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On Early Translations of Buddhist Sutras in China in the Era the Three Kingdoms: 220–280

Abstract

The paper discusses the early days of translation in China which began with the translation of Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese. The article addresses one of the most difficult and dramatic periods in the history of translation activities, the era of Three Kingdoms (220-280). First efforts of the Buddhist missionaries in translating the Buddhist texts from Sanskrit into Chinese are poorly studied in the Russian science. The article aims to fill the gap. This goal sets the following tasks: (1) to analyze the translation activities in the kingdoms of Wei (220–265) and Wu (222–280) during Three Kingdoms period; (2) to show the place and role of the

translators of these kingdoms in the development of the translation tradition in China; (3) to consider the quality of the Buddhist texts translations and their contribution to the development of Buddhism in China. The study shows that Buddhist missionaries who came to China from India and the countries of Central Asia during the Three Kingdoms period played an important role in the spreading of Buddhism. Their search for methods and tools to give the sense of Sanskrit texts in Chinese, which experience had had no experience of assimilation before Buddhism, prepared a fertile ground for the emergence in China of such translations of Buddhist literature that were able to convey the exact meaning of Buddhist teachings. The activities of the Three Kingdoms Buddhist texts translators reflected the rise of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and its texts formation. The article draws on bibliographic works of medieval authors: Hui Jiao's "Gao Sen Zhuan" ("Biography of worthy monks"), Sen Yu's "Chu San Zang Ji Ji" ("Collection of Translation Information about Tripitaka"), Fei Changfang's "Li Dai San Bao Ji" ("Information about the three treasures [during] historical epochs"), which figure prominently in Buddhist historiography. Also the authors draw on the latest Chinese research summarized in the monograph: Lai Yonghai (ed.). "Zhongguo fojiao tongshi" [General History of Chinese Buddhism]. Nanjing, 2006.

Keywords

Buddhist sources, Buddhism, translation, sutras, translation activities, nirvana, Mahayana, Hinayana, Three Kingdoms (220–280).

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