

KUMARAJIVA: A GREAT BUDDHIST MASTER

by

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कुमारजीव

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Jiūmóluóshi, Jap. -

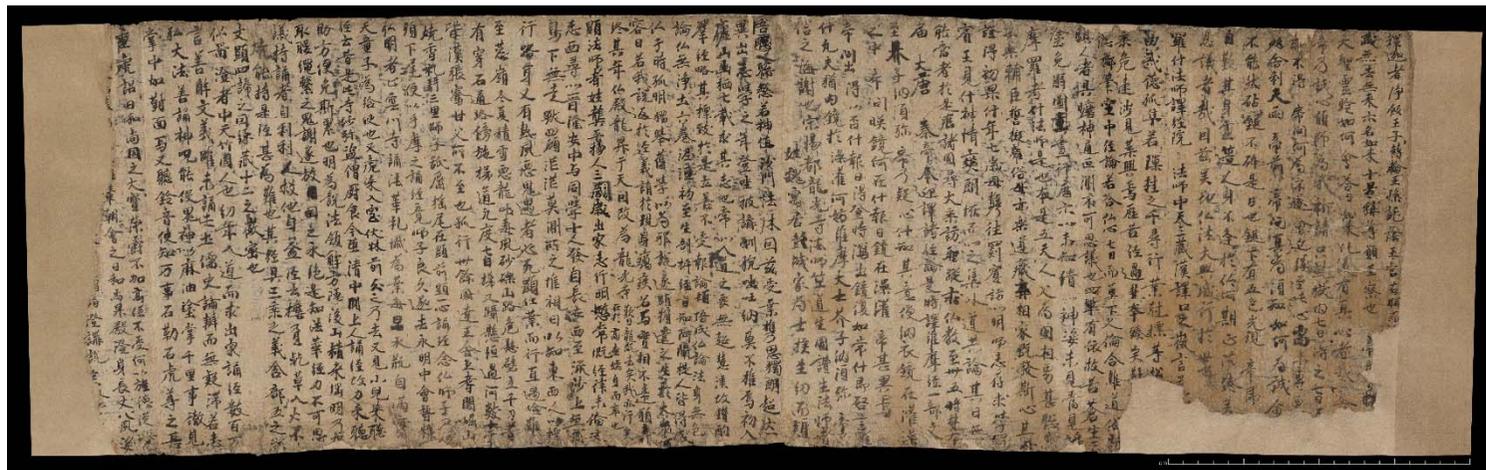
Kumaraju



Oasis in Taklamaken Desert gradually became miraculous kingdoms with sumptuous monasteries and flourishing transnational trade routes. Chinese monk scholars sought Buddhist sūtras in Sanskrit in them and were deeply influenced by the art forms of Kucha while embellishing the walls of the caves of Tun-huang.



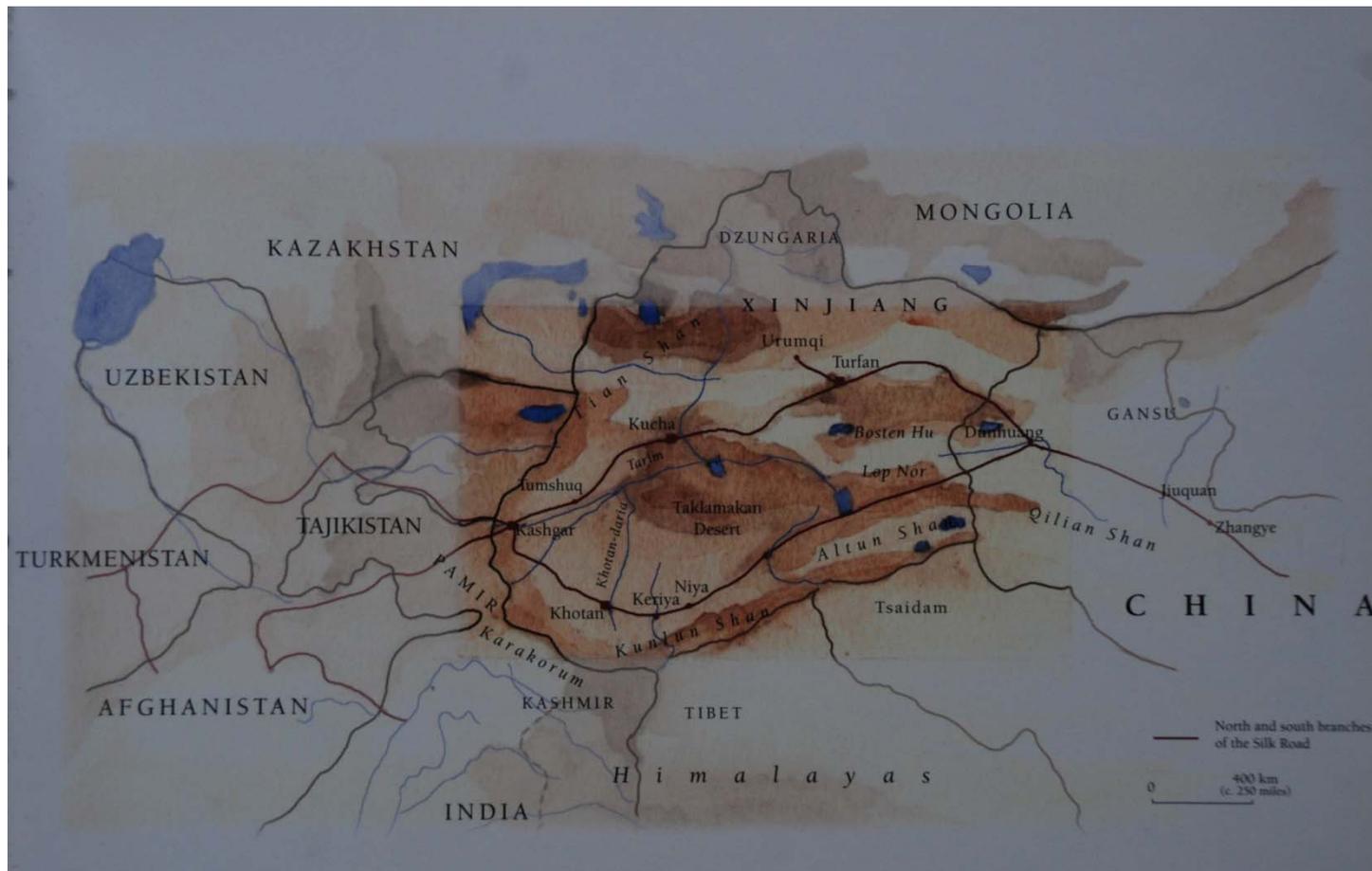
Or.8210/S.3074 Biography of Kumarajiva, Faxian and Buddhacinga in Chinese. Copyright, British Library Board. Image reproduced courtesy of the International Dunhuang Project (IDP): <http://idp.bl.uk>



Kumarajiva's mother Jīvā, a princess of Kucha was a woman of great talent and his father Kumārayāna was a descendant of an honorable line of Prime Ministers of Kashmir.



A map showing the northern and the southern silk route, a major axes along which Buddhism spread from India to Central Asia and China. The royal city state of Kucha on this route was a favoured halt for caravans and pilgrims. It was rich in rock sancturies spread over four sites, of which Kizil, Kizil Kargha and Kumtura are the most significant from the archeological and art history point of view.



Kumarajiva's father left the comforts of his home, strapped a wooden image of Sakyamuni Buddha to his back, set out along the Silk Route across the mighty Pamirs and into the Takla Maken desert. Following the northern route, he reached the devoutly Buddhist kingdom of Kucha on the northern rim of the great Tarim river basin.





Pagoda in the eastern temple at Subashi where Kumarajva was born.

Photo Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan



A DIVINE SPIRIT WAS ENSHRINED IN THE FIVE FEET BODY OF GREAT PILGRIM ON THE PATH OF DHARMA

Photo @ Nobuyoshi Yamabe

Kumārajīva, sitting on a lotus, meditating in front of the Kizil caves as a young monk. Kizil is one of the most famous sites in Central Asia, situated on the Muzart river, where a multitude of Buddhist temples were discovered, hewn in the mountainsides. Approximately 300 caves at Kizil contained frescoes. Its local name is 'Ming-oi' (1000 cells or chambers) referred to the vague figure of great magnitude.

Kizil caves 47-81 in the western direction

These caves are divided by a central pillar, with two side passages so that the devotee would gaze at the vault painted all over that symbolized the cosmos. He could circumambulate the ritual circuit of *pradakṣiṇā*. He would view the murals of Jatakas and Avadanas on the walls.

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan



- Dharmarakṣa, Kumārajīva and Hsuan-tsang are the three masters who stand out by their preeminent virtue and for spreading the subtle philosophical systems of Buddhism.
- The process was begun by Dharmarakṣa who was a Yueh-chih. It found its full flowering in Kumārajīva and culmination in Hsuan-tsang.
- But Kumārajīva remains central to practical Buddhism in East Asia. He represents an international personality. He was a Kuchean who were speaking a European language, reading and discussing in an Indian language, as the medium of instruction was Sanskrit, and also conversing and writing in Chinese.
- Kumārajīva, (Ch. Jiūmóluóshì), a philosopher and seer, had a long cherished mission—propagation of the true spirit of Buddhism. He broke political, geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers.
- He traveled through barren lands and rivers, mountains and forbidding terrains to bequeath to us a casket of sacred sūtras as the most authoritative presentations by translating them from Sanskrit into Chinese.
- He created pure, boundless and incredible versions of the sūtras as an obeisance to the sacred voice so that one could bathe in the pure pond of the Dharma.

Kumārajīva is famed for his encyclopaedic knowledge of Buddhism and Vedantic learning, for fluency and proficiency in writing Sanskrit and Chinese languages and for excellence of translations couched in powerful and compelling language. His sensitivity to both the languages was remarkable like Hsüan-tsang.

For his comprehension of the words of the Buddha, he is recognized as the most prominent among around 200 great translators of Buddhist scriptures, who were active from 2nd to 13th century.

Fifty-four texts that he translated in a distinctive style possessing a flowing smoothness, run into 6000-7000 fascicles. They reflect prioritization of conveying the meaning as opposed to precise literal rendering. Generations after generations acknowledge his brilliance. The impact of his works can still be felt in almost all the schools/sects of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia.

Kumārajīva based himself upon the philosophy of Nāgārjuna whose teachings represent the Mahayana doctrine. His dedication resulted in reverence for sūtras like Saddharma-pundarika (Lotus Sūtra), Prajnaparamita (the Great Wisdom Sūtra) and Vimalakirttinirdesa which are widely studied throughout East Asia. He is seen as a true disciple of the Buddha, a pure mirror, who never made any claim about his special insight. He never offered interpretations bearing shades of his personal bias or polemical judgments. He is compared to a lotus flower in the muddy swamp who was responsible for the great waves of Buddhist thought which flowed across China over a thousand years ago.

THE ROLE OF VIRTUE AND THE VALUES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

- The human body has an inner core and an outer cover, both are to be strong.
- Technosphere cannot supercede biosphere.
- We must harmonise the relationship between wealth and virtue.
- Virtue has to be central and affluence, secondary.
- Laymen, intellectuals and spirituals together in a sharing of minds, to explore truth.
- International harmony through life enhancing systems and thought was taught by Kuamarajiva.

KUMARAJIVA'S UNIQUE STYLE OF TRANSLATING 74 SANSKRIT TEXTS IN 384 FASCICLES

- Kumarajiva did not follow the system of ko-i meaning matching the concepts by grouping together Buddhist and Taoist ideas.
- He offered inspired translations in keeping with the literary flow of Chinese.
- There was no personal bias or polemical judgments.
- His style was the most artistic, creative and easy to understand.
- It was not word to word and simple.
- He first comprehended the nature of the subject and then expressed it in Chinese, putting so much life into them as if they were his own creations.
- The Sanskrit philosophical texts have conceptual intensity but when they were translated by Kumarajiva they attained delicacy and depth.
- He corrected errors of the previous translations and also compared two copies of the sutras— one that was with the emperor and the other with him.
- He shortened the texts, deleted extensive repetitions and ponderous verbosity which was intolerable to the Chinese literati.
- He adapted the texts to Chinese literary tastes.
- Division of the texts into sections and sentences was done with a great care.
- Translations were precise, clear and excellent

**KUMARAJIVA WORKED IN A MULTILINGUAL AND
MULTICULTURAL ENVIRONMENT TO DISSEMINATE THE
BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY TO TRANSMIT UNIVERSAL VALUE
SYSTEMS INTO CHINA**

The psychosphere of Kumarajiva was constituted by three linguistic cultures— Sanskrit, European Tokharian and Chinese besides visual arts, music, dance, and theatrical excellence of the Kuchean people.



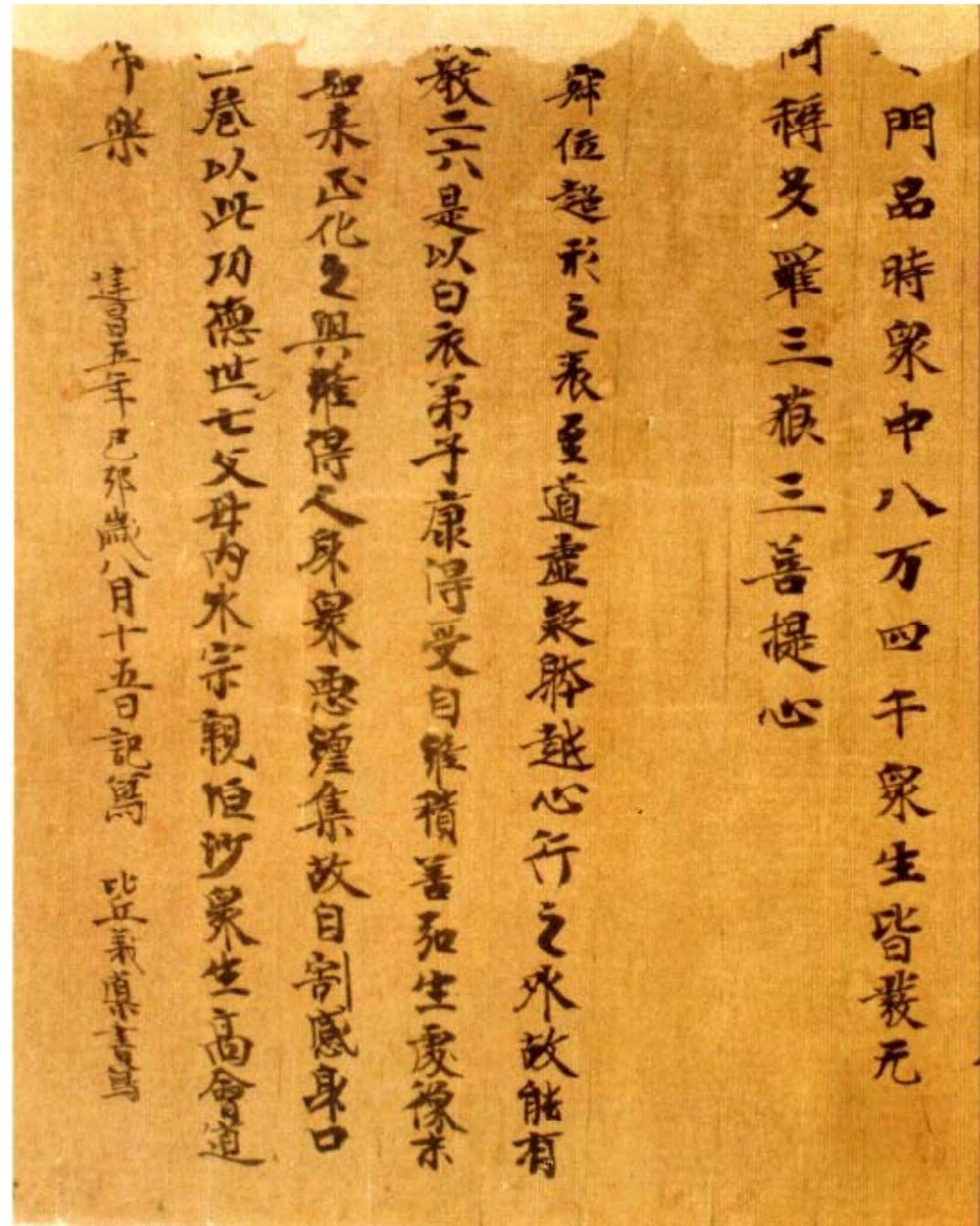
A god playing flute
in Qizil cave 77. The
halo around his head
emphasizes his
divinity as well as
that of music.



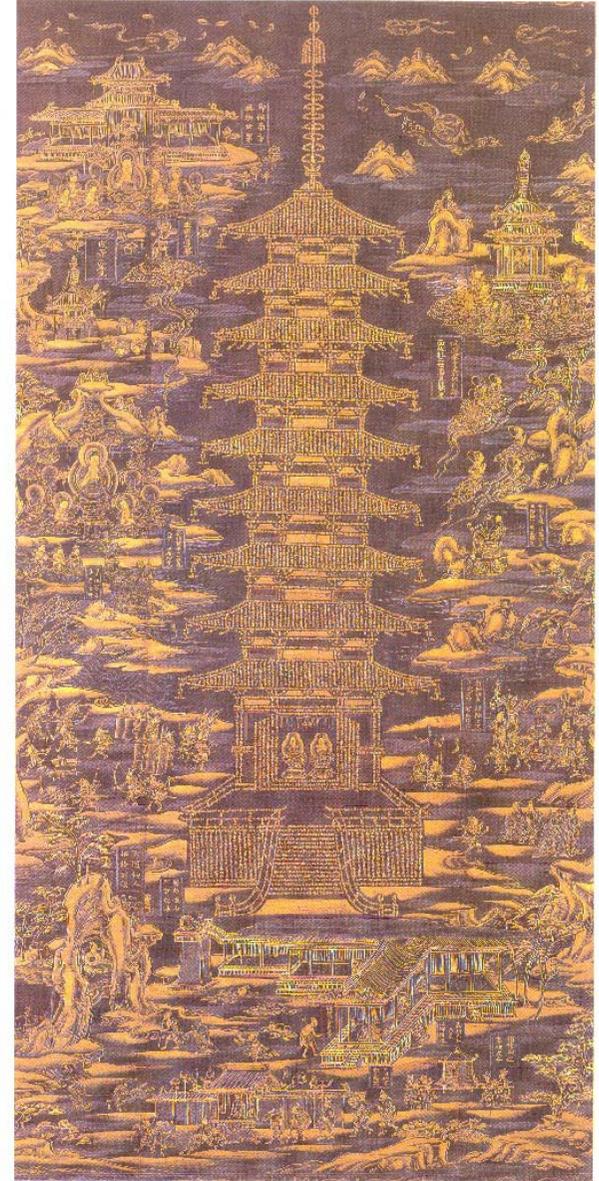
Varṣakāra Ajātaśatru shows a representation of the four major events in the life of Lord Buddha: birth in the Lumbini Park, victory over Māra, first sermon in the Deer Park (Mṛgadāva) and his *nirvāṇa*. It is drawn by Grünwedel (1912:167) from Qizil cave 205



Kumārajīva translation
of the Lotus Sūtra
exhumed from
Central Asia.
Kumarajiva
translated the Lotus
Sutra at Ch'ang-an
under the patronage
of the ruling family
of Yao. Emperor
Yao Hsing was
highly impressed by
his honesty, loyalty,
humane,
resourceful, hard-
working, self-
sacrificing nature
and brilliance.



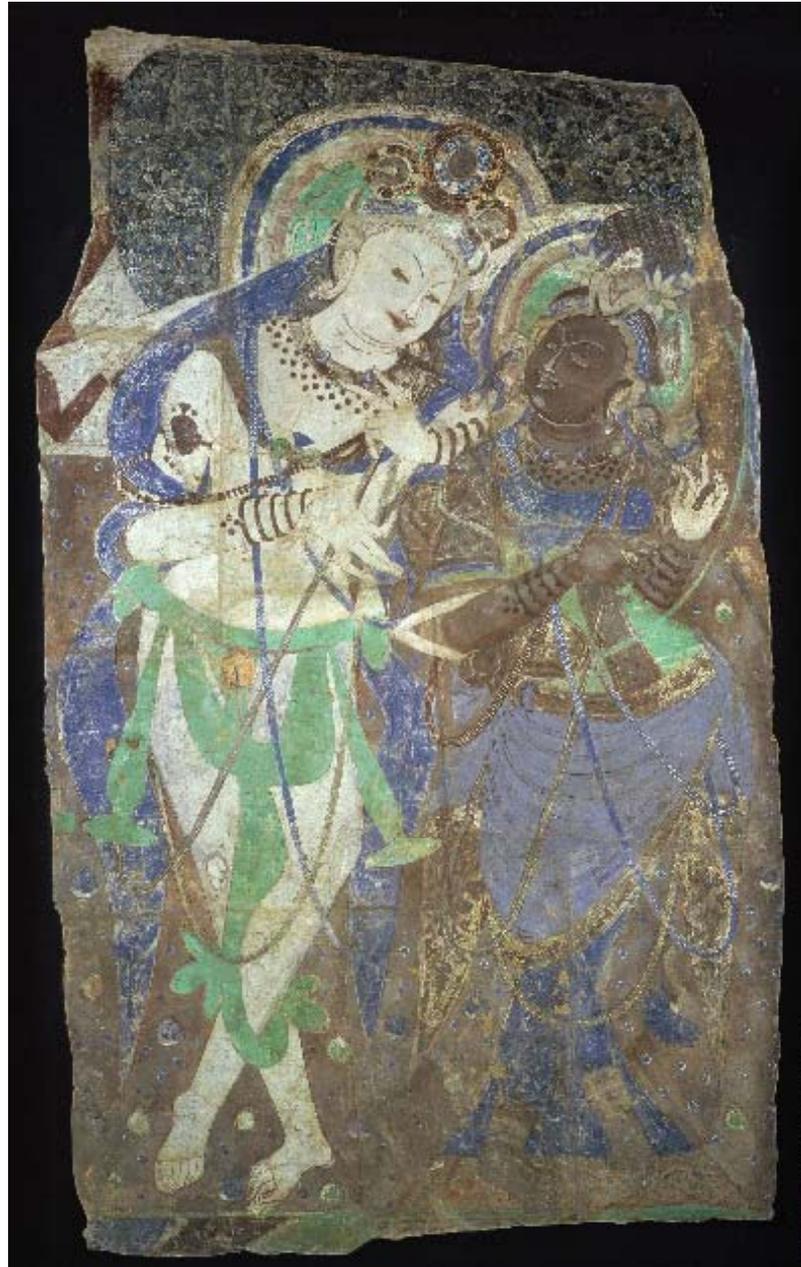
The chapter on the stupa of rabhūtaratna is written in such a way as to create a pagoda. It is a mid thirteenth century painting at the Ryuhonji Monastery. The merits of erecting the edifice of a stupa or fashioning a stupa in any other way are frequently mentioned in the Lotus Sūtra. This painting shows the stupa art at its zenith. It is an instance of *citra-kāvya* in Sanskrit.
@RAGHUVIRA ARCHIVES



Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna seated in the precious stupa in the bronze plaque dated 686 or 698 in the Hasedera monastery. In the center is the large three-storey Tahoto stupa, with a host of small thousand Buddhas in the upper band, executed in repousse, like all other parts of the plaque. It shows the influence of astounding developments in Buddhist arts and crafts in the mature culture of the Flourishing T'ang period.



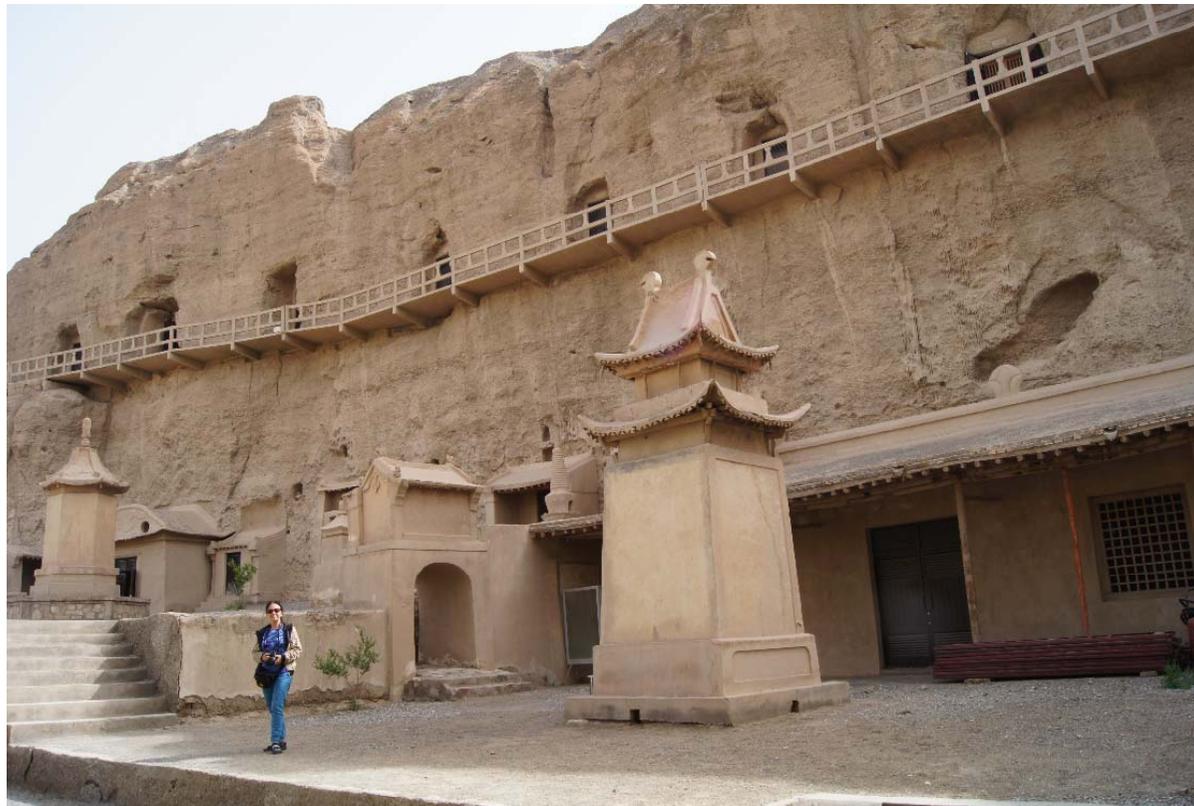
A mural depicting a goddess with a celestial musician, cave 171, Kizil, Possibly it tells the story of the Buddha and the Goddess of Music. The Buddha had disguises himself as a musician – challenges a woman, proud of her musical skills, to a lute playing contest. She is shamed by the Buddha’s superior playing and becomes his devotee.



Kumārajīva translation of the Lotus Sūtra excavated in Central Asia

妙法蓮花經觀世音普門第廿
尔时无盡意菩薩即從空起徧袒右肩
合掌向佛而作是言世尊觀世音菩薩以
何因緣名觀世音佛告无盡意
男子若有无量百千億眾生受諸苦
是觀世音菩薩一心稱名觀世音菩薩即
時觀其音聲皆得解脫若有持是觀世音
菩薩名者設入大火不能燒由是
神力故若為大水所漂稱其名号即得
若有百千万億眾生為求金銀琉璃車乘
珊瑚琥珀真珠等寶入於大海假使黑風
吹其船板墮落羅刹鬼國其中若
稱觀世音菩薩名者是諸人等皆
羅刹之難以是因緣名觀世音若復有人
臨當被鬪稱觀世音菩薩名者彼鬪執刀
杖尋旋壞而得解脫若三千大千國土
大羅刹欲來惱人間其稱觀世音菩薩
是諸惡鬼尚不能以惡眼視之况復加害
有人若有罪若无罪枷械枷鎖檢繫其
觀世音菩薩名者皆悉斷壞即時解脫
三千大千國土諸中怨賊有商主將諸
寶運過險路其中一人
勿得恐怖

The mural on the eastern wall of Tun-huang cave 159 of the middle T'ang period (781-847) illustrates the 11th chapter of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeṣa-sūtra* translated by Kumārajīva. As Lord Buddha was teaching Dharma in the garden of Āmrapālī it grew larger and was tinged with a golden hue. Venerable Ānanda asked; “What do these auspicious signs portend?” Lord Buddha: “They portend that Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are coming to the Tathāgata, with a great multitude.” Vimalakīrti performed the miracle of placing the entire assembly in his right hand and transported himself into the presence of Lord Buddha. This illustration shows the Buddha expounding the liberation of Bodhisattvas called ‘destructible and indestructible’ (*kṣayākṣaya*).



Subashi temple ruins (western temple)

Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan









APAK HOJA TOMB KASHGAR



subashi



Caotang-si temple, Xian, where Kumarajijva had taught and is at rest,

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA

- Picture from Nobuyoshi



Kizil kargah, Thousand Buddha caves



A line drawing depicting the army sent by Fu Chien under general Lu Kuang to subdue Kucha and bring Kumārajīva to Ch'ang-an.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNC



A line drawing by a modern artist depicting Kumārajīva in Ch'ang-an where he took up translation work under state patronage. The emperor Yao Hsing took personal interest in his work.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNCA



Kumārajīva

Calligraphy by Katsuhisa Yamada, Japan

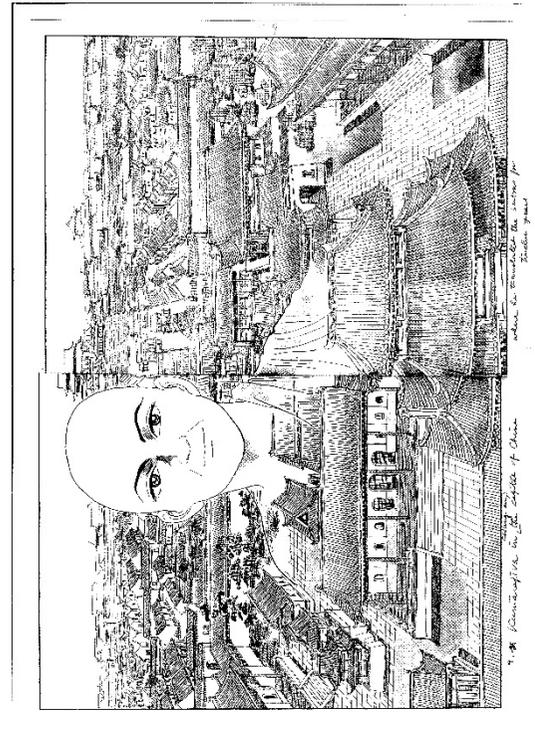
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala organised by IGNCA

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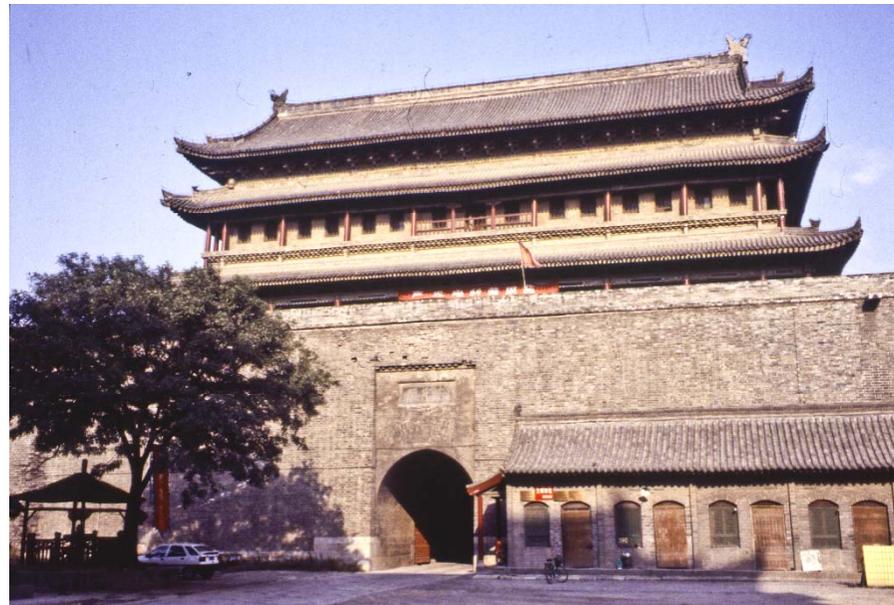
Kumārajīva in Ch'ang-an, the capital of China. He became a luminant symbol of the national metropolis as the new glory and renaissance of culture. Kumārajīva was the heart of the imperial capital of the celestial kingdom to which literati flocked from all over China.

Courtesy: Prof. Nirmala Sharma

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA



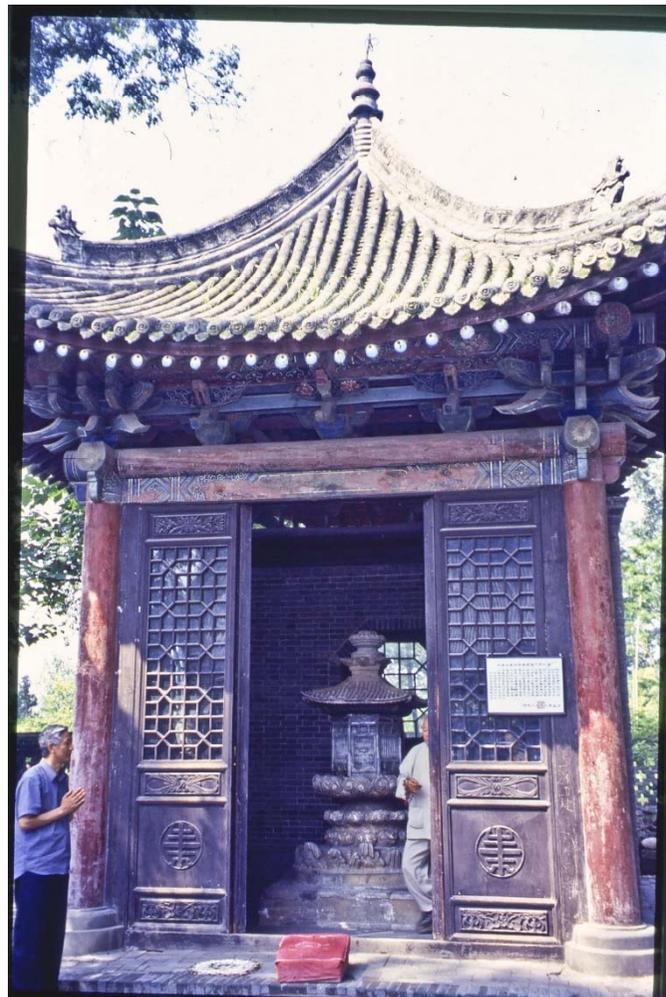
Western gate of Xian (Ch'ag-an)
Courtesy: Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan
Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA



Tomb of Kumārajīva at Caotang-si temple

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA



Kumārajīva's tomb at Caotang-si temple

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA



Statue of Kumārajīva at Caotang-si temple about 25 km away from Xian,
Kumārajīva translated the Buddhist sūtra s from Sanskrit into Chinese. He died in
413 A.D. The temple was a thatch-roofed house, so it got the name
of Caotang Temple, meaning Straw Hut Temple.

Photograph by Prof. Nobuyoshi Yamabe, Japan

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA



Ruins from Kashgarh where the king had invited Kumārajīva to take the seat of honour and expound a sūtra to a prestigious assembly which included the king himself. It was the Kashi of Central Asia. The Chinese still call it Kashi.

Courtesy: IGNCA

Exhibition curated by Prof. Shashibala and organised by IGNCA

行是深般若波羅蜜能入陀羅尼門學具
羅尼諸菩薩得一切樂說辨才阿難般
羅蜜是三世諸佛妙法以是故阿難我
了了說若有人受持深般若波羅蜜讀
近是人則能摠持三世諸佛阿耨多羅
三菩提阿難我說般若波羅蜜是行者
持是般若波羅蜜陀羅尼故則能持一

訶般若波羅蜜經







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金剛般若波羅蜜經

妙法蓮華經

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柿葉子

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柿3-1-3

損前善日修善法

須知善提若三千

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一第四號 金光明經 壹卷 卷四、東大寺印ア

一第五號 大智度論 六拾九卷

卷一 卷二

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卷四乙 卷五

卷六 甲、卷首紙 卷六乙

卷七 卷末朱書云、開年同月廿六日於同御所移點了爲合法久住也、 卷卅三 總後補、題云、文永元年甲子九月二十三日酉時於海住山十輪結構裏紙奉書外題單、法印宗性、

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