

佛經翻譯略覽

An Overview of the History of Translating Buddhist Texts

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縱觀幾千年的佛教歷史，翻譯佛經一直都是弘揚和傳播佛法的一個重要途徑。許多歷代高僧在翻譯的工作中都付出了畢生的心血。作為一位將佛教帶入西方社會的先驅，上人也把翻譯佛經列入他的四大願景之一。

雖然我們都熟知玄奘大師去西天取經的故事；我們也耳熟能詳鳩摩羅什法師往生以後舌頭不壞的傳奇。然而在佛教史中記載有關這些大師們到底如何翻譯佛經的典籍卻並不多。眾多的翻譯家們也很少紀錄當時翻譯的過程是怎樣的。因此我一直以為譯經對他們來說應該不是什麼困難的事情。因為這些高僧多是菩薩化身，所以當他們翻譯的時候，自然有自己的神通

Throughout thousand years of Buddhist history, the translation of Buddhist text has always been a significant method for spreading and propagating the Buddhadharma. Many high Sanghans devoted their entire lives to Buddhist translation. As a pioneer who brought the Buddhadharma to the West, Venerable Master Hua also included Buddhist text translation into his four vows.

Although many know the story of Great Master Xuan Zang who went to India to obtain Buddhist scriptures, we might also know the story of Master

Kumarajiva whose tongue remained as an unburned relic after his cremation. However, it is very rare to find historical records about how these great masters translated Buddhist scriptures. Most eminent translators didn't say a word regarding the process of translation. Therefore, I always thought that translation shouldn't be something very difficult for these patriarchs, because many of them were probably the transformation bodies of the Bodhisattvas who could utilize their phenomenal talents and spiritual powers to help with the translation projects. If you ever heard Master Kumarajiva's comment on his own translation, you would realize how frustrated he was about his own work. The road of translation has never been easy to walk. Now I'd like to share some history regarding the translation of Chinese Buddhist scriptures and some eminent translators' biographies and works.

As we know, the very first Buddhist Sutra that came to China was *The Sutra in the 42 Sections Spoken by the Buddha*. This



玄奘法師取經博物館 (中國甘肅)

The Museum of Great Master Xuanzang in Gansu Province, China

和非常人所擁有的才能來幫助他們。而實際上，當您聽到鳩摩羅什法師如何評價自己的翻譯作品時，才知道其中的無奈只有他自己最清楚。翻譯之路其實並不平坦。下面就和大家分享一些中國佛經翻譯的歷史，和幾位翻譯家的生平及著作。

第一部來到中國的佛教經典就是《佛說四十二章經》。這是迦攝摩騰和竺法蘭兩位高僧在東漢年間從印度帶到中國並翻譯的佛經，至今已有大約兩千年的歷史。據《高僧傳》記載，兩位高僧在中國共翻譯了五部佛經，但是前面四部都已失傳，唯有最後翻譯的《四十二章經》流傳於世。此經是竺法蘭法師從眾多的佛經中挑選出來的四十二個部分而成為《四十二章經》。

東漢還有另外一位高僧，他也是一位大譯經師，那就是我們熟悉的安世高法師。這位法師是安息國的太子。安息國就是波斯，也就是今天的伊朗。他放棄王位而出家修道，聰明好學，博通經藏，尤其擅長阿毘曇學，也非常重視禪經。因此有一種說法謂中國的禪學始於安世高法師。這位法師一來到中國便開始翻譯佛經。歷經二十幾年，他所翻譯的經典超過三十部，主要有《安般守意經》，《道地經》等等。雖然我們不一定熟悉這些佛經，但是他的貢獻對當時和之後數

sutra was brought into China from India and translated by Great Masters Kashyapa Matanga and Gobharana during the Eastern Han dynasty, which was about 2,000 years ago. According to the *Records of High Sanghans*, these two masters translated a total of five Sutras. But the first four were lost, and it is only this Sutra which is existent today. Master Gobharana compiled *The Sutra in the 42 Sections* from many scriptures.

We are also familiar with another high Sangha in the Eastern Han dynasty, who was also a renowned translator. That is Master An Shi Gao. Master An Shi Gao was the crown prince of Arsacid Empire (Parthia), a historical region located in north-eastern Iran. He renounced the throne and left home to devote himself to cultivation. He was very bright and studied assiduously. Thoroughly acquainted with the canonical texts, he was also adept in Abhidharma and paid attention to Chan sutras. Therefore, it was said that the Chan school in China was founded by Master An Shi Gao. As soon as he arrived in China, he had begun to translate Buddhist scriptures. For over twenty years he had translated more than thirty sutras. His masterpieces include the *Ānāpānasati Sutra* (*Sutra of Guarding the Mind Peacefully*) and *Yogācārabhūmi Sutra* the (*Sutra of the Way Ground*.) We might not be familiar with these scriptures he translated; however, Master An Shi Gao's contribution has influenced Chinese Buddhism for over hundreds of years.



鳩摩羅什寺和鳩摩羅什塔，
塔內供奉鳩摩羅什法師之舌舍利。(中國甘肅)
Kumarajiva Temple and Kumarajiva Stupa,
Master Kumarajiva's tongue Sarira is worshiped
in the Stupa in Gansu Province, China.

百年的中國佛教影響深遠。

早期佛教剛剛傳入中國時，翻譯的工作與現在截然不同。那時佛經常常是通過口譯來傳播，而被書寫紀錄下來的佛經並不多。因為當時在印度和亞洲一些國家，佛經多是由師父口授傳給弟子，漸漸在很長的一段時間裡，才慢慢以不同的語言書寫下來。今天翻譯者們可以為了佛經中的幾個中文字或者一句話而反覆討論幾個小時，而當時像安世高法師這樣的譯經家則是在眾多的經書中搜集、節選、詮釋而後才翻譯的，因此他們很多的工作是對佛經進行詳盡的解釋。

在漢朝與安世高法師同具有重要地位的還有另外一位法師支婁迦讖。這位法師出生年代不詳，是月氏國人，月氏國即現在中國新疆一帶，東漢末年他來到中國。與安世高法師不同，他所翻譯的經典幾乎全屬大乘，為大乘典籍在漢土翻譯的開端。其作品涉及般若、華嚴、寶積、涅槃等部。在佛經翻譯史

In the initial stages of the development of Buddhism in China, translation was practiced in a way distinctly different from how it is practiced today. It often took the form of oral translation, there being no written texts for the sutras most of the time. The reason was that in the Indian subcontinent and Inner Asia, the sutras were at first transmitted orally from master to disciple, and only later on were they written down in different combinations of languages and scripts and over a long period of time. Today translators might have to spend a couple of hours to discuss a few words or one sentence from the sutra text. However, the translators like Master An Shi Gao would have to collect, compile, give exegeses and then translate the sutra text. So a lot of their work was actually to explain the scriptures.

In the Han dynasty, there was another Dharma master who was as important as Master An Shi Gao—Master Lokaksema. His date of birth is unknown, he was a native of country Tokharistan, which is now located near Xin Jiang Province in China. Master Lokaksema came to China in the late Eastern Han dynasty. Master Lokaksema's translations differed from Master An Shi Gao, as his works mostly focused on Mahayana scriptures. He is considered to have as opened the Mahayana teachings in China. His translations included *Prajna Sutra*, *Avatamsaka Sutra*, *Ratnakūṭa Sutra* (*Accumulation of Jewels Sutra*), *Nirvna Sutra* and many others. Master Lokaksema was a phenomenal translator who was as significant as Master An Shi Gao.

During the South and North dynasty, we can never forget about the most eminent translator in history, Master Kumarajiva. We must have heard many of his stories, so here I'd like to introduce a bit of his contribution on translation.

Master Kumarajiva translated thirty-two Buddhist sutras in his life, and some of them are still widely circulated today, such as: *The Buddha Speaks of Amitabha Sutra*, *Vajra Sutra*, *Wonderful Dharma Lotus Flower Sutra*, *Maha Prajna Paramita Sutra*, *Vimalakirti Sutra* and *Mahaprajnaparamita Shastra* (*The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*.) Kumarajiva's translations, which marked a distinct departure from previous translations,

上，支婁迦讖法師與安世高法師享有同等重要的地位。

到了南北朝時期，不能不提的就是我們最熟悉的譯經家鳩摩羅什法師。關於他的故事已經聽過很多，這裡就介紹一下他在譯經方面的貢獻。

鳩摩羅什法師一生共翻譯經典三十二部，其中包括沿用至今的《佛說阿彌陀經》，《金剛經》，《妙法蓮華經》，《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》，《維摩詰經》，《大智度論》等等。他的翻譯風格與在他以前所有其他的翻譯風格都迥然不同，被人們稱為「新譯」。如果您有機會對比他和玄奘大師所譯的《佛說阿彌陀經》，就可以看到鳩摩羅什法師的譯文非常精練，簡短。而玄奘法師的譯文則更接近梵文的原文。鳩摩羅什法師的作品無論是在過去還是現在都極為流行。我們所熟悉的《金剛經》在歷史中有眾多的譯本，但是現在大家廣為傳誦的仍然是鳩摩羅什法師所翻譯的版本。

據《南山感通傳》中記載：「什公聰明，善解大乘，彼自七佛以來傳譯，得法王之遺寄也。」又有「羅什師今位階三賢，所在通化」。這是說：「鳩摩羅什法師非常聰明，善於教解大乘義理，是七佛以來的譯經師，是如來入滅後所托付之人。他是三賢位的菩薩，善於教化眾生。」

作為不懂梵文而只懂得中文的人，我們可能會讚嘆中文佛經裡面優雅的用詞和美麗的偈頌。然而，據《出三藏記集》記載，鳩摩羅什法師曾經這樣評價他自己的翻譯：「天竺的語言非常重視豐富的發音和優美的詞彙。那些充滿韻律的偈頌是最好的歌詞。在佛教的儀軌中，唱讚的頌歌充滿了無比的敬重。但是當梵文的經典被譯成中文以後，這種優美和活力完全消失了。只有佛經中的義理以一種不同的方式被很平常的傳達出來。這就比喻你把自己已經嚼過的飯送給別人吃，他不但覺得沒有一點味道，而且還非常噁心。」可見，儘管是這樣一位大譯經家也有如此的無奈。

在兩晉南北朝時代還有許多著名的譯經家如真諦法師，僧肇法師和鳩摩羅什法師最得意的助手僧叡法師等等。著名的道安法師和慧遠

were called “new translations.” If you have a chance to compare the two versions of the Amitabha sutra, you will see that Kumarajiva’s translation is very clear and concise, and Master Xuan Zang’s version is very close to the source text in Sanskrit. Kumarajiva’s translations were enormously popular, not only in his time but even today. The well-known Vajra Sutra has many different versions of translation, but the most popular version that we are using right now is the one translated by Master Kumarajiva.

As it is mentioned in the *Anthology of the Responses in South Mountain*, “Kumarajiva was very bright and adept at interpreting the Mahayana scriptures. He was the translator for seven Buddhas of Antiquity during their lifetimes and he was entrusted by the Thus Come Ones, (Buddhas). Master Kumarajiva is a Bodhisattva at the Three Worthy Stages and is skilled to teach and transform living beings.”

People who know Chinese but don’t know much Sanskrit, might sometimes praise the elegant phrases and the beautiful verses in the Chinese scriptures. However, according to *A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripitaka*, here is how Kumarajiva commented on his own translation: “The culture of India puts much emphasis on colorful diction and stylish writing. Their rhymed verse is always best when set to music. In Buddhist rituals, odes of praise will be sung to show awe and respect. But when the Sanskrit sutras are translated into Chinese, the beauty of form and the color and verve are lost. The meaning can generally be conveyed, but in a form very different from the original. It is like giving someone rice that you have chewed; he will find it not just tasteless, but downright disgusting.” As we can see, such a great translator also had his hopelessness toward translation.

During the two Jin and the South & North dynasties, there were many other great translators, such as: Master Paramartha, Master Seng Zhao and Master Seng Rui who was the best assistant of Master Kumarajiva. The High Masters Dao An and Hui Yuan also participated in some work of translation.

Later on, many eminent translators appeared in the heyday of Chinese Buddhism—the Sui and Tang dynasties. Translation was done mostly by groups of people instead of individuals. The most renowned center of translation was led by Master Xuan Zang, which had a very large

大師也都參與過許多翻譯的事業。

隋唐時代是佛教的鼎盛時期，各大譯經家輩出。翻譯也從個人的行為轉為多人合作的形式。其中最著名的屬玄奘大師的譯場，其規模宏大，結構完善。下面列舉玄奘大師譯場的分工明細，從中我們可以略見當時翻譯工作的周密程度。

首先譯主是玄奘大師，負責統籌譯經工作，解決翻譯難題；此外有證義十二人，就是與譯主探討譯文，增加譯文的準確性；綴文九人，根據梵文和漢文的不同語言結構轉譯經典，調整語句，疏通文理；字學一人，負責校對字的準確性，有點像我們現在校稿的人；證梵文一人，負責聽譯主誦讀梵文，證實是否有誤；還有參譯，負責將譯為漢文的經典回譯為梵文再相互對照，以保正確（這一步驟是我們現在所沒有的）；刊定，去掉累贅的句子，令譯文流暢；潤文，潤色文辭；梵唄，檢驗譯文的音韻是否順口悅耳；最後由皇帝所派欽命大臣做總體勘校，然後呈上譯本。

這種譯場的結構令我想到上人在法總制定的佛經翻譯委員會的工作結構：有人翻譯，有人潤色，有人校對、審核，大家根據自己的專長分工合作。雖然我們的規模無法和前人相比，但是我們是以凡夫的身分來從事聖人的工作，我想最重要的就是以佛心為己心，還有就是不發脾氣。

雖然眾所週知，玄奘大師的譯本並不像鳩摩羅什法師的譯本那樣廣為流傳。然而玄奘大師所帶回和翻譯的佛經對唐朝以後的中國佛教有巨大的影響。如果沒有他，也許大藏經就不是今天的樣子了。而且未來所有從事翻譯工作的人都可以在玄奘大師的譯本中領略梵文佛經的原貌。

歷史上還有很多著名的譯經家，由於時間的關係就不做詳細的介紹了。如果大家有興趣了解多一些，可以閱讀僧佑大師的《出三藏記集》，這是一本很好的參考文獻。❀

scale and complete structures. Below I'd like to introduce some translation duties in different departments of the group, so we could get to know how meticulous the translation projects had been done.

First, the host of the translation was Master Xuan Zang who was in charge of managing the entire translation process and resolving problems. And there were twelve people who certified the meanings with the host to ensure the translation was correct. Nine people rearranged and smoothed out the sentences according the differences between Sanskrit and Chinese. One person proofread the text. One person listened to the host to read the Sanskrit aloud to confirm the accuracy. And there were people who then retranslated the Chinese into Sanskrit and compared it with the source text. We now don't have this procedure. There were other people who would delete the long and repeating sentences and polished the text. Some would check the rhythm to make it pleasing to the ear. At last, a high official sent directly by the emperor would make the final proofreading and provided the translation to the ruler.

The structure of this kind of translation center makes me think of the four translating committees set up by the Venerable Master Hua. Within these four committees, some people translate, some edit and polish the text, and some proofread and certify the text. Everyone works on their own according to one's own expertise and also cooperate with each other in a group. Although there is no comparison between our translation teams and the ones in the history, as ordinary people, we still try our best to do the sages' work. The key point to success I think is to consider the Buddha's mind as our own mind in translation and never become angry.

As we know, Master Xuan Zang's translations are not as popular as Master Kumarajiva's. However, the sutras that were brought back and translated by Master Xuan Zang have greatly influenced Chinese Buddhism after the Tang dynasty. Without him the Tripitaka may not be the same as what we see today. Furthermore, those who work on Buddhist translations in the future will always appreciate Master Xuan Zang's sutra translations, which mainly reflect the original Sanskrit text.

There are numerous eminent translators throughout history who I can't introduce in detail due to the time limit. If anyone who wants to know more about translation history, I'd like to recommend you to Master Seng You's *A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripitaka*. ❀