

ABSTRACT

The beginning of the fifth century may be regarded as a decisive turning point in the history of Buddhism in China, particularly because of the intense translation work of the Kuchean Kumarajiva (Ch. Jiumoluohe 鸠摩罗什: 350-409?) in Chang'an, Northern China, under the patronage of the proto-Tibetan Emperor Yao Xing (AD:384-417) of the Later Qin Dynasty (Hou Qin 后秦).

Thanks to the quality of his translations, Kumarajiva helped Chinese Buddhism to free itself of the method of Ge Yi (格义, lit. "Matching the Meaning [of a Sanskrit term with one of a Chinese ex-pression already existing in traditional philosophy]"), which had caused numerous misinterpretations. Moreover, Kumarajiva was responsible for introducing into China the Madhyamaka school (Ch. Zhonglun 中论) or Middle Path, which was founded in India by Nagarjuna (c. AD 150-250).

Kumarajiva's biography is to be found in the Annals of the Jin dynasty (Jinshu, 95), in the Tang Gaoseng zhuan (T. no 2059), the Chu sanzangji ji (T. no 2145], the Guang hongming ji (T. no.2103), as well as in the prefaces to some Sūtras he translated into Chinese; moreover, some further information can be collected from biographies of his disciples and other famous monks of his lifetime.

Mention of Kumarajiva is also to be found in some eighteenth-century Tibetan sources written by Tibetan and Mongol authors.

The present paper will address the following specific tasks: (1) It will present the type of historical Tibetan sources mentioning Kumarajiva and will identify their primary source. (2) It will depict Kumarajiva's personality, life and work as described in these sources and explain the reasons for the distortions between his Chinese and Tibetan biographies. It will reveal incidentally why Brahmanism was never introduced into China.