

Translation of Sūtras and Its Characteristics in the Period of North and South Dynasties in China

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Historically in China, the period of North and South Dynasties was a period of a great confusion with many changes of dynasties and no unified nation. In the history of Buddhism, this period is called the time of Buddhist study or the period of the spread of Buddhism, because Buddhism was first developed since the Eastern Chin period.

During this period also, a full-scale study on a great number of Sanskrit sūtras translated into Chinese was undertaken. It was during this period of the North and South Dynasties that Buddhist schools were established.

Focusing on Buddhism in the period of North and South Dynasties, which was to bear fruits of Buddhism in Sui and Tang, the author examines the translation of Sanskrit sūtras into Chinese and its characteristics at that time. The nation was stable after Buddhism was introduced, and the nation's leaders always maintained an indispensable relationship with the Buddhist assembly. Accordingly, the author will illuminate the interrelationship between the North and South Dynasty societies and Buddhism, before examining the translation of sūtras of this period.

Since the introduction of new sūtras, the spread of ideas and translation of sūtras differed according to where monks entered the country as well as the impact of geographical conditions in the North and South Dynasties. The author tries to convey a historical appraisal of Chinese Buddhism of the North and South Dynasties by investigating where the sūtras came from and how they appeared.

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I . Translation of Sūtras and Its Characteristics in South Dynasty Buddhism

1. South Dynasty Societies and Buddhism

Like feudalistic dynasties of many generations, the South Dynasties took Confucianism as orthodox, while the ruling classes welcomed and supported Xun and Buddhism as a supplement to Confucianism. However, the first dynasty of the South Dynasties including Wuti of the Liu Song that usurped the throne taking advantage of the dynastic confusion, kings of many generations were friendly to Buddhism on the whole.

Wenti especially well-known as 'Emperor Wen of peaceful times', worshiped Buddhism specially. However, we shouldn't overlook the fact that Wenti's attitude to Buddhism largely supported his political purpose. To a suggestion to build stupas and to make Buddha statues, he said,

Although people don't understand the cause and effect of the three worlds completely..... if they believe that the principles are true, then I can obtain peace without efforts. Do I need to make trouble?(Hung-ming chi, vol.11, T.52, 69b)

This suggests that his main purpose of worshiping Buddha was to support a peaceful reign, by being courteous to Buddhist monks and winning their confidence.

However, Xiao-Wenti who succeeded Wenti raised a concern that 'monks should also pay respect to a king courteously' by Huan-Xuau in the Eastern Chin period.

The present-day Buddhists bend their knees before Buddha, Bodhisattva, Yuan-chiao, and Sheng-Wen, respect their parents, and bow their heads to senior monks. Why don't they bow their backs to the king?(*Kao seng chuan*, vol.8; *Seng yuan chuan*, T.50, 378a)

Although Xiao-Wuti introduced this practice during his rulership,

the system was abolished with his death. Chingling Wang Hsiaotzuliang was a principal Buddhist in the South Chi Dynasty Buddhism. His worship of Buddhism plays a decisive role in helping us to understand the religious forms for Buddhism appreciated by the noble classes. We can find his achievements in his study of sūtras, reading and recitation as well as Bum-pae. (*Kao seng chuan*, vol.13; *Seng pien chuan*, T.50, 414b)

Besides, we can find his profound knowledge of Buddhism and piety in his ideas on the system of Buddhist monks. (*Kuang hung-ming chi*, vol.27, T.52, 306bc)

Although his twenty volume work, the *Chingchutzu chinghsingfamen*, was lost, it suggests that Taohsan of the Tang drew this work in their preaching Posatha-dharma to lay Buddhists. (*Kuang hung-ming chi*, vol.4 T.52, 112a)

The Buddhism of the South Dynasties flourished at the time of Ciang-Wuti. The Buddhist background of Ciang-Wuti began to develop from Hsiaotzuliang, in the Payu days. Two years after his enthronement(504) he issued the royal message of promoting Buddhism at the detriment of Taoism. The following is a part of his message.

I was indulged in Laotzu with an illusion of study of Confucian classics and devoted to wicked reasoning. However, I found a way to abandon the illusion and return by displaying convention.....Although I enter a durgati in cheng-fa (true dharma), I don't want a transient pleasure to be born in the heavens by Laotzus teachings. (*Kuang hung-ming chi*, vol.4, T.52, 112a)

There are some scholars who raise a doubt about the original text.¹ Wuti placed Buddhism above Confucianism and Taoism, entered an envoy² four times in person, and knew religious doctrine thoroughly. The noteworthy point in his relation to Buddhism is that he thought

1 Teizo Ohta, "On the Problem of Promoting Buddhism at the detriment of Taoism by Emperor Wu of Liang Dynasty" (佛教思想史論集, 大藏出版, 1964) ; Tatsuo Naito, "The Historical Falsehood in the Desertion of Taoism by Emperor Wu of Liang Dynasty" (卓山房學叢, 龍興寺刊, 1979).

2 According to 'The Chronicles of Liang Dynasty' of *The History of Southern Dynasties*, vol.7 and *The Chronicles of Jiankang*, Liang Wuti contributed himself to a Buddhist monastery in 527, 529, 546 and 547.

the three religions had the same origin.³ Although Confucianism and Taoism, unlike Buddhism, are wrong, in that they deny deliverance from the transmigration of souls, they do admit doing goodness in realities.

In spite of conflicting estimations of Ciang-Wuti, Buddhism was adopted by the country from this time, and was handed down as a tradition from the time of the Sui and Tang dynasties.

During the last dynasty of South Dynasties, Wuti who established Chin enshrined the relics of the Buddha (Zenryu Tsukamoto: 1950, 59) and held a Great Assembly of Wa-che right after his enthronement. Wenti, who succeeded to Chen-Wuti, was a very faithful king, made efforts to understand Buddhism by through their conversion to T'ien-t'ai Chih-i and cultivation of Chih-kuan meditation.

We have examined the achievements in Buddhism of many kings of the South Dynasties and their policies. In conclusion, the kings of the South Dynasties were always friendly to Buddhism or adopted positive attitudes. Whether the policies arose from political intention or personal belief, they must have resulted in increasing the morale of Buddhism at that time. This was thought possible because the four dynasties of the South Dynasties were composed of the nobility from the royal families of the Eastern Chin dynasty.

2. Translation of Sūtras in South Dynasties

During the period of the North and South Dynasties many translator-monks appeared and a variety of sūtras were translated and distributed. One of the features of this period is that schools of Buddhism were established on the basis of a particular foundations of a sūtra.

In other words, sūtras, which contained different ideas about “emptiness-Buddhism” as translated and introduced by Kumarajiva, were translated and circulated. The representative sūtras are *Hua-yen sūtra*

3 In the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties, there are two textual source of the doctrine of the homogeneity of the three teachings, *Laotzu hua-hu ching* in Taoism and *Ch'ing-ching fah-sing ching* in Buddhism.

translated by Buddhahadra, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, translated and issued by Dharmarakṣa. The former was translated in Southern China, while the latter in Northern China when the Eastern Chin perished and at the commencement of the North and South Dynasties. The Translation of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and the *Dasabhūmikasāstra*, which were commentaries on the Yogācāra, founded by Asanga and Vasubandhu, had a great influence on the world of thought at that time. We will examine the translation of the South Dynasties first.

1) Conveyance of *Hua-yen sūtra*

Before Śiksanānda translated and issued *Hua-yen sūtra* in 80 volumes in 699, the *Hua-yen sūtra* in by Buddhahadra was an exclusive *Hua-yen sūtra* for the Chinese. The 60 volumes of the *Hua-yen-sūtra* became not only a basis to form the doctrine of Hua-yen but also had a great influence on later Chinese Buddhism at large.(Kiyotaka Kimura: 1977, 5)

While Kumārajīva translated a sūtra on the thought of emptiness-Buddhism, the *Hua-yen sūtra* was translated and issued in South China by a monk expelled from the religious association. It tells us that there was a fraction or a conflict in the world of Chinese Buddhism.(Zenryu Tsukamoto: 306)

Meanwhile, the person who brought the Sanskrit version, *Hua-yen sūtra* in 60 volumes, to China was Chihfaling. The *Chu-san-tsang-chi-chi* says the circumstances at that time as follows.

The foreign edition of the *Hua-yen sūtra* is approximately one hundred thousand gathas. Also an old monk, Chinfaling, got thirty six thousand gathas from Khitan. He translated it into Chins letters by asking the Indian master Buddhahadra to Tao-ch'ang Temple on the 10th of March in the year 418.... and finished it on the 10th of June, 420.(*Chu-san-tsang-chi-chi*, vol. 9, T.55, 61a)

According to the above, it is certain that Chinfaling brought the sanskrit version of thirty six thousand gathas to China from Khotan. That is, it is said that the Sanskrit version he obtained was translated

at Tao-ch'ang temple in Ziang-chu by Buddhahadra and that translation began in March of 418 and completed in June of 420.

2) Introduction of Yogācāra Buddhism

Paramārtha, one of four great translators in the history of Chinese Buddhism, lived the unhappiest life of all the translators who came to China. However, he had a great influence on Chinese Buddhism. That is because it was Paramārtha who introduced Yogācāra Buddhism to China for the first time.

Things he translated were just handcuff, the others are kept in two temples in Kuang-chou, Chih-chih and Wang-yan. If he had translated all of them, they would have been about twenty thousand volumes. (*Hs-kao-seng-chuan*, vol.1, T.50, 430b,c)⁴

From the above, we can understand that the history of Chinese sūtra translation would be different if he had come to China earlier. Nevertheless, an important translated sūtra of his is the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.

The *Mahāyānasamgraha* was translated and issued in the North by Buddhasānta(531), but it was not fully understood. The translation by Paramārtha(563) and the interpretation by Vasubandhu were introduced at the same time, and later many researchers appeared as it was now possible to understand the contents.

According to the preface by Huikai(T.32, 113a), the *Mahāyānasamgraha* was completed in July of 564 with the translation finished in October of 563, and then revised through a comparison with the Sanskrit version. This book was unnoticed in the early days of the translation(*Fatai chuan*, T.50, 431a-432a), but the persecution of Buddhism in Northern China caused many scholars of the Tilun school to seek refuge in south. This changed the situation. That is, people who learned the doctrine of the Tilun school strived to be first in studying the *Mahāyānasamgraha* and it was rapidly propagated to Northern Chui with the rise of the Sui dynasty.(Kiyotaka Kimura: 1977, 43)

4 According to *Kai-yan shih-ching lu*, he translated 49 works in the 142 volumes, and 19 works in the 134 volumes are commentaries.

Paramārthas study of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* spread to all parts of the country, but it was propagated in Northern Chui by Tanch'ien. Tanch'ien(542-607)(*Hs kao-seng chuan*, vol.18, T.50, 571a-574b) learned the *Mahāyānasamgraha* while living in Chshui temple to avoid the disturbance of the persecution of Buddhism. Tanch'ien was a person of merit in his propagation of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* to Northern Chui.

II. Characteristics of Translation of Sūtras in North Dynasty Buddhism

1. North Dynasty Societies and Buddhism

As we examined above, South Dynasties Buddhism didn't yield to sovereign powers but tried to keep the national power under the protection of Buddhism. The Buddhism of the North Dynasties, however, centered completely on the nation. It can be said that Buddhism and the North Dynasties had a mutual supplementary relationship; the nation supported Buddhism and Buddhism served the country. As is generally known, the North Dynasties were ruled by other people. They needed a strong national power, and therefore tried to keep Buddhist associations under the control of the administrator.

Although Tai-Wuti of Northern Wei was the first king to persecute Buddhism in the history of Chinese Buddhism, nevertheless commemoration of the birth of Buddha originated with him. Though his behavior seems contradictory, it came from the same desire to make Buddhism serve the country.

Buddhism again was persecuted by Wuti of Northern Chui, since it would not accept a subservient position to the king's law. Persecution of Buddhism of Northern Chui was brought about by the excessive expansion of Buddhist associations and socio-economic needs due to a serious national financial crisis which was caused by an ancestor and the founder of a sect.(Enichi Ocho, 1981, 364) When he made his position clear before the monks right after the northern chou persecution of Buddhism. We can only conjecture that Wuti must have

had his own view of Buddhism to say real Buddha has no look. (*Kuang hung-ming chi*, vol. 10, T.52, 153b)

We shouldn't overlook negotiation of the three religions, which was one of the features of Buddhism of the North Dynasties. It is difficult to strictly distinguish reality from folk beliefs, whether referring to Buddhism or Taoism. Although there were undulating beliefs to invoke blessings and to ward off misfortune in both the North and South Dynasties, it is true that Taoism or secular ideas had deeply penetrated the North Dynasties.

One example is that Wuti of Northern Chui unified the three religions and established T'ung-tao-kuan (*Hs-kao-seng-chuan*, vol. 11, T.50, 512b), a national research institute for religion. He merely classified the three religions as a religious association, and thus it was difficult to distinguish practically the contents of the religions.

2. Translation of Sūtras in North Dynasties

1) Conveyance of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*

The new Mahāyāna sūtra was introduced to the world of Chinese Buddhism devoted to receiving and interpreting the thought of emptiness. It was the sūtras that preached the Dharmakaya and the Buddha-nature. We have already examined the *Hua-yen sūtra* which corresponded to the former in the translated sūtras of the South Dynasties. Now we will examine the conveyance of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* which was translated in Northern Chui by Dharmarakṣa.

In the *preface to the Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, Taolang, who helped with Dharmarakṣa's translation, mentions the following which is a primary source about how Dharmarakṣa came to China, and translated the *Nirvāṇa sūtra*.

The Indian monk, Dharmarakṣa was a Brahmin from the middle of India. He was bright, smart and eloquent in his childhood, combining the inside and the outside. Going with the current of the times, he first stayed in Tunhung for many years.... When the Western Hsia was at peace, this sūtra came with him from

somewhere distant.(T.55, 59c)

It seems that Dharmarakṣa lived in Tunhung for several years at first. It is thought that Dharmarakṣa came to Liang-chou bringing the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* with him when King Hohsi settled Western Hsia. There are a variety of theories about how the sūtra was translated and issued.

The most reliable source is the above-mentioned preface to the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* by Taolang, and the *Chu-san-tsang-chi-chi* and the *Kao-seng-chuan* are next. According to these, Dharmarakṣa began his translating the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* in 414 or 415, and Huisung assisted in the first translation. At that time, the first 10 volumes was translated and issued. However, Dharmarakṣa recognized that volumes of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* were lacking and went back to India to get those sūtras. Then, he obtained the middle volumes in Wu-chen and came to Liang-chou to translate them. It was around 417 when he came back to Liang-chou. After he translated and issued the first and middle volumes (421), Dharmarakṣa thought the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* was completely translated.

Then he was told that it was not a complete translation by Dharmaphala from India but he was killed by Meng-hsun on his way to get the last volumes.

So what happened to last volumes which Dharmarakṣa tried to seek but didn't get? Those volumes of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* were not introduced to China in the period of the North and South Dynasties. The sūtra was finally introduced to Changan during the Tang dynasty (677), and it was in the 245th year after Dharmarakṣa entered nirvāṇa.

The theory of Buddha-nature, "All sentient beings have Buddha-nature" in the Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*, was a great shock to the society at large. Chinese Buddhism came to have a six volume book of the *Nirvāṇa sūtra*(T.55, 60b), as well as forty volume book of the northern versions of the *Nirvāṇa sūtra* translated by Dharmarakṣa, and finally a thirty six volume translation of the southern version of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*(T.55, 59c) which was a revision based on a comparison of the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra* and the northern version the *Nirvāṇa-sūtra*(436). On the basis of the southern version of the *Nirvāṇa sūtra*, the Nirvāṇa school was established.

2) Introduction of the *Dasabhūmika-sāstra*

It was for the *Dasabhūmika-sāstra* that Bodhiruci, Ratnamati, and Buddhasānta came to China and set about translation in the early 6th century. As soon as the sūtra was translated, it was accepted and became widespread. From this we can conjecture the specific situation of the world of Northern Wei Buddhism.

According to the biography of Ratnamati, it is disputed whether he is a joint translator with Bodhiruci or not,

Tripitaka-master, Ratnamati from the middle of India was called Poti or Pao-i in the Northern Wei language. In 508 he came to Loyang and devoted himself to translating sūtras. He helped Bodhiruci translate at first, but translated separately because of their different opinions. A monk of Seng-lang and Cheh-i, as well as attendant Ts'ui-kuang dictated. (*Li-tai-san-pao-chi*, vol. 9, 49, 86b,c)

This there was disagreement between the two of them. But, the record regarding dictators like Seng-lang and Ts'ui-kuang is the same as in the biography of Bodhiruci.

Although three translators including Buddhasā appear in *Hs-kao-seng-chuan* (*Hs-kao-seng-chuan*, vol. 1, T.50, 429a)) seems to be a problem to think the *Dasabhūmika-sāstra* was translated jointly with Buddhasānta.

Further, the question of when Bodhiruci and Ratnamati came to Luyang was raised. The *Li-tai-san-pao-chi* says that Bodhiruci was engaged in translating sūtras from 509, while *Hs-kao-seng-chuan* says that he came to Luyang in 508. Therefore, it means he came to Luyang in 508 or 509. (T.49, 86b) On the other hand, both *Li-tai-san-pao-chi* and *Hs-kao-seng-chuan* say that Ratnamati came to Luyang in 508. (*Li-tai-san-pao-chi*, vol. 9, T.49, 86b)

Taking the above into account, it is possible to consider the following four theories.

- ① Theory of joint translation by three persons, Ratnamati, Bodhiruci and Buddhasānta ... the preface of the *Dasabhūmika-sāstra* (Tsui-kuang)

- ② Theory of separate translation by three persons ...
Hs-kao-seng-chuan the Bibliography of Boddhiruci.
- ③ Theory of separate translation by two persons, Ratnamati and Bodhiruci ... *Li-tai san-pao-chi.*
- ④ Theory of joint translation by the above two persons ...
Fa-ching-lu.

In conclusion, the fourth theory is reasonable. (*Li-tai san-pao-chi* vol. 9, T.49, 86a,b) It seems to be a joint translation by two people in that Ratnamati began to translate as an annotator and Bodhiruci assisted.

As is pointed out already, in the author's opinion, one of the unsolved problems is that there is the *Fahuachinglun* in translation by Bodhiruci out of six volumes which is said to be translated and issued by Ratnamati in *Li-tai-san-pao-chi*: In other words, the sūtra they translated separately is thought to be the *Fahuachinglun*, not the *Dasabhūmikasastra* or the *Paochichinglun*. That is because it is difficult to believe that two great monks translated independently while translating the sūtra together because of conflicting opinions.

III. Conclusion

We have examined the Buddhism of North and South Dynasties as a foundation for the flourishing Sui and Tang dynasty Buddhism that was most splendid in the history of Chinese Buddhism. The author regrets that the study doesn't present an entire view, since it is limited to an examining of translation of the sūtras. However, it is thought that the study significantly bridges Eastern Chin Buddhism and Sui and Tang dynasty Buddhism in Chinese Buddhist thought to a degree.

Results of this study are as follows.

All the sūtras from India were translated in Chinese characters and brought to China. The Chinese people's consciousness developed Buddhist thought and Buddhism at large, and included the sūtras, which were understood in their language and writings. That is why translation of sūtras was undertaken over a period of a thousand years.

Most of all, formation of a national Buddhist view is one of the distinguished achievements in Chinese Buddhism. The Period of North and South Dynasties is a time when wars were fought to expand the land, fighting among the people, and fierce conflicts within the ruling classes continued. Therefore, the national authority maintained an indispensable connection with Buddhist associations.

Buddhism of South Dynasties is different from that of North Dynasties; a continuous and full support was given to the former by kings of many generations, while the latter was supported or encouraged, but attacked or oppressed. Therefore, there is an essential difference in the aspect of consciousness of Buddhism between North and South Dynasties that can't be overlooked. In other words, the royal family of South Dynasties thought of the rise of Buddhism as that of a nation, while to North Dynasties, Buddhism was subordinate to the national existence. That is because controlling the three religions was one of the administrator's most important works at that time.

In considering the sūtra translations of the time, those of the North Dynasties were theoretical and pedantic focusing on translation of a sūtra, while these of the South Dynasties were largely practical and realistic, focusing on reading and recitation.

Glossary of Chinese Terms

Cheng-fa 正法

Chihfaling 支法領

Chih-kuan 止觀

Chin 晉

Chingchutzu chinghsingfamen 淨住子淨行法門

Chui 周

Chu san-tsang chi-chi 出三藏記集

Ciang Wuti 梁武帝

Hsia 夏

Hsiaotzuliang 肅子良

Hs kao-seng chuan 續高僧傳

Huan Xuau 桓玄

Huayen 華嚴

Kao seng chuan 高僧傳

Kuangchou 廣州

Laotzu 老子
Li-tai san-pao-chi 歷代三寶記
 Liu Song 劉宋
 Loyang 洛陽
 Seng-lang 僧朗
 Sui 隋
 Tai Wuti 太武帝
 Tanch'ien 曇遷
 Tang 唐
 Tao-ch'ang Temple 道場寺
 Taohsan 道宣
 Taolang 道朗
 T'ien-t'ai Chih-i 天台智顛
 Tilun 地論
 Ts'ui-kuang 崔光
 T'ungtaokuan 通道觀
 Wa-che 無遮
 Wangyan 王園
 Wei 魏
 Wenti 文帝
 Wuti 武帝
 Xiao-Wenti 孝武帝
 Xun 玄學

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