

Rethinking the Debates between Kumarajiva and Buddhahadra: Themes, Background and Influences

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This article tries to reexamine famous debates between Kumarajiva and Buddhahadra at the first decade of 5th century in Chang'an. The core themes of these debates are how to comprehend Sunya, paramanu and their relations, which are the key concepts of Madhyamika represented by Kumarajiva and Neo-Sarvastivada represented by Buddhahadra respectively. The author traces the relating doctrinal background firstly, with a detailed analysis of Neo-Sarvastivadin theory of paramanu and its responding to Madhyamika's theory of Sunya, as the background for understanding these debates. Then he surveys the context of debates, which relates not only to the different charisma of two leading figures such as their different educational backgrounds, personalities and their different comprehension about virtues, meditations and wisdoms as well, but also relates to the competitive environments among two Buddhist fellowship. Based on these analyses, the author offers a further examination to the practical connotation of these debates in meditative lineage and methods. The article concludes with a survey to the influences of these debates in Chinese Buddhist history, pointing out although these debates ended up with the recession of Buddhahadra and he was expelled from Chang'an with his fellow, finally it is Buddhahadra while not Kumarajiva that was established as the orthodox paradigm of Chinese Buddhist meditative tradition and gave a long run influences on meditative tradition of Tiantai school, Chan school as well as other tradition; meanwhile on the doctrinal dimension, although the discussion about paramanu doesn't go on, Buddhahadra's view on paramanu reoccur in transformed way among scholastic controversies at North-South period.