

A Reexamination of the Influence of Kumārajīva's Thought on His Translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*

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KUMĀRAJĪVA (Ch. Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什; 344–413) stands out as one of the most important translators in Chinese Buddhism. His translations are regarded as a milestone in Chinese Buddhist history, and have exerted considerable influence not only upon Chinese Buddhism, but upon all East Asian Buddhist traditions. Compared to the achievement of Kumārajīva's translations, less attention has been paid to his thought, though according to his biography, he was well known in the field of Madhyamaka philosophy.¹ This seems mainly due to the fact that he did not leave systematically written

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¹ Kumārajīva was originally influenced by mainstream Buddhist sutras, especially the canon of the Sarvāstivādin school. But in Kashgar he was initiated into Mahayana literature and firmly converted to Mahayana. He is famous for transmitting Mahayana doctrine, especially the concept of *śūnyatā*, see the *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (Collection of Notes Concerning the Translation of the Tripiṭaka; T no. 2145, vol. 55) by Sengyou 僧佑 (445–518) and the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks; T no. 2059, vol. 50) by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554). For accounts of his life, translations, and writings by modern scholars, see Tang 1938, pp. 187–213; Chen 1972, pp. 81–83; and Robinson 1967, pp. 71–95.

works of his own, but only two treatises recording some fragments of his thought.²

There exist only a handful of studies on Kumārajīva's thought.³ The common approach in these studies is to summarize his views from the two treatises and from comments left by his disciples. The studies by Tang Yongtong and Richard Robinson exemplify this trend. Tang sums up Kumārajīva's thought in four points: First, he claims that Kumārajīva held the highest esteem for Madhyamaka philosophy. Second, he argues that Kumārajīva's negative attitude toward Hinayana Buddhism is evident based on one treatise that criticizes the Sarvāstivāda school. Third, he proposes that the implications of *anātman* (non-self) had not been illuminated until Kumārajīva correctly rendered it as *wuwo* 無我 (non-self) and explicated it as being empty of conscious spirit.⁴ Before that, *anātman* had always been translated as *feishen* 非身 (non-body), a concept that bears the imprint of Daoist philosophy⁵ and that exerted great influence on Chinese Buddhists. Such an understanding of *anātman* insists on the existence of the spirit, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this essay. Finally, Tang proposes that the most significant concept within Kumārajīva's philosophy is that of ultimate emptiness (*bijing kong* 畢竟空), which negates both being and non-being. Tang points out that such emptiness eliminates all characteristics and extinguishes the way of words. Hence, according to Tang, Kumārajīva emphasizes the significance of the realization of *wuxiang* 無相 ("non-characteristic"), which can lead to the negation of being and non-being, and to the realization of ultimate emptiness.⁶

² The two works are the *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 (The Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*; T no. 1775) and the *Jiumoluoshi fashi dayi* 鳩摩羅什法師大義 (The Great Teaching of Dharma Master Kumārajīva; T no. 1856), the latter being a correspondence between Kumārajīva and Lushan Huiyuan 廬山慧遠 (334–416). The former consists of discussions between Kumārajīva and his two disciples, Daosheng 道生 (355–434) and Sengzhao 僧肇 (384–414), who composed the records. The latter consists of a series of eighteen letters in which Huiyuan's questions take up considerably more space than Kumārajīva's responses, and which mainly concern basic problems of the early Mahayana.

³ See Chen 1972, pp. 81–83; Liu 1994, pp. 36–37; Robinson 1967, pp. 71–95; and Tang 1938, pp. 187–213.

⁴ See Tang 1938, p. 176.

⁵ See Zhu 1984, ch. 13, p. 49: "The reason why I have great trouble is that I have a body. Once I have no body, how could the trouble exist?" (吾有大患、及吾有身。及吾無身、吾有何患?)

⁶ See Tang 1938, pp. 176–78.

Whereas Tang analyzes Kumārajīva's biography and the commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*, Robinson's study of Kumārajīva's thought relies mainly on his correspondence with Huiyuan. Robinson claims that Kumārajīva is an orthodox Madhyamaka thinker and enumerates several points to support this argument: First, Kumārajīva rejects the authority of the Abhidharma and interprets the Āgamas in a Mahayana way. Second, he holds that the Buddha's words are used as mere expedience and do not imply any real entities. Third, he denies that real entities arise, because (a) neither inherence nor non-inherence of the effect in the cause is admissible, and (b) simultaneous and successive occurrence of cause and effect are both untenable. Fourth, he maintains that reality transcends the four modes of the *tetralemma*, and he holds Nāgārjuna's concept of negation.⁷

Alternatively, some scholars try to examine Kumārajīva's underlying thought from the discrepancies between his translations and their parallel versions, since some of his translations do not accord with the Indian originals. It is believed that he thus may have at times made his translations in a manner that inserted his own thought into the texts. In this regard, Japanese scholars have done pioneering work with their studies of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. It is worth noting that their comparisons all rely on Tibetan⁸ and Chinese translations,⁹ as a Sanskrit manuscript of the sutra was not discovered until the 1990s.

Before examining research on Kumārajīva's thought underlying the translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, we need to have a look at the content and philosophy of this text. There is no need to elaborate on the conspicuous place and influence it had on Chinese Buddhism and the whole of East Asia. As Richard Mather claims, "the sheer number of translations¹⁰ and

⁷ Robinson 1967, p. 90.

⁸ The Tibetan version was produced by Chos ŋid tshul khriṃs (Dharmatāṣṭīla) between 814 and 824. See Lamotte 1976, p. xxxvii.

⁹ The three extant Chinese translations are attributed to Zhi Qian 支謙 (fl. 220–252), Kumārajīva, and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664); see note 10, below.

¹⁰ According to Lamotte, the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* has been translated eight times; see Lamotte 1976, pp. xxvi–xxxvii. The translations are: (1) the *Gu Weimo jing* 古維摩經, translated in Luoyang 洛陽 in 188 by Yan Fotiao 嚴佛調 (n.d.), now lost; (2) the *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經 (T no. 474), translated in Jianye 建業 between 222 and 229 by Zhi Qian, still extant; (3) the *Yi Weimojie jing* 異維摩詰經, translated in 291 or 296 by Zhu Shulan 竺叔蘭 (n.d.), now lost; (4) the *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經, translated in Chang'an 長安 in 303 by Dharmarakṣa (Ch. Zhu Fahu 竺法護), now lost; an abridged version by the same translator, the *Shan Weimojie jing* 刪維摩詰經, is also lost; (5) the *He Weimojie jing* 合維摩詰經, combining nos. 2, 3, and 4 synoptically (or, perhaps, using 3 and 4 as annotation for 2), translated between 290 and

commentaries for this sutra which appeared between the third and seventh centuries, and the frequency of the theme of Vimalakīrti in the wall paintings and sculptures of Tun-huang, Yün-kang, and Lung-men, are testimony to its popularity.”¹¹ The scripture, whose name means “Teachings of the Bodhisattva Unstained-glory,” revolves around different dialogues between Vimalakīrti and various groups of personages, including *śrāvakas* (disciples of Buddha), bodhisattvas, and *tathāgatas* “strung together in a *Rahmen-erzählung* with an ever-changing scenery.”¹² Within this narrative context a great variety of doctrinal subjects concerning the ignorance and delusion of the *śrāvakas*, the superiority of Mahayana over Hinayana, the transcendental body of a *tathāgata*, the ambivalence of the sexes, and so forth, are treated. Nevertheless, some identify a basic theme throughout the whole scripture: according to Erik Zürcher, the theme is the benevolent and saving power of the bodhisattvas,¹³ while Lü Cheng argues that it is refuting the Hinayana by impeaching their one-sided view.¹⁴ In addition, Étienne Lamotte points out that the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, as one of the oldest Mahayana sutras, represents the Mādhyamika in the raw state that served as the foundation for Nagārjuna’s school.¹⁵ In his annotated translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, Lamotte elaborately outlines all important theses of the Mādhyamika and how the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* professes them. Due to space limitations, I will only enumerate the theses relevant to our topic:

1. All dharmas are without self-nature (*nīḥsvabhāva*) and are empty of self-nature (*svabhāvaśūnya*).¹⁶
2. All dharmas are originally calm (*ādiśānta*) and naturally nirvana-ized (*prakṛtiparinirvṛta*). As Lamotte demonstrates: “For the Madhyamaka, dharmas which do not arise at all are not produced by reason of causes and do not enter the round of rebirth: thus they are nirvana-ized. For them, samsara is intermixed with nirvana.”¹⁷ As for the

307 by Zhi Mindu 支愍度 (n.d.), and now lost; (6) the *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經, translated by *Gītamitra (Ch. Qiduōmi 祇多蜜; n.d.), now lost; (7) the *Xin Wei Mojie jing* 新維摩詰經, translated in Chang’an in 406 by Kumārajīva, still extant (T no. 475); and (8) the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經, translated in Chang’an in 650 by Xuanzang, and still extant (T no. 476).

¹¹ Mather 1968, pp. 60–61.

¹² Zürcher 1972, p. 131.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Lü 1956, p. 151.

¹⁵ Lamotte 1976, p. LXII.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. LXIII.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. LXVI.

identity between samsara and nirvana, this agrees with the most famous verse of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*: “Between samsara and nirvana, there is no difference; between nirvana and samsara, there is no difference.”¹⁸

3. Dharmas are without marks (*alaksṇa*) and consequently inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*) and unthinkable.
4. All dharmas are the same (*sama*) and without duality (*advaya*). Since dharmas are devoid of nature and empty, they are essentially identical, as shown in the verse from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* that reads: “Being, from the absolute point of view, equally without production and equally without birth, all dharmas are the same from the absolute point of view.”¹⁹

The Japanese scholar Kawaguchi Ekai analyzed the influence of Kumārajīva’s thought upon his translation in 1928. In his Japanese translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* with collated versions of Chinese and Tibetan, he surveys the discrepancies between Kumārajīva’s version and the Tibetan translation to suggest that Kumārajīva may have intentionally changed the original meaning of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* to transmit the idea of the affirmation of secular life, which Kawaguchi believes is used to defend Kumārajīva’s sexual conduct, which severely violated Buddhist discipline.²⁰ Kawaguchi’s research first drew attention to the possible impact of Kumārajīva’s thought on his translations, but unfortunately his argument placed more emphasis on the religious level than on the academic one since he himself was a monk. The first purely academic attempt to identify and demonstrate the influence of Kumārajīva’s thought on his translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* seems to be Toda Hirofumi’s study of 1964. This study provides us with an analysis of the places where Kumārajīva’s translation disagrees with the Tibetan and other Chinese translations, and details Toda’s explanations of such discrepancies with reference to the commentary recorded by Sengzhao and other related Buddhist texts. In so doing, Toda suggests that these discrepancies all stem from the

¹⁸ de La Vallee Poussin 1913, p. 535: *na samsarasya nirvāṇāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam, na nirvanasya samsārāt kiṃcid asti viśeṣaṇam*. The English is cited from Lamotte 1976, p. LXVI.

¹⁹ de La Vallee Poussin 1913, p. 374: *paramārthataḥ sarvadharmānutpādasamatayā paramārthataḥ sarvadharmā-tyantājātisamatayā paramārthataḥ samāḥ sarvadharmāḥ*. The English is cited from Lamotte 1976, p. LXVIII.

²⁰ Kawaguchi 1928, pp. 47–77. Kumārajīva had been forced to violate the discipline of sexual misconduct twice, first by Lü Guang 呂光 (338–399) and then by Yao Xing 姚興 (366–416). See *Gaoseng zhuan*, T no. 2059, 330a11–333a13.

translator's intentional interpolations based on his personal thought concerning the affirmation of secular life, the theory of the "true nature of all dharmas" (Ch. *Zhufa shixiang* 諸法實相), and sudden enlightenment in the present life.²¹ In 1966, on the basis of Toda's research, Nakamura Hajime also investigated how Kumārajīva's thought is reflected in his translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. He used the same approach as that of Toda, but his main concern was how the translation indicates the affirmation of mundane life. He also argues that based on his understanding of Madhyamaka ideas, Kumārajīva sometimes changed the original meaning in his translation.²²

Since the discovery and the publication of a Sanskrit version of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*,²³ the problem of the influence of Kumārajīva's thought on his translation has arisen once more. Wan Jinchuan proposes that some of our former views concerning Kumārajīva's revisions should be reconsidered. First, he suggests that the domestication of Kumārajīva's translation should not be merely attributed to the master; rather, his disciples, that is, Chinese exegetic monks, are also responsible for it.²⁴ Second, the textual development of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* is probably responsible for the differences between the versions belonging to different periods, especially concerning shifts in philosophical meaning.²⁵ Third, he argues that the replacement of *wuxiang* 無想 (non-reflection) with *wuxiang* 無相 (non-characteristic) to render *animitta* originates from Kumārajīva's period and most likely represents the philosophical trend that shifted the focus from the subjective level to the objective level.²⁶

These studies reveal the possibility of excavating Kumārajīva's thought from within his translation. Their approach, which integrated philological and philosophical analysis, has proven to be useful. This essay intends to build upon this research in two respects.

²¹ Toda 1964.

²² Nakamura 1966.

²³ A Sanskrit manuscript of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* was discovered by Japanese scholars in 1999 in Potala Palace in Tibet. It is dated to between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries; however, Paul Harrison further narrows down the date to around the middle of the twelfth century. See Harrison 2008, pp. 218–19, n. 26. The Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature of Taishō University published the trilingual version of the Sanskrit text collated with Chinese and Tibetan translations in 2004 and a critical edition of the Sanskrit text in 2006. See Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature 2004, 2006.

²⁴ Wan 2009, p. 162.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 171–76.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 184–90.

First, Kumārajīva's thought underlying the translation ought to be systematic and revolve around some Madhyamaka philosophical points that Kumārajīva particularly stressed. As we have stated, Kumārajīva principally relied on Madhyamaka philosophy in forming his philosophical viewpoints, and the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* reflects an early stage of the thought of this school. Thus, the viewpoints applied by Kumārajīva to the translation must depend on Madhyamaka philosophy even if they are developed in certain respects according to his personal preferences. The passages that most reflect the translator's thought will be analyzed in depth in the second part of this essay and may be classified according to three doctrinal concepts: "characteristic" or "distinctive feature" (*xiang* 相), "the equality of good and evil dharmas" (*shane buer* 善惡不二), and "the identity between samsara and nirvana" (*shengsi ji niepan* 生死即涅槃).

Second, we should not neglect the fact that Kumārajīva's translations were made in China and assisted by Chinese Buddhists. Therefore, these translations are unavoidably impacted by the atmosphere of Chinese culture and thought. On the one hand, Kumārajīva and his team strove to adapt their translations to the interests of Chinese audiences; on the other hand, they realized the problems in previous understandings of Buddhist doctrines and used the new translations to correct them. As we have mentioned above, the concept of *anātman* had never been correctly understood in China until Kumārajīva offered the right rendering. Thus it can be assumed that Kumārajīva and his assistants may have changed the original meaning of the text in order to emphasize the correct understandings in accordance with his, or their, thought. It is then necessary to introduce the context of the period before we start our examination of the evidence reflecting the influence of Kumārajīva's thought.

Before Kumārajīva arrived in China and introduced new scriptures and thought to China, the Prajñāpāramitā scriptures had been widely circulated and studied for two centuries. There were "six schools and seven sects" of early Chinese interpretations of the idea of emptiness contained in these texts.²⁷ The popularity and development of these scriptures was intimately related to the notion of *xuanxue* 玄學 (mysterious learning), as both of these streams of thought place emphasis on the abolition of attachments and discrimination, though they have different philosophical foundations and terminology. Chinese Buddhist masters "partly due to the influence of the

²⁷ Discussions about the "six schools and seven sects" can be found in Zürcher 1972, pp. 100–48 and Tang 1938, pp. 163–85.

traditional Taoist education they received in childhood and partly due to the wish to attract their ‘compatriots’ attention to their newly adopted Buddhist faith, frequently had recourse to Taoist terminology in their descriptions.”²⁸ This observation also applies to the theories of the “six schools and seven sects.” Thus, Zürcher argues that “all these ‘theories’ are in fact different branches of the *hsüan-hsüeh* [*xuanxue*] interpretation of the Mahāyāna doctrine of universal ‘emptiness.’”²⁹ An analysis of these theories is unfortunately outside the scope of this essay. I will here only focus on two problems pertaining to Kumārajīva’s translations.

First, the theories either treat emptiness equally with non-being, or regard it as a real, or the absolute, substance, and thereby fall either into a nihilist or realist interpretation. Both trends are not in accordance with the dialectical understanding of the Madhyamaka teaching. For instance, Kumārajīva’s disciple Sengzhao, in his essay *Buzhenkong lun* 不真空論 (On Emptiness), offers the following criticism of the theory of *benwu* 本無 (fundamental non-being):

As we investigate the original purports of the texts, [we shall find that] they simply mean by “not existent” [the state] of not being absolutely existent, and by “not inexistent” [the state] of not being absolutely inexistent. Why should [we, having interpreted] “not existent” as the inexistence of the existent, [go on to interpret] “not inexistent” as the inexistence of the inexistent? This is simply the talk of the lovers of inexistence.³⁰

Adhering to the teaching of Madhyamaka philosophy, Sengzhao points out that things are neither existent nor inexistent, and that this should be taken as the true meaning of emptiness.

Second, these theories stress the existence of a permanent spiritual principle that derives from the incorrect understanding of the concept of *anātman* as *feishen* (non-body) as mentioned above. For instance, the “School of Stored [Impressions of] Consciousness” (Ch. Shihan zong 識含宗) established by Yu Fakai 于法開 (ca. 310–370) provides us with the following interpretation of this “spiritual principle”:

The Triple World is the abode of the Long Night [of birth and death]; conscious thought is the primary cause of the Great Dream [of existence]. All [impressions of] existence which we now

²⁸ Liu 1994, p. 41.

²⁹ Zürcher 1972, p. 100.

³⁰ The English translation is that of Liu 1994, p. 55. For the original passage, see T no. 1858, 45: 152a19–24.

perceive are seen in that dream. But as soon as we are awoken from the Great Dream and the Long Night grows light, then delusive consciousness becomes extinguished, and the Triple World [is realized as being] all empty. At that time [the mind], fully enlightened, “has nothing from which it is born, and yet there is nothing which it does not produce.”³¹

Yu Fakai’s account of the mind indicates the understanding of *ātmagraha* (clinging to self) in early Chinese Buddhism, which later yielded to the correct understanding expounded in Kumārajīva’s translations.

According to the criticism of these theories made by Kumārajīva’s disciples Sengzhao and Sengrui 僧叡 (ca. fourth to fifth centuries),³² it can be assumed that Kumārajīva was aware of these theories and recognized the errors in them. Furthermore, it is likely that they had discussions about, and formed criticisms of, these theories during their translation activities.

The three doctrinal concepts mentioned above form the basis for analyzing the passages, examined below, that most reflect the influence of Kumārajīva’s thought on his translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. Such an analysis will allow us to see how the translator inserted his own doctrinal understandings into the translation, how he substituted these understandings for the possible original meaning of the passages, and the extent to which the Chinese context impacted upon such substitutions.

EXAMINATION OF THE PASSAGES THAT MOST REFLECT KUMĀRAJĪVA’S THOUGHT

Characteristic/s (xiang)

In this first set of passages, I will examine Kumārajīva’s use of the term *xiang* (“characteristic”), a term he uses very frequently in his translation to correspond both to the terms *nimitta* (characteristic) and *saṃjñā* (idea). Kumārajīva also uses the term *xiang* to render Sanskrit words that indicate meanings other than “characteristic” and “idea,” as well as in places where the parallel texts have no corresponding term at all.

³¹ As quoted by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623) in the *Zhongguan lunshu* 中觀論疏 (Commentary on the Middle Treatise), T no. 1824, 42: 29b3–7. The English translation is that of Zürcher 1972, p. 142.

³² See for instance Sengrui’s *Pimoluojiedi jing yishu xu* 毘摩羅詰堤經義疏序 (Preface to the Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti Sutra*), included in the *Chu sanzang ji*: “Concept-matching (*geyi* 格義) is pedantic deviating from the essential. The six schools are biased and beyond reach” (講肆格義迂而乖本、六家偏而不即; T no. 2145, 55: 59a2–3).

Chapter 3.6³³

S: *virāgo 'nārambaṇagatikāḥ* (p. 21)

“[The Dharma] is without craving, being without any object.”

Tib: *'dod chags dan bral ba dmigs pa med par 'gro ba ste* (p. 24)

“[The Dharma] is without craving for it has no object.”

Z: 不以姪為無罣礙。(T no. 474, 14: 521c19)

“[The Dharma] does not take desire to be unhindered.”

K: 法離於相、無所緣故。(T no. 475, 14: 540a7)

“The Dharma is free from any mode of activity, because it is without object.”

X: 法離貪著、無所緣故。(T no. 476, 14: 561c4–5)

“The Dharma is free from craving, because it has no object.”

According to the Sanskrit text, the object (*ārambaṇa*) is connected with craving; without it, the craving does not exist. However, Kumārajīva’s translation seems to present a different implication, in which *xiang* is used as a translation of *virāga* (without craving). Here the term *xiang* could not be thought to indicate a “mark or sign”; rather, it means the “mode of activity” according to Sengzhao’s commentary, which states:

The object [refers to] the object of the mind. The mode of activity (*xiang*) is what the mind reflects. Because of the object, the mode of activity exists. If there is no object, there is no mode of activity.³⁴

When treating the problem of Kumārajīva’s use of *xiang* to render *saṃjñā*, Paul Harrison points out that “Kumārajīva is in effect focusing on the object of *saṃjñā*, as a sign or feature we might have in our minds, in the light of which we recognize what we are experiencing, categorize it as this or that, and react accordingly.”³⁵ Correspondingly, once there is no such sign, there will be no

³³ The numbers indicate the chapter and the section respectively. This subdivision follows that of Lamotte 1976. It is worth noting that the conversation between Vimalakīrti and Maitreya beginning at 3.48 according to Lamotte is, in all three Chinese translations, located not in the third, but in the fourth, chapter. As both the Sanskrit and Tibetan texts accord with Lamotte’s numbering, with the final phrase of the chapter appearing after 3.72, I use Lamotte’s numbering throughout. The page numbers for the Sanskrit text refer to those found in the Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature 2006, and those for the Tibetan text refer to Ōshika 1970.

³⁴ *Zhu Weimojie jing*: 緣心緣也。相心之影響也。夫有緣故有相。無緣則無相也 (T no. 1775, 38: 346b10–11).

³⁵ Harrison 2010, p. 240.

notion of it. In this case, though there is no Sanskrit word being translated by the term *xiang*, we can still infer from the context and the commentary that the term is used as a rendering for *saṃjñā*, by which Kumārajīva intended to make explicit his interpretation that the mind and its object depend on each other, and that, furthermore, through the realization of non-object, the mind will attain emptiness, which is an implication of the Madhyamaka theory of the “real characteristic” of all dharmas.

Chapter 3.16

S: *saced evam asy avikopya satkāyaṃ ekāyanaṃ mārgam anugataḥ*
(p. 24)

“[Take this food] if you can follow the path of the single way without disturbing the egoistic views.”

Tib: *gal te 'jig tshogs la lta ba 'an mi bskyod la bgrod pa gcig pa 'i lam du yan' soñ* (p. 26)

“[Take this food] if you can obtain the path of the single way without having disturbed the egoistic views.”

Z: 若不知己身、已得一行。(T no. 474, 14: 522b4–5)

“[Take this food] if you can obtain the path of the single way without knowing oneself.”

K: 不壞於身、而隨一相。(T no. 475, 14: 540b24)

“[Take this food] if you can follow that which is characterized by oneness without destroying the self.”

X: 不壞薩迦耶見、入一趣道。(T no. 476, 14: 562b8)

“[Take this food] if you can enter the way of the single path without destroying the view of *satkāya* (self).”

Here *yi xiang* 一相 (“the characteristic of oneness”) seems to correspond to both *ekāyana* (single path) and *mārga* (way). Such a rendition made by Kumārajīva presents his understanding that the self is identical with the characteristic of oneness,³⁶ which means being without distinction. This agrees with Sengzhao’s comment: “The characteristic of oneness is that all creatures have the same spirit, and right and wrong are taken as the same; moreover, the self is the same as the characteristic of oneness.”³⁷

³⁶ *Zhu Weimojie jing*: “The self is the same as the characteristic of oneness, which [you] can follow without destroying the self” (身即一相。不待壞而隨也; T no. 1775, 38: 350a25–26).

³⁷ *Zhu Weimojie jing*: 萬物齊旨。是非同觀。一相也。然則身即一相 (T no. 1775, 38: 350a26–27).

In contrast to Kumārajīva, Xuanzang's rendering *yiqu dao* 一趣道 seems more loyal to the Sanskrit text, of which *yiqu* 一趣 is interpreted by Kuiji 窺基 (632–682) to imply a view of non-self.³⁸ It seems that Kumārajīva here applies his particular perspective in order to make the translation agree with his understanding that “the characteristic of oneness” and “non-characteristic” are equal and that both are essential for understanding what “real characteristic” means.

Chapter 3.51

S: *sarvasatvānubodho hi bodhiḥ* (p. 35)

“Enlightenment is the awakening of all sentient beings.”

Tib: *sems can thams cad rjes su rtogs pa ni byañ chub yin pa'i phyir ro* (p. 34)

“Enlightenment is the subsequent realization of all living beings.”

Z: 一切人民當從覺道。(T no. 474, 14: 524a1)

“All people will follow the path of enlightenment.”

K: 一切眾生即菩提相。(T no. 475, 14: 542b16–17)

“All sentient beings are characterized by *bodhi* (enlightenment).”

X: 夫菩提者、一切有情等所隨覺。(T no. 476, 14: 564c26–27)

“*Bodhi* (enlightenment) is realized by all sentient beings.”

In this case, Kumārajīva's translation seems to omit the “*bodhi*” at the end of the Sanskrit sentence and to change “*anubodha*” (awakening) into “*puti xiang*” 菩提相 (“having the characteristic of *bodhi*”), the grammatical feature of which resembles the Sanskrit “*bahuvrīhi*,” which is used as an adjective to modify the noun, namely, sentient beings.³⁹ Nakamura and Toda both argue that Kumārajīva intentionally changed the meaning of the original text to express that the awakening of sentient beings already exists in this present life, and thus differs from the original meaning, which possibly indicated an enlightenment to be realized by sentient beings in the future.⁴⁰ By comparing Kumārajīva's translation of this passage with that of the other translations, we can see that he has effected a change of meaning by employing the term “*puti xiang*,” indicating that the characteristic of *bodhi* is inherent in sentient beings. In addition, “*puti xiang*” is believed to refer to the charac-

³⁸ *Shuo wugouchengjing shu* 說無垢稱經疏 (Commentary on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*): “The principle of non-self is called the path of a single course (one direction)” (無我之理。名為一趣; T no. 1782, 38: 1046b3).

³⁹ The comparison with “*bahuvrīhi*” was suggested to me by Paul Harrison in a personal communication.

⁴⁰ See Nakamura 1966, p. 370; Toda 1964, p. 429.

teristic of *wuxiang* (“non-characteristic”),⁴¹ which implies that awakening is the realization that all things are devoid of characteristics, a notion that agrees with Kumārajīva’s Madhyamaka understanding of this issue.

In all three of the passages examined above, Kumārajīva employed the term *xiang*. In order to reveal the underlying reason for his use of this term, we need to consider explanations that are internal to the text as well as those stemming from the historical context. The internal explanations derive from Kumārajīva’s personal thought. He substitutes, or adds, the term “*xiang*” in order to emphasize the significance of the notions of the “non-characteristic” as well as that of the “real-characteristic” of dharmas. Kumārajīva maintains that the real-characteristic of dharmas is the middle way, the ultimate truth, and the core of Prajñāpāramitā and Madhyamaka philosophy. In his correspondence with Huiyuan he explains the real-characteristic of dharmas thus:

The real-mark of dharmas is conventionally termed suchness (*tathatā*), dharma-nature (*dharmatā*), and reality limit (*bhūtakoṭi*).

In this [suchness] even the not-existent-and-not-inexistent cannot be found, much less the existent and the inexistent.⁴²

In addition, the real-characteristic of dharmas is also regarded as “awakening” (*bodhi*).⁴³ It is this understanding that may lie behind Kumārajīva’s choice of the term *puti xiang*.

The method of attaining the real-characteristic of dharmas, according to Kumārajīva, is through observing the truth of “non-characteristic,” which is related to that of the “single characteristic.” He writes:

Because of his keen sense organs, the bodhisattva observes the characteristic of the truth of suffering as that of oneness, the so-called “devoid of characteristic.” . . . As the bodhisattva [has] in-depth [knowledge], he observes the four truths as one truth. . . . The bodhisattva penetrates into the real-characteristic of dharmas by means of one truth.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See the *Zhu Weimojie jing*: “The characteristic of non-characteristic is the characteristic of *bodhi*” (無相之相是菩提相也; T no. 1775, 38: 362a22).

⁴² *Jiumoluoshi fashi dayi*: 諸法實相者。假爲如法性真際。此中非有非無。尚不可得。何況有無耶 (T no. 1856, 45: 135c26–27). The translation is that of Robinson 1967, p. 93.

⁴³ See the *Zhu Weimojie jing*: “[This] also illustrates that *bodhi* is the real characteristic that removes attachments. The real characteristic is the cause of *bodhi*, and it is also called *bodhi*” (亦明菩提即是實相，以遣其著也。實相是菩提因亦名菩提也; T no. 1775, 38: 362c21–22).

⁴⁴ *Jiumoluoshi fashi dayi*: 菩薩利根故。知苦諦一相。所謂無相 . . . 以菩薩深入故。觀四諦爲一諦 . . . 菩薩以一諦。入諸法實相 (T no. 1856, 45: 140b24–c3).

Such an explanation of “characteristic of oneness” and “non-characteristic” allows us to view his use of these terms as instances wherein his own understanding colors his translations.

The historical context of the period during which the translation was made, especially the state of contemporary philosophy and Buddhist exegesis, also explains why Kumārajīva employed the term *xiang*. As I have explained above, Kumārajīva and his assistants may have realized the problem with the contemporary understanding of emptiness, which deviated from the middle way by wrongly interpreting it as non-being and something spiritual. Thus, in the translation Kumārajīva and his assistants seem to use *xiang* to transfer attention from the subjective level to the objective level, from the spiritual to the material, in order to correct the wrong understandings of contemporary Buddhist theories and to introduce Madhyamaka philosophy to their contemporaries.

The Equality of Good and Evil Dharmas

This second set of passages concerns the concept of “the equality of good and evil dharmas,” which, as mentioned earlier, is one of the central doctrinal points of the philosophy of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. As we shall see, the different versions of the passages below assume very different attitudes in their understanding of this concept.

Chapter 3.13

S: *yadi sthaviro mahākāśyapo 'ṣṭau ca mithyātvāni samatīkrāmet, aṣṭau ca vimokṣān samāpadyeta mithyāsamatayā ca samyaktvasamatām avataret* (p. 23)

“If honorable Mahākāśyapa, you overcome the eight falsehoods and attain the eight liberations; and if, through the wrong [understanding of] equality, you can penetrate the right [understanding of] equality . . . [then you may eat].”

Tib: *gal te | gnas brtan 'od sruñ chen po | log pa ñid brgyad las kyañ mi 'da' zñ rnam par thar pa brgyad la 'an sñoms par 'jug cin log pa'i mñam pa ñid kyis yañ dag pa'i mñam pa ñid la 'jug pa dañ* | (p. 25)

“Elder Mahākāśyapa, [take this food] if you absorb yourself in the eight liberations without transgressing the eight perversions; [and also] if you [can] enter into the equality of ultimate reality by the equality of perversion.”

Z: 如今耆年已過八邪、八解正受、以正定越邪定。(T no. 474, 14: 522a17–18)

“Now venerable [Kāśyapa] has crossed over the eight perversions and correctly experienced the eight deliverances, having gone beyond wrong by means of right concentration.”

K: 迦葉、若能不捨八邪、入八解脫、以邪相入正法。(T no. 475, 14: 540b6–7)

“Kāśyapa, [take this food] if you are able to enter the eight emancipations without renouncing the eight perversions, and enter the right Dharma by means of what is characterized as being wrong.”

X: 尊者迦葉、若能不捨八邪、入八解脫、以邪平等入正平等。(T no. 476, 14: 562a14–15)

“Venerable Kāśyapa, [take this food] if you are able to enter the eight emancipations without renouncing the eight perversions; [and if you are able to] enter the right [understanding of] equality by means of the wrong [understanding of] equality.”

Chapter 3.16

S: *na ca te 'vidyā bhavatrṣṇā ca samudghātītā na ca vidyāvimuktī utpādite | ānantaryasamatayā ca te samādhivimuktiḥ* (p. 24)

“[Take this food] if your knowledge and deliverance cannot be produced without destroying ignorance and the thirst for existence; [and] if you can reach the deliverance of concentration through the equality of [the five acts of] immediate fruition.”

Tib: *khyod kyis ma rig pa dan srid pa'i sreg pa'añ ma bcom la rig pa dan rnam par grol pa yan ma skyed*⁴⁵ | *mtshams med pa'i mñam pa ñid dan | khyod kyi rnam par grol ba yan mtshuñs* | (p. 26)

“[Take this food] if you cannot produce knowledge and [a state of] liberation without [first] overcoming ignorance and craving for conditioned existence; [and] if you can penetrate the equality of liberation through the equality of the five inexpressible sins.”

Z: 為非不明、非趣有愛、非得明度。亦非極罪、正解已解。(T no. 474, 14: 522b5–6)

“[Take this food if you hold that] lacking ignorance and the craving for existence is not to attain the perfection of wisdom

⁴⁵ Ōshika 1970 reads *yan skyed*, but both Tibetan translations in the Peking and Narthang Kanjur editions read *yan ma skyed*. Considering the context, I am inclined to choose *yan ma skyed*.

(*prajñāpāramitā*); and if you have already reached the right deliverance lacking the utmost transgressions.”

K: 不滅癡愛、起於明脫。以五逆相而得解脫。(T no. 475, 14: 540b24–25)

“[Take this food,] if you can generate knowledge and emancipation without extinguishing delusion and desire, [and] if you can be delivered through what are characterized as the five transgressions.”

X: 不滅無明并諸有愛、而起慧明及以解脫。能以無間平等法性而入解脫平等法性。(T no. 476, 14: 562b9–11)

“[Take this food,] if you can generate knowledge and emancipation without extinguishing ignorance and any craving for existence, [and] if you can enter the equality of deliverance through the equality of transgressions.”

In both passages, Zhi Qian’s translation mainly insists upon an opposition between good and evil, with the latter being overwhelmed by the former. Asayama Yukihiko argues that such an opposition should be ascribed to contemporaneous Chinese thought. Asayama argues that Zhi Qian applies such thought to his translation and replaces the original dialectical thinking with it. But he bases this argument upon a comparison between the Chinese and Tibetan texts.⁴⁶ This deserves to be reconsidered with the help of the Sanskrit text. Wan Jinchuan has done such research and proposes that Zhi Qian’s translation represents the original form of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* during that time, and reflects the opposition of good and evil present before the rise of the Madhyamaka dialectical doctrine.⁴⁷ I agree with Wan’s point, but a problem arises: Why do the later Sanskrit and Tibetan parallels still contain traces of this original doctrinal understanding, while the earlier translation of Kumārajīva only reflects the later one, namely, the identity between good and evil? A possible explanation seems to be that Kumārajīva intentionally changed the original text where it deals with the opposition of good and evil since it is not consistent with the Madhyamaka doctrine of the equality of dharmas. His commentary serves to reveal his attitude:

[Since] the nature of the eight depravities and the eight deliverances is consistently equal, [if one] can be skilled in observing the eight depravities, he will reach the eight deliverances. Why

⁴⁶ Asayama 1986, pp. 133–34.

⁴⁷ Wan 2009, p. 173.

not reach deliverance without discarding depravity? If one can [do so] in this way, this is called reaching deliverance.⁴⁸

And again:

The *śrāvakas* (listeners) think that wisdom is choked by ignorance. Hence, wisdom [is obtained] through the extinction of ignorance. [They] think the mind is fettered by affection, so the [mind] is delivered by relieving affection. Great beings observe that the true characteristic of ignorance and affection is wisdom and deliverance [respectively]. Therefore [they] produce wisdom and deliverance without extinguishing ignorance and affection.⁴⁹

It seems that Kumārajīva and his assistants take the opposition between good and evil as a Hinayana viewpoint that should be discarded. They claim that depravities are identical to deliverance, and that a similar relationship pertains between ignorance and wisdom. Hence there is no need to extinguish evils or ignorance in order to attain liberation. Such an attitude toward the non-abandonment of depravities and ignorance resembles the statement “generating non-characteristic without discarding conditioned dharmas”⁵⁰ from Kumārajīva’s translation, which is believed, according to Nakamura, to be the translator’s affirmation of secular life.⁵¹ The passages translated by Kumārajīva above all seem to incline toward his affirmation of worldly dharmas. Moreover, when we relate the notion, mentioned above, that “all sentient beings are characterized by *bodhi*” to these passages, we could infer that Kumārajīva may have held a view of contemplation that affirms sudden enlightenment without the need for a gradual extinguishing of affections and evils. It is possible to interpret his omission of the term “sameness” from the passage in chapter 3:16 as being impacted by just such an understanding of contemplation.

On the other hand, in light of the context stated above, Chinese Buddhist theories had not actually mastered dialectical thinking until Kumārajīva introduced this new philosophy into China. Thus, it is highly likely that the translation here not only stems from Kumārajīva’s intention to spread such

⁴⁸ *Zhu Weimojie jing*: 八邪八解本性常一。善觀八邪即入八解。曷為捨邪更求解脫乎。若能如是者。名入解脫也 (T no. 1775, 38: 348c24–27).

⁴⁹ *Zhu Weimojie jing*: 聲聞以癡暗智故癡滅而明。以愛繫心故愛解而脫。大士觀癡愛真相即是明脫、故不滅癡愛而起明脫 (T no. 1775, 38: 350b2–5).

⁵⁰ *Weimojie suoshuo jing*: 不捨有為法而起無相 (T no. 475, 14: 543c16–17).

⁵¹ Nakamura 1966, p. 366.

ideas, but is also used to eliminate the impact of old understandings not in accordance with Madhyamaka philosophy.

The Equality of Samsara and Nirvana

Finally, I will examine passages dealing with the concept of the equality of samsara and nirvana. Concerning the relationship between affliction and liberation, Kumārajīva's translation presents an important difference from Nagarjuna's interpretation of Madhyamaka doctrine as will be discussed below.

Chapter 3.3

S: *tathā pratisaṃlīyaś ca yathā saṃsārāvacarāṃś ca kleśān na prajahāsi nirvanasamavasaraṇaś ca bhavasi* (p. 20)

“Not abandoning the realm of rebirth and afflictions, but entering nirvana, this is how to meditate.”

Tib: *ji ltar 'khor ba na spyod pa'i ñon moñs pa rnam kyañ mi spoñ la | mya ñan las 'das pa la yañ dag par gñol bar gyur ba de ltar nañ du yañ dag gñag par gyis śig* | (p. 23)

“Not renouncing the passions which come from the realm of rebirth, and dedicating oneself to the complete attainment of nirvana, [this is how] one [sits] correctly in [meditative] repose.”

Z: 於生死勞垢而不造、在禪行如泥洹。(T no. 474, 14: 521c9)

“Not generating the afflictions of samsara, in one's practice of meditation one is as if in nirvana.”

K: 不斷煩惱而入涅槃、是為宴坐。(T no. 475, 14: 539c25)

“Not doing away with the afflictions and yet entering nirvana, this is sitting in repose.”

X: 不捨生死而無煩惱、雖證涅槃而無所住、是為宴坐。(T no. 476, 14: 561b18–20)

“Not rejecting samsara, yet free from affliction; realizing nirvana, yet without any dwelling: this is sitting in repose.”

Chapter 3.58

S: *sarvakleśaprasaṃmanamañña eṣa yathābhūtābhisambodhanatayā* (p. 37)

“This is the seat of the extinction of all afflictions, because it is enlightened according to reality.”

Tib: *yañ dag pa ji lta ba bzin du mñon par rdzogs par byañ chub pa'i phyir de ni ñon moñs pa thams cad rab tu zi ba'i sñiñ po'o* (p. 36)

“It is the seat of the stilling of all the passions, because it is perfectly enlightened with regard to the true nature of things.”

Z: 衆勞之靜是、佛從是最正覺故。(T no. 474, 14: 524b9–10)

“The extinction of all afflictions is [the place of enlightenment], because from this buddhas conform to the most perfect enlightenment.”

K: 諸煩惱是道場、知如實故。(T no. 475, 14: 542c28–29)

“The afflictions are the place of enlightenment, because one realizes true reality.”

X: 息諸煩惱是妙菩提、如實現證真法性故。(T no. 476, 14: 565c3–4)

“The extinguishing of all afflictions is the subtle *bodhi*, because one truly realizes the true nature of dharmas.”

We may notice that in both cases Kumārajīva’s translation assumes the attitude that nirvana or enlightenment can be attained without extirpating the afflictions, which differs from most of the versions. It seems Kumārajīva identifies afflictions with transmigration (*samsara*) and further extends this identification to nirvana. There is, thus, no need to obtain nirvana through extirpating afflictions, a notion directly attributed to Kumārajīva in his commentary on chapter 3:3.⁵² Such a perspective seems to conflict with Madhyamaka philosophy. The Madhyamaka position is that liberation should be achieved in the midst of the ordinary practices of life in the empirical world, but with defilements extirpated. This is strongly asserted by Nāgārjuna in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*:

There is *mokṣa* (liberation) from the destruction of karmic defilements, which are but conceptualizations. These arise from mere *prapañca* (conceptual play), which is in turn banished in *śūnyatā*.⁵³

Based on Kumārajīva’s preference for mundane life, we may infer that he deliberately eliminated the boundary between the afflictions and nirvana, and

⁵² See *Zhu Weimojie jing*: “Kumārajīva says: ‘Affliction is identical with nirvana, therefore the former does not need to be eliminated before entering into [nirvana]’” (什曰。煩惱即涅槃。故不待斷而後入也; T no. 1775, 38: 345b5–6).

⁵³ de La Vallée Poussin 1913, pp. 349–50: *Karmakleśakṣayān mokṣa karmakleśā vikalpataḥ, te prapañcāt prapañcas tu śūnyatāyāṃ nirudhyate*. The English translation is cited from Ng Yukwan 1993, p. 164.

identified a *samsara* in which the afflictions are not extirpated with nirvana. Furthermore, this extension of Madhyamaka doctrine that identifies *samsara* and nirvana seems relevant to his understanding of practice mentioned above. The notion of liberation with the non-extirpation of afflictions implies immediate enlightenment. In this sense, the afflictions can also be identified with enlightenment.

Aside from these points, the translation probably involves Kumārajīva's consideration of the Chinese philosophical context. Before he introduced the new interpretations through his translations, Chinese Buddhists' understanding of nirvana did not include Madhyamaka philosophy. In earlier Chinese Buddhist translations, nirvana is always translated as *wuwei* 無為 (non-conditioned) and *miedu* 滅度 (extinction-deliverance). Both terms for nirvana, according to Sengzhao's explanation, respectively take into account the nature of nirvana as transcending the conditioned realm, and indicate the extinction of the body and deliverance from the four streams of desire, illusion, existence, and ignorance.⁵⁴ This understanding of nirvana can be regarded as the dominant trend in Chinese Buddhist exegesis between the second and fourth centuries. To exemplify the point, I cite two passages from essays by famous laymen active during this period. The first is from *Feng fayao* 奉法要 (Essentials of Religion), written by Xi Chao 郗超 (336–377), in which nirvana is described as follows:

If one is neither afraid of activity, nor attached to the contemplation of Emptiness; and, if all principles are effaced, and one does not hold to, or rely upon, anything, then one does not plant any [seeds] at all. Since one does not plant, one is not subject to retribution. The vast emptiness of the mystic discarding [of all notions]—that is the nirvana of the Buddha.⁵⁵

The other quotation is from the emperor of the Later Qin 後秦 (387–417), Yao Xing 姚興 (366–416), who wrote a letter to his brother Yao Song 姚嵩 (n.d.–416) concerning the meaning of nirvana. It is this letter, excerpted below, that stimulated the composition of Sengzhao's *Niepan wuming lun* 涅槃無名論 (Nirvana is Nameless):

⁵⁴ Sengzhao, *Niepan wuming lun* 涅槃無名論: 涅槃者。秦言無為。亦名滅度。無為者。取乎虛無寂寞。妙絕於有為。滅度者。言其大患永滅。超度四流 (T no. 1858, 45: 157b29–c3).

⁵⁵ *Fengfa yao*, included in the *Hongming ji* 弘明集 (Collection of Essays on Buddhism), T no. 2102, 52: 89a3–5. The English translation is that of Zürcher (1972, p. 174).

Sentient beings transmigrate perpetually in samsara all because of attachments and desires. Should the desires in their hearts cease, they would no longer be [bound up] with samsara. Being no [longer bound up with] samsara, their spirits would be absorbed in the profound silence, and their attainments would be equal to the [infinite] void. This [state] is called nirvana. As it is called nirvana, how could it permit the presence of names?⁵⁶

Such interpretations of nirvana are basically in accordance with earlier Buddhist thought, for which nirvana merely means deliverance from samsara. However, in light of Madhyamaka theory, samsara and nirvana in essence are identical. We may infer from the treatises of his disciple Sengzhao and his royal patron Yao Xing that Kumārajīva would have been familiar with contemporary Chinese interpretations of nirvana and their shortcomings. Thus, based on his own views and the desire to correct what he perceived as a mistaken understanding of the relationship between samsara and nirvana, Kumārajīva introduced new translations that advocated the identity of the afflictions and liberation.

CONCLUSION

This study takes as its point of departure the complicated problem of trying to determine the extent to which Kumārajīva's thought influenced his translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. It follows a philological approach like that applied by previous research, which identified certain discrepancies between Kumārajīva's translation and other versions of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* as deriving from Kumārajīva's personal understanding of Buddhist doctrine. This essay has examined three doctrinal concepts—the real-characteristic of dharmas, the equality of good and evil, and the identity of samsara and nirvana—in order to tease out where and why Kumārajīva made the decisions he did when making his translation. It argues that he imprinted his own understanding upon these concepts based on his personal preferences for lay Buddhist practice and for an understanding of meditation that emphasizes the possibility of immediate enlightenment. A striking example of this is his affirmation of the possibility of attaining liberation without having to extirpate the afflictions.

⁵⁶ This letter is included in the *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Further Collection of Essays on Buddhism), compiled by Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), T no. 2103, 52: 229c29–230a3. The English translation is that of Liu 1994, p. 68. Concerning the *Niepan wuming lun*, see note 54.

An examination of the historical context of the period in which Kumārajīva worked reveals a disjuncture between conventional Buddhist understandings of doctrine and the new interpretations introduced by Kumārajīva. As Whalen Lai has suggested, “Chinese Buddhists truly embarked on a ‘Mahāyānist’ phase after the introduction of key Mahāyāna sūtras and key treatises of Nāgārjuna by Kumārajīva.”⁵⁷ It can be argued that one of the motivating factors for undertaking his translation was to correct what he perceived as problematic interpretations of Buddhist teachings. Thus, Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* reflects a dialectical interaction between his own thinking and that of the Chinese philosophical context in which he worked. Both of these factors come together to serve his ultimate aim, namely, to transmit Madhyamaka philosophy into China.

Last but not least, it is worth noting the contribution that Kumārajīva’s Chinese assistants made to the translation. Sengzhao’s commentary on the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, which records discussions made by contributors during the translation process, reveals the extent of their participation and influence. The treatises left by Kumārajīva’s disciples also present important details of the contemporaneous philosophical context in which the translation was made. Moreover, these Chinese assistants were responsible for polishing and styling the text during the translation project. Therefore, we cannot exclude their possible contributions to the choices made for employing particular terms and expressions in the translation. Finally, due to a lack of textual sources, especially that of an earlier Sanskrit manuscript, there remain other possible explanations for the discrepancies between the extant translations besides that of the influence of Kumārajīva’s own thought. This study is, thus, a work in progress, and looks forward to future studies that may elaborate upon its findings.

ABBREVIATIONS

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|---|--|
| K | Kumārajīva’s translation of the <i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśa</i> , the <i>Weimojie suoshuo jing</i> 維摩詰所說經 (T no. 475, 14: 537a–557b). |
| S | Sanskrit text from <i>Vimalakīrtinirdeśa: A Sanskrit Edition Based upon the Manuscript Newly Found at the Potala Palace</i> . Ed. Study Group on Buddhist Sanskrit Literature, The Institute for Comprehensive Studies of Buddhism, Taisho University. Tokyo: Taishō University Press, 2006. |

⁵⁷ Lai 1978, p. 339.

- T *Taishō shinshu daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.
- Tib Tibetan translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* cited from *Tibetan Text of Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*. Ed. Jisshu Ōshika. Chiba: Naritatan Shinshoji, 1970.
- X Xuanzang's translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, the *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經 (T no. 476, 14: 557c4–588a24).
- Z Zhi Qian's translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, the *Foshuo Weimojie jing* 說維摩詰經 (T no. 474, 14: 519a4–536c24).

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