

A Study of the Diamond Sūtra and its Different Versions

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Abstract.

The Diamond Sūtra, full name is Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita in Sanskrit. Vajracchedika means “the diamond that cuts through afflictions, ignorance, delusion, or illusion.” In China, people generally call it *The Diamond Sūtra*. It contains the discourses of the Buddha to a senior monk, Subhuti. The Diamond Sūtra is written in Sanskrit originally. It is recorded that there are six Chinese versions of *The Diamond Sūtra*, and Kumarajiva’s version is the most popular one.

Keywords: The Diamond Sūtra, Kumarajiva, translation

1. Introduction

The history of Indian Buddhism is generally divided into primitive Buddhism, sectarian Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism. In different periods, there are significant differences in Buddhist scriptures and belief objects. Mahayana Buddhism is an important period in the history of Indian Buddhism and also the main feature of Chinese Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism is based on Prajna theory, and its classic basis is Prajna classic.

2. Chinese Versions of The Diamond Sūtra

The Diamond Sūtra first appeared in India around 100 B.C., which was introduced to West China from the Northwest India. Since the Diamond Sūtra was introduced into China from eastern Jin dynasty to the Tang dynasty, there are six translations: they are Kumarajiva in the Post-Qin Dynasty, Bodhiruci in the North-Wei Dynasty, Paramartha in the Liang and Chen Dynasties, Dharmagupta in the Sui Dynasty, Xuanzang and Yijing in the Tang Dynasty. Kumarajiva was the first one who translated *The Diamond Sūtra*.

These six translators are not only the most influential translators in the history of Chinese Buddhism, but also five of them are the founders of important schools of Chinese Buddhism. Now, according to the chronological order of the sūtras, the Chinese versions of the six sutras are introduced as follows:

2.1 Kumarajiva

Kumarajiva, was born in 344-413 A.D., whose Sanskrit name was Kumārajīva. He is a monk, Buddhist scholar, and translator of Post-Qin Dynasty, born in Kuchā (Now an area of Xinjiang province in the northwest of China). He is known as one of the four great translators of Chinese Buddhism, which the other three was Xuanzang,

Amoghavajra, Paramartha. The time of the translation is disputable but most scholars think it mostly was in 401 A.D. He translated *The Diamond Sūtra* during the same year at Chang’an. The title is “金剛般若波羅蜜經”. However, this Sūtra has two versions, with one of 5176 characters and the other version is 5180 which is more popular (Shi Yuanpeng 2009:30). The difference between these two versions is in the last sentence of chapter eight “This is Buddha-Dharma”, the previous version does not have these four words. It is generally believed that the 5180-word version should be acknowledged, as it is found in other Chinese translations and Sanskrit version.

Jiva’s translation of *The Diamond Sūtra* is the most popular in China because of its simple and smooth words. Many buddhist countries under the influence of China, such as Japan and South Korea, still mainly use this version, and several European and American translations were also based on this Chinese translation. Jiva’s translation tries to ensure the original purpose, while retaining the features of the original text and conforming to the language features of the target text. This kind of free translation on the basis of preserving the meaning and style of the original text to the greatest extent indicates that Buddhist sūtra translation at that time has gradually become mature, laying a foundation for later translators and exerting great influence on the latter ages. Jiva’s translation of sutra has laid a solid foundation for the development of Chinese translation literature and opened a new situation of Chinese Buddhist culture.

2.2 Bodhiruci

Bodhiruci is a buddhist scholar in the department of Mahāyāna yoga, who is familiar with sūtra, dharma and Tripitaka, as well as the newly emerging tantric dharma. In the first year of yongping in the North-Wei Dynasty (508 years), he came to Luoyang via the western regions, where he received the superior courtesy from Emperor Xuanwu of Wei and provided him with superior conditions to engage in the translation of sutra. In his lifetime, he

translated thirty buddhist sutras, one hundred and one volume.

Bodhiruci translated the sūtra in Luoyang in the year of 509. The title of his version is the same as Jiva's translation. According to Taisho Tripitaka, Bodhiruci's translation also has two versions. The first translation contains 6105 words which is similar with Jiva's version in both the aspects of content and style. Therefore, this version is influenced by Jiva on a large scale. The other version has 6447 words, which is regarded by many scholars as the second version of Bodhiruci. This version is very close to Paramartha's translation and some parts are complete the same.

2.3 Paramartha

Paramartha lived from 499 to 569. According to the records of the three treasures of the past dynasties, there were 48 books and 232 volumes. Together with kumarashi, xuanzang and bukong, he was named as the four great translators of Chinese Buddhism.

The title of Paramartha's version is also the same as Jiva's translation. He translated the Diamond Sūtra in Liangan Jun in 562. His version is also very close to Bodhiruci's second version. It was said that Paramartha was invited by Emperor Wu in Liang Dynasty to translate *The Diamond Sūtra* and found many mistakes of the former translations, so he decided to retranslate it from Sanskrit version.

2.4 Dharmagupta

Dharmagupta translated this sutra whose name was “金刚能断般若波罗蜜经” in Luoyang in the year 592. He translated the sutra exactly word by word with the order of Chinese characters the same as that of the Sanskrit version. So Dharmagupta's version is very difficult to understand and chant due to the big difference between Chinese and Sanskrit. It looks like a Sanskrit version that is written in Chinese. But on the other hand, it is very helpful for scholars who understand Sanskrit.

2.5 Xuanzang

Xuanzang's (600CE-664CE) original name was Chenyi, and was born in Luozhou. As the famous monk of Tang Dynasty and the founder of the Pharaoh sect, he was honored as “the Tripitaka-master”, later secularly known as the “Tang Monk”. He was also known as the three great translators of Chinese Buddhism along with Kumarajiva and Paramartha.

Xuanzang's translation is called “能断金刚般若波罗蜜经”. According to historical records, Xuanzang had translated *the Diamond Sūtra* twice. The first one was translated in the year 648, and the other one is translated in 663. It is generally believed that the former may have been lost, and the latter is collected in The Maha-prajna-paramita Sūtra, which is the Chapter nine of “Can break the Diamond”. This translation has 8208 words. Ci En Zhuan is a biography of Xuanzang, which records that Xuanzang criticized the Chinese title of Jiva, Bodhiruci, and Paramartha because of losing two characters “can break”, causing serious misunderstanding of the sūtra, that is because “Only by this interpretation, no distinction between wisdom, but can be cut off the troublesome,” so called can break the Diamond Prajna.

2.6 Yijing

Yijing was a monk in the Tang Dynasty. Yijing translated Buddhist Sūtras in Luoyang Buddhist Temple, Yanfufang Dafuxian Temple, Chang'an Yankangfang Ximing Temple, Tokyo Fuxian Temple and Chang'an Jianfu Temple. Yi Jing's translation of the Sutras involves the three theories of Confucianism and Law, totaling 56 books and 230 volumes.

The Diamond Sūtra which Yijing translated in 703 with the long title of “佛说能断金刚般若波罗蜜多经”, it has 5118 words. It is generally considered as a splendid version for it has the advantages of both Jiva's and Xuanzang's versions. The Buddhist master Tan Xiyong and Luo Shixian say it is the best of the six versions. The detailed information is as shown in the following table.

Table: Chinese Versions of *The Diamond Sūtra*

Time	Translator	Title	Title	Taisho Tripitaka	Notes
402CE	Kumarajiva	金刚般若波罗蜜经	The Diamond Sūtra	T08/No.235	Translated in Chang'an
509CE	Bodhiruci	金刚般若波罗蜜经	The Diamond Sūtra	T08/No.236	Translated in Luoyang
562CE	Paramartha	金刚般若波罗蜜经	The Diamond Sūtra	T08/No.237	Translated in Guangzhou
590CE	Dharmagupta	金刚能断般若波罗蜜经	The Diamond Can Break the Prajna Paramita Sūtra	T08/No.238	Translated in Luoyang
648CE	Xuan Zang	大般若波罗蜜多经 (卷577) 第九能断金刚分	Large Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra	T08/No.220	Translated in Chang'an
703CE	Yi Jing	佛说能断金刚般若波罗蜜多经	Buddhist Scripture of Prajna and Paramita	T08/No.239	Translated in Chang'an

3. SUMMARY

The six Chinese versions of *The Diamond Sūtra* differ because of the objective reasons of the different translators, the different sources of the original text, the different understanding of *The Diamond Sūtra* and the different subjective reasons for the different treatment of the text. They can be divided into two categories by their length: the simplified version and the complicated one. If ordered in length from the longest to the shortest, they are:

Xuanzang's (8208 words) > Dharmagupta's (7109 words)
>Paramartha's (6447 words) > Bodhiruce's (6105 words)
> Kumarajiva's (5180 words) > Yijing's (5118 words)

So the former three belong to the complicated version and the last three belong to the simplified version. To sum up, there is little difference in the content. Jiva's version is the most popular one and is easy to be accepted by the ordinary believers. But Jiva's version is not complete, so it is not proper to be regarded as the text for academic research.

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