

UIGHUR'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ANCIENT CHINESE CULTURE

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Abstract: In this my paper I speak briefly on the contributions made by the Uighurs and their ancestors to the Chinese civilization. Of course, the Chinese people also made great contributions to the civilization of Uighur people.

Key words: Uighur; civilization; Jumarajiva

Eski Çin Kültürüne Uygur Katkısı

Özet: Bu yazı Uygurların ve onların atalarının Çin medeniyetine katkısı üzerinedir. Elbette Çin halkı da Uygur medeniyetine katkıda bulunmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Uygur, medeniyet, Jumarajiva

As we know, during the historical time, the Uighur people of China made a great contribution to the Chinese culture, especially to the formation of the Chinese Tripitaka (the so-called 3 parts of Buddhist scriptures). According to the tradition, we can divide these contributions into the following 4 periods:

1. 3-4th centuries AD—in this period the representative figure is Srimitra (from Kuchar of Tarim Basin of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region). From 307-325AD, he came to the inland of China, and arrived at Jiankang (today's Nanking, the capital of Jiangsu province), and transferred the Tantra(mystic) books of Buddhism into China.

2. 4-5th century—the representative personal of this period is the famous Kumarajiva(344-413) . He also came from Kuchar. He translated into Chinese many Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Chinese people appreciate very much his translations.

3. 6.-8th centuries—in this period the representative figure is Sikshananda of Khotan in southern Tarim Basin of Xinjiang. During the reign of the Tang Empress Wu Zetian(690-704). Siksanda was invited by the Empress to come to Luoyang (the Easter capital of Tang Dynasty). There he translated 80 volumes of “Avatamsaka” scripture into Chinese.

4. Period after 9th century—especially during the Yuan(Mongol) time(13th century) , many Uighur literati worked in various circles of China, their representatives are ,e .g. , Karunadas, Prajnasri, Anzang, etc.

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Besides, The famous Khotan painter Vija Irsanga (in Chinese Weichi Yiseng) living in 7th century had given a strong influence to the traditional Chinese painting during the Tang dynasty (618-907 AD).

In the following I will say more or less in detail about the contribution made by one of them, i.e. the famous Kuchar scholar Kumarajiva (344-413 AD) to the Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

According to the Chinese Buddhist tradition, Kumarajiva's father, Kumarayana, was an Indian. He resigned from the post of prime minister, became a monk and then travelled across the Pamirs to Kucha in Tarim Basin, Xinjiang, where he was warmly welcomed by the reigning King of Kuchar. He was appointed to the position as court teacher, and eventually married the king's sister, Jiva.

When Kumarajiva (< Kumara[his father's name]+Jiva[his mother's name]) was seven years old, he left home along with his mother and went to study the scriptures of the Abhidharma ("tefsir" works to the Buddha's teaching) with Buddhaksema. At the age of nine, Kumarajiva travelled with his mother across the Indus River to Kashmir, and further to Yuezhi (Bactria/Afganstan). After several years of study in India, then he returned to Kashgar.

The Buddhist works which Kumarajiva studied prior to his twelfth year were mainly the Hinayana (in Uighur "kichig kölüngü") texts, especially those of the Sarvastivada School of that sect, which was popular in Kashmir at that time. However, after he met the prince Suryasoma of Yarkand in Kashgaria, he turned his interest to the Mahayana (in Uighur "ulugh köküngü") school of Buddhism.

In addition to Hinayana and Mahayna Buddhism, Kumarajiva also studied the classical Indian works: four Vedas (ancient poetries of India) and the Pancavidya(5 sciences or studies of India).

After he returned to Kucha via Aksu, he officially became a bhiksu (monk) connected to the royal palace until he reached the age of twenty.

In the course of this time, Kumarajiva's reputation already reached the inland China, where Daoan suggested in a letter to Fu Jian, the ruler of the Former Qin Dynasty(350-394 AD), that Kumarajiva be invited to China to give lectures on Buddhism. In 385 AD, Fu Jian sent some troops under general Lü Guang to Kucha and forcefully brought Kumarajiva with them back to Liangzhou (a city in modern Gansu province).

When later Fu Jian was assassinated and Lü Guang established his own regime (the Dynasty of Northern Liang [397-439AD]) in the Liangzhou area, where Kumarajiva stayed for more than ten years.

In 401 AD Liangzhou fell to Yao Xing, the founder of the state of Later Qin (381-417AD) , who invited Kumarajiva to Chang'an (the old capital of China) and gave him the title of "national master"(in Chinese "guoshi") .

After that time, Kumarajiva began to translate many Buddhist works into Chinese with the assistance of other monks.

Among the hundreds of volumes of Buddhist texts translated by Kumarajiva in Chang'an were the Mahaprajnaparamita sutra, the Saddharmapundarika sutra, the Vimalakirtinirdesa sutra, the Amitabha sutra, the Vajracchedikaprajnaparamita sutra, etc.

Most of them were works belonging to Mahayana scriptures.

Kumarajiva also introduced the Madhyamika school of Indian Buddhism systematically to China and translated representative Works of this school including the Madhyamika sastra, the Sata sastra , the Dvadasanikaya sastra, the Mahaprajaparamita sastra and Satyasiddhi sastra.

Kumarajiva started a new epoch in the history of Buddhist translation in China, because he was successful in both correctly rendering the original meaning and expressing it in elegant Chinese. That is the reason why Seng You (445-518), in the first volume of Chu Sanzang Jiji (Collection of the Buddhist Works outside the Tripitaka) makes a distinction between Kumarajiva's "new" translations and the "old" ones made by all his predecessors.

As a great master of Buddhist translation, Kumarajiva also wrote some Buddhist works by himself, including the Shixiang Lun (Treatise on the Marks of Reality). This work, which is said to have systematically expressed his philosophic view points, has unfortunately long been lost. His correspondence with the Chinese famous monk Huiyuan (344~416) was collected by later scholars and preserved in a book called Dacheng Dayi Zhang (Essays on the Essence of Mahayana) in three volumes. Recently we heard that an ancient manuscript of Kumarajiva's another work titled Dacheng Pusa Rudao Sanzhong Guan (Three Contemplations of the Enlightened Mahayana Bodhisattva) has been discovered in Nagoya, Japan.

In a word , during the early time , The inland of China was mainly through the scholars and monks of Tarim Basin of Xinjiang knew Buddhism and many Uighur Buddhist scholars and masters made a great deal of contributions to the ancient Chinese cultures. According to some statistics, Kumarajiva translated altogether 74 kinds of Buddhist works (in 384 volumes) into Chinese. His Chinese disciples numbered 3500. So he made a great contribution to the Chinese culture.