

Kumārajīva and early cave-temples of China

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As a Buddhist scholar and a translator of Buddhist scriptures, Kumārajīva (344-413 A.D.) occupies a pivotal position in the history of medieval China. His teaching and translations exerted a far-reaching influence on Buddhism as well as Buddhist art in China.

According to the Chinese documentation, Kumārajīva's mother used to find pleasure in dhyāna. When Kumārajīva made his way to Chang'an in 401 at the invitation of Yao Xing, ruler of the later Qin dynasty, he was given a position of teacher of the nation and immersed himself in the translation of Buddhist scriptures. On the basis of *A Collection of Records concerning translation of the Tripitaka* (出三藏记集), he translated 35 Buddhist texts into Chinese in 294 fascicles, such as *Lotus Sūtra* (法华), *Larger Wisdom Sūtra* (大品般若), *Smaller Wisdom Sūtra* (小品般若), *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* (维摩诘经), *Legacy Teachings Sūtra* (遗教经), *Amida Sūtra* (无量寿经), *Advent of Maitreya Sūtra* (弥勒下生经), *Ten Divisions of Monastic Rules* (十诵律), *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (大智度论), *Treatise on the Middle Way* (中论), *One-Hundred-Verse Treatise* (百论), *Treatise on the Twelve Gates* (十二门论), *Commentary on the Ten Stages Sūtra* (十住毗婆沙论), *Twelve-linked Chain of Causations* (十二因缘) and several *Dhyāna-Sūtras* (坐禅三昧经、禅秘要法经、禅法要解经). Prized by later generations for their excellence and clarity, Kumārajīva's free translations were without parallel in Buddhist history and produced a great impact on the subsequent development of Buddhism in China. Moreover, Kumārajīva fostered many disciples and followers, more than three thousand by some accounts, and most of them enjoyed the dhyāna.

Dhyāna was the only action or behavior of the Buddhist monks in northern China during the 4th to the 6th centuries. The Buddhist cave-temples of China as well as arrangement of the images and subjects inside the caves have a close relation with the dhyāna-sūtras translated by Kumārajīva.

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