

A STUDY OF TRANSLATORSHIP OF THE *WU-LIANG-SHOU-CHING*

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In studying Buddhism of East Asia, the first thing we should bear in our mind is that Buddhism of that region, wherever it may be found, in China, in Korea, or in Japan, is invariably based on the "Chinese-Rendered-Buddhist-Text". Here in this region, those sūtras put in Chinese characters, such as are entitled "佛說……經 (The Buddha Stated...Sūtra)", were held in high esteem. They were considered, in the very form as they are found, to be genuine representations of the Buddha's personal sermons. Some of them indeed were selected by those founders of a Buddhist sect from among the voluminous Chinese Tripitaka as the most important Buddhist texts, and were set up as the standard sūtras according to which the beliefs and dogmas of their particular sect were made to be developed. In such cases, the texts that they selected were invariably the Chinese texts. This is why the present writer maintains that Buddhism of East Asia, the supporter and nourisher of the spiritual life of various peoples of that region, is invariably based on the "Chinese-Rendered-Buddhist-Text".

Recently, however, there arose among the Buddhist students of our country the vogue of textual criticism, and some Chinese texts were the targets of their bitter criticism. Yet, in so far as the faith of Buddhism of East Asia is concerned, we must say that its base lies always in the simple-hearted acceptance of the "Chinese-Rendered-Buddhist-Text".

(2)

Now, of all the Buddhist denominations that arose and developed in East Asia, the most influential one is the Pure Land school. It has prevailed in wide area of East Asia, and penetrated deep into people's heart. In this Pure Land School, there are several standard sūtras. One of them is the "*Wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols, translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei".

The *Wu-liang-shou-ching* of K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei is one member of the "*Wu-liang-shou-ching* cycle". The "*Wu-liang-shou-ching* cycle" is a group of 12 Chinese versions considered to have been produced

on one supposed original. These 12 Chinese versions are as follows.

(1) *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols; by An Shih Kao of the Latter Han. Missing. (無量壽經, 二卷, 後漢, 安世高, 缺)

(2) *Wu-liang-ch'ing-ching-p'ing-têng-chiao-ching*, a vols; by Chin Lou Chia Ch'an (Lokaraksa) of the Latter Han. Extant. (無量清淨平等覺經, 二卷, 後漢, 支婁迦讖, 存)

(3) *A-mi-t'o-san-ya-san-fo-sa-lou-fo-t'an-kuo-to-jen-tao-ching* (*Taa-mi-t'o-ching*), 2 vols; by Chih Chien of Wu in the period of the Three Kingdoms. Extant. (阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過度人道經, 一名, 大阿彌陀經二卷, 三國, 吳, 支謙, 存)

(4) *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols; by K'ang Seng K'ai (Sangharvarman) of Wei in the period of the Three Kingdoms. Extant. (無量壽經二卷, 三國, 魏, 康僧鎧, 存)

(5) *Wu-liang-ch'ing-ching-p'ing-têng-chiao-ching*, 2 vols; by Po Yen of Wei in the period of the Three Kingdoms. Missing. (無量清淨平等覺經, 二卷, 三國, 魏, 白延, 缺)

(6) *Wu-liang-shou-ching* (*Wu-liang-ch'ing-ching-p'ing-têng-chiao-ching*), 2 uols; by Chu Fa Hu (Dharmarakṣa) of West Tsin. Missing. (無量壽經, 一名, 無量清淨平等覺經, 二卷, 西晉, 竺法護, 缺)

(7) *Wu-liang-chou-chih-chen-teng-cheng-chiao-ching*, 2 vols; by Chu Fa Li of East Tsin. Missing. (無量壽至真等正覺經, 二卷, 東晉, 竺法力, 缺)

(8) *Hsin-wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols; by Chiao Hsien (Buddhabhadra) of Liu Sung of the Southern Dynasties. Missing. (新無量壽經, 二卷, 劉宋, 覺賢, 缺)

(9) *Hsin-wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols; by Pao Yün of Liu Sung of the Southern Dynasties. Missing. (新無量壽經, 二卷, 劉宋, 寶雲, 缺)

(10) *Hsin-wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols; by Dharmamitra of Liu Sung of the Southern Dynasties. Missing. (新無量壽經, 二卷, 劉宋, 曇摩密多, 缺)

(11) *Wu-liang-shou-ju-lai-hui*, 2 vols; by Bodhiruci of T'ang. Extant. (無量壽如來會, 二卷, 唐, 菩提流支, 存)

(12) *Ta-wu-liang-shou-chung-yen-ching*, 3 vols; by Fa-hsien of Sung. Extant. (大無量壽莊嚴經, 三卷, 宋, 法賢, 存)

Now, the fact we notice when we pass our eyes through this list is that some version bears a title quite different from others. And,

the difference is so much that it appears rather absurd to think all of them to be the co-translations of one and the same original. However, tradition maintains that these are "the twelve translations of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*", and "the seven are missing while the five are extant".

But this tradition is never a plain piece of fact. When we face it with a critical mind, we can espy in it a number of doubtful points. As to "the seven missing", there are such questions as the following. Is it real that all these translations are actually produced each independent of the others? Is it not possible that there was a casual mistake on the part of some sūtra-catalogue compiler who recorded an item of translation as two items of different translations? Concerning such problems, minute investigations have been made and satisfactory solutions have been presented by those scholars whose special study is the research of the sūtra-translation history. Yet, one question had scarcely vanished another would surely appear. It seems as if there were no end. Thus it comes to this, that the theory of the seven missing, although it is a tradition, cannot be accepted just in the very form as it stands.

With "the five extant", there are problems also. It is true that these five have been preserved to this day, but is the ascribed translator the real one? About this, even among Buddhist historians, there are disruptions of opinions. The two later versions (Bodhiruci's and Fa-hsien's) are indisputable. But, three earlier versions (ascribed respectively to Lokaraksa, Chih Chien, and K'ang Seng K'ai) are problematical. As it so happened that a most important text of the Pure Land school of Buddhism was included in this group, an elaborate research has been carried out by many scholars into the history of these translations. In the following pages, the present writer will touch upon this research and offer a brief explanation of the problem of the translatorship of "the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*" commonly attributed to K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei.

(3)

Among the five extant, the version whose translatorship is ascribed to K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei is the very text of the Pure Land School of Buddhism. Accordingly, it was held in reverence as such by men of all ages, and, as the mainspring of beliefs and dogmas, made the object of serious study by all the Pure Land scholars of later

days.

While this is so, there has always been a problem about this version. The central point of that problem is whether the translation of the version was really done by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei in the period of Three Kingdoms i. e. in the middle of the third century. The reason why there arose such a question is this, that mention of "the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols, translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei" is not found in the *Ch'u-san-ts'ang-chi-chi* 出三藏記集, the oldest existing sūtra-catalogue compiled by Seng Yu 僧祐 of Liang 梁; but only in the *Li-tai-san-pao-chi* 歷代三寶記, a later sūtra-catalogue of comparatively less value as a historical material.

In this latter book, we read: "K'ang Seng K'ai, an Indian śramaṇa, rendered the *Yu-ch'ieh-ch'ang-che-so-wen-ching*, two volumes 郁伽長者問經二卷, and the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, two volumes 無量壽經二卷, at Po-ma-ssu, Lo-yang 洛陽白馬寺, during the Chia-peing 嘉平 years of the Wei (249-253)."

But this statement is not well-founded; there are many dubious points. In what way was it decided that K'ang Seng K'ai was an Indian śramaṇa? From what facts was it deduced that those sūtras were translated at Po-ma-ssu? That is quite uncertain. Moreover, between "the *Yü-ch'ieh-ch'ang-che-so-wen-ching* translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei" and "the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei", there is no resemblance in their way of expression, which fact makes us suspect that they were not done by the same hand. Furthermore, the very person of K'ang Seng K'ai is not perspicuous but quite obscure. In the *Kao-seng-chuan* 高僧傳, his mention is only as follows: "there was a foreign monk whose name was K'ang Seng K'ai. In the latter years of Chia-p'ing, he came to Lo-yang and translated four fasciculi of sūtras including the *Yü-chieh-ch'ang-che-ching*".

This is all we know about him. The details of his life-history are beyond our ken. This being the case, some scholars go so far as to deny the existence of K'ang Seng K'ai and identify him with K'ang Seng Hui 康僧會, that noted monk who came to the capital of Wu 吳, one of the Three Kingdoms, and took an active part in Buddhist movement. The view that denies the existence of K'ang Seng K'ai may be extreme, yet the incontestable fact is that his life-history is not sufficiently known. Further, again, as to the view that the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* is too much refined in its style to be regarded as a

translation produced in the period of the Three Kingdoms, we should say that there is something in it which we cannot deny, although it is a vague argument.

In this way, the maintenance of the view that the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei, turns out to be untenable. In this connexion, we should like to ask the reader to turn their attention to the fact that the *Fa-ching-lu* 法經錄 and the *Yen-ts'ung-lu* 彥綜錄, two sūtra-catalogues of the Sui period i. e. compiled at about the same period with the *Li-tai-san-pao-chi*, did not adopt the K'ang Seng K'ai theory but advocated the Chu Fa Hu 竺法護 theory, saying that it was Chu Fa Hu of West Tsin who translated this version. By this we learn that the K'ang Seng K'ai theory was just the opinion of the minority, which first came to the surface in the Sui period. When these circumstances are considered, it becomes quite natural that Buddhist historians are disposed for denying the K'ang Seng K'ai theory.

However, as to the fact that all the current editions of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* have been handed down to us invariably as the translation of K'ang Seng K'ai, we have to say a word. It is entirely due to the influence of the *Kai-yüan-shin-chiao-lu* 開元釋教錄, which happened to follow the example of the *Li-tai-san-pao-chi* and regarded the version as the translation of K'ang Sen K'ai. The *Kai-yüan-shih-chiao-lu*, as is well known, is the basic material used at the time when the Tripitaka was edited in the period of Sung. Those sūtras, of which mention is made in that catalogue, were adopted and included in the Tripitaka. The example was followed by the succeeding editions of the Tripitaka. It is thus due to all-powerful influence of the 同元錄 that the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was circulated in later times as having been translated by K'ang Seng K'ai.

(4)

Now, when thus the K'ang Seng K'ai theory is defeated, whom do we presume to be the translator of this sūtra? In regard to this, Buddhist historians consider in the following way.

The two-volumed *Wu-liang-shou-ching* is not to be regarded as the work done by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei; but to be considered as the work done by Buddhahadra of the Sung of the Southern dynasties.

The reasons are as follows. The words used in the work are rather of later period. It is not the work belonging to the period

of the Three Kingdoms, but the work pertaining to a later times. Moreover, the expression "Hua Yen San Mei 華嚴三昧", which we find in that version, proves that it is not altogether unconnected with the *Hua-yen-ching* 華嚴經. Now, the first translation of the *Hua-yen-ching* is the sixty volumed one which was rendered by Buddhahadhara. Therefore, it must be he, Buddhahadhara, who translated the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* as well as the *Hua-yen-ching*. This comes to mean that the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* whose translator was hitherto thought as K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei is no other than the New *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, the mention of which is find in the *Chu-san-ts'ang-chi-chi* as having been translated by Buddhahadhara in the second year of Yung-chieh 永初 (421).

This view was made developed a step further by a more minute investigation. In the *Ch'u-san-ts'ang-chi-chi*, mention is made not only of the *New-wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols, translated in 421 by Buddhahadhara, but also of the *New-wu-liang-shou-ching*, 2 vols, translated by Pao-yün 寶雲 in the same year. This is to be interpreted not as two items of the fact but as one item, which was set down apart by some mistake. In other words, it is not always unreasonable to think that Buddhahadhara and Pao-yün combined their efforts in translating a new *Wu-liang-shou-ching*. Buddhahadhara and Pao-Yün were master and disciple. They lived in the same temple, Tao-i-ssū 道場寺 in Chien-k'ang (now, Nan-ching). Accordingly, it is most unlikely that they who are master and disciple translated the same sūtra in the same year and at the same place each independent of the other. So, it has been concluded that the *New-wu-liang-shou-ching* translated by the combined efforts of Buddhahadhara and Pao-Yün, is the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* now in general use, though it is generally believed to have been translated by K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei. When this supposition is associated with the fact that the *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching*, another important text of the Pure Land school, was translated by Kolayasas in the same city during the years of Yuan-chia 元嘉 (424-453), the theory of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* translation in 421 by the combined effort of Buddhahadhara and Pao yün becomes a possible fact. Judging from the content of these two sūtras, the translation of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* should reasonably precede that of *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-ching*.

The Buddhahadhara-and-Pao-Yün theory was thus established and made developed. It was supported by many learned men who formed

the main body of Japanese Buddhist historians. It is indeed that some held different views, but they are minority. The theory became the prevailing one.

Nevertheless, it was not the decisive theory ; for, it was not founded on the firm ground. There was indeed a skilfulness of logical inference in it, but at the same time a kind of weakness lurked in it which will necessitates its own reconsideration. As it was afraid, so it turned out. A new material was discovered to defeat all the purposes of this established theory of Buddhahadara-and-Pao-Yün translation.

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The new material just mentioned is a Tun-huang MS of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, recently recovered from among a collection of MSS belonging to the Otani University Library. For one thing, this recovery has fulfilled the validity of the established theory.

Now, it is to our great regret that we could not recover it as a whole. It is wanting in the first part of the first volume and in the whole of the second volume. What we have recovered is no more than the middle and latter part of the first volume. Fortunately, however, there is a kind of "back-note" appended at the end of the first volume in which the MS date was clearly put down. The MS has been made in the second year of 神瑞 Shen-jui.

Now, the second year of Shen-jui (corresponding to 415 in the Christian era) falls on the middle of the reign of Ming Yuan Ti 明元帝 the second monarch of North Wei. North Wei is not the Wei of the period of the Three Kingdoms i. e. of the third century, but the Wei of the Northern Dynasties i. e. of the third and fourth centuries. The fact that a *Wu-liang-shou-ching* MS dated the second year of Shen-jui was in existence shows that within the domain of North Wei the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* had already been in circulation round about 415. In other words, it testifies to the fact that the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* had already been in existence six years before 421, the year when according to the established theory the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was translated by Buddhahadra and Pao Yun at Tao-i-ssü in Chien-k'ang. This is quite absurd. The established theory was thus made utterly untenable.

In this way, the problem of the translatorship of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was brought back to its starting point so as to make a new

start again.

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When the Buddhahadra-and-Pao-Yün theory was found thus untenable, the first idea that occurs to our mind is that it might be rather safer for us to believe as it stands in the text and to accept the K'ang Seng K'ai theory. However, in order to firmly establish that theory, it is necessary to destroy all the refutations brought upon it or to introduce some new evidences which can prove its validity. Neither can be done at present, for we do not possess any new material to do so. Thus, we cannot positively maintain the K'ang Seng K'ai theory. We should rather offer a different view, which can be deduced from the obvious fact of the existence of the Shen-jui MS.

The existence of this MS, as I have said before, shows that, in about the second year of Shen-jui (415), the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was already in general circulation in some part of North China. Now, the years around the second year of Shen-jui was the time when North Wei did not yet come to its later supremacy so as to rule over all North China. At that time there were a number of powers in that region, which were vying with each other: Hou Ts'in 後秦 in Chang-an 長安: North Yen 北燕 in the part of Hu-peh 河北 and Jehol 熱河: Hsia 夏 in T'ung-wan 統萬, which is present Huaj-yuan, Shen-si 陝西懷遠: Whst Ts'in 西秦 and North Liang 北涼 in the area to the west of Hou Ts'in: and North Wei at that time was no more than one of these vying states, whose base was situated in Ping-ch'eng 平城 (now, Ta-tung, Shan-si 山西大同), and whose domain, setting Mongolia apart, was confined to the northern part and the central part of Shan-si and some part of Hu-peh. This was the case at that time. Accordingly, the existence of the Shen-jui MS bears witness to the fact that about that time the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* was already in general circulation even in so confined a region far from the Chang-an and Lo-yang district which is the centre of North China. Consequently, we presume, it would be more to the point to think that the translation of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* should be in time far back before the second year of Shen-jui.

Now, when we temporarily admit that we are right in this inference, and look back upon what is so-called history of the *Wu-liang-shou-ching* translation (of which it is said that there were twelve

translations and that the five of them are extant and other seven are missing), and seek for the one which will satisfy the conditions, we naturally come upon the work done by Chu Fa Hu of West Tsin.

Chu Fa Hu was a priest who flourished from sometime of the third to the beginning of the fourth century. In his earlier days he was already famed as a priest of distinction in Tun-huang the western quarter of China and in his later days he was busy promoting Buddhism in the Chang-an and Loyang district. He was engaged in the work of translating sūtras for about forty years, and sūtras which were rendered by him are said to have amounted to the number of 154 fasciculi 309 volumes. He was thus one of the most important translators in the time of the "Earlier Translation". As to the fact of his having translated the *Wu-liang-shou-ching*, we find that it is recorded in the *Ch'u-san-ts'ang-chi-chi*. The date of this translation is stated to be in the second year of Yung-chia 永嘉 of West Tsin (308 A. D.).

The view that the sūtra was translated by Chu Fa Hu was current among the students of the period from the end of Sui to the beginning of T'ang. It was adopted by the *Fa-ching-lu* and the *Yen-ts'ung-lu*. It was accepted by Chih-i 智顛 and Chung-hsing 憬興. Among Japanese students since the Meiji era the advocates of this theory were not quite absent, including the present writer. Judging from the circumstances of that time, we presume that this is the rough sketch of the translation and circulation of the two volumed *Wu-liang-shou-ching*.

To recapitulate. It has been generally believed that it was K'ang Seng K'ai of Wei who translated the two-volumed *Wu-liang-shou-ching*. But that is not the case. It was Chu Fa Hu of West Tsin who translated it. It was rendered by him at somewhere in North China in the beginning of the fourth century; and, in the beginning of the next century, it has already gained general circulation and reached even so far as those remote regions of Shan-si.

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