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Sai Yau Siu



**The Evolution
of Team-Based Buddhist
Scripture Translation in
Tang China**
United in Dharma

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The Evolution of Team-Based Buddhist Scripture Translation in Tang China

United in Dharma

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Preface

Buddhist scripture translation in China possesses a rich heritage dating back to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) and flourished during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). Over nearly a millennium, translators achieved remarkable accomplishments in spreading Buddhism throughout medieval China. The translated scriptures, comprising the Tripiṭaka (sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma), have bequeathed a priceless legacy of philosophical wisdom to future generations.

The Evolution of Team-based Buddhist Scripture Translation in Tang China: United in Dharma offers a concise analysis of the high point in the history of Chinese Buddhist scripture translation during the Tang Dynasty. This book emphasizes the variety of approaches taken by members of Buddhist translation teams, who united their efforts, tackled various obstacles, and distributed an extensive collection of scriptures throughout China, thereby enhancing the understanding of Buddhist teachings among the general public.

This monograph, intended for scholars, students, and enthusiasts of Buddhism, Chinese history, and Translation Studies, brings to the spotlight the under-explored aspect of collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures during in Tang China. It explores the factors contributing to the translation of the Tripiṭaka and reveals the essential role played by translation teams in shaping Chinese Buddhism as it is known today. A comprehensive overview of organizational structures, translation processes, and diverse positions within these institutions provides meaningful insights into the cultural and religious fabric of the Tang era. This extensive analysis of translation institutions in Tang China not only broadens our understanding of their internal

dynamics but also addresses the existing research gap in the study of sūtra translation history during pre-modern China.

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Chapter 1

Introduction



Abstract This chapter sets the stage for my research project on the evolution of team-based Buddhist scripture translation by providing an overview of its background. It includes a literature review and highlights the limited research on translation institutions during the Tang era. Referring to Andrew Chesterman’s theoretical framework for the sociological study of translation phenomena, this chapter outlines three historical categories of Buddhist translation teams in medieval China, emphasizing the significance of studying the “elite translation teams” of the Tang Dynasty. Moreover, it explains the research methodology and chapter outline, along with the importance of this project in understanding the cultural interaction between China and the Western Regions, reconstructing the history of collaborative translation, bridging gaps in Translation Studies, and appreciating the wisdom of ancient Buddhist translators.

The history of Buddhist scripture translation in China boasts a rich and extensive heritage, tracing its roots to the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220) and flourishing during the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907). Over a period of nearly a thousand years, the remarkable accomplishments of translators in promulgating Buddhism can be observed throughout medieval China.¹ These translated scriptures encompass the Tripiṭaka, including sūtra, vinaya, and abhidharma, giving a priceless trove of philosophical wisdom for future generations.

In this book titled “The Evolution of Team-Based Buddhist Scripture Translation in Tang China: United in Dharma,” the objective is to offer a thorough examination of the translated scriptures, explore historical sources, and reconstruct the history of the apex era of the Chinese translation of Buddhist scriptures in the Tang Dynasty.

¹ The term “Medieval China” in this book refers to the time encompassing the late Eastern Han (25–220), the Three Kingdoms (220–280), the Jin Dynasty and Sixteen Kingdoms (266–439), the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), the Sui Dynasty (581–618), and the Tang Dynasty (618–907). This interpretation of Medieval China is also widely recognized among modern Chinese and international scholars (Xia, 1933; Naitō, 1969–1976; Dien, 1990). For a deeper understanding and exploration of the evolution of the term “Medieval” in the realm of East Asian historical studies, Tse Wai-kit’s (2016) study offers an essential critique.

This book highlights the diverse strategies employed by translators, who formed collaborative translation teams, overcame numerous challenges, translated a wide array of scriptures, and distributed them throughout China, ultimately inspiring the public to enhance their comprehension of Buddhist principles.²

1.1 Literature Review: Previous Research on Sūtra Translation Institutions

The existing body of literature on Buddhist translation institutions is relatively limited and can be classified into three primary categories:

- A. **General overview of translation settings:** These works offer a foundational understanding of the evolution, organization, and division of labor within ancient Chinese translation environments. For example, Wang Wenyuan’s 王文顏 (?–2012) *Research on the Chinese Translation of Buddhist Scriptures* provides a comprehensive summary (Wang 1984), while Funayama Toru’s 船山徹 *How Were Buddhist Scriptures Translated into Chinese?—When Sūtras Became Classics* delineates two distinct types of ancient Chinese translation settings: the open-style institutions, which facilitated public participation along with synchronous translation and lectures, and the closed-style institutions, which were strictly managed by professional translators (Funayama 2013).
- B. **Focused discussions:** This category includes papers that examine specific aspects of ancient Chinese translation activities. Cao Shibang 曹仕邦 (1932–2016) authored several papers on a variety of issues, including “On the Translation Methods and Procedures of Chinese Buddhist Translation Institutions” and “On the ‘Translation Institutions’ of Buddhism.” These works are compiled in *A Study of the History of Chinese Buddhist Scripture Translation* (Cao 1992).
- C. **Era-specific studies:** These works analyze the translation institutions of particular historical periods. Liang Tianxi’s 梁天錫 *The Dharma Transmission Court of the Northern Song Dynasty and Its Scripture Translation System* focuses on the Song Dynasty (960–1279) (Liang 2003). Another example is Nishida Tatsuo’s 西田龍雄 (1928–2012) “The Buddhist Faith of the Western Xia People and the Translation of the Tripiṭaka,” which investigates the translation establishments of the Western Xia (Nishida 1977).

Drawing on the findings of prior research, this book sets out to analyze the collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures during the Tang Dynasty. A focal point of this period is selected due to the translation history of Tang China being relatively

² The insights mentioned in this book are further detailed in my Chinese monograph, “A History of Collaborative Buddhist Scripture Translation in Medieval China” (*Zhonggu Zhongguo Fojing Xiezuo Fanyishi* 中古中國佛經協作翻譯史), published by Chung Hwa Book Co. The book extends its focus beyond the Tang Dynasty, offering a comprehensive survey of the development and efforts of numerous Buddhist scripture translation collectives throughout medieval China.

under-explored, which presents a gap in research concerning the intricacies of translation institutions of that era. By undertaking a detailed examination of translation archives from the Eastern Han, Three Kingdoms, Sui, and Tang Dynasties, with special emphasis on the Tang era, the goal of this research is to augment the current understanding of the history of collaborative translation and to provide valuable insights specific to this context.

Furthermore, this research aims to illuminate the factors that contributed to the translation of Buddhist scriptures during the Tang Dynasty and to reveal the critical role these translation teams played in shaping Chinese Buddhism. By offering a comprehensive view of the organizational structures, translation processes, and the diverse positions assumed by participants within these institutions, this research elucidates the cultural and religious complexities of Tang China. This extensive study of translation institutions during the Tang period not only broadens the understanding of their internal dynamics but also addresses the existing research gap in the study of sūtra translation history in medieval China.

1.2 Chesterman's Framework and the Evolution of Buddhist Translation Teams in Medieval China

In his article "The Name and Nature of Translator Studies," translation scholar Andrew Chesterman introduced three main directions for expanding Translation Studies (Chesterman, 2009), in line with the "sociological turn" that emerged after the turn of the millennium (Chesterman, 2006). These include: (1) the sociology of translations, which focuses on the analysis of translation market demands and the functional roles of translated works (Chesterman, 2006, 17); (2) the sociology of translators, examining aspects such as status, compensation, working conditions, professional organizations, and public perceptions of translators from diverse backgrounds (Chesterman, 2009, 16); and (3) the sociology of the translation process, investigating activities and stages in the translation industry, such as practices, workflows, quality control, team collaboration, and relationships with agents and clients (Chesterman, 2009, 17; Chesterman, 2017, 123–146). Chesterman's insights offer a structured approach to studying translation phenomena, including the history of Buddhist scripture translation, thus enriching research frameworks in related fields.

Using Chesterman's third research direction as a foundation, this book examines the characteristics of team-based Buddhist scripture translation in Tang China and sheds light on the historical development of significant translation teams during this period. The Tang Dynasty is acknowledged as a key era in the history of Chinese Buddhism, marked by a surge in translation activities. Understanding the organization of Buddhist translation teams during this time illuminates the broader context of religious and cultural exchanges in Chinese history.

Prior to this period, the organization of Buddhist translation teams can be broadly divided into three categories:

- A. **Category 1:** The first category, “small-scale translation teams,” was prevalent during the Eastern Han, the Three Kingdoms (220–280), and the Western Jin (265–316) periods. Translators from the Western Regions, who came to China to spread Buddhism, often collaborated with Chinese scholars interested in Buddhism and foreign languages. These small groups, usually comprising a few individuals, worked together to translate Buddhist scriptures from foreign languages into Chinese. Their collaborative efforts played a crucial role in the early dissemination of Buddhist teachings in China. Notable examples include the team of An Xuan 安玄 in the Eastern Han and the team of Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (239–316) in the Western Jin.
- B. **Category 2:** The second category, “large-scale translation teams,” emerged during the Eastern Jin (317–420) and the Sixteen Kingdoms (317–439) period. As Buddhism gained wider acceptance, rulers began supporting Buddhist scripture translation by funding the establishment of extensive translation centers that housed thousands of participants. These centers assembled individuals from various locations to collaborate on translation projects, aiming to produce high-quality scriptures and address earlier translations’ shortcomings. This period marked a significant shift in the scale and scope of translation efforts, reflecting the growing importance of Buddhism in Chinese society. Notable examples include the team of Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344–413) in the Later Qin (384–417) and the team of Dharmakṣema 曇無讖 (385–433) in the Northern Liang (397–439).
- C. **Category 3:** The third category, “elite translation teams,” gained prominence during the Tang Dynasty. As large-scale translation centers declined, elite translation, supported by small group translation, emerged as the standard for official translation projects. Resident translators were required to demonstrate exceptional skills and virtues while adhering to a strict division of labor. In certain instances, translations even required court approval prior to publication, indicating the high level of scrutiny and quality assurance in this era. This model initially took shape during the Sui Dynasty and was later formalized and implemented throughout the Tang Dynasty. Its roots can be traced back to the early Tang Dynasty when Prabhākaramitra 波羅頗迦羅蜜多羅 (565–633) established a translation center in Chang’an. Subsequent translators, such as Xuanzang 玄奘 (602–664), embraced and refined this model, ultimately solidifying it as the foundational system for official translation work.

To examine the growth and progression of the third category of Buddhist translation teams during the Tang Dynasty, this book performs a comprehensive analysis of various historical sources, including Sanskrit-Chinese scriptures, Tripiṭaka catalogs, prefaces to translated Buddhist texts, biographies of Buddhist translators, commentaries, literary notes, official historical records, and excavated documents. This multifaceted approach not only deepens our understanding of the translation process during this era but also unveils the sophisticated cultural and religious context of Tang China.

1.3 Chapter Outline

The book is structured into six chapters as follows:

- A. **Chapter 1—Introduction:** In this opening chapter, the foundation is laid by introducing the research topic, emphasizing its significance, detailing the materials utilized, presenting the chapter organization, and discussing the key issues explored throughout the book.
- B. **Chapter 2—Tracing the Origins: Pre-Tang Translation Models:** This chapter provides a concise overview of the characteristics of sūtra translation from the Eastern Han to the Sui Dynasty, establishing the necessary historical backdrop for the entire monograph.
- C. **Chapter 3—Dawn of a New Era: Translation Efforts in Early Tang:** Focusing on the reign of Emperor Gaozu 高祖 (566–635) and Taizong 太宗 (598–649), this chapter studies the translation contributions of Prabhākaramitra 波羅頗迦羅蜜多羅 and Xuanzang 玄奘. It also examines the organizational structures that facilitated their work, revealing the early foundations of Tang translation efforts.
- D. **Chapter 4—The Golden Age: Tang Translation Initiatives in Full Swing:** Spanning the reign of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628–683) to Emperor Daizong 代宗 (726–779), this chapter investigates the translation teams organized by Divākara 地婆訶羅 (614–688), Devaprajña 提雲般若, Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652–710), Yijing 義淨 (635–713), Bodhiruci 菩提流志 (?–727), and Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774). It sheds light on the prosperous era of translation activities during the Tang Dynasty, highlighting the zenith of sūtra translation practices.
- E. **Chapter 5—Fortitude in Flux: The Persistence of Translation Activities in the Changing Landscape of the Late Tang Period:** This chapter discusses the resilience and adaptability of translation activities during the shifting political and social landscape of the Late Tang period. It closely examines the translation team led by Prajña 般若 during the reign of Emperor Dezong 德宗 (742–805), analyzing the organizational structure, strategies, and collaborative efforts that enabled the team to overcome challenges and continue their translation endeavors.
- F. **Chapter 6—Conclusion:** The concluding chapter synthesizes the main points of the book and briefly outlines potential future research directions. These include exploring translation organizations during the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, as well as investigating the translation models embraced by translators in the post-Tang Dynasty era.

1.4 Research Methodology

To conduct this research, a blend of qualitative and quantitative methods is utilized. The investigation adopts a historical and socio-cultural approach to comprehend the development of collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures in China.

- A. **Historical analysis:** A systematic examination of primary sources, such as Buddhist commentaries, Tripiṭaka catalogs, prefaces, biographies of translators, notes, and official historical documents, is undertaken. This analysis yields a comprehensive understanding of the evolution of translation practices and the cultural, political, and social contexts that shaped them.
- B. **Textual analysis:** Various types of historical materials, including excavated documents like Dunhuang manuscripts and Turpan documents, are studied to ensure a thorough investigation. Textual analysis concentrates on translation methods, language usage, and the process of adaptation and localization of Buddhist scriptures.
- C. **Comparative analysis:** A comparative approach is employed to pinpoint similarities and differences among different collaborative translation models in Tang China. This analysis unveils the distinct characteristics of each model and traces their evolution over time.
- D. **Case studies:** Select translation teams or organizations serve as case studies, providing a detailed exploration of their translation processes, division of labor, and challenges encountered. These case studies furnish valuable insights into the practical aspects of collaborative translation in medieval China.

1.5 Research Significance

The significance of this research project can be outlined in four key points:

- A. **Unveiling Chinese history through a unique lens:** While studies of Chinese culture often highlight its more observable attributes like traditional dress and cuisine, the practice of translation offers a unique window into the nation's historical narrative. Christopher Rundle, a prominent scholar in Western Translation Studies, has posited "translation as a method to understand history" (Rundle, 2012), a concept that this book embraces. It investigates the profound influence of translating Buddhist scriptures from the Western Regions on Chinese society, a process that extended beyond linguistic translation to significantly impact Chinese thought, religion, and values. These translated texts served as vessels of cultural exchange, shaping the intellectual and spiritual landscape in ancient China. This book intends to highlight this influential aspect of China's heritage, providing readers with a comprehensive understanding of the crucial role translation has played in the evolution of Chinese history.

- B. Reconstructing the history of medieval Buddhist translation teams:** Although previous studies have recognized the significant contributions of renowned individual Buddhist translators in Chinese history, there is a lack of complete survey of the collective efforts of monk translators. This book aims to fill that void by offering a fresh and innovative perspective. It focuses on translation teams as the primary units of analysis and extensively explores a wide range of historical texts. Through this approach, this research provides an in-depth and engaging narrative of the collaborative endeavors involved in translating Buddhist scriptures during Tang China. This inquiry not only deepens readers' understanding of the intricate interactions and vital contributions of these translation groups but also underscores their pivotal influence on the evolution of Chinese translation discourse.³
- C. Bridging the gaps in Translation Studies:** The subject of “translation history” holds significant importance within the field of Translation Studies (Delisle & Judith, 1995; Pym, 1998). However, existing research encounters three primary limitations: a predominant focus on Western translation activities (Raine, 2014), an emphasis on Chinese translation history primarily from a translation theory perspective (Zhu & Zhu, 2006), and insufficient exploration of collaborative translation efforts (Cheung, 2014). This monograph aims to overcome these limitations and foster scholarly dialogue by addressing these deficiencies. Through in-depth research and analysis, its goal is to bridge the gaps in current literature and facilitate a deeper understanding of translation history, particularly in the context of collaborative translation activities.
- D. Embracing the wisdom and skills of ancient translators:** Translators of Buddhist scriptures were ardent in their pursuit of finding the perfect rendition for each word, ensuring both fidelity to the original text and comprehension for the Chinese audience. This book not only provides a gateway for readers to explore the historical facts surrounding Buddhist scripture translation activities in Tang China but also presents invaluable insights into the ingenious methods, such as naturalizing and domestication (Schleiermacher, 2012; Venuti, 2008), employed by these translators to navigate the complexities of

³ Japanese Buddhist scholar Okabe Kazuo offers a compelling argument for the use of a “collaborative translation model” as an analytical approach to the history of sūtra translation. According to Okabe, this model provides a more accurate representation of historical realities (Okabe & Tanaka, 2013). For a comprehensive discussion, please refer to Okabe Kazuo and Tanaka Ryōshō's work, *Introduction to the Study of Chinese Buddhism*, with a particular focus on the section discussing the distinctive characteristics of Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures. My critique of this work offers additional insights on this topic (Siu 2014).

cross-language texts and surmount cultural barriers.⁴ Beyond historical appreciation, the knowledge gleaned from this exploration can be applied to daily life, enhancing problem-solving abilities and fostering a deeper understanding of effective communication across diverse contexts.

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⁴ In the Sanskrit text of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* 維摩經, a verse reads as follows: “kṣatriyeṣu ca kṣatriyasammatāḥ kṣāntisauratyabalapratiṣṭhāpanāya” (Vaidya, 1960). Zhi Qian 支謙, a translator active during Eastern Wu (222–280), interprets this verse to be “(Vimalakīrti) enters the realm of gentlemen, corrects their intentions, and is capable of establishing patience and harmony among them.” (入君子種, 正君子意, 能使忍和). Zhi Qian accentuates Vimalakīrti’s power to purify minds, including those of the noble kṣatriya class in ancient India. The terms “gentleman” (*Junzi* 君子) and “gentleman’s species” (*Junzizhong* 君子種) are Zhi Qian’s translations of the term “kṣatriya.” The term “gentleman” also surfaces in Buddhist scriptures from the Han and Jin periods, notably in Lokakṣema’s translation of the *Bhadrapālasūtra* 般舟三昧經 and Dharmarakṣa’s (239–316) translations of the *Sūtra of Bhadrakalpika* 賢劫經, the *Sūtra of the Eight Virtues of the Sea* 八德經, and the *Sūtra of Glorious Praises* 光讚經. In pre-Qin Confucian texts, the concept of “gentleman” carries multiple interpretations. It can refer to individuals who embody both virtue and talent, or it can denote those in positions of power. Kong Yingda 孔穎達 (574–648) of the Tang Dynasty clarified this ambiguity, stating “‘Gentleman’ refers to ‘ruler of men’” (君子謂人君也). Translators adopted the traditional Chinese concept of “gentleman” to interpret the Indian social class of “kṣatriya.” This method of “naturalizing” or “domesticating” the translation assisted Chinese Buddhist learners in gaining a rudimentary understanding of Indian customs and societal structures, thus bridging the cultural gap between these distinct civilizations.

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Chapter 2

Tracing the Origins: Pre-Tang Translation Models



Abstract To provide a historical context for understanding the subsequent progress of team translation in the Tang Dynasty, this chapter investigates the changing modes of collaborative translation of Buddhist texts in China from the Eastern Han to the Sui Dynasty. It investigates the strengths and weaknesses of each mode when the foreign-led groups gradually evolved into larger, collective assemblies. Also, this chapter explores how these early approaches evolved into a sophisticated Tang model, characterized by imperial support for the broad dissemination of translated Buddhist scriptures and clearly defined expert roles within collaborative translation teams.

This chapter provides a concise overview of the characteristics of sūtra translation from the Eastern Han to the Sui Dynasty, establishing the necessary historical backdrop for the entire monograph. During this transformative period, the translation of Buddhist scriptures underwent significant developments through the interplay of various models.

The translation journey began with small teams of foreign translators partnering with Chinese assistants, pioneering fundamental techniques in a nascent environment. Although these teams laid the groundwork for translation, their perspectives were initially limited. As patronage for Buddhist translation grew, vast translation assemblies emerged, mobilizing hundreds of scholars to collaborate and align drafts with the comprehension of Chinese readers. However, the fluctuating participation in these assemblies posed organizational challenges, highlighting the need for alternative approaches.

In response, the Tang court refined the small group model by expanding team sizes and specializing roles. This pragmatic evolution integrated the collective wisdom of translation assemblies through idea exchanges with selected participants. Supported by the imperial court, this sophisticated methodology facilitated the wide dissemination of sacred texts. Understanding the characteristics of sūtra translation during this period offers a window into both the challenges faced by translators and the innovative approaches they developed, setting the stage for further exploration of translation efforts during the Tang Dynasty and beyond in subsequent chapters.

2.1 The Development History of Small-Scale Translation Teams

The history of small-scale translation teams can be divided into several stages for discussion:

2.1.1 Stage One: The Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms

During the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, group translation efforts involved a limited number of individuals. These groups typically consisted of foreign translators collaborating with local scholars or monks to translate the scriptures into Chinese. Common translation processes included the “two-step collaboration” and the “three-step collaboration.”

During the “two-step collaboration” approach, as demonstrated by the partnership of An Xuan 安玄 and Yan Fudiao 嚴佛調, the lead translator took on the task of interpreting the original foreign-language text into Chinese. Meanwhile, an assistant would carefully transcribe the lead translator’s interpretation and make necessary amendments. An Xuan, a knowledgeable lay Buddhist from Parthia, and Yan Fudiao, a diligent monk from Linhuai, gained recognition for their translation work on the *Fa jing jing* 法鏡經 during the late Eastern Han Dynasty (T55, no. 2145, vol. 6, 46).

An Xuan played a vital role in managing the translation process, orally conveying the text’s meaning in Chinese. Yan Fudiao, on the other hand, contributed by diligently transcribing and refining the prose. Together, their collaboration resulted in the effective translation of the sūtra, showcasing their expertise and dedication to the task at hand. Their partnership serves as an example of the two-step collaboration method employed during this period of Buddhist scripture translation (T55, no. 2145, vol. 13, 96).

Furthermore, the “three-step collaboration” can be observed in the group composed of Zhu Shuofu 竺朔佛, Lokakṣema 支樓迦讖, Meng Fu 孟福, and Zhang Lian 張蓮. Zhu Shuofu, an Indian native, undertook the translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* 道行般若經, while Lokakṣema, a Yuezhi native, was renowned for his adherence to precepts and diligent practice. In the second year of Emperor Ling’s Guanghe 光和 era, these four individuals collaborated in translating the *Bhadrapālasūtra* 般舟三昧經. Zhu Shuofu recited the original scripture, while Lokakṣema provided an oral translation, and Meng Fu and Zhang Lian recorded the oral translation for subsequent revision and dissemination (T55, no. 2145, vol. 7, 48).¹

¹ The teachings of the Dharma in the Western Regions were predominantly transmitted through the oral tradition of master and disciple. Instead of relying on physical written texts, the entire canon was memorized and passed down through generations (外國法, 師徒相傳, 以口授相付, 不聽載文). See *Fenbie Gongde Lun* 分別功德論 (T25, no. 1507, vol. 2, 34).

In both cases, the collaboration among translators was driven by a desire to overcome limitations. The groups aimed to ensure accurate translations by drawing upon the complementary strengths of each member. The inclusion of local scholars or monks helped refine the translations to align with the complexities of the Chinese language and cultural context.

2.1.2 Stage Two: The Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms

During the era of the Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms, the group translation of scriptures underwent notable improvements. This stage was characterized by an increase in the number of participants, the addition of new translation steps, and an enhanced emphasis on proofreading and refining the translated texts.

Compared to the previous stage, the translation teams during this period involved a larger number of individuals. In addition to translators, there were scribes, proofreaders, and those responsible for formal writing of the translated texts. This expansion allowed for a more comprehensive and systematic approach to scripture translation.

One significant example from this period is the early translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* 正法華經 led by Dharmarakṣa in the seventh year of Taikang 太康 (286).² Dharmarakṣa assembled a team of translators and collaborators to work on this project. Nie Chengyuan 聶承遠 served as the main scribe, while others, such as Zhang Shiming 張仕明, Zhang Zhongzheng 張仲政, Zhu Li 竺力, Bo Yuanxin 帛元信, and Kang Nalü 康那律, assisted in the translation process. The translation procedure of Dharmarakṣa's team can be divided into several key steps (Sengyou T55, no. 2145, vol. 8, 56–57):

- A. **Interpretation:** Dharmarakṣa, fluent in various Western Regions languages and Chinese, orally translated the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* from the original text into 27 chapters, following the strategy of maintaining the fidelity of the original text.
- B. **Scribing:** Multiple translators, including Nie Chengyuan, Zhang Shiming, and Zhang Zhongzheng, assisted in recording Dharmarakṣa's oral translation, forming the initial draft of the translation.

² Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* is a testament to his dedication to preserving the integrity of the original text. His Chinese translation of the sūtra's verses is particularly illustrative of this fidelity. As observed by Karashima Seishi (1957–2019), Dharmarakṣa ingeniously mirrored the Śloka meter of the original Sanskrit by translating it into quartets of five characters each. When faced with the Triṣṭubh-Jagatī meter, he skillfully crafted equivalents of eight lines of four characters each. This approach ensured that the structural essence of the verses remained intact in the Chinese rendition, thus closely reflecting the source material. Karashima highlighted that this faithful reflection of form and content is a consistent feature throughout Dharmarakṣa's rendition of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Karashima, 2019).

- C. **Proofreading:** Zhu Li, an Indian monk, and Bo Yuanxin, a Kucha layman, were responsible for proofreading the translated text to ensure its accuracy and consistency with the original. This increased emphasis on proofreading represented a significant improvement compared to earlier periods.
- D. **Writing the sūtra:** Kang Nalü wrote out the complete sūtra in Luoyang after the translation and revision stages.
- E. **Explaining the sūtra:** Dharmarakṣa and other individuals, including laymen Zhang Jibo 張季博, Dong Jingxuan 董景玄, Liu Changwu 劉長武, and Liu Changwen 劉長文, provided oral annotations to ensure a correct interpretation of the scripture and further refine the translation.
- F. **Final proofreading and circulation:** Kang Nalü and others conducted a thorough review of the text at the Dongniu Monastery (*Dongniusi* 東牛寺). After finalizing the translation, a grand assembly was held to recite the sūtra, and the finalized scripture was then widely circulated.

The translation model during the era of the Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms demonstrated a more systematic and intricate organization compared to previous stages. It involved additional steps such as writing in Sanskrit, proofreading and refining, and formal writing of translated texts. The inclusion of translators proficient in both Chinese and Sanskrit, as well as the increased emphasis on proofreading, contributed to more accurate and complete translations. This period marked an important advancement in the history of team-based scripture translation, providing a solid foundation for subsequent periods.

2.1.3 Stage Three: The Southern and Northern Dynasties

During the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589), the pattern of scripture translation continued the practices established in previous periods. Translation methods such as the “two-step collaboration” or “three-step collaboration” from the Eastern Han and the Three Kingdoms period, as well as the improved assistance method from the Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms period, were commonly employed. While the overall framework for the collaborative translation process remained stable, significant changes took place within specific translation organizations during the middle and late periods of the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

2.1.3.1 Introduction of a Supervisory System for Translation

During the Chen Dynasty, Upaśūnya 月婆首那 organized a translation team for the *Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā Prajñāpāramitā* 勝天王般若波羅蜜經 and introduced a new role called the “supervisor” (*jianzhang* 監掌) to the translation process. Upaśūnya’s translation of the sūtra began in the sixth year of the Tianjia 天嘉 era

(565) under Emperor Wen 文帝 (522–566, reigned 559–566). The preface of the scripture provides details about the translation:

On the twenty-third day of the seventh month in the sixth year of the Tianjia era, Upaśūnya was invited to begin the translation. A large assembly of over 5,000 people from various backgrounds gathered for the occasion. [...] Upaśūnya interpreted the Sanskrit original into Chinese, holding the original text in hand. The next step involved the monk Zhixin, who listened to Upaśūnya’s oral translation, transcribed it, and then precisely proofread the transcription for accuracy. The final Chinese version, which comprised seven volumes, was completed on the eighteenth day of the ninth month in the sixth year of the Tianjia era. (T08, no. 231, vol. 7, 726)

Although Upaśūnya’s translation organization may appear similar to the teams in previous stages, it introduced a significant innovation—the emergence of the “supervisor” role. In the elite translation model of the Tang Dynasty, a similar position known as the “guardian” (*jianhu* 監護) existed (T50, no. 2061, vol. 3, 724). Typically held by court officials, the guardian was responsible for managing translation operations. While not directly involved in the translation process, the guardian played a central role in coordinating the affairs of translators and ensuring the smooth functioning of the translation team. The roots of this supervisory role can be traced back to the Southern and Northern Dynasties, specifically appearing in Upaśūnya’s translation of the *Suvikrāntavikrāmiparipṛcchā Prajñāpāramitā*. This indicates the gradual systematization of translation teams during the medieval period and the early emphasis on translation management.

2.1.3.2 Selection of Translators Based on Competence and Cultivation

One notable example involves the translation team led by Paramārtha, who played a decisive role in the early stages of translating the *Yogācārabhūmi* 十七地論 in Fuchun. Paramārtha received valuable support from the county magistrate, Lu Yuanzhe 陸元哲, and together they assembled a team comprising over twenty skilled individuals. This team included the esteemed monk Bao Qiong 寶瓊, who was instrumental in the translation efforts.

In the selection process, Lu Yuanzhe placed great emphasis on the exceptional talent of the assistants. Although the exact details of the selection process remain unclear, it is evident that during the Liang Dynasty, the monastic community gradually recognized the vital importance of translators’ background and scholarship. This shift marked a departure from the earlier stages during the Eastern Han and the Three Kingdoms period when translators were appointed without specific criteria.

This recognition of the importance of competence and cultivation in translator selection can be seen as a precursor to the elite translation practices that would later characterize the Tang Dynasty. The emergence of specific requirements and the growing emphasis on competence and cultivation laid the foundation for a more refined and rigorous approach to translation. The *Xu Gaosengzhuan* 續高僧傳 (*The Continuation of Biographies of Eminent Monks*) provides a comprehensive account,

revealing the significant shifts that defined the Southern and Northern Dynasties (T50, no. 2060, vol. 1, p. 429).

2.1.4 Stage Four: The Sui Dynasty

During the Sui Dynasty, the translation process underwent significant advancements. The scripture translation team adopted a collaborative approach, building upon the model used during the Southern and Northern Dynasties. It combined the “two-step collaboration” and “three-step collaboration,” supplemented by a supervisory translation system led by the “Ten Great Virtues” (*Shidade* 十大德) (T49, no. 2034, vol. 12, p. 104 and T50, no. 2060, vol. 2, p. 434). As a result, the process of proofreading and translating the scriptures became more rigorous and thorough. The translation team also expanded in size, with dozens of translation assistants, contributing to the grand scale of their work. These developments laid a solid foundation for the highly skilled translation assembly that flourished in the Tang Dynasty.

One notable example is the translation team led by Jñānaśrīmitra 闍那崛多 (523–600). Jñānaśrīmitra, accompanied by his teacher Jñānayaśas 闍那耶舍 and fellow student Jñānagupta 耶舍崛多, arrived in China with the goal of promoting Buddhism and translating scriptures during the reign of Emperor Ming of the Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581). However, when Emperor Wu of the Northern Zhou Dynasty abolished Buddhism, Jñānaśrīmitra and other monks refused to return to secular life and sought refuge among the Turks to continue spreading Buddhist teachings. It was only when Emperor Wen of the Sui Dynasty assumed power that Jñānaśrīmitra was summoned back to the capital of Daxing to oversee the translation work (T49, no. 2034, vol. 12, p. 104).

Jñānaśrīmitra’s team included several translation assistants, such as Dharmagupta 達摩笈多 (?-619), a renowned translator of the Sui Dynasty known for his extensive translations. Gao Tiannu 高天奴 and Gao Heren 高和仁, two laymen brothers, also provided assistance in translating Sanskrit texts. The Ten Great Virtues, monk officials selected by the court for their virtue and talent, played a crucial role in reviewing the logical coherence of the translations. They included Sengxiu 僧休, Facan 法粲, Fajing 法經, Huicang 慧藏, Hongzun 洪遵 (530–608), Huiyuan 慧遠 (523–592), Fazuan 法纂, Senghui 僧暉, Mingmu 明穆, and Tanqian 曇遷 (543–608). Mingmu, one of the Ten Great Virtues of the Sui Dynasty, together with Yancong 彦琮, compared the Sanskrit and Chinese scriptures to ensure accuracy and oversaw the overall translation process (T49, no. 2034, vol. 12, p. 104 and T50, no. 2060, vol. 2, p. 434). Yancong, a prominent scripture translator of the Sui Dynasty, possessed exceptional linguistic skills, fluency in both Chinese and Sanskrit, and actively participated in translation affairs at the capital. His contributions to Buddhist translation theory, including “Eight Preconditions” (*Babei* 八備) and “Ten Rules” (*Shitiao* 十條), have survived as significant research materials in Chinese translation history.

The translation team led by Jñānaśrīmitra exemplifies the Sui Dynasty’s new and improved translation approach. While inheriting the collaborative translation model

of earlier eras, the Sui Dynasty teams introduced significant enhancements. They established clear divisions of labor and implemented a hierarchical system. The chief translator handled the initial translation, while a group of scholars reviewed the logical coherence and authenticity of the translations. Another group ensured accuracy by comparing the translations with the original scriptures. This rigorous and systematic translation process guaranteed high-quality translations.

2.2 The Development History of Large-Scale Translation Teams

Prior to the Tang Dynasty, alongside small-scale translation teams, another model for collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures emerged known as “large-scale translation teams.” These teams developed and flourished during the Eastern Jin, the Sixteen Kingdoms, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties, presenting distinct characteristics:

- A. **Extensive participation:** Large-scale translation teams involved a significant number of participants, often ranging from hundreds to over a thousand. These participants comprised monks and Buddhist scholars from diverse regions.
- B. **Two vital stages in the translation process:** The translation process in these teams consisted of two primary parts: Translation and collaborative review. While the chief translator handled the actual translation into Chinese, the hundreds or thousands of assistant translators primarily engaged in the collaborative review phase.
- C. **Collaborative review:** The collaborative review process within the large-scale translation teams was more than a mere comparison between the original text and the translated version or revising Chinese sentences. It incorporated scriptural debate as a key activity. The chief translator would lecture on the initial Chinese translation, while the assistant translators listened attentively. If any ambiguities arose, the assistants would promptly ask questions, and the chief translator would provide clarifications. Through this iterative process of questioning and answering, collective wisdom was harnessed to identify unclear sections in the translation, align it with the understanding of Chinese Buddhist practitioners, and employ suitable translation strategies for corrections. Moreover, this platform served as an opportunity to disseminate the new translation by combining translation with lectures. Such a distinctive translation procedure characterized the large-scale translation teams.

During the Eastern Jin, the Sixteen Kingdoms, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, four notable large-scale translation teams emerged, each playing a significant role in the translation of Buddhist scriptures. The details of the teams are as follows:

2.2.1 *The Large-Scale Translation Team in the Later Qin*

During the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms period, the Later Qin emerged as one of the separatist forces in the north. Founded by Yao Chang 姚萇 (330–393, reigned 384–393), a general from the Qiang tribe, the Later Qin replaced the Former Qin regime led by Fu Jian 苻堅 (338–385, reigned 357–385). Despite its relatively short reign, the Later Qin's second emperor, Yao Xing 姚興 (366–416, reigned 394–416), was a devoted Buddhist who played a major role in promoting the translation of Buddhist scriptures (T51, no. 2068, vol. 7, 80). Under Yao Xing's patronage, large-scale translation teams were established, attracting Buddhist scholars from various regions to assist in the translation and interpretation of sūtras in Chang'an, the capital city of the Later Qin.

The translation initiatives of the Later Qin era achieved remarkable productivity, notably the works of Kumārajīva, which have reached the status of classics and continue to exert a profound and enduring influence to the present day. Looking back at that era, several significant large-scale translation centers emerged, led by Kumārajīva, Buddhayaśas 佛陀耶舍, and Puṇyatāra 弗若多羅, among which Kumārajīva's team was the most prominent. The following provides details about Kumārajīva's translation work.

Kumārajīva, an eminent translator of the Buddhist tradition during medieval China, significantly contributed to the propagation of Mahāyāna Buddhism with his extensive and impactful translations. Originally from the Kingdom of Kucha, Kumārajīva hailed from a family of prime ministers and embraced monastic life at a young age under the influence of his mother. He possessed extensive knowledge of the Tripiṭaka, initially studying Theravāda before dedicating himself to the promotion of Mahāyāna Buddhism, earning the respect of several monarchs in the Western Regions.

Later, Fu Jian, the emperor of the Former Qin, dispatched Lü Guang 呂光 (338–399) to invite Kumārajīva to his kingdom to propagate Buddhism. However, following Fu Jian's defeat in the Battle of Fei River, the Former Qin regime disintegrated. Upon hearing this news, Lü Guang declared himself the king of a new kingdom known as the Later Liang in the Hexi area. Unfortunately, Lü Guang's lack of appreciation for Buddhism left Kumārajīva without the means to spread its teachings, compelling him to wait patiently for an opportune moment to propagate the Dharma.

Soon after, Yao Chang established the Later Qin regime in Chang'an. Yao Xing, the second ruler of the Later Qin, was enthusiastic about promoting Buddhism. He extended a warm invitation to Kumārajīva to translate Buddhist scriptures and received him with the highest honors as an imperial consultant. After Yao Xing launched a military campaign and defeated the Later Liang, Kumārajīva finally arrived in Chang'an during the early years of the Hongshi 弘始 era (399–416), commencing his work on translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese with Yao Xing's staunch support.

According to historical records of the translation of Buddhist sūtras during the Later Qin period, Kumārajīva's translation work during the Hongshi era greatly benefited from Yao Xing's patronage. Moreover, Kumārajīva discovered numerous discrepancies in the existing translations of Buddhist scriptures, which he deemed inconsistent with the original Sanskrit texts. Consequently, he ardently promoted the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese.

Kumārajīva's large-scale translation team was situated in various locations in Chang'an, including the Great Monastery (*Changandasi* 長安大寺), the Thatched Cottage Monastery (*Caotangsi* 草堂寺), and the Serenity Garden (*Xiaoyao yuan* 逍遙園). The number of participants ranged from several hundred to over a thousand. For instance, the preface to the *Brahmajālasūtra* 梵網經 reveals that Kumārajīva and "over 3000 learned monks" (義學沙門三千餘僧) collaborated in the translation of the scriptures at the Thatched Cottage Monastery (T24, no. 1484, vol. 1, 997).

In addition, the preface to the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* 大智度論 mentions that Yao Xing gathered more than 500 monks and scholars from the capital to undertake a translation project at the Serenity Garden on the Wei River. The emperor himself participated in the translation of Buddhist scriptures alongside Kumārajīva's team. The following excerpt is taken from the original text:

In the third year of Emperor Qin's reign, Kumārajīva completed his journey from Guzang to Chang'an on the twentieth day of the twelfth month. The Emperor of Qin, with an open mind, had already prepared for the translation of Buddhist texts. His heart was filled with more than just joy upon Kumārajīva's arrival. [...] He gathered monks and scholars from the capital, commanding over 500 to assemble at the Serenity Garden on the Wei River. [...] He participated in examining the profound chapters and sought the correct names in the Sanskrit originals; he consulted on the key points, laying a foundation for future translations. (T24, no. 1509, vol. 1, 57)

Furthermore, during the translation of the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* 大品般若經, Yao Xing personally participated in the translation process and commissioned more than 800 monks, including scholars from various regions, to undertake the translation project at the Serenity Garden (T55, no. 2145, vol. 14, 101).

In summary, the Later Qin period marked a pivotal moment in Buddhist translation, as Emperor Yao Xing sponsored the formation of extensive translation teams in Chang'an, led by the renowned scholar Kumārajīva and other distinguished Buddhist experts. These teams attracted hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of monks and scholars who collaborated on translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. The efforts of Kumārajīva and his assistant translators greatly contributed to the dissemination of Mahāyāna Buddhism in China and left a lasting impact on the development of Chinese Buddhism.³

³ To further explore the specific translation activities at the Chang'an Translation Center by Kumārajīva, please refer to Siu Sai-cheong's 蕭世昌 *Jiumoluoshi de Chang'an Yichang* 鳩摩羅什的長安譯場 [Kumarajiva's Translation Site in Chang'an], published by Fo Guang Culture in Kaohsiung in 2010.

2.2.2 *The Large-Scale Translation Team in the Eastern Jin Dynasty*

The translation activities conducted at the large translation center of the Eastern Jin Dynasty, especially the translation of the *Avataṃsakasūtra* 華嚴經 by Buddhahadra 佛馱跋陀羅 (359–429) and his team, represent a significant chapter in the history of Buddhism in China. As a renowned monk from the Sixteen Kingdoms period, Buddhahadra played a focal role as the lead translator in this monumental endeavor.

Buddhahadra was a dedicated practitioner who embarked on a journey from North India to China, enduring numerous hardships along the way. His encounter with Kumārajīva, who was translating scriptures in Chang'an, was akin to a reunion of old friends. However, due to disputes in the translation team, Buddhahadra eventually relocated to the Jin territory, where he continued his preaching and received support from both monastic and lay communities.

Establishing a significant translation center at the capital of the Jin Dynasty, Buddhahadra and his team took on the task of translating the Mahāyāna canon, specifically the *Avataṃsakasūtra*. The translation process involved diligent steps and the collaboration of numerous individuals. The center was situated in the Daochang Monastery (*Daochang Si* 道場寺), established by the distinguished nobleman and military leader Xie Shi 謝石 (327–388), during the fourteenth year of the Yixi era 義熙 (418) (T9, no. 278, vol. 60, 788).

The translation of the *Avataṃsakasūtra* was a complex undertaking. In the initial step, Buddhahadra recited the sūtra while holding the original Sanskrit text, which was a 36,000-verse manuscript brought from the Uḍḍiyāna Kingdom by Zhi Faling 支法領. The second step involved the recording of Buddhahadra's Chinese interpretation by the Buddhist translator Faye 法業. In addition, the translation center included over a hundred individuals, including Huiyan 慧嚴 and Huiyi 慧義, who worked diligently to ensure the accuracy and fidelity of the translation, bridging the gap between Chinese and Sanskrit (T55, no. 2145, vol. 14, 104).

The challenging translation work reached its successful conclusion on the tenth day of the sixth month, in the second year of the Yuanxi 元熙 period. The translated text was carefully edited and proofread, resulting in the compilation of the sixty-volume *Avataṃsakasūtra*. The translation process, along with the names of the translators and patrons, was documented in the postscript of the sūtra (T55, no. 2145, vol. 9, 61).

The profound influence of the Eastern Jin Dynasty's expansive translation center, epitomized by its rendition of the *Avataṃsakasūtra*, was transformative and far-reaching. It marked a significant milestone in the transmission and integration of Buddhism from India into Chinese culture. The teachings and themes of the sūtra have shaped the development of Chinese Buddhism and influenced Buddhist thought and practice in East Asia, giving rise to the Huayan school of Buddhism.

2.2.3 *The Large-Scale Translation Team in the Northern Liang*

During the Northern Liang period, two prominent translation teams were established in the capital city of Guzang. These centers were founded by Dharmakṣema and Buddhavarman 浮陀跋摩 respectively, and Dharmakṣema's team played a vital role in the translation of Buddhist scriptures.

Dharmakṣema, hailing from Central India, began his Buddhist studies at a young age under the guidance of Dharmayaśas 達摩耶舍. His exceptional intelligence and eloquence in expounding on scriptures earned him respect among his peers. Initially, he focused on studying Theravāda and the Pañcavidyā, but later delved deeper into Mahāyāna Buddhism with the aim of spreading its teachings widely. By the age of twenty, he had recited over two million words from both Theravāda and Mahāyāna scriptures. Dharmakṣema gained particular renown for his mastery of mantras and became known throughout the Western Regions as the “Great Mantra Master” (*Dazhoushi* 大咒師) (T55, no. 2145, vol. 14, 102–103).

Dharmakṣema's aspiration was to propagate the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* 大般涅槃經 and various Bodhisattva precepts. However, the Kucha Kingdom in the Western Regions adhered to Theravāda Buddhism, posing challenges to the dissemination of these teachings. Consequently, Dharmakṣema ventured eastward to Guzang, the capital of the Northern Liang Kingdom in Hexi. Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜 (368–433, reign 401–433), the ruler of the Northern Liang, was deeply committed to the Dharma and supported Dharmakṣema's efforts to translate these scriptures into Chinese. After spending three years studying Chinese, Dharmakṣema established a large-scale translation center and commenced the translation of Buddhist texts.

Dharmakṣema adopted a collaborative approach to Buddhist scripture translation. He initiated the translation with the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and subsequently worked on numerous Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures. The preface to the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* describes the process as follows:

Dharmakṣema, a monk from India, was a Brahmin hailing from Central India. Endowed with great talents, sharp intellect, and eloquence, he possessed a comprehensive understanding of both the internal and external aspects of Buddhist teachings. Initially arriving in Dunhuang, he resided there for several years. The noble Juqu King of Hexi, a man of hidden virtues who established a prosperous kingdom, was always devoted to spreading the Dharma and establishing a city of enlightenment. It was through fate that the scriptures and prophecies arrived from afar. Once Dharmakṣema arrived here, on the twenty-third day of the tenth month in the tenth year of Xuanshi era, the King of Hexi encouraged him to undertake the translation. Holding the Sanskrit text in his hand, Dharmakṣema recited the words in Chinese. His sharp intellect and deep reverence for the Dharma were evident, and he meticulously and respectfully translated the text. He conducted thorough research on the original text and diligently endeavored to preserve its essence. His only regret was that the Sanskrit version was incomplete and not fully prepared. (T12, no. 374, vol. 1, 365)

According to the *Chu Sangzang Ji Ji* 出三藏記集 (*A Collection of Records on the Tripiṭaka*), the account of the translation process is as follows:

Mengxun, deeply committed to the Dharma and its propagation, requested that the scriptures be made available. However, Dharmakṣema, not yet fluent in the local language and lacking an assistant interpreter, was concerned about potentially distorting the teachings and initially declined. He dedicated three years to studying the language before embarking on the translation into Chinese. During this time, the monks Huisong and Daolang resided in Hexi and shared a deep respect for the propagation of the Dharma. They assisted in translating the Sanskrit text, with Huisong serving as the note-taker. Numerous laypeople and monks posed questions and doubts regarding the new translation, which Dharmakṣema promptly resolved. Huisong and Daolang requested further translations, leading to the translation of multiple works. (T55, no. 2145, vol. 14, 103)

Furthermore, the *Gaosengzhuan* 高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*) provides the following account:

Juqu Mengxun, the King of Hexi, gained control over the Liang territory and declared himself king. Upon hearing of Dharmakṣema's reputation, he invited him and treated him with great hospitality. Mengxun was fervently devoted to the Dharma and its propagation, desiring to make the scriptures available. However, Dharmakṣema, not yet fluent in the local language and lacking an assistant interpreter, initially declined due to concerns about distorting the teachings. Consequently, he dedicated three years to studying the language and subsequently translated the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* into Chinese. Following this accomplishment, he went on to translate many other sūtras. Dharmakṣema's wisdom and intelligence amazed both monks and laypeople, as he adeptly addressed their doubts and questions. (T50, no. 2059, vol. 2, 336)

These historical records reveal that Dharmakṣema's team operated as a well-organized translation center in the Hexi region. He led the translation efforts, supported by Huisong 慧嵩 and Daolang 道朗, while numerous other monks and laypeople actively participated in discussions and debates. The translation work followed a systematic approach, ensuring the quality and accuracy of the translated scriptures.⁴

2.2.4 *The Large-Scale Translation Team in the Southern Song Dynasty*

The large-scale translation team of the Southern Song Dynasty were led by Gunabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394–468), a Brahmin from Central India who dedicated himself to the study of the Dharma. After leaving his non-Buddhist family, he pursued ordination and immersed himself in the Tripiṭaka, initially focusing on Theravāda teachings and later delving into Mahāyāna Buddhism. Gunabhadra's profound understanding of the scriptures and his ability to eloquently explain them even led to the conversion of his own parents to Buddhism. With the goal of propagating the Dharma, Gunabhadra set out to travel eastward and eventually arrived in Guangzhou via a sea route in the twelfth year of Emperor Wen's reign in the Song Dynasty (435). His arrival was reported to the royal court, and he was warmly welcomed and invited to the capital, marking the beginning of translation work in China.

⁴ See Siu (2014).

Supported by the royal court and the monastic community, Gunabhadra commenced translating scriptures. He began with the translation of the *Saṃyuktāgamasūtra* 雜阿含經 at the Jetavana Monastery (*Qiyuansi* 祇洹寺), followed by the *Mahābherihārakaparivartasūtra* 法鼓經 at the Dong'an Monastery (Dongansi 東安寺). Later, he translated the *Śrīmālādevīsīṃhanādasūtra* 勝鬘經 and the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 楞伽經 in Danyang County. These translation activities are recorded in the *Chu Sangzang Ji Ji* 出三藏記集 (*A Collection of Records on the Tripiṭaka*):

Upon Gunabhadra's arrival in Guangzhou, Governor Che Lang reported the news to Emperor Wen, who sent a delegation to welcome Gunabhadra. Once in the capital, Gunabhadra was greeted by monks Huiyan and Huiguan at Xinting on the outskirts of the city. Despite the language barrier, there was great joy and reverence among those who interacted with him. Initially staying at the Jetavana Monastery, Gunabhadra was soon invited and highly respected by Emperor Wen, attracting scholars and monks from all over the capital. Princes Yikang and Yixuan, sons of Emperor Wen, also studied under Gunabhadra. At the request of the monastic community, Gunabhadra began his translation work at the Jetavana Monastery, with over 700 disciples following him. Monk Baoyun served as the interpreter, while Hui Guan recorded the translations. Through extensive discussions and debates, they captured the essence of the texts, ensuring the accuracy and understanding of the translations. Later, Prince Qiao invited Gunabhadra to Jingzhou, where they established a new monastery and translated numerous other texts. (T55, no. 2145, vol. 14, 105)

The historical record emphasizes that Gunabhadra's translations were often conducted at large-scale translation center. As Gunabhadra initially did not understand Chinese, he primarily focused on explaining the original texts while Baoyun 寶雲 translated them into Chinese. Huiguan 慧觀 played a crucial role in recording the translations. This collaborative approach resembled the translation sites led by Kumārajīva and Dharmakṣema, where a large group of assistants actively participated in questioning and refining the initial drafts of the translations. Gunabhadra would address their inquiries, thereby shaping the content to suit the understanding of the Chinese audience. This collaborative model of translation and collation was typical of the large-scale translation efforts during that era.

2.3 Concluding Remarks

The history of team-based Buddhist scripture translation leading up to the Tang Dynasty was characterized by two parallel models: small group collaborations and vast collective assemblies. Each model had its strengths and limitations, but their fusion resulted in innovative approaches that left lasting legacies.

During the Sui Dynasty, the small group approach emerged, with expanded team sizes and specialized roles. This allowed for precise cooperation among individuals with complementary expertise. However, this model sometimes suffered from the limitations of individual translators. On the other hand, the large assembly model that developed during the Sixteen Kingdoms era provided a platform for extensive collective deliberation, debate, and the pooling of wisdom. Hundreds of participants

joined forces to refine draft translations, ensuring their alignment with the understanding of the general public. Nevertheless, organizing such sizable assemblies also posed challenges, including the potential for discord.

The elite translation model in the Tang Dynasty sought to integrate the best aspects of both approaches. It upheld the close collaboration and specialized roles found in small groups, while also embracing the exchange of ideas and inclusivity seen in large assemblies. This synthesis, coupled with selective participation and oversight, created an optimal structure suited for imperial patronage. Although large assemblies eventually declined, their spirit endured and influenced celebrated translations and the formalized Tang model. The ingenuity that drove this evolution highlights how adaptable efforts to balance accuracy and accessibility propelled China's translation achievements during the medieval period.

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⁵ “T” stands for *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, which is a comprehensive collection of the Chinese Buddhist canon. It was published in Tokyo by the Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai from 1924 to 1932. The digitized versions can be accessed via The SAT Daizōkyō Text Database (<https://21dzk.1.u-tokyo.ac.jp/SAT/>) and CBETA Online (<https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/>).

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Chapter 3

Dawn of a New Era: Translation Efforts in Early Tang



Abstract This chapter analyzes the paradigm of the “elite translation team” in the early Tang Dynasty, focusing on the groundbreaking translation approach initiated by Prabhākaramitra, an Indian pioneer of team-based sūtra translation in Tang China. Prabhākaramitra’s approach was later inherited by Xuanzang after his pilgrimage to India and the establishment of a translation organization in Chang’an. Also, this chapter examines how the translation teams of Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang integrated elements from pre-Tang models, strengthened organizational systems, and benefited from imperial patronage to develop a more systematic framework for the collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures. Their efforts paved the way for the formation of imperial translation institutions in the Tang era.

Tracing its origins back to the Eastern Han Dynasty, the tradition of translating Buddhist texts into Chinese underwent significant development over several centuries. By the time of the Sui Dynasty, two main collaborative models had emerged: small-scale translation teams and large-scale translation teams. After the fall of the Sui Dynasty, the Tang Dynasty came to power. During Emperor Gaozu’s reign (566–635, reigned 618–626), although China experienced relative peace, translation activities were yet to fully flourish. It was during the early years of the Zhen-guan 貞觀 era, under Emperor Taizong (598–649, reigned 626–649), that he ordered support for the Indian Buddhist monk Prabhākaramitra (565–633) in organizing a translation team. This initiative revitalized the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese and gave rise to a new collaborative translation model, which is called the “elite translation team” in this monograph.

The “elite translation team” concept encompasses: (1) a foundation rooted in the small group translation structure of the Sui Dynasty, which thoroughly integrates translation steps from small-scale translation teams that emerged during the Eastern Han, the Three Kingdoms, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties; (2) a fusion of the emphasis on idea-sharing and collective deliberation present in previous large-scale translation teams, resulting in a more comprehensive process of proof-reading and editing translated texts; and (3) a constraint on the number of translators, limited to between ten and several dozen individuals, who are carefully selected by

the imperial court from the most distinguished Buddhist scholars. This approach ultimately leads to a new collaborative model characterized by a clear division of labor and refinement, composed of translation elites. Spearheaded and promoted by Prabhākaramitra in Chang'an, this marked the beginning of the elite translation team model. In time, it was adopted by Xuanzang and subsequent generations of translators who continued to promote, adjust, and refine the model. This model eventually became the primary translation organization of the Tang Dynasty, a subject that will be examined in detail in the subsequent sections.

This chapter focuses on the establishment of the translation team led by Prabhākaramitra during the early Tang period, followed by an analysis of how Xuanzang's elite translation team inherited and developed this legacy. It reveals how the two generations of Buddhist masters laid the foundation for the earliest official translation system in the Tang Dynasty.

3.1 Prabhākaramitra's Elite Translation Team

3.1.1 *Founding the Premier Elite Translation Team in the Early Tang Dynasty*

During the initial years of Emperor Taizong's reign, Prabhākaramitra, with the backing of the imperial court, directed the first team-based Buddhist scripture translation project in Chang'an after the founding of the Tang Dynasty in 618. This elite translation team was established before the acclaimed translation team led by Xuanzang, and it significantly impacted the collaborative translation efforts in subsequent generations.

Prabhākaramitra, the chief translator, hailed from Central India and belonged to the Brahmin caste. At the age of ten, he became a monk and followed his master's guidance. Through tireless recitation of scriptures, strict adherence to precepts, and seeking knowledge from renowned teachers across the Western Regions, he eventually mastered both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism.

Prabhākaramitra, along with his disciples, propagated Buddhist teachings extensively, guiding border tribes yet to embrace Buddhism. His reputation reached its peak when he arrived in the territory of Yehu Khan 葉護可汗. In 626, during the ninth year of Wude 武德, the King of Gaoping 高平王 requested Prabhākaramitra to enter the Tang Dynasty and promote Buddhism. The imperial court granted approval, and Prabhākaramitra accompanied the king to the capital. By 627, Prabhākaramitra reached Guanzhong, settled in Chang'an, and enjoyed the support of the imperial court.

Emperor Taizong, who believed that "everything is void, and no discourse is more essential than the Buddhist canon" (諸有非樂, 物我皆空, 眷言真要, 無過釋典) (T50, no. 2060, vol. 3, 439–440), endorsed Prabhākaramitra's translation project at the Daxingshan Monastery. This significant event took place in 629, during the third

year of Zhenguan, marking the inception of the premier elite translation team in the Tang Dynasty.

3.1.2 *Assembling the Team for Prabhākaramitra's Translation Center*

Prior to initiating the translation process in Prabhākaramitra's translation team, the primary focus was on selecting highly skilled translators and assembling a capable translation team. In early medieval China, there were no stringent requirements for participants in collaborative scripture translation projects. However, as standards gradually emerged during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, Yancong of the Sui Dynasty introduced the "Eight Preconditions" (*babei*八備), outlining essential qualifications for Buddhist translators (T54, no. 2131, vol. 1, 1067).

By the time of the Tang Dynasty, greater emphasis was placed on the moral character and talents of translators. Those who entered the court for translation work were expected to possess specific abilities that distinguished them from large-scale translation teams, where both monastic and laypeople could assist in translation tasks. Consequently, when forming Prabhākaramitra's team, the imperial court dispatched officials to recruit translators who embodied both virtue and learning, as historical records state: "by imperial decree, seek those with great virtue" (下詔所司, 搜揚碩德) (T13, no. 402, vol. 1, 536). Translators were expected to "be well-versed in the three teachings and proficient in the ten branches" (兼閑三教, 備舉十科), which implied they should have extensive knowledge in both Buddhism and secular subjects (T13, no. 402, vol. 1, 536). The "Ten Branches" (*Shike*十科), akin to the "Ten Rules" mentioned by Yancong in the Sui Dynasty, dictated that translators should be familiar with syntax, dialogue, terminology, scriptures, hymns, mantra, chapter titles, specialization, character components, and pronunciation (T54, no. 2131, vol. 1, 1067). The translation team was limited to nineteen members, and only those who successfully passed the selection process could join the esteemed translation team.

3.1.3 *The First Project of Prabhākaramitra's Translation Team*

Once the translation team was assembled, Prabhākaramitra led the translation efforts in the capital, successfully completing three Buddhist texts: *Ratnaketuparivarta* 寶星陀羅尼經, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 般若燈論釋, and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* 大乘莊嚴經論. The prefaces of these translations offer in-depth insights into the translation process, shedding light on the inner workings of the earliest elite translation team. As detailed in the preface of the *Ratnaketuparivarta* authored by Falin法琳 (571–639):

Prabhākaramitra, a Tripiṭaka master from Central India, journeyed to the Tang Dynasty to propagate the Dharma, braving various dangers and difficulties to traverse the Pamir Mountains. During the first year of Zhenguan (627), he reached the capital and garnered imperial support. The imperial court assembled nineteen virtuous and knowledgeable translators proficient in the three teachings and ten branches. At Daxingshan Monastery, Prabhākaramitra and his team engaged in face-to-face translation. Śramaṇa Huicheng and others verified the meanings, Śramaṇa Xuanmo and others undertook the translation, while Śramaṇa Huiming, Falin, and others penned the manuscript. The team attentively reviewed and refined the text, confirming the meanings, and finalizing the translation. The work commenced in the third year of Zhenguan (629) and concluded in the fourth year of Zhenguan (630). The translation spans ten volumes and thirteen chapters, totaling 63,882 words. (T13, no. 402, vol. 1, 536)

The translation process unfolded at the Daxingshan Monastery, where Prabhākaramitra and his team carried out “face-to-face translation” (相對翻譯), announcing the original text as the initial step. Subsequently, Huicheng 慧乘 and others verified the Sanskrit text, ensuring the content accurately reflected Prabhākaramitra’s description. The translation into Chinese, spearheaded by Xuanmo 玄謨 and others, then commenced. Huiming 慧明, Falin, and others were tasked with composing the manuscript, thoroughly reviewing, and revising the text, and confirming that the translation accurately conveyed the original text’s meanings. The finalized version was documented after multiple revisions, completed between the third and fourth years of Zhenguan (629–630). This demonstrates that the first elite translation project in the early Tang Dynasty refined and improved upon the previous collaborative translation model, reintroducing the verification step for the original text and providing more comprehensive and precise explanations of the writing and editing work.

3.1.4 *The Second Project of Prabhākaramitra’s Translation Team*

The second translation project undertaken by Prabhākaramitra and his team resulted in another version of Nāgārjuna’s *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* and an accompanying commentary that distinguishes the interpretation by Bodhisattva of Clear Discrimination and Discernment (*Fenbieming Pusa* 分別明菩薩). The preface of Prabhākaramitra’s translation of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* provides a detailed account of the translation process:

In the fourth year of Zhenguan (630), after completing the translation of *Ratnaketuparivarta*, Prabhākaramitra moved to the Shengguang Monastery. Many learned Śramaṇas were selected to assist with the translation, including Huicheng (555-630), Huilang, Fachang (567-645), Tanzang (567-635), Zhishou (567-635), Huiming, Daoyue (568-636), Sengbian (568-642), Sengzhen, Zhijie, Wenshun, Falin (571-639), Lingjia, Huizi (580-636), and Huijing (578-?). Fifteen selected translators were in charge of translating the original text announced by the Tripiṭaka master into Chinese. Śramaṇa Xuanmo, Sengjia, and the Vinaya master Gupta, who is the Tripiṭaka master’s schoolmate, collaborated as proofreaders and examiners to review and ensure the accuracy of the translation. (T30, no. 1566, vol. 1, 51)

The team worked diligently, day and night, to thoroughly examine the subtle meanings of the text, remove the unnecessary parts, and preserve the essence of the original work. This became the core strategy for translation, emphasizing the importance of proofreading and editing the translated text, just as in the large-scale translation teams. However, the number of participants was significantly reduced, limited to translators appointed by the imperial court.

In addition to the monk translators, court officials Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (579–648), Du Zhenglun 杜正倫, and Li Xiaogong 李孝恭 (591–640) jointly oversaw the translation process, known as “supervising translation” (*Jiānyì* 監譯). The famous Buddhist official Xiao Jing 蕭瑒 also provided continuous support. This continued the translation supervision system that appeared during the Southern and Northern Dynasties and the Sui Dynasty. The final version of the text was completed in the sixth year of Zhenguan (632).

3.1.5 *The Third Project of Prabhākaramitra's Translation Team*

In the fourth year of the Zhenguan, the translation team led by Prabhākaramitra not only worked on the translation of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* but also focused on the *Mahāyānasūtrāḷḷāḷḷā*. The translation process was documented by Li Baiyao 李百藥 (565–648) in the preface to the translated *Mahāyānasūtrāḷḷāḷḷā*:

In the fourth year of Zhenguan, following the imperial decree, Fang Xuanling, the Assistant Minister of the Left of the Department of State Affairs and Duke of Xingguo, and Du Zhenglun, a Gentleman of the Horse and acting Principal of the Crown Prince's Eastern Palace, were appointed to oversee the translation. Buddhist masters Huicheng, Huilang, Fachang, Zhijie, Tanzang, Zhishou, Daoyue, Huiming, Sengbian, Sengzhen, Falin, Lingjia, Huizi, Huijing, Xuanmo, and Sengjia were gathered at the Shengguang Monastery to carry out the translation work. Furthermore, the imperial court appointed Xiao Jing, the Minister of the Imperial Treasury and Lord of Lanling, to supervise the editing and collation of the translated texts. Prabhākaramitra said, “In foreign countries, this work is regarded as the basis for both Mahāyāna and Theravāda studies. If one does not understand this work, they cannot propagate the Dharma.” Therefore, the team devoted themselves to the study and translation of the text. Among the translators, Huijing was especially skilled at collating the text, while Xuanmo was adept at understanding the regional dialect and interpreting the meaning of the text, ensuring accuracy in the translation. The work was finally completed in the seventh year of Zhenguan, consisting of thirteen volumes and twenty-four chapters. (T31, no. 1604, vol. 1, 590)

From the preface, we can see that in addition to Prabhākaramitra, the main translator, the translation team also included Huicheng 慧乘, Huilang 慧朗, Fachang 法常, Zhijie 智解, Tanzang 曇藏, Zhishou 智首, Daoyue 道岳, Huiming 惠明, Sengbian 僧辯, Sengzhen 僧珍, Falin 法琳, Lingjia 靈佳, Huizi 慧隄, Huijing 慧淨, Xuanmo 玄謨, and Sengjia 僧伽. These translators were similar to the team mentioned above, with Huijing being particularly skilled at collating the text and Xuanmo contributing greatly to the understanding and interpretation of the text. Several court officials

also assisted in the revision of the translated scripture, with Fang Xuanling and Du Zhenglun responsible for overseeing the translation, and Xiao Jing supervising the editing and collation process.

From this information, we can see that the role of “collating the text” (*Zhuiwen* 綴文) first appeared in the translation team led by Prabhākaramitra, and the task of refining the translated text was established as part of the translation process. This further systematized the collaborative workflow in the translation team. Li Baiyao’s account also shows that during the early Tang Dynasty, the supervisory role of court officials was no longer limited to coordinating administrative affairs and supplying offerings for the Buddhist translators. They also participated in the revision of the translated text alongside the Buddhist monks, reflecting a further evolution of the roles and responsibilities within the translation organization (Table 3.1).

3.1.6 *Exploring Additional Historical Sources for Prabhākaramitra’s Translation Process Beyond Prefaces*

In addition to the above prefaces, the biography of Prabhākaramitra in the *Xu Gaosen-gzhuàn* 續高僧傳 (*The Continuation of Biographies of Eminent Monks*) provides insight into the formation, size, and overall division of labor within the early translation teams. According to the biography, Huicheng and others were responsible for verifying the meaning, while Xuanmo and others focused on language translation. Huizi, Huijing, Huiming, and Falin contributed to composing the text, with Fang Xuanling and Du Zhenglun assisting in scrutinizing and finalizing the translation. Xiao Jing oversaw and safeguarded the process. Provisions for the translators were all provided by the imperial court. The biography’s content can be cross-referenced with historical materials in the prefaces, offering a complementary and illustrative account of the operations and responsibilities within the translation teams led by Prabhākaramitra. The original text is as follows:

(Prabhākaramitra and the nineteen translators) began the translation work at the Daxingshan Monastery. Monk Huicheng and others were responsible for verifying the meaning, Monk Xuanmo and others for translating the language, and Monk Huizi, Huijing, Huiming, and Falin for composing the text. In addition, the imperial decree appointed Fang Xuanling, the Assistant Minister of the Left of the Department of State Affairs and Duke of Xingguo, and Du Zhenglun, a Gentleman of the Horse and acting Principal of the Crown Prince’s Eastern Palace, to assist in the scrutiny and finalization of the translated text. Xiao Jing, the Minister of the Imperial Treasury and Lord of Lanling, supervised and monitored the process, with various government departments providing provisions and support for the translators’ needs. (T50, no. 2060, vol. 3, 440)

Table 3.1 Overview of Prabhākaramitra's translation projects in the early Tang Dynasty

	First project	Second project	Third project
Texts translated	<i>Ratnaketuparivarta</i>	<i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i> (new version with commentary)	<i>Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra</i>
Translation period	629–630 (Zhenguan, 3rd–4th year)	630–632 (Zhenguan, 4th–6th year)	632–633 (Zhenguan, 4th–7th year)
Main contributors	Prabhākaramitra (chief), Huicheng, Xuanmo, Huiming, Falin	Prabhākaramitra (chief), Huicheng, Huilang, Fachang, Tanzang, Zhishou, Huiming, Daoyue, Sengbian, Sengzhen, Zhijie, Wenshun, Falin, Lingjia, Huizi, Huijing, Xuanmo, Sengjia, Gupta	Prabhākaramitra (chief), same team as the second project with the addition of Li Baiyao for documentation
Translation location	Daxingshan Monastery	Shengguang Monastery	Shengguang Monastery
Process description	Face-to-face translation, verification of meanings by Huicheng and others, manuscript composition by Huiming and others, meticulous text review	Emphasis on proofreading and editing, supervised translation by court officials, reduction in team size for focused quality	In-depth study and translation, collation of text by Huijing, interpretation of regional dialects by Xuanmo, oversight by court officials
Output volume	10 volumes and 13 chapters, totaling 63,882 words	Not specified, but significant due to the inclusion of commentary	13 volumes and 24 chapters
Methodological innovations	Introduction of face-to-face translation, comprehensive review, and refinement of text	Core strategy of thorough examination of text and preservation of essence, continued emphasis on proofreading and editing	First appearance of “collating the text” (Zhuiwen 綴文), refining the translated text as part of the process
Official oversight	Imperial support garnered, with no specific officials mentioned in this project	Supervising translation by Fang Xuanling, Du Zhenglun, and Li Xiaogong, continuous support by Xiao Jing	Supervising editing and collation by Xiao Jing, oversight of translation by Fang Xuanling and Du Zhenglun

3.1.7 *The Evolution of Translation Teams and the Legacy of Prabhākaramitra's Elite Translation Approach*

In summary, the rise of elite translation teams under Prabhākaramitra's leadership marked a significant shift in collaborative translation during medieval China. These teams brought refinements in organization, procedures, and roles of translators,

drawing on the strengths of both small-scale translation teams and large-scale translation teams from earlier times. This innovative approach aimed to enhance and advance translation processes.

Notably, after initiating the translation work, Prabhākaramitra proposed to reinstate and restructure large-scale translation teams, building on the foundation of elite translation. Prabhākaramitra believed the Former Qin and Later Qin Dynasties represented the zenith of sūtra translation in early medieval China. According to his view, this period saw the involvement of as many as 3000 translation scholars, who greatly contributed to the dissemination and comprehension of Buddhist texts (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 455). In these large-scale translation teams, scholars collaborated, exchanged ideas, and debated, resulting in more comprehensive and nuanced translations. These collective efforts produced works that gained broader acceptance from the public, as they went beyond the constraints of individual perspectives. Prabhākaramitra regarded this collaborative approach as superior to the elite translation methods, which were frequently limited to a few select translators.

Nonetheless, Prabhākaramitra's proposal faced criticism from his contemporaries, who believed that assembling a large number of people for translation was a means to expand personal influence, attract disciples, exchange favors, and seek fame, rather than truly promoting the dissemination of Buddhism. Furthermore, the unhealthy trend of "selfishness and self-interest" (當世盛德, 自私諸己) in early Tang society raised concerns among the learned that such practices could harm Buddhism (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 455). As a result, reviving the old model became challenging, as it was closely tied to the normative power of society at large.

Ultimately, Prabhākaramitra's vision could not be realized, and it faded away amid public criticism. Nevertheless, Prabhākaramitra's first-generation elite translation team undeniably pioneered a new collaborative translation approach, characterized by more stringent organization and distinct procedural divisions. This approach was inherited by subsequent translators, such as Xuanzang, and became the fundamental operational model for the royal translation teams of the Tang Dynasty. The contribution of Prabhākaramitra's elite translation approach cannot be overlooked.

3.2 Xuanzang's Elite Translation Team

3.2.1 *Xuanzang's Journey to the West and His Language Proficiency*

Prabhākaramitra arrived in China to propagate Buddhism during the early years of the Zhenguan period. Although his time spent translating texts in the capital was brief, the translation model he established laid the groundwork for the elite translation efforts of the Tang Dynasty. Xuanzang's renowned translation team, prominent in the history of Chinese translation, adopted the model established by Prabhākaramitra and engaged in collaborative translation work. Xuanzang was a celebrated Buddhist

translator both within China and abroad. His journey to the West to obtain scriptures has been passed down through the ages, with numerous original historical documents recording his pursuit of Buddhist teachings. Extensive research has been conducted on this topic in later generations, making further elaboration unnecessary here. This section focuses on the biographical and historical examination of the translator's life, with an emphasis on Xuanzang's language learning. The aim is to explore when the master began learning languages of the Silk Road region (such as Sanskrit) to facilitate seamless communication in the Western Regions and enable him to translate scriptures from Sanskrit to Chinese.

According to existing historical materials, Xuanzang became a monk and studied Buddhism under his elder brother, Master Changjie 長捷法師, from a young age. He visited renowned monks in the Bashu and Jingwu regions, diligently studied the scriptures, and widely preached. However, at that time, he had yet to master Sanskrit. When Xuanzang returned to Chang'an at the beginning of Emperor Taizong's reign, he started learning Sanskrit. The *Jigujin Fodao Lunheng* 集古今佛道論衡 (*A Collection of Buddhist and Taoist Debates Throughout the Ages*) states: "In the early years of Zhenguan, Xuanzang entered the capital, stayed at the Zhuangyan Monastery, and studied Sanskrit" ((玄奘)以貞觀初入關,住莊嚴寺,學梵書語) (T52, no. 2104, vol. 3, 387). Concurrently, Xuanzang prepared to travel abroad with companions to obtain scriptures and petitioned the imperial court for permission. Although permission was not granted, the master continued to actively learn foreign languages, visited foreign communities in the capital, and sought their guidance, preparing to leave the capital when the opportunity arose to fulfill his future needs. The historical record states, "He paused at the capital, extensively visited various foreign communities, learned their languages, and sought instruction everywhere" (頓迹京,廣就諸蕃,遍學書語,行坐尋授) (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 447). Based on this, it can be inferred that Xuanzang had some knowledge of Sanskrit and other Central Asian languages before embarking on his journey to India. Later, as he traveled to Western countries, he constantly interacted with local people, participated in Dharma assemblies, and practiced day after day. After nearly twenty years of experience, he mastered various languages and was able to skillfully translate Buddhist scriptures upon returning to China.

3.2.2 *Debates on Translation Methods and the Formation of the Second-Generation Elite Translation Team*

After over a decade spent collecting scriptures, Xuanzang returned to China on the twenty-fourth day of the first month in the nineteenth year of the Zhenguan era, bearing numerous scriptures and statues. Both the monastic and secular communities warmly welcomed him, with banners and flags lining the streets, creating a grand scene. Upon his return, Xuanzang met with Emperor Taizong to discuss the customs

of the Western Regions and the translation of the scriptures. The *Xu Gaosengzhuàn* 續高僧傳 (*The Continuation of Biographies of Eminent Monks*) recounts the following:

Emperor Taizong eagerly sought Xuanzang's insights and repeatedly issued imperial edicts, urging him to return as soon as possible. However, for various reasons, Xuanzang's return was delayed. Upon arriving at the palace, he proposed a collaborative translation approach and the selection of capable and wise individuals. Emperor Taizong responded: "Master, you are proficient in both Chinese and Sanskrit and are articulate and intelligent. I am concerned that involving too many people with varying abilities might actually compromise the quality of the translations." Xuanzang disagreed, citing previous translations involving 3,000 disciples. These translations were verified by a large audience and widely circulated, helping to prevent doubts and misinterpretations in future generations. Xuanzang persistently requested the recruitment of skilled translators to collaborate on the translation of scriptures. Finally, Emperor Taizong consented, organizing the second-generation elite translation team of the early Tang Dynasty. (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 455)

Though the above passage on translation methodology is brief, it significantly contributes to understanding the history of translating Buddhist scriptures in medieval China. It reveals the contrasting views of non-translators and Buddhist translators on collaborative translation, serving as vital historical material for studying ancient scripture translation. Emperor Taizong, as a non-translator, advocated for a streamlined translation process. He believed translations should be handled by a single individual proficient in both the source and target languages, thereby minimizing inconsistencies and errors. However, Xuanzang held different opinions, sharing similar views with Prabhākaramitra mentioned earlier. Both generations of translators emphasized that collaborative translation could improve the acceptance of translations, promoting not only collective wisdom but also ensuring the best possible translations. More importantly, it allowed the wider community to witness the translation process, confirming its authenticity and avoiding misunderstandings and forgeries in future generations. In ancient times, communication technology was not advanced, so information circulation mainly relied on word of mouth and written records. The more people who witnessed the translation process, the more it could dispel false claims. Therefore, collaborative translation could not only improve translation efficiency but also help promote the circulation and acceptance of translated works. The differing views of translators and non-translators each highlighted the pros and cons of collaborative translation, illustrating the practical implementation of this model in medieval China and aiding in understanding ancient Chinese thought on translating Buddhist scriptures.

3.2.3 *Organizational Structure and Evolution of Xuanzang's Translation Team During the Zhenguan Period*

Xuanzang's translation team began operating toward the end of the Zhenguan era and continued until the early years of Emperor Gaozong's reign (628–683, reigned 649–683). The internal organization underwent changes, refining the collaborative

model and making it more efficient. By integrating Xuanzang's translation records, it is possible to illustrate the operational structure and evolutionary process of the translation team. An examination of Xuanzang's team-based translation activities during the Zhenguan era provides valuable insights. According to the *Cienzhuān* 慈恩傳 (*The Biography of Ci'en*), Xuanzang's translation team was initially established in the Hongfu Monastery, where a specific number of translators were selected to join and translate the scriptures. Among them, twelve were designated as "Eminent Scholars of Proof of Meaning" (*Zhengyi Dade* 證義大德), all of whom were proficient in both Mahāyāna and Theravāda scriptures and highly regarded by their contemporaries. Nine individuals were "Eminent Scholars of Text Composition" (*Zhuiwen Dade* 綴文大德), one was "Eminent Scholar of Lexicography" (*Zixue Dade* 字學大德), and one was "Eminent Scholar of Sanskrit Language and Script" (*Zhengfanyu, fanwen Dade* 證梵語、梵文大德). The tasks were divided systematically, with Fang Xuanling overseeing the translation team's supplies and personnel coordination, executing imperial orders, and ensuring thorough preparation, embodying the characteristics of an elite translation team. The original record is as follows:

In the third month of the year, Xuanzang returned to Chang'an from Luoyang and resided in the Hongfu Monastery. He prepared for the translation work by specifying the required roles, such as proofreaders, writers, and scribes, and submitted a proposal to the Minister of Works, Liangguo Duke Fang Xuanling. Fang Xuanling dispatched officials to arrange for the personnel and supplies according to the proposal, ensuring everything was well-prepared. In the sixth month of the year, twelve highly regarded individuals proficient in both Mahāyāna and Theravāda scriptures arrived, followed by nine "Eminent Scholars of Text Composition," one "Eminent Scholar of Lexicography," and one "Eminent Scholar of Sanskrit Language and Script." Other scribes and personnel responsible for supplies also arrived. (T50, no. 2053, vol. 6, 253-254)

Furthermore, the translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論 in the *Taishō Tripiṭaka* 大正藏 provides detailed information on the names, monasteries, and responsibilities of the monks involved in the translation process, offering valuable insights into the organization of Xuanzang's translation team during the Zhenguan era. The translation of the *Yogācārabhūmi* into Chinese involved multiple steps. Initially, Xuanzang translated the original text into Chinese by himself, as he was proficient in both Chinese and Sanskrit and well-versed in the principles of Yogācāra. This ensured consistency in translation and prevented misunderstandings. In addition, the initial Chinese translation required multiple stages of proofreading and editing, carried out by several collaborating monks: those responsible for the "proof of meaning" (*Zhengyi* 證義) were Wenbei 文備, Shentai 神泰, Daoshen 道深, Faxiang 法祥, Huihui 慧貴, Mingyan 明琰, and Daohong 道洪; "Proof of Sanskrit language" (*Zhengfanyu* 證梵語) was carried out by Xuanmo 玄謨; "Correcting characters" (*Zhengzi* 正字) was done by Mingjun 明濬 and Xuanying 玄應; "Proof of Text" (*Zhengwen* 證文) was managed by Bianji 辨機 (?-649), Jingmai 靖邁, Xingyou 行友, Daozhi 道智, and Xuanzhong 玄忠. Moreover, five monks—Zhiren 知仁, Lingjun 靈馬, Daoguan 道觀, Daozhuo 道卓, and Mingjue 明覺—were in charge of "transcription" (*Bishou* 筆受), while court official Xu Jingzong 許敬宗 oversaw the "review of the translation" (*Jianyue* 監閱). Finally, "Scribes" (*Shushou* 書手)

copied the finalized text, which was then distributed throughout the empire (T30, no. 1579, vol. 100, 881–882). From this, it is evident that Xuanzang's translation team was highly organized and systematic, with more rigorous and specific translation processes and division of labor compared to earlier small-scale translation teams and large-scale translation teams, as well as the first-generation elite translation organization led by Prabhākaramitra.

3.2.4 *Continuation and Transformation of Xuanzang's Translation Team Under Emperor Gaozong*

In 649, at the dawn of the twenty-third year of the Zhenguan era, Emperor Taizong passed away, leaving the throne to Emperor Gaozong. Gaozong remained committed to supporting the translation of Buddhist scriptures and promoting Buddhism, extending further patronage to Xuanzang's translation team, which enabled Xuanzang to devote himself entirely to translating the scriptures. During Emperor Taizong's reign, translation efforts were sometimes interrupted due to the emperor summoning monks for discussions on Dharma and the customs of the Western Regions. In contrast, under Emperor Gaozong's rule, the focus was solely on translation, adhering to a set schedule that persisted into the night when required. This dedication led to the translation of a considerable number of scriptures.

During Emperor Gaozong's reign, Xuanzang's translation team received unwavering support and experienced two notable transformations. First, the emperor assumed responsibility for determining which Buddhist scriptures would be translated. As documented in the *Cienzhuān* 慈恩傳 (*The Biography of Ci'en*), Emperor Gaozong instructed Xuanzang to prioritize translating unavailable scriptures and to postpone working on those already in existence. This strategy established a specific sequence for translating scriptures. At that time, Xuanzang was eager to translate the *Jñānaprasthāna* 發智毘婆沙論, a scripture not yet thoroughly and accurately rendered in China, despite the availability of a previous version. However, due to Emperor Gaozong's directive, the translation of the *Jñānaprasthāna* was delayed. Xuanzang then argued that the scripture was of great importance to scholars and sought special permission to prioritize its translation (T50, no. 2053, vol. 9, 272–273). This intervention in the selection of scriptures for translation marked a significant shift, as emperors from the Eastern Han Dynasty to the Sui Dynasty rarely intervened in such matters.

Secondly, the number of supervising officials assisting with the revision of translations increased. The supervision system, established during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, was inherited by the Sui and Tang Dynasties. Under Emperor Taizong's rule, there were more supervising officials in the imperial translation team than in previous periods. Court officials like Fang Xuanling, Du Zhenglun, and Xiao Jing took up these positions, which had been previously held by monks and monastic officials. Under Emperor Gaozong, the court went further by directing officials such

as Yu Zhining 于志寧 (588–665), Lai Ji 來濟 (610–662), Xu Jingzong 許敬宗, Xue Yuanchao 薛元超 (622–683), and Li Yifu 李義府 (614–666) to regularly review and oversee translation matters. This enabled them to make necessary adjustments to translations, striving for precision in both language and meaning in Xuanzang's translations. If additional scholars were needed, two or three more people could be enlisted. The participation of secular officials in translation marked an unprecedented change (T50, no. 2052, 218 & T50, no. 2053, vol. 8, 266).¹

In light of the increased involvement of the imperial court in the process of Buddhist scripture translation, Xuanzang explained that “although the translation of scriptures is done by monks, their value ultimately depends on the support of court officials” (譯經雖位在僧, 光價終憑朝貴) (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 457). This implied that the greater the involvement and support of high-ranking officials in the translation process, the more it could be demonstrated that the translations were authentic and endorsed by the Tang court, thereby boosting their acceptance. This would encourage the general public to have faith in and uphold the scriptures, facilitating the circulation of new translations, which otherwise would not “shine far and wide” (不足光遠) (T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 457). This rationale is consistent with Xuanzang's advocacy for collaborative translation, aiming to harness the power of a third party to authenticate the accuracy of translation efforts, elevate the status of translated scriptures, and ultimately promote the dissemination of these texts.

3.2.5 *Xuanzang's Unique Approach to Translation*

Historical sources provide insights into the unique characteristics of Xuanzang's translations, which can be summarized into two main points:

- A. **Xuanzang's expertise in both Sanskrit and Chinese:** Xuanzang excelled at translating directly from the original texts, requiring only minor modifications from the monks assisting him. This approach yielded high-quality translations that captivated readers. In contrast, previous translation missions often faced language barriers, leading to collaborative works that involved multiple contributors. These translations frequently displayed chaotic sentence arrangements, which resulted in omissions and insertions throughout the text, causing important expressions and concepts to be overlooked or misplaced. Xuanzang's exceptional skills and profound understanding of the scriptures allowed him to act as the principal translator, referencing the original text while reciting the Chinese translation. His work was described as “decisive in meaning, and eloquent in language”

¹ After Xuanzang received Emperor Gaozong's special mission to assist in the translation of Buddhist scriptures, he personally submitted a letter of thanks. This missive can be found in *Si Shamen Xuanzang Shangbiao Ji* 寺沙門玄奘上表記 (*The Record of Monk Xuanzang's Submission*) (T52, no. 2119, 821). The letter is titled “Xie Xuzhi Daciensi Beiwen Ji De Zaixiang Zhuyijing Biao” 謝許製大慈恩寺碑文及得宰相助譯經表 (Thanking for the Permission to Erect a Stele in the Great Ci'en Temple and Assistance in Translating the Scriptures by the Prime Ministers”).

(意思獨斷,出語成章)(T50, no. 2060, vol. 4, 455). Once he completed the initial draft, the scribes could simply follow and copy, earning him high praise from his contemporaries.

- B. **Xuanzang's dedication to preserving the original:** Unlike Kumārajīva's translation approach during the Later Qin period, which focused on simplifying complex content and reducing redundancy, Xuanzang's translations prioritized faithfulness to the original text, ensuring the integrity of the content. While Kumārajīva's translations were designed to be more accessible, aligning with the reading preferences of the Chinese audience, they did not always adhere strictly to the original text. Nonetheless, they remained true to the essence of the Buddha's teachings, as exemplified by Kumārajīva's translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra* 大智度論 (T24, no. 1509, vol. 1, 57). In contrast, Xuanzang's translations aimed to mirror the original text as closely as possible, making cuts only when absolutely necessary, with the Chinese translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* 大般若經 serving as a prime example (T50, no. 2053, vol. 10, 275–276).

As a result, when comparing the translation styles of Kumārajīva and Xuanzang, ancient scholars observed, “for conveying the meaning in translation, Kumarajiva is the best” (取意譯經,則什為最), and “for accurately representing the original text while reflecting its inherent features, Xuanzang excels” (敵對唐梵,則奘稱能) (T33, no. 1702, vol. 7, 227). Some also noted, “in understanding the meaning of translated scriptures, Kumarajiva of the Qin Dynasty was the best” (會意譯經,秦朝羅什為最), and “for maintaining the integrity and precision of translations, Xuanzang of the Tang Dynasty showcased exceptional skill” (若敵對翻譯,大唐三藏稱能) (T36, no. 1736, vol. 19, 148).

In conclusion, Xuanzang's exceptional expertise in both Sanskrit and Chinese, along with his dedication to preserving the original text, set his translation approach apart from his predecessors like Kumārajīva. His team's collaborative translation model and elite translation center approach, established during the early Tang Dynasty, efficiently combined the division of specialized labor with Xuanzang's unique skills. This synergy resulted in high-quality translations that significantly influenced the dissemination and understanding of Buddhism in medieval China.

3.3 Concluding Remarks

The formation of elite translation teams under Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang marked a turning point in the history of collaborative translation during the Tang Dynasty. These pioneering efforts laid the foundation for the imperial translation system that thrived in this era, aligning with the practical objectives of the Tang rulers while building upon the key strengths of earlier models.

Prabhākaramitra's elite team introduced significant refinements in organization, procedures, and role distribution. By incorporating steps such as verifying the original

text and rigorously proofreading and editing translations, Prabhākaramitra enhanced the collaborative models that preceded his. Although his vision for large-scale translation teams remained unfulfilled, his team initiated a more systematic approach to elite translation.

Xuanzang's translation team built upon Prabhākaramitra's innovations and further developed them in several ways. By assigning more specialized roles based on translators' expertise, the collaborative process became more structured and efficient. Moreover, Xuanzang played a more substantial personal role in translation compared to Prabhākaramitra, due to his exceptional proficiency in both Sanskrit and Chinese. This ensured high-quality translations from the initial drafts. Lastly, increased imperial oversight on scripture selection and revisions by officials elevated the status and acceptance of Xuanzang's translations.

To sum up, Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang's efforts to optimize the structure, processes, and delegation of roles within elite translation teams pioneered a revolutionary collaborative translation model. Their advancements aligned with the pragmatic aims of Tang rulers and integrated the collective wisdom of previous models. These two generations of translators established the initial framework for the Tang Dynasty's formalized imperial translation system.

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Chapter 4

The Golden Age: Tang Translation Initiatives in Full Swing



Abstract This chapter studies the collective sūtra translation activities during the reigns of Emperors Gaozong and Daizong, often considered the zenith of Tang Buddhism. Six well-known translation teams organized by Divākara, Devaprajña, Śikṣānanda, Yijing, Bodhiruci, and Amoghavajra are examined one by one to reveal how they fostered the advancement of the elite translation model established by their forebears and navigated the political and social landscapes of their time to facilitate the translation projects of Buddhist texts. By exploring the organization, capabilities, and influence of the translation teams, this chapter also explains the complexity of translation and the extraordinary level of imperial support during this period.

The previous chapter shed light on the groundbreaking activities of Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang in establishing elite translation teams, marking a significant milestone in the collaborative translation history of the Tang Dynasty. Their methodologies not only laid the groundwork for a robust imperial translation system but also aligned with the practical objectives of the Tang rulers, effectively incorporating the best elements of earlier models.

In this chapter, the narrative progresses to the period encompassing the reigns of Emperor Gaozong 高宗 (628–683, reigned 649–683) and Emperor Daizong 代宗 (726–779, reigned 762–779). Often referred to as the golden age of Buddhist scripture translation, this era witnessed team-based translation efforts reaching unprecedented levels of activity and sophistication, building upon the foundation established by Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang. Notably, six distinguished Buddhist monks—Divākara, Devaprajña, Śikṣānanda, Yijing, Bodhiruci, and Amoghavajra—took center stage during this period. They not only translated a vast array of texts but also further refined the structured team-based model initiated by their predecessors. Their leadership and visionary approach played a significant role in the development and implementation of a formalized and efficient translation system.

4.1 Divākara's Elite Translation Team

Under the charismatic leadership of Divākara 地婆訶羅 (614–688), the translation model pioneered by Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang continued to flourish and evolve. Originating from Central India, Divākara exhibited exceptional mastery of the five vidyās and a profound understanding of the four Āgama scriptures. His expertise in incantation methods further set him apart in his field. During the Yifeng 儀鳳 era of Emperor Gaozong (676–679), Divākara embarked on a journey to China, undertaking the noble task of translating Buddhist sūtras. His translation work persisted under the reign of Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (624–705, reigned 690–705), during which he successfully translated over ten Buddhist scriptures at the Eastern and Western Taiyuan Monasteries (*Dong, Xi Taiyuansi* 東、西太原寺), as well as at the Hongfu Monastery (*Hongfusi* 弘福寺). The official elite translation court lent its support to Divākara's translation initiatives, underscoring the significance and prestige of his work.

A historical record from the *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) provides us with insights into the meticulous five-step process that characterized the operations of Divākara's translation court:

During Emperor Gaozong's Yifeng era and Empress Wu Zetian's Chuigong era, a total of eighteen scriptures, including the *Bhadrapalāśreṣṭhipariprcchāsūtra*, were translated. The primary translation activities took place at the Taiyuan Monasteries in the Eastern and Western Capitals, known today as the Dafuxian Monastery and the Xichongfu Monastery, respectively. The Hongfu Monastery in the Western Capital also served as a translation site. The initial language translation was conducted by Jiantuo and Prajñādeva, while Huizhi ensured the accuracy of the Sanskrit text. Ten individuals of great virtue were summoned by royal decree to assist in the propagation of Dharma. Monks such as Daocheng, Bochen, Jiashang, Yuance, Lingbian, Mingxun, and Huaide were entrusted with verifying the interpretations. Sixuan and Fulai played crucial roles in refining the text and finalizing the translations. Empress Wu personally penned introductions for each sūtra, affirming their authenticity and facilitating their widespread dissemination. (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 564)

The first step of the translation process involved Divākara, as the chief translator, reciting the original sūtra. In the second step, monks Zhantuo 戰陀 and Prajñādeva 般若提婆 interpreted the sūtra into Chinese based on Divākara's recitation, a process known as "translating language" (*Yiyu* 譯語). The third step included Huizhi 慧智's preliminary proofreading to verify the Sanskrit, supported by the "Ten Virtuous Individuals" (*Mingdeshiren* 名德十人) summoned to contribute to the dissemination of the Dharma. In the fourth step, a team of translators led by monks Daocheng 道成, Bochen 薄塵, Jiashang 嘉尚, Yuance 圓測 (613–696), Lingbian 靈辯, Mingxun 明恂, Huaidu 懷度, and others engaged in a second round of proofreading, known as "verifying the meaning" (*Zhengyi* 證義). The fifth step encompassed "refining the text" (*Zhuiwen* 綴文) and "transcribing the translation" (*Bishou* 筆受), where the translation was distilled to its essence by eliminating unnecessary elements. Monks Sixuan 思玄 and Fuli 復禮 oversaw this finalization process. Empress Wu's personal

composition of the sūtra introductions marked the culmination of the translation, guaranteeing their authenticity and readiness for dissemination.

This overview sheds light on the foundational structure of Divākara's translation court, an embodiment of the collaborative translation model established by Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang. It exemplifies the dedication and cooperation necessary for successful translation pursuits during that era.

4.2 Devaprajña's Elite Translation Team

During the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, a distinguished translation organization flourished under the leadership of Devaprajña 提雲般若, forming yet another elite translation team. Hailing from the Kingdom of Yutian, Devaprajña possessed profound knowledge of both Mahāyāna and Theravāda Buddhism, as well as expertise in Chan practices and the art of incantation.

In the year 689, during the Yongchang 永昌 era, Devaprajña embarked on a mission to bring Buddhist teachings to China. His exceptional translation skills were recognized, leading to his appointment at the Eastern Monastery of the Great Zhou Dynasty (*Dazhoudongsi* 大周東寺), where he undertook the task of translating Buddhist scriptures. His diligent efforts resulted in the production of numerous treatises and sacred texts, with detailed records of his contributions preserved in the *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) as follows:

Devaprajña, known as "Heavenly Wisdom" in the Tang language, hailed from Yutian. His vast knowledge encompassed both the Mahāyāna and Theravāda traditions of Buddhism, combining profound spiritual wisdom with a deep understanding of secular matters. He had attained mastery in Chan practices and the art of incantation. In the inaugural year of Empress Wu's reign, the Yongchang era, he arrived and was granted an audience with the Empress in Luoyang. Subsequently, he was commissioned to translate scriptures at the Eastern Monastery of the Wei State, which was later renamed the Eastern Monastery of the Great Zhou Dynasty. From the first year of Yongchang to the second year of the Tianshou era, he successfully translated six scriptures and treatises. His team consisted of renowned monks such as Zhantuo and Huizhi, responsible for translating the languages, while Chu Yi carefully transcribed the translations. Others, including Fuli, contributed literary refinements to the texts, while scholars such as De Gan, Hui Yan, Fa Ming, and Hong Jing verified the meanings and ensured the accuracy of the translations. (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 565)

The operations of Devaprajña's translation team closely resembled the model previously described. As the team leader, Devaprajña would commence by reciting the original Buddhist scriptures. Monks like Zhantuo 戰陀 and Huizhi 慧智 would then orally translate the recited contents into Chinese. The initial oral translation was subsequently recorded and edited by a group of dedicated monk translators. Chuyi 處—transcribed the translations, while Fuli 復禮 and others refined the text, adding literary embellishments when necessary. Respected monk scholars such as Degan 德感, Huiyan 慧嚴, Faming 法明, and Hongjing 弘景 (634–712) diligently validated the meanings and conducted thorough proofreading of the final version.

This collaborative process, a hallmark of the distinguished royal elite translation teams of the Tang Dynasty, ensured the production of authoritative and accurate translations.

4.3 Śikṣānanda's Elite Translation Team

During the reign of Empress Wu Zetian, one of the most remarkable translation initiatives was led by Śikṣānanda 實叉難陀 (652–710). Hailing from Khotan, Śikṣānanda was a revered monk proficient in both the Greater and Lesser Vehicles of Buddhism. His life's purpose was to disseminate the Dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings. This shared devotion to Buddhism forged a profound bond between Śikṣānanda and Empress Wu, particularly regarding the *Avataṃsakasūtra* 華嚴經, a text that had yet to be fully translated into Chinese.

To acquire the original texts and invite knowledgeable translators to China, Empress Wu dispatched envoys to the Western Regions, and Śikṣānanda was among those invited. In the year 695, during the inaugural year of the Zhengsheng 證聖 era, Śikṣānanda arrived in Guanzhong. He was stationed at the prestigious Great Universal Void Monastery (*Dabiankongsi* 大遍空寺) in the Eastern Capital, entrusted with the momentous task of translating the 80-volume *Avataṃsakasūtra*. This marked the first major project undertaken by Śikṣānanda and his elite translation team.

The royal family extended unwavering support to Śikṣānanda's translation efforts. Historical records, including sūtra prefaces, provide vivid details about the translation process, offering a glimpse into the grand collaborative translation efforts of the time. In Empress Wu's composed preface to *Avataṃsakasūtra*, she wrote:

I have heard of its Sanskrit version, which was first found in the country of Khotan. I sent envoys to welcome it, and it has recently arrived here. After seeing its wonderful praises in the hundreds and thousands, it was as if I were unrolling the main text of ten thousand. On the fourteenth day of the first year of the Zhengsheng era, I personally received and revised the translation of this sūtra at the Great Universal Void Monastery. Consequently, I obtained the sweet dew of the river of wisdom, and I dreamt of it on the eve of Gengshen; the anointing rain was sprinkling and moistening, which happened later on the morning of the date Renxu. Thus, the door of true form was opened, to comply with the essence of the One Taste. On the eighth day of the tenth month of the second year of the Shengli era, the copy of the sūtra was finalized. (T10, no. 279, vol. 1, 1)

The *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) also provides a comprehensive account:

In the first year of the Zhengsheng era of the Empress Wu, the translation of the *Avataṃsakasūtra* took place at the Great Universal Void Monastery in the Eastern Capital. Empress Wu herself presided over the Dharma seat, wrote the preface, and bestowed the title upon the text. South Indian monks Bodhiruci and Yijing eloquently recited the original Sanskrit text, which was subsequently handed over to monks such as Fuli and Fazang for further translation at the Monastery of the Buddha's Enlightening Teachings. The task was completed in the second year of the Shengli era. (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 566)

These historical records indicate that Empress Wu took an active role in the translation process, bestowing titles on each section of the sūtra herself. Monks Bodhiruci 菩提流志 (?–727) and Yijing 義淨 (635–713) recited the original Sanskrit text, while monks like Fuli 復禮 and Fazang 法藏 (643–712) refined the translations. The final version was disseminated in the second year of the Shengli era (699).

Following the successful translation of the *Avataṃsakasūtra*, Empress Wu continued to lend her support to Śikṣānanda's elite translation team. They embarked on the translation of numerous sūtras at the Sanyang Palace (*Sanyanggong* 三陽宮), the Qichan Monastery (Qizhansi 清禪寺) in the Western Capital, and the Shouji Monastery (*Shoujisi* 授記寺) in the Eastern Capital. The team consisted of eminent monks and court officials. Monk translators such as Bolun 波崙 and Xuangui 玄軌 transcribed the texts, while monks like Fuli 復禮 composed the translations. Fabao 法寶 and Hongjing 弘景 (634–712) ensured the accuracy of the meanings. Furthermore, Jia Yingfu 賈膺福 (?–713), a member of the Middle House of the Prince, supervised the translation process, organized the translation site, and provided necessary resources to the team. The *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) provides a detailed account as follows:

In the first year of the Jiushi era, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* was translated at the Sanyang Palace, and other sūtras such as the *Gathering of Mañjuśrī's Profound Teachings* were translated at the Qizhan Monastery in the Western Capital and the Shouji Monastery in the Eastern Capital. Jia Yingfu oversaw all translation work. Monks Bolun and Xuangui transcribed the texts, Fuli composed the translations, and monks including Fabao and Hongjing validated the meanings of the translations. (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 566)

Śikṣānanda's Elite Translation Team stands as a testament to the grandeur and systematic organization of the translation efforts during that era. Under the direct supervision and support of Empress Wu herself, the team produced some of the most influential Buddhist texts in China, leaving an indelible impact on Chinese Buddhism and culture. The operations of this elite translation team offer a captivating glimpse into the intricate process of translating and disseminating Buddhist texts during the Great Tang period. Moreover, it exemplifies Empress Wu Zetian's profound respect and reverence for Buddhism, which played an essential role in the spread and development of Buddhism in China throughout her reign.

4.4 Yijing's Elite Translation Team

Yijing's translation organization, which operated during the reigns of Empress Wu, Emperors Zhongzong 中宗 (656–710, reigned 684/705–710) and Ruizong 睿宗 (662–716, reigned 684–690/710–712), was a distinguished and influential elite translation court in the Great Tang era. Yijing, a native of Qizhou, became a monk in his youth. He diligently sought renowned teachers, immersed himself in the practice of

Buddhism, and developed a deep love for reading. His extensive knowledge encompassed a wide range of ancient and contemporary scriptures, both from China and abroad, showcasing his exceptional intellect.

At the young age of fifteen, Yijing set his sights on a journey to the West in search of the profound teachings of Buddhism. During the early years of Emperor Gaozong's Xianheng 咸亨 era (670–674), Yijing and his companions embarked on a sea voyage from Guangzhou to India. Their voyage took them through numerous countries, traversing vast distances over a span of two decades. Eventually, in the first year of the Zhengsheng era of Empress Wu's reign (695), Yijing and his companions returned to Guanzhong, bringing with them a multitude of invaluable Buddhist scriptures and sacred relics. Empress Wu held Yijing in high esteem, recognizing the significance of his achievements.

Upon Yijing's return to China, he initially took up residence at the Monastery of the Buddha's Enlightening Teachings (*Foshoujisi* 佛授記寺), where he carefully stored the newly acquired Sanskrit scriptures. During this time, he collaborated with Śikṣānanda in translating the *Avatamsakasūtra*. It is worth noting that Yijing did not yet have an independent translation team at that stage. It was only after a considerable period that he commenced independent translation work.

4.4.1 The Early Phase (700–703)

During the Jiushi 久視 era of Empress Wu, with the unwavering support of the imperial court, Yijing established his first translation team on a grand scale. This translation team undertook the significant task of translating numerous Buddhist classics that had been newly brought from the West, including a substantial collection of Vinaya scriptures. The paratexts of translated scriptures bear explicit documentation of Yijing's establishment and involvement in their creation.

The team-based translation efforts led by Yijing can be divided into four distinct periods. The first period commenced in the inaugural year of the Jiushi era (700) and concluded in the third year of the Chang'an 長安 era (703). During this time, the team diligently translated twenty Buddhist scriptures, including notable works such as the *Suvarṇaprabhāsauttamarājasūtra* 金光明最勝王經 and the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* 能斷金剛般若經.

Yijing, possessing a command of both Sanskrit and Chinese, served as the chief translator. The North Indian monk, Mañicintana 阿彌真那 (?–721), assumed the responsibility of verifying the Sanskrit text's intended meaning. Accompanying them were a group of dedicated monks, including Polun 波崙, Fuli 復禮, Huibiao 慧表, and Zhiji 智積, who collectively transcribed and verified the translated text. Eminent monk translators such as Fabao 法寶, Fazang 法藏, Degan 德感, Chengzhuang 成莊, Shenyong 神英, Renliang 仁亮, Dayi 大儀, and Cixun 慈訓 rigorously examined and verified the accuracy and significance of the translations.

Supervising the translation court was Xu Guan 許觀, the assistant teacher of the Chengjun National Academy. Xu Guan oversaw the process of copying the translated texts and presented the completed translations to Empress Wu for her personal review and the composition of prefaces. Historical records indicate that “the Empress composed the “Preface to the Newly Translated Holy Teachings,” which was placed at the beginning of the translation” (天后製(新翻聖教序), 令標經首) (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 568).

4.4.2 *The Middle Phase (703 Onwards)*

Following the successful translation of the aforementioned Buddhist scriptures, Yijing's translation team embarked on three additional periods of translation, each marked by further refinement and sophistication. During this time, the translation team undertook the translation of multiple significant Buddhist scriptures such as *Mahāmāyūrividya-rājñīsūtra* 孔雀王經, *Rājāvavādakasūtra* 佛為勝光天子說王法經, and *Sarvadharmaguṇavyūharājasūtra* 佛說一切功德莊嚴王經. These translations took place at the Imperial Dharma Hall (*Neidaochang* 內道場) in the Eastern Capital and the Dafuxian Monastery (*Dafuxiansi* 大福先寺).

The translation process involved a collaborative effort. Pandu 盤度 was entrusted with reading the Sanskrit text, while Xuansan 玄傘 received and transcribed the text. Dayi 大儀 verified the accuracy of the text, while Shengzhuang 勝莊, Lizhen 利貞, and others ensured the fidelity of the translations' meaning. Cui Shi 崔澁 (671–713), the Minister of the Ministry of War, and Lu Can 盧粲 (?–713), his assistant, contributed their expertise by refining the text and correcting any inaccuracies in the characters. Overseeing the entire translation endeavor was Yang Shenjiao 楊慎交 (675–728), the Grand Supervisor of the Secretariat and Prince of the State (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 568).

The translated version of the *Sarvadharmaguṇavyūharājasūtra* 佛說一切功德莊嚴王經 bore a comprehensive list of the translators and their respective responsibilities, showcasing their individual roles and collective effort (T21, no. 1374, 894). This marked the second period of Yijing's collaborative translation activities. Shortly thereafter, a new translation of the *Saptatathāgatapūrvaprañidhānaviśeṣavistarasūtra* 樂師琉璃光七佛本願功德經 was produced, personally received by Emperor Zhongzong himself, underscoring the significance and recognition bestowed upon Yijing's translation efforts.

4.4.3 *The Key Phase (710)*

In the fourth year of the Jinglong 景龍 era (710), Yijing received a prestigious commission to translate scriptures at the Great Blessings Monastery (*Dajianfusi* 大薦福寺). This endeavor encompassed a comprehensive collection of twenty parts

of scriptures. The translation project involved the dedicated efforts of numerous assistants, each playing a vital role in the process.

The Tocharian monk Damomomo 達磨末磨 and the Indo-Middle Eastern monk Banu 拔弩 contributed their expertise by confirming the meanings of the Sanskrit text. The Khotan monk Dharmananda 達磨難陀 verified the accuracy of the Sanskrit original, while the layman and East Indian chief Īśvara 伊舍羅 provided further confirmation of the Sanskrit source. Monks such as Huiji 慧積, the Indo-Middle Eastern layman Li Shijia 李釋迦, and Duopoduo 度頗多, among others, attentively recited the Sanskrit text. Monks Wengang 文綱 (636–727), Huizhu 慧沼 (652–715), Lizhen 利貞, Shengzhuang 勝莊, Aitong 愛同, and Siheng 思恒 (651–726), among others, verified the meanings. Xuansan 玄傘, Zhiji 智積, and others transcribed the translation. Laymen such as the East Indian Gautamavajra 瞿曇金剛 and the prince from Kasmira, Ashun 阿順, provided confirmation of the translation (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 568–569).

Furthermore, more than twenty individuals, including Li Jiao 李嶠, Duke of Zhao State and Academician of Xiuwen Academy, Wei Sili 韋嗣立 (654–719), Minister of the Ministry of War and Duke of Xiaoyao, Zhao Yanzhao 趙彥昭, Lu Zangyong 盧藏用 (664–713), Zhang Shuo 張說 (667–713), Li Ai 李乂 (649–716), and Su Ting 蘇頌 (670–727), contributed to the revision of the text. The translation process was overseen by Left Attendant Wei Juyuan 韋巨源 (631–710), Duke of Shu State, Right Attendant Su Gui 蘇瓌 (639–710), Duke of Xu State, and others. Li Yong 李邕 (687–727), Grand Supervisor of the Secretariat and King Siguo, provided valuable support throughout the translation process. This marked the third period of translation activities, characterized by the involvement of a diverse and dedicated group of individuals (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 568–569).

Also, existing translations of Yijing's works, such as the *Mūlasarvāstivādanidānamāṭṛkā* 根本說一切有部尼陀那目得迦 (T24, no. 1452, vol. 1, 418–419), *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayanidānamāṭṛkārikā* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶尼陀那目得迦攝頌 (T24, no. 1456, 520), and *the Treatise on the Manifestation of the Treasury of Consciousness-Only* 成唯識寶生論 (T31, no. 1591, vol. 1, 81), provide detailed descriptions of the translators involved and their specific roles.

4.4.4 The Final Phase (711)

By the second year of the Jingyun 景雲 era under Emperor Ruizong (711), Yijing's team successfully concluded their final elite translation project at the Great Blessings Monastery. This initiative resulted in the production of various sūtras, commentaries, and praises dedicated to the Buddha. Historical records state:

In the second year of Jingyun, at the Great Blessings Monastery, Yijing translated sūtras such as the *Dvādaśabuddhakasūtra*, *Sāgaranāgarājaparipṛcchāsūtra*, *Abbreviated Precepts*, as well as commentaries such as the *Verses on the Perfection of Wisdom that Cuts Off All Defilements*, *Explanation on the Door to the Principles of Inference*, *Verses on the Observation of General Characteristics*, *Verses on the Door to Sustained Observation*, *Treatise on*

Handheld Implements, and others. Moreover, Yijing translated one hundred and five praises related to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and *Pramāṇasamuccaya*. In total, he translated twelve works comprising twenty-one scrolls of Buddhist scriptures. (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 569)

In this translation undertaking, Yijing served as the chief translator, and monks like Halimadi 曷利末底 and Uditipo 烏帝提婆 were entrusted with reciting the Sanskrit text. Monks Xuansan 玄傘, Zhiji 智積, and others transcribe the translation, while Huizhu 慧沼 and other scholars confirmed the intended meanings. The Minister of the Ministry of Rites, Xue Chongyin 薛崇胤 (?–713), provided crucial support and guardianship throughout the process.

In summary, Yijing's four periods of translation, as discussed above, played a significant role in advancing the development of the elite collaboration model. The process of translating sūtras became more refined and precise, with a detailed division of labor and a stringent review system. The translation work involved extensive scrutiny of both the original and translated texts, and it witnessed an unprecedented involvement of monks and laymen, including lay princes from the Western Regions who assisted in verifying the accuracy of the sūtras. This demonstrates that during that time, frequent and close exchanges between China and foreign countries were commonplace, and the translation of Buddhist scriptures served as a vital bridge for communication between the East and the West.

Moreover, the elite translation system of the Tang Dynasty was further refined and systematized at this juncture, approaching a state of maturity and perfection. It entailed a grand-scale operation with a well-defined structure of sūtra translation. Notably, the method of collaboration observed in the later generations' "Dharma Transmission Court" (*Chuanfayuan* 傳法院) of the Song Dynasty bears a striking resemblance to the translation practices of the Tang Dynasty, showcasing the enduring influence and legacy of this translation model.

4.5 Bodhiruci's Elite Translation Team

Bodhiruci 菩提流志 (?–727), originally named "Dharmaruci" 達摩流支, was a distinguished South Indian Brahmin who made significant contributions to the team-based Buddhist scripture translation during the reign of Empress Wu and the restoration of Emperor Ruizong. Recognized for his exceptional intellect and profound knowledge across various disciplines, including cosmology, calendar systems, geography, astronomy, sorcery, and medicine, Empress Wu bestowed upon him the name "Bodhiruci." This new name symbolized his remarkable intellectual capabilities.

Bodhiruci's deep curiosity and quest for knowledge led him to immerse himself in the study of Buddhism. Astoundingly, within a span of just five years, he mastered the Tripiṭaka, the sacred scriptures of Buddhism. His scholarly achievements did not go unnoticed by the Tang court during Emperor Gaozong's reign. Upon hearing of Bodhiruci's renowned reputation, envoys were dispatched to invite him to the capital.

In the second year of Empress Wu's Changshou 長壽 era (693), Bodhiruci arrived at the capital and was tasked with the important task of translating sacred scriptures. This commission served as evidence of his erudition and the Tang court's acknowledgment of his exceptional skills.

Bodhiruci's translation projects were primarily supported by the elite translation team. These collaborative translation projects, most notably the *Ratnameghasūtra* 佛說寶雨經 (T16, no. 660, vol. 2, 292) and *Mahāratnakūṭa* 大寶積經 (T11, no. 310, vol. 1, 1–2), offer a comprehensive account of the translation activities under his supervision. Upon his arrival in China, Bodhiruci established his residence at the Monastery of the Buddha's Enlightening Teachings (*Foshoujisi* 佛授記寺), where he commenced the translation of the *Ratnameghasūtra*. Valuable insights into the composition and division of labor within Bodhiruci's team can be gleaned from records found in the Shōgozō version of the *Ratnameghasūtra* (Maiko, 2015) and the *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) (Maiko, 2015 and T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 570).

The translation process was conducted with methodical diligence, comprising fifteen distinct tasks ranging from text processing and scripture translation to proof-reading, editing, and scripture management. Significantly, certain roles within the translation team were unprecedented and required the expertise of specialized individuals, including both monks and laypeople. This arrangement exemplified the early collaborative translation methods that were implemented upon Bodhiruci's arrival.

Bodhiruci, after relocating to various monasteries such as the Eastern Monastery of the Great Zhou Dynasty (*Dazhoudongsi* 大周東寺) and the West Chongfu Monastery (*Xichongfusi* 西崇福寺), dedicated himself to the translation of a wide range of Buddhist scriptures. Particularly, he undertook the translation of the significant Mahāyāna scripture known as the *Mahāratnakūṭa*, which was a notable project of the elite translation team during the era of Empress Wu. It is worth mentioning that the sūtra had its origins in the early Tang Dynasty during Xuanzang's time. Initially, Xuanzang began the translation of the monumental 600-volume the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* 大般若經, which led to requests for the translation of the the *Mahāratnakūṭa* (T50, no. 2053, vol. 10, 276). However, due to his advanced age, Xuanzang was unable to complete the task, and it was subsequently undertaken and accomplished by Bodhiruci.

Historical records indicate that prior to the collaborative translation of the *Mahāratnakūṭa*, extensive preparatory work was undertaken by the Tang court and Bodhiruci himself. The court issued specific orders to gather scholars of renowned virtue and select individuals with exceptional moral integrity to participate in the translation process. Their responsibilities included reviewing existing translations and comparing them with the new original texts. The aim was to preserve accurate portions of the old translations while supplementing and completing any incomplete sections based on the original text. This comprehensive review and translation process sought to unveil and clarify any meanings that may have been lost or distorted over time, thus establishing a robust translation strategy for the newly translated scriptures.

The translation of the *Mahāratnakūṭa* began in the second year of the Shenlong 神龍 era (706) and was completed in the second year of Ruizong's Xiantian 先天

era (713). Emperor Zhongzong himself attended the inaugural translation session, lending his support to the translation project. Alongside him, a group of officials and members of the harem were present as observers, highlighting the significance placed on the translation of Buddhist scriptures by the Tang court. When Emperor Ruizong ascended to the throne, he also visited the translation site to actively contribute to the process, further emphasizing the court's commitment to the project.

The collaborative translation model employed for the *Mahāratnakūṭa* bore similarities to Yijing's translation venue and was executed on a grand scale. Historical records from works such as the "Dabaojijingshu" 大寶積經述 ("A Narration of the *Mahāratnakūṭa*") (T11, no. 310, vol. 1, 1–2) and the *Kaiyuan Shijiao Lu* 開元釋教錄 (*Record of Śākyamuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Period*) (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 570) provide insights into the individuals involved in the translation process. Bodhiruci himself spearheaded the translation efforts. Monk translators such as Sizhong 思忠 and the East Indian leader Īśvara 伊舍羅 undertook the translation of the Sanskrit text, while South Indian monk Prajñākuta 波若屈多 and North Indian monk Dharma 達摩 reviewed the original text. Lüfang 履方, Huijue 慧覺, Zongyi 宗一, and Pujing 普敬 were responsible for the transcription of the translation, while monks like Chengli 承禮, Yunguan 雲觀, Shenjian 神暕, and Daoben 道本 took on the task of translation revision. Monks such as Shenliang 深亮, Shengzhuang 勝莊, Chenwai 塵外, Wuzhuo 無著, Huidi 慧迪, Huaidi 懷迪, and Fazang 法藏 verified its meanings.

Lu Can 盧粲 (?–713), Xu Jian 徐堅 (659–729), Su Jin 蘇晉 (676–734), Cui Qu 崔璩, Lu Cangyong 盧藏用 (664–713), Peng Jingzhi 彭景直, Wang Jun 王琚, Yan Wenzhi 顏溫之, He Zhizhang 賀知章 (659–744), and others were involved in refining the text. They contributed their expertise to polish and enhance its quality. Furthermore, individuals such as Wei Zhigu 魏知古 (647–715), Guo Yuanzhen 郭元振 (656–713), Zhang Shuo 張說, Lu Xiangxian 陸象先 (665–736), Xue Chongyin 薛崇胤 (?–713), Yang Zhongsi 楊仲嗣, and others played crucial roles in overseeing the translation process and safeguarding its integrity, leaving a lasting impact on the Buddhist literary tradition of the time.

4.6 Amoghavajra's Elite Translation Team

The translation work of Amoghavajra 不空 (705–774) took place during the reigns of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗, Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (711–762, reigned 756–762), and Emperor Daizong 代宗 (726–779, reigned 762–779), spanning multiple periods of time.

Amoghavajra, hailing from India, developed a deep affinity for Buddhism from an early age. He left his home behind in pursuit of spiritual practice and became a devoted disciple of the renowned Buddhist monk Vajrabodhi 金剛智 (669–741). During the Kaiyuan 開元 era under Emperor Xuanzong's reign (713–741), Vajrabodhi and Amoghavajra journeyed to China to propagate the teachings of Buddhism.

Amoghavajra's role as an assistant translator to Vajrabodhi provided him with invaluable opportunities to practice and refine his skills in translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese.

In the nineteenth year of the Kaiyuan era (731), Vajrabodhi passed away. Amoghavajra then embarked on a sea voyage to the Western Regions, returning to India to deepen his studies in Tantric Buddhism. Conscientiously serving and immersing himself in the practice, he acquired a vast collection of Sanskrit scriptures. In the fifth year of the Tianbao 天寶 era (746), Amoghavajra returned to Chang'an to spread Buddhism. His powerful mantras earned him fame within the imperial palace.

In the eighth year of Tianbao (749), Amoghavajra sought Emperor Xuanzong's permission to return to his homeland. The emperor graciously granted this request. However, during his journey back, he fell ill and temporarily resided in Shaozhou. Despite this setback, he continued his translation work, undeterred by adversity. In the twelfth year of Tianbao (753), the Emperor summoned Amoghavajra back to the capital, providing generous support for him to resume his important translation campaigns.

In the fourteenth year of Tianbao (755), the Anshi Rebellion erupted, yet Amoghavajra steadfastly continued his translation work, persistently translating new sūtra and conducting ceremonies to accumulate merit for the Tang Dynasty and pray for the rebellion's end. He also played a vital role in gathering information about the affected regions (T50, no. 2056, 292–294 and T55, no. 2157, vol. 15, 881). Throughout the reigns of Emperors Xuanzong, Suzong, and Daizong, Amoghavajra enjoyed immense trust and held in high regard. His contributions to Buddhism and unwavering dedication earned him great respect.

4.6.1 Hallmarks of Amoghavajra's Translation Approach

Amoghavajra's translation activities reached their zenith during the reigns of Suzong and Daizong. While his approach largely followed the existing translation model, it also exhibited distinct deviations from earlier collaborative translations. His method was characterized by three notable hallmarks:

- A. **Purpose-driven translations:** Amoghavajra's translation endeavors were fundamentally aligned with the interests of the Tang Empire, focusing primarily on "resolving difficulties and calamities" (息難除災) (T55, no. 2154, vol. 15, 881) and "overcoming disasters" (度災禦難) (T52, no. 2120, vol. 1, 829). This purpose extended beyond the mere propagation of Buddhist philosophy, emphasizing the role of Buddhism in alleviating national challenges during times of crisis more prominently than in previous eras.
- B. **Celebratory commemorations:** Once the definitive versions of the newly translated Buddhist scriptures were established, they were often commemorated through grand ceremonies that invited broad public participation. Elaborate

rituals based on the newly translated scriptures were conducted, sometimes involving the erection of large altars. This synthesis of collaborative translation and religious ceremonies surpassed the scale seen in earlier periods.

- C. **Integration of rituals and chanting:** Amoghavajra's scriptures frequently incorporated Buddhist religious rituals and the recitation of sūtras. To ensure the seamless performance of post-translation chanting rituals with accurate pronunciation, novel roles were introduced at the translation site. These individuals were appointed to maintain the rhythmic cadence of Buddhist chants, a practice that was unprecedented.

An exemplary manifestation of these three characteristics is found in the collaborative translation of the *Renwang Borejing* 仁王般若經 (*The Sūtra of the Benevolent Kings*), spearheaded by Amoghavajra during the reigns of Suzong and Daizong.

4.6.2 *The Team-Based Translation of the Renwang Borejing*

The *Renwang Borejing* holds great reverence as a significant Buddhist text renowned for its protective powers. Emperors Suzong and Daizong were deeply influenced by this scripture, firmly believing in its potent capabilities. However, during their reigns, Amoghavajra raised concerns regarding the existing translations of the sūtra pointing out issues with linguistic accuracy and semantic integrity. In response, he proposed a comprehensive retranslation of the scripture (T55, no. 2157, vol. 15, 884).

Emperor Suzong wholeheartedly supported Amoghavajra's initiative, hoping that this effort would help restore peace within the Tang Empire. He believed that the spiritual merits gained from translating the scriptures could alleviate the ongoing military unrest (T33, no. 1709, vol. 1, 430). As a result, the royal court mandated the formation of a proficient translation team, drawing scholars from the capital, to undertake this vital task. Eventually, seventeen translators were carefully selected for the project.

Historical records provide clear evidence of the division of labor within the translation team. Amoghavajra took on the task of translating the original Sanskrit text, while Fachong 法崇 verified the meaning of the Sanskrit. Liangbin 良賁 (717–777) served as the scribe and refined the text, with Zilin 子隣 providing assistance. Huigan 懷感, Jianzong 建宗, Feixi 飛錫, Yisong 義嵩, Qianzhen 潛真 (718–788), Daoye 道液, Zhaowu 趙悟, Yingzhen 應真, Guixing 歸性, Huiling 慧靈, and Huijing 慧靜 were responsible for verifying the meaning. Yuanji 圓寂 focused on Sanskrit pronunciation, Daolin 道林 performed the chanting of praises, and Yixiu 義秀 served as the proofreader. Hongzhao 弘照 checked and proofread the text, while court officials Ma Feng 馬奉, Yang Liquan 楊利全, Luo Fengxian 駱奉仙, Yu Chaoen 魚朝恩 (722–770), Chang Gun 常袞 (729–783), and Liu Zhen 柳枕 supervised the translation process. Emperor Daizong supported the translation and would “hold the old sūtra and help review the new version” (執舊經，對讀新本), assisting from the sidelines. Notably, the roles of “Sanskrit pronunciation” (*Fanyin* 梵音) and “singing

praises” (zanbai 讚頌) represented new additions to the translation team, involving phonetics and sūtra chanting (T8, no. 246, vol. 1, 430 and T55, no. 2157, vol. 15, 884).

After the completion of the new translation of the *Renwang Borejing*, several post-translation tasks were undertaken. The first was a grand ceremony to honor the new sūtra. Emperor Daizong ordered imperial guards to prepare banners, flowers, canopies, and treasure cars, along with musicians from the Imperial Music Bureau, to gather at the Silver Terrace Gate and perform musical plays. A magnificent procession escorted the new sūtra from the palace, with military generals marching behind. The second task involved the propagation and prayer for blessings. Recognizing the transformative potential of practicing the newly translated sūtra, Emperor Daizong funded Amoghavajra and his monks to organize numerous Dharma assemblies at the Zisheng and Ximing Monasteries, widely disseminating the new translation and praying for the Buddha’s teachings to bring stability to the country. These Dharma assemblies were accompanied by offerings of incense, flowers, food and drink, as well as drums and music (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 751–752).

These activities reflect the three major characteristics of Amoghavajra’s elite translation team mentioned earlier. Furthermore, they demonstrate that the collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures during the mid-Tang Dynasty went beyond a mere cultural task. It was intertwined with the emperor’s belief in “dispelling calamities through translating sūtra” (仰恃佛力，輔成國家) (T52, no. 2120, vol. 3, 840) and the turbulent domestic political situation of the time.

4.7 Concluding Remarks

The seventh and eighth centuries stand as the pinnacle of Buddhist scripture translation in medieval China, representing a golden age of intellectual and cultural growth. During this time, the elite translation model flourished under the guidance of renowned translators like Divākara, Devaprajñā, Śikṣānanda, Yijing, Bodhiruci, and Amoghavajra.

The sustained patronage of emperors from Taizong to Daizong played a vital role in enabling the formation of highly organized translation teams. These activities were characterized by detailed division of labor, rigorous proofreading, and court-appointed oversight. While the model pioneered by Prabhākaramitra and Xuanzang was preserved, it was also refined and enhanced, reflecting a commitment to excellence.

This era witnessed the emergence of new roles, including rhythm keepers responsible for sūtra chanting and officials tasked with reviewing texts for imperial authorization. The scale of operations expanded, involving foreign experts who verified the authenticity and accuracy of translated texts. Translation became deeply intertwined with religious rituals, transcending the mere conversion of words.

The diligent collaboration of these dedicated translators led to the creation of precise translations of invaluable scriptures and treatises, including influential works

like the *Avatamsakasūtra*, which gained widespread circulation. These translations had a deep cultural impact, profoundly shaping religious practices and scholarship. The remarkable productivity of this period demonstrates the adaptable and resilient translation culture, fostered by ruler support and the dedicated efforts of Buddhist luminaries.

Despite the challenges they encountered, the ingenuity and dedication of Tang-era translators propelled Chinese Buddhism to new heights, allowing for the dissemination of sacred knowledge and wisdom. Their lasting legacy laid strong foundations for the subsequent revival of the translation tradition during the Song Dynasty. This golden age serves as an ongoing inspiration for future generations, imparting wondrous wisdom that continues to illuminate minds in the present day.

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Chapter 5

Fortitude in Flux: The Persistence of Translation Activities in the Changing Landscape of the Late Tang Period



Abstract Focusing on the translation team led by Prajña and Liyan during the reign of Emperor Dezong, the last massive translation activity in Tang China, this chapter explores the continuation of Buddhist scripture translation during the politically unstable late Tang era. It discusses the team's workflow, organizational structure, and translation process, highlighting the translators' unique qualities that helped them overcome the obstacles of the time and maintain the operation of the translation institution at Chang'an. This chapter also analyzes the historical role of monk translators in national affairs, the continued transformation of the elite translation model, and the emperor's intention to strengthen imperial authority through sūtra translation. It concludes by examining the factors that sustained Buddhist translation activities during turbulent times and provides an overview of the revival of collective sūtra translation in the Song Dynasty.

After the Anshi Rebellion, the domestic political landscape experienced instability and unrest. However, the translation of Buddhist scriptures continued uninterrupted, driven by several significant factors. One key reason was the deep devotion to Buddhism among the rulers of that era. They sought to accumulate merit and enhance the empire's prosperity by promoting Buddhism, while also using Buddhist religious rituals to pacify the public's minds.

During the late Tang period, one of the most prominent translation organizations was led by Prajña, operating under the reign of Emperor Dezong. Their translation initiatives were extensively documented in Yuanzhao 圓照's *Datang Zhenyuan Xukaiyuanshijiaolu* 大唐貞元續開元釋教錄 (*The Continuation of the Kaiyuan Buddhist Records in the Zhenyuan Era of the Great Tang*) and Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiaomulu 貞元新定釋教目錄 (*The Newly Established Buddhist Catalogue in the Zhenyuan Era*). Notably, the translation of the longer version of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* 廣本般若波羅蜜多心經 received particular attention in these records. Unfortunately, this aspect has not received widespread scholarly examination in the past.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the translation team of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, co-led by Prajña and Liyan 利言. It explores the team's

(1) organizational structure, (2) translation process, and (3) workflow, revealing their distinctive characteristics. Subsequently, this chapter analyzes the relationship between these features and the translation norms, taking into account various factors. This analysis aims to reconstruct the history of sūtra translation within the Prajña translation team during the politically tumultuous mid-Tang period. Through this exploration, it becomes evident how sūtra translation activities persisted despite the political upheaval, emphasizing their enduring significance within the cultural landscape of that era.

5.1 Prajña's Background and Arrival in China

During the late Tang period, the final prominent translation institution before Emperor Wuzong's suppression of Buddhism was established by Prajña under the reign of Emperor Dezong. Hailing from North India, Prajña renounced his family at a tender age of seven to pursue a monastic life. He received full ordination at the age of twenty and initially focused on studying Theravāda Buddhism. Later, at the renowned Nālandā Monastery in Central India, he immersed himself in the study of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Prajña had the privilege of being instructed by the renowned masters Zhihu 智護, Jinyou 進友, and Zhiyou 智友. Subsequently, he embarked on a journey to South India to explore esoteric Buddhism, thus gaining proficiency in various Buddhist doctrines.

Upon learning that Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva was preaching in the Central Plains, Prajña resolved to visit China and propagate Buddhism. Carrying the original Sanskrit scriptures, he arrived in Guangzhou, during the early years of Emperor Dezong's Jianzhong 建中 period (780–783) via the sea route. From there, he made his way to the capital. Upon the onset of the Zhenyuan 貞元 period, Prajña took up residence at the home of his relative, Luo Haoxin 羅好心, who held the position of a commander in the forbidden army, and patiently awaited an opportunity to commence his scripture translation endeavors.

5.2 The Composition of the Translation Team and Its Characteristics

5.2.1 *The Structure of the Translation Team Comprised of Seasoned Translators*

The translation team responsible for the expanded version of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* by Prajña and Liyan during the reign of Emperor Dezong possessed several notable features, the first being the composition of experienced translators. This team consisted of four types of members:

- A. **Initiator of translation requests:** During the late Tang era, the translation of Buddhist scriptures in China was typically initiated either by imperial decree or by devoted Buddhist practitioners. In the case of Prajña's project on the translation of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, it was Zhirou 智柔 from the capital who played a fundamental role in requesting the translation.
- B. **Chief translators:** These individuals held the primary responsibility for overseeing the translation process from Sanskrit to Chinese. In the historical records, it is evident that the expanded *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* was translated during the reign of Emperor Dezong by Prajña and Liyan (般若共利言), indicating that these two masters jointly managed the translation efforts. The decision to have two chief translators for the scripture was influenced by two key factors. Firstly, it is known from historical accounts that while Prajña possessed proficiency in Sanskrit, his command of Chinese was comparatively limited. Thus, an assistant was needed to ensure smooth communication and accurate translation. Liyan, who was multilingual and adept in both Sanskrit and Chinese, played a crucial role in bridging the linguistic gap between Prajña and the Chinese language (T55, no. 2157, vol. 14, 878). His presence allowed for effective communication, understanding of intended meanings, and the translation process. If any uncertainties, inaccuracies, or difficulties emerged in the Chinese version, Liyan could consult with Prajña to ensure the translation's quality. Secondly, Liyan possessed prior experience in translating another version of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* during the Kaiyuan 開元 period of Emperor Xuanzong, making him an excellent candidate to apply his previous translation expertise to this new project (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 748).
- C. **Ancillary translators:** These individuals played supportive roles in various stages of the translation process. Although the expanded *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* is credited to the joint translation efforts of the two masters Prajña and Liyan, historical records from the *Zhenyuan Xinding Shijiaomulu* 貞元新定釋教目錄 (*The Newly Established Buddhist Catalogue in the Zhenyuan Era*) not only reveal that the final translation was the result of various tasks such as proofreading, text embellishment, and copywriting but also indicate that the translation process of the scripture involved several ancillary translators who each had specific responsibilities. Also, these translators had substantial translation experience, having been involved in the translation of the *Sūtra of the Six Pāramitā* 大乘理趣六波羅蜜多經 (T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 893).
- D. **Presenter:** During the reign of Emperor Dezong, the translation of scriptures held significant importance, with each new Chinese translation of a Buddhist scripture requiring personal review by the emperor before dissemination. In this process, a designated monk served as the "presenter" (*Jinshang* 進上) (T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 893), responsible for documenting and explaining the rationale and methodology behind the translation. The presenter's role also involved emphasizing the value of the newly translated scriptures and seeking the emperor's permission for wider dissemination. For instance, the *Sūtra of the Six Pāramitā* was presented by Liangxiu 良秀 from the Ximing Monastery. Similarly, in the case of Prajña and Liyan's Chinese translation of the expanded

Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya, Zhirou 智柔 from the Qianfu Monastery, who initiated the translation request, also served as the presenter, fulfilling the aforementioned responsibilities.

In summary, in addition to the support from Liyan, Prajñā's translation team was composed of highly skilled individuals who led the translation efforts. They possessed extensive experience in translation, expertise in proofreading and refining texts, a deep understanding of scriptural exegesis, and a history of assisting in the translation and interpretation of scriptures in the capital long before the reign of Emperor Dezong. Their background allowed them to participate actively in imperial translation activities and develop close relationships with influential supporters of the team.

5.2.2 *The Multifaceted Division of Labor in the Translation Process*

The expanded *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* was not a long scripture, but it still adopted a finely divided collaborative translation model. This was the second major characteristic of the team-based translation process in the era of Emperor Dezong.

The Chinese translation process for the scripture involved several distinct steps (T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 893). It began with the “request for translation” (Qingyi 請譯), where the chief translator was asked to undertake the translation of a specific scripture. Following this, Prajñā assumed leadership of the translation project, with the assistance of Liyan. Both Prajñā and Liyan served as chief translators, responsible for the crucial task of producing the first draft of the translation. However, as mentioned earlier, Liyan, with his exceptional proficiency in multiple languages, including Sanskrit and Chinese, and profound understanding of Buddhist principles, likely played a major role in the process of “transcription” (*Bishou* 筆受).

According to the *Songgaosengzhuān* 宋高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty*), the role of the “transcriber” demanded fluency in both Chinese and Sanskrit, as well as extensive knowledge of Buddhism. The transcriber's primary responsibility was to engage in active communication with the chief translator, asking pertinent questions and learning from them, before proceeding to write down the translated text (相問委知, 然後下筆) (T50, no. 2061, vol. 3, 724). Liyan, with his linguistic talents, was well-suited to fulfill this crucial role and collaborated with Prajñā to produce the initial translated version in Chinese.

After the initial translation, the text was handed over to other monk translators responsible for “proving the meaning” (*Zhengyi* 證義) and “embellishing the text” (*Runwen* 潤文), and “copywriting” (*Shanxie* 繕寫). “Proving the meaning” aimed to ensure that the translated text did not deviate from the original Sanskrit version. “Embellishing the text” was to refine the wording for better understanding. The *Songgaosengzhuān* 宋高僧傳 (*Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty*) explained this process as generally being carried out by those familiar with

Buddhist teachings and secular knowledge (T50, no. 2061, vol. 3, 724). They checked whether the language used in the first draft of the translation was appropriate. In addition, “copywriting” involved carefully transcribing the verified translated text in its entirety for presentation, in preparation for future dissemination of the scriptures.

The final two steps involved presenting the completed scripture to the emperor for approval, after which it could be published and distributed throughout the country. Historical records provide evidence of this process during the late Tang era, particularly when Prajña’s translation team completed the translation of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhrdaya*. In this case, Zhirou, the initiator of the translation project, submitted the new translation to Emperor Dezhong, accompanied by a comprehensive statement explaining the translation process from start to finish. Upon reviewing the submission, the emperor expressed his profound agreement with Zhirou’s report and granted permission for the newly translated scripture to be widely disseminated (師所陳請，深為允愜。今依來奏，用廣真經) (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 757). This remarkable example serves as a testament to the elite translation process during the late Tang era.

5.2.3 *Simultaneous Processing of Collaborative Translation and Court Duties*

According to historical records, the translation of the expanded *Prajñāpāramitāhrdaya* by Prajña and Liyan commenced in the middle of the sixth year of Zhenyuan. However, during this period, they were also engaged in preparations for a diplomatic mission to North India. This dual commitment hindered their ability to devote their full attention to the translation work. This simultaneous handling of translation and court duties exemplifies the third characteristic of team-based translation during that era. The detailed record of the diplomatic duties that Prajña was specifically responsible for was clearly documented by Yuanzhao, a translator at the Prajña’s translation team:

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month in the sixth year of Zhenyuan, an allocation of fifty bolts of silk and five sets of winter clothes was once again bestowed upon Prajña. It was on this day that Prajña received the order to embark on a significant mission as a messenger to Kashmir in North India. Two days later, an additional set of spring clothes, along with thirty bolts of silk and four sets of winter clothes, were granted specifically for two of Prajña’s disciples who were chosen to accompany their revered master.

Subsequently, on the twenty-second day of the seventh month, Prajña was escorted to the imperial palace, specifically the Right Silver Terrace Gate, where he had a personal meeting with the emperor and received the imperial edict from the Zhongshumenxia, an administrative bureau. On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, he set out and spent the night at the Chang Le Station.

The following day, which was the twenty-fifth day of the seventh month, the emperor issued an order for the promotion of Prajña, granting him the well-deserved title of “Prajña Tripiṭaka” and presenting him with a purple robe. On the twenty-seventh day, the emperor

continued to send messengers to provide Prajña's mission with ten catties of assorted medicinal materials. Prajña resumed his journey the next morning, following a route that passed through Khuihuk, Beiting, Zhenxi, Persia, and finally reached India. It is noteworthy that at this time, Prajña was fifty-seven years old. (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 757)

5.3 The Factors of the Emergence of Prajña's Translation Team

5.3.1 *The Trend of Elite Translation Teams*

Prajña and Liyan employed an exceptional translation approach for the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, utilizing an elite translation team. Despite the sūtra's brevity, the chief translators implemented a structured approach, assigning specific roles to each team member. These experienced translators, who had previously served in translation teams, combined their extensive expertise in translating Buddhist scriptures to form a highly skilled group dedicated to sacred text translation. This translation model aligns with the longstanding tradition of elite translation teams since the early Tang era.

During the early Tang Dynasty, renowned translators like Prabhākaramitra, Xuanzang, and Yijing embraced the concept of the "elite translation team." Prabhākaramitra formed a team of nineteen experts from various backgrounds, summoned by the imperial court during the Zhenguan era. Xuanzang, upon his return from India, refined and inherited Prabhākaramitra's collaborative translation team (T50, no. 2060, vol. 3, 440). With Emperor Taizong's support, Xuanzang established a translation team that set the standard for the Tang Dynasty. He introduced a new translation process that ensured both the quantity and quality of sūtra translations. Xuanzang's ideas on building translation teams continue to provide valuable insights for contemporary translation practices (T50, no. 2053, vol. 6, 253). Similarly, during the Wu Zhou period, Yijing's elite translation team also played a significant role. Each member had specific responsibilities, including verifying Sanskrit meanings, copying, text and meaning verification, supervision, and transcription (T55, no. 2154, vol. 9, 568).

These historical examples illustrate the prevalence of forming elite translation teams during the early Tang, which persisted until the reign of Emperor Dezong. The collaborative translation model was not only applied to the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* but also to numerous Buddhist scriptures translated during the Zhenyuan era.

5.3.2 *The Historical Role of Translator Monks in National Affairs in Tang China*

The translation process of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhrdaya* by Prajña and Liyan was marked by their simultaneous involvement in state affairs, a characteristic deeply rooted in the traditions of the Tang Dynasty. During this period, translator monks often had to balance their religious and secular responsibilities.

During that era, translators were tasked not only with the translation of Buddhist scriptures but also with the management of secular matters and royal commands. This dual role presented challenges as it diverted their attention from their translation work. A notable example can be seen during the reign of Emperor Taizong when monks, including the renowned Xuanzang, were frequently summoned to the palace. These summons encompassed discussions not only on Buddhist doctrines but also on state affairs. Taizong even went so far as to request Xuanzang to abandon his monastic life and join the court, a proposal that Xuanzang declined. Nevertheless, Xuanzang occasionally carried out the emperor's orders, which inevitably disrupted his translation projects (T50, no. 2053, vol. 6, 255).

Under Emperor Xuanzong's rule, translators became even more involved in royal missions. The emperor often enlisted monks, including translators, for tasks unrelated to their religious duties, such as providing omens for the country. Eminent monks like Śubhakarasiṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, who introduced esoteric teachings during Xuanzong's reign, had to strike a delicate balance between their religious responsibilities and the special tasks assigned by the emperor. For instance, Śubhakarasiṃha was urgently summoned to perform rain prayers during a heatwave, while Vajrabodhi was entrusted with the construction of altars and the conduction of rituals for various purposes (T50, no. 2061, vol. 1, 711 & vol. 2, 715). Amoghavajra, in addition to translating Tantric scriptures, played a role in mitigating national crises and providing intelligence during the An Lushan Rebellion (T52, no. 2120, vol. 1, 828).

These examples illustrate how, apart from their primary role in sūtra translation, monks in the Tang Dynasty were frequently called upon to assist in managing court affairs, royal matters, and special assignments from the emperor. These additional duties sometimes hindered their translation work, becoming a common phenomenon and a tradition during that era. This tradition continued during the period under Emperor Dezong's reign. After the An Lushan Rebellion, the weakened Tang Dynasty faced threats from powerful Western neighbors, particularly Tibet. Dezong sought to utilize the knowledge of Prajña to negotiate with the Uyghurs, form alliances, and strategize against Tibet. Thus, Prajña's dual role as a translator and a special envoy to North India demonstrated the tradition of monks serving not only as Buddhist translators but also as diplomatic assets to the court (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 757 & T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 893).

5.3.3 *The Strategy of Bolstering Imperial Authority Through the Process of Sūtra Translation*

The translation of the *Longer Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* by Prajña and Liyan took place in an era deeply influenced by Buddhism. Emperor Dezong, recognizing the immense popularity of Buddhism, saw an opportunity to consolidate his imperial power by integrating it into the process of sūtra translation. His approach involved incorporating rituals and ceremonies that went beyond the mere translation of texts. The activities encompassed various ceremonial events: initiations for the sūtras, presentations of newly completed translations, and intricate rituals involving sūtra recitations and blessings.

A notable example of Dezong's approach can be seen in the initiation of the *Sūtra of the Six Pāramitā*. The emperor organized a grand procession, with a sizable contingent of the imperial army escorting the Sanskrit version of the sūtra to the designated translation site. The procession was accompanied by musicians, creating a captivating spectacle, and lavish gifts were granted to Prajña and other translators, emphasizing the magnificence of the event (T55, no. 2156, vol. 1, 756).

Following the translation of the *Sūtra of the Six Pāramitā*, monks from the Ximing Monastery, led by Liangxiu 良秀, requested a grand Dharma assembly. Their intention was to create an atmosphere of solemnity by illuminating the Dharma venue with ten thousand lamps and reciting sūtras such as the *Renwang Borejing* and other Prajñāpāramitā texts as prayers for national blessings. The scale of this event was equally impressive (T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 892).

In the fourteenth year of Zhengyuan (798), Prajña's team completed a new translation of the *Avatamsakasūtra* 華嚴經 at the royal translation site. This forty-volume translation was presented to the court in a formal manner. Officials, including Huo Xianming 霍仙鳴 (?-798), placed the translated works in an ornate treasure box, adorned with fragrant flowers (T10, no. 293, vol. 40, 848–849 & T55, no. 2157, vol. 17, 895). Emperor Dezong would then review and distribute the texts, reaffirming his central role in the sūtra translation process.

These grand events attracted participation from officials and civilians throughout the country, reinforcing the Tang Dynasty's position as a prominent global power. It was a crucial element of Dezong's strategy to utilize the sponsorship of Buddhist sūtra translation to enhance his imperial mandate and stabilize the nation, which was experiencing the capture of different parts of the empire by numerous warlords after the Anshi Rebellion.

In essence, Emperor Dezong aimed to merge the translation of Buddhist sūtras with the promotion of imperial authority, thereby showcasing the court's reverence for Buddhism and its embrace of divine and popular blessings. This approach elucidates the inclusion of procedures unrelated to mere language conversion, such as monks' presentations and the imperial announcement of the new translation, in the process of translating the expanded version of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* by Prajña's elite translation team. Furthermore, it underscored the fact that all scripture translations required the emperor's endorsement before dissemination in China. By

actively participating in the translation process, Dezong emphasized the authority of the national monarch, elevating his prestige and intertwining the propagation of Buddhism with the consolidation of political power—a trend that grew increasingly pronounced during the late Tang era.

5.3.4 *Post-Prajña Era: The Resurgence of Sūtra Translation in the Song Dynasty*

Following Prajña's translation work, Buddhism in China faced significant challenges in the subsequent era. Emperor Wuzong's persecution of Buddhism, along with societal upheavals, dealt a severe blow to the religion. Furthermore, the waning power of the Tang Dynasty resulted in the decline of elite translation teams, leaving only isolated translation activities carried out by small groups or individuals. It was only after the unification of China under the Song Dynasty that team-based Buddhist scripture translation experienced a revival.

Taking inspiration from the elite translation system of the Tang Dynasty, the Song court established the Dharma Transmission Court, ushering in a revival of collaborative sūtra translation that flourished for a century.¹ The *Fozutongji* 佛祖統紀 (*A Chronicle of Buddhism in China*) from the Song Dynasty offers valuable insights into the establishment and operation of the Dharma Transmission Court, shedding light on the division of labor in sūtra translation (T49, no. 2035, vol. 43, 398) (Table 5.1).

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The translation of the expanded *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* by Prajña and Liyan's team during the late Tang dynasty illustrates the resilience of Buddhist scripture translation amidst political turmoil. Despite instability after the An Lushan rebellion, Emperor Dezong's support enabled the persistence of translation efforts.

Prajña's team combined experienced translators in specialized roles to efficiently produce high-quality translations. Their workflow balanced translation duties with court obligations, speaking to the era's tradition of monk translators serving both religious and state needs. Though complex, this model enabled the continued circulation of Buddhist teachings.

The emergence of Prajña's elite team stemmed from several key factors—the prevalence of small expert teams, monks' dual political-religious roles, and the

¹ In-depth analysis can be found in Liang Tianxi's works on the categorization, volumes, translators, and translation periods of Chinese Buddhist scriptures during the Northern Song Dynasty (2013a, 54–112 & 2013b, 54–112). Furthermore, Feng Guodong (2019, 54–112) has made significant contributions in recent years with his examination of the translation system during the Song Dynasty, focusing on the three major Buddhist scripture collections.

Table 5.1 Roles and responsibilities of translation collaborators of the Dharma Transmission Court as described in the *Fozutongji* 佛祖統紀

Role	Description
1. Chief translator	Occupying the helm of the group and facing outward, this person had the task of orally presenting the Sanskrit text
2. Meaning verifiers	Seated to the left of the chief translator, they collaborated with the Chief Translator to decipher the Sanskrit text
3. Text verifiers	Stationed to the right of the chief translator, they were responsible for listening to the Sanskrit text as recited aloud by the Chief Translator in order to spot any discrepancies or errors
4. Scribes	As a scholar proficient in Sanskrit, the Scribe attentively listened to the Sanskrit text and then transcribed it using Chinese characters that closely mirrored the Sanskrit pronunciation
5. Transcribers	Their task involved converting the Chinese transliteration of Sanskrit texts into meaningful Chinese, adhering to the original word sequence while employing broader, contextual interpretations of individual terms
6. Contextualizers	They restructured the translated text to align with the syntax and semantics of the Chinese language
7. Proofreaders	Their duty was to cross-check the text in both languages to ensure there were no mistakes
8. Editors	Tasked with eliminating redundant or verbose phrases, the Editor also determined the final meanings of sentences
9. Polishers	Positioned facing south among the monks, the Polisher was charged with refining the translated text to its final form

strategy of intertwining imperial power with Buddhism. Together, these elements shaped an adaptive translation approach for the precarious times.

This examination of Prajña's team provides a window into the ingenuity and dedication that enabled scripture translation to thrive in the face of adversity. Their legacy set the stage for a revival of collaborative translation under the subsequent Song Dynasty. This highlights the profound significance of translation in upholding spiritual and cultural continuity, even during times of instability.

The late Tang era stands as evidence of how supportive rulers and committed translators preserved the transmission of Buddhist ideas. As Prajña's team demonstrated, cooperation, skill, and adaptability can overcome considerable challenges. Their steadfast efforts in the face of turmoil showcased translation's power to uplift society during difficult transitions.

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Chapter 6

Conclusion



Abstract This chapter outlines the main conclusions of this monograph by tracing the development of collaborative translation of Buddhist texts in medieval China through six distinct phases. It summarizes the features of the elite translation model during the Tang Dynasty and puts forward multiple directions for follow-up research, which include the study of the complexity of sūtra translation strategies, normative factors of translation activities, and the distribution modes of Buddhist translations in imperial China. Furthermore, to open up a broader understanding of this rich historical and cultural phenomenon, research on individual translators, team-based translation in the post-Tang era, and the application of digital technologies is suggested.

This final chapter distills the key findings explored throughout this book, underscoring significant conclusions on sūtra translation from the early medieval China to the Tang Dynasty. It also serves as a bridge to potential future research, highlighting the need for continued exploration into translation organizations and models in the post-Tang era.

The conclusion affirms the importance of ongoing scholarly discourse on this topic, given the historical impact and cultural significance of sūtra translation. It is hoped that the presented analysis inspires further investigations, enriching the understanding of sūtra translation's role in shaping Chinese Buddhism and cultural history.

6.1 Evolution of Collaborative Sūtra Translation in Medieval China: A Journey from Small Teams to Large-Scale Efforts

During the medieval period, the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese followed two paths. The first involved individual translators who undertook the task of translating the entire text on their own. The second path involved collaborative

translation, where a group of translators worked together, progressing through the scripture step by step. This monograph specifically focuses on the collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures in Tang China. Historically, these collaborative efforts can be classified into three distinct models: small-scale collaborative translation, large-scale collaborative translation, and elite collaborative translation. These models underwent six stages of evolution, and the key highlights of these stages are summarized as follows:

6.1.1 Stage One: The Emergence of Small Group Translations During the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms Period

During the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, which marked the initial introduction of Buddhism to China, a significant development took place in the form of small group translations. At this time, translators from the Western Regions who were spreading Buddhism in China faced a challenge: their proficiency in Chinese was limited, requiring assistance from others in translating and transcribing the scriptures. Local Buddhists, eager to deepen their understanding of Buddhism, willingly stepped forward to offer their help, leading to the emergence of small group translations.

The primary methods employed in these early translations were the “two-step collaboration” and the “three-step collaboration.” In the two-step collaboration, the process involved the translator orally translating the scriptures into Chinese, followed by another individual who would listen to the translator’s interpretation and transcribe it into a final written text. The three-step collaboration, on the other hand, comprised of three stages: Firstly, the translator recited the original text of the scriptures; secondly, an assistant listened to the contents recited by the translator and provided an oral translation into Chinese; thirdly, another translator listened to the Chinese oral translation and transcribed it into written form.

These collaborative methods facilitated the gradual transfer of the profound teachings and sacred knowledge of Buddhism from the original scriptures to the Chinese language, making them accessible to a wider audience in China. This period laid the foundation for the subsequent development and refinement of translation techniques in later eras.

6.1.2 Stage Two: The Transformation of Small Group Translations During the Western Jin Dynasty

The second stage occurred during the Western Jin Dynasty, marking an important improvement in the small group translations. At this time, the Chinese translation of

Buddhist scriptures was spearheaded by Dharmarakṣa, a renowned translator who rendered numerous significant Mahāyāna scriptures into Chinese. His contributions were so remarkable that he earned the revered title of “Dunhuang Bodhisattva” (*Dunhuang Pusa* 敦煌菩薩). Building upon the small group translation practices from the previous era, Dharmarakṣa introduced notable revisions to the collaborative structure.

During the translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, Dharmarakṣa implemented several enhancements. Firstly, he expanded the number of assistant translators involved in the process, allowing for a more comprehensive and accurate rendering of the text. In addition, Dharmarakṣa introduced a crucial step of proofreading the translations to ensure the high quality of the resulting Chinese version. Moreover, he incorporated post-translation processes, such as scripture writing, explication, and teaching, to facilitate the wider dissemination and understanding of the translated scriptures. These innovations marked the first transformation of the small group translation model, elevating its effectiveness and impact.

Dharmarakṣa’s contributions during the Western Jin Dynasty not only enriched the body of translated Buddhist scriptures but also set a precedent for future translators to refine and improve upon the translation practices. His efforts laid a solid foundation for the continued development of Chinese Buddhist translation in subsequent periods.

6.1.3 Stage Three: Further Improvements in Small Group Translations and the Emergence of Large-Scale Translation Teams during the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms Period

The third stage occurred during the Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms period, which exhibited two significant developments in the field of translation.

Firstly, there was further refinement of small group translations. During this period, the “two-step collaboration” and “three-step collaboration” approaches became highly popular in small group translations. Some later translators, building upon Dharmarakṣa’s translation reforms, made additional adjustments to the collaborative process. They introduced new translation tasks such as Sanskrit writing and proofreading, and the post-translation review became more thorough. The aim was to minimize errors and misunderstandings in the translation process. This marked the second transformation of the small group translation model, which gained prominence during the Former Qin Dynasty under the leadership of Daoan 道安 (314–385) and Zhao Zheng 趙正.

Secondly, large-scale translation sites emerged for the first time. The Eastern Jin Dynasty and the Sixteen Kingdoms period witnessed significant changes in the collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures in medieval China, introducing new methods. In addition to the improvements in small group translations, a new translation model emerged, referred to in this book as “large-scale translation teams.”

This model was characterized by the involvement of numerous assistants, often exceeding a hundred and, in some cases, even surpassing a thousand. In the process of translating scriptures, additional steps were introduced, including teaching, debating, and correction, which fostered the participation of hundreds or even thousands of individuals at the translation site. The goal was to harness collective wisdom, foster clear mutual understanding, and ensure that the translations aligned with the reading habits of the general public. This large-scale collaboration originated from the Chang'an translation site of Kumārajīva in the Later Qin Dynasty and continued into the Northern Liang Dynasty.

6.1.4 Stage Four: Continuation and Adaptation of Translation Models During the Southern and Northern Dynasties

The fourth stage corresponds to the Southern and Northern Dynasties, which demonstrates three distinct characteristics in collaborative translation.

Firstly, it continued the small group translation model inherited from the previous generation. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, small group collaborative translation largely retained the “two-step collaboration” or “three-step collaboration” method without significant reforms. However, the patrons of translations placed greater emphasis on selecting talented assistant translators, and the number of translators in small groups exceeded that of previous dynasties.

Secondly, the introduction of translation supervisors was notable. In the mid-Southern and Northern Dynasties, the Northern Dynasties initiated a translation supervision system to coordinate the operations of translation groups, meet the needs of translators, and enhance the collective management of Buddhist scripture translation. This system gradually spread to the late Southern Dynasties as well.

Thirdly, large-scale translation sites occasionally emerged. The prime period for large-scale translation teams was during the Eastern Jin and Sixteen Kingdoms period. While this model facilitated the dissemination and canonicalization of translations, it posed significant management challenges during the execution process. These challenges involved the fluctuating quality of hundreds or thousands of assistant translators and the absence of standardized procedures to prevent leaks of unfinished translations that could potentially mislead the recipients of the new scriptures. As a result, large-scale translation teams declined during the Southern and Northern Dynasties and became far less common compared to small group translations.

6.1.5 Stage Five: Expansion and Maturation of Small Group Translation Model During the Sui Dynasty

The fifth stage corresponds to the Sui Dynasty, which predominantly continued the small group translation model established during the Southern and Northern Dynasties while also expanding the size of translation groups. Inheriting the small group translation model from the previous era, the Sui Dynasty implemented detailed division of labor. In addition to recitation, translation, and transcription, there were dedicated translators responsible for proofreading and correcting the text. Ten virtuous monks served as guardians of the translation site to ensure smooth operations, and the overall structure of the translation process matured.

Furthermore, certain translation groups in the Sui Dynasty consisted of more than twenty assistants, which represented a significant scale. The number of participants exceeded that of the early medieval period, thus laying the groundwork for the establishment of elite translation teams in the Tang Dynasty.

6.1.6 Stage Six: The Fusion of Translation Models and Emergence of Elite Translation Sites During the Tang Dynasty

The sixth stage corresponds to the Tang Dynasty, which was characterized by the development of an elite translation model that combined both small group translation and large-scale translation teams. Collaborative translation during this era predominantly occurred at imperial translation sites, accompanied by small group translations. The elite translation teams built upon the translation model established during the Sui Dynasty, incorporating the small group translation practices from the Eastern Han, the Three Kingdoms, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties. Furthermore, they integrated the collaborative elements of collective discussion and correction found in large-scale translation teams from earlier eras.

The Tang court placed significant emphasis on the academic background of translators. In the early Tang Dynasty, the “Ten Branches” served as selection criteria, restricting entry to the translation sites and limiting the number of translators to exclude ordinary individuals.

The elite translation sites of the Tang Dynasty first emerged during the early reign of Emperor Taizong. They were initiated by Prabhākaramitra, inherited by Xuanzang, and further refined during the reigns of Emperor Gaozong to Emperor Ruizong. Notably, two major translation sites led by Yijing and Bodhiruci made remarkable contributions, representing significant innovations.

During the Tianbao 天寶 period under Emperor Xuanzong, the elite translation efforts were spearheaded by Amoghavajra, extending through the subsequent reigns of Emperors Suzong and Daizong. This period witnessed another innovation as positions dedicated to the phonetics and rhythm of Sanskrit chants were introduced.

Collaborative translation activities were also linked to the court's focus on protecting the country and alleviating disasters.

The last large-scale elite translation in the Tang Dynasty occurred during the Zhenyuan 貞元 era under Emperor Dezong, presided over by Prajña. However, translation efforts faced obstacles due to Emperor Wuzong's persecution of Buddhism and the subsequent decline of national strength. With the establishment of the Dharma Transmission Court following the Tang system during the Northern Song Dynasty, the elite translation site was revived.

6.2 Prospects for Further Investigation

6.2.1 *Further Elaborating on the Perspective of Buddhist Scripture Translation in Medieval China*

This book extensively examines a wide range of historical archives encompassing Chinese Buddhist scripture translations. It offers a detailed analysis of the collaborative translation model employed during the Tang Dynasty, delving into the growth and evolution of each translation organization, the biographies of notable translators, and the fundamental processes involved in translation. Its primary objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the unique features and qualities inherent in Buddhist scripture translations during the Tang China for university students studying translation history or Buddhist scripture translation, researchers in these fields, and individuals from the general public with a keen interest in this subject matter.

In the future, there are several compelling topics that warrant in-depth exploration:

- A. **The origins of translation:** The causal model proposed by translation scholar Andrew Chesterman can be utilized to analyze the factors that contributed to collaborative translations in different periods (Chesterman, 2017, 123–146).¹ These factors include the historical and cultural context, prevalent translation conventions in medieval China, and the choices made by individual translators. Unraveling these elements will provide further insights into the nature of ancient Chinese scripture translation activities.
- B. **Translation strategies:** Preserved original texts of translated scriptures offer an opportunity for comparative analysis. Future research can involve methodical textual analysis from a linguistic perspective to examine the translation strategies employed by various translation organizations. In addition, exploring the

¹ According to Andrew Chesterman's causal model, there are seven factors influencing the generation of translation activities. These include: (1) socio-cultural conditions, (2) translation events, (3) translation acts, (4) translation profiles, (5) cognitive effects, (6) behavioral effects, and (7) socio-cultural effects. This model framework can be used to analyze the causes of the translation of ancient Buddhist scriptures into Chinese.

relationship between these strategies and the division of labor processes will be valuable.

- C. **The impact of normative forces on translation:** By applying norm theory from Translation Studies, it is possible to investigate the diverse normative forces at play within the medieval translation world and their influence on translators' decision-making processes.² This line of inquiry will contribute to a better understanding of the specific dynamics underlying collaborative translations.
- D. **The dissemination of translations:** Understanding how the completed scripture translations were disseminated to enable Chinese Buddhists to access the newly translated texts is crucial. While this book briefly touches upon this topic, future research can draw upon actor-network theory from sociology to deconstruct the historical events involved in the transmission process.

6.2.2 *The Lone Translators: Investigating Independent Translation in Medieval China*

As mentioned earlier, ancient Chinese Buddhist scripture translation activities followed two distinct paths: collaborative and individual translations. While this book has provided a brief overview of collaborative translation models, individual translations have not been thoroughly explored. Historical records reveal numerous instances of translators independently translating Buddhist scriptures, often showcasing skills and expertise comparable to collaborative efforts. An example of such an individual translator is An Shigao 安世高 from the Eastern Han period, who quickly mastered Chinese upon his arrival in China and undertook independent translation work, teaching the translated texts to others without royal or institutional support (T50, no. 2059, vol. 1, 323). Similar cases can be found in historical accounts.

Therefore, a significant area for future research lies in exploring the history of individual translations in medieval China. This would involve investigating the backgrounds and histories of independent translators, examining each case through prefaces, scripture records, monk biographies, and other relevant sources. This research should explore the translation processes employed by these individual translators, investigate their thoughts and strategies regarding translation, and analyze whether their translated texts reflect their unique translation philosophies. A potential structure for this book could draw inspiration from Douglas Robinson's *Western Translation Theory: From Herodotus to Nietzsche*, with each translator being given a dedicated biography that chronicles their life and translation activities (Robinson, 2002). Moreover, including a comprehensive list of original documents and research works related to each translator would further enhance the readers' understanding. If realized, this endeavor could serve as a companion volume to this monograph, providing

² For a basic understanding of the concept of translation norms, significant insights can be found in *In Search of a Theory of Translation* by Toury (1980), "The Concept of Norms in Translation Studies" by Schäffner (1999), and *Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory* by Chesterman (2016).

readers with a more comprehensive understanding of the history of Buddhist scripture translation in medieval China.

6.2.3 *Beyond the Tang Dynasty: Tracing Collaborative Translation Thereafter*

The medieval period witnessed a remarkable flourishing of Chinese Buddhist scripture translation activities, reaching its zenith during the Tang Dynasty. Subsequently, the Northern Song government established the Dharma Transmission Court, which perpetuated the elite system of the Tang Dynasty and engaged in collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures for a century. However, a significant shift occurred in scripture translation activities due to various factors, including the decline of Buddhism in India, the scarcity of new scriptures, a decrease in Western monks, and the evolving cultural and political landscapes in East Asia. Translation activities expanded beyond the translation of Buddhist scriptures from Sanskrit and other languages of the Silk Road into Chinese. They encompassed translations into languages spoken by bordering ethnic groups such as Mongolian and Manchu. Moreover, there was a notable endeavor to translate old Chinese Buddhist scriptures into these border languages, which found wide readership among diverse ethnic communities in East Asia. Collaboration continued to be a prominent and defining feature of these translation models. Therefore, the subject matter covered in this book, focusing on translation organizations in Tang China, represents only the initial exploration of a much broader research landscape. Future studies can probe the examination of scripture translation organizations during or after the Song Dynasty.

Two key topics are recommended for further investigation:

- A. **The history of collaborative scripture translation in the Western Xia Kingdom:** The discovery of a vast collection of Western Xia documents, including Buddhist scriptures, in locations like Khara-Khoto in the nineteenth century provides valuable firsthand accounts of Western Xia people involved in translating scriptures.³ This offers insights into how Western Xia monarchs supported scripture translation and the collaborative practices employed by translators. It would be intriguing to explore whether the translation teams in the Western Xia Kingdom resembled those of the Central Plains dynasties, whether they adhered to Han regulations, introduced innovations, or developed their distinct approaches. Examining these aspects will contribute to constructing a comprehensive history of collaborative translation of Buddhist scriptures in East Asia.
- B. **The history of collaborative translation in the Qing Dynasty:** While the translation activities of the Qing Dynasty, especially regarding the translation and engraving of the Manchu Tripiṭaka, have been extensively discussed, there

³ For an overview of the quantity and types of Buddhist scriptures unearthed in the Western Xia region, please see page 84–93 of *A Brief History of Western Xia Buddhism* by Shi (1988).

remains a notable gap in scholarly analysis from the perspective of collaborative translation (Zhang, 2008). To further advance our understanding, future research can delve into the re-examination of scripture translation records, such as the *Qingshilu* 清實錄 (*The Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty*). In addition, the digitized Manchu scriptures available in recent years can be taken into consideration.⁴ Through these valuable sources, scholars can reassess the system and translation model utilized in the Manchu translation of Buddhist scriptures during the Qing Dynasty. This comprehensive analysis will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the translation practices and methodologies employed after the medieval period.

6.2.4 Utilizing Digital Tools to Unlock the History of Buddhist Scripture Translation

The remarkable growth of digital humanities in the twenty-first century offers exciting opportunities for exploring the history of Buddhist scripture translation. Leveraging the latest advancements in information technology to aid in this endeavor is a valuable topic for scholarly discussion (Siu, 2019). A key focus should be on digitizing historical materials related to scripture translation, integrating existing research findings, and making them publicly accessible. Furthermore, the development of a robust system with data visualization capabilities would greatly assist researchers in uncovering overlooked historical nuances through interactive three-dimensional representations of textual materials. Such a system could also be utilized in classroom settings to facilitate student learning. By starting with Buddhist scripture translation, students can gain insights into the ancient cultural exchanges between China and other regions.

One suggestion is to gather historical materials on Buddhist scripture translation from diverse sources and develop an innovative online tool called the “Buddhist Translation Nexus: A Web-based Platform for Teaching and Research on Scripture Translation in Medieval China.” This platform would serve as a centralized repository for original materials from collaborative translation sites across different time periods. It would incorporate annotations and include a full-text search engine for convenient exploration of related files. The platform could visualize the relationships among translators at each site using interactive tools such as force-directed graphs or three-dimensional maps, providing a clear understanding of their connections. In addition, by employing the translator research framework in Translation Studies, it would be possible to analyze the relationship between translators’ social networks and the emergence of scripture translation activities. This system could also be integrated into undergraduate and graduate courses on translation history, incorporating digital tools to enhance students’ understanding of the complex history and relationships involved in ancient Chinese scripture translation. This approach would deepen

⁴ For more details, please see the “Research Material for the Manchu Buddhist Canon” (<https://buddhistinformatics.dila.edu.tw/manchu/>) provided by the Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts.

students' knowledge, improve teaching effectiveness, and foster future research in the field of Buddhist scripture translation.

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