

## KUMARAJIVA AND MADHYAMAKA SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

### Abstract

The present paper discusses the life of Kumarajiva who was a great translator of the Buddhist texts and a great teacher of a new Madhyamaka School of thought in China. The Chinese records throw much light on Kumarajiva's ancestors. His biography is well written in the Chinese account *Kao seng tehoam* (ch. II) dated 519 A.D., *Tch'ou san tsang ki si* (520 A.D.) and *Chi-mo-lo-shi*. He showed a new religious path to Mahayana Buddhism in China through Madhyamaka philosophy enunciated by Nagarjuna.

Kumarajiva was the world's greatest translator. He translated important Mahayanist Buddhist texts into Chinese. The translated books goes to his credit are 300 in number; out of which many were included in the Chinese *Tripitaka* (Nanjio's Catalogue, Appendix II, p. 59). The text "Life of Asvaghosa", he also translated from Sanskrit to Chinese. With the assistance of a number of Chinese collaborators, he made a fresh translation of the voluminous work (*Maha*) *Prajnaparamita Sutra*. Important texts translated by him in Chinese are *Dasabhumivibhava*, *Dvadasa nikaya (Mukha)* (Murti, 1955, p. 91) and *Satasastra* (Murti, p. 93). His chief translated *sunyavadin* works were the *Pancavimsati* (T.D. No. 223), the *Astasahasrika* (T.D. No. 227), the *Vimalakirtinirdesa* (T.D. No. 475), the *Vajracchedika* (T.D. No. 235), and the *Prajnaparamitahrdaya* (T.D. No. 250). He also translated the three Madhyamaka treatises that form the basis for the San-lun school in China and Japan. The major Vinaya works that translated by Kumarajiva are *Sarvastivada Pratimoksa Sutra* and according to tradition the *P'u-sa-chieh-pen (Bodhissattva-pratimoksa)*. His pietist translation include the *saddharmapundarika* (T.D. No. 262), the smaller *sukhavativyuha* (T.D. No. 366) and two Maitreya texts (T.D. No. 286) in collaboration with his friend from Kashgar Buddhayasas. The Central Buddhist philosophy of China is based on all these texts. It is said that a number of scholars assisted him in his exacting job. It consists of specialists of all levels: those who discussed doctrinal question with Kumarajiva; those who checked the new translation against the old and imperfect ones; hundred of editors, subeditors and copyist. (Wright, 1959, p. 63). About him, it is said that even at his age of sixty; he was engaged in translating of composing the Buddhist texts and continued this hard work till his end of life. He also revised the earlier Chinese translations which were in crude or even incoherent versions. His translation is considered to be authentic translation in China.

The Sun-lun sect of China is originated from Madhamika School of India. This sect is known as the classic sect of China. The characteristic of the teaching in San-lun Sect is no-mark and no-attachment. This sect can be traced back to Lokakshema, the great translator in Han Dynasty who is known to be the founder of Mahayana Buddhism in China. However, Sun-lun sect was first introduced by Kumarajiva in China who translated the Three Shastras. According to Fitzgerald, Kumarajiva worked, taught and spread the doctrines of a new sect of Buddhism in China (1942, PP.

275-276). Later this text was organised by Master Tao-sheng (A.D.360-434) and instituted by Master Chia-hsiang. San-lun is a pronunciation of the Chinese words, which means Three Shastras, or Three Treatises, so this sect is also known as Three Shastra Sect, or Three Treatise Sect. The three sastras are:

- (1) Madhyamika-karikas Sastra or simply Madhyamika Sastra or Middle treatise written by Nagarjuna.
- (2) Dvadasanikaya Sastra or Twelve Gate treatise written by also Nagarjuna.
- (3) Shatasastra, it is a one hundred verses Treatise, written by Aryadeva.

The Sun-lun sect focus on emptiness (*K'ung*), the Middle way (*chung-lao*), the twofold truth (*erh-t'i*) and the refutation of erroneous views as the illumination of right views (*p'o-hsieh-hsien-cheng*). These doctrines are interrelated and aim at showing that all things are empty. According to Sun-lun masters, the refutation of erroneous views is the illumination of right view; it is not necessary to present other views but simply to discard false views. The more wrong views one refutes, the closer one is to liberation. In other words, the absence of wrong views is itself the right view. Therefore, to say that all things are empty is not to argue for new metaphysics. Once this is realized, one discovers that even truth should be discarded.

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