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# Narrative and Historicity in the Buddhist Biographies of Early Medieval China: The Case of Kumārajīva

## EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP AND ITS PROBLEMS

**K**umārajīva was a towering figure both inside and outside the Buddhist community in medieval China. Arguably the most accomplished foreign monk China had witnessed, he created a cultural and religious legacy that few in premodern times could rival. Unlike other religious figures whose lives were obscure, Kumārajīva was already the center of attention during his life time. Medieval writers through a variety of sources provide us with much information on this Central Asian monk. Of particular importance to the present study is a number of full-length biographies, most of which produced by Buddhist ecclesiastic historians of the Southern Dynasties. These biographies offer us not only rich details pertaining to the life and works of Kumārajīva, they also help shed light on his time – an exciting moment in the development of Chinese Buddhism – and on the narrative process that precipitated later perceptions of Kumārajīva as an individual.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, many scholars have employed the biographies as the primary sources for retelling Kumārajīva's life and have carefully scrutinized the authenticity of the information. Tang Yongtong's 湯用彤 investigation of Kumārajīva, part of his authoritative history of early-medieval Chinese Buddhism, was groundbreaking in his time and remains one of the most insightful and thorough works on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Tsukamoto Zenryū's 塚本善隆 work,

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<sup>1</sup> See Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nanbei chao Fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (1938; rpt. Beijing: Beijing U.P., 1962), pp. 194–234.

especially his meticulous examination of the much-debated dates of Kumārajīva's birth and death, helps clarify puzzling contradictions in the medieval accounts.<sup>2</sup> Kamata Shigeo 鎌田茂雄, drawing from more recent Chinese and Japanese scholarship, provides an in-depth look at the life of Kumārajīva.<sup>3</sup> The recently published research notes of Paul Pelliot and Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 also contain insightful analyses of the biographical materials.<sup>4</sup> Despite all these accomplishments, most of the attention was on the data taken from the biographies. Narrative served simply as a rack on which the data hung, and hence it received no attention.

Yet, narrative was crucial to a medieval biographer's effort in conveying his subject to readers. To neglect it signals a missed opportunity in understanding the devices that shaped the early biographies. The present article is a contextualized reading of Kumārajīva's several biographies compiled in medieval China, using the one in Huijiao's 慧皎 (497–554) *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) as the basis for analyses and comparisons. By aligning the narratives carefully, the article studies the way in which ecclesiastic historians in medieval China imaginatively appropriated available sources on Kumārajīva and created a complex and coherent interpretation of his life that was particularly meaningful. It also illuminates the ways in which these historians portrayed important figures of their history and the strategies they developed to advance their religious and historical views. These new perspectives would then allow us to reevaluate the historiographical sophistication they achieved.

<sup>2</sup> Also see Tsukamoto Zenryū, "Bukkyōshi ue ni okeru jōron no igi" 佛教史上における肇論に意義, in Tsukamoto, ed., *Jōron kenkyū* 肇論研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1955), pp. 130–46.

<sup>3</sup> Kamata Shigeo, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 中國佛教史 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1982), pp. 209–83.

<sup>4</sup> Chen Yinke, *Dushu zhaji san ji* 讀書札記三集, in *Chen Yinke ji* 陳寅恪集 (Beijing: Sanlian shidian, 2001); Paul Pelliot, "Notes sur Kumārajīva," in Antonino Forte and Federico Masini, eds., *A Life Journey to the West: Sinological Studies in Memory of Giuliano Bertuccioli* (1923–2001) (Kyoto: Istituto Italiano di Cultura Scuola di Studi Sull' Asia Orientale, 2002). Modern studies of Kumārajīva are too numerous to mention individually. For the life of Kumārajīva, see: Suwa Gijun 諏訪義純 and Ōchō Enichi 横超慧日, *Rajū* 羅什 (Tokyo, 1983); Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, ed., *Zhongguo Fojiao shi* 中國佛教史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1985) 2, pp. 251–510; P. C. Bagchi, *Le Canon bouddhique en Chine* (Paris, 1927), vol. 1. For complete translations of the *Gaoseng zhuan* biography of Kumārajīva in Western languages, see Johannes Nobel, "Kumārajīva," in *Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Academie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* (Berlin 1927), pp. 206–33; Robert Shih, *Biographies de premiers de moines éminents (Kao seng tchouen) de Houei-kiao, traduites et annotées, Première partie: Biographies de premiers traducteurs*, Université de Louvain, Bibliothèque de muséon 54 (Louvain: Institut orientaliste, 1968); For a Japanese translation, see Suwa Gijun, trans., *Kōsōden* 高僧傳 (Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1991), pp. 9–44.

We must first revisit a few assumptions nested in modern Kumārajīva scholarship. Studies in medieval Chinese Buddhism classify foreign monks, such as Kumārajīva, either as “Mahāyānists” or “Hīnayānists.” Many consider that these two branches of Buddhism were so diametrically opposed in their teachings that their memberships were mutually exclusive.<sup>5</sup> Such bifurcation is misleading: it privileges mere doctrinal preference over other aspects of an individual’s religious identity. It assumes that one did not associate himself with a monastic community that did not share one’s doctrinal views. It also assumes that the activities that a foreign monk engaged in and the scriptures they translated – if they were involved in any translation project in China at all – are indicative of their doctrinal preferences and specializations. Both assumptions ignore the reality of individual endeavors as subjected to and constrained by immediate social and cultural environments. Intellectual fashions, political and financial patronage, and material conditions all contributed to his decisions on which monastic community to join and what text to translate, as did the religious tradition of his native land and his personal inclinations.

Scholars have recently begun to question the validity of earlier claims that foreign monks from the Indian subcontinent or Central Asia were carriers of the latest and most fashionable currents of thought. Certain criticisms maintain that such views remove both the Mahāyāna movement from its Indian and Central Asian religious and social context and its participants from the monastic setting.<sup>6</sup> Some critics also caution that works on Buddhist history compiled in medieval China should not be taken at face value due to their polemical nature.<sup>7</sup> Though

<sup>5</sup> A recent example of this tendency is Antonino Forte’s study of An Shigao 安世高; see Forte, *The Hostage An Shigao and His Offspring: An Iranian Family in China* (Kyoto: Istituto Italiano di Cultura Scuola di Studi Sull’ Asia Orientale, 1995), pp. 65–78. While Forte cautions us that An Shigao might not have lived a monastic life and that the existing translations of Buddhist texts attributed to him may only constitute a portion of his life’s work, he insists that An was a “Mahāyānist” who translated only the “Hīnayāna” texts that he considered “to be the basis of a good support for the Great Vehicle,” p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert Sharf, *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2001), pp. 4–12. For recent reflections on the rise of Mahāyāna as a religious movement, see Gregory Schopen, *Daijō Bukkyō kyōki jidai Indo no sōin seikatsu* 大乘佛教興起時代インドの僧院生活, trans. Otani Nobuichiyo 小谷信千代 (Tokyo: Shunjusha, 2000); Wang Bangwei, “Buddhist Nikāyas through Ancient Chinese Eyes,” in Heinz Bechert ed., *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch der buddhistischen Texte aus den Turfan-Funden*, Beiheft 5: Untersuchungen zur buddhistischen Literatur (Göttingen, 1994), pp. 166–203; Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugrapariprechā)* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 2003); Jonathan Silk, “What, If Anything, Is Mahāyāna Buddhism? Problems of Definitions and Classifications,” *Numen* 49 (2002), pp. 355–405. For an excellent work on Buddhist scholasticism, see Georges B. J. Dreyfus, *The Sound of Two Hands Clapping: The Education of a Tibetan Buddhist Monk* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2003).

<sup>7</sup> For example, Silk (“What, If Anything,” pp. 359–60) provides a helpful review of the cur-

justifiable to a certain extent, both critiques have gone too far by underestimating the historiographical sophistication of Chinese ecclesiastic writers in presenting their own history. Often times, the issue is not simply the historicity of these works, but that we need to bring our latest reflections to bear on the development of a new reading strategy.

In the case of Kumārajīva, perhaps because of his reputation as a great translator and a key advocate of Mahāyāna teachings, modern scholars have long been interested in his *oeuvre* and its impact on the development of Chinese Buddhism. This is related to the common assumption that his authority remained unchallenged during his lifetime and that within the history of Chinese Buddhism he was a giver of knowledge. This forward-looking view obscures the fact that Kumārajīva was also on the receiving end of a unique Buddhist tradition and was a member of the community associated with that tradition. Recent advances in the study of Indian and Central Asian Buddhism and of Buddhist monasticism and scholasticism have yielded rich insights. By incorporating them, we might identify previously unappreciated narrative details and achieve a nuanced reading of the relationship between Kumārajīva and the monastic communities from which he came and how medieval Chinese perceived the world of their coreligionists in the Indian subcontinent and in Central Asia.

#### THE BIOGRAPHIES OF KUMĀRAJĪVA

There are three medieval biographies of Kumārajīva still extant. One is by Sengyou 僧祐 (445–518) and retained in *Chu Sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (*Collected Records on the Making of the Tripiṭaka*). Another is by Huijiao (497–554) and was included in his *Gaoseng zhuan*.<sup>8</sup> Both authors were Buddhist ecclesiastic historians. The third, compiled by secular historians, was the official biography of Kumārajīva, as classified under the category of “Arts and Occult Techniques 藝術” in *Jin shu* 晉書 (*History of the Jin*).<sup>9</sup> It is known that Baochang 寶唱 (464–after 514), a disciple of Sengyou and a contemporary of Huijiao, also composed a

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rent scholarly debate on the definition of Mahāyāna Buddhism and points out how the travel accounts of medieval Chinese Buddhist monks, such as Faxian 法顯, Xuanzang 玄奘, and Yijing 義淨, attest to the problem of existing conventions.

<sup>8</sup> For both *Chu Sanzang jiji* (hereafter, *CSZJJ*) and *Gaoseng zhuan* (hereafter, *GSZ*), I am referring to the edition in *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (hereafter, *T*). I also consult some critical modern editions of these two texts including the *Chu Sanzang jiji* edited and punctuated by Su Jinren 蘇晉仁 and Xiao Lianzi 蕭鍊子 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), and the *Gaoseng zhuan* edited, punctuated, and annotated by Tang Yongtong (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> *Jin shu* (Zhonghua edn.) 95, pp. 2499–502.

biography of Kumārajīva and placed it in his *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (*Biographies of Famous Monks*). Although the biography and most of *Mingseng zhuan* have not survived, the Japanese monk Shūshō 宗性 (1202-?) excerpted a portion, giving us some idea of its content.<sup>10</sup>

Various aspects of the historical significance of Sengyou's and Huijiao's biographies of Kumārajīva are instantly recognizable. To begin with, these are the most contemporary of the portraits of this great foreign monk. They were written when the memories of him were still fresh in the minds of many who were part of the larger Buddhist community – including those who did not share his doctrinal views – and when the process of idolizing him had yet to reach its climax. The two biographies were also the products of a period during which the Buddhist community in China was more diverse and dynamic in both doctrine and practice than it later became, and its reflections on its own history had yet to become systematic. While both Sengyou and Huijiao believed that the monastic order should have a distinctive identity and a unified teaching, neither of them appeared to be dogmatic in their writings. In his writings, Sengyou emphasized the lineage of monastic discipline. Huijiao only composed biographies of monks whose virtues and contributions were indeed “eminent” (*gao* 高) and not just “famous” (*ming* 名).<sup>11</sup> They used many contemporary sources, including personal correspondences, official records, and prefaces to Kumārajīva's translations authored by the master's associates and disciples. Long ago Johannes Nobel suggested that many of the materials in *Gaoseng zhuan* can be traced back to *Er Qin zhongjing lumu* 二秦眾經錄目 (*A Catalogue of Translated Scriptures during the Dynasties of Qian Qin 前秦 and Hou Qin 後秦*), a catalogue of Buddhist works compiled by Sengrui 僧叡, one of Kumārajīva's disciples and closest collaborators.<sup>12</sup> Since this catalogue is no longer extant, one cannot know if it contained ex-

<sup>10</sup> See *Meisōden shō* 名僧傳鈔 (*Excerpts from Mingseng zhuan*), in *Dainippon zoku zōkyō* 大日本續藏經, case no. 7, vol. 1, pp. 14a–b. Shūshō selectively copied from Baochang's biography of Kumārajīva seven passages of various lengths. All but one incident were mentioned by Sengyou and Huijiao in their biographies of Kumārajīva. Nevertheless, it is possible that Baochang might have included some information from sources that others did not use. For an excellent introduction to *Mingseng zhuan*, see Chen Shiqiang 陳士強, *Fodian jingjie* 佛典精解 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1992), pp. 310–17; also Arthur F. Wright, “Biography and Hagiography: Hui-chiao's Lives of Eminent Monks,” *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1990), pp. 95–98.

<sup>11</sup> *T* 2059, p. 419A; Also see Wright's discussion of Huijiao's religious attitude, “Biography and Hagiography,” pp. 82–85. The English word “eminent” does not entirely express the meaning of *gao*, which carries also the meaning of “lofty” in the context of Huijiao's writing.

<sup>12</sup> See Johannes Nobel, “Kumārajīva,” pp. 207–8. This particular theory might have come from Chen Yinke. Nobel expressed his gratitude to Chen (whose name he rendered as Yinkoh Tschen) for helping him identify important sources and solved difficult problems in the intro-

tensive information on Kumārajīva; however, one ought not exclude the possibility that there were biographies of Kumārajīva produced before Sengyou and Huijiao and that had influenced them. By examining the discrepancies between the three extant biographies, we gain a better idea of the development of medieval Buddhist biography as a historiographical genre and compare the methods through which the ecclesiastic and secular historians appropriated their sources to serve their agendas.

Compiled early in the seventh century, the biography of Kumārajīva in *Jin shu* is essentially an abridged composite of the biographies by Sengyou and Huijiao. Its portrayal of Kumārajīva's life is similar to that of the other two, except for the inclusion of his most infamous sexual transgression, on which more is said further on. The similarities and differences between Sengyou's and Huijiao's biographies are more subtle and interesting. Given the striking similarities between the two in most of their contents, narrative sequences, and wording, Sengyou's work is without doubt the *urtext* of Huijiao's, hence modern scholars generally accept that there is no fundamental difference in view between these two.<sup>13</sup> A close comparison, however, reveals this to be a misconception.

While both Sengyou and Huijiao saw Kumārajīva's life time as the beginning of a new era in the transmission of Buddhist teachings to China, the latter managed to present a more sophisticated and nuanced depiction of the great master and his time than the former. Huijiao refined Sengyou's biography of Kumārajīva by strategically adding a few details, skillfully changing the ways some of the materials were presented in the narrative, and extensively using inter-textual references. For example, unlike Sengyou, who selected a number of important Buddhist translators and chronologically arranged their biographies in his compilation, Huijiao grouped his together with a clearer sense of affiliation and development in Buddhist learning. In Kumārajīva's case particularly, Huijiao placed his biography first in the second *juan*

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duction. This is likely to be the earliest record of Chen Yinke's influence on works produced in Western academia. The theory is recorded also in Chen's recently published research notes on *GSZ*: "Gaoseng zhuan jizheng gaoben" 高僧傳箋證稿本, in *Dushu zhaji sanji* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), pp. 304-5.

<sup>13</sup> See Chen Yuan 陳垣, *Zhongguo Fojiao shiji gailun* 中國佛教史籍概論 (1962; rpt. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), p. 21, cf. n. 1 in Suwa, *Kōsōden*, p. 281. For the study of Sengyou as a Buddhist scholar, see Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤, "Lun Sengyou 論僧佑," in *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiu xuebao* 中國文化研究學報 (Hongkong, 1997) 6, pp. 405-15; also H. Schmidt-Glintzer, *Das Hun-ming Chi und die Aufnahme des Buddhismus in China* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1976), pp. 14-20.

of the “Chapter on Translation.” Five out of the six remaining biographies in this *juan* belong to his close Central Asian associates or rivals. The more intricately their lives and careers intertwined with that of Kumārajīva, the closer would their biographies be placed in the chapter to his. Thus this arrangement not only allows Huijiao to present Kumārajīva as the center of a major Buddhist circle, but also helps illuminating the chronology of events in his life that Sengyou had left out by drawing out related details from these associated biographies. Hence Huijiao managed to offer an interpretative framework that is more sophisticated and interesting, without the danger of overloading the narrative of Kumārajīva’s biography with a great number of details. In contrast, Sengyou only accorded Buddhayaśas (Fotuoyeshe 佛陀耶舍, or Jueming 覺明) among Kumārajīva’s close associates with a biography in the *Chu sanzang jiji*.<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Huijiao’s account of Kumārajīva far surpasses Sengyou’s in terms of the wealth of information. The sophistication of Huijiao’s skills in narrative structure and subtle interpretation and the relationship between his and Sengyou’s accounts will be the focus of the following discussion.

#### KUMĀRAJĪVA’S MOTHER

The role of the mother in the life of a saint was rarely discussed in Buddhist biographies of this time. While details concerning family background had become a standard feature in all biographies long before, the space devoted by Sengyou and Huijiao to Kumārajīva’s mother and her actions is far beyond the convention. Strangely, their portrayals of the mother have hitherto attracted no scholarly attention.

Readers of Huijiao’s account of Kumārajīva would be drawn to a dramatic portrayal of his mother from the beginning. After a brief introduction of Kumārajīva’s father, who was said to be a descendent of an Indian family whose members had served as ministers for many generations, the focus immediately turns to his mother, Jīvā 耆婆:

The king had a younger sister who had just reached the age of twenty. She was known for her sharp wits and could commit to memory things she just seen or heard. She had a red mole on her body that was indicative of her mothering a wise child. [Princes from] various kingdoms had sought her hand in marriage, yet

<sup>14</sup> *Mingseng zhuan* did contain biographies for all these foreign monks according to the surviving table of contents. But it classifies them in various categories. Since none of these biographies survive, it is impossible to know if it in any way influenced Huijiao’s work; see *Meisō*, case no. 7, vol. 1, pp. 1b, 3a-b.



she would not consent to any. When [she] saw Jiumoyan 鳩摩炎 (Kumārayāna), she desired to marry him. Therefore [she] forced him to take her as his wife and became pregnant with Kumārajīva. Already when Kumārajīva was in the womb, his mother could feel her own mind becoming sharper than usual. There in the great temple of Qiaoli 雀梨 (Cakir ?) gathered many renowned and enlightened monks.<sup>15</sup> When she learned of this, along with the great ladies of the royal clan and various virtuous nuns, she made offerings [to them] for many days, held feasts [in their honor] and listened to their preaching of the *dharma*. Kumārajīva's mother also was suddenly fluent in the Indic language 天竺語 without having ever learned it. All were in awe of her ability as she could exhaustively answer even the most difficultly phrased questions. There was an arhat [named] Damoqusha 達摩瞿沙 (Dharmaghoṣa) who claimed that “she must be pregnant with a wise child.” [He] preached [to Jīvā] the legend of the miraculous signs manifested when Śāriputra was in [his mother's] womb. [She] quite forgot the language after Kumārajīva was born. Some time after [giving birth to Kumārajīva], she desired to leave home. Her husband did not permit it. So she gave birth to another boy named Fushatipo 弗沙提婆 (Puṣyadeva). Later, while on an excursion out of the town, she witnessed human bones scattered about among graves. Thereby [she] deeply understood the root of suffering and resolutely vowed to become a nun. [She began to] refuse food and drink as long as her hair was not shaven. After six days and nights, she had become so frail that [many] feared [she] could not survive until dawn. [Her] husband feared [for her life] and hence consented. Even then she would not consume anything for her head had not been shaved. Only after [her husband] had ordered someone to get rid of [her] hair, did she swallow some food and drink. The next morning she received the precepts and was particularly fond of practicing meditation techniques. She was dedicated to perfecting them without a moment of slacking and acquired the first abode [of Buddhist sainthood]. When Kumārajīva reached the age of seven, he too became a novice. 王有妹，年始二十，識悟明敏，過目必能，一聞則誦。且體有赤鬘，法生智子，諸國娉之，並不肯行。及見摩炎，心欲當之，乃逼以妻焉，既而懷什。什在胎時，其母自覺神悟超解，有倍常日。聞雀梨大寺名德既多，又有得道之僧，即與王族貴女，德行諸尼，彌日設供，請齋聽法。什母忽自通

<sup>15</sup> For the original reference for “Qiaoli,” I am following Ji Xianlin 季羨林, ed., *Da Tang xiyu ji jiaozhu* 大唐西域記校注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p. 61.



天竺語，難問之辭，必窮淵致，眾咸歎之。有羅漢達摩瞿沙曰：此必懷智子。爲說舍利弗在胎之證。及什生之後，還忘前言。頃之，什母樂欲出家，夫未之許，遂更產一男，名弗沙提婆。後因出城遊觀，見塚間枯骨異處縱橫，於是深惟苦本，定誓出家，若不落髮，不咽飲食。至六日夜，氣力綿乏，疑不達旦，夫乃懼而許焉。以未剃髮故，猶不嘗進。即敕人除髮，乃下飲食。次日受戒，仍樂禪法。專精匪懈，學得初果。什年七歲，亦俱出家。<sup>16</sup>

The differences between Huijiao's and Sengyou's portrayal of Jīvā are crucial. The related section in Sengyou's account is as follows:

The king had a younger sister who had just reached the age of twenty. She was known for her sharp wits and could commit to memory things she had just seen or heard. She had a red mole on her body that was indicative of her mothering a wise child. [Princes from] various kingdoms had sought her hand in marriage, she did not consent to any. When [she] saw Jiumoyan, she desired to marry him. The king was delighted when learning about this, and forced Jiumoyan to take her as his wife. Later she gave birth to Kumārajīva. Already when Kumārajīva was in her womb, she could feel her own mind became sharper than usual. She went to the great temple of Qiaoli to listen to the preaching of the sūtra, and became suddenly fluent in the Indic language without having ever learned it. All were in awe of her ability. There was an arhat [named] Damoqusha who claimed that "she must be pregnant with a wise child," and preached [to Jīvā] the legend of the miraculous signs manifested when Śāriputra was in [his mother's] womb. When Kumārajīva was born, he had a god-like brightness. Shortly after, his mother became a nun in order to seek enlightenment, and [she] acquired the first abode [of Buddhist sainthood]. When Kumārajīva reached the age of seven, he too became a novice. 王有妹，年始二十，才悟明敏，過目必能，一聞則誦。且體有赤黶，法生智子，諸國媵之，並不行。及見炎，心欲當之。王聞大喜，逼炎爲妻，遂生什。什之在胎，其母慧解倍常，往雀梨大寺聽經，忽自通天竺語，眾咸歎異。有羅漢達摩瞿沙曰：此必懷智子。爲說舍利弗在胎之證。既而生什，岐嶷若神。什生之後，還忘前語。有頃，其母出家修道，學得初果。什年七歲，亦俱出家。<sup>17</sup>

Comparing the two, we immediately see that Huijiao selectively rephrased some sentences and added new and substantial information to the narrative. His alterations underscore a deliberate attempt to highlight the initiatives that Jīvā had taken. For example, Sengyou did not

<sup>16</sup> T 2059, p. 330A-B.

<sup>17</sup> T 2145, p. 100A-B.

explicitly state that Jīvā had been reluctant to marry before meeting Jiumoyan. The phrase Sengyou used was that she “did not” consent 並不行 to any. In Huijiao’s version, the phrase becomes she “would not” consent to any 並不肯行. By adding to the character *ken* 肯, meaning “willing” or “consenting,” Huijiao left no doubt that it was Jīvā who rejected the offers. Huijiao also stated that it was Jīvā who forced Jiumoyan to marry her 心欲當之, 乃逼以妻焉, whereas Sengyou made it plain that it was the king who forced the match 王聞大喜, 逼炎為妻.<sup>18</sup>

Huijiao portrayed Jīvā as someone who took charge of her own life at critical junctures, especially in the matters of her marriage and her entry into the monastic order, as well as someone who was dedicated to and accomplished in Buddhism. The alterations Huijiao made are indicative of a shift of focus onto Kumārajīva’s mother. In Sengyou’s narrative, all signs of Jīvā’s endowed qualities were karmic merits that resulted from being pregnant with Kumārajīva. The culminating moment in this part of the narrative is when the baby was born with “a god-like brightness 岐嶷若神.” Sengyou therefore attributed all signs of Jīvā’s piety to Kumārajīva and his inborn qualities. Huijiao did not describe the newly born Kumārajīva with this particular term. This does not mean that to Huijiao the birth of Kumārajīva was less significant. Rather, he saw the event as equally significant for Jīvā because it served as a crucial step forward in her quest for salvation. Huijiao implied that it was Kumārajīva who inherited her qualities – sharp intelligence, free spirit, and eloquence. The providence she received during the pregnancy resembled, as the biography explicitly stated, the story of Śāriputra’s birth, and the experience of her awakening was parallel to that of Śakyamuni.

Huijiao’s intention to represent Jīvā as the force behind Kumārajīva’s awakening becomes only more pronounced as the story unfolds. It was Jīvā who turned her prodigious son into a member of the Buddhist community and arranged an excellent monastic education for him by taking him to Jibin 罽賓, then the center of the Sarvāstivādin monastic order.<sup>19</sup> While there is no evidence suggesting that she was herself a Mahāyāna adept, it was under her encouragement that Kumārajīva

<sup>18</sup> The similarity between the two accounts has led modern scholars, such as Robert Shih and Suwa Gijun, to suggest that the character for king (*wang* 王) is omitted by mistake from Huijiao’s account; see Shih, *Biographies*, p. 9, and Suwa, *Kōsōden*, p. 282, n. 4. I believe however, that Huijiao intentionally dropped this character to give Jīvā more agency. My justification is that the entire phrase “the king was delighted 王聞大喜” is missing from Huijiao’s account. Therefore this cannot be a textual corruption or a careless mistake but an intentional act that is consistent with other changes he made.

<sup>19</sup> In Chinese Buddhist texts written before the Sui and Tang, Jibin denotes not only Kash-

developed his intellectual interest in the teaching.<sup>20</sup> She was not only Kumārajīva's protector but also his motivator. It is no coincidence that the references to her often appear in the narrative at the key moments of Kumārajīva's life.

Huijiao included two important prophecies concerning the destiny of Kumārajīva, both involving his mother. One was made to Jīvā on the importance of keeping her son abstinent – something dealt with below. The other prophecy was made by her to her son before she took leave for India. The poignant moment is as follows:

Kumārajīva's mother said to him before her departure, "The profound teaching of Vaipulia 方等 should be widely propagated in Zhendan (that is, China). Its transmission to the Eastern Land will depend on your strength; yet, as such it will not benefit you. What will you say to that?"

Kumārajīva replied, "The way of the Mahasattva 大士 is that he benefit others while forgetting about himself. If I must help to disseminate the teaching of great transformation, to wash away the blindness and to enlighten the ignorant, even if my body is to enter the furnace and stove, I shall suffer without regret." 什母臨去謂什曰：“方等深教，應大闡真丹。傳之東土，唯爾之力。但於自身無利，其可如何？”什曰：“大士之道，利彼忘軀。若必使大化流傳，能洗悟矇俗。雖復身當爐鑊，苦而無恨。”<sup>21</sup>

Only in *Gaoseng zhuan* do we find this at once encouraging yet stern exchange. It is most likely an invention of Huijiao and hence crucial

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mir but also Gandhara; see Enomoto Fumio, "A Note on Kashmir as Referred to in Chinese Literature: Ji-bin," in Ikari Yasuke, ed., *A Study of the Nīlamata: Aspects of Hinduism in Ancient Kashmir* (Kyoto: Institute for Research in Humanities, Kyoto University, 1994), pp. 357–65.

<sup>20</sup> In Huijiao's biography of Kumārajīva, a Buddhist nun by the name of Ajieyemodi 阿竭耶末帝 (Skt.: Akṣayamati) invited Kumārajīva, who had just returned from Jibin, to lecture on the Mahāyāna sūtras. She is said to be a daughter of the king of Kuchā and have attained to *sakṛdāgāmin* (*Situohan guo* 斯陀含果), the second abode of Buddhist sainthood. Kumārajīva's mother was also a daughter of the king of Kuchā and is said to have reached soon after her ordination the *Srotāpana* (*xutuohuan guo* 須陀洹果), the first abode of Buddhist sainthood. She eventually attained *anāgāmin* (*anahan guo* 阿那含果), the third abode, after moving to India. Based on this, Tang Yongtong suggests that Akṣayamati was in fact Jīvā; see *Fojiao shi*, p. 199. Since Huijiao said that Akṣayamati leaped with joy upon hearing about the Mahāyāna teachings, she could not be Jīvā. Having already traveled to Jibin, Jīvā would have heard them before, hence she had no reason for leaping.

<sup>21</sup> *T* 2059, p. 331A. In an early-9th c. Buddhist text called *Bei shan lu* 北山錄, author Shenqing 神清 claimed that this exchange took place with an *arhat* whom Kumārajīva met on his journey abroad; see *T* 2113, p. 589c. It is likely that Shenqing confused this exchange with the prediction made to Jīvā about keeping Kumārajīva under watch. Yet given that he was a very learned monk, and that some detailed information on Kumārajīva's life mentioned in *Bei shan lu* is quite different from that recorded by Sengyou and Huijiao, we should not exclude the possibility that he drew his materials from different sources.

to our understanding of his complex view of Kumārajīva's religious endeavor – another issue to which I return. As far as Kumārajīva's life is concerned, this event marks the beginning of his spiritual independence. Jīvā met her destiny soon after these words were spoken. Huijiao told us that she achieved in India the attainment of the Anāgāmin, the second highest abode of Buddhist sainthood, and nothing more was known of her. Such an end for Jīvā represents the ultimate fulfillment of the spiritual quest she undertook when she chose to leave home.

It is impossible for us to determine the sources from which ecclesiastical historians, Huijiao in particular, developed portrayals of Jīvā. Stories about her might already have been in circulation for some time. Huijiao and many other members of the Buddhist community in southern China must also have learned about the existence of a large community of Buddhist nuns in Kuchā at Kumārajīva's time.<sup>22</sup> Still, nothing similar to Huijiao's portrayal of Jīvā is extant in early Indian or Chinese Buddhist literature and thus a possible source.

There is little doubt that this emphasis on Jīvā was Huijiao's own. Kumārajīva's father, in contrast, occupies no significant position in Kumārajīva's life except for his role in the conception. One wonders if Huijiao expected his contemporaries to accept such a provocative a portrayal of a woman practitioner. In fact, his confidence in his new emphasis may have stemmed from a society in which Buddhist nuns and their religious pursuits were held in great esteem. It was around this time that Baochang wrote the *Biographies of Buddhist Nuns* (*Biqiuni zhuan* 比丘尼傳), and Huijiao might have enjoyed a greater creative latitude with Jīvā since his readers would expect to find something “exotic” about her foreign femininity. After all, to the majority of medieval readers the land of the Buddha was an alien place filled with customs that were different from their own; the actions foreign people took to seek salvation therefore would be readily accepted as different.

It appears that Huijiao attempted to achieve a balance between Jīvā the model mother and Jīvā the model Buddhist practitioner. As shown in the *Gaoseng zhuan* passage quoted earlier, he had Jīvā give birth to a second son by Kumārayāna named Puṣyadeva. There is no mention of the fate of this second son, but the context suggests that he continued the patrilineal line and did not enter the monastic order. It

<sup>22</sup> One account states that there were three Buddhist nunneries in Kuchā that were attended by female members of the royal families from east of the Pamirs. The precepts used in these nunneries were brought to China by Sengchun 僧純; see “Biqiunijie suo chu ben mo xu 比丘尼戒所出本末序,” in *CSZJ* 11; *T* 2145, p. 79c; See also Tang, *Fojiao shi*, pp. 196–97; Chen, *Dushu zhaji sanji*, pp. 48–49.

is likely that Huijiao invented this plot to show Jīvā fulfilling the medieval Chinese social expectation of a model mother before entering the monastic order. But his decision might have also been inspired by a common theme in Indian Buddhist literature. That is, a religious saint often has a brother who devotes himself to and excels in secular matters. A well-known example is the famous King Aśoka and his brother Vītaśoka.<sup>23</sup> One should also consider the portrait presenting Jīvā as both a model mother and a model Buddhist practitioner as a narrative strategy. By emphasizing the dominant role Jīvā played in the early religious development of her son, Huijiao hinted at what was to come – Kumārajīva could only thrive in a protected environment where he was neither overly privileged due to his rank nor overpowered by non-believers. What was in store for Kumārajīva, in turn, reinforced the importance of Jīvā, and for us it attests the structural perfection of Huijiao's biography of Kumārajīva.

#### KUMĀRAJĪVA AS PRODIGY

Medieval Chinese ecclesiastical historians clearly saw that Kumārajīva's unsurpassed genius was what destined him to be one of the greatest transmitters and interpreters of Buddhist thought; Sengyou and Huijiao were no exceptions. They gave ample examples of his genius, such as his quickness, capacity for learning, and eloquence. Their treatment, however, is more subtle and has more structural significance than what meets the eye. Their stories of Kumārajīva's life began and ended with miracles attesting to his genius. The miracles surrounding Jīvā's pregnancy hint at his becoming the Śāriputra of his own time, possessing the astonishing ability to penetrate and elucidate the Buddha's teachings. That his tongue remained intact after his cremation was a miracle testifying the authenticity of the Buddhist teachings he had expounded and propagated, as well as the eloquence he had displayed in countering the views of heretics.<sup>24</sup>

In the case of Kumārajīva, we ought to expect a biographer to examine the power and effect of genius; but Sengyou and Huijiao display an ambivalent attitude. They make clear in their writings that extraordinary intelligence could be a double-edged sword for a Buddhist

<sup>23</sup> For a study of the legend of King Aśoka and his brother Vītaśoka, see John S. Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1983), pp. 135–43. The legend was well-known to the medieval Buddhist clergy. It appears, e.g., in Sengyou's *Shijia pu* 釋迦譜, T 2040, p. 76c.

<sup>24</sup> A number of scholars have associated the indestructibility of the tongue specifically with the medieval belief in miracles related to the chanting of the *Lotus sūtra*. See Gijun Suwa,

practitioner. And Kumārajīva's royal status further enhanced both the advantages and disadvantages that came with genius. Together, mother and son attracted much recognition, which allowed him to relax the rules of monastic life. We are told that Jīvā removed her son from Kuchā precisely because he was treated with this sort of indulgence. (Whether or not this was her motive is impossible for us to know.) It seems that Kumārajīva's royal status attracted attention even after he left Kuchā. For example, a clergyman named Xijian 喜見 advised the king of Kashgar to invite, partly for diplomatic reasons, the young man to court to deliver a sūtra-lecture.<sup>25</sup> Sengyou and Huijiao suggest that the recognition Kumārajīva received resulted in his growing pride, along with the widening rift between himself and the surrounding religious community of Central Asia. His conduct was under ever more intense scrutiny, as his reputation as a prodigy grew in his native land. Sengyou and Huijiao took care to juxtapose Kumārajīva's widely recognized mastery of the Sarvāstivāda texts with his equally criticized disregard for the monastic codes. Such laxness, they suggested, led "all practitioners [of the Law] to suspect [his sincerity] 修行者頗共疑之." This set the stage for the unfolding of Kumārajīva's many weaknesses, chief among which, was his casual attitude towards sex.

In this regard, the parallel between the portrayals of Kumārajīva and Buddhayaśas, one of his teachers, becomes interesting and relevant to our study.<sup>26</sup> The life of Buddhayaśas as told by Sengyou and Huijiao resembles that of Kumārajīva, except for the former's less illustrious birth. Buddhayaśas was also known to be highly intelligent – someone "proud in his demeanor, [and who] thought of himself as knowledge-

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*Chūgoku Nanchō Bukkyōshi no kenkyū* 中国南朝仏教史の研究 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1997), pp. 303–27; also James Benn, "Burning for the Buddha: Self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism," Ph.D. diss. (Los Angeles: U. California, 2001), pp. 304–7. Gijun remarks that the textual evidence linking these miracles to the practice were first found in *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 (*Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*), see *T* 1509, p. 127A. Interestingly, Kumārajīva was the translator of both the *Da zhi du lun* and the *Lotus sūtra*. I doubt this association has anything to do with both Sengyou's and Huijiao's biographies having ended with his leaving behind an indestructible tongue. I believe instead that this miracle might have inspired the association. The translation of *Lotus sūtra* does not figure prominently in either biography. The fact that the indestructible tongue was only mentioned once in *Gaoseng zhuan* suggests that Huijiao had yet begun to associate it with sūtra chanting. Having said that, we do not rule out the possibility that they portrayed his (after-)life's imitating the texts he translated. There is an example of this which we will discuss later.

<sup>25</sup> *T* 2059, p. 330C.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Pelliot stated that the information about Buddhayaśas in his biographies in *CSZ* and *GSZ* appears to be credible, but it contradicts the chronology provided by the biographies of Kumārajīva. According to this chronology, Buddhayaśas was already over 70 when he arrived in China and was around 83 when he decided to return to Kashgar. See Pelliot, "Notes sur Kumārajīva," p. 12.

able and wise, saying that few were qualified to be his teacher; thus he was not respected by the clergy 然性度簡傲，頗以知見自處，謂少堪己師者，故不為諸僧所重。”<sup>27</sup> The circumstances suggest that Buddhayaśas was among those who first exposed Kumārajīva to Mahāyānist ideas.<sup>28</sup> There was also mutual affection and deep friendship between the two. Sengyou and Huijiao noted that Buddhayaśas was the only person openly sympathetic to Kumārajīva when the latter’s sexual transgressions were known. All of this made the biographies of Buddhayaśas supplemental to those of Kumārajīva. One also wonders if they chose to present Buddhayaśas as such a free spirit in order to hint at the kind of role-model Kumārajīva had had and thus to provide some explanation for the personality for which he was later known. In any case, such portrayal stresses the biographers’ own ambivalence towards the role that intelligence played in religious life.

#### KUMĀRAJĪVA AND THE MONASTIC ESTABLISHMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

Huijiao treated more extensively the religious pedigree of Kumārajīva than that of any other foreign monk contained in *Gaoseng zhuan*. His decision to include biographies of Kumārajīva’s former teachers and other Central Asian associates who later came to join him in Chang’an aimed not only at making Kumārajīva’s pedigree appear more credible, but also at presenting the complex relationship between Kumārajīva and the monastic establishment in Central Asia. According to *Gaoseng zhuan*, Kumārajīva grew up in a community dominated by Nikāya Buddhism, especially that of the Sarvāstivāda. Medieval ecclesiastical historians, including Huijiao, were keenly aware that the dominance of Sarvāstivāda teaching persisted during Kumārajīva’s life time in his native land and the doctrinal position held by the Sarvāstivādins was the orthodoxy in Jibin.<sup>29</sup> Huijiao stated that upon entering into the

<sup>27</sup> *T* 2059, p. 333C; also *T* 2145, p. 102A.

<sup>28</sup> Sengyou’s and Huijiao’s biographies of Buddhayaśas are almost entirely identical. Only Huijiao noted that Buddhayaśas could recite from memory the “scriptures of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna [containing] millions of words.” The biographies yield no other evidence that may suggest Buddhayaśas’s Mahāyāna inclination. What is said explicitly of Buddhayaśas’s training was that he specialized in *piposha* 毗婆沙. I agree with Funayama Tōru 船山徹 that the term *piposha* here most likely refers to the *Vibhāṣā* commentary on the *Daśabhūmika sūtra* 十住毗婆沙 rather than to the *Sarvāstivāda vinaya*; see “Masquerading as Translation: Examples of Chinese Lectures by Indian Scholar-Monks in the Six Dynasties Period,” paper presented December 6, 2003, at the Conference Honoring Victor Mair’s Sixtieth Birthday at the University of Pennsylvania, p. 13, n. 32.

<sup>29</sup> The enormous influence that the Sarvāstivāda school had on medieval Chinese Buddhism did not receive much attention in the 20th c. Therefore the recent revival of interest in the



monastic order at Kuchā, the first text Kumārajīva learned at the tender age of six was *Pitan* 毘曇 (namely, the Jñānaprasthāna, or *Abidamo fazhilun* 阿毗達磨發智論) by Kātyāyanīputra (Jiazhanyanzi 迦旃延子), the dean of Sarvāstivāda philosophy.<sup>30</sup> Whereas modern scholarship has emphasized Kumārajīva's roots in Kuchā, his medieval biographers made it clear that the religious community with which he formed the closest intellectual tie was the Sarvāstivādins in Jibin. It was in Jibin where he met his Dharma-master Bandhudatta (Pantoudaduo 槃頭達多), under whose tutelage he studied the Buddhist canon of the Sarvāstivāda school. The closeness of the tie that he formed with the Sarvāstivādins in Jibin became more evident and important during his final years in Chang'an, when several of them joined him there and collaborated with him on various translation projects. These included Puṇyatāra (Furuoduoluo 弗若多羅, or Gongdehua 功德華), Dharmaruci (Tanmoliuzhi 曇摩流支, or Fale 法樂), Vimalākṣa (Beimoluocha 卑摩羅叉, Wugouyan 無垢眼), Buddhayaśas, Buddhabhadra (Fotobatuoluo 佛跋跋陀羅, also known as Juexian 覺賢 or Foxian 佛賢, 360–429), and Dharmayaśas (Tanmoyeshe 曇摩耶舍, or Faming 法明).<sup>31</sup>

Medieval ecclesiastical historians portrayed Kumārajīva as an explorer of new ideas rather than a diligent follower of conventional learning in part because of his genius. Huijiao, particularly, gave contemporary readers a strong impression that his turning to Mahāyāna doctrines in general and the Madhyamaka of Nāgārjuna in particular

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history and philosophy of the Sarvāstivāda school is much welcome. For the latest treatment in a Western language, see Charles Willemen, Bart Dessein, and Collett Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>30</sup> Here I concur with Suwa, *Kōsōden*, p. 284, n. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Although we do not know the exact date of Dharmayaśas's arrival at Chang'an, it is clear from various sources that he was most likely an associate of Kumārajīva and might have collaborated with him. To begin with, Dharmayaśas arrived no later than 414, since in that year he completed a translation of *Shelifu apitan* 舍利弗阿毗曇 (Skt. *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra*) with Dharmagupta (Tanmojiueduo, 曇摩崛多, or Fangzang 法藏) according to his biography in *GSZ*; see *T* 2059, p. 329c. In Sengzhao's 僧肇 letter to Liu Yimin 劉遺民, it is said that Dharmayaśas was in Chang'an when Kumārajīva was still alive, see *GSZ* 6, *T* 2059, p. 365b; Tang, *Fojiao shi*, p. 214–15; Kamata, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 3, pp. 12–13. It is not clear if Dharmayaśas directly collaborated with Kumārajīva; however people close to him were often close to Kumārajīva as well. For example, Daobiao 道標, who wrote the preface to *Śāriputrābhidharmaśāstra*, was a close associate of Kumārajīva. The latter had spoke on his and Daoheng's 道恆 behalf when Yao Xing pressed them to give up their monastic practice and return to secular life; see the Daoheng's biog. in *GSZ* (*T* 2059, pp. 364c–65a). For another example, Dharmayaśas's former teacher Puṇyatāra did collaborate directly with Kumārajīva. The Buddhists from Jibin were likely to have been a part of a large foreign assembly in Chang'an that included people affiliated with religious communities in other regions. Dharmagupta, for example, was from India (see Daobiao's pref., *T* 1548, p. 525b). But the fact that only these names were singled out in medieval Buddhist sources pertaining to Kumārajīva shows the significance of the Jibin connection in his life.

was a result of his intellectual curiosity. He suggested that Kumārajīva had begun to study various kinds of knowledge soon after he left Jibin, reading among the “heretical schools” and Vedic literatures, as well as works on prognostication, before he was introduced to the doctrine of Emptiness (Skt.: *śūnyatā*). The account of Kumārajīva’s exposure to the Mahāyāna doctrine also supports the argument that Jan Nattier made in her discussion on the origins of the Mahāyāna movement that there existed within the monastic communities of Central Asia a group of like-minded members who pursued the study of “Mahāyāna” scriptures.<sup>32</sup> Medieval ecclesiastical historians singled out a former prince from Yarkand 莎車 named Sūryasoma (Xuliyesimo 須立耶蘇摩) as the one person who had a hand in Kumārajīva’s acceptance of the Mahāyāna position on Emptiness.<sup>33</sup> Xuliyesimo introduced to Kumārajīva the Mahāyāna scripture *Anavatapta sūtra* (*Anouda jing* 阿耨達經).<sup>34</sup>

Huijiao predictably highlighted Kumārajīva’s triumph in defending the superiority of the Mahāyāna teaching and the veneration he received from his audience in Central Asia. But he was careful not to let his emphasis on the exceptional treatment Kumārajīva had received overshadow the importance of monastic authority, which served as the ultimate judge of one’s religious status in the Buddhist communities of fourth- and fifth-century China. Huijiao’s Kumārajīva met all essential requirements for embarking on an ecclesiastical career. He received full ordination at the age of twenty,<sup>35</sup> and sought his teachers’ endorsement on doctrinal issues. Huijiao also depicted the spiritual growth of Kumārajīva through exposing the complex relationship between him and the larger community of the Buddhist order in both Central Asia and China, especially between Kumārajīva’s own determination to seek

<sup>32</sup> Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, pp. 193–97.

<sup>33</sup> Both he and his elder brother relinquished their secular prestige for a monastic life. Kumārajīva’s biography in *GSZ* does not state clearly whether his meeting with the princes occurred in Yarkand or Kashgar. Although the two places are not far apart, based on context, it seems more likely to have been Kashgar.

<sup>34</sup> In a text called *Sanron soshidenshū* 三論祖師伝集 (*Collected Biographies of the Patriarchs of the Three Treatises*) compiled in Japan sometime before 1204, Sūryasoma was even listed as the last Indian patriarch of the Three Treatises Sect; see Ōchō Enichi et al., ed., *Sōgō Bukkyō daijiten* 総合仏教大辞典 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1987), p. 680c. Dharmarakṣa translated *Anavatapta sūtra* (also called *Hongdao guangxian sanmei jing* 弘道廣顯三昧經). *Anavatapta* is the name of the famous Nāga king to whom the Buddha expounded the Mahāyāna doctrine of emptiness. Interestingly, Kumārajīva never retranslated the text despite the alleged influence this sūtra had on him.

<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, Sengyou did not mention this important detail in Kumārajīva’s biography. Huijiao placed it well after Kumārajīva had earned a great reputation as a Buddhist master and converted to Mahāyāna.

truth and the emotional and intellectual attachments he had to the religious community in which he was brought up.<sup>36</sup>

#### ENCOUNTERING PĀPĪYAS

It was a convention for medieval ecclesiastical historians to adopt supernatural phenomena in their narrative as a way to highlight the moment at which the protagonist approached his enlightenment, perhaps, as an effort to mirror the celebrated encounter between the historic Buddha and Pāpīyas (*mo* 魔 or *mo poxun* 魔波旬).<sup>37</sup> The dramatic episode of Kumārajīva's discovery and study of the *Fangguang jing* 放光經 (*Sūtra of the Radiant Light*; Skt.: *Pañcaviṃśatisāharikā-prajñāpāramitā*) in Kuchā, which is recounted both in *Chu sanzang jiji* and *Gaoseng Zhuan*, appears to follow this convention. The following is Huijiao's version:

Therefore [Kumārajīva] remained in Kuchā and resided in the New Monastery 新寺. Later he discovered the *Fangguang jing* in the old palace next to the monastery. When he first attempted to study the scripture, Pāpīyas (that is, the devil) came and concealed the words. Only the blank tablets were there to be seen. Kumārajīva knew it was Pāpīyas' doing and vowed to redouble his dedication. The words reappeared after Pāpīyas disappeared, thus enabling him to carry on with studying and chanting the sūtra. Kumārajīva then heard a voice in the air saying, "You are an intelligent man, what use is there in reading this?" Kumārajīva replied, "You are a small devil, timely is this moment for you to leave. My mind is likened to the earth. It cannot regress." [Kumārajīva] stayed on for two years during which he extensively chanted the Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras and fully comprehended their profound meanings. 於是留住龜茲，止于新寺。後於寺側故宮中，初得放光經。始就披讀，魔來蔽文，唯見空牒。什知魔所為，誓心踰固。魔去字顯，仍習誦之。復聞空中聲曰：“汝是智人何用讀此。”什曰：“汝是小魔，宜時速去。我心如地，不可轉也。”停住二年，廣誦大乘經論，洞其祕奧。<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Jan Nattier recently points out that the term "Hīnayāna" was translated by Kumārajīva and others as "small vehicle" (*xiaocheng* 小乘) rather than the offensive "inferior vehicle" (*liecheng* 劣乘). She surmises that: "It may well be that Kumārajīva (whose own background was originally Sarvāstivādin) chose a less offensive, though technically inaccurate, expression to translate 'Hīnayāna'; see Nattier, *A Few Good Men*, p. 173, n. 4. Her argument, if it is true, certainly would enhance the argument made in this paper. Nevertheless, Kumārajīva was not the first to use the term "small vehicle," thus diminishing Nattier's hypothesis; e.g., the term already appears in earlier translations such as Dharmarakṣa's 竺法護 *Zheng Fahua jing* 正法華經.

<sup>37</sup> For a thorough investigation of Pāpīyas, esp. its usage in Chinese translation of Buddhist literature, see Paul Pelliot, "Pāpīyān > 波旬 > Po-siun," *TP* 30 (1933), pp. 85-99.

<sup>38</sup> See *T* 2059, p. 331A.

In this account Pāpīyas made two separate attempts in one visit to prevent Kumārajīva from learning the sūtra. He first tried to conceal the words on the tablets. When this failed, he tried to convince Kumārajīva that this Mahāyāna sūtra was of no use to an intelligent man like him.<sup>39</sup> Modern scholars often disregard the supernatural elements of the story, but insist that Kuchā was indeed the location where Kumārajīva first discovered and studied the *Fangguang jing*.<sup>40</sup> But once we abandon the reductionist approach and treat this episode as a part of the whole biography, we find rich interplay between scriptural references and biographical narrative that was subtly woven together by Huijiao to serve a variety of purposes. Before we can illustrate fully what the intent of the supernatural in the narrative, it is necessary to take another look at how this episode may have come to exist in the first place.

In Sengrui's 僧叡 preface to Kumārajīva's translation of the *Dapin banruo jing* 大品般若經 (*The Long Sūtra on Perfect Wisdom, or The Perfection of Wisdom in Twenty-five Thousand Lines*), which is a variant translation of the *Fangguang jing*, he praised Kumārajīva for being a person who was “born with a wise mind that was already enlightened in previous lives and with extraordinary attainments that have found no peers. The hindrance from Pāpīyas could not make [him] regress; reproofs from the erudite could not make [him] succumb 慧心夙悟, 超拔特詣, 天魔干而不能廻, 淵識難而不能屈.”<sup>41</sup> Is this indeed an explicit reference to Kumārajīva's overcoming Pāpīyas? If so, it indicates that the story of Kumārajīva's encounter with Pāpīyas was already in circulation during his lifetime.<sup>42</sup> Be that as it may, the source Sengrui drew upon to make this reference lies closer than one might have imagined – it was the message of the sūtra to which he wrote the preface. In fact, Pāpīyas' distracting the faithful and the latter's overcoming it by chanting and studying the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* are the central themes of *Fangguang jing*.<sup>43</sup> It is just as likely that Sengrui conveniently used this theme as a literary allusion to connect the translation to its translator and the

<sup>39</sup> Worth noting is that Sengyuo believed these to be two separate visits; while both of them took place during Kumārajīva's stay in Kuchā, they did not occur on the same day or at the same location; *T* 2145, p. 100c.

<sup>40</sup> See Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (Madison: U. Wisconsin P., 1967), p. 73; B. N. Puri, *Buddhism in Central Asia* (1967; rpt. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers; 1993), p. 117; Ren, *Zhongguo Fojiao shi* 2, p. 262.

<sup>41</sup> See Sengrui, “Daping jing xu” 大品經序, *CSZJJ* 8 (*T* 2145, pp. 52c–53b).

<sup>42</sup> Chen Yinke suggested this in his research note; *Dushu zhaji sanji*, pp. 50–51.

<sup>43</sup> The Buddha warned of Pāpīyas' distraction to the faithful and explained the power of chanting and studying the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra*. For such examples in the *Fangguang jing* (translated by Wuluocha 無羅叉), see *T* 221, pp. 49A–B, 71B–C.

latter's faith in the sūtra. This reference then inspired subsequent historians like Sengyou and Huijiao to develop an elaborate story of the discovery of *Fangguang jing*.<sup>44</sup>

While the episode appears to have no historical basis whatsoever, its key elements were carefully chosen to illustrate a major stage of Kumārajīva's religious journey. For obvious reasons, medieval Buddhist biographers deduced that *Fangguang jing* was the text discovered by Kumārajīva. Public perception of Kumārajīva's devotion to and authority on the Prajñāpāramitā texts was well-established during his lifetime.<sup>45</sup> By the mid- fifth century, at the latest, the translation of this sūtra was considered Kumārajīva's crowning achievement.<sup>46</sup> Members of Buddhist communities also regarded the sūtra and its exegesis titled *Da zhi du lun* 大智度論 to be the foundation of Kumārajīva's doctrinal views. By linking his encounter with and subsequent defeat of Pāpiyas to the central message of the sūtra, Sengyou and Huijiao reaffirmed Kumārajīva's historical status as a true master of the Prajñāpāramitā, as well as, the sanctioned authority of his translation.

Meanwhile, the episode also took an unexpected turn in the hands of Huijiao,<sup>47</sup> who placed it immediately after the final exchange

<sup>44</sup> Other references, similar in tactic to the one mentioned above in Sengrui's preface to the *Dapin jing*, may have also contributed to the imagined connection between Kumārajīva and the *Fangguang jing*. In addition to his preface to Kumārajīva's translation of *Dapin boruo jing*, Sengrui also wrote the preface to Kumārajīva's translation of *Xiaopin boruo jing* 小品般若經 (*The Short Sūtra on the Perfection of Wisdom or Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*; Skt.: *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*). In it he remarked, "The crown prince of Later Qin invited Kumārajīva to retranslate the sūtra ... after he heard that Kumārajīva possesses a true version of the sūtra that was transmitted to him by a deity 有秦太子... 會聞鳩摩羅法師神授其文, 真本猶存... 請令出之." See Sengrui, "Xiaopin jing xu" 小品經序, *CSZJJ* 8 (*T* 2145, p. 55A). The crown prince here is referred to as Yao Hong 姚泓, see Ren, *Zhongguo Fojiashi* 1, p. 280. Whether the notion of receiving the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra* through divine revelation was merely a literary rhetoric or a reference to an actual belief of the writer, it offered another possibility for later elaboration.

<sup>45</sup> The translation of *Dapin banruo jing* and its exegesis, *Da zhi du lun* (*Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*), were both widely celebrated events. As Kamata Shigeo noted, they not only brought Kumārajīva personal joy but also greatly enhanced the prestige of the Later Qin court. The request Yao Xing made of Huiyuan, leader of the Buddhist community in the south, to write the preface for Kumārajīva's *Perfection of the Great Wisdom* was motivated by a desire to enhance the cultural hegemony of his regime; see Kamata, *Chūgoku Bukkyōshi* 2, pp. 272-73.

<sup>46</sup> It was certainly the most celebrated event at the court; and Yao Xing himself participated in the translation process; see Sengrui's preface, *CSZJJ* 8 (*T* 2145, p. 53B); also *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記 (*T* 2034, p. 77B); *Jin shu* 117, pp. 2984-85.

<sup>47</sup> All the biogs., including that in *Jin shu*, state that Kumārajīva encountered Pāpiyas after he returned to Kuchā from his itinerant study during which he was exposed to the teaching of the Madhyāmaka. As stated above, Sengyou mentioned neither the departure of Kumārajīva's mother for India nor her final exchange with her son. Kumārajīva's *Jin shu* biog. includes the exchange but not the Pāpiyas episode.

Kumārajīva had with his mother and her departure for India. While we have already touched on the importance of this final exchange, we must return to it once again, since Huijiao's arrangement is an ingenious attempt to delineate Kumārajīva's spiritual and psychological development; it allows the readers to identify the exact moment at which the savant gained his spiritual independence. Before it, Kumārajīva was a well-protected prodigy who was extraordinarily intelligent but without a focus in life. Now, with the departure of his mother, he must act with his own strength. Kumārajīva's struggle with Pāpīyas is a test of his strength and maturity. Huijiao's effort to indicate spiritual rather than intellectual depth at this time becomes more evident when we consider that prior to this episode Kumārajīva was said to have already mastered Nāgārjuna's advanced theory of Emptiness.

In addition, the Pāpīyas episode attests the inner struggle Kumārajīva experienced as he made the commitment to spread Mahāyāna teachings. Gregory Schopen observes that the concept of "nonretrogression" (the stage at which a true Bodhisattva cannot return to the world of illusion) had become essential in Mahāyāna teachings by the fifth century, and the combative tone that Mahāyānists took against sectarian monastic establishments is particularly strong in sūtras such as the *Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*. The enemies of the Perfect Wisdom were often characterized as the ones following the "Dharma and Vinaya." Pāpīyas was said to have frequently disguised himself as a monk who tricked the faithful into giving up the practice of the Perfect Wisdom.<sup>48</sup> Schopen's observation fits the context here extremely well. In the age of Sengyou and Huijiao, it was not uncommon for opposing religious traditions within the Buddhist community to accuse each other's scriptures as books of the devil (*moshu* 魔書).<sup>49</sup> One wonders if Huijiao implied by mentioning the appearance of Pāpīyas and his subsequent defeat that Kumārajīva had psychologically distanced himself from the largely sectarian community of which he had been a member. Following the inner logic of Huijiao's device, we should not be surprised by what he stated to be Kumārajīva's action after he defeated Pāpīyas – Kumārajīva was eager to persuade his own teacher Bandhudatta of the virtues of the Mahāyāna teachings.

<sup>48</sup> See Schopen, *Daijō bukkhyō kyōki jidai*, pp. 24–25.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., in his letter to Zhu Daosheng and Huiguan, Fan Bolun 范伯倫 mentioned that the Indian monk Deva 提婆 and his Chinese followers accused the Vāipulya scripture of being a book of the devil; *Hong ming ji* (T 2102, p. 78B).

## PERSUADING BANDHUDATTA

After Kumārajīva's defeat of Pāpīyas, he was said to have convinced his own tonsure master Bandhudatta of the profundity of the Mahāyāna teachings. Huijiao offered the following account:

The master [Bandhudatta] asked Kumārajīva, "What have you discovered in the teachings of Mahāyāna that is so extraordinary and prompted you to follow it?" Kumārajīva replied, "The Mahāyāna [teachings] are so profound and purely illuminating that *dharma* of all kinds are just empty. The Hīnayāna [teaching] covers only limited grounds [in which] omissions and mistakes abound." 師謂什曰: "汝於大乘, 見何異相, 而欲尚之." 什曰: "大乘深淨, 明有法皆空. 小乘偏局, 多諸漏失."

The master said, "What you said about all being empty is something that should be feared. How could one give up practicable *dharma* in favor of emptiness? It is like [the story of] the madman of old who ordered the spinster to spin fine threads. The spinster did manage to come up with ones that were as fine as a molecule, yet the madman found them too thick still. The spinster was exasperated. She pointed to the thin air and said 'these are the finest threads.' The madman asked, 'Why can I not see these?' The spinster responded, 'These threads are indeed the most fine. As the most skilled among the best craftsmen, [even] I cannot see them, never mind the others.' The madman was thrilled and handed the threads to the weaver. The weaver followed the spinster's example and received great rewards too without creating anything real. Your *dharma* of emptiness is just the same [as these threads]." 師曰: "汝說一切皆空, 甚可畏也, 安捨有法而愛空乎? 如昔狂人令績師績線, 極令細好. 績師加意, 細若微塵, 狂人猶恨其麤. 績師大怒, 乃指空示曰: '此是細縷.' 狂人曰: '何以不見?' 師曰: '此縷極細, 我工之良匠, 猶且不見, 況他人耶?' 狂人大喜, 以付織師. 師亦效焉, 皆蒙上賞, 而實無物. 汝之空法亦由此也."

Kumārajīva then presented his view using a series of analogies. Back and forth they debated it for more than a month. Bandhudatta was finally convinced. He sighed, "[There is a saying that] a teacher who fails to achieve enlightenment arouses the aspiration in the student. It came true today." He then saluted Kumārajīva as his teacher and said, "Śrāvaka, you are my teacher of the Great Vehicle, as I am your teacher of the Small Vehicle." 什乃連類而陳之, 往復苦至, 經一月餘日, 方乃信服. 師歎曰: "師不能達, 反啓其志, 驗於今矣." 於是, 禮什爲師, 言 "和上是我大乘師. 我是和上小乘師矣."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>50</sup> See *T* 2059, p. 331A-B.



Although Kumārajīva was declared winner at the end of the lengthy debate, Huijiao did not unequivocally favor him. Rather than a true acknowledgement of defeat, the praise that Bandhudatta gave Kumārajīva can be read as a polite recognition of his former disciple's achievement as a master of a different doctrine rather than as a complete change of his own philosophical position.

This doctrinal debate between Bandhudatta and Kumārajīva is likely a product of later imagination. While Sengyou stated it was Kumārajīva who went to Jibin to persuade Bandhudatta without offering any detail of the event, Huijiao claimed that Bandhudatta arrived at Kuchā to meet his disciple, thereby putting Kumārajīva at the center. The disparities between the two accounts notwithstanding, the inclusion of this episode affirms that even for someone like Kumārajīva the ritual of winning a debate against one's teacher must be observed if one was to establish any sort of authority. It is noteworthy that Huijiao did not provide the analogies through which Kumārajīva was able to persuade his tonsure-master. The space instead was given to Bandhudatta's critiques in which Kumārajīva was likened to a madman.<sup>51</sup> Huijiao was very likely implying that critiques of the Mahāyāna teachings were present in the Chinese monastic community despite Kumārajīva's growing dominance. The metaphor of the madman may also serve as a subtle reminder of the image Kumārajīva had as being both intelligent and egotistical. In any case, the debate between Kumārajīva and his former teacher serves a function similar to that of the Pāpīyas episode – and together they mark the completion of Kumārajīva's quest for religious independence.

#### SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

Sexual transgression is another important aspect of Kumārajīva's biographies, in addition to his genius. Sources preserve three separate incidents in which he had sexual contact with women. Both Sengyou and Huijiao mentioned two of the three. The first incident took place when a general of the Later Liang, Lü Guang 吕光, conquered and occupied Kuchā in 384. The general was said to have thought Kumārajīva too young to be of such reputed intelligence and importance – a point to which we shall return when we discuss the much debated issue of Kumārajīva's age at the time of his death. The general decided

<sup>51</sup> Kumārajīva's *CSZ* biog. does not report Bandhudatta's disparaging response. It also differs from *GSZ* in that Kumārajīva went as far as Jibin, where Bandhudatta resided at the time, in order to persuade the latter.

to put Kumārajīva to a test by forcing him to sleep with a daughter of the king of Kuchā.<sup>52</sup> Kumārajīva put up a great resistance at first, but when he was locked up in a chamber with the princess after being forced to drink a great quantity of liquor, he succumbed to the pressure. The second incident took place some years later when Kumārajīva was residing in Chang'an. Yao Xing 姚興 (ruler of Later Qin; r. 394–416) told Kumārajīva that given his unsurpassed intelligence, it would be regrettable if he did not pass on his “*dharma* seeds 法種.” Yao Xing then ordered him to take ten concubines and set up a household outside of the monastery.

Yet only in *Jin shu* does one find the third and the most notorious incident of Kumārajīva’s sexual transgressions:

[Kumārajīva] gave a lecture at the Thatched Hall Monastery 草堂寺, solemnly attended by Yao Xing, his courtiers, the great virtuous 大德, and monks. Together they numbered in the thousands. Kumārajīva suddenly descended from the elevated podium, telling Yao Xing, “[I had a premonition in which] two boys climbed onto my shoulder. [I am encountering] the hindrance of desire and in need of a woman [to help me cross it].” Yao Xing immediately summoned a palace lady and presented her to Kumārajīva. [He] had sex with her at once and [it] led to the birth of twin sons. 嘗講經於草堂寺, 興及朝臣、大德沙門千有餘人肅容觀聽, 羅什忽下高坐, 謂興曰: “有二小兒登吾肩, 慾鄣須婦人.” 興乃召宮女進之, 一交而生二子焉。<sup>53</sup>

In this last incident, Kumārajīva’s own sexual desire was the cause of his failure in keeping to the monastic codes. Shocking and bizarre, it presents a different side of Kumārajīva that we have not witnessed before. Whereas in the other two incidents he was a victim of those who wielded secular power, here he appears to be acting on his own volition. We do not know what sources the compilers of *Jin shu* used.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> The biog. does not specify whether Bo Chun 白(帛)純, who was dethroned by Lü Guang, or his brother Bo Zhen 白(帛)震, who became the new king after the kingdom of Kuchā was sacked, was the king referred to.

<sup>53</sup> *Jin shu* 95, pp. 2501–2.

<sup>54</sup> Nobel (“Kumārajīva,” p. 226, n. 2) suggested that this episode is an interpolation by the *Jin shu* compilers, since it contradicts Yao Xing’s later rationale for forcing Kumārajīva to take as many as ten concubines. Pelliot argued that Nobel’s understanding of “*shao si* 少嗣” as “no heirs” was incorrect, meaning instead that Kumārajīva had “few heirs,” including two sons born of his liaison with the palace lady, just mentioned. Therefore it made perfect sense that Yao Xing should want the master to produce more heirs. Moreover, it appears to Pelliot that the episode was already part of the biography from which the *Jin shu* compilers drew information; see Pelliot, “Notes sur Kumārajīva,” pp. 6–7. Although Pelliot’s reading is acceptable, his argument about the *Jin shu*’s sources being other than *CSZJJ* or *GSZ* is not convincing because of the striking resemblance among all three.

But it is hard to make the case that its inclusion in Kumārajīva's official biography was a result of social bias against Buddhism. Not only did the *Jin shu* compilers express admiration for Kumārajīva, as had their Buddhist history-writing counterparts, they also attempted to justify his action by highlighting his supernatural powers. In the subsequent scene, Kumārajīva challenged all those who, like him, had set up households to a needle swallowing contest, stating, "One is only qualified to get a wife when one is capable of taking in these [needles] like me 若能見效食此者, 乃可畜室耳." He then ingested a large quantity of needles as if they were normal food. Ashamed, the transgressors ceased their sinful ways. It is worth noting that the *Jin shu* episode came before Yao Xing offered ten concubines to Kumārajīva. The compilers were clearly trying to make the case that Kumārajīva was not an average monk, hence the conventional rules and regulations did not apply to him. Though the Mahāyāna concept of *upāya* no doubt influenced the *Jin shu* portrayal of Kumārajīva, it was still necessary to give examples of Kumārajīva's supernatural power in order to comply with the convention of the category of "Arts and Occult Techniques," under which biographies of religious figures are placed in the official history.<sup>55</sup>

However, Kumārajīva's sexual transgressions proved to be a conundrum for ecclesiastical scholars. Given Kumārajīva's status, his sexual transgressions undermined the importance of celibacy in monastic life and cast the efficacy of his teaching in doubt. For example, Daoxuan 道宣, a great scholar-monk in the seventh century, responded to the controversy in his *Daoxuan lüshi gantong zhuan* 道宣律師相感通傳 (*Vinaya Master Daoxuan's Records of Spiritual Resonance*). He argued that Kumārajīva's sexual transgressions were forgivable, given the great contributions he had made to the propagation of Buddhism in China. As a staunch defender of monastic codes, Daoxuan naturally cautioned the public that Kumārajīva's conduct was not routine. But what particularly drove Daoxuan's defense was the negative impact such transgressions had on Kumārajīva's many translations. Kumārajīva was known to alter texts that he helped to translate, based on his own interpretations, and probably scholars dissatisfied with his loose textual method criticized Kumārajīva by making an analogy between editorial and sexual looseness. Daoxuan was eager to point out that the majority of his contemporaries continued to rely on the sūtras Kumārajīva translated, and

<sup>55</sup> The category of arts (*yi shu* 藝術) is also referred to as the category of the occult (*fang ji* 方技). For example, the biographies of famous Tang monks such as Xuanzang 玄奘, Shenxiu 神秀, and Yixing are all included in the chapter on the occult in the *Old History of Tang* (*Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書).

their efficacy was affirmed by the numerous occurrences of miracles. Daoxuan argued further that one must distinguish the transgressions Kumārajīva made in his private life from the liberty he took with translations. After all, Daoxuan reasoned, they were informed by divine revelations.<sup>56</sup>

Shenqing, a learned monk of the early-ninth century, also commented on Kumārajīva's transgressions in his *Bei shan lu* 北山錄 in addressing the complex relationship between secular power and the development of Buddhism.<sup>57</sup> He argued that the transgressions were insignificant compared to Kumārajīva's profound contribution to the spread of Buddhism. He also blamed rulers, such as Lü Guang and Yao Xing, for forcing Kumārajīva to commit sins and stressed that Kumārajīva made a personal sacrifice in bringing the great teaching to China, disregarding the warning he had received. Shenqing lamented that the tragedy of Kumārajīva was that of limited wisdom. Like Bian He 卞和 and the divine turtle, Kumārajīva was also blind to the danger his knowledge would bring him.<sup>58</sup>

Modern scholarship has primarily been interested in the social-historical aspect of Kumārajīva's sexual transgressions. For example, noticing that Kumārajīva's marriage with the Kuchā princess and his parents' marriage were both results of coercion, John Kieschnick suspects that these sexual transgressions may be "an amalgamation of three distorted legends." He points out that the circulation of the legends is indicative of a general disregard of sexual abstinence proselytized by the Buddhist clergy in medieval society.<sup>59</sup> While it is important to

<sup>56</sup> See *T* 2107, pp. 437c–38a. Tang monk Sengxiang also quoted Daoxuan's comments in his *Fahua zhuanji* 法華傳記 (*Record on the Transmission of the Lotus sūtra*); see *T* 2068, p. 52a. Kyōkai, a Japanese monk, defended Kumārajīva despite the fact that he mistook Kumārajīva's disciples for his children – an innocent mistake, perhaps, due to the fact that Japanese monks were often married and produced children who inherited their parish. Bernard Faure suggests that Japanese Buddhists did not find Kumārajīva's transgressions troubling at all; *Red Thread: Buddhist Approaches to Sexuality* (Princeton: Princeton U.P., 2001), p. 191–92.

<sup>57</sup> The discussion appears in the chapter called "Complying with Hegemons and Kings (*He ba wang* 合霸王)"; *T* 2113, p. 589c.

<sup>58</sup> The first story appears in the *Han Fei zi* 韓非子. Bian He found that an ordinary looking stone from Mount Jing 荆山 was indeed a remarkable piece of jade. He presented the stone uncut to the king of Chu 楚. The king did not believe him and had his feet chopped off as a punishment for lying. The second story appears in the chapter of "External Things" in the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. A sacred turtle was caught by a fisherman, and then appeared in a dream of the lord of Song, seeking his assistance. The lord therefore got hold of the turtle. However, since the turtle had proved its ability by appearing in the king's dream, the diviner suggested to the lord that its shell may be efficacious in divination. The king thus had the turtle slaughtered for its shell.

<sup>59</sup> Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk* (Honolulu: U. Hawaii P., 1997), pp. 18–19. Bernard Faure holds a similar view in his extensive discussion on Buddhist attitudes towards sex; see

study the social and religious implications of these incidents and to highlight the tension between the monastic ideal and the social response to it, we also need to investigate their function in the overall narrative structure in order to understand properly why they held such an important place and how they were appropriated in accounts of the life of Kumārajīva.<sup>60</sup>

While Sengyou and Huijiao stopped short of accusing Kumārajīva of failing to rein in his sexual desire, they did not downplay the impact that the transgressions had on his image and legacy. Unlike the *jin shu* compilers, neither of them tried to defend Kumārajīva's reputation by evoking the doctrine of expediency (*upāya* 方便) or non-duality 不二, the two most essential of the Mahāyāna teachings that Kumārajīva propagated and that the public had accepted as convenient excuses. Whether or not the incident in Kuchā is historically reliable, I would argue that the decision to include it in the biography indicates that both Sengyou and Huijiao wanted their readers to notice the traces of sin in Kumārajīva's life, and that such sin had a deeper root. Their critical attitude seems common among ecclesiastical writers of the fifth century.<sup>61</sup>

This brings us back to the prophecy concerning Kumārajīva's career, as mentioned earlier in the biographies. At age twelve, Kumārajīva and his mother encountered an *arhat* on their return journey to Kuchā. The *arhat* told Jīvā that her son should be kept under extremely careful guard:

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*Red Thread*, pp. 26–27. Kieschnick, in his otherwise perceptive discussion, mistakes the king of Kuchā as the one who forced Kumārajīva to have sex with the princess.

<sup>60</sup> We must keep in mind that ecclesiastical historians had the liberty to use selectively materials that were available to them, and the standards by which they made their selections were in no way consistent. For example, Sengyou's and Huijiao's biographies of Tanwuchan 曇無讖 do not give any hint of the sexual techniques and accompanying transgressions that this master was famous for. These aspects instead only appear in the *Wei shu* biography of Tanwuchan, see *Wei shu* 魏書 (Zhonghua edn.) 99, pp. 2208–9.

<sup>61</sup> Baochang might have explored the psychology of Kumārajīva in order to explain his sexual desire. Shūshō's *Meisōden shō* included the following passage in his excerpt: “[Kumārajīva] dreamed that Shakyamuni Buddha touched his head with his hand, saying ‘As soon as a lustful thought arises in you, the heart of regret follows 夢釋迦如來以手摩羅什頂曰汝起慾想即生悔心.’” We do not know how Baochang dealt with Kumārajīva's sexual transgressions as a whole. He might have argued that, being forewarned, Kumārajīva was able to overcome his sexual desire. However, the fact that such desire did indeed arise shows Baochang's inclination was to hold Kumārajīva responsible. While ecclesiastical historians in later periods placed the responsibility of Kumārajīva's transgressions on the shoulder of secular rulers, some of them were not blind to the part Kumārajīva played in his own downfall. Nianchang 念常, the compiler of the Buddhist chronicle *Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, is one such example. He lamented that had Kumārajīva's practice matched his knowledge, he would enjoy a longer life and accomplish far more than he did; see *T* 2036, p. 529A.

If he can reach thirty-five years of age without breaking his precepts,” said the arhat, “then he will widely disseminate the *dharma* and convert innumerable people. [His achievement] will be no different from that of Upagupta. If not, he will not be able to do much else but become a *dharma* teacher who has a talent in explaining the meaning [of the teaching].” 若至三十五而不破戒者，當大興佛法，度無數人，與優波掘多無異。若戒不全，無能爲也，正可才明俊義法師而已。<sup>62</sup>

This prophecy is most likely an invention by which the biographers attempted to draw a connection between Kumārajīva’s sexual transgressions and his “mediocre” career and to evaluate his legacy.<sup>63</sup> In their view, had Kumārajīva not committed his offenses, he could have been another Upagupta in his achievements.

While there is no conclusive evidence on Kumārajīva’s dates,<sup>64</sup> a close reading of the narrative suggests that both Sengyou and Huijiao

<sup>62</sup> See *T* 2059, p. 330B; also *T* 2145, p. 100B. I concur with Tang Yongtong that the character *zhi* 止 is a textual corruption for *zheng* 正, which gives a clearer meaning here as “just,” and the characters *xiyi* 攜詣 should be *junyi* 俊義; see Tang, annot., *Gao seng zhuan* 2, p. 56, nn. 29–30.

<sup>63</sup> Tsukamoto (*Bukkyōshi ue ni*, p. 134) suggested that the legend concerning this prophecy may have appeared quite early and was incorporated into Sengyou’s and Huijiao’s biographies. The purpose of the prophecy was to defend Kumārajīva’s violation as a result of Karmic force. This is certainly possible, but even if this was the case, the karmic aspect is not emphasized by either Sengyou or Huijiao.

<sup>64</sup> For the birth and death dates of Kumārajīva, see Tsukamoto, *ibid.*, pp. 130–35; Kamata, *Chūgoku Bukkyōshi* 2, pp. 213–26; and Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika*, pp. 244–46, n. 1. According to the “Obituary of the Dharma-Master Kumārajīva” 鳩摩羅什法師誄 attributed to Sengzhao, Kumārajīva was likely to have been over thirty-five when captured by Lü Guang; *T* 2103, pp. 264B–65B. The dates given in the obituary, however, sharply contradict Sengyou’s and Huijiao’s biographies, in which Lü Guang remarked that Kumārajīva appeared too young for his reputation. The reliability of the obituary has also been called into question. Tsukamoto (just cited) argued that it is a forgery based on external evidence, and that it was first mentioned in Daoxuan’s 7th -c. *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集. Tsukamoto’s evidence is persuasive but far from conclusive. Since the obituary was composed in the style used in Sengzhao’s time, Pelliot, Nobel, and Tang all accepted its dates as historical; see Pelliot, “Notes sur Kumārajīva,” pp. 16–17, Nobel, “Kumārajīva,” pp. 228–29, and Tang, *Fojiao shi*, p. 204. I too am convinced that the obituary is a forgery. What calls its authenticity into question is the reference it makes to both Fu Jian and Yao Xing. These two emperors are mentioned together in a sentence: “Fu [Qian] and Yao [Xing], the two heavenly kings of the Great Qin, welcomed him (Kumārajīva) by sending the armies 大秦苻姚二天王，師旅以迎之 (*T* 2103, p. 264B).” Yao Xing’s father, Yao Qiang 姚萇, founded his own dynasty – the Later Qin – by usurping and murdering Fu Jian of the Former Qin. As the remnants of the Fu clan remained hostile to the new regime, the Later Qin rulers naturally preferred to hush up any reference to the usurpation; see the biographies of Fu Jian, Fu Pi 苻丕, Fu Deng 苻登, Yao Qiang, and Yao Xing in *Wei shu* 95, pp. 2076–82, and *Jin shu* 114–16. It is doubtful that Sengzhao would praise Fu Jian at the risk of offending Yao Xing, who was the current ruler and the most important patron of the Buddhist community in Chang’an. The obituary appears to be the work of someone who was familiar with the events that took place within the Buddhist circle but not the political considerations contemporary to Sengzhao. It was likely written based on

believed Kumārajīva to have broken his precepts before the age of thirty-five.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, just as the prophecy had predicted, the future that was in store for him was a regrettable one. It is worth noting that they placed this prophecy after Kumārajīva had completed his basic education and before his advancement to higher learning, that is, the Mahāyāna teachings. As such, they present Kumārajīva's failure in matching the achievements of Upagupta as a result of choice rather than destiny. The placement of the prophecy also echoes the resulting irony of Kumārajīva's genius and the tension between his iconoclastic spirit and the monastic rules and regulations. Kumārajīva's outstanding intelligence was both a blessing and a curse. People, regardless of their religious affiliations, either admired him or were confused by his problematic reputation. It was for this reason that Lü Guang tested young Kumārajīva's commitment to his precepts. Similarly, Yao Xing's coercing Kumārajīva into taking concubines was in no small part prompted by his admiration for a great intelligence.

Sengyou and Huijiao further emphasized the contrast between the greatness of Kumārajīva's genius and the gravity of his sexual transgressions by subtly juxtaposing them. Their view found the most succinct expression in Buddhayaśas's comment on Kumārajīva's transgressions. When Buddhayaśas heard the news that Kumārajīva had taken concubines at Yao Xing's urging, he lamented that: "Kumārajīva is [as soft as] a piece of fine textile, how can he be made to enter the thicket [of society]? 羅什如好綿，何可使入棘林中?"<sup>66</sup> The comment highlights again Kumārajīva's greatest gift and frailty. On this point, Huijiao followed Sengyou's interpretation, and further suggested that the transgressions were the results of Kumārajīva's mission to China. This is evident from the previously discussed prophecy Jivā made of her son before her departure to India.

Both Sengyou and Huijiao also insisted on having Kumārajīva express regret though his own voice. We are told that Kumārajīva's former teacher, Vimalākṣa, asked him for the number of disciples he had in Chang'an, knowing nothing of his transgressions. Kumārajīva replied that he was concentrating his effort on making sūtras and the

Kumārajīva's biographies in *CSZJ* and *GSZ*. Saitō Tatsuya 齋藤達也 professes a similar view in a recent study; see "Kumarajū no botsu nen mondai no saikentou" 鳩摩羅什の没年問題の再検討, *Kokusai Bukkyōgaku daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 3 (2000), pp. 129-30.

<sup>65</sup> Scholars generally agree on this point, see Kamata, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 2, pp. 223-24; B. N. Puri, *Buddhism in Central Asia*, p. 119. Upagupta is commonly known to be one of the founders of the Sarvāstivāda and established the Buddhist institution in Mathura; see *T* 2043, pp. 157B-61A.

<sup>66</sup> *T* 2059, p. 334A; also *T* 2145, p. 102B.



*vinaya* available to a Chinese audience, and that although there were 3,000 who studied with him, he could not consider himself to be their teacher because he was “grievously burdened by karmic hinderance 累業障深.”<sup>67</sup> To any contemporary, or even modern, reader it would surely seem that Kumārajīva had also judged his overall situation in the light of the prophecy.

Sengyou and Huijiao reminded readers that doctrinal learning alone could not save Kumārajīva from sin. Bernard Faure suggests that sex was often treated either as the “morality of ambivalence” or as the “transcendence through transgression” in Buddhist rhetoric;<sup>68</sup> but these are not the cases here. Instead, Sengyou and Huijiao used sex as an opportunity to analyze the human condition and to show that learning and practice could sometimes be at odds with each other. What was implied in their writings was that Kumārajīva’s transgression hindered his ability to persuade the non-believer, namely, Lü Guang and his court. What followed his first sexual transgression was sixteen years of imprisonment at the court in Liangzhou 涼州, during which time he appeared to have done little to propagate the faith. The biographies report only his predicting anomalous phenomena. The rulers of the Later Liang repeatedly ignored his warnings even when the outcomes clearly showed that he had lost none of the potency of his genius. While this may be a faithful recording of Kumārajīva’s Liangzhou years, it does not fully explain why Sengyou and Huijiao chose to focus exclusively on Kumārajīva’s skills in prognostication at this point of the biographies. Interestingly, this is also the only place in the biographies where examples of such skills were given. Paranormal skills are often synonymous with religious power in Buddhist biographies. But while Fotucheng 佛圖澄, for example, used this power to convert the barbarian ruler of the Later Zhao 後趙 to Buddhism, Kumārajīva achieved nothing of the sort. In fact as prophets, Huijiao’s depictions of Kumārajīva and Fotucheng in *Gaoseng zhuan* could not be more different. Kumārajīva’s ineffectiveness has led some modern scholars to believe that Kumārajīva was employed as a political rather than spiritual advisor. Be that as it may, Sengyou and Huijiao portrayed Kumārajīva as humbled by his experience in Liangzhou, where he commanded the least amount of respect ever in his life.<sup>69</sup> Recording the predictions

<sup>67</sup> *T* 2059, p. 332C; also *T* 2145, pp. 101C–2A.

<sup>68</sup> Faure, *Red Thread*, pp. 96, 98–143.

<sup>69</sup> It is not clear if Kumārajīva was forbade to proselytize. While there is no indication that he ever engaged in any public event supporting the Buddhist faith, Sengzhao was said to have become his disciple at this time. See Walter Liebenthal, *The Book of Chao: A Translation from*

seems to have been a strategy employed to highlight the predicament created by his own flaws.

#### DISPLACEMENT AND FRUSTRATION

Kumārajīva has long been credited for introducing to his contemporaries in China the fundamental differences between the Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna teachings and the absolute superiority of the former. Modern scholars have repeatedly reminded us that only after his arrival in Chang'an did members of the Chinese Buddhist community begin to develop a clear sense of the "genuine" teaching of Mahāyāna.<sup>70</sup> Generations of Buddhist practitioners and scholars have unequivocally stressed his staunch opposition to the Hīnayāna, especially the Sarvāstivāda, since he was said to have abandoned it for the Mahāyāna. Their discussions center on his relation with his Chinese disciples and his legacy as a religious "patriarch." These views were generated from later perspectives that focused mostly on Kumārajīva's influence on Chinese Buddhism. They, however, overlooked some of his more important religious and intellectual concerns that were vividly captured in Sengyou and Huijiao's portrayals.

Both Sengyou and Huijiao informed their readers that there was a psychological distance between this foreign master and his adopted home. According to them, a key reason for this distance was that Kumārajīva was unable to recreate in China an intellectual environment that could rival what he had in his native land, and in which his religious aspiration could be fulfilled:

Kumārajīva was deeply fond of [the teaching] of the Great Vehicle and had the aspiration to expound and propagate [it]. [He] often sighed, "Had I written an Abhidharma on the Great Vehicle, nothing by Kātyāyanīputra could rival it. Now, in the land of Qin, where the well-learned are scarce, [I am but a bird with] clipped wings, what more could I say." Therefore he dejectedly ceased [his pursuit]. The only [scholastic work] he produced was the *Shixiang lun* 實相論 (*Treatise on Tattva*) in two volumes at the request of Yao Xing.<sup>71</sup>

*the Original Chinese with Introduction, Notes and Appendices* (Beijing: The Catholic University of Peking, 1948), p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> There are numerous studies that make this kind of assertions, most typically those produced by Chinese and Japanese scholars. A recent Western example is David W. Chappell, "Hermeneutical Phases in Chinese Buddhism," in Donald S. Lopez Jr. ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics* (Honolulu: U. Hawai'i P., 1988), p. 179.

<sup>71</sup> *T* 2059, p. 332c; also *T* 2145, p. 101c. The Chinese text is: 什雅好大乘志存敷廣。常歎

This passage gives us a glimpse of Kumārajīva's mood during his final years, a period of great fame. The despair expressed through Kumārajīva's "own" voice and the melancholy tone that spilled over the final part of the biographies contrast sharply with his earlier semi-divine image and the high expectation others had of him that we see at the beginning of his biographies. Thereby, Sengyou and Huijiao were suggesting that Kumārajīva came to realize that his aspiration of producing a Mahāyāna scholastic work *par excellence* superseding that of Kātyāyanīputra would not be fulfilled.<sup>72</sup> Huijiao's narrative in particular clearly implied that the intellectual discourse with the Sarvāstivādin school continued to occupy Kumārajīva despite his disappointment, and that the Buddhist establishment of Central Asia and India remained his intended audience. This is a fact that was also supported in his biography of Sengrui. After Kumārajīva completed his translation of *Chengshi lun* 成實論 (*Treatise on the Realization of Truth*), he proceeded to point out to Sengrui, arguably his favorite Chinese disciple, seven places in which the Sarvāstivādin doctrine was refuted in the treatise. When Sengrui informed him that he himself had discovered them already, Kumārajīva was greatly delighted.<sup>73</sup>

Kumārajīva's despair can also be detected in one of the ten pentasyllabic poems he purportedly wrote to Fahe 法和, a former colleague of Dao'an and an advocate for the *abhidharma* learning.<sup>74</sup> Sengyou and Huijiao each recorded a slightly different version, the following being Huijiao's:

- |       |                                                                                   |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 心山育明德 | [His] mind's mountain cultivates illuminating virtues,                            |
| 流薰萬由延 | Extending its fragrance for tens of thousands of yoyanas.                         |
| 哀鸞孤桐上 | [As] the despondent <i>luan</i> bird [he] perches on the solitary paulownia tree, |
| 清音徹九天 | Reaching the ninth heaven was his pure voice. <sup>75</sup>                       |

曰。吾若著筆作大乘阿毘曇。非迦旃延子比也。今在秦地深識者寡。折翻於此將何所論。乃悽然而止。唯爲姚興著實相論二卷。For an alternative translation, see Lieberthal, *Book of Chao*, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> In both biographies, Kumārajīva did not specify which text by Kātyāyanīputra he was referring to. It is most likely the Jñānaprasthāna 阿毗曇八韋度論, one of the seven principal works of the Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma*.

<sup>73</sup> See the *Gaoseng zhuan* biography of Sengrui, *T* 2059, p. 364B. For Kumārajīva's criticism of the Sarvāstivādin doctrine, see Tang, *Fojiao shi*, pp. 222–23.

<sup>74</sup> For the main information on Fahe, see *CSZZ* 15; *T* 2145, p. 109B.

<sup>75</sup> *T* 2059, p. 332C; 2145, p. 101C. Sengyou's version is: 心山育德薰/流芳萬由旬/哀鸞鳴孤桐/清響徹九天. This poem is a *ji* 偈 poem, which was a Chinese adoption of the Indian poetic form *gāthā*. It is also one of the ten *ji* poems composed by Kumārajīva. It is unclear whether

As far as I am aware, no scholar has yet raised any serious question about the authorship of this poem. I would like to suggest that the poem is most likely not a work of Kumārajīva. My view is supported by evidences from various areas, the most important of which is the author's vocabulary. The author juxtaposed allusions from ancient Chinese and Indian literary traditions. The poem speaks of a saint as an *ai luan* 哀鸞 that dwelled on a solitary paulownia tree and left behind a great spiritual legacy through his virtue and preaching. The term *ai luan* referred to the "despondent *luan* bird" that sang sorrowful songs in the straightest sense of the literary convention of the date. The term was also widely used in earlier translations of Buddhist scriptures as the Chinese equivalent for the Sanskrit term "kalaviṅka," a cuckoo-like bird known for its beautiful voice, which was believed to resemble that of the Buddha and as such did not denote any conventional sense of "sorrow."<sup>76</sup> So, had Kumārajīva composed this poem and used *ai luan* for "kalaviṅka," he would have meant to eulogize the glory of the Buddha, and perhaps also to suggest that he himself was a lone spiritual leader of the Buddhist community in China.

This reading is limited because it considers very little about what the term *gu tong* 孤桐 (solitary paulownia tree). While the term *ai luan* could be used to represent the voice of the Buddha and therefore carries no sorrow, the term *gu tong* was distinctively Chinese and had a strong melancholy tone. When the two were put together, *ai luan* thus could only mean the "despondent *luan* bird." The larger image, then, of a despondent *luan* on a solitary paulownia unmistakably communicates sorrow and isolation. The image and its sadness tie the poem to a widely circulated story of a tragic *luan* bird. Fan Tai 范泰, a contemporary of Kumārajīva and a devout Buddhist in the southern court, recounted the story in the preface to one of his poems:

Once upon a time, the king of Jibin placed a net on a soaring and luxuriant mountain and caught a *luan* bird. He was very fond of it.

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all of them were written for the same person – i.e., Fahe, or for the same occasion. While the biographies only cited one, the others were said to be "having similar wording and metaphors 辭喻皆爾," *T* 2059, p. 332c; *T* 2145, p. 101c.

<sup>76</sup> This is especially the case in translation projects that Dharmarakṣa oversaw. See, for example, *Pu yao jing* 普曜經, *T* 186, p. 484c; *Da ai jing* 大哀經, *T* 398, p. 414c; *Zheng Fahua jing*, *T* 263, p. 90b; *Baonü suo wen jing* 寶女所問經, *T* 399, p. 13.469b; *Deguang taizi jing* 德光太子經, *T* 170, p. 415a; *Chang e han jing* 長阿含經, *T* 1, p. 1c; *Xiuxing bengi jing* 修行本起經, *T* 184, p. 465a; *Fo benxing jing* 佛本行經, *T* 193, p. 86c; *Sengqiulocha suo ji jing* 僧伽羅利所集經, *T* 194, p. 128a; also see *Kan'yaku taishō Bon-Wa daijiten* 漢訳対照梵和大辞典, rev. and enlarged edn., ed. Ogiwara Unrai 荻原雲來, assisted by Tsuji Naoshirō 辻直四郎 (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1979), p. 326. Having the voice of Kalaviṅka is one of thirty-two major marks of the Buddha.

He tried to make it sing in vain. He accommodated [it] in a golden cage and fed [it] great delicacies. In the face of all this, the bird became increasingly despondent and did not sing for three years. The king's wife said to him, "I heard that when birds meet their own kind they sing. Why don't you hang a mirror [before it, so it could see] its image?" The king took her advice. When the bird saw its own reflection, it cried sadly. Its despondent sound pierced the clouds, and, with this sudden burst of effort, it died. 昔罽賓王結罽峻卯之山，獲一鸞鳥。王甚愛之，欲其鳴而不致也。乃飾以金樊，饗以珍饈，對之愈戚，三年不鳴。其夫人曰：“嘗聞鳥見其類而後鳴，何不懸鏡而映之。”王從其意。鸞睹形悲鳴，哀響衝霄，一奮而絕。<sup>77</sup>

Lamenting that the lonely had bird, Fan Tai compared this tragedy to that of the famed ancient musician Zhong Ziqi 鍾子期, who destroyed his favorite zither (*qin* 琴) upon learning that his best friend, Yu Boya 俞伯牙, the one person in the world who truly understood his music, had passed away.<sup>78</sup> At this point, Fan Tai's opens with this line: "A divine *luan* bird perched on a soaring paulownia tree 神鸞栖高梧." The fourth line reads: "The pure voice [of the bird] resounded in mid-sky 清響中天厲." These lines bear striking similarities in image and phraseology to the poem attributed to Kumārajīva. Using terms such as "crying sadly 悲鳴" and "despondent sound 哀響" to describe the voice of the *luan* bird, Fan Tai's poem evoked a similar mood of sorrow. All these suggest a strong intertextual connection between the two works.<sup>79</sup>

It is clear, based on these textual evidence, that the poem attributed to Kumārajīva meant to be sorrowful; and as such, its subject was clearly not the Buddha. So did Kumārajīva compose it and refer it to himself? In his many works, Kumārajīva had never once translated the term "kalaviṅka" as *ai luan*. He preferred the transliteration, "*jialing pingie* 迦陵頻伽."<sup>80</sup> The careful avoidance of the conventional translation suggests that he had intended to distinguish *kalaviṅka* from the *luan* bird in Chinese mythology. Thus it would be rather uncharacteristic for him to use *ai luan* for *kalaviṅka* here, even if his Chinese associates had helped him compose it. Thus it seems that Kumārajīva was not the

<sup>77</sup> See Lu Qinli 遼欽立, *Xian Qin Han Wei Jin Nan Bei chao shi* 先秦漢魏晉南北朝詩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), p. 1144. The story of this captured *luan* bird could have an Indian origin. A similar story is found in Sengyou's *Shijia pu* (Genealogy of Śakyāmuni); only this time, it does not end tragically. It is interesting that when Fan Tai adopted the theme of the story, he was already juxtaposing the Indian *kalaviṅka* with the sadness of the *Chinese ai luan*.

<sup>78</sup> *T* 2040, p. 78A.

<sup>79</sup> This is even more so if compared to the version Sengyou rendered in his biography of Kumārajīva.

<sup>80</sup> See examples in *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經, *T* 262, p. 23C; 262, p. 48A.

author of this poem,<sup>81</sup> and that the poem was already in circulation for some time. We do not know, however, if it had been attributed to Kumārajīva before Sengyou and Huijiao included it in their biographies. While the poem alludes to the tragic story of the *luan* bird and, as a result, enhanced the image of a proud but dislocated Kumārajīva, Sengyou and Huijiao probably used it to prepare the reader for the master's comment that follows – he felt that he himself was “a bird with clipped wings.”

Like the *luan* bird in captivity in the royal palace of Jibin, Kumārajīva did not seem to be satisfied with what was held to be his crowning accomplishment – the translation of Buddhist scriptures. It is no small irony that the place that most eagerly embraced his Mahāyāna faith was to him an intellectual wasteland. This fulfilled the prophecy his mother made about the detrimental effect his journey to China had on his intellectual and spiritual growth. Sengyou and Huijiao's empathy towards Kumārajīva became particularly poignant when they described the final moment of Kumārajīva's life. When he was mortally ill, those whom he summoned for aid were his “foreign disciples 外國弟子.” They were asked to cure his illness by chanting an incantation he provided.<sup>82</sup> When he realized that he was not going to recover, he made the following remarks to his fellow clerics:

We met because of the dharma, but I have yet fulfilled my wish.  
Now having to leave this [to be fulfilled] for another time, I am  
saddened beyond words.<sup>83</sup>

Such phrases are strewn throughout this part of the biographies and capture the mood he was in before his death. He died modestly, wishing that he had translated and transmitted no falsehoods. He was vindicated, as previously mentioned, by the fact that his tongue withstood the cremation fire. Moreover, as we see at the end of Kumārajīva's biog-

<sup>81</sup> Three poems that are attributed to Kumārajīva have survive. In addition to the one we have discussed here, the biography of Huiyuan in the *Gaoseng zhuan* contains one that Kumārajīva allegedly wrote to this great Chinese monk (*GSZ* 6, *T* 2059, p. 359c). The third one, entitled *Shi yu shi* 十喻詩 (*Verse on Ten Metaphors*), is recorded in the Tang compendium, *Yiwen leiju* 藝文類聚 (*Yiwen leiju* 76). There is reason to suspect that this poem to Fahe is not Kumārajīva's work even from a stylistic point of view. Unlike the other two, this poem bears virtually no resemblance to the style typical found in religious verses composed by foreign monks such as Kumārajīva. It is only described as a *ji* poem only because both Sengyou and Huijiao considered Kumārajīva to be the author. It shows an influence of a more refined literary style: the first couplet is rhymed in the version Sengyou recorded; the second and the fourth sentences are rhymed in the version Huijiao recorded. This feature makes the poem stylistically similar to the regulated verse that gained fashion at the Southern Qi 齊 and Liang 梁 courts. Therefore, whoever made the revision could not possibly be Kumārajīva's contemporaries.

<sup>82</sup> *T* 2059, p. 332c.

<sup>83</sup> *T* 2059, p. 332c; *T* 2145, p. 102A.

raphy, his vast intelligence was seen as ironically too much to handle: a foreign monk came to Chang'an and informed the monks that no more than ten percent of the Kumārajīva's knowledge was transmitted to his Chinese disciples.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE *GAOSEN*  
*ZHUAN* BIOGRAPHY OF KUMĀRAJĪVA

Only Sengyou and Huijiao captured Kumārajīva's fading aspiration and the accompanied frustration and sadness. What they achieved stands in sharp contrast to how Kumārajīva was portrayed subsequently. The perception of Kumārajīva's legacy took a more polemical turn in the sixth century. A number of Buddhist thinkers, including Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), used Kumārajīva's translations to polarize the Greater and Lesser Vehicles and to advance their own doctrinal agendas.<sup>84</sup> The growing influence of his translations in the Chinese Buddhist community at large and the fame of his disciples, especially Zhu Daosheng 竺道生, also helped to exonerate Kumārajīva's reputation.<sup>85</sup> The legend of his greatness grew substantially. For example, the preface to *Jiumoluoshi fashi dayi* 鳩摩羅什法師大義 (*A General Summary of [the Ideas] of Dharma Master Kumārajīva*), proclaims that Kumārajīva was born bearing: "a halo that was one *zhang* in diameter. The height [of the infant's body] was extraordinary. And by himself he walked in the Jambudvīpa 圓光一丈, 既長超絕, 獨步閻浮."<sup>86</sup> Kumārajīva's needle swallowing contest recorded in *Jin shu* also gained considerable popularity among the public. Among the materials discovered in Dunhuang is a piece entitled *Luoshi fashi zan* 羅什法師讚 ("Eulogy of Dharma Master Luoshi," S6631) that eulogizes the episode:

<sup>84</sup> Jizang resembles in many ways the Kumārajīva in the *CSZJJ* and *GSZ* biographies. It leads one to wonder if Jizang had consciously styled himself after Kumārajīva. For a brief analysis of Jizang's personality, see Lan Jifu 藍吉富, *Suidai Fojiao shi shu lun* 隋代佛教史述論 (rpt. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshu guan, 1993), pp. 188–92.

<sup>85</sup> In this case, Kumārajīva's posthumous fame was clearly sustained by Zhu Daosheng's rise to eminence. While Zhu Daosheng did in fact study with Kumārajīva, there is no evidence suggesting that the two were particularly close. Kumārajīva's relationships with Sengrui and Sengzhao were much closer. Zhu Daosheng gained his own fame long after Kumārajīva's death when the newly translated *Mahāparinirvāna sūtra* confirmed his view on enlightenment. He was hence considered Kumārajīva's most prominent disciple by the end of sixth century at the latest. In the *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶記, he is the first among the so-called "Four Sagely Disciples of Kumārajīva (*Shi men si sheng* 什門四聖)," ahead of Sengzhao, Daorong 道融, and Sengrui, see Jao Tsung-i 饒宗頤, "Jiumoluoshi Tong yun jian" 鳩摩羅什通韻箋, in *Jao Tsung-i ershi shiji xueshu wenji* 饒宗頤二十世紀學術文集 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 2004) 5, p. 710.

<sup>86</sup> This text was compiled in the late sixth century; see *T* 1856, p. 122B. The compiler most likely had also written its preface; see *Butten nyūmon jiten* 仏典入門事典, edited by Daizōkyō Gakujutsu Yōgo Kenkyūkai 大藏經學術用語研究会 (Kyōto: Nagata Bunshōdō, 2001), p. 288.



[He] swallowed the needles from the porridge bowl,  
Expediently admonished the lust of his disciples.<sup>87</sup>

The *Jin shu* account of the contest emphasizes only his supernatural power. But the Dunhuang text explicitly identifies this power as an expedient means for keeping at bay the sexual desires of his disciples. Neither the divine feature – a halo – nor the use of supernatural power as an expedient means was presented in Sengyou’s or Huijiao’s biographies of Kumārajīva.

An important question remains: what made the relatively more nuanced portrayal like that of Sengyou or Huijiao possible? If the answer lies in the environment in which these biographies were produced, then how was the Chinese Buddhist community in the early-sixth century different from that in later eras? The short answer is that it appears to be an environment in which ecclesiastical historians were encouraged to explore the complexity of their subjects. As noted earlier, Kumārajīva’s authority did not go uncontested in his time. Even at the peak of his influence, his peers had taken him to task on a variety of issues ranging from the authenticity of his meditation techniques to his ability to follow monastic rules. Leaders of the Chinese Buddhist community were in awe of his formidable doctrinal learning, but they did not indiscriminately accept his views. Even some of Kumārajīva’s close associates spoke out on the shortcomings of his translations despite their general admiration. Sengrui, for example, commented on the impact Kumārajīva’s limited ability in the Chinese language had on the quality of his translations in the prefaces to the *Da zhi du lun* and *Mūlamadhyamakārikā*, both of which were translated by Kumārajīva.<sup>88</sup> Huiyuan was well aware of the difference between his and Kumārajīva’s views and remained unswayed.<sup>89</sup> He complained about the way in which Kumārajīva reorganized the *Da zhi du lun*. He therefore made an excerpt of it, in which he “streamlined the superfluous and sorted out the frivolous 簡繁理機.”<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> The Chinese is “吞針糜鉢中，機戒弟子色。” The text I choose is from Jao, “Jiumoluoshi Tong yun jian,” p. 709. For a textual image of the relevant section in S6631, see Huang Yongwu 黃永武, ed., *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌寶藏, vol. 49 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1981), p. 515.

<sup>88</sup> See *T* 2145, p. 75B; *T* 2145, p. 77A; Lü Cheng 呂澂, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lue jiang* 中國佛學源流略講 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), pp. 2572–73; Ren, ed., *Zhongguo Fojiao shi* 2, p. 321.

<sup>89</sup> See Lü, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu*, pp. 2559–66.

<sup>90</sup> It was known to Kumārajīva’s contemporaries that he extensively revised what was originally in the *Da zhi du lun* when he was translating the text. See Huiyuan’s “Da zhi lun chao xu” 大智論抄序 (“Preface to an Excerpt of *Da zhi du lun*”), *T* 2145, p. 76B. Kamata Shigeo suggests that Huiyuan excised the materials that Kumārajīva added; see his *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 2, p. 273. This suggestion cannot be verified, since Huiyuan’s excerpt is no longer extant.

Kumārajīva was not the only Buddhist adept who came to China with impeccable religious credentials. Competition and rivalry were part of the daily life of the religious world of his time. Buddhahadra, a descendent of the Śākya tribe, posted the most serious challenge to his authority.<sup>91</sup> Motivated by a missionary impulse, Buddhahadra journeyed to China and arrived in Chang'an in 410.<sup>92</sup> Huijiao recounted that Buddhahadra was particularly keen on going to Chang'an because he wanted to join Kumārajīva.<sup>93</sup> The two had a cordial relationship in the beginning, but frictions quickly rose out of their philosophical differences, as demonstrated in the following exchange:

Buddhabhadra asked Kumārajīva, “[I found] your elaboration [of the Buddhist teaching] rather commonplace; how did you gain such fame?” Kumārajīva replied, “It is because I am quite old. Why must there be anything praiseworthy?”<sup>94</sup>

Kumārajīva appeared to be on the defensive. The ruling elite of Chang'an soon recognized Buddhahadra's competence in doctrinal learnings. The crown prince of the Later Qin invited several learned monks, including Kumārajīva, to debate with Buddhahadra. But it was in the field of meditation that Buddhahadra gained the upper hand.

Meditation was valued as an essential part of the monastic identity within the Buddhist community since the early fifth century.<sup>95</sup> The lay society also revered it and compared it to the traditional ideal of self-control. Kumārajīva's own meditational techniques, called “Bodhisattva *dhyaṇa* 菩薩禪,” became quite fashionable in Chang'an shortly after his arrival. A meditation center specifically established for him was said to be thriving.<sup>96</sup> The example of Sengrui illuminates how the

<sup>91</sup> Buddhahadra's posthumous fame, however, came largely from his translation of the *Huayan sūtra*. Tang Yongtong hence suggested that Buddhahadra's doctrinal position was close to that of the Yogācāra school – an offshoot of the Sarvāstivāda; see *Han Wei Liang Jin Nan Bei Chao Fo jiao shi*, pp. 217–18. This may not in fact be his doctrinal position. Foreign missionaries translated many texts that Chinese pilgrims had brought back at the request of the Chinese Buddhist community. In this case, Zhi Faling 支法領 had brought back the *Huayan sūtra* from Kotan long before Buddhahadra began to translate it in 418; see *GSZ* 2; *T* 2059, p. 335C.

<sup>92</sup> According to the *GSZ* biography of Zhiyan 智嚴, who received directly from Buddhahadra instructions on meditation when travelled to Central Asia, Buddhahadra was invited to China to transmit meditation techniques; see *T* 2059, p. 339B.

<sup>93</sup> *GSZ* 2, *T* 2059, p. 335A.

<sup>94</sup> The text in Chinese is: “因謂什曰: ‘君所釋, 不出人意而致高名, 何耶?’ 什曰: ‘吾年老故爾, 何必能稱美談。’” See *T* 2145, p. 103C; 2059, p. 335A.

<sup>95</sup> *GSZ* reflects this growing emphasis on meditation within the Chinese Buddhist community as it reports a significant increase in meditation related activities starting in the early fifth century; see Mutō Akinori's 武藤明範 article titled “梁高僧伝にみられる禪觀実修の動向,” in *Sōtō shū kenkyūin kenkyūkiyō* 曹洞宗研究員研究紀要 34 (2004), pp. 17–76.

<sup>96</sup> According to *Jin shu* 95, p. 2985, thousands followed Kumārajīva to practice meditation.

possession of such learning could be crucial to a monk's status. Not only did he reportedly seek Kumārajīva's instructions on meditation as soon as the latter arrived in Chang'an, but also the respect that Sengrui received from the court of the Later Qin was initially due to his mastery of the Kumārajīva school of meditation.<sup>97</sup>

It was in such an atmosphere that Buddhahadra found his most receptive audience. Like Kumārajīva, he was a product of the great Sarvāstivāda school. But unlike Kumārajīva, he could trace his training in meditation to an illustrious lineage, which turned out to be a distinct advantage.<sup>98</sup> Buddhahadra attracted a huge following, including some of Kumārajīva's close associates, such as Huiguan 慧觀.<sup>99</sup> Even Sengzhao spoke admiringly of Buddhahadra's and his followers' dedication to meditation in a letter to Liu Yimin, a famous lay disciple of Huiyuan.<sup>100</sup> The rapid surge of Buddhahadra's popularity demonstrates that those in the Chinese monastic circles were very interested in acquiring *dhyāna* transmission from a master of an illustrious and orthodox line. The "Bodhisattva *dhyāna*," in contrast, was a synthesis that Kumārajīva had drawn together from various traditions.<sup>101</sup> Kumārajī-

<sup>97</sup> See Sengrui, "Guanzhong chu Chan jing xu" 關中出禪經序, *CSZJF* 9, *T* 2145, p. 65A; also the *GSZ* biography of Sengrui, *T* 2059, p. 364A.

<sup>98</sup> Buddhahadra was said to have studied with the famous *dhyāna* master, Buddhaśena 佛陀斯那 (Fodaxian 佛大先). A medieval Chinese text called *Chang'an cheng Qigong si Sapoduo bu Fodabatuolu shizong xiangcheng luezhuan* 長安城齊公寺薩婆多部佛大跋陀羅師宗相承略傳 records the Sarvāstivāda lineage from which Buddhahadra received the transmission; see *CSZJF* 12, *T* 2145, pp. 89C–90A. For a study of this particular text, see Funayama Tōru 船山徹, "Ryō no Sōyō sen Satsubata shishiden to Tōdai bukkyō" 梁の僧祐撰薩婆多師資傳と唐代仏教, in *Tōdai no shūkyō* 唐代の宗教, edited by Yoshigawa Tadao 吉川忠夫 (Kyoto: Hōyū shoten, 2000), pp. 325–53. For a brief discussion on Buddhahadra, see E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), p. 223. Yet Zürcher seems to have underestimated the influence of Buddhahadra and the meditation tradition he represented.

<sup>99</sup> Huiguan was one of Kumārajīva's eight most talented disciples whom the contemporaries referred to as the "eight talents 八俊" But he not only went on to become Buddhahadra's main assistants, but also followed him to the south; see *CSZJF* 14, *T* 2145, p. 103C; *GSZ* 2, *T* 2059, p. 335B. Interestingly, Huiguan's biography in *GSZ* does not mention this last point. It only states that Kumārajīva had encouraged him to carry out missionary works in the Middle Yangtze region (*Jiang Han zhijian* 江漢之間). It also recorded that Huiguan left the North for Jingzhou 荊州 after the death of Kumārajīva, which is incorrect (*GSZ* 4, *T* 2059, p. 368B); see Kamata, *Chūgoku Bukkyō shi* 3, pp. 16–17. Huiguan was likely to have acted as the liaison between Huiyuan and Buddhahadra because he was a former disciple of Huiyuan.

<sup>100</sup> *GSZ* 6, *T* 2059, p. 365B. Sengzhao's letter did not mention Buddhahadra by name. It simply referred to him courteously as the "Dhyāna master (*chan shi* 禪師)."

<sup>101</sup> For studies on Kumārajīva's meditation practice, see Ikeda Eijun 池田英淳 "Kumarajū yakushutsu no zen kyōten to Rozan Eon" 鳩摩羅什譯出の禪經典と廬山慧遠, in *Taishō daigaku gakuhō* 大正大学学報 26 (1937), pp. 101–18; Tōdō Kyōshun 藤堂恭俊, "Kumarajū yakushutsu to iwareru zen kyōten no setsujisuru nenbutsu kan" 鳩摩羅什譯出と言われる禪經典の説示する念佛觀, in *Fukui hakase shōju kinen Tōyō shisō ronshū* 福井博士頌壽記念東洋思想論集 (Tokyo: 1960); Kanno Ryusyo 菅野龍清, "Kumarajū yakuzenkyō ni tsu ite" 鳩摩羅什訳禪經について, in *Bukkyōgaku Bukkyōshi ronshū: Sasaki Kōken hakushi koki kinen ronshū* 佛教學佛敎

va's ability to create from synthesizing found few sympathizers among the leading members of the Chinese Buddhist community.<sup>102</sup>

The sharp contrast in personality and personal conduct between the two was not in Kumārajīva's favor either. Kumārajīva's flagrant disregard for the monastic codes was as widely publicized as Buddhābhadrā's perseverance and austere monastic practices.<sup>103</sup> Since the aim of practicing meditation after all was to achieve self-control, Buddhābhadrā's qualities were particularly effective in earning greater acknowledgment of the *dhyāna* tradition he represented. It is not surprising therefore that some of Buddhābhadrā's staunch followers were pilgrims who endured tremendous hardship to journey west in search of the *dharma*.<sup>104</sup>

Neither Sengyou nor Huijiao explicitly stated that Kumārajīva played a direct role in the expulsion of Buddhābhadrā from Chang'an.<sup>105</sup> But the outpour of support and sympathy for Buddhābhadrā from prominent members of the Chinese Buddhist community in the south is not to be overlooked. Huiyuan not only openly protested against what he deemed a great injustice done to Buddhābhadrā, he also invited the latter to his own hermitage at Mount Lu 廬山. The great influence Buddhābhadrā exerted on the Buddhist community in the south understand-

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史論集佐木孝憲博士古稀記念論集, edited by Sasaki Kōken hakushi koki kinen Ronbunshū Kankōkai (Tokyo: Sankibō Busshorin, 2001), pp. 77–90; and Shi Huimin 釋慧敏, "Jiumoluoshi suo chuan 'shuxi guan' chanfa zhi pouxi" 鳩摩羅什所傳'數息觀'禪法之剖析, in *Jiumoluoshi he Zhongguo minzu wenhua: jinian jiumoluoshi danchen: 1650 zhounian guoji xueshu taolun hui* 鳩摩羅什和中國民族文化 紀念鳩摩羅什誕辰1650周年國際學術討論會, ed. Xinjiang Qjuzi shiku yanjiu suo, 2001, pp. 31–50.

<sup>102</sup> Both Huiguan and Huiyuan explicitly criticized Kumārajīva's meditation practice as lacking a clear lineage of transmission; see Huiguan, "Xiusing di bujing guan jing xu" 修行地不淨觀經序, *CSZJJ* 9, T 2145, pp. 65c–66c; Huiyuan, "Lu shan chu Xiuxing fangbian chan jing tong xu" 廬山出修行方便禪經統序, *CSZJJ* 9, T 2145, pp. 65c–a; and Lü, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lue jiang*, pp. 2552–53. Huijiao highlighted Buddhābhadrā's contribution in transmitting the authentic meditation techniques to China, but did not mention Kumārajīva, in his "comments" (*lun* 論) in the *GSZ* "Chapter of Meditation Practice"; T 2059, p. 400b–c.

<sup>103</sup> In 497, the court of Northern Wei decreed to express the desire to look after the heir of Kumārajīva. This decree, which is recorded in *Wei shu*, also made the claim that Kumārajīva suffered the misfortune of being forced into marriage by malicious rulers; see *Wei shu* 114, p. 3040. What motivated the Northern Wei court to take such action is clearly related to its attempt to claim to be the inheritor of the Buddhist legacy left by Kumārajīva while discrediting the regimes it had destroyed.

<sup>104</sup> The two cases in point are Zhiyan 智儼 and Baoyun 寶雲; T 2059, p. 339b, and p. 339c.

<sup>105</sup> The medieval ecclesiastical historians did not openly accuse Kumārajīva of expelling Buddhābhadrā since he was not the head of the Buddhist church in Chang'an at the time. However, those who ordered Buddhābhadrā to leave were close associates of Kumārajīva. The situation could have been quite different for Buddhābhadrā had Kumārajīva intervened like he did on behalf of Daoheng and Daobiao.

ably affected the way in which both Sengyou and Huijiao perceived the conflict. This would have cast a certain shadow upon Kumārajīva's character in their biographies.

Kumārajīva was the advocator of the Madhyamaka school of thought. However, the Madhyamaka texts he translated were not widely studied until the early-seventh century. Modern Buddhologists have suggested that the ideas presented in these texts were too radical and advanced for Kumārajīva's Chinese audience, hence the lukewarm initial reception. As the Chinese audience was not ready to fully grasp the philosophical depth, they turned to the "lesser" texts, such as *Chengshi lun* and the Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma*. The study of these "lesser" texts was indeed in vogue among scholar monks.<sup>106</sup> Their rise in popularity in the fifth century, however, was a complex phenomenon that deserves a separate study. Suffice it to say that the monastic leaders such as Huiyuan advocated the study of *abhidharma* in order to revise the existing curriculum of monastic learning and to free Buddhist hermeneutics from the trappings of Chinese philosophical concepts, most notably that of the "Dark Learning 玄學."<sup>107</sup> *Chengshi lun*, thought by many as the *abhidharma* of Mahāyāna teachings,<sup>108</sup> met the demands of those who were looking for a comprehensive primer. The members of the Chinese Buddhist community did not accept or reject a certain text on the basis of its doctrinal sophistication alone. Rather their choice was first and foremost informed by their desire to develop an extensive curriculum of monastic learning that suited their pressing needs. The texts and teachings they favored thus were not necessarily what appeared to be most advanced or the most fashionable outside of China.

How Kumārajīva fitted into the scheme of the still evolving monastic models is another issue that affected Sengyou's and Huijiao's portrayals of him. His foreign origin must have kept him more or less distant from the daily operation of the Buddhist church in Chang'an and from the politics it engaged in with the Later Qin court.<sup>109</sup> Yet he was not immune from being judged against the standards and conventions

<sup>106</sup> See Lü, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lue jiang*, pp. 2602-3.

<sup>107</sup> Lü Cheng was perhaps the first to point out the connection between the curriculum change of monastic learnings in the fourth and fifth century and the rise of *abhidharma* study; see *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lue jiang*, pp. 2572-73; also Du Jiwen 杜繼文, "Fan shuo Fojiao pitan xue yu xuanxue chongyou pai" 泛說佛教毗曇學與玄學崇有派, in *Zhonghua Foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 12 (1999), pp. 339-51.

<sup>108</sup> Lü, *Zhongguo Foxue yuanliu lue jiang*, pp. 2624-29.

<sup>109</sup> While it is possible that Kumārajīva was behind the decision to expel Buddhadrā from Chang'an, he did not usually involve himself in monastic affairs. The incident in which he spoke on behalf of Daoheng was one of the rare examples.

of the Chinese monastic community. Huijiao, in particular, portrayed him as a successful preacher in the monastic tradition and not as a patriarch of later imagination. The scene of Kumārajīva's deathbed is a case in point. Not only does it fit what was said of his personality, it also reflects the real assessment that the Chinese monastic community had of him. He saw Kumārajīva's residence outside of the monastic compound as a display of his transgressions and noted it as such. In this sense, Kumārajīva was clearly not a positive model for monastic practice. In Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*, that honor was reserved for the likes of Dao'an, Huiyuan, and Faxian 法顯.

#### CONCLUSION

The narrative portraits of Kumārajīva are among the most intriguing and well-crafted narrative writing produced in medieval China. Both Sengyou and Huijiao presented a sequence of events that illuminates Kumārajīva's spiritual development and frailty. They achieved a critical and yet sympathetic review of a flawed religious figure, which few surpassed in premodern times. Yet their portraits were also constructed with devices borrowed from Indian Buddhist literature, including the *avadānas* and the biographies of Indian Buddhist saints. Sengyou and Huijiao drew a parallel between Kumārajīva and Aśvagoṣa 馬鳴 (one of Kumārajīva's heroes). Both Buddhist masters possessed legendary knowledge of Buddhist doctrine and were considered treasures of their native lands. Both were the reason why their native lands were invaded and they themselves became prisoners.<sup>110</sup> While modern historians find such reason for war historically unconvincing, it appears to be the contemporary interpretation within the Chinese Buddhist community.<sup>111</sup> By linking Kumārajīva to Aśvagoṣa, Sengyou and Huijiao show us how powerful was Kumārajīva's genius in the public imagination. We should therefore be careful not to refer to this part of the biographies as historically inaccurate. Similar treatment should also be extended to the parts of the biographies containing supernatural elements. Miracles and prophecies were conventional in religious biographies. The miracles surrounding Jīvā's pregnancy, Kumārajīva's encounter with Pāpīyas,

<sup>110</sup> For the legend of Aśvagoṣa, see the *Fu Fazang yinyuan zhuan* 付法藏因緣傳 (T 2058, p. 315B).

<sup>111</sup> For example, Tang Yongtong pointed out that Lü Guang could not have kept Kumārajīva in Liangzhou for so long if he was the purpose of the war, see *Han Wei Liang Jin Nan Bei chaojiao shi*, p. 201.

even the arhat's prediction, might all have been legends based on little truth, or products straight out of Sengyou's and Huijiao's imaginations. They all evoke existing Indian Buddhist motifs to explain how Kumārajīva was perceived by his contemporaries. Huijiao was most ingenious in using these miracles and prophecies as windows to Kumārajīva's psychology. He did not make them out to be deterministic. Expositions of inner struggle were also harbingers of critical change. They foreshadowed the choices that would come before him and their possible outcomes, and served as the backdrop against which Kumārajīva would grow as a character in the narrative. What came to pass resulted from the choices Kumārajīva made, given both his personality and circumstances. By weaving what was supernatural (therefore "imagined") into what was "historical," Huijiao could capture the dynamic interchange between Kumārajīva's self-perception and the public perception. In this sense, both the biographies and the supernatural elements contained therein are to be considered historical.

In this sense, we might say that Huijiao was more interested in writing history than hagiography. He portrayed Kumārajīva to be a man who aspired to propagate his faith wide and far, but gave in to the weaknesses of his own character. What underlines his writing was an understanding of human behavior rather than Buddhist didactics. He showed us his own ambivalent attitude towards Kumārajīva by juxtaposing success with transgression. His own view on transcendence was caught – not unlike Kumārajīva himself – between the quest for knowledge and the perfection of practice, both of which were held up as monastic ideals. In making Kumārajīva "real," Huijiao revealed to the reader his own sense of history.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSZJJ	Sengyou 僧祐, <i>Chu Sanzang jiji</i> 出三藏記集
GSZ	Huijiao 慧皎, <i>Gaoseng zhuan</i> 高僧傳