

佛经翻译

对中古汉语词汇和语法的影响

王庆·著

INFLUENCES OF THE
TRANSLATION OF BUDDHIST SUTRAS
ON THE LEXICON AND GRAMMAR
OF MIDDLE CHINESE

中国戏剧出版社

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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

佛经翻译对中古汉语词汇和语法的影响 / 王庆著. —北京:
中国戏剧出版社, 2008. 3

ISBN 978-7-104-02661-7

I. 佛… II. 王… III. 佛经翻译—研究 IV. H161.2

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2007) 第 103081 号

书 名: 佛经翻译对中古汉语词汇和语法的影响

责任编辑: 王媛媛

封面设计: 张玉霞

出版发行: 中国戏剧出版社

社 址: 北京市海淀区紫竹院路 116 号
嘉豪国际中心 A 座 10 层

邮政编码: 100089

经 销: 新华书店

印 刷: 北京忠信诚胶印厂

开 本: 880mm×1230mm 1/32

印 张: 10

字 数: 250 千字

印 数: 2000

版 次: 2008 年 3 月北京第 1 版

印 次: 2008 年 3 月第 1 次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-104-02661-7

全套定价: 200.00 元 (本册: 22.00 元)

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Abstract

Influences of the Translation of Buddhist Sutras on the Lexicon and Grammar of Middle Chinese

From East Han dynasty to Song dynasty in Chinese history there was a great movement of translating Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit to Chinese. The movement has brought great influences to Middle Chinese. This study examines the influences on Chinese lexicon and grammar.

Some scholars deny the great influences of the translation of Buddhist sutras to Chinese because, as they claim, Buddhism is only confined to a very small group of people. This observation seems to be true in modern time, but it was not the case in Medieval China. Buddhism was then much more pervasive than in modern time, flowing to every corner of Medieval China. Copying and chanting Buddhist sutras were the routines of ordinary Chinese at that age. The brief description of the social background in Medieval China would be much helpful for us in understanding the great influences of the translation of Buddhist sutras on the Chinese language.

The influences of the translation of Buddhist sutras on the lexicon of Chinese can be investigated from two perspectives: the form and the meaning. From the perspective of form, the most obvious influence is the loan words from Buddhism,

which are always mentioned by the previous studies. Besides the direct loans, a great amount of new words and phrases are created by the translators in the process of translation, which would mean more important to the lexicon of Middle Chinese. These new words and phrases which may be resulted from the influence of the source language style and the analogies of the translators have greatly enriched the reservoir of Chinese vocabulary besides the loans. Another influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras is recognized in the process of disyllabication in Middle Chinese. By means of calquing in the translation, the translators have introduced the method of Sanskrit word-formation into Chinese unconsciously. The Sanskrit word-formation techniques have produced much more diversified compounds in Chinese than before. The influence of speeding up the disyllabication in Chinese word-formation cannot be underestimated.

The influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras on Chinese lexicon is quite comprehensive, not only in the form, but also in the meaning field. The introduction of loan words is accompanied by the introduction of new meanings, which has changed the semantic system of Middle Chinese. Furthermore, the semantic structures of many native Chinese words have also been changed in the process of translation. The main types of semantic changes demonstrate themselves as: meaning extension, meaning restriction, meaning replacement and grammaticalization.

It is generally believed that the grammar in language is more stable and conservative to be borrowed or influenced.

However, we can easily find the influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras in the grammatical area of Middle Chinese. In this study we propose that the use of “他” as the third person pronoun began in the translation of Buddhist sutras. The language of the Chinese version of Buddhist sutras has displayed itself as a peculiar variety of Chinese. The peculiarity mainly comes from the syntax (e. g. 以…故), though the loans also contribute a lot. The syntactic influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras on Chinese can be shown in the use of some grammatical words. For instance, the use of “已” at the end of a temporal or conditional clause is due to the influence of the Sanskrit gerund or absolute structure ending with “-tva” and “-ya”. The reject of the traditional Chinese grammatical words, such as “之” and “而”, also means critically important to Chinese syntax. For example, the omission of “之” has led to the more concise syntax, long determinative compounds, long string of attributives before the central word, and even some grammaticalization. Another form of the influence of the Buddhist sutras translation shows in the structures which can be attributed to the source language and the translators’ creativeness as well. These structures examined in this study include: assertive sentence with copula “是”, interrogative, relativization, causal adverbial, long sentences, repetition and exaggeration.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

This chapter will define the scope, state the rationale, raise the objectives, and then display the method and data collection of the study. The general structure of the study is also included at the end.

1.1 The scope of this study

This study finds itself in the field of historical linguistics. It aims to make a research on the language contact, a kind of indirect contact mainly through the translation of Buddhist sutras (Tripiṭaka), between Middle Chinese^[1] and the ancient Indian language——Sanskrit^[2]. In particular, the influences of the translation of Buddhist sutras on the lexicon and grammar of Middle Chinese, mainly from the period of East Han dynasty to Tang dynasty, are to be examined. Therefore, the lexical and grammatical features of the Chinese version of Buddhist sutras are to be analyzed. When it is necessary, and possible as well, a comparison between Chinese and Sanskrit will be carried out and the impacts of Sanskrit on Middle Chinese will be further recognized.

In some contexts, language contact and language borrowing are used interchangeably. However, these two concepts are not taken as equivalents in this study. Language contact is a kind of

situation; while it often leads to language change through borrowing (one language otherwise influencing another, possibly reciprocally), the contact itself is not a change. Language borrowing is a natural consequence of language contact, while it is not the whole of the story in language contact. As we know well, language contact can result in many kinds of changes, such as the simplification of phonological structures, leveling of inflections, covering more than borrowing (though borrowing can be of different levels). As far as the language contact between Sanskrit and Middle Chinese is concerned, these two languages are so different in phonological, morphological and grammatical levels that it is unlikely for too many direct borrowings to take place. (Similarities between languages are likely to give rise to direct borrowings without much adaptation. Direct borrowings here generally refer to transcriptions of sounds.) On the other hand, besides the direct borrowings from Sanskrit, some new elements rising up in Middle Chinese may be attributed to the consequence of the borrowing or the influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit to Chinese. The most common case would be that the Chinese language has undergone some variations or changes under the influence of Sanskrit. So in this text, the word “influence” is always employed for convenience’s sake. The influences cover not only every kind of borrowings from the source language, but also the series of changes which may be attributed to the practice of translation.

Language variations and changes are extremely complicated matters involving various factors. The influence of the translation of

Buddhist sutras may not be the whole of it in some cases. Then the words as “possibly” or “probably” are usually inserted in some statements for a more conservative and objective attitude.

1.2 Rationale of the study

1.2.1 Why from East Han dynasty to Tang dynasty

Every language in use is subject to constant change. But the speed and the range of the language change tend to vary greatly from region to region, from one range of time to another range of time, and also from language to language. The change may be, sometimes, intensive and obvious for one language at a region while for some other languages the change may be very difficult to perceive even over a long period of time. Take the Chinese language as an example. In the northern part of China it has been changing more violently than in the southern part; and in the period of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties the change has been more dramatic than in some other periods in the history of the language.

If somebody has ever had a chance to read some texts in Archaic Chinese and in Middle Chinese, he can easily find the differences between them. Middle Chinese has experienced a series of changes, such as the simplification of the phonological system, the springing-up of new members of lexicon, the replacement of new words instead of old ones, the semantic drifting of the ordinary vocabulary, the disyllabication of the

lexicon, the appearance of some new syntactic patterns, and the application of new grammatical elements, etc. Just as many scholars say, Middle Chinese has changed a lot and the East Han dynasty and the Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties have witnessed a dramatic change in the history of Chinese language (Hu Chirui, 2002: 2). Otatatsuo (1991: 10) has called this period as a stage of “qualitative” change in the history of Chinese. Cai Jinghao (1990: i) has once said that this period means a critical transmitting period for the Chinese lexicon. Though the period from East Han dynasty to Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties weighs heavy to the change of Chinese language, the language study of this period could not be said to be satisfactory. Many studies on Archaic Chinese and on Modern Chinese have been carried out, but the study of Middle Chinese is comparatively very weak (Jiang Shaoyu, 2001: 9). Though many scholars have kept joining into the study of Middle Chinese and great achievements have been acquired recently, there is still a lot that can be further explored.

Tang dynasty is usually regarded as a transition period from Middle Chinese to Early Modern Chinese. Some scholars insist that Tang dynasty weighs heavier than other periods in the history of Chinese language. They would take Tang dynasty as the dividing line between Archaic Chinese and the early Modern Chinese. And what is more, Buddhism was coming to its climax at this time in China. The translation of Buddhist sutras also entered a new era then. The influence of Buddhism on Chinese language was further encouraged and reinforced in the

period of Tang dynasty. So Tang dynasty will also be covered in this text.

1.2.2 Why the objectives of lexicon and grammar

As stated above, Middle Chinese has undergone a series of dramatic changes in every aspect. However the studies on these changes are not in a balance. The importance of the material of Chinese Buddhist sutras was first recognized in the studies of Chinese phonology by scholars like A. Von Stael-Holstein (钢和泰), Wang Rongbao (汪荣宝), and Luo Changpei (罗常培)^[3], etc. The studies on the grammatical characteristics of Buddhist materials were initiated by Lü Shuxiang's series of articles in 1940's. Comparatively, the studies on the lexicon are lagging behind those of phonology and grammar. Guo Zaiyi (1992: 328) has pointed out that the study of Chinese lexicon during the period of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties has become Achilles' heel for the study of historical lexicology. As a response to this situation, we could be happy to find some works that keep coming out in the area of lexicon, such as Jiang Lansheng's *Interpretation of the words in short stories of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties*, Cai Jinghao's *Interpretation of the words in Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties with examples*, Li Weiqi's *Interpretation of words in Buddhist sutras*, Fang Yixin's *Interpretation of words of Middle Chinese and Interpretation of words in historical books of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties*. The prosperity of the interpretation of Chinese words during the period of

Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties shows from another aspect the dramatic change taking place in the field of vocabulary and also the backwardness of the lexical study in this period. However, the interpretation only is not the whole of the study of lexicon. Jiang Lansheng points out that the lexical studies in the passing two decades are mainly on the interpretation and etymology of certain difficult words (Wang Weihui, 2000: Foreword). Jiang Shaoyu (2001: 239) also expresses the same opinion about the situation: up to now, the works and articles on the vocabulary of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties are mostly about the interpretation of certain difficult words. We have to say, however, the study of lexicon should cover more: not only the interpretation of certain difficult words, but also the change of the ordinary vocabulary, the study of word formation, the study of the whole vocabulary system of a particular period, and the study of the historical development of lexicon. Besides, there is another problem in the lexical studies of Middle Chinese: in the works of interpretation, most scholars have attributed the causes of the dramatic change in the lexicon to the absorption of spoken language elements, the social factors, without paying enough attention to the influence of the movement of the Buddhist sutras translation. Though the situation is a little bit changed with the works of Zhu Qingzhi (1992, *Study of the relationship between Buddhist scriptures and the vocabulary of medieval Chinese*), Liang Xiaohong (1994, *Structure of Buddhist words and the development of Chinese vocabulary*), and Wang Weihui (2000, *A Study on the*

change of ordinary vocabulary from East Han dynasty to Sui dynasty), there is still much more that can be further explored, for example, the word formation, the semantic change of the lexicon, and the account for the change which the historical linguists have attempted to do. This study is intended to make a research into the influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras on the change of Middle Chinese lexicon, mainly focusing on the word formation and the semantic change.

The study in the area of grammar is a little bit better than that of lexicon for Middle Chinese. However, the previous studies mainly paid more attention on functional words, almost neglecting the study of syntactic structures (Jiang Shaoyu 2001: 141). When speaking of the influence of Buddhist sutras on the syntax of Chinese, some scholars only give Liang Qichao's comments almost 70 years ago (Wang Kefei, 1997: 14; Liang Xiaohong, 1994: 6). This has shown from another aspect the neglect of syntactic field in the historical study of Middle Chinese. Perhaps there are some accounts for the neglect. As Lehmann (2002: 237) puts it, "The analysis of sentences discloses only with difficulty the structure of syntax. Unlike morphology, syntax cannot be analyzed into regular paradigms. Further, syntactic sequences are more open to pragmatic variation than are those of morphology and phonology." Besides the neglect of syntax in the previous grammatical studies, there is another reason for the study: the previous studies merely employed "百喻经" and a few other sutras, leaving the vast majority of Chinese Buddhist sutras untouched. In this

study, the author would attempt to make a research on some grammatical features which could be regarded as the result of the contact between Middle Chinese and ancient Indian language. The material employed in the research will cover much more sutras, sometimes with a comparison between the Chinese text and the Sanskrit text.

1.2.3 Why the influence of the translation of Buddhist sutras

Why did the Chinese language turn out to have radical changes during the period from East Han dynasty to Tang dynasty? Historical linguistic studies would attempt to provide some explanations, for linguistics today is not only descriptive, but also interpretative. This study will examine what the changes are and see how the language is influenced by the social factors.

Language change is a highly complex matter. The causes of the change are bound to be highly complex. Generally, internal causes and external causes can be roughly distinguished. The internal impetus tends to lead the language change to proceed in a uniform speed, while the external contributions usually come into force abruptly. Of the external causes, language contact (in some contexts “borrowing”) is almost unanimously recognized as a most important one. Considering the language situation during the period of Wei-Jin and Northern-Southern dynasties, the language contact plays a major role