

# Persuasion and Entertainment at Once: Kumārajīva's Buddhist Storytelling in His Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*

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**P**ERSUASION is often based on formal arguments and formal arguments are typically characterized by analytical disputation over abstract ideas. But if philosophical persuasion can be won over with formal arguments, persuasion to action is seldom exclusively dependent upon them. Belief and a willingness to practice beliefs depend on motive, and motive is stimulated by emotions. To stimulate emotions, we need something else such as storytelling in addition to, and sometimes perhaps other than, formal arguments. Stories can inspire people to action, and formal arguments are seldom by themselves sufficient to motivate.

This paper addresses how Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344-413), one of the greatest Buddhist translators in China, practiced his storytelling in the form of philosophical commentary. Through an analysis of his commentary on the famed Buddhist classic *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* 維摩詰所說經, this paper will demonstrate that Kumārajīva appreciated the virtue of storytelling in religious proselytization and that he told stories throughout his lengthy commentary even when the textual contexts do not seem to call for them. Storytelling was crafted to be entertaining and, in the disarming presence of fun and pleasure, Buddhist osmosis, it was hoped, would materialize. As a secondary issue, this paper also attempts to examine the issue of orality in Kumārajīva's commentary. As far as we can surmise, it is unlikely that Kumārajīva himself would write his

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commentary in Chinese, even though he presumably had learned Chinese for more than a decade before he finally arrived in central China in 401.<sup>1</sup> However, virtually no scholar has been curious enough to examine the exact nature of the writing itself in his commentary.<sup>2</sup> It, then, appears to be a non-issue to most scholars whether Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was penned down by himself or it was in fact transcribed from an oral delivery. This paper will show that apart from tacit assumption, the commentary was, in all likelihood, delivered orally to a live audience and was probably committed to writing as a record of extemporaneous sermons.

### **Kumārajīva: Buddhist Storyteller qua Commentator**

It is well known that the Buddha was fond of using stories and parables in his preaching. Indeed, stories and the life stories of the Buddha himself in his numerous previous lives were part and parcel of many Buddhist scriptures. While many Buddhist scriptures were translated into Chinese prior to the fifth century, there was virtually no Buddhist commentarial literature introduced and translated during the same period. There do exist commentaries written on Buddhist scriptures, but they were all written, in Chinese, by Chinese Buddhist scholars or monks.<sup>3</sup>

So far as I know, the only commentary we have today from a non-Chinese Buddhist person is the commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* attributed

<sup>1</sup> Kumārajīva was detained in Wuwei 武威 in the state of Latter Liang 後梁 for eighteen years before he was welcomed to Chang'an 長安 in 401 by Yao Xing 姚興 (366-416), ruler of the Latter Qin 後秦. According to Wang Wenyan 王文顏, Kumārajīva had not mastered the Chinese language while in Wuwei, and it took him six years after he arrived in Chang'an to finally become proficient in the language. See his *Fodian hanyi zhi yanjiu* 佛典漢譯之研究 (A Study of Chinese Translations of Buddhist Scriptures) (Taipei: Tianhua chuban shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1984), pp. 221-222. Various other sources dated Kumārajīva's arrival in Chang'an to 395, 400, or 402, but 401 is the date accepted by most scholars.

<sup>2</sup> Étienne Lamotte, in my knowledge, is the only exception.

<sup>3</sup> The two extant Buddhist commentaries written by Chinese monks prior to Kumārajīva's arrival in China are Chen Hui's 陳慧 (fl. third century) *Yin chi ru jing zhu* 陰持入經註 in Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡邊海旭 eds., *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (The Taishō edition of the Chinese Buddhist canon), (1927; rpt., Tokyo: Taishō shinshū daizōkyō kankōkai, 1968), work no. 1694, vol. 33, page 9b, line 7 to p. 24, line 28 (hereafter T.1694:33.9b7-24b28) and Daoan's 道安 (312-385) *Ren ben yusheng jing zhu* 人本欲生經註 (T.1693:33.1a4-9a29). Daoan in fact had annotated and commented on another sixteen Buddhist scriptures but they were long lost. They were either called *zhu* 註 or *jie* 解. See Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518), *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Collection of Notices from the Tripitaka), *juan* 5, T.2145:55.39b29-39c29. Yan Fudiao 嚴浮調 (aka Fodiao 佛調) (fl. third century) also wrote a commentary called *Shami shihui zhangju* 沙彌十慧章句; it was long lost but Yan's preface survives. See *Chu sanzang ji ji*, *juan* 10, T.2145:55.69c9-70a8.

to Kumārajīva.<sup>4</sup> As is generally known, Kumārajīva was one of the greatest translators in Buddhist history.<sup>5</sup> Before Kumārajīva came to China in the late fourth century, Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures were not always reliable. Linguistic imprecision often hampered the Chinese understanding of the foreign doctrine, and the Chinese frequently resorted to native Chinese philosophical categories to grasp exotic Buddhist concepts. Instrumental in introducing the authentic Buddhist doctrine to China, Kumārajīva in fact translated three important scriptures for the first time in China, on the basis of which a Chinese Mādhyamika School was later established.<sup>6</sup> He translated new scriptures and retranslated old ones, setting the standard of Buddhist translation in Chinese history and asserting Buddhism as an independent system of philosophy and religious thinking in China.

While scholarly attention has been entirely, and deservedly, focused on his accomplishment in translation, virtually no one has ever noticed Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*. Translated seven times by seven different monks including Kumārajīva himself,<sup>7</sup> the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was one of the

<sup>4</sup> Kumārajīva probably also wrote a commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra*, which he also retranslated, and a commentary on the *Laozi* 老子. The former is no longer extant and the latter exists in fragments today, but its authenticity is questionable.

<sup>5</sup> There are six biographies written of Kumārajīva by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist historians in traditional China. See Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554), *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks) (T.2059:50.330a10-333a12); Sengyou, *Chu sanzang ji ji* (T.2145:55.100a4-102a13); Fei Zhangfang 費長房, *Lidai Sanbaoji* 歷代三寶記 (Accounts of the Three Jewels from Various Dynasties); Daoxuan 道宣, *Datang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (Records of Buddhist Literature of the Tang Dynasty); Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jinshu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974) 8:2499-2502; and Fayun 法雲 (fl. eleventh century), *Fanyi mingyi ji* 翻譯名義集 (Collection of Names and Their Explanations in Buddhist Translations), see T.2131:54.1069a. For modern studies, see, for instance, Juzan 巨贊, "Jiumoluoshi fashi" 鳩摩羅什法師 (Dharma Teacher Kumārajīva) in Huang Xianian 黃夏年 ed., *Juzan ji* 巨贊集 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 1995), pp. 180-189. The article was originally published in 1955. More recent studies include Xu Kangsheng 許抗生, "Lu elun Jiumoluoshi fojiao sixiang ji qi zai woguo foxue shi shang de diwei" 略論鳩摩羅什佛教思想及其在我國佛學史上的地位 (A Brief Discussion of Kumārajīva's Buddhist Thought and his Role in the History of Chinese Buddhism) in *Zhongguo beifang shaoshu minzu zhexue ji shehui sixiang shixuehui comp.*, *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu zhexuesixiang shi lunji* 中國少數民族哲學思想史論集 (Essays on the Philosophies of Minority Peoples in China) (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 1985), pp. 142-156; Zheng Yuqing 鄭郁卿, *Jiumoluoshi yanjiu* 鳩摩羅什研究 (A Study of Kumārajīva) (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1988); Chen Shiliang 陳世良, "Jiumoluoshi nianbiao kaolue" 鳩摩羅什年表考略 (A Chronological Biography of Kumārajīva), and Yin Ding 殷鼎, "Luelun Jiumoluoshi" 略論鳩摩羅什 (On Kumārajīva), both in Xinjiang Qiuci Shiku Yanjiusuo 新疆龜茲石窟研究所 ed., *Qiuci Fojiao wenhua lunji* 龜茲佛教文化論集 (Essays on the Buddhist Culture in Kucha) (Xinjiang: Xinjiang meishu sheying chubanshe, 1993), pp. 15-38 and pp. 39-54 respectively.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the Mādhyamika School that Kumārajīva helped to establish in China, see Richard Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China* (rpt., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978), esp. pp. 71-85.

<sup>7</sup> For the various translations of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* in Chinese, Tibetan, Sogdian and Khotanese, see Étienne Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa)*, trans.

most popular and influential Buddhist scriptures in the early medieval period. That Kumārajīva himself created a singular commentary on the scripture is perhaps a most convincing testimony to its importance. In the early years of Buddhist scripture translation during the fourth and fifth centuries, sermonizing was typically conducted during the process of translation. Foreign Buddhist masters translated scriptures and explicated them at once at the site of translation. Their audience could amount to several thousands, and they often raised questions that prompted the masters to employ various exegetical strategies to explain the translated text in question and enlighten the audience.<sup>8</sup> Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was probably the result of such a translation cum explication process. It should be noted that Kumārajīva translated the scripture with the aid of his Chinese disciples, most notable of whom were Sengzhao 僧肇 (384-414),<sup>9</sup> Sengrui 僧叡,<sup>10</sup> Daorong 道融,<sup>11</sup> and Daosheng 道生 (ca. 360-434).<sup>12</sup> It was only serendipity that some of these disciples also wrote commentaries of their own on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.<sup>13</sup> This historical coincidence offers us an unusual opportunity to compare Kumārajīva's commentary to those of his disciples, who were native Chinese.

The commentaries of Sengzhao, Sengrui, and Daosheng on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* are highly and consistently philosophical, and it is perhaps not surprising that they are very much characteristic of the Neo-Taoist exegetical approach as

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Sara Boin (London: The Pali Text Society, 1976). The original French version under the title of *L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti* appeared as Volume 51 in the collection Bibliothèque que du Muséon, (Louvain: Publications universitaires, 1962), pp. xxvi-lxxxix. According to Lamotte, the earliest Chinese translation attributed to Yan Fodiao, which was dated to 188, never existed. See pp. lxxxix-xci.

<sup>8</sup> For a fine discussion of sites of Buddhist translation, see Wang Wenyan, *Fodian hanyi zhiyanjiu*, pp. 129-201, esp. pp. 131-141.

<sup>9</sup> Sengzhao's biography can be found in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.365a9-366a29.

<sup>10</sup> Sengrui's biography can be found in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.364a14-366b22. Kumārajīva once said that he had no regrets whatsoever in his translation career because he had met Sengrui, with whom he consulted on every work of his translation. See T.2059:50.364a9-11.

<sup>11</sup> Daorong's biography can be found in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.363b22-363c29. Curiously, according to his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, Daorong indeed wrote a commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, but only one entry survived today. See Li Yizhuo 李翊灼, *Weimojie jing jizhu* 維摩詰經集注, 2nd ed. (Taipei: Laogu chubanshe, 1983), pp. 313-314; T.1775:38.371c28-372a12. We shall see the implication of this unique situation later.

<sup>12</sup> Daosheng's biography can be found in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.366b23-367a28. For a study of Daosheng, see Young-Ho Kim, *Tao-sheng's Commentary on the Lotus Sūtra: A Study and Translation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> The commentaries of Kumārajīva and his disciples were collated together in *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 in T.1775:38.327a9ff. Another monk, Tan Shen 曇詵, who was a disciple of Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416), also wrote a commentary in five scrolls on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* titled *Weimojiezhi zhu jing* 維摩詰子注經, but apparently it was lost. See T.2059:50.363a25 and T.2149:55.244b19, 248c11.

exemplified in Wang Bi's 王弼 (226-249) commentary on the *Laozi* 老子<sup>14</sup> and Guo Xiang's 郭象 (d.312) commentary on the *Zhuangzi* 莊子.<sup>15</sup> While close attention is given to Buddhist philosophical concepts, there is very little interest in explicating historical details or proper nouns of non-philosophical nature in their commentaries. In comparison, Kumārajīva's commentary as a whole is quite similar, but there are a few features that separate it from those of his disciples.

First, and only Kumārajīva could do this, he occasionally would cite the Sanskrit variants for certain words in the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, he would take the trouble to offer, in Chinese, the meaning of Sanskrit terms which were routinely transliterated in the scripture.<sup>17</sup> Sometimes, he would cite the locus classicus for a Buddhist allusion, or he would, on very rare occasion, cite another scripture to interpret a passage in the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.<sup>18</sup> Second, unlike his disciples, Kumārajīva sometimes has a keen eye for empirical and historical details, and he often cites the customs and practices in foreign countries to make his commentary more intelligible. He discusses, for instance, the literary characteristics of Sanskrit literature when he explains the principles

<sup>14</sup> For a recent translation of the commentary, see Richard John Lynn translated, *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> An English translation of Guo Xiang's commentary on the first seven chapters of the *Zhuangzi* can be found in Yu-lan Fung's *Chuang Tzu: A New Selected Translation with an Exposition of the Philosophy of Kuo Hsiang* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1933).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Li, pp. 60 (T.1775:38.334b5-7), 66 (335a27-b3), 128 (344a9), 248 (362b 13-14), 398 (385a5-17), 400 (385b10-11), 413 (387b2-3), 416 (387c8-9), 461 (394b7), 516 (402b6-9), 544 (406b26-28), 556 (408b6-7), 588 (413a22-26), 597 (414a21-22) and 598 (414b7-8). According to Wang Wenyan, Kumārajīva's translations are characterized by a proclivity for literary adornments, frequent abbreviation and extrapolation of the translated works, and correction of technical terms, proper nouns, and historical or legendary details. See his *Fodian hanyi zhi yanjiu*, pp. 219, 233-234. Sengyou even made a special inventory of terms that Kumārajīva created in his translations to replace imprecise ones used in earlier translations. The list is cited in Wang Wenyan's *Fodian hanyi zhi yanjiu*, pp. 234-236. Evidently, Kumārajīva's interest in non-philosophical details was also exhibited in his explicative commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.

<sup>17</sup> These Sanskrit terms were typically personal names. It should be noted that in his commentary Sengzhao also had a tendency to offer the literal meanings of personal names in Chinese, although his renditions were invariably identical to those given by Kumārajīva.

<sup>18</sup> For instance, Kumārajīva cited the *Za baozang jing* 雜寶藏經 (\**Samyuktaratnapitka-sūtra*) (T.203) and the *Dazhidu lun* 大智度論 (\**Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra*) (T.1509) to explain the term *aśura* and *zongchi* 總持 (conviction) respectively. See Li, pp. 42-43; T. 1775:38.331c21-23, and p. 91; 339a13-14. It should be noted that Kumārajīva himself translated the *Dazhidu lun*. And he cites the *Miji jing* 密經經 (Scripture on Secret Traces) to interpret "the secrets of the Buddha" mentioned in the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*. See Li, p. 307; T.1775:38.371a7. This scriptural citation seems to be the only case in the entire commentary, and notably, it does not concern any profound philosophical issue.

of his translation.<sup>19</sup> In explicating the idea of merit cultivation, he says: “The practice [of merit cultivation] in foreign countries is thus: One jots down, one by one, all the merits one cultivates from birth to death. At death, people around the dying person would recount all these merits to him. Thus reminded, he will not worry.”<sup>20</sup>

Third, Kumārajīva often would give a list of definitions for one single term or concept, a practice characteristic of the Buddhist abhidharma commentarial literature, in which he was steeped before he was converted to Mahāyāna Buddhism. For instance, in glossing the term *boxun* (波旬, Skt., *pāpān*), Kumārajīva writes:

*Boxun* means murderer in Chinese. A murderer always wants to cut short other people’s lives of wisdom; hence he is so named and is also called the evil of evils. There are three kinds of evil: [ordinary] evil, great evil, and evil of evils. If an evil act is inflicted on you and you retaliate in kind, what you do is called [ordinary] evil. If you are not offended, yet you inflict evil on others, that is called great evil. If people come to honor you and make offerings to you, and you not only show no gratitude, but instead harm them, that is called evil of evils.<sup>21</sup>

Another example is when Kumārajīva explains the notion of dharma (*fa*, 法). He says:

There are two kinds of dharma: the letter (*vyāñjana*, *wenzi yuyan* 文字語言) and the meaning (*artha*, *yifa* 義法), which does not rely on the letter. And there are two kinds of meaning as well: the meaning known through discursive consciousness (*viññana*, *shi* 識) and the meaning known through knowledge (*jñana*, *zhi* 智). The discursive consciousness seeks after only the desires of the five senses, which are illusory; it does not seek after the benefits of truth. Knowledge, on the other hand, can seek after the benefits of truth and abandon the desires of the five senses. Therefore, one should rely on the meaning known through knowledge and not rely on the meaning known through discursive consciousness. To seek after the meaning known through knowledge, one must rely on knowledge.

There are also two kinds of meaning known through knowledge: unobstructed meaning (*anīrtha*, *liaoyi* 了義) and obstructed meaning (*anīrtha*, *buliao yi* 不了義). What is obstructed meaning? For example, when the Buddha said it was not a sin to

<sup>19</sup> Li, p. 11. This passage is not found in the *Taishō* edition, but can be found in Kumārajīva’s biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.333a2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Li, p. 336; T.1775:38.375c26-276a1. Other citations about foreign customs can be found in pp. 465 and 471.

<sup>21</sup> Li, p. 268; T.1775:38.365b6-11. Numerous other examples can be found in pp. 221; 358c3-8 (leaving the household life), 229; 359c19-22 (dharma body), 251; 362c18-23 (wisdom), 284; 367c26-28 (almsgiving).

kill your parents, and if you accept it indiscriminately, then it is called obstructed meaning. If you can tell that ignorance is the father and craving is the mother, and they are the roots of samsāra, and are thus called one's parents, you can then cut off the roots, thereby terminating samsāra. Hence, [the Buddha] said killing one's parents is not a sin. Such discriminative meaning is called unobstructed meaning.<sup>22</sup>

Evidently, these exegetical differences can be explained by Kumārajīva's privileged knowledge of the Sanskrit language, his personal experiences in foreign countries as well as his admirable Buddhist scholarship. In these respects, his disciples simply could not emulate him in their commentaries. What really distinguishes Kumārajīva from his disciples in their commentaries, however, lies in another exegetical practice, a practice that his disciples most probably could emulate if they had so wished, but they did not. And that is storytelling.

That Kumārajīva uses storytelling to illustrate the points he belabors is doubtless a unique feature in his commentary in comparison to those of his disciples. There are about two dozen stories of various lengths in his commentary and they are all used as metaphor or parable to get a point across. To be sure, the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* itself is full of analogies, metaphors, and parables, and the commentaries of Kumārajīva and his disciples all capitalize on these hermeneutic strategies to explicate the scripture. As Sengzhao said in his preface to the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, one of the goals of the scripture was to unify the myriad Buddhist practices, and it was achieved with the application of expedient wisdom (此經所明, 統萬行則以權智爲主).<sup>23</sup> Analogies, metaphors, and parables certainly were considered legitimate devices of expedient wisdom. Sometimes they are necessary as an intermediate step to a deeper level of meaning, because human understanding is not uniform, and it comes in different gradations. Kumārajīva acutely realizes it when he says:

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<sup>22</sup> Li, p. 616; T.1775:38.417a18-23. My translation of the technical terms is modified from Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, p. 262, note 23. Kumārajīva's interpretation of dharma and meaning comes from the rules of textual interpretation formulated in the *Catuhpratisaranasūtra* (Scripture of the Four Refuges). See Lamotte, "The Assessment of Textual Interpretation in Buddhism" in Donald S. Lopez, Jr. ed., *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Studies in East Asian Buddhism 6, Kuroda Institute (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988) pp. 11-28. According to Lamotte, even if the *Catuhpratisaranasūtra* "was not given its definite form until a period after the establishment of the Buddhist sects and schools, the ideas which it contains had already been evolving since the earliest texts of the Buddhist canon" (p. 12).

<sup>23</sup> Sengzhao said: "As regards what the scripture illustrates, in unifying the myriad practices, its key is expedient wisdom; in establishing the foundation of virtues, its ground is the six pāramitās; in helping the ignorant and deluded across the shore, its first order of importance is compassion; in articulating the ultimate, its gateway lies in non-duality. All of these articulations are the root of inconceivability." See Li, p. 2; T.1775:38.327a27-328 b1.

If the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* expounds on the emptiness of all dharmas right from the start, the exposition will go against common sense and would then fail to be convincing. Therefore the scripture, first of all, makes it clear that things change in response to the mind. In this way it demonstrates that things have no fixed natures. And if things have no fixed natures, then it is evident that they are empty in nature.<sup>24</sup>

And one way he deals with the diversity of human understanding is to pitch his explanation at a level appropriate to the receptivity and understanding of the audience. As he puts it:

Depending on the intelligence of the audience, the exposition will vary in detail. Say there is a huge tree, a mere axe is not going to hew it down, because the intertwined roots are so deep underground, and you cannot get rid of them with just one tool. Similarly, a person may have heard about the doctrine of impermanence and he may say that life is not suffering, you can then speak to him about the doctrine of suffering. Once he has heard about the doctrine of suffering, he may say that there is an agent for suffering and pleasure, so you can then speak to him about the doctrines of no self and emptiness.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, in arguing for the necessity of applying appropriate strategies to preach, Kumārajīva is cavalierly using a metaphor of a tree with deeply intertwined roots.

How does Kumārajīva apply his rhetorical devices? Perhaps two examples will suffice. Commenting on the line “destroying the non-Buddhists (*waidao* 外

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<sup>24</sup> Li, p. 9; T.1775:38.327c20-23.

<sup>25</sup> Li, pp. 332-33; T.1775:38.375a17-21. Another example can be found in pp.275-276 (T.1775:38.366b26-c8), where Kumārajīva said: “Faith is born of the Three Treasures . . . In attaining the four kinds of faith, first one has to discover faith in the Dharma, next in the Buddha, then in the monastic community, and finally in the precepts. Somebody asked: ‘Of the four kinds of faith, why is it that faith in the Dharma comes first, then faith in the Buddha, then faith in the monastic community, and finally faith in the precepts?’ Kumārajīva *replied*: ‘If, for example, a person is severely ill, and he takes medicine and recovers, then he will believe in the wonder of the medicine. No doubt it is due to the physician that the prescribed medicine could work wonder on him, so the patient will place his trust in the physician. Nevertheless, however skillful the physician and efficacious the medicine, the outcome hinges on how well the physician is at diagnosing patients, and so the patient will believe in the importance of diagnosis. Yet even when the physician, medicine, and diagnosis are all wonderful, the outcome still hinges on the fact that the patient was capable of seeking the right advice, and must also believe in his own judgment. The four kinds of faith in the Dharma are like this. When one contemplates the true nature of things and sees the truth, one’s afflictions will be dispelled, and one will have faith in the wonder of the Dharma. The Three Treasures are wonderful, but the most important point of all is that the practice comes from oneself. When one observes the precepts of purity, one’s misery and disease will be eliminated, and one will have faith in the precepts.’”



道),”<sup>26</sup> Kumārajīva says: “Leaving the household life does not destroy anything, yet all evils are eliminated of themselves. This is just like when the sun rises, darkness will vanish of itself.”<sup>27</sup> And in his commentary on the lines “You all have aspired to nirvana and now can amuse yourselves with the joy of the Dharma, so you should not indulge in the pleasures of the five desires anymore,” Kumārajīva says: “Just as the nature of fish is to rely on water for life, the nature of women is to seek pleasure in desires.”<sup>28</sup> The analogy in the first example is somewhat related to the line commented on; it is offered as an example of how the non-Buddhists can be persuaded without being attacked. On the other hand, the analogy in the second example seems totally off-handed and extemporaneous, and it is only tangentially relevant and does not throw any light on the self-evident meaning of the lines it explicates. Off-handed analogies like this are seldom seen in the commentaries of Kumārajīva's disciples; this suggests that it is something unique in Kumārajīva's non-Chinese exegetical approach. Indeed, his exegetical uniqueness is even more prominent when it comes to his use of storytelling, which is totally absent in the commentaries of his disciples, or for that matter, commentaries of virtually any sort from China prior to his arrival there.<sup>29</sup>

### Kumārajīva's Storytelling

What kinds of story does Kumārajīva tell? And for what purposes? The stories Kumārajīva tells are usually morally edifying. While the general goal of Kumārajīva's storytelling is to illustrate the point in a given passage, its

<sup>26</sup> Kumārajīva defined the term *waidao* as follows: In Buddhism and non-Buddhist religions (*waidao*), anyone who has left the household life is called *shamen* 沙門 (Skt., *śramaṇa*). People who are engaged in learning other than Buddhism are called *waidao* if they can debate eloquently. See Li, p. 284; T.1775:38.367c26-28.

<sup>27</sup> Li, p. 218; T.1775:38.358b4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Li, p. 274; T.1775:38.366b9-10.

<sup>29</sup> The use of story as an exegetical device of course was not unknown in China prior to the arrival of Buddhism; the “Yu-lao” 喻老 chapter of the *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 is one good example of such hermeneutical strategy. At the same time, however, the “Yu-lao” chapter was also unique in its time. Arguably, the *Hanshi waizhuan* 韓詩外傳 from the early Han might be considered another such example, where stories are used to explicate the meaning of given lines from a poem in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of Odes). But upon close examination, it seems clear that the commentator was actually using a poem to illustrate a given story, usually a well known historical anecdote or legend. I have found one unique example from the Han in which a story was cited in a commentary. It was the commentary (*jian* 箋) written by Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200) on the *Shijing*. See Ruan Yuan 阮元 ed., *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 6th ed. (Commentaries and Subcommentaries on the Thirteen Classics) (Taipei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1976), *Shijing*, *juan* 12, 2:428. Storytelling, however, is not the standard mode of exegesis in Zheng Xuan's commentary on the *Book of Odes*, or in the entire corpus of his commentaries. The dearth of examples of using stories as commentary evidently speaks for the relative uniqueness of the Buddhist predilection for such exegetical device.

religious import is almost always to convert his audience to Buddhism. Sometimes, he did not actually tell a story; rather, he would just refer to it, presumably because the story was well known or had been taught to his audience previously, if it was not indeed a chestnut. For instance, commenting on the line which reads “subduing the devils and enemies and overwhelming the non-Buddhists,” Kumārajīva said: “An instance of overwhelming the non-Buddhists would be this: Śāriputra debated with the non-Buddhists for seven days and seven nights, and he prevailed.”<sup>30</sup> No details were given about the exchange between Śāriputra and his opponents.

But when Kumārajīva did tell a story, it might serve to illustrate a given situation in the text. He might tell a story about a given character<sup>31</sup> or a given object mentioned in the text such as the robes of the Buddha.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes, he might tell a story of someone who exemplifies a given virtue. To comment on Vimalakīrti’s super knowledges and eloquence, for instance, Kumārajīva cites the debate between Nāgārjuna and the non-Buddhists and gives the following details.

The non-Buddhists asked, “What are Indras doing right now?”

“They are fighting with the titanic demons,” replied Nāgārjuna.

“How can you prove it?”

Bodhisattva [Nāgārjuna] then offered the evidence. Instantly, damaged halberds and broken swords fell down from the sky. The non-Buddhists also saw Indras and the demons arranging in oppositional formations in the sky. Upon seeing the evidence, the non-Buddhists surrendered to Nāgārjuna’s eloquence.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Li, p. 19; T.1775:38.329a12-14. A similar example can be found in p. 441 (391b11-12), where the story of Prince Mupo 慕魄 was mentioned but not told. The story of Prince Mupo is preserved in *Taizi Mupo jing* 太子慕魄經 (Scripture on Prince Mupo), which survives in two different renditions by An Shigao 安世高 (fl. second century) and Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (in Chang’an 265-313) respectively. See T.167:3 and T.168:3. From the original lines Kumārajīva commented on, it is not clear how the story of Prince Mupo could have been relevant in this context. This suggests that the story might have been given a peculiar twist when Kumārajīva told it for the first time.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, the stories about Mahākāśyapa and Cakravartī (King of Turning Wheel, or universal monarch) in Li, pp. 150-151 (T.1775:38.347c7-21) and p. 211 (T.1775:38.357b2-20) respectively.

<sup>32</sup> Li, pp. 528-29; T.1775:38.404a21-24.

<sup>33</sup> Li, pp. 90-91; T.1775:38.339a4-9. The story of the combat between Nāgārjuna and Indras can be found, in fuller detail, in the *Longshu Pusa zhuan* 龍樹菩薩傳 (Biography of Nāgārjuna). See T.2047:50.185a17-25. But the protagonist of the combat was also said to be Āryadeva rather than Nāgārjuna. See *Tipo Pusa zhuan* 提婆菩薩傳 (Biography of Āryadeva) in T.2047:50.187b4-13. Since both biographies were translated by Kumārajīva himself, it seems evident he must have told this story to his audience before. More illustrative examples can be found in pp. 294 (T.1775:38.369b20-21), 544-45 (T.1775:38.406c2-21), 546 (T.1775:38.406b29-407a5), 627-30 (T.1775:38.419a1-419b17).

Sometimes Kumārajīva would tell a story or two to illustrate a Buddhist philosophical concept. In Chapter 6 of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, the scripture reads: “[A bodhisattva should] regard all sentient beings as a wise man would regard the reflection of the moon in water. He should regard them just like he would regard a face in a mirror; like a mirage in the heat; like the sound of an echo; like the clouds in the sky.” And Kumārajīva glosses as follows:

This is how a bodhisattva should regard all sentient beings. Sentient beings, soul (*shen* 神), ego (*zhu* 主), and self (*wo* 我) are synonymous. Let me illustrate this. A fool was traveling on the road and came upon a chest that somebody had lost. Inside the chest was a huge mirror. As he opened the chest, the fool caught sight of himself in the mirror. Believing that his own reflection was the owner of the mirror, he bowed to it, put the mirror back, and left the chest where it was. In the same way, sentient beings, upon entering the treasure trove of the Buddhist Dharma, see the bejeweled mirror, and become attached to appearances, and then fabricate a self (*jiwo* 計我). They are just like the fool in the story.

Here is another example. While traveling on a road, a blind man ran into the prince of the country and he caught hold of him tenaciously, refusing to let go. Officials soon came to the scene and they gave the man a terrible beating. Only when the pain became unbearable did he let go. Sentient beings that uphold erroneous views are just like the blind man. They see a self when there is no self. They then feel the suffering of impermanence that is changing in response to shifting conditions. There is in fact no self. In the same way as the clouds in the sky vanish upon close scrutiny, so too is there no self.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Li, p. 389; T.1775:38.383b29-c9. Kumārajīva's story is very similar to another story in a collection of parables called the *Baiyu jing* 百喻經 (Scripture of One Hundred Parables), translated by Gunavṛddhi 求那毘地 in 492. See T.209:4.548b4-17. The story goes like this.

Once there was a man who was in dire poverty. He had a heavy debt and could not pay it back, so he fled. When he came to an open space he chanced upon a chest full of treasures. There was a mirror on the top of the treasures and it had a cover. The poor man was excited about what he found. He then opened up the mirror and saw a person in it. It gave him a start. With his hands closed in a ritual gesture, he said:

“I thought this chest was empty and nobody was inside, I really had no idea that you were inside. Please don't be angry.”

Ordinary people are also like this. Vexed by innumerable afflictions, they are plagued by the devil-king of birth and death as if they were in debt. In order to avoid the cycle of birth and death, they enter the Buddhist path to practice the good teachings and cultivate merit. This is like coming upon a treasure trunk. Yet nonplused by the mirror of egoism, ordinary people foolishly believe that there is a personal self, and they become attached to it and believe that it is real. Thereby they are fallen and lose all their merit. The achievement of meditation, the merit of passionlessness, and the fruit of the Three Vehicles are all lost. Just like that foolish man who abandoned the treasure trunk, people who adhere to belief in a personal self are also the same.

Clearly in the original, no specific Buddhist concepts are introduced and those of sentient beings, soul, and ego are at best implied only. Nevertheless, Kumārajīva ushers in these concepts and then wastes no time in telling his stories to illustrate them. In contrast, only Sengzhao cared to make a brief note, saying: “When distant, it is visible in form. When nearby, it is formless.”<sup>35</sup> The other three disciples were completely silent on this passage. Kumārajīva’s impulse to tell a good story with pragmatic import is evident.

But most of the time, Kumārajīva tells a story to illustrate a given situation, circumstance, or incident in the original passage. He might try to tease out the meaning of the given situation or explore its implication. Still, he might simply cite an incident similar to the given one. For instance, when commenting on the lines that read “[A bodhisattva] always examines his own faults and does not complain about other people’s shortcomings,” Kumārajīva cites this similar account:

One is reminded of the story about a monk (*bhikṣu* 比丘) who was meditating in a forest. When it was time to eat, he took his alms bowl and left the forest. On his way he ran into an evil robber, who drew his bow to shoot at him. The monk pardoned the other man and berated himself, refusing to entertain any evil thoughts. Then, pointing at his stomach, he said to the robber, “You should shoot here. I came out of the forest because of this. As a result, I got myself into trouble. It is all my stomach’s fault.” Self-examination and forgiveness of others operate in the same way.<sup>36</sup>

Admittedly, this is a dramatic story that neatly illustrates that we should own up to our mistakes. The neat correspondence between the original passage and its illustrative story is due partly to the fact that the original story is about a general virtue of being self-critical and is devoid of any specific detail about the exemplification of such virtue thereby leaving room for any creative illustration. But when specific details are limned in the original, Kumārajīva’s stories are often less than straightforward. For example, in Chapter 2 of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, the scripture says: “He [Vimalakīrti] went to the brothels in order to demonstrate the problems of having desires,” and Kumārajīva tells the following story:

In a foreign country there was once a woman whose body was golden in color. Dharmatrāta 達慕多羅, the son of a householder, offered her ten thousand taels of gold and invited her to go with him to a bamboo grove. And off they went together in a chariot. It happened that Mañjuśrī was standing in the middle of their way and he had transformed himself into a lay person. He was dressed in a garment covered with

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<sup>35</sup> Li, p. 390; T.1775:38.384a3-4.

<sup>36</sup> Li, p. 519; T.1775:38.402c16-24.

exquisite jewels. When the woman saw the garment, her covetous mind was aroused.

"If you want to have this garment," Mañjuśrī told her, "you must awaken to the mind of wisdom."

"What is the mind of wisdom?" asked the woman.

"It is your own body," replied Mañjuśrī

"How can that be?" asked the woman.

"Wisdom is empty in nature and your body is also empty in nature. Therefore they are the same."

As it turned out, this woman had once cultivated wisdom at Buddha Kāśyapa's place and the roots of goodness had been planted in her. Thus, upon hearing Mañjuśrī's explanation, she attained tolerance in no rebirth. Having attained tolerance in no rebirth, she wanted to demonstrate the error of having desires, so she continued her journey to the bamboo grove with the householder's son. As soon as they went into the bamboo grove, she revealed herself to him as a dead body, which was swollen, rotten, and stinking. The householder's son was utterly horrified at what he saw, and he went to visit the Buddha. The Buddha expounded the Dharma to him, and he too attained tolerance in no rebirth. The demonstration of the error of having desires can have this kind of benefit.<sup>37</sup>

Even though brothels are not involved in Kumārajīva's story, the idea of using sexual desires as an expedient springboard to awaken someone to enlightenment is clearly consistent with what Vimalakīrti is said to have done in the original passage. It is perhaps more appropriate to characterize Kumārajīva's stories as extrapolation rather than explanation of the original passage he commented on. Hence, oftentimes the correspondence between the message in the original passage and the moral of the commentarial story can be dislocated. For instance, when commenting on the line "This body, like a well on a hillock (*qiujiing* 丘井), is overwhelmed by aging," Kumārajīva offers this gloss: "*Qiujiing* means 'abandoned site and dried-up well respectively'," and he then tells the following story:

Long ago there was a man who offended the king. Afraid of the consequences of his offense, he fled. The king ordered that a drunken elephant pursue him and, in a panic, the man threw himself into a dried-up well. As he was halfway down, he saw a blade of rotten grass, and he grabbed it. Underneath him a ferocious dragon was spitting its venom at him. Around him five poisonous serpents were attempting to injure him. Two rats were gnawing at the grass, which was about to snap. At the same time, the elephant above him was trying to get at him. The anguished man was in extreme peril, and he was utterly horrified. Above his head stood a tree, from which honey-like

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<sup>37</sup> Li, p. 99; T.1775:38.340a9-21. For Boin's rendition of Lamotte's French translation of the same story, see Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, p. 31, note 12.

liquid dripped down into his mouth from time to time. Because he was enticed by the sweet flavor, the man forgot about his fear.

The dried-up well in the abandoned site is a metaphor for life and death; the drunken elephant, for impermanence. The venomous dragon is a metaphor for the evil destinies; the five poisonous serpents, the five mental aggregates. The rotten grass is a metaphor for the root of life. As for the black and white rats, the white one is a metaphor for the sun and the black one for the moon (i.e., time). The honey-like globules are a metaphor for the five sensuous pleasures. Forgetting about fear because of the drops of honey-like liquid is a metaphor for the fact that sentient beings, when they taste the honey-like liquid provided by the five sensuous pleasures, are not afraid of suffering.<sup>38</sup>

One cannot but notice that the point of the original passage is to compare the aging of the physical body to an abandoned well that will dry up in time. However, Kumārajīva's story does not elaborate on this point; rather, it seems to focus on the image of the well, which in turn triggers the story. As a result, the story changes the message from aging, a specific form of suffering, to suffering in general. And while the idea of distraction is not mentioned in the original passage, it is superimposed on the meaning of Kumārajīva's story by the dictates of the storyplot. The link between the original passage and the illustrative story is tenuous.

Oftentimes Kumārajīva's own stories would take on a life of their own and he would draw a moral from them, a moral that is by no means implied in the original passage he comments on. Glossing "When he (Vimalakīrti) was

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<sup>38</sup> Li, p. 114; T.1775:38.342b2-13. For Boin's translation of Lamotte's French translation of the same story, see Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, p. 37, note 6. This is a famous parable that appears in many different Indian sources. See *ibid.*, p. 36, note 27. One of them is the \**Samyuktāvadāna-sūtra* (*Zhongjing zhuan za piyu jing*) 眾經撰雜譬喻經 (Collection of Parables from Various Scriptures), collected by a monk named Daolüe 道略 and translated by Kumārajīva himself in T.208:4.533a26-533b13. Interestingly, the old well in this version symbolizes the dwelling place of all sentient beings. It, then, seems clear that Kumārajīva used his stories as he pleased for the ultimate purpose of making his sermons accessible to his audience. While it is not clear when Kumārajīva translated this text, his translation of another similar collection of parables (*Za piyu jing* 雜譬喻經) was done in the year of 405 and the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was translated in 406. Scholars generally agree that the *Za piyu jing* (not found in any Buddhist collection today by that title) and the *Zhongjing zhuan za piyu jing* are the same text with different titles. As Liang Liling 梁麗玲 pointed out, similar stories in Buddhist scripture were often given a somewhat unique plot and shape as a result of differences in writing strategies, expressive modes, and purpose of storytelling. In her thorough study of the *Za baozang jing* 雜寶藏經 (Scripture of Assorted Treasures), she has traced and compared numerous stories that appear to share a common origin in a wide range of Buddhist scriptures. See her *Za baozang jing ji gi gushi yanjiu* 雜寶藏經及其故事研究 (A Study of the Scripture of Assorted Treasures and Its Stories) (Taipei: Fagu wenhua shiyegufen youxian gongsi, 1998), p. 185 and passim.

among the commoners, he was the most respectable one who inspired them to the power of merit (*fuli* 福力),” Kumārajīva tells the following story:

Long ago a person of humble origin came to town. Upon seeing a man in a handsome costume who was riding a large horse and holding a bejeweled parasol he called out ‘Darn it!’ several times. Taken aback, the rider asked him, “I adorned myself in such a dignified manner. Why did you say ‘Darn it’?”

“Sir,” the humble man replied, “you cultivated virtue in the past, so you’ve now earned this karmic reward. Your honor and virtues are admirable and everybody respects you. I did not cultivate any merit in the past, so I am in a shabby condition now. If I compare myself to you, sir, I am no more than a beast. That is why I said ‘Darn it’ to myself; I didn’t mean to swear at you.”

In this way, the humble man was vigorously motivated to cultivate merit in every way possible. If an awe-inspiring form can inspire such far-reaching benefits; how much greater will they be for those who are transformed by the Dharma?<sup>39</sup>

Kumārajīva’s moral at the end of the story clearly is prompted by his own story, which in turn is prompted by the original message. In other words, it is twice removed from the original message, and we may say that Kumārajīva’s stories are not so much dictated by his obligation to explicate as a scholar-monk as his impulse to sermonize as a storyteller.<sup>40</sup> Insofar as the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* is a story in itself, Kumārajīva’s commentaries in many instances constitute a kind of meta-story, which, spun from specific details in a given passage in the scripture, exhibits an inclination to seek a new configuration of meaning of its own.

### Some Concluding Remarks

I have intentionally included many of Kumārajīva’s stories in this paper,

<sup>39</sup> Li, pp. 102-103; T.1775:38.340b29-c9. Kumārajīva told another story about retribution as a warning elsewhere in his commentary. See *ibid.*, p. 549; T.1775:38.407b8-17. In the Biography of Faxian 法顯 in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, Faxian reportedly told the robbers he once encountered thus: Gentlemen, you did not practice almsgiving in your previous lives, that is why you are suffering from starvation and poverty now. See T.2058:50.337b27-337c3.

<sup>40</sup> As Lamotte’s study shows, the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* “is closely linked to the earliest known recensions of the *Prajñāpāramitās*, the *Ratnakūṭa*, the *Avatamsaka* and the *Mahāsamnipāta*, and belongs to the same philosophico-mystical movement” and the scripture seems to allude to these sources, but Kumārajīva never refers to any of these hard-core philosophical issues in his commentary by citing relevant scriptural sources for his audience. See Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, pp. lxxxi-lxxxvii. Furthermore, there are numerous references to the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* in Indian commentarial sources (*śāstra*), many of which had been translated by Kumārajīva himself, however, he did not cite any of them in his commentary. See *ibid.*, pp. cxi.

because not only did I want to suggest a sense of what they are like, but I also wanted to show how they might or might not be directly linked to the passages they were deployed to explicate. It should be clear by now that while Kumārajīva might not exactly favor a parabolic approach to Buddhist exegesis, he seemed to think that abstract ideas could be explained by illustrative stories more easily than they could be defined analytically, or at the very least, he thought he could, through storytelling, make himself understood more readily to a live audience of the general public.

Parable as an art of narrative writing and doctrinal explication corresponds to what was called *avadāna* (Ch. *piyu* 譬喻), which constituted one of the twelve different modes of scripture writing that were created by the Mahayanists no later than the third century.<sup>41</sup> In embellishing his text with edifying and illustrative stories, Kumārajīva seemed also to have followed a traditional Indian rhetorical convention which was recognized as one of the legitimate *alamkāras* (literally, “adornments”). However, observance of a rhetorical tradition that was exemplified in written texts does not preclude the application of the same tradition in an oral fashion. Moreover, the formation of *avadāna* and *alamkāra* may very well have been inspired by an oral tradition of storytelling in the first place. At any rate, given Kumārajīva’s upbringing and training in Central Asia, it is also likely that he personally observed and learned his storytelling approach directly from one of his childhood teachers, Bandhudatta 盤頭達多, who was a master in the Lesser Vehicle. When Kumārajīva was about twenty-seven years of age, he converted himself to the teachings of the Greater Vehicle and was highly regarded by the King of Kucha 龜茲, who was most enthusiastic in promoting Buddhism. Upon learning this, Bandhudatta came to Kucha to see his former disciple. Kumārajīva then explained the doctrine of emptiness to his former teacher but he was not convinced. And he challenged: “You said everything is empty; that is exceedingly threatening. How can you abandon the doctrine of existence and fall in love with emptiness? It is just like a madman in the past who asked a weaver to make an extremely fine piece of cloth. The weaver was particularly meticulous about it and his product turned out to be as refined as dust particles. However, the madman found it still too coarse. Exasperated, the weaver pointed his finger to the air and said: ‘Now, here’s the fine cloth you wanted!’ ‘Why can’t I see it?’ asked the madman. ‘This piece of cloth is extremely fine, even the best weaver cannot see it, let alone ordinary people,’ the weaver replied. The madman was overjoyed and he paid the weaver. Other weavers then followed suit and they were all

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<sup>41</sup> See Gu Zhengmei 古正美, “Dacheng fojiao de zaojing fangfa yu zaoqi fojiao wenxue ji yishu de fazhan guanxi” 大乘佛教的造經方法與早期佛教文學及藝術的發展關係 (The Methods of Scripture Writing in Mahāyāna and the Relationship between Early Buddhist Literature and Art), *Lingnan Journal of Chinese Studies* 嶺南學報, New Series, No.1 (October 1999): 137-164.



generously rewarded. Yet there was indeed no cloth. Your doctrine of emptiness is also like this.” Thereupon, Kumārajīva attempted to demonstrate his argument with similar stories, and argued back and forth with his teacher for over a month before he could finally convince him.<sup>42</sup>

Kumārajīva's stories, as we have seen, are mostly extraneous and only tangentially relevant to the original passages they explicate. Illustrative rather than analytical in nature, the language of Kumārajīva's commentary is straightforward and prosaic. Compared to the elegant prose in the various commentaries by his disciples on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, it is, by far, less formalized and less adorned, free of Chinese literary allusions, parallelisms, antithetical couplets and other similar rhetorical devices. More important, it is indeed more prosaic than the language we find in the translation of the scripture itself, which, of course, was polished up by his disciples. The most prominent rhetorical devices Kumārajīva uses in his commentaries are similes, analogies, and metaphors, and they of course serve very well in storytelling. They help Kumārajīva emplot a concept, a virtue, an imagery, or an incident, giving it a literary form, a personified embodiment, or religious significance. Sometimes, the reader may even have the impression that Kumārajīva's stories are no more than his afterthoughts to his more formal and philosophical explications. Viewed in such light, it is plausible that Kumārajīva's commentaries as a whole were not written as a text to be read in silence; rather they were probably records of his extemporaneous sermons. The question, of course, is: can we prove it?

We know that Kumārajīva somehow felt trapped in China, even though he was well respected by people from all walks of life including the emperor. He almost felt pity for himself because he thought that very few people in China could understand him and appreciate his talents. That was why, he himself explained, he chose not to *hold a pen to write* anything profound in spite of his cherished intention to do so. Other than his correspondences with Huiyuan 慧遠, Wang Mi 王謐, and Yao Xing 姚興, ruler of the Latter Qin 後秦 dynasty, who invited him to China, the only writing he actually did was a text called

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<sup>42</sup> T.2059:50.331a24-b6. According to Sengyou, the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (Scripture of the Wise and the Foolish), which was translated into Chinese in 445, was the record of what eight Chinese monks had observed and heard, in Khotan 于闐, at a five-yearly assembly in the Great Community in the early decades of the fifth century. It appears that the art of using storytelling for argumentation was popular in Central Asia in the third and fourth centuries. See Sengyou's account of the translation of the *Xianyu jing* in *Chusanzang jiji* (T.2145:55.67c9-68a1) and Victor Mair's annotated translation of the account and his detailed discussion of the linguistic aspects of the scripture as well as their implications on the performance of the text, in his "The Linguistic and Textual Antecedents of *The Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*," *Sino-Platonic Papers*, No. 38 (April 1993). Hence, it is no wonder that Kumārajīva could learn the art of storytelling in his early years in Kucha.

*Shixiang lun* 實相論 (On Reality) in two scrolls, whose composition was probably requested by Yao Xing.<sup>43</sup> Thus Kumārajīva resigned himself to translating scriptures and lecturing on them. To be sure, we know for certain that Kumārajīva did lecture on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.<sup>44</sup> Further, his biographies in both the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 and the *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 record that he “composed a commentary (*zhu* 注) on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*. As soon as he uttered the words, they formed an essay without any revision. His language, metaphors and analogies were subtle and precise; there was nothing that was not profound” (出言成章, 無所改刪, 辭喻婉約, 莫非玄奧).<sup>45</sup> Compared to the descriptions of the composition of his disciples' commentaries on the same scripture, Kumārajīva's case is indeed unique. While his disciples were either described to have written (*zhu* 著) or composed a commentary (*zhu* 注) on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, it seems clear that Kumārajīva actually expounded on the scripture orally and his biographers were evidently impressed with his oratory and quick wit. There would not be any need for his biographers to make a special note about his eloquence, had Kumārajīva indeed written the commentary instead of giving it orally. In fact, Sengzhao, who was responsible for writing down Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, also confirmed that his master had lectured on the scripture, for Sengzhao confessed that his own commentary on the scripture was no more than what he had heard

<sup>43</sup> See his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2059:50.332c3-6. The *Shixiang lun* is no longer extant. Kumārajīva's letter to Yao Xing was preserved in Daoxuan's *Guang Hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Sequel to the Collection of Great Illumination) (T.2103:52.228b 17-c3) and some of his correspondences with Huiyuan and Wang Mi were compiled together in three scrolls under the title of *Dacheng dayi zhang* 大乘大義章 (On the Essential Meanings of the Greater Vehicle) (T.1856:45.122bff). See Tang Yongtong 湯用彤 *Han-Wei Liang-Jin Nanbeichao fojiaoshi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (rpt., Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 1:220-222.

<sup>44</sup> See his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2059:50.332b12-13. See also his biography in *Chu sanzang ji ji*, in T.2145:55.100a24-102a13. Cf. T.2145:55.58b17-20. Since the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was translated in 406, six years after he was taken to Chang'an, we may assume that his oral commentary was also delivered and jotted down in that same year.

<sup>45</sup> T.2059:50.332c7-9. Both biographies were based on Sengzhao's eyewitness account of Kumārajīva in action, which was recorded in his preface to the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*. See T.2145:55.58a16-b20. *Fanyi mingyi ji*, an eleventh-century Buddhist dictionary, characterized all translations of Kumārajīva in virtually identical language; it says: “Kumārajīva's language, metaphors and analogies were subtle and precise, and as soon as he uttered the words, they formed an essay.” See T.2131:54.1069b22. It is interesting and telling to compare the description of Kumārajīva's quick-witted oral exposition to Sengche's 僧徹 equally quick-witted written versification. According to the *Gaoseng zhuan*, whenever Sengche, who was a disciple of Huiyuan, felt inspired to write poetry, he simply penned it down and a poem was thus completed (至若一賦一詠, 輒落筆成章). See T.2059:50.370c9-10. Given that the two descriptions came from the same author, we can clearly see the difference between Kumārajīva's oral exposition and Sengche's written versification, even though both quick-witted monks were described with the same expression *chengzhang* 成章 to have their products completed.

from his master's sermons. That is to say, when Kumārajīva lectured on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, he also expounded on its meaning, and his exposition constituted his commentary on the scripture.<sup>46</sup> If we take Sengzhao's confession in good faith, it appears that his own commentary represented a reproduction of Kumārajīva's commentary less the extemporaneous stories. It would be safe, then, to argue that Kumārajīva's biographers' specific comments about his use of metaphors and parables, in reality, referred to his storytelling and other more explicit allegories and analogies. Even though the extant commentary as we have it today might be a late compilation from the Tang dynasty consisting of selected glosses, and therefore may not represent the entirety of the original text, Sengzhao's observation should remain reliable testimony to the oral composition of his master's commentary and its literary characteristics. In fact, given Sengzhao's specific observations about Kumārajīva's apt uses of metaphors and parables, if the commentary indeed was a late compilation, the compiler evidently did justice to the original by preserving so many of Kumārajīva's metaphors and parables in the work.

According to Sengzhao, who transcribed the translation, Kumārajīva was translating the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* orally while he apparently read from a Sanskrit original he held in his hand (手執梵本, 口自宣譯).<sup>47</sup> From the numerous records we have about Kumārajīva's translation activities, it is certain that the oral mode was the norm of his translation.<sup>48</sup> It would only make sense if Kumārajīva also explicated the scripture orally to a live audience.<sup>49</sup> In his funerary eulogy for Kumārajīva, Sengzhao naturally sang praise of his teacher's momentous contribution in China and he even compared him to Buddha himself. But he also repeatedly and emphatically referred to Kumārajīva's

<sup>46</sup> When the transcribers described their jotting down of Kumārajīva's translation (*zhengwen* 正文), they often added that they also preserved the "gist" (*dagui* 大歸) of the translated scripture. See, for instance, Sengruī's prefaces to the *Lotus Sūtra* and the *Siyi jing* 思益經 in T.2145:55.57c15 and 58a8-9. Evidently, the gist is not the translation itself, from which it is clearly separated according to our eyewitness accounts. In fact, in his preface to the *Lotus Sūtra*, Sengruī went so far as to say that Kumārajīva, in addition to offering the translation, explicated the profound meaning of the scripture and made clear the gist under individual sentences (*zhengwen yan yu zhubo, you meng pishi xuanzhi, xiao dagui yu juxia* 正文言於竹帛, 又蒙披釋玄旨, 曉大歸於句下). It seems certain then that the "gist" must be Kumārajīva's interpretation of the scripture in question, and it is, in effect, the master's running commentary to the scripture.

<sup>47</sup> Li, p. 3; T.1775:38.327b13-14. See also T.2145:55.58b15.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Chu sanzang ji ji*, juan 8, T.2145:55.53b5-6.

<sup>49</sup> Lamotte evidently read Kumārajīva's commentary very carefully and he translated some of his stories in his own translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*. He opined that Kumārajīva's commentary was based on his own "notes" on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* and was finally put into the form we have today by his disciples. He seems to hold that the commentary was initially penned down in the form of "notes" by Kumārajīva himself, but he does not give any specific evidence for his claim. See Lamotte, *The Teaching of Vimalakīrti*, p. xcvi.

extraordinary success in reaching the general public. He enthusiastically commended that Kumārajīva's locution was appropriate to the occasion and his disputations could respond to any given situation (言既適時, 理有圓會, 故辯不徒興, 道不虛唱).<sup>50</sup> He emphasized Kumārajīva's adaptability and flexibility in his preaching, much like Vimalakīrti himself.<sup>51</sup> Thus his proselytization could transform the public (恂恂善誘, 肅肅風馳. 道能易俗, 化能移時).<sup>52</sup>

In fact, it seems certain that Kumārajīva himself considered his career of Buddhist proselytization *oral* in nature. It is well known that Kumārajīva compared translation to the pre-chewing of food that was to be fed others (但改梵爲秦, 失其藻蔚. 雖得大意, 殊隔文體. 有似嚼飯與人, 非徒失味, 乃令嘔噦也).<sup>53</sup> One is tempted to suspect that there might be a double entendre in his metaphor of chewing. That is to say, Kumārajīva's translation was done orally, much like the chewing of food. After all, his translations were written down by his disciples rather than by himself. Further, Kumārajīva vowed that if his translations of Buddhist scriptures were indeed faithful to the originals, his *tongue* (not his hand) should remain intact after his cremation (若所傳無謬者, 當使焚身之後, 舌不焦爛).<sup>54</sup> Whether this vow was historically true or not, it indicates that Kumārajīva's missionary career was certainly characterized with oral activities, certainly by himself and most likely by his contemporaries and later historians as well.

Several features in Kumārajīva's storytelling would make good sense if indeed his commentaries were records of a series of extemporaneous sermons. First, many off-handed analogies (recall the comparison of women's nature to the nature of fish) would not seem entirely out of place as they were most likely prompted by the audience or inspired by a recent event presumably known to the audience. Second, given its extemporaneous nature, it is understandable why Kumārajīva sometimes only referred to a story without telling it. It is because he simply assumed that his audience had not forgotten the details of that story, perhaps from a previous sermon he gave.<sup>55</sup> Third, the dislocation between Kumārajīva's story and the original passage in many instances suggests that

<sup>50</sup> T.2103:52.264c11-13.

<sup>51</sup> T.2103:52.265a11-14.

<sup>52</sup> T.2103:52.265a20-21.

<sup>53</sup> See his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, in T.2059:50.332b24-29.

<sup>54</sup> Li, p. 11. This passage is not found in the Taishō edition, but can be found in Kumārajīva's biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.333a2-3. As it turned out, his vow reportedly materialized upon his cremation. See Kumārajīva's biography in Fang Xuanling, *Jinshu*8:2502.

<sup>55</sup> Lamotte claimed that Kumārajīva's commentary was based on his "notes," which were then polished up by his disciples. If it was indeed the case, one would think that the notes would probably be given full expression in full-blown stories during the actual sermon. In other words, Kumārajīva's sketchy notes, if they ever existed, seem to suggest that storytelling was indeed used in his sermons.

Kumārajīva was more interested in catering to the ongoing interests of his audience than in being faithful to the original passage he explicated. He was merely using the original passage as a convenient springboard to connect with his audience. Such digressions would appear inappropriate in formal writings, and the integrity and coherence of Kumārajīva's commentary do become suspect if we read it as a written text. And given Kumārajīva's fastidious preference for literary elegance,<sup>56</sup> it would seem unthinkable that he would allow such infelicitous writings to pass in his name. But if the commentary, indeed, was merely a record of his extemporaneous sermons, the infelicities would make sense. As Kumārajīva himself expressed it most succinctly, as long as one could help the audience seek the Buddhist Way and cultivate their loving minds, it was not necessary to stick to the literal meaning of the text.<sup>57</sup> This approach, outlined in the *Catuhpratisaranasūtra* to which he alluded in his commentary,<sup>58</sup> is certainly consistent with his broad-minded character, which paid no particular attention to adhering to every single minutia of behavioral norms.<sup>59</sup>

Fourth, sometimes Kumārajīva's language itself suggests that he was talking to a live audience. For instance, to explain why Śāriputra embarrassed himself in his previous encounter with Vimalakīrti, Kumārajīva says: "*Let me illustrate it with an analogy. It is like a skillful archer who never misses his target. Even though a bird may be able to skim with light wings, it cannot afford to fly over his house. Similarly, Vimalakīrti had penetrating wisdom and eloquence and never failed to respond to a challenge. Therefore, none of the five hundred arhats dared to peep into his door.*"<sup>60</sup> On another occasion, Kumārajīva appears to be swearing to a live audience when he says: "*Now I swear in all sincerity to the assembly (今於眾復發誠誓) that if my translations are infallible, may my tongue not be burned after my cremation!*"<sup>61</sup> The directness and intensity of such outburst of emotions normally do not fit in a formal philosophical commentary.

Finally, stylistic clues may betray the oral nature of Kumārajīva's

<sup>56</sup> See Kumārajīva's persistent attempt to polish an existing translation in spite of its faithfulness to the original, in T.2059:50.364b5-6. See also T.2059:50.365a24-26.

<sup>57</sup> Li, p. 288; T.1775:38.368b19-23.

<sup>58</sup> I.e., he would follow the meaning rather than the letter of the scripture. See n. 22.

<sup>59</sup> See his biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, T.2059:50.330c9-12. It should be noted that the character traits of the subject of a biography is typically mentioned early on in the biography, but the comment about Kumārajīva's unconventional character was mentioned in connection with his extensive study of non-Buddhist literature and magical arts in Kucha when he was a teenager. According to his biographer, his unconventional character evidently offended the orthodox, but it is important to note that Kumārajīva's change of attitude might have something to do with his unorthodox learning at the time.

<sup>60</sup> Li, p. 162; T.1775:38.349c2-5.

<sup>61</sup> Li, p. 11. This passage is not found in the Taishō edition, but can be found in Kumārajīva's biography in the *Gaoseng zhuan*. See T.2059:50.333a2-3.

commentary as well. In Kumārajīva's commentary, the phrase "youyue" 又曰 or "youyun" 又云 or "yiyun" 亦云 ("[Kumārajīva] also said") appears sporadically to link an afterthought to a point just established or to simply introduce an unrelated idea somehow triggered by the passage being explicated.<sup>62</sup> Given its virtual absence in the commentaries of Kumārajīva's disciples,<sup>63</sup> this unique phrase may indicate that Kumārajīva's commentary was indeed written down as he was sermonizing, and the transcriber was simply jotting down the ideas he heard, even if they might not always be coherent.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, the commentaries of Kumārajīva's disciples always exhibit a literary coherence uninterrupted by any obtrusive rhetorical devices. Occasionally, the phrase "lunyue" 論曰 ("The discourse goes as follows") is inserted to mark the beginning of a formal philosophical exposition.<sup>65</sup> All these suggest that the commentaries were carefully thought out before being committed to writing.

In fact, the rhetorical features noted above are generally absent in Kumārajīva's only extant written text, the *Dacheng dayi zhang* 大乘大義章 (On the Essential Meanings of the Greater Vehicle), which comprised a series of correspondences between Kumārajīva in Chang'an and his admirer Huiyuan in Mt. Lu 廬山 in the south. Analogies and similes no doubt are recurrent in this anthology of epistles, but they are always framed in an explicit context where the burden of the discussion is direct and unambiguous.<sup>66</sup> Storytelling itself is totally missing in the epistolary exchange. Given a highly erudite monk as the inquirer and the exclusively philosophical nature of the exchange when faith was a given and the need to convert superfluous, Kumārajīva apparently did not

<sup>62</sup> These phrases appear almost forty times in Kumārajīva's commentary in Li's edition, but some of them are simply given as "Shiyue" 什曰 ("Kumārajīva said") in the Taishō edition. The variations suggest that Kumārajīva was adding afterthoughts to his own expositions either in the same sermon or on a different occasion. They also reflect the fragmentary nature of the commentary. See, for instance, Li, pp. 66 (T.1775:38.335a29), 156, 222, 227, 275, and 283.

<sup>63</sup> Sengzhao used "youyue" 又曰 seven times in Li's edition to link two separate yet related explanations. The phrase seems to be legitimately called for in this context and therefore does not undermine the thesis that it was used to link extemporaneous musings in Kumārajīva's oral commentary. See Li, pp. 237, 278, 306. However, the phrase was replaced, without exception with "Zhaoyue" 肇曰 ("Sengzhao said") in the Taishō edition.

<sup>64</sup> There is even a possibility that new ideas or afterthoughts were added, with one of these linking phrases, from different lectures by him on the same scripture on different occasions. That is, Kumārajīva's commentary as we have it today may well represent his expositions from numerous occasions rather than one.

<sup>65</sup> For a philosophical discourse introduced by "lunyue" 論曰 in Sengzhao's commentary, see Li, p. 50; T.1775:38.333a4-6.

<sup>66</sup> T.1856:45.137c24-25; 138b10-12; 138c5-6; 139c10-14; 140a1-4; 140a28-29; 141a7-9; 141a14-16; 141b1-2; 141b12-14; 141b29-141c1; 141c3-6; 142a20-23; 142c28-29; among many others.

find the occasion to tell any story or allude to it. In contrast, he often cited Buddhist scriptures explicitly including the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* to drive his point home,<sup>67</sup> a practice he rarely did in his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.

Earlier, we have mentioned (n.11) that Daorong's commentary consists of only one entry. It appears that Daorong was jotting down a point he apparently thought of great importance. It should be noted that in this unique comment, Daorong, whom Kumārajīva singled out as the most talented and learned disciple of his,<sup>68</sup> cited an interpretation of ignorance by Kumārajīva in reference to the same passage he was commenting on. However, Kumārajīva's commentary itself was not preserved at all in the version we have today. It seems evident, then, that while the person (probably Sengzhao) who transcribed Kumārajīva's commentary here did not consider it worthy of note, Daorong himself saw some significance in it and took the trouble to write it down.<sup>69</sup> This also suggests that Kumārajīva himself did not pen his commentary; he was only giving it orally.<sup>70</sup> In this connection, it makes perfect sense that Kumārajīva sometimes appeared to be addressing specific questions from an interlocutor. Occasionally, Kumārajīva's commentary is punctuated with a question (*wenyue* 問曰) immediately followed by an answer (*dayue* 答曰). This does not seem to be intended for rhetorical purposes; rather, it records the actual questions raised by a live audience.<sup>71</sup> Interlocution is absent in the commentaries of Kumārajīva's disciples.

That Kumārajīva's commentaries on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* might have been the records of extemporaneous sermons is not just a circumstantial speculation. Monks in early medieval China did give sermons at regular religious gatherings and they often spiced up their sermons with storytelling.<sup>72</sup> We now know that novice monks were trained in storytelling as part of their religious curriculum and there were special texts translated and used for that specific purpose. Many collections of Buddhist stories were translated into Chinese before the third century and Kumārajīva himself translated one, in two

<sup>67</sup> The *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was cited twice. See T.1856:45.123a29 and 133c7.

<sup>68</sup> Kumārajīva even went so far as to say that "the prosperity of the Buddhist Dharma was dependent on Daorong." See Daorong's biography in T.2059:50.363c2-3.

<sup>69</sup> Sengrui himself confessed that he always jotted down what he considered important in Kumārajīva's lectures. See Kumārajīva's view on the use of analogy and metaphor as skillful means in *Chu sanzang jiji*, *juan* 5, T.2145:55.41b21ff.

<sup>70</sup> It is of course possible that Kumārajīva's commentary did not survive in its entirety as we have it today.

<sup>71</sup> See, for instance, Li, pp. 223 (T.1775:38.359a6-7), 275 (translated in n. 25), 415 (T.1775:38.387c1-5), 445 (T.1775:38.392a8-11), 477 (T.1775:38.396b1-7), 505 (T.1775:38.400c12-14), 523 (T.1775:38.403b16-18) and 627 (T.1775:38.418c28-419b18).

<sup>72</sup> *Gaoseng zhuan*, *juan* 13, T.2059:50.417c7ff. See also Li Xiaorong 李小榮, "Bianwen yu changdao guanxi zhi jiantao" 變文與唱導關係之檢討 (An Examination of the relationship between transformation texts and chanting-cum-edification), *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 (Dunhuang Studies) 4 (1999): 1-5.73T.208:4.531b7-542c28.

scrolls, called the *Zhongjing zhuan za piyu jing* 衆經撰雜譬喻經 (Collection of Parables from Various Scriptures).<sup>73</sup> But the most notable of all might be the *Baiyu jing* 百喻經 (Scripture of One Hundred Parables), which, translated by Gunavṛddhi 求那毘地 in 492, in all likelihood, was the earliest oral text in China.<sup>74</sup> The preface to the scripture clearly states that the collection was translated for the express purpose of training Buddhist novices in the basics of Buddhism,<sup>75</sup> and as I have argued elsewhere, the *Baiyu jing* as a whole was used for training in storytelling as well. Each of the ninety-eight parables in the scripture comes with a Buddhist moral at the end. This literary structure was by no means unique. In fact, it was very similar to that of Kumārajīva's *Zhongjing zhuan za piyu jing*, except that in the latter the moral lessons, when supplied, were used to introduce the stories. The fact that Kumārajīva cited a story from his own *Zhongjing zhuan za piyu jing* in his commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* suggests that the former was meant to be some kind of mental archive for Buddhist sermonizing, which often could use some help from storytelling.<sup>76</sup>

The idea of blending storytelling with sermonizing may not sound odd at all if we realize that the dichotomy between entertainment and religious proselytization is a false one in the first place. In clarifying any ambiguous passage that his live audience might have raised, Kumārajīva engages himself in a process of fictionalizing by which the bare facts in the original passage he explicates are enhanced, amplified, linked, and rendered continuously and intelligibly in a self-contained and coherent narrative. Oftentimes it is the storytelling in his commentary that gives significance for the audience. In fact, sometimes the story comprises the commentary itself, and in such cases, the significance of the story, then, is tantamount to the instructive force for the audience. Kumārajīva's didactic impulse, in the end, preempts his scholastic duties.

Storytelling continued to be essential in Buddhist proselytization after the early medieval period. The entire genre of *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) from the eighth century onward is now well known. It seems probable that the kind of storytelling preserved in Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* might have foreshadowed the well-known transformation texts. Further studies in identifying any possible connection between Buddhist storytelling in

<sup>74</sup> T.209:4.543a4-587c26.

<sup>75</sup> T.2145:55.68c24-28.

<sup>76</sup> See n. 38. See also the story of the combat between Nāgārjuna and Indras cited in n. 33. It was not coincidental that Kumārajīva translated the biography of Nāgārjuna and cited it in his commentary as an illustrative story. He seemed to cite stories from his own translated texts routinely. At least one episode from the biography of Aśvaghosa was cited and more importantly, it was modified and elaborated in a much expanded story in Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*. See Li, pp. 496-498; T.1775:38.399b 5-29 and T.2046:50.183c1-13.



the early medieval period and transformation texts from about two centuries later would seem worthwhile. On the other hand, it will also be instructive to Buddhist specialists if we can venture to compare early medieval Buddhist storytelling to records of Chan sermons from later times where popular romance stories were often recited for entertainment in the course of Buddhist proselytization.<sup>77</sup> Given Kumārajīva's habit of citing stories from existing Buddhist scriptures, it is not entirely impossible that Chan masters might have consciously inherited a long tradition of Buddhist sermonizing dating back at least to him.

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<sup>77</sup> Xu Shuofang 徐朔方 has identified several popular stories such as the well-known *Shuihu zhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Marshes) and *Pingyao zhuan* 平妖傳 (Pacifying the Demons) in the records of Chan sermons preserved in the *Wudeng huiyuan* 五燈會元 (Confluence of Five Lamp Records) compiled by Puji 普濟 in the year of 1252. See Xu, *Xiaoshuo zhengxin lu* 小說徵信錄 (Finding What is Veritable: Studies in Chinese Fiction) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 151-154.

# Persuasion and Entertainment at Once: Kumārajīva's Buddhist Storytelling in His Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*

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This paper addresses how Kumārajīva (344-413), one of the greatest Buddhist translators in China, practiced his storytelling in the form of philosophical commentary. Through an analysis of his commentary on the famed Buddhist classic *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*, this paper will demonstrate that Kumārajīva appreciated the virtue of storytelling in religious proselytization, and that he told stories throughout his lengthy commentary even when the textual contexts do not seem to call for them. Storytelling was crafted to be entertaining and, it was hoped, in the disarming presence of fun and pleasure, Buddhist osmosis would materialize. As a secondary issue, this paper also attempts to examine the issue of orality in Kumārajīva's commentary. As far as we can surmise, it is unlikely that Kumārajīva himself would write his commentary in Chinese, even though he presumably had learned Chinese for more than a decade before he finally arrived in central China in 401. However, virtually no scholar has been curious enough to examine the exact nature of the writing itself in his commentary. It appears to be a non-issue to most scholars whether Kumārajīva's commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra* was penned down by himself or it was in fact transcribed from an oral delivery. This paper will show that apart from tacit assumption, the commentary was, in all likelihood, delivered orally to a live audience and was probably committed to writing as a record of extemporaneous sermons.

# Persuasion and Entertainment at Once: Kumārajīva's Buddhist Storytelling in His Commentary on the *Vimalakīrti-sūtra*

勞悅強

學者研究鳩摩羅什多半僅著重其譯經活動，而甚少注意其對佛經所作之注解。本文將通過對什公僅存的《維摩詰經注》的仔細分析，探討佛教翻譯大師鳩摩羅什如何以注疏形式宣講佛教故事。本文將論證什公深明故事演說對宣揚佛家教義之重要性，同時，又指出什公演說故事率多隨機應變，因而所講故事與經文原意未必相關。什公所演說之故事往往刻意出奇，引人入勝，似在娛人，實欲宣教。此外，由於什公本人既不太可能親筆撰述，本文又嘗試考察什公注中之故事及其演說方式，從而探究其故事之口述性質。什公之《維摩詰經注》極有可能乃其譯講同施之結果，而由其助譯之弟子筆錄成篇。

關鍵詞：鳩摩羅什 維摩詰經 佛教故事演說 注疏 口述性 娛樂

