *prajñā* does mean wisdom, its fuller meaning of perfect wisdom is preserved only when it is transliterated.

27. CATEGORIES OF TRANSLATIONS

The translation of Buddhist of Buddhist texts into Chinese first began around the 1st-2nd century CE, and continued over a period of over 1000 years. Understandably, this resulted in several different translations of the same texts and several different transliterations of the same terms, reflecting the inclinations and influences of the place, time, associates, and collaborators of the translators.

Chinese translations are usually designated by one of three terms: “ancient translation”, “old translation” or “new translation”:

Ancient translations are those made before the time of Kumārajīva.

Old translations are those made between the time of Kumārajīva and 645, when Xuanzang began translating.

New translations include works by Xuanzang and all later translators (who generally followed his choices in the translation of specific terms).

Terms from both the “old translations” and the “new translations” are commonly used today. Apart from the inherent difficulties of the theories and doctrines of Buddhism, present-day study of Chinese texts is hindered by the fact that there are a number of translations of the same term.

28. XUANZANG’S DREAM

There is an interesting story about Xuanzang’s translation of the **Abhidharma, mahā, vibhāṣā Śāstra**, the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma. The Sanskrit original contains 200,000 verses (some 6,400,000 characters) and the Chinese translation comprises 3 full volumes of the Taishō Dai-zōkyō. It was the longest work translated by Xuanzang.

When Xuanzang began translating the Abhidharma, mahā, vibhāṣā Śāstra, he was already about 62. He and his disciples relied on three different Sanskrit manuscripts that he had brought from India. Because the sutra was **long and repetitious**, his disciples felt it would not appeal to the literary tastes of the Chinese, and they suggested that it would be better to **merely tease the essence out of the sutra and eliminate the repetitions** as Kumārajīva had done.

Xuanzang thought about this problem for a while. During that time, he began to suffer nightmares. He dreamed that he had to climb a steep and dangerous mountain road or was attacked by fierce animals, and he would wake up in cold sweat. He told his disciples about his dreams and at least decided to translate the sutra just as it was in the original. In his dream that night, the Buddha and Bodhisattvas appeared, emitting rays of light from between their eyebrows, and showed their great joy to him, and he revered them with incense and candles.

It was said that even the disciples assisting him with the translation had many auspicious dreams and saw favourable signs. For instance, at one point a mango tree outside the translation building blossomed out of season. Realizing that his life was drawing to a close, Xuanzang put all his energy into his work. The 600-fascicle translation was completed, after 4 years of toil, at the end of the 11th moon of 663.

On the first day of the following year, 664, Xuanzang’s disciples pleaded with him to translate the Mahā, ratna, kūṭa Sūtra (The Discourse on the Great Accumulation of Treasures). After translating only a few lines, he realized that his stamina had gone. On 5th day of the 2nd moon of that year (lunar calendar) Xuanzang’s extraordinary life came to an end.

29. SYSTEMATIZED TRANSLATION PROCESS

Those famous translators (whether native-born Indian, Central Asian or Chinese) who excelled in knowledge and skills in both Chinese and Indic languages, also have an excellent understanding of Buddhism faced very few problems in translating the Buddhist texts into Chinese.

One of the greatest translators before Kumārajīva was **Dharmarakṣa** (231-308?), born in Dun-huang, probably knew as many as 36 Indic and Central Asian languages. He translated over 150 works (over 300 fascicles) with very little assistance in transcription.

In the 6th century, **Pāramārtha** [21] also translated sutras into Chinese with little help. By the time that **Kumārajīva**, **Xuanzang**, and **Amoghavajra** were translating—in the 5th, 7th and 8th centuries respectively—translation work became more systematized. It was carried out with government support, and translators had the assistance of as many scholars as they required. This was the system of the translation bureau.

Kumārajīva's translation process

When Kumārajīva translated the Pañca,viṃśati,sahaśrika Prajñā,pāramitā Śūtra (The Discourse on the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines) at the beginning of the 5th century, he worked with a company of many learned monks. He translated the original Sanskrit manuscript into Chinese and at the same time explained the meaning of the sutra.

It should be noted here that in Kumārajīva's time, copyists were occasionally employed to transcribe the recitations of people who had memorized sutras in Sanskrit.

Emperor Yao Hsing himself held other translation projects of the same sutra: one made by **Dharma-rakṣa** in 286 and another by **Wu-ch'a-lo** in 291. Kumārajīva then used these translations for comparison to ensure accuracy.

About 500 learned monks and scholars then assembled to closely check the new translations and then refine the writing style. Then, they made fair copies of the manuscript, which they also proofread.

Although Kumārajīva's translations are very old, they are still widely read because:

- (1) the original meanings are fully conveyed in his translations;
- (2) his translations are so polished that they are smooth, being lyrical to read and pleasant to hear.

30. XUANZANG'S TRANSLATION PROCESS

When Xuanzang translated the **Yogācāra,bhūmi Śāstra** (Treatise on the Stages of the Practice), he proceed in these stages:

- (1) Xuanzang himself orally translated the Sanskrit manuscript into Chinese.
- (2) A recorder transcribed the oral Chinese translation.
- (3) A Sanskrit reader verified the correctness of the Sanskrit characters.
- (4) An ideogram corrector confirmed the accuracy of the written Chinese.
- (5) A meaning verifier carefully studied and discussed the meaning of each translated sentence.
- (6) A sentence arranger put them in the correct order.
- (7) A revision supervisor oversaw the whole project.

As such, Xuanzang's translations are very accurate.

31. SONG TRANSLATION PROCESS

During the Song dynasty, the translation bureau system reached its highest perfection with a nine-phase process:

- (1) The person who had brought the manuscript to China read it out aloud in Sanskrit.
- (2) The copyist transcribed not the Chinese translation, but the Sanskrit as it was read from the original manuscript.
- (3) A translator then translated the Sanskrit into Chinese. [Kumārajīva and Xuanzang both knew Sanskrit and Chinese, so they immediately began their own translations.]
- (4) The Chinese translation was checked by verifiers by comparing it to the Sanskrit original. This stage entails two processes: one group made certain that the meanings in the Sanskrit original had been correctly translated; another group confirmed that the significance of its content had been correctly understood by the translator of the Chinese version.
- (5) Editors checked the Chinese translation so that it would read smoothly so that it would appeal to the Chinese audience. [Literary embellishments became a tradition since the time of the Chinese translator **Zhiqian** (Chi Ch'ien) of the Wu dynasty (222-280).]
- (6) Another group of editors then examined the translations for correctness of content and consistency.
- (7) The chanters then recited the Sanskrit original, a ritual that was performed at the commencement of scriptural translation work or lectures on the Dharma.
- (8) If there were other translations of the text available, a group of editors would refer to those other versions and compare the two to evaluate their respective merit and to weed out errors in content. [This method was also followed by Kumārajīva and Xuanzang, and the latter pointed out many errors in Pāramārtha's translations of sutras that Xuanzang himself translated.]

- (9) The supervisors then inspected the whole translation project at each stage and were responsible for its smooth progress.

2. GENUINE CHINESE SUTRAS

Canonical texts

Not all original Buddhist texts are the *ipsissima verba* of the Buddha alone. There are texts that record the statements by monks and by lay followers; some by Brahma or Indra; some by various demons; and some are statements made after the Buddha had passed away. Moreover, many sutras assumed to have been spoken by the Buddha have undergone considerable change during the several centuries of oral transmission.

However, we do know that some texts are very old. For example, **the Aṭṭhaka,vagga** (The Chapter of Eights) and **the Pārāyana,vagga** (The Chapter of Going to the Far Shore) of the Sutta Nipāta of the Pali Nikāyas are also found in the Sanskrit **Āgamas** (the Saṃyukta Āgama and the Ekōttara Āgama).

We now know that many sutras—in Pali, Sanskrit or any other Indic language—were most likely not spoken by the Buddha himself in exactly the form they have been handed down to us, and still less do the Mahayana texts (composed much later) contain the Buddha’s exact words. Nevertheless, both the primitive sutras and the Mahayana sutras are considered Sakyamuni’s genuine teachings because they embody the true spirit of Buddha Dharma. They may be regarded as the genuine records of the Buddha Word.

Genuine Chinese sutras

In Chinese Buddhism, however, there appeared sutras that were not translations from Indic languages, but that actually originated in China. Of these, there are two kinds: the genuine and the apocryphal. The genuine Chinese sutras were compiled because:

- (1) The sutras translated from the Indic languages often did not accord with Chinese thought or with Chinese understanding of Buddhism. They had to indigenize the texts.
- (2) The Chinese could not find in these translated texts what they considered as effective or ideal ways of teaching Buddhism.

33. GUIDELINES FOR GENUINE CHINESE SUTRAS

Like their Indian counterparts, the Chinese authors are unknown, but they composed Chinese sutras with the intention of dissemination of the Buddha more effectively and more correctly. Such sutras are in harmony with the original teaching when examined in the light of **the Seal of the Three Laws**:

- (1) All things in the universe constantly change. (“All things are impermanent.”)
- (2) All things in the universe are interrelated. (“Nothing has an ego.”)
- (3) The ultimate freedom is to be rid of greed, hate, self-delusion. (“Nirvana is quiescence.”)

Among such genuine Chinese sutras are:

The Sutra of the Perfect Net (Fan-wang ching)

The Sutra on a Bodhisattva’s Original Action (P’u-sa ying-uo pen-yeh ching)¹¹

The Sutra on the Meditation on Amitabha Buddha (Kuan wu-liang-shou ching)

The Sutra on the Immeasurable Meanings (Wu-liang-i Ching). Preamble to the Threefold Lotus Sutra

The Sutra of Diamond Meditation (Chin-kang sa-mei ching)

All such texts are accepted as genuine and included in the Taishō Daizōkyō.

34. APOCRYPHAL CHINESE SUTRAS

In the early days of translating sutras from Indic languages, apocryphal sutras may have been fabricated to interpret Buddhism in terms of the philosophy of Daoism and the philosophy of the Daoist writer Juangzu (Chuang-tzu) (fl. 4th cent.BCE). Such sutras were however used in good faith to adapt a

¹¹ These two texts together set forth a system of discipline and spiritual attainment of Bodhisattvas that had not yet been codified in India.

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“barbarian” religion to Chinese society. However, because they often distorted Buddhism, they are regarded as apocryphal, or even spurious.

However, it should be noted that apocryphal sutras are found throughout Chinese history. The apocryphal sutras produced in China are readily distinguishable from the genuine sutras. The apocryphal sutras and texts fall into seven general categories:

(1) Extended texts of the early translations.

John Brough first revealed an interesting case of apocryphal sutra (though he did not call it such in his study of the Chinese translation of the *Jātaka,māla* (Garland of Birth Stories).¹² In the despair at translating the text, the few Sanskrit phrases the Chinese were able to construe served as clues for lifting entire stories verbatim from other texts that contained the same keywords.

For example, finding the term *vyāghrī* (tigress) in their manuscript, they simply wrote out the *Vyāghrī,parivarta*, the last chapter of the *Suvarṇa,prabhāsōttama Sūtra* (T 665). Compounding their problems, the translators were working often without dictionary or grammar, and not always with an Indian pundit to assist them in construing the text.

There is also evidence that they were working on a deadline and were not given time to revise their hurried work.¹³

(2) Texts that reconcile Buddhism with the indigenous Daoism, or that use Daoist terminology and ideas to express Buddhist thought.

The antecedence of Daoist and Confucianist terminologies and philosophies actually helped Buddhism adapt itself to Chinese society.

(3) Texts that attempt to adapt Buddhist doctrines to the indigenous needs of Chinese Buddhists.

This would include texts that promote filial piety and ancestor worship.

(4) Texts that relate Buddhism to traditional folk beliefs.

Such texts were composed and expounded to palm off folk beliefs off as Buddha Word.

(5) Condensed sutras (*ch'ao ching*) that are simplified abridgements of more complex, repetitive translated sutras.

It is said that the Southern Ch'i prince Ching-ling (459-494), a devoted Buddhist who encouraged Buddhist scholarship, himself compiled 36 abridged sutras (120 fascicles) so that his father's subjects could easily read and understand them. Among his abridgements are:

The Abridged Flower Garland Sutra (Ch'ao hua-yen ching), of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*.

The Abridged Great Collection of Sutras (Ch'ao fang-teng ta-chi ching), of the *Mahā,saṃnipāta Sūtra*.

The Threefold Lotus Sutra, chapter 23 (Bodhisattva Medicine King) and the “closing sutra” (Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue)

(6) Texts “transmitted” by someone experiencing a state of possessive vision claiming to reveal teachings from the Buddha.

A psychic nun named Seng-fa (b. 489), of scholarly birth, had since childhood indulged in ecstatic meditation. In such a trance, she would recite various “sutras” as if she was acquainted with them. This even impressed the emperor Wu-ti of Liang (r. 502-549). In fact, some 21 apocryphal sutras of Seng-fa's are included in the Chinese canon.

The Tibetan “treasure” (*gter-ma*) texts would be examples of such scriptures, too.¹⁴

(7) Sutras composed and expounded to exploit Buddhism for some agenda.

There are two such kinds of apocryphal texts: one done by the Buddhists themselves; the other, fabricated by non-Buddhists to discredit Buddhism.

¹² John Brough, “The Chinese Pseudo-Translation of Ārya-Śūra's *Jātakālā*,” *Asia Major* 11 (1964-1965): 27-53. Brough's study has been summarized with additional textual sources cited for the storied pilfered by the Chinese translators, in Kōgen Mizuno, “J. Brough: The Chinese Pseudo-Translation of Ārya-Śūra's *Jātakamāla*” *shōkai*,” *IBK* 14 (1966): 801-805.

¹³ Robert E. Buswell, *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, 1990: 11.

¹⁴ Reading: Robert E. Buswell (ed.), *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1990. Chapters by Kyoko Tokuno and by Michel Strickmann.

35. DECLINE OF CHINESE BUDDHISM

Routinization of Buddhism

In pre-modern China, Buddhism as a social phenomenon had closely followed the political fortunes of the dynasties. Buddhism, as a social system, was often used to legitimize the power of the rulers and as such became state-controlled. As an advantage, Buddhism flourished as a protected system within a vast empire. In sociology, this is called the routinization of Buddhism.¹⁵

The disadvantage of Buddhism as a state-sponsored religion is greater, in that the fate of Buddhism is often closely connected with the whims of the powerful and the fate of the kingdom. Moreover, the final authority for Buddhists in such a system is not the Buddhist canon or Buddhist spirituality, but the worldly powers that be. Such a situation also attracts many other worldly problems. As a state-sponsored faith, Buddhism sometimes assimilated aspects of other religions, especially Confucianism, and so became eclectic.

Loss of state patronage

The An Lu-shan 安祿山 rebellion of 755, which almost brought political and financial collapse of the Tang, marks the beginning of the end of large-scale state patronage of Buddhism. This crisis was followed by some 90 years later by the **persecution of Buddhists** by emperor Hui-ch'ang, which was especially bad for those schools known for textual exegesis, such as Tiantai, Huayan and Faxiang. The Buddhist traditions that survived—Pure Land and Chan—did so simply because

...they were less dependent on scriptural learning, monastic ritual, and clerical tutelage, and thus less susceptible to the vagaries of state and aristocratic patronage. Pure Land and Ch'an were oriented toward individual faith and salvation gained through meditation practice, respectively, rendering them accessible and appealing to the masses. As such, these traditions, infused at time with popular forms of Tantra, came to dominate the Chinese Buddhist landscape down to the present day. However, this syncretic form of Buddhist practice failed to inspire the kinds of doctrinal creativity and sophistication in the T'ang period. Intellectually, Buddhism went into a long and inexorable decline from which it never recovered. (Sharf 2002:6 f)

Song dynasty

When China became more stable under **the Song dynasty**, Buddhism enjoyed favourable support through this period. But this was not a dawning light or noonday sun, but a sunset glow for Chinese Buddhism. It was the “Memories of a Great Tradition”, as Kenneth K.S. Chen¹⁶ puts it. Periods of greater recession and decline would follow.

In pre-Song Buddhism, for example, ordination certificates had to be earned by the candidate's passing an examination on the Buddhist scriptures. During the Song period, there was the widespread practice of selling ordination certificates for monks. These certificates had economic value, since they exempted the holder from tax and from corvée (a period of national labour service). Now that anyone could become a Buddhist monk without knowing anything about Buddhism resulted in easy access into the Order for any criminal or vagabond (Ch'en, 1964:391 f.).

State control of religion

Like pre-modern Theravada Buddhism in South and South-east Asian countries (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia), in China, too, the rulers used religion to legitimize their power. However, in the case of the Theravada countries, the rulers were themselves generally devout Buddhists and they acknowledged the superior status of the Sangha.

In China, however, what was developing during the Song period, was what C.K. Yang describes as the stabilization of government control over religion.¹⁷ Moreover, during this period, there was a general

¹⁵ See, for example, Trevor Ling, *A History of Religion East and West*, London: Macmillan, 1968: section 3.21.

¹⁶ *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964:389 ff.

¹⁷ C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1961: 106.

reassertion of the superiority of what was Chinese over what was foreign. Under such circumstances, Buddhism was affected by the following situations:

- (1) All religions became increasingly eclectic as Confucian ideas rose to prominence again and the classical belief in the emperor as the Son of Heaven dominated Chinese society.
- (2) Among the Song Buddhists, there was a growing tendency towards forms of Buddhism that were more Chinese than Indian in origin, namely, Chan and Amidism.

Amidism

Even then, Amidism or Pure Land Buddhism 淨土宗 (centering around Amitabha Buddha) was declining in importance. A curious feature of Amidism during this period was the transformation of the next Buddha, Maitreya 彌勒, into the figure of **the Laughing Buddha**. He was generally believed to have appeared wandering about China as the laughing, pot-bellied simpleton Milo, surrounded by hordes of children.

The Laughing Buddha symbolized the values upheld by Chinese society then: his full hemp-bag symbolizing wealth, his fat belly a symbol of contentment, and the children the high value placed on a large family.¹⁸

Chan

During the Song period, Ch'an Buddhism alone really flourished in China, mainly because it had the tradition of "a day without work, a day without food" self-sufficiency. Even though Chan became more widespread, there was less emphasis on meditation to prepare the mind for enlightenment. There was instead greater emphasis on the use of *gongan* (koans or paradoxical statements meant to transcend the bonds of language and concepts) and the physical techniques of shouting and beating of disciples.

The scholar Dumoulin notes that though Chan enjoyed great prestige in Song China, "inner impoverishment accompanied outer splendour."¹⁹ It was also during this period that Chan was introduced into Japan as Zen.

36. NATURE OF CHINESE BUDDHISM

Robert Sharf, in his important "Prolegomenon to the study of medieval Chinese Buddhist literature" (2002:1-27), raised some vital issues in the study of Chinese Buddhism, which is often riddled with historical and hermeneutical problems. Some of his observations are summarized here. The claim that Kumārajīva's translations were more "accurate" than those of his predecessors is problematic. The popularity of Kumārajīva's translations was not due to their fidelity to the originals, but rather to the elegance and accessibility of his prose. As such, Kumārajīva's translations continued to be favoured long after the more technically "accurate" translations of Xuanzang became available (2002:12).

Any of the so called Chinese schools of Buddhism are not really discrete schools. Such traditions as San-lun, Ti-lun and She-lun are better regarded as "organizational categories applied after the fact by mediaeval Buddhist historians and bibliographers" (2002:7). The notion that the Tang dynasty was the golden age of Buddhism is general and Chan in particular turns out to be the product of Sung Chan polemicists:

there is little evidence that the major Ch'an figures of the T'ang viewed themselves as belonging to an independent tradition or school. And despite its rhetoric Ch'an was no less dependent on the written word, on formal monastic ritual, and on state and aristocratic patronage than was any other Buddhist tradition in China. Pure Land never existed at all as an independent exegetical tradition, much less as an institution or sect, in T'ang or Sung China, and the same appears to be true of Tantra or Vajrayāna. (Sharf 2002:8)

¹⁸ Ch'en 1964: 405-408.

¹⁹ Heinrich Dumoulin, "Technique and Personal Devotion in the Zen Exercise", in *Studies in Japanese Culture*, ed. J. Ringendorf, Tokyo, 1963: 124.

Unlike in Japan, where Buddhism was from its inception subject to a degree of autocratic state control, in China, despite efforts by the state to regulate the Sangha, such efforts were tempered by geographical, cultural and political contingencies. Chinese monks, irrespective of their ordination lineage, were unified by their adherence to a more or less common monastic code, a common mode of dress, a common stock of liturgical and ritual knowledge, and so on. As such, Chinese monks could easily wander from monastery to monastery in search of new teachers and teachings. Such peregrinations were the norm that contributed to the consolidation of the Chinese Sangha across the empire. (2002:9)

Above all, the Chinese looked to Buddhism for answers to questions that they found relevant. They approached Chinese translations of Buddhist texts not as glosses on the Indic originals,

but as valuable resources that addressed their own immediate conceptual, social, and existential concerns. Accordingly, in order to understand the answers they found, we must first deduce the question they were asking, questions, whose historical, linguistic, and conceptual genealogy was largely Chinese. (Sharf 2002:12)

37. REVIVAL AND REFORM

During the modern period, especially after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Buddhism in China was characterized by revival and reform. In reaction of the long dominant Chan, which placed a low value on intellectual pursuits, a new intellectual upsurge amongst the Chinese Buddhists (mainly through the influence of the progress of oriental studies in Europe) that largely rejected what was conservative and traditional. This development climaxed in the 1920s with the infusion of Marxist ideas into the Chinese “cultural renaissance”.

Taixi (T'ai-hsü, 1890-1947)

It was during this period that there arose a remarkable Chinese Buddhist monk, named **Taixi (T'ai-hsü, 1889-1947)**, who succeeded in initiating a “humanistic Buddhism” (rensheng fojiao) to carry out a series of Buddhist reforms.²⁰ Two events strongly motivated Taixi's reformist ideas. The first was the revolution of 1911 that toppled the Manchu dynasty and established the Republic of China. At this point, he was dismayed at the state of Buddhism and the disunity of the Sangha. The clergy generally neglected education and practice, and relied heavily on the performance of funerals rites and other rituals.

The second motivating factor behind Taixi's reformist ideas was his dialogue with the Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Dr Karl L Reichelt (1877-1952), who founded the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre.²¹ Taixi criticized Christian theism and believed that Buddhism could give to Christianity what it desperately needed: a religious spirit that was not in opposition to modern science and that could be the foundation for trust and community.²²

Taixi emphasized the international character of Buddhism and initiated contacts between Chinese Buddhists and those of other Asian countries, especially of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan. He did this, convinced that

Buddhist doctrine is fully capable of uniting all existing forms of civilization, and should spread throughout the world so that it may become a compass, as it were, for the human mind.²³

Institutes for the training of large number of Buddhist religious leaders were set up in various parts of China, with the aim of reforming the Sangha.²⁴ Buddhist texts were studied in a way that had not happened for a very long time. A notable feature of Taixi's revival movement was the appearance of an increasing number of Buddhist periodicals devoted mainly to hermeneutics (the exposition of Buddhist thought) and apologetics (the rebuttal of criticisms against Buddhism). Between 1920 and 1935, there were a total

²⁰ Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953:56. Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism*: T'ai-hsü.

²¹ See Burnett 2003:281.

²² See for example “Science and Buddhism” in Donald Lopez (ed), 2002:85-90.

²³ Qu by C.H. Hamilton, “Buddhism” in China, ed. H.F. MacNair, Berkeley: Univ. of California, 1946:297.

²⁴ Ch'en 1964: 456 f.

of 58 such periodicals. Taixi's reform efforts, however, produced only patchy results, and he failed to unify the Chinese Sangha.

38. PURE LAND BUDDHISM

In the 1920s Taixi initiated a series of meetings with the World Buddhist Federation (an organization that existed only on paper). He helped organize the East Asian Buddhist Conference on 1925, and in 1928, convinced the Nationalist Government of China to send him on a nine-month tour of Europe and America. Although this tour failed to impress many westerners (mainly due to lack of preparation and of competent interpreters), it established his reputation at home as an international figure. In the 1930s he tried to establish an exchange programme with the Theravāda Buddhists of Sri Lanka. He met G P Malalasekera to discuss the need for an international Buddhist organization. After the Second World War, in 1950, Malalasekera set up **the World Fellowship of Buddhists**.

The success of Taixi's revival was especially evident in two areas of Chinese Buddhism:

- (1) A rediscovery of the monistic philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism and the awakening of interest in Buddhist philosophical ideas amongst young intellectuals.
- (2) A revival of religious life in Pure Land Buddhism (Amidism), with a growth of new societies which not only encouraged spiritual practice but also social services.

In the 1930s between 60-70% of China's lay Buddhists were Pure Land Buddhists (Ch'en 1964:460). In 1929, he organized **the Chinese Buddhist Society**, which by 1947 had over 4½ million members.²⁵

39. CHINESE BUDDHISM TODAY

The infamous and inhuman Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Zedong was a sustained government campaign against all aspects of traditional Chinese culture, especially religion. The few vestiges of Chinese Buddhist heritage were destroyed or damaged beyond recognition. For a decade Buddhism (and religion) virtually ceased to exist in China.

The death of Mao in 1976 opened the way for social and economic reforms in communist China. The 1980s saw a cautious resurgence of popular (non-denominational) devotional Buddhism. A few of the major Buddhist temples were restored with government funds, mostly to encourage a foreign tourist trade. Monks were allowed to return to their robes, though few did. Buddhist Associations were revived, and especially in the remote areas of China, the people themselves began to donate labour and money for the restoration of Buddhism.

If in pre-modern China, Chinese Buddhism was used by the rulers and their supporters to legitimize their power, making Buddhism a state-controlled system, in our own times, we are likely to see Chinese Buddhism as a national organization encouraged and patronized by the government mainly as a part of a greater economic plan and for social stability. The true success of Chinese Buddhism, as with any form of Buddhism anywhere, depends only the bona fide practitioners of Buddhism itself. However, if one-fifth of the human race could be in some way enlightened in the process, it would constitute a formidable religious and spiritual force on this global village.

40. CONCLUSION

We have taken a panoramic view of the spread of Buddhism in China, looking in some detail at a few important foreign and Chinese monks, the problems they faced and their successes, the process and problems of translating Indic texts into Chinese and how Buddhism became an important part of Chinese culture.

With the exception of Kumārajīva and a few thoroughly sinicized masters, the term "missionary" can hardly be applied to them: they have very little in common with their Christians controlled the whole process, from the translation of texts to their orthodox interpretations and Confucian adaptation, whereas with a few exceptions the foreign Buddhist monks were involved only in the first stage, the furnishing of raw materials. All the rest was done by the Chinese, and digested by Chinese minds.

²⁵ The first modern Buddhist Society in China, however, was founded in 1900 (Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968: 10).

The difference is significant, for it may go part of the way toward explaining why the Jesuit mission failed, and Buddhism was to stay in China. (Zurcher 1993:59)

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