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ceremony to China

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An introductory note on the early Chinese translations of Buddhist texts and the weight given to the masters expounding the scriptures

Certain Chinese translations of Buddhist texts have come down to us together with the original notices and prefaces composed in China. These precious sources of information were mostly written at the time of the translation. In the Chinese canon a preface might either immediately precede its respective text and/or be included in various Chinese catalogues and anthologies.² The introductory passages contain data regarding the transmission of a particular text, the translation procedure and the involved persons. On the basis of these notices and prefaces of which the oldest dates back to the

¹ This paper is based on materials studied for the sixth chapter of my PhD dissertation (Hureau, 2003, p. 251-273). As a research fellow at the Institute of the International College of Advanced Buddhist Studies (now called International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies) I held a conference on this topic in April 2004. Since then I have further expanded my researches and their results are published for the first time in the present paper. I am grateful to Stefano Zacchetti, who kindly read a previous draft, for his precious comments and corrections. I would also like to thank Jan Nattier for her comments at the conference and during following conversations. I also thank very much Laurence Vigier and Barry Hall who tirelessly and without avail corrected my English, and Elsa I. Legittimo who carefully read through the last version of this paper. Presently I am carrying out researches on the history and practice of *poṣadha* with a postdoctoral fellowship of the Taiwanese Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchanges.

² In this paper references are always given according to the *Taishō* edition, the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經.

year 179 CE, we see that the translation procedures followed a similar pattern.

A foreign manuscript was read aloud by a narrator. Most of the time, the narrator was a foreign Buddhist master who brought along the manuscript, but sometimes it was given to merchants who travelled along the silk road for bringing it to a Chinese monastery where a monk conversant with the respective Indic language would read it aloud. If the narrator did not master the Chinese language, an interpreter would translate his words into Chinese. When a narrator had a manuscript, he would read it aloud, but sometimes he recited a text from memory. There are stories of missionaries who had forgotten portions of their texts and who were sent back to India to learn what they had been unable to recite.³ One or several scribes would write down the translated text in Chinese, and one or several correctors would revise then the scripture and fix the last version.⁴

Instead of acknowledging the important role of each member of such teams, the authors of catalogues mostly attributed the works to the narrators and only seldom mentioned the names of the other participants. This can be seen already in Dao'an's 道安 (312-385) *Zongli zhongjing mulu* 總理衆經目錄, the first truly critic catalogue, presently lost, but which has been partly included by Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518) in his *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集, as well as in Sengyou's own work.⁵

³ This happened for example when the narrator of the *Wenshushili jinglü jing* 文殊師利淨律經 (T. 460) forgot the last chapters. Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 had to wait for a new manuscript (see T. 2145, 55, p. 51b9-11; Boucher, 1996, p. 77). See also the entertaining and instructive note by Demiéville on monks' forgetfulness (1951, n. 1 p. 245).

⁴ For further explanations and for a bibliography on researches done on the translation process, see Boucher, 1998, n. 63 p. 485.

⁵ Sengyou mentions merely ten collaborating persons' names, and these relate to only 36 of the 450 titles quoted in his "Xinji jinglun lu 新集經論錄": the layman who corrected the *Chaori ming jing* 超日明經 tr. by Dharmarakṣa; the two laymen who wrote down the *Xuzhen tianzi jing* 須真天子經 tr. by Dharmarakṣa; the monk who orally

The early Indian tradition of reciting the Buddha's words and its influence upon the Chinese translation procedures

The importance of the specific task of reciting a text dates back to the earliest times of Buddhism, before the appearance of Indian scripture. The Buddha lived at a time when writing did not yet exist in the areas he is said to have been active. None of his biographies mentions that he learned to read or write, but he is described as having an extraordinary memory. His words were at first transmitted orally by his disciples: every sūtra begins with the formula “thus have I heard” and this very formula was a guaranty of authenticity.⁶ The first assemblies of his disciples, then of monks, who gathered after his nirvāṇa to establish the Dharma and the Vinaya, are called *saṃgīti*, which means “reciting together.” Until the texts were written down, and even long afterwards, their transmission was done orally, and their

translated the *Shisong biqiu jieben* 十誦比丘戒本 recited by Tanmochi 曇摩持 who together with Dharmapriya was also the co-translator of the *Biqiuni dajie* 比丘尼大戒 and translator of the *Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 expounded by Dharmanandin 曇摩難提; the two translators of three works expounded by Saṃghabhadra 僧伽跋澄; the two oral translators and the two correctors of the *Si ahanmu chao* 四阿含暮抄 expounded by Kumārabodhi 鳩摩羅佛提; the monk who co-translated the works brought to China by the pilgrim Faxian 法顯; the two *śramaṇas* who translated thirteen works expounded by Guṇabhadra 求那跋陀羅; the oral translator and the scribe who participated to the translation of three works explained by Jijiaye 吉迦夜 (see T. 2145, 55, p. 5-13). There are a few exceptions to the rule of attributing a work to the narrator. Boucher (1996, n. 91 p. 91) mentions the *Pratyutpannasamādhisūtra* (*Banzhouban sanmei jing* 般舟般三昧經), recited (*chu* 出) by Zhu Shufo 竺朔佛 and translated by Lokakṣema 支識, of which the translation is attributed to Lokakṣema (T. 2145, 55, p. 6b12). The *Chu sanzang jiji* also attributes several translations to the interpreter Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, but maybe the respective works were attributed to him because the narrators' names were missing, unless Zhu Fonian received manuscripts and translated them by himself without someone else reading them aloud (*ibid.*, p. 10b-c).

⁶ See Kuo Li-ying, 2000, n. 11 p. 679.

appropriation was made by memorization and learning by heart.⁷ One of the most ancient practices regulating the monks' life consisted in gathering twice a month to recite together the set of rules they had to follow (the *prātimokṣa*). So, there was, from the early time of Buddhism, a tradition of recitation of texts, or in other terms a collective ritual of reciting the Buddha's words. Due to its oral nature, the practice of collective recitation not only influenced the translation activities, but also shaped the procedure of translation. From the prefaces of the works translated by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344-413?),⁸ we can infer that this great master gave special attention to this tradition. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that he popularized in China the practice of reciting Buddhist scriptures on ritual days and that he standardized this practice also in combination with translation work.

The picture of a great Buddhist master in China - Kumārajīva's impression on the masses of auditors

Various sources, as described below, tell us that Kumārajīva was a master who taught for assemblies in which all auditors would listen to him carefully, and were allowed to ask questions. Above all, he was perceived as a master of Abhidharma, particularly of *Mahāyāna-abhidharma*.⁹ According to

⁷ See von Hinüber, 1990, p. 29.

⁸ The question of Kumārajīva's birth and death dates is still under discussion and does not have a definitive answer yet. Although Tsukamoto Zenryū's (1954, p. 568-577) demonstration for 350-409 was convincing, Arthur Robinson (1967, n. 1 p. 244-247) brought forth arguments for 344-413. Recently, Saitō Tatsuya (2000) who focused on indications provided by biographical data and Kumārajīva's close assistant Sengzhao, suggested 411 as the earliest possible date of his death. Reexamining the same sources on Kumārajīva's biography, I also assume that Kumārajīva died in 411 at the earliest, maybe in 412 or in 413 (Hureau, 2003, p. 189-199 and 358).

⁹ The Sanskrit term *Mahāyāna-abhidharma* is not attested. The formula 大乘阿毘曇 seems to be a creation of Chinese bibliographers and commentators and is not found in Chinese translations of Buddhist texts. The term appears for the first time in

his biographies, he had expressed his will to compose a *Mahāyāna-abhidharma* and before his death, he is said to have told his close collaborators: “We met to define the characteristics of the dharmas (*faxiang* 法相).”¹⁰

His assistant Sengrui 僧叡 (352-436)¹¹ said that one week after Kumārajīva’s arrival in Chang’an 長安, in February 402, he “received a teaching on *dhyāna* from him” (*cong shou chanfa* 從受禪法) and explained his understanding of the received instructions (*qishou* 啟授).¹² In his preface to the *Siyi jing* 思益經 (T. 586, tr. in 402),¹³ Sengrui described an assembly who “received and understood his explanations” (*ziwu* 諮悟).¹⁴ Concerning the translation of the *Fahua jing* 法華經 (T. 262, tr. in 406), Sengrui described an assembly who “listened and received, [and] understood” (*tingshou lingwu* 聽

Kumārajīva’s biography contained in the *Chu sanzang jiji* (T. 2145, 55, p. 101c16). As a specific category of texts the formula is first contained in the *Zhongjing mulu* 衆經目錄 of Fajing 法經 (composed in 594), the oldest surviving catalogue which classifies the Buddhist scriptures into six categories: sūtras, Vinaya and Abhidharma of respectively the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna traditions (T. 2146, 55, p. 141a8).

¹⁰ T. 2145, 55, p. 102a5-6; T. 2059, 50, p. 332c4, p. 332c26-27. The expression *faxiang* is certainly used as a gloss of the term Abhidharma, as did Sengzhao in a preface of the *Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經 (T. 2145, 55, p. 63b25). The biographers say Kumārajīva’s ability to explain *faxiang* is the reason why Fu Jian 苻堅 sent an army to Kucha: he wanted to bring Kumārajīva, whose fame had reached China, under his own control (T. 2145, 55, p. 100c24-26; T. 2059, 50, p. 331b23-28; translated by Shih, 1968, p. 69).

¹¹ On the dates of Sengrui, see Wright, 1957.

¹² “Guanzhong chu chanjing xu” 關中出禪經序, T. 2145, 55, p. 65a25.

¹³ Actually, the notices are not dated. The indicated dates point out the year of completion of the respective translations. I assume that the notices have been written soon after a translation was finished, but this can not be proven, except maybe for the “*Fahua jing houxu*” 法華經後序 by Sengrui which ends with the words “done the eighth year of the Hongshi reign period (406)” (T. 2145, 55, p. 57c18). The *Fahua jing* was translated that same year (see the “*Fahua zongyao xu*” 法華宗要序 by Huiguan, *ibid.*, p. 57b6). The case of the “*Guanzhong chu chanjing xu*” might be different as the sūtra was corrected in 407. The date of Kumārajīva’s translation work is 402.

¹⁴ “*Siyi jing xu*” 思益經序, T. 2145, 55, p. 58a9.

受領悟)¹⁵ and he also said that Kumārajīva taught (*shou* 授) the *Xiaopin jing* 小品經 (T. 227, tr. in 408) as if it were the original (taught by the Buddha).¹⁶ Illustrating the translation of the *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經 (T. 475, tr. in 406), Sengzhao 僧肇 (374-414) compared Kumārajīva's preaching to the Buddha's original sermons.¹⁷ Certain prefaces of his translations are less descriptive, and simply render the oral and pedagogical dimension of Kumārajīva's activity by the word *chu* 出, "to issue", which here means to make a text public or bring it to the knowledge of an audience otherwise unable to understand by itself.¹⁸

The image of Kumārajīva as a master is developed in several biographies of monks, where it is said that they received Kumārajīva's teaching (*shouye* 受業,¹⁹ *shouxue* 受學,²⁰ *congixue* 從學²¹) and in the "Shi Lao zhi 釋老志"

¹⁵ "Fahua jing houxu", T. 2145, 55, p. 57c16-17.

¹⁶ "Xiaopin jing xu" 小品經序, T. 2145, 55, p. 55a4.

¹⁷ "Da Liu Yimin shu" 答劉遺民書, *Zhaolun* 肇論, T. 1858, 45, p. 155c19-20. Liebenenthal, 1948, p. 100.

¹⁸ "Dazhi lun ji" 大智論記, T. 2145, 55, p. 75b12. The word *chu* applied to translations has been the subject of different interpretations, summarized and discussed by Daniel Boucher (1996, 89-92). It would be useless to repeat him here. I agree with him, saying that *chu* refers to an activity that precedes the final translation into Chinese. For instance, the biography on Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍 says that he issued (*yichu* 譯出) the *Sifen lü* 四分律, and that then Zhu Fonian translated (*yi* 譯) it into Chinese (T. 2059, 50, p. 334b19-21). *Chu* is not restricted to "the exposition of a text" in view of its translation, but it is also used for the recitation and oral production of a text. In this sense, Dao'an wrote: "Ānanda made the sūtras public (*chujing* 出經) shortly after the Buddha's death" (T. 2145, 55, p. 52c6). Shih (1968, p. 167-168) made a good comment on the role of the narrators: "Celui qui publie un texte doit non seulement le réciter habilement, mais aussi le comprendre à fond : il doit en même temps en expliquer le sens". Certain prefaces of Kumārajīva's translations begin their description of the work with the word *chu* as an abridgement for the whole process: "Dapin jing xu" 小品經序 (T. 2145, 55, p. 53b5) and "Fahua zongyao xu" (*ibid.*, p. 57b7).

¹⁹ T. 2059, 50, p. 366c4-5, on Zhu Daosheng 竺道生, Huirui 慧叡 and Huiyan 慧嚴; p. 401a2, on Sengye 僧業 (367-441).

(“Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism”), where it is said that the monk Huishi 惠始 “hearing that Kumārajīva issued new sūtras, went to Chang’an to hear him [...] During the daytime he went downtown to listen to his preaching (*tingjiang* 聽講).”²² The same image is given in his biography: “An assembly of three thousand disciples received Kumārajīva’s instructions.”²³ The biography on Yao Xing 姚興 (366–416), the ruler of Later Qin kingdom who hosted Kumārajīva in Chang’an, describes how the king “invited the *śramana*s to listen to Kumārajīva explaining and exposing (*yanshuo* 演說) Buddhist sūtras.”²⁴

A Note on Kumārajīva’s nearly impeccable knowledge of Chinese and his public performances of instant oral translations

Contrary to other foreign masters, Kumārajīva could speak Chinese when he arrived in Chang’an, for he had learned it in Liangzhou 涼州 (present-day Wuwei 武威) during the seventeen years he spent there.²⁵ But though history

²⁰ T. 2059, 50, p. 367b20–21, on Huirui; p. 369a23 on Sengbi 僧弼; p. 401a18 on Huixun 慧詢 (375–458).

²¹ T. 2059, 50, p. 370a3, on Tanjian 曇鑒.

²² *Weishu*, j. 114, vol. 8, p. 3032–3033.

²³ T. 2145, 55, p. 102a2; T. 2059, 50, p. 332c20–21. This audience included children, such as Tanshun 曇順 (T. 2059, 50, p. 363a22–23) and Sengbao 僧苞 (*ibid.*, p. 369b14).

²⁴ *Jinshu* 晉書, j. 117, vol. 10, p. 2984–2985. This episode had been handed down in the *Shiliu guo Chunqiu* 十六國春秋 (*Springs and Autumns of the Sixteen Kingdoms*), a lost history compiled by Cui Hong 崔鴻 (?–523) concerning the northern kingdoms during the period of disunity, which served as a basis for the *Jinshu*; it is quoted in the *Taiping yulan* 太平御覽, j. 123/3b27–4a1, vol. 1, p. 595. On the history of the *Shiliu guo Chunqiu* and its use as a source of the *Jinshu*, see Schreiber, 1955, p. 381–386 and Rogers, 1968, p. 18–21.

²⁵ Kumārajīva was living in Kucha when the kingdom fell into the hands of the general Lū Guang 呂光, sent there in 384 by the Former Qin ruler, Fu Jian. The following year, Lū Guang went back to Chang’an, carrying along Kumārajīva as part of his war tribute, but stopped in Liangzhou where he established a new kingdom, the Later Zhao. After his

remembers that he was bilingual,²⁶ it still took him several years after his arrival to Chang'an to improve his style and reach a perfect knowledge of the Chinese language.²⁷ He is described as holding the foreign manuscripts of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 (T. 223, tr. in 404), *Fahua jing*, *Weimojie jing* and *Chengshi lun* 成實論 (T. 1646, tr. in 406 or 411) and translating them orally into Chinese.²⁸ This image was so characteristic of

death in 399, he was succeeded by his son Lü Zuan 呂纂, then by his nephew Lü Long 呂隆 (second month of 401). Notified of Lü Long's tyranny, Yao Xing, who in the meantime became ruler of the Later Qin kingdom, sent troops from Chang'an guided by his uncle Yao Shuode 姚碩德. Lü Long abdicated on the ninth month of 401. Yao Shuode went back to Chang'an followed by some fifty people, relatives of Lü Long, literary men, militaries and officials. They arrived on the eleventh month. Regarding these events, see the *Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑑, j. 105 p. 3332, j. 106 p. 3352-3353, j. 111 p. 3504, j. 112 p. 3520 and 3529 vol. 4. It is very probable that Kumārajīva was among these fifty people who arrived in Chang'an on the eleventh month, but his arrival is dated on the 20th day of the twelfth month of the year 401 (in our calendar 402, 8 February) by Sengrui ("Guanzhong chu chanjing xu", T. 2145, 55, p. 65a23; "Dapin jing xu", *ibid.*, p. 53a23-24; "Dazhi shilun xu" 大智釋論序, *ibid.*, p. 75a5). This date is also given in his biographies (T. 2145, 55, p. 101b12-13; T. 2059, 50, p. 332a24-25).

²⁶ Liu Xie's 劉勰 "Miehuo lun" 滅惑論: "Kumārajīva was conversant with Chinese and foreign languages" (T. 2102, 52, p. 50c12). Kumārajīva's biographies: "Kumārajīva mastered everything obscure and perfectly understood all he recited. He could convert it into the Jin language (*Jin yan* 晉言) by translating it in a flowing style." (T. 2145, 55, p. 101b17-18; T. 2059, 50, p. 332b1-2 with *Han yan* 漢言 instead of *Jin yan*). Biography on Yao Xing in the *Jinshu*: "Kumārajīva understood and discoursed perfectly in the Xia language (*Xia yan* 夏言)" (*Jinshu*, j. 117, vol. 10, p. 2984).

²⁷ To sum up the comments given by Sengrui and Sengzhao in the "Siyi jing xu", "Bailun xu" 百論序, "Dazhi shilun xu" and "Weimojie jing xu" 維摩詰經序, Kumārajīva went from the partial mastery he had of Chinese until 404, and the satisfying but still hindered knowledge in 405, to a perfect knowledge from 406 onwards. See Wang Wenyan, 1984, p. 221-222; Hureau, 2003, p. 259-263.

²⁸ "Holding the foreign manuscript in hands he expounded it orally in the Qin idiom (*i.e.* Chinese)" *kouxuan Qin yan* 口宣秦言 ("Dapin jing xu" by Sengrui, T. 2145, 55, p. 53b5). "Holding the foreign book in his own hands he translated it orally into the Qin

Kumārajīva that it became a cliché used by later authors in their prefaces of apocryphal writings, such as the introduction to the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經.²⁹

The nature and content of Kumārajīva's translations are partly mentioned in Sengrui's preface to the *Siyi jing*. Sengrui starts by explaining his disagreement with Kumārajīva's translation (*chuanyi* 傳譯) of the bodhisattva's name used in the Indian title of the sūtra,³⁰ then, after justifying his disagreement, he goes on saying that Kumārajīva "re-translated the Sanskrit phonemes (*gengyi fanyin* 更譯梵音) and corrected the text word by word (*zheng wenyang* 正文言)."³¹ A more precise description is given by the commentary of the *Weimojie jing*, the *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 (T. 1775). The *Zhu Weimojie jing* is a collection of explanations on the sūtra by Kumārajīva and several monks who assisted and collaborated to the sūtra's translation: Sengzhao, Sengrui, Daorong 道融 and Zhu Daosheng. It elucidates how the master explained the meaning of Indian proper names, names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, city names, etc.,³² how he compared the Chinese wordings to the Indian originals³³ as well as how he told stories to illustrate some theories, characters, objects and virtues presented in the sūtra.³⁴ This

language" *kouyi Qin yu* 口譯秦語 ("Fahua zongyao xu" by Huiguan 慧觀, T. 2145, p. 57b8). "Holding the foreign manuscript he expounded himself an oral translation" *kou zi xuanyi* 口自宣譯 ("Weimojie jing xu" by Sengzhao, T. 2145, p. 58b15). "Holding the foreign manuscript in hands he orally transmitted and translated it himself" *kou zi chuanyi* 口自傳譯 ("Chengshi lun ji" 成實論記 by an anonymous author, T. 2145, p. 78a9).

²⁹ "Holding the Sanskrit manuscripts, he translated and explained them orally" *shouzhi fanwen kou fan jieshi* 手執梵文. 口翻解釋 (T. 1484, 24, p. 997a28-29).

³⁰ See Boucher, 2000, n. 6 p. 9-10.

³¹ T. 2145, 55, p. 57c24-58a8.

³² See for instance in the first chapter his explanations on Vimalakīrti's name (T. 1775, 38, p. 327b-c), on Vaiśālī (*ibid.*, p. 328a26-28) and on the names of fifty-two bodhisattvas (*ibid.*, p. 330b-331b).

³³ See T. 1775, 38, p. 329c5-6; p. 332c7-8; p. 360b9-10; p. 362 b13-14.

³⁴ See the examples given by Lo Yuet-Keung, 2002, p. 97-101.

kind of “commentary” is specific and has nothing in common with the commentaries written by Chinese monks several hundred years later, which are more philosophical and better structured, probably written in order to be read silently. Kumārajīva’s explanations are not philosophical in nature and seem to have been composed to be listened to.³⁵

The audiences’ participation in ongoing translations in Chang’an during Kumārajīva’s time

The audience was allowed to participate in the translations. Describing the translation procedure of two masters contemporaneous with Kumārajīva in Chang’an, Sengzhao said: “The masters of the *Vibhāṣā* doctrine [Dharmagupta 曇摩崛多 and Dharmayaśas 曇摩耶舍] are publishing (*chu*) the foreign (*hu* 胡) text of the *Shelifu apitan* 舍利弗阿毘曇 (*Śāriput-rābhidharma*) in the Shiyang monastery. Though their translation is not yet complete, when someone raises a question about the content, they answer providing new and astonishing indications.”³⁶ It is conceivable that Kumārajīva did the same for the translations of the *Bailun* 百論 (404; T. 1569), *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*, *Fahua jing* and *Weimojie jing*. The work on the *Bailun* was done in team work by Kumārajīva and the “*śramaṇas* who relished the principle (*liwei shamen* 理味沙門)”, who “moulded and deciphered it progressively, applying themselves to give existence to the treatise’s significance.”³⁷ Some “ancient *śramaṇas* specialized in exegesis”

³⁵ See Lo Yuet-Keung, 2002, p. 105.

³⁶ “Da Liu Yimin shu”, *Zhaolun*, T. 1858, 45, p. 155c17–18. Dharmagupta and Dharmayaśas were requested by Yao Xing in 407 to write down the Indian text of the *Shelifu apitan* and to publish a Chinese translation of it the following year, but it took them six years to learn Chinese before being able to translate it themselves. The crown prince Yao Hong 姚泓 (388–417) collaborated to the redaction and correction of the work, which ended in 415. Cf. “Shelifu apitan xu” 舍利弗阿毘曇序 by Daobiao, T. 2145, 55, p. 70c–71b. Their translation is T. 1548.

cooperated to “the study of the profound meaning [of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*], deeply examined the text, and then wrote down [the Chinese version].”³⁸ Kumārajīva studied the *Fahua jing* in detail with an assembly (*yu zhong* 與衆).³⁹ Also, the *Zhu Weimojie jing* reports questions arising from the audience, and answers given by the master.⁴⁰

Composition of the audience

The audience included monks who were already members of Dao’an’s translation team in Chang’an in the years 379–385. We know the names of the translator Zhu Fonian,⁴¹ the scribes Sengrui⁴² and Senglūe 僧略 (348–417)⁴³

³⁷ “Bailun xu”, T. 2145, 55, p. 77c5–6. A long extract from this preface has been translated by Johannes Nobel, 1927, n. 3 p. 225–226.

³⁸ “Dapin jing xu” by Sengrui, T. 2145, 55, p. 53b7–10.

³⁹ “Fahua zongyao xu” by Huiguan, T. 2145, 55, p. 57b7–8.

⁴⁰ See for instance T. 1775, 38, p. 366b29; p. 392a8.

⁴¹ This polyglot monk from Liangzhou is described by his biographers as the great interpreter of the Former and Later Qin kingdoms (T. 2145, 55, p. 111b23; T. 2059, 50, p. 329b11). He translated the *Binaiye* 鼻奈耶 (T. 1464, 24, p. 851a18–20) and the *Si ahanmu chao* in 382 (T. 2145, 55, p. 64c13–14), the *Apitan* 阿毘曇 (*i.e.* the *Jñānaprasthāna*, T. 1543) in 383 (*ibid.*, p. 72a26–28), the *Sengqieluocha jing* 僧伽羅利經 (*Collection of sūtras [compiled] by Saṃgharakṣa*; T. 194) in 384 (*ibid.*, p. 71b16–19), the *Poxumi jing* 婆須蜜經 (*Collection of sūtras [compiled] by Vasumitra*; T. 1549) in 384 (*ibid.*, p. 71c29–72a3) and the *Zengyi ahan jing* 增一阿含經 (T. 125) in 384–385 (*ibid.*, p. 64b8–11). Several works translated during the years following Dao’an’s death are attributed to him: the *Wangzi fayi huaimu yinyuan jing* 王子法益壞目因緣經 in 391, the *Pusa yingluo jing* 菩薩瓔珞經 (T. 656), the *Shizhu duanjie jing* 十住斷結經 (T. 309), the *Zhongyin jing* 中陰經 (T. 385) and the *Pusa chutai jing* 菩薩處胎經 (T. 384). Regarding this last text, Zhu Fonian and his other translations see Elsa I. Legittimo’s forthcoming PhD thesis (2006, p. 73–85) which contains the first full scale analysis and evaluation of the *Pusa chutai jing*.

⁴² He was the scribe of the *Si ahanmu chao* (T. 1505) in 382 (T. 2145, 55, p. 64c15).

⁴³ Senglūe was the son of the chamberlain for attendants (*langzhong ling* 郎中令) Fu Xia 傅遐, and was originally from Niyang. He was one of the scribes of the *Zengyi ahan*

and the censor Fahe 法和 (310?-402?).⁴⁴ Sengruì became the major scribe of Kumārajīva. Zhu Fonian maybe acted as the translator of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*.⁴⁵

Although the documents related to the translation of the *Bailun* and *Fahua jing* report only the participation of *śramaṇas*,⁴⁶ it is not excluded that

jing in 384–385 (T. 2145, 55, p. 64c17). His name is quoted in the list of *śramaṇas* who participated in the translation of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*.

⁴⁴ His birth and death dates are not given in his biographies (T. 2145, 55, p. 109b2–9; T. 2059, 50, p. 354a18–29), but it is said that he was over eighty around the years 390, which implies a birth year as early as 310. As Kumārajīva dedicated him an eulogy (cf. T. 2145, 55, p. 101c13; T. 2059, 50, p. 332c1), the two men are likely to have met, but because his name is not quoted in the list of *śramaṇas* who participated to the translation of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*, between 403 and 404, he might have died between Kumārajīva's arrival in Chang'an (in early 402) and the beginning of 403. Fahe had also been a disciple of Fotudeng 佛圖澄 and together with Dao'an he had corrected several works, such as the *Jñānaprasthāna* in 383 (T. 2145, 55, p. 72a29), the *Sengqieluocha jing* in 384 (*ibid.*, p. 71b20), the *Poxumi jing* in 384 (*ibid.*, p. 72a4), the *Zengyi ahan jing* in 385 (*ibid.*, p. 64b13). After Dao'an's death and during the turmoil following the decline of the Former Qin kingdom, he escaped to Luoyang where he continued his role as a corrector. He went back to Chang'an when Buddhism flourished again thanks to the ruling family of Later Qin kingdom.

⁴⁵ This statement comes from a lost catalogue called *Er Qin lu* 二秦錄 (*Catalogue of [translations done during] the two Qin, i.e. Former and Later Qin*), whose quotation has been preserved in the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀 (T. 2034, 49, p. 77b27). The fact that the *Er Qin lu* is attributed to Sengruì (*ibid.*, p. 127c3) confers a certain authority to the information, but doubts remain concerning its transmission, hence its authenticity. Neither the *Chu sanzang jiji* nor the *Gaoseng zhuan* quote the title of this work or indicate that Sengruì compiled a catalogue, though both of them contain data that seem directly borrowed from it (for the detail, see Hureau 2003, p. 222–223). The *Er Qin lu* might have existed at the time of Sengyou and Huijiao, but as an anonymous work, and it might have been later attributed to Sengruì. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Zhu Fonian acted as an interpreter twenty years after his participation to Dao'an's team since he was still alive in 410–412 and translated the *Sifen lü* recited by Buddhayaśas (“Chang ahan jing xu” 長阿鎗經序 by Sengzhao, T. 2145, 55, p. 63c16).

⁴⁶ “Bailun xu” by Sengzhao (T. 2145, 55, p. 77c5), “Fahua jing houxu” by Sengruì

the audience might have included laymen too. In his description regarding the process of the translation of the *Weimojie jing*, Sengzhao mentions the presence of religious men and laymen (*daosu* 道俗) “who carefully repeated each sentence three times, shaping it while searching its quintessence and devoting themselves to give life to its holy ideas.”⁴⁷ In a letter sent by Sengzhao to the scholar Liu Yimin 劉遺民 (354-410) who lived retired on Mount Lu as a follower of Huiyuan 慧遠 (344-416), he said that he “regrets that the pure and excellent gentleman (*i.e.* Liu Yimin) could not participate in the assemblies of the Dharma (*fahui* 法會).”⁴⁸ This confirms that laymen had the opportunity to listen to the preaching of Kumārajīva.

A novelty regarding Kumārajīva’s translation gatherings: the king’s involvement

Historical evidence shows that in the past certain lay followers had been members of translation teams, as interpreters or scribes,⁴⁹ but with Kumārajīva we see, for the first time in the history of Chinese Buddhism, the participation of the king and members of the ruling family.⁵⁰ For instance, all

(*ibid.*, p. 57c17) and “Fahua zongyao xu” by Huiguan (*ibid.*, p. 57b7).

⁴⁷ T, 2145, 55, p. 58b15–16.

⁴⁸ *Zhaolun*, T. 1858, 45, p. 155c20–21. Liebenthal, 1948, 100.

⁴⁹ The narrator-translator Zhi Qian 支謙 was a layman. Three laymen served as scribes for Dharmarakṣa, two Chinese, Nie Chengyuan 聶承遠 and Nie Daozhen 聶道真, and one Kuchean, Bo Yuanxin 帛元信. In Dao’an’s team, one of the correctors was assistant in the palace library, Zhao Zheng 趙正.

⁵⁰ There are testimonies of the Yao family’s faith in Buddhism up to the generation before Yao Xing: regarding Yao Chang 姚萇, his father, as well as Yao Xu 姚緒 and Yao Min 姚旻, his uncles. He and his brothers were Buddhists since their youth, and as the clan lived in Chang’an until 384, they also may have met certain members of Dao’an’s translation team. I say more on the Buddhist faith of the Yao in Hureau, 2003, p. 66–68 and 302–307. See also Ōchō Enichi, 1982, p. 198–209; Mu Zhongtian, 1993. Yao Xing has sometimes been associated to translations to which he probably did not participate (see Hureau, 2003, n. 64, p. 265).

the sources describing the translation process of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing* and the *Da zhidu lun* insist on the participation of the king, Yao Xing:

Then, [Kumārajīva and Yao Xing] gathered the *śramaṇas* from the capital specialized in exegesis. The nobles, the ministers and the scholars were asked to join them. There were more than five hundred persons.⁵¹

The master of Dharma [Kumārajīva] held in hands the foreign manuscript and expounded it orally in the Qin idiom, explaining twice the different sounds. The Qin sovereign read himself the old versions, examining what was new and what was missing.⁵²

Kumārajīva held the foreign manuscript, while Yao Xing held the ancient translations, in order to compare them.⁵³

Also the crown prince Yao Hong and two of Yao Xing's younger brothers, Yao Xian 姚顯 and Yao Song 姚嵩, took part in several translations, such as the *Bailun*, the *Weimojie jing*, the *Fahua jing* and the *Zizai wang jing* 自在王經 (tr. in 407).⁵⁴

The participation of Central Asian sovereigns in Buddhist ceremonies

Though we know by the testimony of the Chinese pilgrim Faxian (who was contemporaneous with Kumārajīva) that sovereigns of local kingdoms in Central Asia participated in Buddhist ceremonies,⁵⁵ we have no information

⁵¹ “Dazhi shilun xu” of Sengruì, T. 2145, 55, p. 75a10–11. In his “Dapin jing xu” (*ibid.*, p. 53b7–9), Sengruì does not mention the participation of nobles and ministers, but tells the names of some monks. The biographies on Kumārajīva and the biography on Yao Xing in the *Jinshu* also give the names of some monks, but say that the audience consisted of eight hundred persons (T. 2145, 55, p. 101b19–20; T. 2059, 50, p. 332b4–5; *Jinshu*, j. 95, vol. 8, p. 2501; *Jinshu*, j. 114, vol. 10, p. 2984–2985).

⁵² T. 2145, 55, p. 53b5–6.

⁵³ T. 2145, 55, p. 101b20–21; T. 2059, 50, p. 332b6; *Jinshu*, j. 114, vol. 10, p. 2985.

⁵⁴ “Bailun xu” (T. 2145, 55, p. 77c1–2); “Weimojie jing xu” (p. 58b11–12); “Fahua jing houxu” (p. 57c12–13); “Zizai wang jing houxu” 自在王經後序 by Sengruì (p. 59a26–27).

⁵⁵ He mentions a procession of images in Khotan on the first day of the fourth month of

concerning their presence during translations in any of the local languages of Central Asia. This does not exclude their participation to this activity but simply means that none of the documents written in one of these languages describes this activity. There exists only one notice written in Chinese, concerning the translation of a sūtra in Kucha. It states that a text was translated into Tocharian in 394 and that a Chinese monk who was present at that time brought the manuscript to China where it was translated into Chinese under the title of *Chengyang zhufo gongde jing* 稱揚諸佛功德經. This notice mentions that a Buddhist master called Tanmobotan 曇摩跋檀 explained the text to an assembly of monks and laymen (*daosu*) who repeated it or sung it after him (*jing gong fengsong* 競共諷誦).⁵⁶ This is the sole information concerning translations activities in Kucha at this time, and it is interesting to see that the procedure was identical to that used in China.

Even if the participation of members of the ruling family of Kucha to the translation is not mentioned in the above-mentioned document, we can not exclude that they might have been present during the translation of other works. We can neither exclude that Kumārajīva might have seen such activities in Kucha, where he was born, or in other Central Asian countries that he visited during his youth and that he applied the same procedure in Chang'an. His biographies say that he preached for assemblies called together

the year 399 which the king and members of his family and his government attended (T. 2085, 51, p. 857b13-24). He also describes the five-yearly festival (*pañcavarṣa*) held in the Qisha 竭叉 kingdom, at the end of which the king urged his ministers to give presents to the community of monks, and to buy then their own presents back in order to give them money (*ibid.*, p. 857c13-16; Abel-Rémusat, 1836, p. 26-27; Beal, 1869, p. 15-16). The name of Qisha has not been identified by Beal or Abel-Rémusat with any known place. From Faxian's description of the climate, Klaproth (*in* Abel-Rémusat, p. 29) infers that the location of Qisha corresponds to the Baltistan region. On the patronage of Buddhism by sovereigns, see Lingat, 1989.

⁵⁶ T. 434, 14, p. 105a15-20.

by the sovereigns of such kingdoms as Cashmere and Kashgar.⁵⁷ When he arrived in Chang'an, he met Yao Xing, the first king on Chinese ground devoted to Buddhism. Together they convened assemblies for the Dharma's exposition. Often the preaching and explanations of the scriptures would take place during *poṣadha* ceremonies, and if we closely examine the prefaces of Kumārajīva's translations, we discover that he also translated his major works during *poṣadha* ceremonies.

A Note on *poṣadha* and its origin

Poṣadha, also called *uṣoṣatha* or *uṣoṣadha*, and in Pāli *uṣoṣatha*,⁵⁸ has been translated into Chinese by *zhai* 齋, literally meaning "fasting". It refers to two kinds of ceremonies, for the clergy and for the laity. The *poṣadha* for the clergy consists in the confession of sins, the recitation of the Dharma and the *prātimokṣa*. The recitation of the *prātimokṣa* occurs twice a month, on the 14th or 15th day of the semi-lunar month. The laymen and laywomen held *poṣadha* six times a month, on the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th and 30th days of each month, and, following certain Chinese sources, also on three long periods, which are the first fortnight of the 1st, 5th and 9th months.⁵⁹ Laymen and laywomen were requested to attend these ceremonies in order to confess their sins, observe the rules of eight prohibitions, meditate on the heavens and listen to preaching.⁶⁰ These ceremonies which aim at self-purification date back to a pre-Buddhist time and were modelled on an ancient Vedic practice of sacrifices held on full moon and new moon days, called *upavasatha*. When a sacrifice was going to be

⁵⁷ T. 2145, 55, p. 100b15–16; T. 2059, 50, p. 330b13–14, p. 330c5–6.

⁵⁸ Haiyan Hu- von Hinüber (1994, p. 1) says that *poṣadha* is used by the Mūlasarvāstivādins, *poṣatha* by the Sarvāstivādins, and *uṣoṣadha* by the Mahāsaṃghīka-Lokottaravādins.

⁵⁹ On the three long *poṣadhas*, see Forte and May, 1979.

⁶⁰ The eight prohibitions consist in avoiding to kill, steal, have sexual intercourse, tell lies, drink alcohol, use perfumes and flowers, sleep on high beds, eat after noon.

performed, the sacrificer would undergo a self-purification ritual on the day preceding the full moon.⁶¹ This explains the two pairs of double days within the sequence. During the Buddha's lifetime, certain non-Buddhist religious groups had since long adopted these ceremonies and adapted them to the exposition of their Dharma and the recitation of their rules. Following his disciples' request, the Buddha also introduced the practice of reciting his Dharma and *prātimokṣa* on these days.

The early Buddhist tradition of preaching sūtras on *poṣadha* days: a known example from Ceylon

As recorded in the Pāli canon and in the Vinayas of various schools of early Buddhism, such as the Mahīśāsaka, Sarvāstivāda, Dharmaguptaka, and Mahāsaṃghika,⁶² the practice of expounding the Dharma on *poṣadha* days might have been applied by those schools. Other texts also belonging to the earlier tradition report the Buddha's prescription for the observance of *poṣadha* by laymen and laywomen, such is the case with the *Sūtra on observance of poṣadha* (*Chizhai jing* 持齋經) which is incorporated in the Chinese translation of the *Madhyamāgama* (*Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經) and has an equivalent in the Pāli canon.⁶³ Moreover, based on Faxian's notes regarding Ceylon, it can be assumed that this practice was held there in the early fifth century:

On the 8th, 14th and 15th days of the moon a high chair was set out and the four congregations of religious and lay people assembled to listen to the [preaching of the] Dharma.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Malalasekera, 1991, p. 283.

⁶² T. 1421, 22, p. 121b7; T. 1435, 23, p. 420c27-421a6; T. 1428, 22, p. 816c-817a. See Gangopadhyay, 1991, p. 4 n. 1.

⁶³ T. 26, 1, p. 770a-773a. *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* III, 70.

⁶⁴ T. 2085, 51, p. 865a16-17.

A Note on *poṣadha* in Buddhist sites of the Tarim basin

The material presently available regarding the Buddhist sites around the Tarim Basin, such as Kucha, is still scarce. Thus, even if none of the manuscripts written in Tocharian A and B, the language from and around Kucha, mentions the term *poṣadha*, we should not exclude the possibility that this ceremony was known and practiced there. The book on the history of the Wei dynasty (386–534), *Weishu* 魏書, contains a notice on a kingdom culturally and linguistically connected to Kucha, neighbouring it in the south-east: the kingdom of Yanqi. The notice says that the 8th day of the second month and of the fourth month “the whole country follows the teaching of Śākya, observes the rules of *poṣadha* (*zhaijie* 齋戒) and walks in procession.”⁶⁵ These dates do not simply refer to *poṣadha* days but correspond respectively to the Buddha’s birthday anniversary and to his escape from the palace. Nevertheless, the text indicates that some ceremonies similar to those held on *poṣadha* days, but probably of a much larger scale were known and widely practiced in the area. We note that the term *zhaijie* contained in the notice is unequivocal and refers to the rules of *poṣadha*. It is unknown whether *poṣadha* ceremonies were held on a regular basis six times a month, but since “the whole” country is said to have participated to the above-mentioned two special events, it can not be excluded that *poṣadha* ceremonies were held regularly in Yanqi and maybe even in Kucha.

The *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*’s authority in the Buddhist monasteries of Kucha and the text’s instructions on the preaching of the Dharma during *poṣadha* ceremonies

We can assume that at this time, the Kuchean Buddhist monasteries followed a Vinaya which clearly stated to expound the Dharma during *poṣadha*

⁶⁵ *Weishu*, j. 102, vol. 6, p. 2265. In Dunhuang, a great ceremony was held on the 8th day of the second month. See Wang-Toutain, 1996.

ceremonies: the Vinaya of the Sarvāstivāda. The manuscripts of Vinaya texts found in the ruins of the Kuchean monasteries belong to this school.⁶⁶ The *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya* has not yet been completely reconstructed, neither in Kuchean language, nor in Sanskrit, and the whole text is therefore only known in its Chinese translation, entitled *Shisong lü* 十誦律. This text says:

On the six days of *poṣadha* each month, the 8th, 14th, 15th, 23rd, 29th and 30th days, the bhikṣus, except the invalid ones, shall gather in the same place in order to preach the Dharma. If among them a heretical theoretician jealous and envious in his heart comes intentionally to harm the preaching of the Dharma, the bhikṣus will raise objections and subdue him following the Dharma, without getting angry nor being rude.⁶⁷

It is probable that Kumārajīva, who lived in Kucha up to the year 385, had seen and participated in such ceremonies. He was certainly well acquainted with this Vinaya, for he was able to help the foreign masters who came to Chang'an several years after him to translate this text into Chinese. Moreover, in one of his major translations, the *Da zhidu lun*, it is the sole Vinaya which is quoted.

A few examples of sūtras' exposition during *poṣadha* ceremonies in China

Since traditionally *poṣadha* days were considered as particularly opportune for the exposition of sūtras, this practice was probably transmitted to China in the earliest period of Buddhism's transmission. For instance, the first known transmission of a *praññāpāramitā* scripture, the *Daoxing jing* 道行經 (T. 224), was completed in 179 and is said to have been "orally explained

⁶⁶ Filliozat, 1938, p. 22. Lévi, 1912, p. 101-111. Pinault, 1984. The Sanskrit text of the *prātimokṣa* was reconstructed from fragments found mainly in Kucha. See Georg Von Simson, 2000.

⁶⁷ T. 1435, 23, p. 420c13-17.

(*koushou* 口授)” on a *poṣadha* day: the 8th day of the tenth month by the layman Meng Yuanshi 孟元士.⁶⁸ In China, however, as translations were carried out based on an oral procedure, we may assume that the *poṣadha* days received a particular significance also for texts’ translations. There are a few more examples of recitations and translations performed during *poṣadha* days. Lokakṣema “issued (*chu*)” the *Shoulengyan jing* 首楞嚴經 on the 8th day of the twelfth month in 185.⁶⁹ Dharmarakṣa “orally explained (*kou shou chu*)” the *Xuzhen tianzi jing* 須真天子經 (T. 588) on the 8th day of the eleventh month and “ended [its translation]” on the 30th day of the twelfth month in 266.⁷⁰ He “ended [the translation]” of the *Xiuxing daodi jing* 修行道地經 on the 23rd day of the second month of the year 284,⁷¹ and he “orally explained (*koufu*)” the *Aweiyuezhizhe jing* 阿維越致遮經 on the 14th day of the tenth month of the same year.⁷² The translation of the *Fanguang jing* 放光經 (T. 221) began with an oral exposition on the 15th day of the fifth month in 291 by Mokṣala 無叉羅.⁷³ In this case, the translation was probably carried out in the presence of an assembly of lay followers who sponsored it.⁷⁴

These indications do not mean that the translations were made

⁶⁸ “Daoxing jing houji” 道行經後記, T. 2145, 55, p. 47c5-9. Concerning the year of writing, the notice says Zhengguang 正光 reign period, but I follow Tang Yongtong’s amendment into Zhengyuan 正元, *i.e.* 255, as Zhengguang is not the name of a reign period (1983, vol. 1 p. 48).

⁶⁹ “Shoulengyan sanmei jing zhu xu” 首楞嚴三昧經注序, T. 2145, 55, p. 49a14-15. In an additional note, Sengyou says that this data was taken from Dao’an’s catalogue.

⁷⁰ “Xuzhen tianzi jing ji” 須真天子經記, T. 2145, 55, p. 48b23-26.

⁷¹ T. 606, 15, p. 230 n. 19.

⁷² “Aweiyuezhizhe jing ji” 阿維越致遮經記, T. 2145, 55, p. 50b2-4.

⁷³ “Fanguang jing ji” 放光經記, T. 2145, 55, p. 47c16-17.

⁷⁴ The “Fanguang jing ji” says that on the first day of its translation “an assembly of worthies gathered to debate (*zhongxian zhe jie jiyi* 衆賢者皆集議)”; as the notice adds that the merits of the worthies made the completion of the translation possible, we might assume that the assembly of worthies of the first day was an assembly of lay followers, each of them being a generous donor.

exclusively on the days mentioned. It is hardly conceivable that the first version of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā*, i.e. the *Fangguang jing*, was orally translated in only one day, whereas Kumārajīva needed eight months to expound it. They more plausibly mean that in the course of their translations, these sūtras were preached on ritual days, i.e. on days of *poṣadha*. The very word *poṣadha* appears in two sources which describe Dharmarakṣa reciting sūtras on such days. The first mention concerns the *Zheng fahua jing* 正法華經 (T. 263):

In the ninth month [of the first year of the Yongxi reign period (290)], during the great *poṣadha* held on the 14th day, within the great assembly of lay donators who had gathered in the Dongniu monastery, he [Dharmarakṣa] recited (*jiangsong* 講誦) this sūtra. All day and all night long everyone was overjoyed, and the translation was again corrected and fixed.⁷⁵

We notice here that the preaching gave the opportunity to correct the translation. A similar event took place when earlier translations were read and criticized on the occasion of Kumārajīva's new translation of the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*. Yao Xing was in charge of reading the previous translations while Kumārajīva criticized them. The second testimony on Dharmarakṣa concerns the *Puyao jing* 普耀經 (T. 186):

On the *poṣadha* day of the fifth month of the second year of the Yongjia reign period (308), a *wuchen* year [of the sexagenarian cycle], the *śramaṇa-bodhisattva* Dharmarakṣa, holding the western manuscript in his hands, orally expounded it (*kouxuan*) in Chinese at the Tianshui monastery.⁷⁶

These notices do neither mean that oral translations occurred only on *poṣadha* days, nor that they took place mainly on such days. The sources on

⁷⁵ “Zheng fahua jing houji” 正法華經後記, T. 2145, 55, p. 56c29–57a2.

⁷⁶ “Puyao jing ji” 普耀經記, T. 2145, 55, p. 48b-c.

Dharmarakṣa's translation activities indicate mostly ordinary days.⁷⁷ The notices cited above merely indicate that the exposition and translation, and sometimes the writing or copying of the Buddha's words as part of a ritual took place on days of *poṣadha*.⁷⁸ It is also noteworthy that such days were sometimes chosen to celebrate the achievement of a translation work.

While he was staying in Xiangyang, before coming to Chang'an in 379, Dao'an also used to preach on *poṣadha* days (*zhaijiang* 齋講),⁷⁹ but we do not know whether he continued this practice in Chang'an. We only have a mention that after his death, some years before the arrival of Kumārajīva to Chang'an, an uncle of Yao Xing, named Yao Xu, invited the ancient assistant of Dao'an, Fahe, then aged over eighty, to "convene the monks and preach on a *poṣadha* (*zhaijiang*)" in his garrison of Puban.⁸⁰ The prefaces to the translations made

⁷⁷ The 10th day of the third month of the year 286 for the *Chixing jing* 持心經; from the 10th day of the eighth month to the 2nd day of the ninth month of the year 286 regarding the translation of the *Zheng fahua jing*, the 6th day of the second month for its correction; the 25th day of the eleventh month of the same year regarding the publication of the *Fanguang jing*; the 2nd day of the twelfth month of the year 289 for the oral spreading of the *Moni jing* 魔逆經; the 9th day of the fourth month in 291 for the oral issuing of the *Yongfuding* 勇伏定; the 7th day of the seventh month of the same year regarding the explanation of the *Rulai da'ai jing* 如來大哀經; the 12th day of the first month of the year 292 for the explanation of the *Zhufo yaoji jing* 諸佛要集經; the 25th day of the twelfth month of the year 294 for the publication of the *Shengfayin jing* 聖法印經; the 21st day of the eleventh month of the year 297 for the publication of the *Jianbei jing* 漸備經; the 21st day of the seventh month of the year 300 for the oral exposition of the *Xianjie jing* 賢劫經; see Boucher, 1996, p. 65–88.

⁷⁸ For instance the writing of the *Daoxing jing* took place on the 15th day of the ninth month of the year 255 and the writing of the *Zheng fahua jing* took place on the 15th day of the fourth month of the year 291.

⁷⁹ See the letter written by the scholar Xi Zuochi 希鑿齒 to Xie An 謝安, quoted in the biographies on Dao'an: T. 2145, 55, p. 108b13–14; T. 2059, 50, p. 352c11.

⁸⁰ T. 2145, 55, p. 109b5–6; biography on Fahe. Fahe's biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan* does not mention the *zhai*, but says that he was invited to preach (*jiangshuo* 講說) in Puban (T. 2059, 50, p. 354a26).

under Dao'an's supervision only occasionally indicate one of the six *poṣadha* days as the starting or closing day of a translation, and they never contain the term *zhai*, nor do they reflect the same systematic, ritual and official aspects as Kumārajīva's major translations.⁸¹

The most crucial phases of Kumārajīva's translation process occurred on *poṣadha* days

Kumārajīva's translation work on the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing* started on the 23rd day of the fourth month and ended on the 15th day of the twelfth month of the year 403. The corrections on the Chinese version ended on the 23rd day of the fourth month of 404.⁸² These dates are not coincidences,⁸³ as the sūtra itself recommends to preach the *prajñāpāramitā* on *poṣadha* days:

The Buddha said to Subhūti: "Thus it is, thus it is. If good men and good

⁸¹ The translation of the *Apitan* ended on a 23rd day, but started on a 20th day ("Apitan xu" 阿毘曇序, T. 2145, 55, p. 72a29–b1); the *Piṣoṣa* (*Vibhāṣā*)'s translation ended on a 29th day, but the starting date is not indicated ("Bingpoṣa xu" 鞞婆沙序, *ibid.*, p. 73c8). The date of beginning of the corrections made on the *Sengqieluoḥa jing* is unknown, but they were completed on a 30th day, and the date of beginning of the work is not indicated ("Sengqieluoḥa jing xu", *ibid.*, p. 71b20); moreover, a notice related to this work says that on this particular 30th day of the month the text was read aloud (*kousong* 口誦) by the narrator, Saṃghabhadra ("Sengqieluoḥa ji jing houji" 僧伽羅刹集經後記, *ibid.*, p. 71b25–26). We may note also the case of the starting day of the *Poxumi jing*'s translation which is said a 5th day in the preface, but a 15th day in the catalogue of Sengyou (respectively in the "Poxumi ji xu" 婆須蜜集序, *ibid.*, p. 72a3 and "Xinji jinglun lu", *ibid.*, p. 10b7).

⁸² T. 2145, 55, p. 53b3–11. In his study on Kumārajīva, Ōchō Enichi points to the correspondence between these dates and the days of *poṣadha* (1982, p. 223).

⁸³ Because these dates, which are indicated with such precisions, correspond to precise days of the Buddhist liturgical calendar, it is preferable to keep them as they are given in the original texts rather than converting them into our calendar, although this might burden reading. Demiéville (1950, p. 383) converted them all and Shih (1980, p. 315) followed this practice.

women, on the six days of *poṣadha*, the 8th, 23rd, 14th, 29th, 15th and 30th days of each month recite the *prajñāpāramitā* facing up the *devas*, they will obtain unconceivable and innumerable merits during countless *asaṃkhyeya-kalpas*.⁸⁴

There are further cases of texts' predications and translations by Kumārajīva on *poṣadha* days. For example his translation of the *Chengshi lun* started on the 8th day of the ninth month of 411 and ended on the 15th day of the ninth month of the following year.⁸⁵ In the case of his translation of the *Siyi jing*, the days are not specified, but the preface explicitly informs us about "more than two thousand monks present at the Dharma assembly (*faji* 法集) on the occasion of the great *poṣadha* (*dazhai* 大齋⁸⁶)".⁸⁷

Regarding the translation of the *Weimojie jing*, Sengzhao mentioned the presence of an assembly of monks and laymen, and moreover, in his letter to Liu Yimin, he expressed an alternate of days for listening to Kumārajīva's explanations, and days for writing down his notes:

The poor monk [that I am] joined those who listened to [Kumārajīva] during [translation] sessions. In the spare time, between the sessions, I systematically classified my notes and wrote down his words, in order to annotate and explain [the translation].⁸⁸

Sengzhao's comments prove that the translation was not a non-stop activity, a fact which could well correspond to the practice of *poṣadha*. We may infer that the same procedure took place in the case of the translation of the

⁸⁴ T. 223, 8, p. 310c10-15. The same injunction exists in the translation done by Mokṣala (*Fangguang jing*, T. 221, 8, p. 67b7-8), but the passage does not appear in the second version of the same sūtra, translated by Dharmarakṣa, the *Guangzan jing*.

⁸⁵ "Chengshi lun ji", T. 2145, 55, p. 78a7-8.

⁸⁶ Read *zhai* as in the Korean edition, and not *qi* 齊 as in the Song, Ming and Yuan editions.

⁸⁷ "Siyi jing xu", T. 2145, 55, p. 58a9-10.

⁸⁸ T. 1858, 45, p. 155c27-29.

short version of the *prajñāpāramitā*, the *Xiaopin jing*, and maybe also in the case of the *Fahua jing*. The case of the *Xiaopin jing* is uncertain because only the date of the completion of the translation corresponds to a *poṣadha* day (30th of the fourth month of the year 408), whereas the starting date refers to an ordinary day, the 6th day of the second month of the year 408.⁸⁹ But since the *Xiaopin jing* contains the same injunction as the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing* to recite *prajñāpāramitā* teachings on *poṣadha* days,⁹⁰ there is no reason to imagine that this scripture was not translated according to the same procedure. Otherwise it might represent an exception. We cannot assert the same practice regarding the *Fahua jing* and the *Bailun*, but just point out that their prefaces mention the participation of lay followers and members of the royal family, which reminds us of the translations done on *poṣadha* days. Moreover, the *Zheng fahua jing* had been preached by Dharmarakṣa on *poṣadha* days, and Kumārajīva might have repeated this practice.

For this research I exclusively take into account the data found in the prefaces written by Kumārajīva's assistants, since these notices should be considered the most reliable ones. Nevertheless I wish to mention that the *Lidai sanbao ji* states that the translation of the *Wuliang shou jing* 無量壽經 (*Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經; T. 366) was issued on a *poṣadha* day, the 8th day of second month of 402.⁹¹ The *Lidai sanbao ji* also indicates the dates of publication of four further works attributed to Kumārajīva, the *Xianjie jing*, *Siyi jing*, *Fozang jing* and *Chanjing*, which however do not coincide with *poṣadha* days.⁹²

⁸⁹ "Xiaopin jing xu", T. 2145, 55, p. 55a5.

⁹⁰ T. 227, 8, p. 553a1-5. The earlier translations of the sūtra by Lokakṣema (T. 224), Zhi Qian (T. 225) and Dharmapriya (T. 226) do not contain this passage.

⁹¹ T. 2034, 49, p. 78a18. The data was taken from the *Er Qin lu*.

⁹² 5th day of the first month of the year 402 for the *Chanjing* (T. 2034, 49, p. 78a1); 5th day of the third month of the year 402 for the *Xianjie jing* (*ibid.*, p. 77c9); 1st day of the twelfth month of the year 402 for the *Siyi jing* (*ibid.*, p. 77c12); 12th day of the sixth

Kumārajīva instilled the observance of *poṣadha* into the Chinese believers by explaining its effect on auspicious rebirths

Kumārajīva contributed in establishing the practice of teaching the Dharma on *poṣadha* days by his translation procedure as well as by translating specific scriptures which clearly induce also the lay followers to observe the *poṣadha*. This is certainly the case for the above-mentioned Vinaya, the *Shisong lü*, but also for the *Da zhidu lun*, a scripture that explains why the *devas* come to listen to the good persons words on the six *poṣadha* days. The *Da zhidu lun* refers to a belief narrated in the *Si tianwang jing* 四天王經 (*Sūtra on the four devarājas*)⁹³: on the six *poṣadha* days, the four *devārājas* (on the 15th and 30rd days), the princes (on the 14th and 29th days) and messengers (on the 8th and 23rd days) come down to earth to inspect the human beings' deeds. Then they return to the heaven of the thirty-three gods and inform Śakra who makes the final judgement. Those whose deeds are good, who give alms, observe the *poṣadha* and the prohibitions, and respect and obey their parents, will be reborn among the *devas*, but those whose deeds are bad will be reborn among the *asuras*.

The narration on the inspection of the human beings by the four *devarājas* and their messengers was probably first made known in China through the translation of the *Da loutan jing* 大樓炭經 (T. 23) by Faju 法炬 between the years 290–306. We do not know whether the lost *Loutan jing* 樓炭經, which bears nearly the same title and is said to have been translated by Dharmarakṣa, also contained the topic in question. There is at least one more Chinese work which predates the *Da zhidu lun* and contains a passage exhorting the lay believers to practice *poṣadha* based on the above-mentioned

month of the year 405 for the *Fozang jing* (*ibid.*, p. 77c19).

⁹³ The *Si tianwang jing* (T. 590) was translated by Baoyun 寶雲 and Zhiyan 智嚴 at Jiankang in 426. Similar stories are contained in scriptures translated after the *Da zhidu lun*: the *Chang ahan jing*, T. 1, 1, p. 134b–135b; the *Za ahan jing* 雜阿含經, T. 99 [1117], 1, p. 295 c–296 a. It is also contained in the Aṅguttara-Nikāya III 36–37.

theme of *devarājas*' inspections tours on earth: the *Zengyi ahan jing* 增壹阿含經 (T. 125), a text translated at the end of the fourth century.⁹⁴

It seems that Kumārajīva is responsible for popularizing the theme of the upholding of *poṣadha* related to a “final judgement” more than any other previous Buddhist master, and that through his explanations on the Dharma he inculcated it to an audience of several hundred persons.

Moreover, the *Da zhidu lun* might be the first text among the scriptures translated into Chinese which elucidates why the *poṣadha* days are inauspicious and deserve humans' particular attention: on those specific days the demons harass the people, except those who observe the *poṣadha* and the prohibitions and do good deeds. Quoting from the *Tiandi benqi jing* 天地本起經 (*Sūtra on the genesis of the world*), the *Da zhidu lun* explains that on those days, the father of the demons used to cut flesh and extract its blood to feed his fire, and that this is the reason why the demons gain energy during these days.⁹⁵ Through this exposition Kumārajīva might have shocked, or at least surprised, his audience.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ In the *Taishō* edition this work is classified as a translation done by Gautama Saṃghadeva in 397. In her PhD. thesis Elsa I. Legittimo (2006, p. 80–81) argues however that the text included in the *Taishō* edition bears all the marks of the supposedly lost first translation of 384 attributed to Dharmanandin 曇摩難提 and Zhu Fonian 竺佛念, that either the second translation went lost, or that a new second translation never took place, and that in such a case the version contained in the *Taishō* is a mere correction done by Saṃghadeva on the basis of Dharmanandin and Zhu Fonian's work.

⁹⁵ T. 1509, 25, p. 160a-b.

⁹⁶ A sūtra bearing this title has never been translated into Chinese, but it is also quoted in Falin's 法琳 (572–640) *Bianzheng lun* 辯正論 (T. 2110, 52, p. 495 a). Citations from the *Da zhidu lun* are found in Daoshi's 道世 (?–683) *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 (T. 2122, 53, p. 932 b), and in Mingkuang's 明曠 (8th century) *Tiantai pusa jie shu* 天台菩薩戒疏 (T. 1812, 40, p. 595 a). It is also cited in a Dunhuang manuscript (S. 2551), a commentary of the *Yaoshi rulai benyuan jing* 藥師如來本願經, *Bhaiṣajyaguruvaidūryaprabharājasūtra*, (T. 449), translated by Dharmagupta 達摩笈多 (?–619), T.

Final remarks

We cannot say, *stricto sensu*, that Kumārajīva introduced in China the practice of translating and preaching on *poṣadha* days, but he popularized it, and with the help and participation of the king Yao Xing, he made this activity frequent and regular. The biography on one of his assistant, Senglüe, says that Yao Xing organized “assemblies (*hui* 會) and *poṣadha* on which the smoke of incense would double”.⁹⁷ This king probably invented the Chinese “court-*poṣadha*” in China, which later on became so frequent, by the time of the emperors of the Qi and Liang dynasties and especially by the time of the emperor Wu of the Liang.⁹⁸

Shortly after Kumārajīva, still in the first half of the fifth century, the long Vinayas of several early Buddhist schools as well as several sūtras belonging to the collection of the so-called Mahāyāna-vinaya (*dasheng lü* 大乘律) were translated into Chinese and published. For instance the *Youposai jie jing* 優婆塞戒經 (*Sūtra on the rules of the laymen*, T. 1488) was translated by Dharmakṣema 曇摩讖 at the request of the king of the Bei Liang, Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜. The translation of this sūtra also started on a *poṣadha* day, the 23rd day of the fourth month of 426. The text was publicly preached for an audience of more than five hundred lay believers, and the translation ended on the 23rd day of the seventh month of the same year.⁹⁹ Dharmakṣema is also said to have translated the *Da niepan jing* 大涅槃經 (*Sūtra on the great nirvāṇa*) on the 23rd day of the tenth month of the year 421. These dates are maybe not coincidences. Also the *Baguanzhai jing* 八關齋經 (*Sūtra on the poṣadha with eight prohibitions*, T. 89) translated by Juqu Mengxun’s nephew,

2767, vol. 85, p. 319b.

⁹⁷ T. 2059, 50, p. 363b6.

⁹⁸ See Martin, 2002, p. 91–97. The *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 says that there was a succession of *zhaijiang* during the reign of emperor Wu of Liang, not to interrupt the Dharma wheel (T. 2060, 50, p. 427a7).

⁹⁹ “Youposai jie jing ji” 優婆塞戒經記, T. 2145, 55, p. 64c25–29.

Juqu Jingsheng 沮渠京聲, in 455, and other works by Guṇavarman 求那跋摩 stress the ritual aspect either of *poṣadha* (may it be for lay followers or for monks), or the ceremonies of the reception of the rules of the *bodhisattva* (the *pusa jie* 菩薩戒). It was also during the same period that were published certain apocryphal sūtras which develop the dogma of the extinction of the Dharma and the decline of Buddhist practices, such as for example the *Fa miejin jing* 法滅盡經 (*Sūtra on the total extinction of the Dharma*; T. 396). Certain apocryphal texts give importance to the observance of *poṣadha*, by monks as well as by lay believers, for instance the *Anzhai shenzhou jing* 安宅神咒經 (*Sūtra on the magical formulas for disposing a room*),¹⁰⁰ others develop and insist upon the theme of preaching the Dharma, for example the *Zui miaosheng ding jing* 最妙勝定經 (*Sūtra of the most profound and supreme concentration*).¹⁰¹

In sum, Kumārajīva was the first Buddhist master whom the Chinese met who was able to comment and explain the Buddhist scriptures all while carrying out their oral translation into Chinese by himself. Moreover, no other Buddhist master had probably ever expounded the Buddhist doctrine publicly in front of such a great number of Chinese auditors. The assemblies which came together to hear him preaching or translating could count up to thousands of members. The great number of participants and the royal participation might help explain Kumārajīva's success in instituting a Chinese *poṣadha* tradition. The fact that he popularized *poṣadha* and the practice of sūtras' exposition during *poṣadha* days goes hand in hand with the contents of several of the scriptures he translated. Texts such as the *Mohe banruo boluomi jing*, the *Da zhidu lun*, the *Xiaopin jing*, and the *Shisong lü*, all stress the importance of paying particular attention to one's deeds on the fixed days. His

¹⁰⁰ T. 1394.

¹⁰¹ The *Zui miaosheng ding jing* has been reconstructed based on Dunhuang manuscripts and studied by Paul Magnin (2002). See his translation, p. 294.

thereto related inculcations also shaped the later developments of Chinese Buddhism and its rituals, for example those related to repentance or to state protection.

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