KUMARAJIVA: A GREAT BUDDHIST MASTER

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Ch. -
Jiumóluóshi, Jap. -
Kumaraju
Oasis in Taklamaken Desert gradually became miraculous kingdoms with sumptuous monasteries and flourishing transnational trade routes. Chinese monk scholars sought Buddhist sūtras in Sanskrit in them and were deeply influenced by the art forms of Kucha while embellishing the walls of the caves of Tun-huang.
Kumarajiva’s mother Jīvā, a princess of Kucha was a woman of great talent and his father Kumārayāna was a descendant of an honorable line of Prime Ministers of Kashmir.
A map showing the northern and the southern silk route, a major axes along which Buddhism spread from India to Central Asia and China. The royal city state of Kucha on this route was a favoured halt for caravans and pilgrims. It was rich in rock sanctuories spread over four sites, of which Kizil, Kizil Kargha and Kumtura are the most significant from the archeological and art history point of view.
Kumarajiva’s father left the comforts of his home, strapped a wooden image of Sakyamuni Buddha to his back, set out along the Silk Route across the mighty Pamirs and into the Takla Maken desert. Following the northern route, he reached the devoutly Buddhist kingdom of Kucha on the northern rim of the great Tarim river basin.
Pagoda in the eastern temple at Subashi where Kumarajva was born.
Photo Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Kumārajīva, sitting on a lotus, meditating in front of the Kizil caves as a young monk. Kizil is one of the most famous sites in Central Asia, situated on the Muzart river, where a multitude of Buddhist temples were discovered, hewn in the mountainsides. Approximately 300 caves at Kizil contained frescoes. Its local name is ‘Ming-oi’ (1000 cells or chambers) referred to the vague figure of great magnitude.
Kizil caves 47-81 in the western direction
These caves are divided by a central pillar, with two side passages so that the devotee would gaze at the vault painted all over that symbolized the cosmos. He could circumambulate the ritual circuit of *pradakṣiṇā*. He would view the murals of Jatakas and Avadanas on the walls.

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
• Dharmaraksa, Kumārajīva and Hsuan-tsang are the three masters who stand out by their preeminent virtue and for spreading the subtle philosophical systems of Buddhism.

• The process was begun by Dharmaraksa who was a Yueh-chih. It found its full flowering in Kumārajīva and culmination in Hsuan-tsang.

• But Kumārajīva remains central to practical Buddhism in East Asia. He represents an international personality. He was a Kuchean who were speaking a European language, reading and discussing in an Indian language, as the medium of instruction was Sanskrit, and also conversing and writing in Chinese.

• Kumārajīva, (Ch. Jiūmóluóshi), a philosopher and seer, had a long cherished mission—propagation of the true spirit of Buddhism. He broke political, geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers.

• He traveled through barren lands and rivers, mountains and forbidding terrains to bequeath to us a casket of sacred sūtras as the most authoritative presentations by translating them from Sanskrit into Chinese.

• He created pure, boundless and incredible versions of the sūtras as an obeisance to the sacred voice so that one could bathe in the pure pond of the Dharma.
Kumārajīva is famed for his encyclopedic knowledge of Buddhism and Vedantic learning, for fluency and proficiency in writing Sanskrit and Chinese languages and for excellence of translations couched in powerful and compelling language. His sensitivity to both the languages was remarkable like Hsüan-tsang.

For his comprehension of the words of the Buddha, he is recognized as the most prominent among around 200 great translators of Buddhist scriptures, who were active from 2nd to 13th century.

Fifty-four texts that he translated in a distinctive style possessing a flowing smoothness, run into 6000-7000 fascicles. They reflect prioritization of conveying the meaning as opposed to precise literal rendering. Generations after generations acknowledge his brilliance. The impact of his works can still be felt in almost all the schools/sects of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia.

Kumārajīva based himself upon the philosophy of Nāgārjuna whose teachings represent the Mahayana doctrine. His dedication resulted in reverence for sūtras like Saddharma-pundarika (Lotus Sūtra), Prajñaparamita (the Great Wisdom Sūtra) and Vimalakirttinirdesa which are widely studied throughout East Asia. He is seen as a true disciple of the Buddha, a pure mirror, who never made any claim about his special insight. He never offered interpretations bearing shades of his personal bias or polemical judgments. He is compared to a lotus flower in the muddy swamp who was responsible for the great waves of Buddhist thought which flowed across China over a thousand years ago.
THE ROLE OF VIRTUE AND THE VALUES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

• The human body has an inner core and an outer cover, both are to be strong.
• Technosphere cannot supercede biosphere.
• We must harmonise the relationship between wealth and virtue.
• Virtue has to be central and affluence, secondary.
• Laymen, intellectuals and spirituals together in a sharing of minds, to explore truth.
• International harmony through life enhancing systems and thought was taught by Kuamarajiva.
KUMARAJIVA’S UNIQUE STYLE OF TRANSLATING
74 SANSKRIT TEXTS IN 384 FASCICLES

• Kumarajiva did not follow the system of ko-i meaning matching the concepts by grouping together Buddhist and Taoist ideas.
• He offered inspired translations in keeping with the literary flow of Chinese.
• There was no personal bias or polemical judgments.
• His style was the most artistic, creative and easy to understand.
• It was not word to word and simple.
• He first comprehended the nature of the subject and then expressed it in Chinese, putting so much life into them as if they were his own creations.
• The Sanskrit philosophical texts have conceptual intensity but when they were translated by Kumarajiva they attained delicacy and depth.
• He corrected errors of the previous translations and also compared two copies of the sutras—one that was with the emperor and the other with him.
• He shortened the texts, deleted extensive repetitions and ponderous verbosity which was intolerable to the Chinese literati.
• He adapted the texts to Chinese literary tastes.
• Division of the texts into sections and sentences was done with a great care.
• Translations were precise, clear and excellent
KUMARAJIVA WORKED IN A MULTILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT TO DISSEMINATE THE BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY TO TRANSMIT UNIVERSAL VALUE SYSTEMS INTO CHINA

The psychosphere of Kumarajiva was constituted by three linguistic cultures—Sanskrit, European Tokharian and Chinese besides visual arts, music, dance, and theatrical excellence of the Kuchean people.
A god playing flute in Qizil cave 77. The halo around his head emphasizes his divinity as well as that of music.
Varṣakāra Ajātaśatru shows a representation of the four major events in the life of Lord Buddha: birth in the Lumbini Park, victory over Māra, first sermon in the Deer Park (Mṛgaḍāva) and his nirvāṇa. It is drawn by Grünwedel (1912:167) from Qizil cave 205.
Kumārajīva translation of the Lotus Sūtra exhumed from Central Asia. Kumarajiva translated the Lotus Sutra at Ch’ang-an under the patronage of the ruling family of Yao. Emperor Yao Hsing was highly impressed by his honesty, loyalty, humane, resourceful, hard-working, self-sacrificing nature and brilliance.
The chapter on the stupa of rabhūtaratna is written in such a way as to create a pagoda. It is a mid thirteenth century painting at the Ryuhonji Monastery. The merits of erecting the edifice of a stupa or fashioning a stupa in any other way are frequently mentioned in the Lotus Sūtra. This painting shows the stupa art at its zenith. It is an instance of citra-kāvya in Sanskrit.

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Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna seated in the precious stupa in the bronze plaque dated 686 or 698 in the Hasedera monastery. In the center is the large three-storey Tahoto stupa, with a host of small thousand Buddhas in the upper band, executed in repousse, like all other parts of the plaque. It shows the influence of astounding developments in Buddhist arts and crafts in the mature culture of the Flourishing T’ang period.
A mural depicting a goddess with a celestial musician, cave 171, Kizil, Possibly it tells the story of the Buddha and the Goddess of Music. The Buddha had disguises himself as a musician – challenges a woman, proud of her musical skills, to a lute playing contest. She is shamed by the Buddha’s superior playing and becomes his devotee.
Kumārajīva translation of the Lotus Sūtra excavated in Central Asia
The mural on the eastern wall of Tun-huang cave 159 of the middle T’ang period (781-847) illustrates the 11th chapter of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa- sūtra translated by Kumārajīva. As Lord Buddha was teaching Dharma in the garden of Āmrapāli it grew larger and was tinged with a golden hue. Venerable Ānanda asked: “What do these auspicious signs portend?” Lord Buddha: “They portend that Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are coming to the Tathāgata, with a great multitude.” Vimalakīrti performed the miracle of placing the entire assembly in his right hand and transported himself into the presence of Lord Buddha. This illustration shows the Buddha expounding the liberation of Bodhisattvas called ‘destructible and indestructible’ (kṣayākṣaya).
Subashi temple ruins (western temple)
Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
APAK HOJA TOMB KASHGAR
subashi
Caotang-si temple, Xian, where Kumarajijva had taught and is at rest,
Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA

• Picture from Nobuyoshi
Kizil kargah, Thousand Buddha caves
A line drawing depicting the army sent by Fu Chien under general Lu Kuang to subdue Kucha and bring Kumārajīva to Ch’ang-an.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNCA
A line drawing by a modern artist depicting Kumārajīva in Ch’ang-an where he took up translation work under state patronage. The emperor Yao Hsing took personal interest in his work.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNCA
Kumārajīva
Calligraphy by Katsuhisa Yamada, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNCA
Kumārajīva translating sūtra s in Ch’ang-an
Emperor Yao Hsing took personal interest in translation of sūtra s, gave him all facilities so that he could devote himself whole-heartedly to his activities. The emperor would even attend the translation sessions.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Kumārajīva in Ch’ang-an, the capital of China. He became a luminant symbol of the national metropolis as the new glory and renaissance of culture. Kumārajīva was the heart of the imperial capital of the celestial kingdom to which literati flocked from all over China.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Kumārajīva as depicted in the Kosozo ‘portraits of eminent monks’ drawn by the monk Kanyu in AD 1163. The roll is preserved at the Ninnaji monastery, Kyoto, Japan. Taisho Zuzobu, vol. 11 no. 3204 text A #24

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNC
Western gate of Xian (Ch’ag-an)
Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Tomb of Kumārajīva at Caotang-si temple
Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Kumārajīva’s tomb at Caotang-si temple
Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Statue of Kumārajīva at Caotang-si temple about 25 km away from Xian, Kumārajīva translated the Buddhist sūtras from Sanskrit into Chinese. He died in 413 A.D. The temple was a thatch-roofed house, so it got the name of Caotang Temple, meaning Straw Hut Temple.

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
Ruins from Kashgarh where the king had invited Kumārajīva to take the seat of honour and expound a sūtra to a prestigious assembly which included the king himself. It was the Kashi of Central Asia. The Chinese still call it Kashi.

Courtesy: IGNCA
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA
The site where Kokera Sutra Copies were found

Map of Japan