

Mind The Hermeneutical Gap: A Terminological Issue in Kumārajīva's Version of The *Diamond Sutra*

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Abstract

The *Jingang banruoboluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 T8, no. 235, translated by Kumārajīva at the beginning of the 5th century CE, is the earliest and most influential of the six Chinese versions of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*. No doubt it can be regarded as the Chinese *Diamond Sutra* par excellence: almost all of the numerous Chinese commentaries devoted to this scripture (which constitute a rich source for exploring the reception of this text in China) are based on Kumārajīva's version. This article focuses on the use of the term *xiang* 相 in this translation and in some related commentaries, showing how Kumārajīva's creative translation technique exerted a profound influence on the Chinese understanding of this Mahāyāna scripture.

Keywords: *Jingang banruoboluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, Kumārajīva, translated terminology, *xiang* 相, *lakṣaṇa*, *nimitta*, *saṃjñā*.

I. Introductory remarks¹

It has become something of a commonplace in modern scholarship to say that Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures are, on the whole, less mechanically literal than their Tibetan counterparts (if we are allowed to generalize a bit).² There is also a general consensus in the field that this flexible approach to the task of translating Buddhist scriptures is particularly typical of Kumārajīva's translations. As one of the leading modern scholars of Chinese Buddhism, Paul Demiéville, wrote, "Kumārajīva tenait essentiellement à gagner à ses idées un public encore assez mal préparé à les saisir. Il lui importait donc d'être

¹ This paper is an updated English version of a chapter of my Italian BA thesis: Stefano Zacchetti, *Le traduzioni cinesi del Sutra del Diamante (Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra). Uno studio comparativo con una traduzione della versione di Kumārajīva*, unpublished BA thesis (tesi di laurea), academic year 1992-1993 (1993): 356-380. Recently I have come across a detailed, important analysis of the same issue dealt with in the present paper in a book by Matsumoto Shirō 松本史朗, *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū* (禪思想の批判的研究), 1994, pp. 7-85. Though differing in many ways, my own study of Kumārajīva's *Diamond Sutra* independently came close to some aspects of Prof. Matsumoto's discussion.

I should like to express my gratitude to my friends Fang Guangchang, Ji Yun, Hiroshi Kanno, Antonello Palumbo, Robert Sharf, Jonathan Silk, Ken Su, and Alberto Todeschini for their comments, assistance, and advice at various stages of my work. I want to thank also Paul Harrison for reviving, with his own studies, my interest in the *Vajracchedikā*. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous reviewers for their useful remarks. Any error remaining in this paper is my own.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this little article to the memory of my teacher, Prof. Tilmann Vetter, with whom I had a chance to discuss the issue dealt with in the present article during my sojourn at Leiden, twenty years ago.

² See for example § 2068 (p. 410) of Paul Demiéville, "Le bouddhisme – Les sources chinoises," in *L'Inde classique – Manuel des études indiennes*, ed. Louis Renou and Jean Filliozat, 1953 (repr. 2000), pp. 398-463.

intelligible pour tous les lettrés chinois, et pour cela de mettre à leur portée et d'adapter à leur usage les textes qu'il traduisait".³

In this paper, I will try to give a more precise characterization of Kumārajīva's "creativity" in matter of translations and, particularly, translated terminology. But I also have the more ambitious aim of addressing, in more precise terms than is usually done in studies on Chinese Buddhism, the related question of how to assess the influence exerted by translations on the Chinese understanding of a particular scripture. My methodological approach in dealing with these issues consists in isolating specific terminological problems, and analysing them at first in the translations, and then in the related Chinese indigenous exegetical literature.

In this paper, I further narrow the scope of my analysis by focusing on a single terminological issue occurring in one of Kumārajīva's translations, namely the *Jin'gang banruoboluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 T8, no. 235 (hereafter VajK), the earliest Chinese translation of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*, well-known under the name *Diamond Sutra*. From a lexical point of view, one of the most interesting aspects of the VajK is its use of *xiàng* 相. I will argue that not only can this term open a window on the "terminological mechanism" of Kumārajīva's workshop, but it also played a crucial role in the Chinese reception of the *Diamond Sutra*.

The translation in question is an almost ideal source for this kind of research. First of all, its limited size allows us to treat the text as a single terminological system. Moreover, the *Vajracchedikā* is attested by a rich and varied Sanskrit tradition, a fact of considerable importance for a correct

³ Paul Demiéville, "Review of É. Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna Tome II*" (1949), *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 238 (1950): 387.

assessment of Kumārajīva's translation strategies: apart from early witnesses such as the text preserved in a manuscript in the Schøyen Collection edited by Paul Harrison and Watanabe Shōgo (hereafter VajHW) and that in the Gilgit finds edited by Gregory Schopen (VajS), both particularly important for the study of VajK, we also have a later recension edited – not without problems – by Conze (VajC), which bears witness to the subsequent historical development of the text. While these Sanskrit sources constitute an invaluable asset for the first half of my analysis (focused on the translation), the Chinese exegetical tradition based on Kumārajīva's translation, which is of an almost unparalleled richness, will be the main evidentiary body for the second part of my work, devoted to the Chinese understanding of the translated text.

A caveat should be made at this point: I refer, throughout my analysis, to Kumārajīva as “the translator,” as if I were investing him with exclusive, individual authorial responsibility, but this should be regarded as a mere expedient. We have to bear in mind that most, if not all, Chinese Buddhist translations were the result of team work, and it is generally impossible to ascribe a particular feature of a given translation to a particular individual member of the team. In fact, the category “individual translator” in any discourse on Chinese Buddhist translations is something of a functional fiction, to be regarded more as a form of *prajñāpti* (*jiǎmíng* 假名) – a practically useful, but ontologically fluid, category.

II. The use of *xiàng* 相 in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Vajracchedikā*

In Buddhist literature, the most common meanings of the word *xiàng* 相 are “form,” “appearance,” “characteristic,” “distinctive feature,” “mark,” and “aspect.” Kumārajīva uses it in four different ways in his VajK:

(1) It translates the Sanskrit word *lakṣaṇa* (in chapters 5, 20, 26, and 27 of the *sūtra*). In the *Vajracchedikā*, *lakṣaṇa* is always used with reference to the thirty-two characteristic features, or marks, of the Buddha's body. In this particular meaning, *xiàng* 相 is employed by all the six translators of the *Vajracchedikā* and is unproblematic.⁴

(2) It corresponds systematically to Sanskrit *saṃjñā*, which other *Vajracchedikā* translators, with the exception of Bodhiruci,⁵ regularly rendered as *xiǎng* 想. In the *Vajracchedikā*, *saṃjñā* is used with particular frequency in a list of four "notions"⁶ (*ātmasaṃjñā*, *sattvasaṃjñā*, *jīvasaṃjñā*, and

⁴ *Xiàng* 相, which was first adopted to render *lakṣaṇa* in An Shigao's translations (see p. 400 with n. 18 of S. Zacchetti, "Inventing a New Idiom: Some Aspects of the Language of the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 T15, no. 603 Translated by An Shigao," *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University*, Vol. 10 [2007]: 395-416), remained the standard Chinese translation of this important term.

⁵ Bodhiruci's translation of the *Vajracchedikā* (T8, no. 236) draws extensively on VajK (e.g. see Paul Harrison, "Experimental Core Samples of Chinese Translations of Two Buddhist *Sūtras* Analysed in the Light of Recent Sanskrit Manuscript Discoveries," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1-2 [2010]: 243), also in the use of *xiàng* 相, including the equivalence *pinḍagraha* = yīhé xiàng 一合相. The only place where Bodhiruci's translation differs from VajK in its way of rendering *saṃjñā*, and agrees with the other Chinese translations, is in a passage from chapter 4. Here the Sanskrit *nimittasaṃjñā* (VajC p. 29, 13; VajHW p. 114), "notion of mark," which Kumārajīva translates just as *xiàng* 相 ("mark"), whereas all the other translators (T8, no. 237, p. 762, b12; T8. no. 238, p. 767, a21; T7, no. 220, p. 980, b17; T8, no. 239, p. 772, a23), including Bodhiruci (T8, no. 236a, p. 753, a11) have *xiàng xiǎng* 相想.

⁶ Or "ideas," as *saṃjñā* is rendered by Harrison in this context: see Paul Harrison, "*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Sanskrit Manuscripts from Greater Gandhāra," in *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection – Buddhist Manuscripts*, vol. 3, ed. Jens Braarvig, 2006, p. 143 and

pudgalasaṃjñā). The corresponding list in VajK is *wǒ xiàng* 我相, *rén xiàng* 人相, *zhòngshēng xiàng* 眾生相, and *shòuzhě xiàng* 壽者相, but identifying the correspondence between Sanskrit and Chinese terms in each case turns out to be a rather complex task.⁷

(3) It is used in the expression *yīhé xiàng* 一合相, which corresponds, not without problems, to the Sanskrit compound *piṇḍagraha* (chapter 30).⁸

(4) Finally, in a small number of passages, *xiàng* 相 occurs in VajK without a direct Sanskrit equivalent, and is probably to be regarded as an addition by the translator.⁹

passim. Conze translates *saṃjñā* as “perception” (cf. his remarks in VajC pp. 112-13).

⁷ See Stefano Zacchetti, *In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa's Guang zan jing* 光讚經, *Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā*, 2005, pp. 327-328, notes 5-8. Note that Xuanzang's translation contains an extended list of nine items (see for example T7, no. 220, p. 980, c18-21), which has numerous parallels in the larger *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (for references see Zacchetti, *In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa's Guang zan jing* 光讚經, *Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā*, as above, § 3.2 pp. 207 and 327-329).

⁸ VajS p. 107 (cf. VajC p. 60, 5-8): *saced bhagavan dhātur abhaviṣyat sa eva bhagavan piṇḍagrāho 'bhaviṣyad yaś caiva tathāgatena piṇḍagrāho bhāṣitaḥ agrāhaḥ sa tathāgatena bhāṣitaḥ tenocyate piṇḍagrāha iti*. This is translated by Paul Harrison, “*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation*,” as above, p. 158 as follows: “If, Lord, there were a system, that, Lord, would indeed constitute seizing upon a solid mass, yet what the Realized One has preached of as seizing upon a solid mass, that has been preached by the Realized One as devoid of any seizing. That is why it is called ‘seizing upon a solid mass’.” The corresponding passage in VajK is: 若世界實有者，則是一合相。如來說一合相，則非一合相，是名一合相。(T8, no. 235, p. 752, b12-13).

⁹ The first instance of these likely additions is constituted by a passage occurring in chapter 27 of the *sūtra*: 須菩提！若作是念：『發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提[v.l. + (心)]

Of these four uses of *xiàng* 相, the most problematic (but also interesting) one is the second, as translation of *saṃjñā* – a complex term in Buddhist literature, where it has a particular prominence as the name of the third *skandha*.¹⁰

者，說諸法斷滅相[v.l. – 相]。』莫作是念！何以故？發阿耨多羅三藐三菩提心者，於法不說斷滅相。(T8, no. 235, p. 752, a22-25; this passage is also found in Bodhiruci's translation: T8, no. 236a, p. 756, b28-c1). The corresponding passage in VajS p. 106 reads (cf. VajC pp. 57-58): *yat khalu punaḥ subhūte syād evaṃ bodhisatvayānasamprasthitaiḥ kasyacid dharmasya vināśaḥ prajñāpto ucchedo vā na khalu punaḥ subhūte evaṃ draṣṭavyaṃ | na bodhisatvayānasamprasthitaiḥ kasyacid dharmasya vināśaḥ prajñāpto nocchedaḥ*. The addition of *xiàng* 相 in VajK might reflect an attempt to establish an explicit connection with the immediately preceding passage (VajS pp. 105-106; VajC p. 57), dealing with the possession of *lakṣaṇas* (*lakṣaṇasampad*). However, I think that 斷滅相 is more likely to be patterned after the use of *lakṣaṇa* i.f.c., “characterized by, having the characteristic of etc.” (although, as already noted, in this particular case *xiàng* 相 is probably not the direct translation of any Sanskrit word), a common usage in Buddhist Chinese since the earliest translations (see S. Zacchetti, “Inventing a New Idiom: Some Aspects of the Language of the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 T15, no. 603 Translated by An Shigao,” as above, p. 400 with n. 18). If analysed in this way, the phrase 於法不說斷滅相, for example, could be translated literally as “with respect to *dharmas*, [the Bodhisattvas] do not say that they are characterized by annihilation.”

The second instance of *xiàng* 相 being used without a direct Sanskrit equivalent is to be found in chapter 32, at the end of the *sūtra*, where VajK has a phrase not attested in the available Sanskrit parallels (it is partly found, interestingly enough, in Paramārtha's version: see T8, no. 237, p. 766, b23): 不取於相，如如不動 (T 235, p. 752, b27). The first four characters, 不取於相, clearly echo another passage of VajK (若心取相 etc., T8, no. 235, p. 749, b6-7) which is crucial to my analysis and will be discussed in detail below.

¹⁰ On the meaning of *saṃjñā* see, for example, Tilmann Vetter, *The 'Khandha Passages' in the Vinayapiṭaka and in the Four Main Nikāyas*, 2000, pp. 24-27; Peter Skilling, *Mahāsūtras: Great Discourses of the Buddha*, vol. 2, parts 1-2, 1997, pp. 477-480 with n.31; Richard Gombrich gives the following definition of the third khandha:

Since Later Han translations, *saṃjñā* has been generally translated into Chinese as *xiǎng* 想 (to ponder, to think, to imagine etc.) or related forms,¹¹ and Kumārajīva himself, in other translations, adopted this standard rendition,¹² even in contexts similar to that of the *Vajracchedikā*.¹³

“apperceptions (perceptions in which we put a name to what we perceive)” (*What the Buddha Thought*, 2009, p. 114).

¹¹ In the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 translated by An Shigao, *saṃjñā* is translated both as *xiǎng* 想 (e.g. T15, no. 603, p. 173, b7) and as *sīxiǎng* 思想 (T15, no. 603, p. 173, b13 and *passim*). The latter is also the normal translation of *saṃjñā* = third *skandha* in Lokakṣema’s *Dao xing jing* 道行經, e.g. see T8, no. 224, p. 426, a19-20 and *passim*.

¹² A comprehensive discussion of the use of *xiǎng* 想 in a textual body as substantial as that of Kumārajīva’s translations would go beyond the scope of this article. Here suffice it to observe that *xiǎng* 想 is regularly used in Kumārajīva’s translation of the larger *Prajñāpāramitā* (*Mohebanruoboluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 T8, no. 223) as a rendition of *saṃjñā* in various contexts: within the list of the *skandhas* (T 223 p. 221, b29 and *passim*), in the list of ten *saṃjñās* (T8, no. 223, p. 219, a11-13), in the expression 非有想非無想處 = *naivasamjñānāsamjñāyatana* (T8, no. 223, p. 220, a16 and *passim*; cf. Zacchetti, *In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa’s Guang zan jing* 光讚經, *Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā*, as above, p. 186 § 1.152 for the Sanskrit parallel). A particularly important use of *xiǎng* 想 in Kumārajīva’s translations is in expressions such as *yìxiǎng* 憶想, *fēnbié yìxiǎng* 分別憶想, *yìxiǎng fēnbié* 憶想分別 etc., to indicate (wrong) discriminating mental activity (cf. Sanskrit *vikalpa* etc.; e.g. see T8, no. 223, p. 221, c8, on which cf. Zacchetti, *In Praise of the Light: A Critical Synoptic Edition with an Annotated Translation of Chapters 1-3 of Dharmarakṣa’s Guang zan jing* 光讚經, *Being the Earliest Chinese Translation of the Larger Prajñāpāramitā*, as above, p. 206 with n. 45); for a detailed discussion see Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 (ed.), *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中國佛教史, vol. 2, 1985, pp. 370 and 375-376.

¹³ See, for instance, the following passage of Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*: 即除我想及眾生想，當起法想 (*Weimojie suo shuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 T14, no. 475, no. 475, p. 545, a2-3), and cf. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* ch. 4.11,

One of the main problems posed by this particular lexical choice in VajK is due to the fact that, as is well known, the term employed to translate *saṃjñā*, *xiàng* 相, usually corresponds in Chinese Buddhist translations to two other Sanskrit terms: *lakṣaṇa*, as already noted above, and *nimitta*. As a consequence of their both being translated as *xiàng* 相, these two terms are not immediately distinguishable in Chinese. In Buddhist Sanskrit, though partially overlapping from a semantic point of view,¹⁴ *lakṣaṇa* and *nimitta* are generally used in different

p. 49 (f. 29b 3-4): *tenātmasaṃjñāṃ viṣṭhāpya dharmasaṃjñōtpādayitavyā* (note, incidentally, that Kumārajīva's 眾生想, **sattvasaṃjñā*, is not found in the Sanskrit).

Another example is *Mohebanruoboluomi jing* 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 T8, no. 223, p. 227, a 29-b3: 菩薩摩訶薩以是智慧，不作佛想，不作菩薩想，不作聲聞、辟支佛想，不作我想，不作佛國想， corresponding to *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* p. 76, 9-11: *yena jñānena samanvāgatānāṃ bodhisattvānāṃ mahāsattvānāṃ na buddhasaṃjñā bhavati na bodhisattvaṃjñā bhavati na śrāvakaṃjñā bhavati na pratyekabuddhasaṃjñā bhavati nātmasaṃjñā bhavati na parasaṃjñā bhavati na buddhakṣetrasaṃjñā bhavati*.

However, in other seemingly similar passages of the same translation, *saṃjñā* is rendered, exactly as in the *Vajracchedikā* translation, as *xiàng* 相. See for example, T8, no. 223, p. 225, a4-6 (which is particularly close to the *Vajracchedikā* use of *saṃjñā*): 菩薩摩訶薩行般若波羅蜜時，不生我相、眾生相乃至知者、見者相. This corresponds to *Śatasāhasrikā* p. 265, 8-13 (cf. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* p. 59, 11-12): *tat kasya hetos tathā hi bodhisattvasya mahāsattvasya prajñāpāramitāyāṃ carato na sattvasaṃjñōtpadyate / nātmasaṃjñōtpadyate / ... na jānakasaṃjñōtpadyate / na paśyakaṃjñōtpadyate*. Of course, in these cases (unlike the *Vajracchedikā* translation, as I will demonstrate below) it is impossible to completely rule out confusion between *xiàng* 相 and *xiǎng* 想 simply due to a scribal error happened during the manuscript transmission of the text.

¹⁴ Both terms mean, among other things, “mark, sign etc.” As noted above, in the *Vajracchedikā*, *lakṣaṇa* is used in the sense of “characteristic mark of a superior person (a cakravartin or a Buddha)”: see F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, 2 vols, 1953, pp. 458-460. On *nimitta*, see Edgerton, as above, pp. 297-298: “(sign, mark and so) external aspect or feature, appearance (but not

contexts.

The key question we are facing could then be framed in these terms: what is the relationship between the *saṃjñā* of the Sanskrit *Vajracchedikā*¹⁵ and its corresponding term in VajK, *xiàng* 相? Is VajK's *xiàng* 相 semantically identical to the *xiǎng* 想 = *saṃjñā* of the other translators – perhaps just a mere graphical variant due to the similarity of the two characters in shape and pronunciation¹⁶ – or does it involve a difference in meaning? And if so, to what extent?

I will at first try to demonstrate that the adoption of *xiàng* 相 reflects a deliberate translation strategy, and then move on to examining the hermeneutical consequences of Kumārajīva's choice.

We have, first of all, to analyse the reasons underlying this particular

only visual ...)". In certain contexts, *nimitta* can have a negative connotation: as Conze (VajC, pp. 106-107) puts it, "*nimitta* is a technical term which denotes the object of false perception, the implication being that all perceptions are eo ipso equally false etc."

¹⁵ In view of the fact that the various Sanskrit manuscripts of the *Vajracchedikā* (supported by the Tibetan version and, as we have seen, by most of the later Chinese translations) are unanimous in having *saṃjñā* as the Sanskrit term corresponding to VajK's *xiàng* 相, I think that we can rule out the possibility that Kumārajīva was reading a different word in his manuscript. Particularly significant, from this point of view, is the testimony of the early manuscript edited by F. E. Pargiter: "*Vajracchedikā* in the Original Sanskrit", in *Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in Eastern Turkestan*, ed. A. F. Rudolf Hoernle, vol. 1, 1916, pp. 176-195. This manuscript was conjecturally dated by Pargiter to "about the end of the fifth or the beginning of the sixth century A.D." (F. E. Pargiter, as above, p. 178); for the first occurrence of the list of four *saṃjñās* (i.e., *ātmasaṃjñā* etc., corresponding to *wǒ xiàng* 我相 etc. in VajK p. 749a 11) in this manuscript, see F. E. Pargiter, as above, p. 180 (folio 2b).

¹⁶ Cf. for example the remarks by Paul Demiéville, *Le Concile de Lhasa – une controverse sur le quietisme entre bouddhistes de l'Inde et de la Chine au VIII^e siècle de l'ère chrétienne*, 1987, p. 52 n. 2.

rendition *xiàng* 相 = *saṃjñā*. We can start by observing that a close relationship between *saṃjñā* (*xiǎng* 想) and *nimitta* (*xiàng* 相) is already posited by some Indian Buddhist sources: according to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*, *saṃjñā* as one of the *skandhas* “consists in grasping signs (*nimitta*)”.¹⁷

In non-Sarvāstivādin literature, an interesting partial parallel to this definition is found in the explanation of *saññāvipallāsa* occurring in the *Peṭakopadesa* (p. 120, 15):¹⁸ ... *yo nimittassa uggāho, ayaṃ saññāvipallāso*. An Shigao's 安世高 early Chinese translation of this passage is worth mentioning (*Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 T 603 p. 175c 2-3: 若彼所想分別受，是名為想倒), given that his rendition of *nimitta* as, literally, the object of *xiǎng* 想 (*suǒ xiǎng* 所想) is particularly interesting for our discussion.

Kuiji 窺基 (632-682), the learned exegete of the Faxiang School (法相宗), probably had this particular definition of *saṃjñā* in mind when, in his commentary on the *Vajracchedikā* (*Jin'gang banruo jing zanshu* 金剛般若經贊述 T 1700), he commented on a passage in chapter 4 of VajK – 須菩提，菩薩應如是布施，不住於相 (T8, no. 235, p. 749, a14), corresponding to *evaṃ hi subhūte bodhisatvena dānaṃ dātavyam | yathā na nimittasaṃjñāyāṃ pratitiṣṭhet* in VajHW p. 114 (cf. VajC p. 29, 13-14) – as follows:

¹⁷ See *Abhidharmakośa* i.14 (vol. 1 p. 39, 5): *saṃjñā nimittodgrahaṇātmikā*. As the text itself specifies, *nimitta* here refers to qualities such as blue, yellow, long, short, woman, man, friend, enemy, pleasant, painful etc. (p. 39, 6-7: *yāvan nīlapītadīrghahrasva-śtrīpuruṣamitrāmītrasukhaduḥkhādīnimittoḍgrahaṇam asau saṃjñāskandhaḥ*). Cf. also Tilmann Vetter, *The 'Khandha Passages' in the Vinaya-piṭaka and in the Four Main Nikāyas*, as above, p. 26, §§ 37-38.

¹⁸ This paragraph is partly corrupt and here I only quote the final part; cf. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (tr.), *The Piṭaka-Disclosure*, 1964, p. 165 § 483 with n. 483/1.

[The *sūtra* translation] should say 不住相想;¹⁹ *xiǎng* 想 [= **saṃjñā*] refers to the discriminating mind, *xiàng* 相 [= **nimitta*] to the object which is clung to.²⁰

In other words, it would seem that in his *Vajracchedikā* translation, Kumārajīva decided to render *saṃjñā* not with the term usually corresponding to it in Chinese translations, but with the one which rather indicates the correlative object of *saṃjñā*, viz. *xiàng* 相 (*nimitta*).

This relative freedom in handling the originals is typical of Kumārajīva's translation style²¹ which, at a lexical level, involved the possibility of rendering the same Sanskrit term with different Chinese words (or the other way round, as we have seen above). While such variations could be due to a number of reasons (including stylistic ones), at least in some cases they might reflect a more or less successful attempt to bring to light different nuances in the originals.²²

¹⁹ *Xiàng xiǎng* 相想 (which is indeed what the other Chinese translations have at this point, cf. n. 5 above) would be a more literal rendition of *nimittasaṃjñā*.

²⁰ 應云「不住相想」。想者，分別心；相者，所著境。(T33, no. 1700, p. 131, c17-18).

²¹ On this aspect of Kumārajīva's translation policy, see for example Paul Demiéville, "Review of É. Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna Tome II*" (1949), *Journal Asiatique*, vol. 238 (1950), pp. 375-395; Ōchō Enichi 横超慧日, "Kumarajū no honyaku" 鳩摩羅什の翻譯, *Ōtani Gakuhō* 大谷學報, vol. 37, no. 4 (1958): 21-23; Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, 1967, pp. 80-88; Wang Wenyan 王文顏, *Fodian hanyi zhi yanjiu* 佛典漢譯之研究, 1984, pp. 219-ff. On Kumārajīva's translation style, as reflected in his translation of the *Vajracchedikā*, now see Paul Harrison, "Resetting the Diamond: Reflections on Kumārajīva's Chinese Translation of the *Vajracchedikā* (*'Diamond Sūtra'*)", in *Historical and Philological Studies of China's Western Regions* (西域历史语言研究集刊), ed. Shen Weirong 沈衛榮, vol. 3, 2010, pp. 233-248.

²² This approach was, as is well known, shared by several – perhaps most – Chinese translators. For an early example, see Zacchetti, "Inventing a New Idiom: Some Aspects of the Language of the *Yin chi ru jing* 陰持入經 T15, no. 603 Translated by An Shigao," as above, p. 401.

This appears to be the case with *saṃjñā* in VajK. Indeed, it seems possible to recognize a general semantic pattern underlying (some) renditions of this term in Kumārajīva's translations: when *saṃjñā* refers to a form of mental activity ("apperception" etc., e.g. as a *skandha*), it was rendered as *xiǎng* 想;²³ when, on the other hand, it refers to specific "mental constructs" (i.e. "notions," or "ideas"), as with the various "*ātmasaṃjñā*," "*sattvasaṃjñā*" etc. in the *Vajracchedikā*, Kumārajīva tended to translate it as *xiàng* 相 (though certainly not without exceptions: see n. 13 above).²⁴

A strong argument to demonstrate that in VajK *xiàng* 相 is not just a graphical variant (a heartless *xiǎng* 想, so to speak) for *xiǎng* 想 = *saṃjñā*, but consciously and systematically reflects a virtual *nimitta* (thus working as a rendition of *saṃjñā* not directly, but through a form of metonymy) is provided by a passage occurring in chapter 6. In the Sanskrit (VajHW pp. 116-117; cf. VajC p. 31, 20-23), it reads:

sace<t> subhūte teṣāṃ bodhisatvānā(m) dharmasaṃjñā

²³ This is also more in line with the semantic range of this Chinese word: all the meanings of *xiǎng* 想 recorded by the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大詞典, 13 vols. (Shanghai: *Hanyu da cidian* chubanshe, 1986-1994) are verbal, and refer to various forms of mental activity.

²⁴ From the perspective of Chinese etymology, *xiàng* 相 too has, in the first place, a verbal meaning: "to look at, inspect" (see Axel Schuessler, *ABC Etymological Dictionary of Old Chinese*, 2007, p. 531); Schuessler goes on quoting the meanings given by Boltz for *xiàng*: "observe, vision, image, fantasy." The word *xiǎng* 想 is in turn a derivative of *xiàng* 相, through a semantic development which is intriguingly specular to the 相 / 想 relationship we encounter in Buddhist literature: according to Schuessler (as above), *xiǎng* 想 is an "endoactive of *xiàng* 相 'observe' ... Boltz: 'to draw up a mental image, vision' > 'to think' " (on the notion of "endoactive," see Schuessler, as above, pp. 38-39).

*prav(a)<r>tsyate sa eva teṣām ātmaḡrāho bhavet etc.*²⁵

All the other Chinese translations of this passage (apart from Bodhiruci's version, which here too follows in part VajK: see T8, no. 236a, p. 753, b12) reflect more or less faithfully the Sanskrit text; so, for example, Xuanzang translated this passage very literally as 若菩薩摩訶薩有法想轉，彼即應有我執、 etc. (T7, no. 220, p. 980, c22-23).

On the other hand, Kumārajīva's translation reads as follows:

是諸眾生，若心取相，則為著我、 etc. (T8, no. 235, p. 749, b6-7).

That is: "If the mind of these beings grasps characteristics, then they would be clinging to a self etc."

Apart from the comparatively less significant facts that VajK has *zhòngshēng* 眾生, "beings" (*sattva*), instead of Bodhisattvas, and that *dharma* (in *dharmaśamjñā*) is not found in VajK, this translation contains two noteworthy divergences from the corresponding Sanskrit text: here Kumārajīva has supplemented the usual, mechanical correspondence *xiàng* 相 = *śamjñā* with *xīn* 心 (mind) and *qǔ* 取 (seize, grasp, apprehend etc.).²⁶

²⁵ "If, Subhūti, the idea of a *dharma* should occur to those bodhisattvas, for them that would constitute seizing upon a self, etc." (tr. Paul Harrison, "Vajracchedikā *Prajñāpāramitā*: A New English Translation," as above, p. 144).

²⁶ In other words, the entire expression 心取相 could be taken as a free rendering of the phrase [*dharma*]*śamjñā pravartsyate* in the Sanskrit text. The expression (心) 取相 is not uncommon in Kumārajīva's translation corpus. See, for example, his translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (*Xiao pin banruoboluomi jing* 小品般若波羅蜜經 T8, no. 227), p. 538, c9: 是諸緣、諸事不可得，如心取相。(T8, no. 227, p. 547, c29-p. 548, a1); cf. *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* p. 70, 22-23: *na tāni bhadanta subhūte vastūni tāni vā ārambaṇāni te vā ākārās tathopalabhyante yathā nimittīkaroti*.

These two additions make clear beyond doubt that here *xiàng* 相 is being consciously used by the translator in the sense of “characteristic,” or “sign” (**nimitta*), being the object of mental perception (心取). In other words, this passage demonstrates that *xiàng* 相 in VajK does not correspond linearly (and hence completely) to *saṃjñā*: in the light of the *Abhidharmakośa* definition quoted above, the correspondence seems rather to be *qǔ xiàng* 取相 (cf. *nimittodgrahaṇa*) = *saṃjñā* / *xiǎng* 想. In a sense, it is almost as if in this passage Kumārajīva had paraphrased *saṃjñā* with its traditional definition.²⁷

I think that, in order to properly understand this problem, we have to interpret it within the broader context of Kumārajīva's translation project and doctrinal background, and it is to these issues that we have now to turn.

III. Extemporaneous jottings on the use of *xiàng* 相 in Kumārajīva's works

A particularly important source for the study of Kumārajīva's thought and terminology is the great *Prajñāpāramitā* commentary known as *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (T 1509; hereafter DZDL), perhaps the most influential of his translations. As even the most casual observer could not fail to notice, the term *xiàng* 相 is practically ubiquitous in this commentary, where it plays a crucial role also at a doctrinal level.

This is probably to be explained by the particular nature of the DZDL: its Madhyamaka-oriented exegesis is deeply rooted in a Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma*

²⁷ See also Matsumoto Shirō 松本史郎, *Zen shisō no hihanteki kenkyū*, as above, pp. 45-46; cf. p. 55 of Shirato Waka 白土わか, “Jissō yakugo kō – Kumārājū o chūshin ni” 「実相」訳語考 — 鳩摩羅什を中心に, *Ōtani Gakuhō* 大谷学報, vol. 37.3 (1957) : 48-61.

background,²⁸ which generally provides the author (or authors) with the starting point of his/their interpretations.

As pointed out by several authors, the category of *lakṣaṇa* (xiàng 相), “characteristic,” played an important role in the development of *Abhidharma* thought – particularly, though not only, that of the Sarvāstivādin school – as one of the most important conceptual tools used to define, in close conjunction with other categories such as *svabhāva*, the notion of *dharma*.²⁹ As remarked by Paul Williams, “... the *svabhāva* is unique to each *dharma* to which it pertains. In the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* the *svabhāva* is said to be the same as the *svalakṣaṇa*, the individual or defining characteristic, and is set in opposition to the general characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) which pertain to all conditioned *dharma*s – impermanence and so on.”³⁰

The notion of *lakṣaṇa* (and its relationship with *svabhāva*) in *Abhidharma* thought constitutes a complex issue, which falls outside the scope of this article.³¹ There is, however, a particular function performed by this category in the descriptive model of mature Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma* which is crucial to

²⁸ See Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra)*, Tome III, 1970, pp. xiv-xliv.

²⁹ Indeed, as observed by: Collett Cox, “From Category to Ontology: the Evolution of *Dharma* in Sarvāstivāda *Abhidharma*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 5-6 (2004): 250. “*Abhidharma* itself is defined as insight (*prajñā*), which is then identified with *dharmapravicaya* that discriminates *dharma*s according to their intrinsic nature, or according to their particular inherent (*svalakṣaṇa*) and generic characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*).”

³⁰ Paul Williams, “On the *Abhidharma* Ontology,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 9 (1981): 242.

³¹ See, for example, Collett Cox, as above, pp. 574-576; on this category in Theravāda scholastic literature, see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition*, 2005, pp. 89-91.

my analysis: Collett Cox contrasts “the two methods of analytical description either by intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) or by characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*)”, remarking that they “are separated by one important difference: whereas intrinsic nature acquires its special significance in the context of exegetical categorization, the starting point for the characteristics lies in perspectivistic cognition. Ontology is a concern for both systems, but the shift in terminology from intrinsic nature to the characteristics reflects a concurrent shift from a category-based abstract ontology to an epistemological ontology [that] is experientially or cognitively determined.”³²

Noa Ronkin comes to similar conclusions in her comparison of the Sarvāstivādin and Theravādin approaches to these categories: “In the Sarvāstivādin framework, *svabhāva* is an ontological determinant of primary, real existence (*dravya*). *Svalakṣaṇa*, on the other hand, is an epistemological, linguistic determinant of a *dharma* as that which is discernable, definable, and knowable.”³³

I think that with this epistemological side of *lakṣaṇa* in mind we can better understand the particular role played by this category in the DZDL. As already observed, this commentary widely adopts abhidharmic categories, but with an agenda which is the exact reversal of that of the Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma*: not classifying *dharmas* (as well as other entities) and establishing their modalities of

³² Collett Cox, as above, p. 576.

³³ Noa Ronkin, “From the Buddha’s Teaching to the Abhidhamma,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, vol. 253 (2010): 356 n. 6. Cf. also Noa Ronkin, as above, 2005, p. 110: “The *svalakṣaṇa* ... is an epistemological, linguistic determinant of a *dharma*: it is by means of its own-characteristic that a *dharma* becomes uniquely discernable, verbally definable and knowable. The *svalakṣaṇa* renders a verbal description unique to each *dharma* and makes it possible to refer to that *dharma* as distinct from any other *dharma*”.

existence, but dissolving them by means of a (negative) epistemological approach (cf. the notion of *bùkědé* 不可得, corresponding to **anupalambha* and related forms).

For example, we can see how, in the following passage, this line of attack is applied to the notion of self, and it is interesting that we find here the expression *wǒ xiàng* 我相, identical, at least on surface,³⁴ to the rendition of *ātmasamjñā* found in the *Vajracchedikā* translation:

It is because the characteristic of self (我相) cannot be apprehended that there is no self: for it is through the fact that *dharmas* possess [their] characteristics (相) that they are known to exist.³⁵

In this operation, it is precisely the relationship between *dharmas* and their *svalakṣaṇas* – identified as a strategically convenient weak spot in the abhidharmic model – which is being constantly challenged in the DZDL (see also the text quoted in n. 60 below).³⁶ The denial that any *dharma* possesses a “fixed (or definite) characteristic” – *dìng xiàng* 定相, another crucial term in Kumārajīva’s doctrinal building³⁷ – which could stably identify it, is repeated *ad nauseam* in the DZDL and elsewhere in Kumārajīva’s translations and exegetical

³⁴ Given the context, here *xiàng* 相 should probably correspond to *lakṣaṇa*, as suggested by Lamotte’s translation of *wǒ xiàng* 我相 as “les caractères (*lakṣaṇa*) de l’*ātman*” (see Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Tome III, as above, p. 1448).

³⁵ 我相不可得故，無我。一切法有相故，則知有。(T25, no.1509, p. 230, c18-19).

³⁶ As remarked by Paul Williams (“On the Abhidharma Ontology”, as above, p. 243), “[t]he impossibility of an entity without a defining characteristic underlies Nāgārjuna’s arguments in Chapter 5 of the *Madhyamakakārikā*.”

³⁷ This was already recognized long ago by Tang Yongtong in his 1938 monumental history of Chinese Buddhism: see Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Tang Yongtong quanji* 湯用彤全集, 7 vols, 2000, vol. 1, pp. 240-241.

works.³⁸

But what does this all have to do with Kumārajīva's use of *xiàng* 相 in his translation of the *Vajracchedikā*? After all, one might object that in all the passages from the DZDL discussed above, *xiàng* 相 is likely to correspond to *lakṣaṇa*, and not to *nimitta/saṃjñā*. While probably correct from the perspective of the Indic original texts, I think that this objection nevertheless misses a crucial point: from the perspective of a Chinese reader, in all these cases there is only

³⁸ See for example DZDL, T25, no. 1509, p. 294, b14-c10 (e.g. 諸法無有定相, p. 265, c16 and *passim*). A gloss preserved in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* commentary edited by Sengzhao 僧肇 (*Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經 T38, no. 1775) provides us with direct access to Kumārajīva's own interpretation of this expression (this is a gloss on T14, no. 475, p. 547, c18-19: 虛妄分別為本, "false discrimination is the root [of desire]"; cf. *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* p. 68, f. 41b 2-3: *icchālobhayor abhūtaparikalpo mūlam*): "Kumārajīva said: *dharma*s do not possess a definite characteristic (定相); characteristics are born from delusion: due to mistaken imagination, one discriminates [thinking:] 'this certain thing is good, this other is bad.' Once the [notions of] good and bad have taken shape, desire naturally arises. Therefore [the *sūtra* says that false discrimination] is the root of desire" (什曰: 法無定相, 相由惑生: 妄想分別『是好, 是醜』。好惡既形, 欲心自發, 故為欲本也。T38, no. 1775, p. 386, b16-18).

For an example of the use of *dìng xiàng* 定相 in a translation by Kumārajīva without a clear Sanskrit corresponding term, see *Weimojie suo shuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 T14, no. 475, p. 548, b25-27: 舍利弗言: 「不也! 幻無定相, 當何所轉?」天曰: 「一切諸法亦復如是, 無有定相, 云何乃問不轉女身?」, corresponding to *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* ch. 6.14, p. 73 (f. 44b 2): *āha: na tasyāḥ kācit bhūtā pariniṣpattiḥ | āha: evam eva bhadanta śāriputra apariniṣpanneṣu sarvadharmeṣu māyānirmitasvabhāveṣu kutas tavaivaṃ bhavati: kiṃ tvam strībhāvaṃ na nivartayasīti*. Huàn 幻, in the passage 幻無定相 ("[that] illusory creature does not possess a definite characteristic"), refers to a hypothetical "illusory woman" (幻女) mentioned in the immediately preceding sentence, so that the whole passage corresponds rather freely to *na tasyāḥ kācit bhūtā pariniṣpattiḥ*.

one single term – the *Chinese* word *xiàng* 相.³⁹ Indeed, as I will show in the next section, it is precisely the fact that different original Sanskrit terms have collapsed into one single Chinese word that proved particularly productive, in the case of VajK, from a hermeneutical point of view.

IV. The hermeneutical reverberation of a creative translation: *xiàng* 相 in Chinese commentaries on the *Diamond Sutra*

We have so far established the most important facts underlying the use of *xiàng* 相 in VajK, and particularly its conscious and philosophically relevant nature. It is clear that in this case the original text, filtered through the prism of Kumārajīva's conceptual and terminological system, has undergone a certain degree of semantic refraction, so to speak.

It is now time to address the other important question I mentioned in the introduction: how did this particular rendition modify the meaning of the text in Chinese? And, more importantly, how did it influence the Chinese understanding and reception of the *Diamond Sutra*?⁴⁰

The main consequence of the use of *xiàng* 相 as a rendition of *saṃjñā* is that in this way two different terms of the Sanskrit original, *saṃjñā* (always used in the sense of “notion, idea etc.”) and *lakṣaṇa* (in the sense of “characteristics [of the Buddha's body]”), which in other, more literal translations have been kept

³⁹ Cf. Robert Sharf's perceptive remarks on the role played by translations in Chinese Buddhism in *Coming to Terms with Chinese Buddhism: A Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise*, 2001, pp. 18-20.

⁴⁰ On these issues, now see also Paul Harrison, “Resetting the Diamond”, as above, p. 240 with n. 22.

differentiated, in VajK have merged into one single Chinese word. Therefore *xiàng* 相, in this particular text, has arguably a richer and broader semantic scope than either *saṃjñā* or *lakṣaṇa* in the Sanskrit texts of the *Vajracchedikā*.

It is true that even in VajK the overlapping between *xiàng* 相 = *saṃjñā* and *xiàng* 相 = *lakṣaṇa* is not absolute, given that the latter is usually used, within this scripture, in compounds (such as *shēnxiàng* 身相, “bodily characteristics” or *sānshí’èr xiàng* 三十二相, “thirty-two characteristics”) which can provide adequate contextual distinction from the other usage of *xiàng* 相.

There is, however, a passage where the *sūtra* itself seems to suggest the possibility of a widening of the semantic scope of *lakṣaṇa*. It occurs in chapter 5, where the important topic of the thirty-two characteristics of the Buddha’s body is introduced for the first time in the *Vajracchedikā*. In the later recension of the *sūtra* edited by Conze this passage reads as follows (VajC p. 30, 12):

*yāvat subhūte lakṣaṇasaṃpat tāvan mṛṣā.*⁴¹

The corresponding passage in VajK is:

凡所有相，皆是虛妄。(T8, no. 235, p. 749, a24).⁴²

I have to admit that in my previous study of this passage, on the basis of the Sanskrit sources then available,⁴³ I interpreted it, with its general reference to “all existing characteristics,” as yet another example of Kumārajīva’s free style

⁴¹ Conze (VajC p. 68) translates this as “Wherever there is possession of marks there is fraud.”

⁴² “All existing characteristics are false and misleading.”

⁴³ The so-called Pargiter manuscript lacks this portion of the *sūtra*: see F. E. Pargiter, “*Vajracchedikā* in the Original Sanskrit”, as above, pp. 176-195.

of translation (particularly in matter of *xiàng* 相).⁴⁴ However, evaluating early Chinese translations in the light of later Sanskrit parallels can be a dangerous affair, and I was reminded of this truth (not for the first time in my life) when the Schøyen Collection *Vajracchedikā* manuscript was published in 2006. For in this text the same passage occurs with a notable variant (VajHW p. 115):

y<ā>vat su<bhū>te lakṣaṇaṃ tāvan mṛṣā.

Harrison translates this as “as long as there is any distinctive feature there is falsehood,”⁴⁵ and indeed in this particular reading (almost certainly the same on which also Kumārajīva’s translation of this passage is based) *lakṣaṇa* seems to be invested with a more general meaning vis-à-vis the variant *lakṣaṇasampad*, which probably implies a connection with the Buddha’s bodily marks.⁴⁶

Be that as it may, this phrase, as translated by Kumārajīva (凡所有相 etc.), is one of the most popular quotations from the *Vajracchedikā* in Chinese exegetical and scholastic literature. And quite clearly, many of its Chinese interpreters have taken this as a reference to “characteristics” in general.

A particularly interesting example is offered by the works of Zongmi 宗密 (781-841), the prominent Huayan and Chan master of the late Tang period. In his *Vajracchedikā* commentary,⁴⁷ based, as most Chinese works of this kind, on

⁴⁴ Stefano Zacchetti, *Le traduzioni cinesi del Sutra del Diamante (Vajracchedikā-Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra). Uno studio comparativo con una traduzione della versione di Kumārajīva*, as above, pp. 372-373.

⁴⁵ Paul Harrison, “Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation,” as above, p. 144.

⁴⁶ See the relevant entry in Conze’s glossary (VajC p. 111).

⁴⁷ *Jin’gang banruo jing shu lun zuanyao* (金剛般若經疏論纂要) T33, no. 1701 on which see Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*, 1991 (repr. 2002), p. 317.

VajK, Zongmi interprets the *Vajracchedikā* phrase within the hermeneutical framework provided by the (presumably apocryphal) *Dasheng qi xin lun* 大乘起信論 T 1666, or *Treatise on the Mahāyāna Awakening of Faith*, whose technical use of *xiàng* 相 is also extremely important:

As to [the *sūtra*'s statement that] 'all existing characteristics are false and misleading; if one sees all characteristics as not being characteristics, then one sees the Tathāgata':⁴⁸ it is not just that the Buddha's body is devoid of characteristics, but all conditioned characteristics such as ordinary person and saint, dependent and proper [forms of retribution,⁴⁹ etc.] are, without exception, false and misleading, being manifested by mistaken mental activity. The latter being fundamentally empty, how could its manifestations be real? Hence the *Awakening of Faith* says: 'all the objects are differentiated entirely depending upon mistaken mental activity: if one abandons mental activity, there are no characteristics of any object'.⁵⁰

This interpretation is also echoed by Zongmi's famous treatise, the *Yuan ren lun* 原人論, which, besides quoting the same *Qi xin lun* passage in conjunction

⁴⁸ 若見諸相非相，則見如來。(T8, no. 235, p. 749, a24-25); cf. VajHW p. 115: iti hi *lakṣaṇālakṣaṇataḥ tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ* (tr. Paul Harrison, "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation", as above, p. 144: "Accordingly it is by virtue of the featurelessness of his distinctive features that a Realized One can be seen").

⁴⁹ On *yī zhèng* 依正 see Nakamura Hajime 中村元, *Bukkyōgo daijiten* 佛教語大辭典, 1981, p. 101a; these are two forms of karmic retribution, one consisting in the environmental circumstances in which one is reborn (*yī bào* 依報), and the other consisting in the physical and mental characteristics of one's rebirth (*zhèng bào* 正報).

⁵⁰ 「凡所有相，皆是虛妄。若見諸相非相，即見如來」非但佛身無相，但是一切凡聖依正有為之相盡是虛妄，以從妄念所變現故。妄念本空，所變何實？故《起信》云：「一切境界唯依妄念而有差別。若離心念，即無一切境界之相」。(T33, no. 1701, p. 159, a17-22; cf. *Dasheng qi xin lun* 大乘起信論 T32, no. 1666, p. 576, a9-10).

with the statement “all existing characteristics are false and misleading,” links the latter to another passage from the *Vajracchedikā*:

The Awakening of Faith says: ‘all the objects are differentiated entirely depending upon mistaken mental activity: if one abandons mental activity, there are no characteristics of any object’; the [*Diamond*] *sutra* says: ‘all existing characteristics are false and misleading’ [and] ‘It is by abandoning all characteristics that the Buddhas are defined’ (passages such as these are to be found everywhere in the Great Vehicle canon). Thus we know that the fact that mind and objects are empty is precisely the true principle of the Great Vehicle.⁵¹

The second *Vajracchedikā* phrase quoted by Zongmi in this passage is another quotation favoured by Chinese exegetes. It occurs in chapter 14 of VajK:

It is by abandoning all characteristics (相) that the Buddhas are defined.⁵²

There is little doubt that Zongmi intended this *xiàng* 相 to refer, in the first place, to the Buddha’s bodily characteristics (= *lakṣaṇa*), as, indeed, did other commentators.⁵³ However, the corresponding Sanskrit does not mention

⁵¹ 《起信論》云：「一切諸法唯依妄念而有差別，若離心念，即無一切境界之相」。經云：「凡所有相皆是虛妄」，「離一切相即名諸佛」（如此等文偏大乘藏）。是知心境皆空，方是大乘實理。（T45, no. 1886, p. 709, c22-25). For an annotated translation, cf. Peter N. Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity: An Annotated Translation of Tsung-mi’s Yüan jen lun with a Modern Commentary*, 1995, p. 173.

⁵² 離一切諸相，則名諸佛。（T8, no. 235, p. 750, b9).

⁵³ See, for example, Tankuang’s *Vajracchedikā* commentary, the *Jin’gang banruo jing zhi zan* 金剛般若經旨贊 (on which see W. Pachow, “A study of the twenty-two dialogues on Mahāyāna Buddhism,” *Chinese culture*, vol. 20, no. 1-2 [1979]: 28): 「如來即是諸法如義。是相非相，即見如來。離一切相，即名諸佛。」 (T85, no. 2735, p. 67, a21-23). Cf. also the following passage from Jizang’s 吉藏 (549-623)

“characteristics,” but “notions” (VajHW p. 125): *sarvasaṃjñāpagatā hi buddhā bhagava<ṃta>ḥ* – “Because the Buddhas and Lords are free of all ideas,” as Harrison translates it.⁵⁴

In other words, this is an instance of Kumārajīva's use of *xiàng* 相 = *saṃjñā*, and, as far as the translation is concerned, there would be little to add to what is said above on this issue. What is really noteworthy here is another, albeit related, issue: we can see how Kumārajīva's lexical choice has become productive, in the context of Chinese exegesis, by establishing new fruitful connections among categories which in the Sanskrit text are not explicitly related.

Another consequence of Kumārajīva's translation of *saṃjñā* (and another instance of VajK's enhanced exegetical potential) can be seen in chapter 14, where the compound *shíxiàng* 實相 (“real characteristic”) occurs three times in the same passage:

世尊，若復有人得聞是經，信心清淨，則生實相，當知是人成就第一希有功德。世尊，是實相者，則是非相，是故如來說名實相。(T8, no. 235, p. 750, b 1-3).⁵⁵

Jin'gang banruo shu 金剛般若疏 (though here the connection between *xiàng* 相 = *saṃjñā* and *xiàng* 相 = *lakṣaṇa* may be less clear than in Tankuang's commentary): 「問：『若言此明法空，應云法相即是非法相。何云我相即是非相耶？』答：『無我有二種，一者人無我，二法無我。今法無我也。何以故？離一切諸相則名諸佛者，此重釋無相所以也。若有諸相，佛應見之。以離一切諸相名為諸佛故，則知諸法無此相也。』問：『佛何故離一切相耶？』答：『有一切相，則是有所得。無一切相，則是無所得。有所得故，是生死凡夫；無所得，名為涅槃，名為諸佛也。』」 (T33, no. 1699, p. 115, a7-16).

⁵⁴ Paul Harrison, “Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation,” as above, p. 149.

⁵⁵ “World-honoured One, if there are persons who, upon getting to hear this *sūtra* with pure faith, produce a real characteristic, [then] one should know that these persons

The corresponding Sanskrit (VajHW pp. 124-125; cf. VajC p. 39, 16-21) reads:

*paramēṇa te bhagavan | āścaryeṇa samanvāgatā bhaviṣyanti ya iha
sūtre bhāṣyamāṇe bhūtaśa(m)jñāṃ utpādayiṣyanti | yā caiṣā bhagavan
| bhūtaśamjñā saivāśamjñā tasmā<t> tathāgato bhāṣate bhūtaśamjñā
bhūtaśamjñeti |*⁵⁶

In a sense, this is just a particular instance of Kumārajīva's normal way of translating *śamjñā* as *xiàng* 相 in this text: hence, within the terminological system of VajK, *shíxiàng* 實相 is nothing but a straightforward (and indeed hardly unexpected) rendition of *bhūtaśamjñā*.⁵⁷ The problem, however, is that, while *bhūtaśamjñā* does not seem to have any particular terminological

achieve the supreme, rare virtue. World-honoured One, this real characteristic is a non-characteristic, and for this reason the Thus-come One has named it a 'real characteristic'.

⁵⁶ "They will come to be endowed with a most marvellous thing, Lord, who when this discourse is being preached conceive the idea that it is the truth. But any such idea of truth, Lord, is indeed idealess. Therefore the Realized One preaches the so-called 'idea of truth.'" (tr. Paul Harrison, "*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*: A New English Translation," as above, p. 149).

⁵⁷ Both Kumārajīva and Bodhiruci rendered *bhūtaśamjñā* as 實相, while all the other translators have regularly 實想. In fact the situation is a little more complicated. The compound *bhūtaśamjñā* occurs also in chapter 6 of the *sūtra* (VajHW p. 116; cf. VajC pp. 30-31), but in this place Kumārajīva has translated the two occurrences of *bhūtaśamjñāṃ utpādayiṣyanti* as 生實信 ("[they will] produce real faith," T8, no. 235 p. 749, a27) and [於此章句] 能生信心, 以此為實 ("[there will be beings] capable of producing faith [towards this text], considering it real," T8, no. 235, p. 749, a29). For a detailed discussion of Kumārajīva's treatment of *bhūtaśamjñā* in VajK, see Shirato Waka, "Jissō yakugo kō – Kumarajū o chūshin ni" 「実相」訳語考 — 鳩摩羅什を中心に, as above, pp. 53-56.

relevance,⁵⁸ *shíxiàng* 實相, as is well known, is one of the most important terms in East Asian Buddhist literature: a philosophically fruitful synonym of emptiness (*sūnyatā*), seen as the real, absolute aspect of reality.

Whatever its origin, there is little doubt that the term *shíxiàng* 實相 is typical of Kumārajīva's translations, where it is used to render various terms, and it often occurs even without a clear Sanskrit parallel.⁵⁹ More precisely, it is one of the focal points of its conceptual and terminological system centred on *xiàng* 相, which we have discussed in § 3 above. The systemic relevance of this term (especially in its relationship with *xiàng* 相) is, again, particularly evident in the DZDL T 1509, where the expression *zhū fǎ shíxiàng* 諸法實相 ("the real characteristic of all *dharma*s") occurs hundreds of times.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ This is just an example of the common Buddhist Sanskrit idiom *-saṃjñāṃ utpādayati* (see Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, as above, p. 552a [no. 5]; cf. also Harrison's translation: "conceive the idea that it is the truth," see n. 56 above).

⁵⁹ On *shíxiàng* 實相 in Kumārajīva's translations see Shirato Waka, "Jissō yakugo kō – Kumārajū o chūshin ni" 「実相」訳語考 — 鳩摩羅什を中心に, as above; Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Tome III, as above, pp. xlii-xliii and Tome V, 1980, pp. 2181-ff.; Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Sinica Leidensia, vol. XI, 2007, p. 404 n. 17. In this connection, it is interesting to observe that, according to the main biographical sources (*Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 T55, no. 2145, p. 101, c18-19; *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 T50, no. 2059, p. 332, c6-7; cf. also Tang Yong-tong quanji 湯用彤全集, as above, vol. 1 pp. 233-234), Kumārajīva composed a lost *Shixiang lun* 實相論 (*Treatise on the real characteristic*).

⁶⁰ A passage where the particular doctrinal implications of *shíxiàng* 實相 are especially clear occurs in chapter 49 of the DZDL, within a discussion of the terms *tathatā*, *dharmadhātu*, and *bhūtakoti*: "There are two kinds of 'suchness of all *dharma*s (諸法如, cf. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* p. 24, 18 *sarvadharmatathatā*)': the first is constituted by the characteristic [specific to] each [*dharma*], the second by the real characteristic (實相). Examples of the first are [the fact] that the earth is characterized by hardness (堅相), the water by humidity, the wind by movement; in this way one

Given that the technical meaning of *shíxiàng* 實相 outlined above does not seem to be a direct reflection of that of the compound *bhūtasamjñā* as it is used in the *Vajracchedikā*, one wonders how this expression is actually to be understood in this particular passage of VajK. It seems hard to believe that the conceptual implications of *shíxiàng* 實相 could have escaped Kumārajīva and his team, in view of the importance of this term in their works.

In any case, the presence of *shíxiàng* 實相, with its inherent hermeneutical potentialities, did not go unnoticed in the Chinese commentaries on VajK. And there is little doubt that at least some of them interpreted this term in its usual technical meaning.

A clear example is provided by Jizang's 吉藏 (549-623) *Vajracchedikā* commentary (*Jin'gang banruo jing yishu* 金剛般若經義疏 T 1699), where the understanding of *shíxiàng* 實相 as the true aspect of reality can be inferred

distinguishes all *dharma*s, each as having its own characteristic. As for the real characteristic, one seeks, by means of discriminative analysis with respect to each characteristic, its reality which, as it can neither be apprehended nor destroyed, is free from all errors. As it has been explained in the [commentary] on the emptiness of own characteristics (自相空, *svalakṣaṇasūnyatā*; cf. DZDL p. 293a 25-ff.), if the [element] earth were really characterized by hardness, why then when glue, wax etc. come into contact with fire they would abandon their own nature? ... When one seeks the characteristic of earth in this way, it cannot be apprehended; if it cannot be apprehended, then its reality is nothing but emptiness, and then emptiness is the real characteristic of earth. The same applies to all distinctive characteristics, and this is called 'suchness' (如, *tathatā*). 「諸法如」，有二種：一者，各各相；二者，實相。各各相者，如：地，堅相；水，濕相；火，熱相；風，動相，如是等分別諸法，各自有相。實相者，於各各相中分別，求實不可得，不可破，無諸過失。如自相空中說：地若實是堅相者，何以故膠、蠟等與火會時，捨其自性？... 如是推求地相，則不可得。若不可得，其實皆空。空則是地之實相。一切別相，皆亦如是。是名為「如」。(T20, no. 1509, p. 297, b24-c5; cf. Étienne Lamotte, *Le Traité de la Grande Vertu de Sagesse*, Tome V, as above, pp. 2186-2187).

precisely from the way in which the problematic aspects of its occurrence in VajK are discussed:⁶¹

As for [the *sūtra*'s statement] "produce a real characteristic," someone else said: "the conventional truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) arises (生), the supreme truth (*paramārthasatya*) does not arise"; then [I] asked: "given that [according to that passage of the *sūtra*] one produces (生) the real characteristic (實相), why then one does not [also] produce the supreme truth?" That [interlocutor] then explained that [that passage of the *sūtra*] is just referring to the fact that one produces the insight of the real characteristic. The real characteristic [itself] cannot be produced; it is simply that the insight, taking its name from the [relevant] objective sphere, is called real insight. [Similarly,] because the objective sphere takes name from the insight, when it is a matter of producing [that] insight, [the *sūtra*] states [instead] that one produces the [relevant] objective sphere [viz. the real characteristic.]⁶²

It would be possible to dismiss all these interpretations of VajK's *xiàng* 相 by Zongmi, Jizang and other Chinese exegetes as being ultimately based on what, from a narrowly philological perspective, could be labelled as an inaccurate translation – just the confusion of different original words. However, I would rather argue in favour of a more nuanced approach: I think that the

⁶¹ Cf. also the following passage from Zhiyi's 智顗 (538-597) *Jin'gang banruo jing shu* 金剛般若經疏 T33, no. 1698: 「實相者，即是非相。若有少相，即非實相。故以無相為實相。如來說此而人能信，豈非第一希有！而言生實相者，此是無生生也。」 (T33, no. 1698, p. 80, a1-3).

⁶² 「則生實相者」，他云：世諦生，真諦不生。即問：實相即是真諦：既生實相，何不生真諦耶？彼釋云：生實相之慧耳。實相不可生，但慧從境作名，稱為實慧；境從慧作名，故生慧言生境耳。(T33, no. 1699, p. 114, b14-18). I am grateful to Prof. Hiroshi Kanno for suggestions on the interpretation of 他云 and 彼釋云, which seem to refer to an interlocutor (perhaps fictional) of Jizang.

very possibility that a semantic intersection of this kind could take place in a given translated term (such as, in this particular case, *xiàng* 相), far from being something accidental, should be taken as being fully constitutive of the meaning of that particular term. In other words, Kumārajīva's translation has produced an entirely new term (and concept), *xiàng* 相, which arguably played an important role in East Asian Buddhist thought and whose interpretation in effect defies any hermeneutically reductionistic attempt to explain away the problem posed by this word by referring it back to its Sanskrit "originals." And it is precisely this new concept that defined, to no little degree, the East Asian reception of the *Diamond Sutra*. The characterization of the central teaching of this scripture in terms of "no-characteristics" (*wúxiàng* 無相) found in some sources⁶³ is in fact entirely due to Kumārajīva's translation.

V. Conclusions

It seems fair to say that the celebrated stylistic refinement of Kumārajīva's versions has monopolized scholarly discussions of his translation technique. This is also due, to a certain extent, to the biographical sources on the great translator, which emphasize his attention to the literary quality of translations.⁶⁴

⁶³ See for example p. 24 of Charles Muller, "A Korean Contribution to the Zen Canon: The *Oga Hae Seorui* (Commentaries of Five Masters on the *Diamond Sūtra*)", in *Zen Classics: Formative Texts in the History of Zen Buddhism*, Ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, 2005, pp. 43-64. This characterization underlies also the passage from Zongmi's *Yuan ren lun* quoted above (§ 4): it occurs in the section of the treatise devoted to the "Teaching of the Great Vehicle that refutes phenomenal appearances" (大乘破相教, T45, no. 1886, p. 709, c9-ff.), on which see Gregory, *Inquiry into the Origin of Humanity*, as above, pp. 161-ff.

⁶⁴ See for example Kumārajīva's discussion of western (i.e. Indian) literary forms reported in Huijiao's *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 T50, no. 2059, p. 332, b23-29; tr. Robert Shih, *Biographies des Moines Éminents* (Kao Seng Tchouan) de Houei-kiao, traduites et annotées, 1968, pp. 77-78.

Kumārajīva's readiness to introduce into his versions stylistic embellishments is exemplified by a famous episode centred on the translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*,⁶⁵ which has come to epitomize his attitude towards the problem of translating Buddhist scriptures.

However, the analysis of the particular terminological issue discussed in the preceding paragraphs brings to light a different and more complex picture of Kumārajīva's approach to translation. Certainly it was not out of stylistic considerations that Kumārajīva decided to render *saṃjñā* as *xiàng* 相, with all the consequences discussed in § 4. Rather, as made clear by the overview of the use of this term carried out in § 3, this particular lexical choice reflects a coherent philosophical agenda.

In order to understand a text such as VajK, we have to take into account also the particular process – quite far from our modern notion of translation –

⁶⁵ According to a passage of Sengrui's 僧叡 biography, Kumārajīva accepted, on stylistic grounds, a rendition, suggested by Sengrui, which involved a considerable departure from the original Sanskrit wording, closely reflected by Dharmarakṣa's earlier version (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 T50, no. 2059, p. 364, b2-6: 「昔竺法護出正法華經。受決品云：『天見人，人見天。』什譯經至此，乃言：『此語與西域義同，但在言過質。』叡曰：『將非「人天交接兩得相見」？』什喜曰：『實然！』」). On this episode – which is not free of problems – see, for example, Florin Deleanu, “Tempering Belles Infidèles and Promoting Jolies Laides: Idle Thoughts on the Ideal Rendering of Buddhist Texts and Terminology,” *Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, vol. 2 (2012) 146-178 (see p. 168 n. 62); Jan Willem de Jong, *Buddha's Word in China*, 28th George Ernest Morrison Lecture delivered at the Australian National University (1968): 13-14 (repr. in *Buddhist Studies*, pp. 89-90); Kenneth Chén, “Some Problems in the Translation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon,” *Tsing-hua Journal of Chinese Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1960): 178-188 (see p. 180); Richard H. Robinson, *Early Mādhyamika in India and China*, as above, pp. 80-81; Wang Wenyan 王文顏, *Fodian hanyi zhi yanjiu* 佛典漢譯之研究, as above, p. 220.

through which it was produced. As pointed out by Cao Shibang,⁶⁶ exegesis played a crucial role in Chinese Buddhist translations produced before the Sui-Tang period: not as a separate, subsequent activity based on the translated texts, but as a constitutive element of the translation process itself.

This brings us to the fundamental issue which more or less explicitly underlies my study: the problem of how to render justice to Chinese Buddhist translations as complex, multifaceted cultural creations. There is little doubt that the study of these texts (and of their elusive mirrors – the commentaries) requires a particularly careful approach. From this perspective, Buddhist translated terminology has to be understood in its own terms: as a “third language,” neither fully Chinese, nor mechanically Indian.

Abbreviations

- *Abhidharmakośa*: Shastri, Swami Dwarikadas (ed.). *Abhidharmakośa & Bhāṣya of Ācārya Vasubandhu with Sphuṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra*, 2 vols. Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1998 (1st ed. 1970).
- *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*: Vaidya, P.L. (ed.). *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā - With Haribhadra's Commentary Called Āloka*. Buddhist Sanskrit Texts no. 4. Darbhanga: The Mithila Institute, 1960.
- DZDL: Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (tr.), *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 T25, no. 1509.

⁶⁶ Cao Shibang (Tso Sze-bong) 曹仕邦, *Zhongguo fojiao yijing shi lunji* 中國佛教譯經史論集, 1990, pp. 96-103. On the complex nature of pre-Sui-Tang translations, see also Tōru Funayama, “‘Kan’yaku’ to ‘Chūgoku senjutsu’ no aida: Kanbun butten ni tokuyū na keitai o megutte” 「漢譯」と「中國撰述」の間 – 漢文佛典に特有な形態をめぐって, *Bukkyō shigaku kenkyū* 佛教史學研究, vol. 45, no. 1, 2002, pp. 1-28 (see especially pp. 3-10).

- *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā*: Dutt, Nalinaksha (ed.). *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Calcutta: Calcutta Oriental Series No. 28, 1934.
- *Peṭakopadesa*: Barua, Arabinda (ed.). *The Peṭakopadesa*. London: Pali Text Society, 1949 (Revised Edition 1982).
- *Śatasāhasrikā*: Ghoṣa, Pratāpacandra (ed.). *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1902-1914.
- VajC: Conze, Edward. *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Edited and Translated with Introduction and Glossary*. Roma: Ismeo, 1974.
- VajHW: Harrison, Paul, and Watanabe Shōgo. "Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā." In *Manuscripts in the Schøyen Collection – Buddhist Manuscripts*, vol. 3. Ed. Jens Braarvig. Oslo: Hermes Publishing, 2006, pp. 89-132.
- VajK: Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (tr.) *Jin'gang banruoboluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*) T8, no. 235.
- VajS: Schopen, Gregory. "The Manuscript of *Vajracchedikā* found at Gilgit." In *Studies in the literature of the Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts*. Ed. Luis O. Gómez and Jonathan A. Silk. Ann Arbor: Collegiate Institute for the Study of Buddhist Literature and Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Michigan, 1989, pp. 89-139.
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