

## Thematic Research on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*: An Integrative Review

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### ABSTRACT

The current integrative review aims to do the following: first, examine the Chinese and English topical studies on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* published from 1900 to 2011; second, analyze the characteristics of those works; third, investigate related study trends through a statistical analysis; and finally, identify research gaps. This review not only offers a comprehensive overview of the available literature on the *Sūtra* retrieved from 25 English and Chinese electronic databases, but also categorizes the 256 selected publications (n=34 English; n=222 Chinese) into eight sub-themes: art (n=36; 14%), book reviews (n=11; 4%), philological studies (n=11; 4%), literature (n=24; 10%), philosophy (n=77; 30%), textual criticism (n=22; 9%), translation (n=56; 22%), and miscellaneous topics (n=19; 7%); thus illuminating different research foci and features between English and Chinese scholars, and also among Chinese researchers in various territories. This project illustrates how an integrative review can be employed in Buddhist studies; it reveals challenges and opportunities related to Buddhist studies, stemming from technology; it suggests collaborative research in Buddhism; and it proposes the application of the philosophy of the *Sūtra* to practical disciplines.

### Keywords

Chinese Buddhism, integrative review, Mahāyāna, *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, technology, statistical analysis

### Introduction

Buddhism has been developing for over two thousand years in China (Chen and Deng 2003, 499), during which time Chinese Buddhism has evolved as an eminent stream, and Buddhist studies has become a traditionally Chinese scholarly focus. With the advent of cultural exchange with the West from the beginning of the

twentieth century (Shi 2006c, 118; Shi 2006a, 130), the research foci and methods of Buddhist studies in China have been changing, which has brought about challenges that have a strong, direct effect on the rise and decline of Chinese Buddhism (Chen and Deng 2003, 500). Many Chinese elites have been equipping themselves with Western research practices, such as historical-philological and phenomenological approaches (Lau 2012, 114, 116); and thus have achieved leadership in the academic community (Chen and Deng 2003, 504). This is particularly true for scholars trained in Taiwan who are able to gear their research towards international academia (Lau 2012, 116).

In addition, negative forces, stemming from political movements impeded Buddhist studies in mainland China (Lau 2012, 192; Hua 2006, 114) between the 1940s and the 1970s, creating a barrier in that Buddhist studies was seen not chiefly as an academic issue but also as a social and political concern (Lau 2012, 114). Despite a variety of Buddhist research studies available in the first few decades of the twentieth century before the establishment of the Chinese communist government, records documented only 1,003 publications within the 18 years from 1949 to 1966 (Hua 2006, 192), and none in the seven years between 1967 and 1973 (Chen and Deng 2003, 505; Hua 2006, 192), after which came a single study published in 1974 (Chen and Deng 2003, 505). This dormancy ended with a speedy increase in publications in the 1980s, in which there were 1,125 Buddhist sources generated in 1992 alone (Chen and Deng 2003, 508), followed by a rapid growth which resumed in mainland China after 2000 (Huang 2002, 1). During the research vacuum period in mainland China in the 1960s and 1970s, the academic fields in Hong Kong and Taiwan offered opportunities for those who were keen to research Buddhist studies, while Western scholars have been substantially contributing to the study of Buddhism (Li 2009, Zhang 2006).

The traditional accomplishments of Chinese academia principally concern Buddhist history, Buddhist tenets and philosophies, literary criticism, exegeses, textual criticism, and cultural movements (Chen and Deng 2003, 503; Conze 1967, 2). Research methodology conventionally involves the interpretation of schools of Buddhism, textual analysis, textual criticism, and comparative study (Chen and Deng 2003, 531; Hua 2006, 192). However, the theory of materialism was widely and purposefully adopted by mainland China researchers from the 1950s to the 1980s in order to align themselves with the political ideology of the time. After the government's unitary control began to relax, various disciplines began to be referred to, such as anthropology, theology, and sociology. Recently, Buddhist studies has thus been expanded to take advantage of cross-disciplinary opportunities, including archaeology, ethics, ecology, psychology, sociology, and cultural studies (Fang 2006, 6). This modernisation has become a notable discussion in respect to research topics and methods (National Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies at Fudan University 2013, 201–297).

The current integrative review investigates research themes conducted by Anglophone and Chinese scholars, through the example of studying the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (hereafter simply referred to as 'the *Sūtra*'), an important Mahāyāna scripture. The objectives of this research are: first, to illustrate how an alternative research method, namely, an integrative review, is able to produce a comprehensive overview of a specific Buddhist topic — the *Sūtra*; second, to analyse critically the characteristics of works published in English or Chinese; third,

to examine the study trends structurally; and lastly, to identify research gaps. Throughout this review, the research provides an in-depth and extensive body of knowledge about the *Sūtra* as studied over the past 111 years, from which it supplies a platform to help Buddhist literati access relevant sources, and introduces this research method for modern Buddhist studies. Additionally, interdisciplinary findings offer insight into the dynamics between academic research and social environment, and into the plausible application of the *Sūtra* teachings to other research areas.

### An integrative review: A research method

Literature review is an essential procedure or portion of research projects (Burton 2000a, 137) that use various methods, from which researchers acquire major knowledge of and generate discussion on a particular subject. Adding it to classical review methods, a group of psychology scholars in the 1970s attempted to develop a new way to examine the available materials related to a specific topic in order to reduce bias and random errors (Chalmers and Altman 1998, no page number). Those trials drew much attention and triggered more such undertakings in the mid-1980s (Borenstein et al. 2009, xxiii), reflecting the ‘increasing role’ (Chalmers and Haynes 1998, 89) of this method in an increasing number of publications, particularly in the area of health science.<sup>1</sup> This method is collectively defined as a systematic review guided by a protocol and a checklist (Oxman 1994, 649), and moves further towards statistical analysis; that is, meta-analysis.

Both systematic review and meta-analysis focus on reviewing and analysing quantitative studies. Recently, these methods have been extended to the ‘broadest category of research review’ (Whittemore 2005b, 57), accepting various categories of literature and ‘diverse data sources’ (Whittemore and Knafel 2005, 552), including quantitative, qualitative, and theoretical discourses.<sup>2</sup> This extension, creating what is known as an integrative review, furnishes an alternative for researchers (Whittemore 2007, 149), and is defined as:

a method that summarizes the literature on a clinical problem or phenomenon of concern that incorporates multiple perspectives and types of literature. The diversity of the sampling frame is the hallmark of this type of review. Integrative reviews are the broadest type of review, and include experimental and non-experimental research as well as the theoretical literature if appropriate. Thus, integrative reviews have the potential to contribute to a comprehensive portrayal of the phenomenon of concern.

An integrative review, as a ‘secondary analysis’ (Glass 1976, 3), includes the components of a systematic review in terms of purpose and function, targets, procedures, inclusions and characteristics, as previously explained. The aims of this research method are three-fold. First, it offers answers to research questions stemming from a specific theme (Glasziou 2003, 31) through thorough sourcing (Knipschild 1998, 9) of previous studies. Second, it evaluates and interprets obtainable literature (Glasziou 2003, 1) for the sake of ‘generating a rigor-

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1. Borenstein et al. 2009, xxii; Chalmers 2001, xiii-xiv; Clarke 2007, 4; Webb and Roe 2007, xi; Chalmers and Haynes 1998, 86; Whittemore 2005a, 261.
  2. Evans 2007, 137; Kirkevold 1997, 980; Whittemore and Knafel 2005, 547.

ous summary of research' (Evans 2007, 145). This summary will thus become an instrument by which to address feasible future topics (Egger and Smith 2001, 23). Third, it assimilates a large number of research outcomes for a certain study topic (Evans 2007, 138–139), resulting in the display of possible research niches for further work (Knipschild 1998, 13), particularly for those topics around which a body of knowledge for concept development has begun to arise (Broome 1993, 213).

The 'completeness of the evidence' (Knipschild 1998, 9) will be mined through a set of 'organised' (Burton 2000b, 141) and 'systematic' (Burton 2000b, 141) procedures, from selecting a review topic to reporting the results (Jackson 1980, 441), guided by a 'review protocol' (Egger and Smith 2001, 25). Basically, the protocol governs the formulation of research questions, the location and collection of materials, the selection and assessment of the retrieved literature, a summary and synthesis of the findings, and the interpretation of results.<sup>3</sup>

The first step of the review protocol is to identify relevant studies.<sup>4</sup> A set of selection criteria directs the screening of the individual publications (Evans 2007, 140), and the evaluation of eligible or potential literature.<sup>5</sup> The next task is to analyse the selected sources (Clarke 2007, 3; Glasziou 2003, 1) and tabulate the findings (Egger, Davey and O'Rourke 2001, 11). In short, an integrative review primarily aims at learning from 'talking to the authors of earlier studies' (Knipschild 1998, 13) in order to plan the progress of research projects.

An integrative review is scientific in nature, in the sense of inquiry procedures, techniques, and findings.<sup>6</sup> It not only differs from 'traditional narrative reviews' (Egger, Davey and O'Rourke 2001, 3), but also represents an 'explicit methodology' (Clarke 2007, 3) through a clear research design (Knipschild 1998, 9) and transparent review process.<sup>7</sup> This method demonstrates careful data collection, standardised and rigorous assessment, and comprehensive performance (Glasziou 2003, 140; Evans 2007, 1, 3). Following these procedures, other researchers are able to duplicate such prior work with similar results.<sup>8</sup> This type of research complies with the requirements of a scientific investigation characterised by objectivity, replication, reliability, and validity (Gray et al. 2007, 10–12).

The features of an integrative review facilitate a more objective evaluation (Egger and Smith 2001, 23), and allow such reviews to possess 'increased power' (Glasziou 2003, 1; Mulrow 1998, 4) through consistent outcomes. The significance of this type of 'retrospective research' (Clarke 2007, 4) lies not only in the intensive review of previous research achievements, but is equally vital to the identification of future research directions and in designing new studies. Thus, its role as a premier research component (Dickerson, Scherer, and Lefebvre 1998, 18) is crucial (Borenstein et al. 2009, xxv). Hence, the employment of integrative reviews

3. Glasziou 2003, 24–25; Egger and Smith 2001, 2; Evans 2007, 139; Sandelowski, Docherty, and Emden 1997, 368–369.

4. Clarke 2007, 3; Egger, Davey, and O'Rourke 2001, 11; Glasziou 2003, 1.

5. Mulrow 1998, 2; Glasziou 2003, 1; Clarke 2007, 3.

6. Glasziou 2003, 1; Knipschild 1998, 9; Mulrow 1998, 1, 2.

7. Clarke 2007, 4; Egger, Davey, and O'Rourke 2001, 12; Roe 2007, 9; Borenstein et al. 2009, xxii.

8. Egger, Dickerson, and Smith 2001, 12; Roe 2007, 9; Borenstein et al. 2009, xxiii.

is being developed in various fields pertaining to mental health, medicine, nursing, science, business, the social sciences, psychotherapy, education, and sport.<sup>9</sup>

An integrative review is situated between systematic review and conventional literature review (Evans 2007, 148), in connection with empirical and non-experimental studies (Evans 2007, 137), and therefore continuous attention is being drawn to this methodology within different research fields. Whether this research method is suited to humanities disciplines, such as Buddhist studies, has not been explored; in contrast, traditional literature reviews regarding textual criticism or the development of Buddhist studies are bountiful, such as the studies by De Jong (1984), Guan (2002), He (2006b), and Prebish (1983, 1994). Examples include the following: a bibliography covering 776 references on meditation over the period from 1931 to 1983 (Murphy and Donovan 1983); ‘classical reviews’ (Egger, Davey, and O’Rourke 2001, 10) regarding Buddhist meditation or mindfulness, such as those by Davis and Hayes (2011), West (1979), and Williams and Kabat-Zinn (2011); and systematic reviews of meditation research (Chiesa 2010a, b, Keng, Smoski, and Robins 2011, Chiesa, Calati, and Serretti 2011). Also, one integrative review, conducted by Chambers, Gullone, and Allen (2009), studied the relationship between mindfulness and emotion regulation. These works exhibit three characteristics: first, the review themes focus on textual criticism and the development of Buddhist studies; second, in respect to methodology, most of them are traditional literature reviews; and lastly, the evidence-related studies (whether systematic or integrative reviews) are only associated with mindfulness or meditation, whereas none of them are about Buddhist theories or Buddhist texts. Even though one review attempted to source recent Chinese works on the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (Han 2012), it shows an absence of sufficient resources or a systematic method by which to review the topic comprehensively. These insufficiencies invoke a possible need to conduct integrative reviews in order to study theoretically-based Buddhist research differently. This integrative review examines the available English and Chinese references connected to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* from 1900 to 2011, and explores the feasibility of utilising this method in Buddhist studies.

### The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*

The *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* is one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures from the evolutionary period of the Mahāyāna, especially for early Mahāyāna (Lai and Gao 2010, 4). It contains only 30,500 Chinese characters in Kumārajīva’s translation (Lin 2008a, 92). There are three extant Chinese and five major English renditions available. The English translations stem mainly from either Chinese or Tibetan versions (Cheng 2013, 5–6). The Chinese renditions were translated from the Sanskrit original (Cheng 2013, 5; Jiang 2004, 11–12; Lamotte 1962/1976, XXV) by Zhi Qian<sup>10</sup> (支謙) in about 223 CE (Tam and Ip 1996, 35; Yong-ming 1986,

9. Borenstein et al. 2009; Park 2010; Zilko 2010; Pellico et al. 2012; Pittman 2011; O’Connell, Hickerson, and Pillutla 2011; Kelo, Martikainen, and Eriksson 2011; Wooton 2010; Ameringer and Leventhal 2010; Marroquín 2011; Doughty and Tse 2011; Abdullah and Brown 2011; Cheng and Tse 2013.

10. 佛說維摩詰經 CBETA T09, No. 474, p. 0519a09-0536c04 (2 fascicles)

17), by Kumārajīva<sup>11</sup> (鳩摩羅什), about 406 CE (Tam and Ip 1996, 35; Yong-ming 1986, 17) and by Xuan Zang<sup>12</sup> (玄奘) in 627–629 CE (Chen 1986, 17; Chen 2005, 6). The *Sūtra* was initially introduced to the West by Shuntai, a Japanese Buddhist Master, as early as the end of the nineteenth century (Hashimoto 1977, 152). It was then translated separately into English by Luk (1972), Watson (1997), and McRae (2004) based on Kumārajīva's rendition, and by Lamotte (1962/1976), and Thurman (1976/1986), based on Tibetan versions.

The significance of the *Sūtra* includes five facets that underpin its use in this study. First, it contains many of the most important Mahāyāna doctrines (Kamata 1994, 4), particularly on *prajñā* (wisdom 般若), but presents them in a radical and paradoxical fashion. Second, its insight sheds positive impact on not only the development of Chinese Buddhism, such as Chan (Zen 禪宗),<sup>13</sup> Tiantai (天臺宗; You 1999), Huayan (華嚴宗; Anacker 1975, 108; Wang 2009a, 2), Pure Land (淨土宗; Xie and Pan 2011, 148), and Vajrayāna (Tantric Buddhism 密宗; Tam 1995); but also on the long-term cultivation of Buddhism in East and South East Asia.<sup>14</sup> Third, its teachings have been implanted into Chinese culture (Liu and Li 2008, 19) and the thought processes of the Chinese elite (Shi 1999, 62; Chen 1999, 168). Also, Vimalakīrti was a leading figure in Chinese folk religions (He 2005a, 21; He 2005b, 64). Fourth, the *Sūtra* is in the name of a layperson, Vimalakīrti, which is infrequent in Buddhist scriptures, but represents the characteristics of the *Sūtra*. Fifth, its influences reach far beyond Chinese and English academia and extend to various other countries, such as Germany, and Thailand (Li 2009, 68), with many vernacular versions having been adapted. Despite these merits, its influence in China faded after the Song Dynasty (Sun 1995; He 2009b); however, the *Sūtra* has recently regained attention. In responding to this resumed attention, conducting an integrative review related to the *Sūtra* may provide a deeper understanding of Mahāyāna teachings and Chinese Buddhism, which have been not as sufficiently studied in the West as have Tibetan Buddhism and Theravāda. It may also hint at how to improve the development of Chinese Buddhism studies in Western academia.

### Selection strategies

The current integrative review employs 25 English and Chinese databases (English, n=19; Chinese, n=5; bilingual resources, n=1) which were searched in February and March of 2012, according to specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows: first, only studies published from 1900 to 2011 were permitted; second, thematic studies in books, topical book chapters, book reviews, journal articles, and unpublished dissertations were used; third, only English or Chinese references were searched, but these included translated pieces, such as those by Demiéville (1962/1988), or Lamotte (1962/1976).

The exclusion criteria were as follows, done in this way in order to maintain the research objectives, as articulated previously. First, 'Literacy Sinitic'<sup>15</sup>

11. 維摩詰所說經CBETA T09, No. 475, p. 0537a07-0557b19 (3 fascicles)

12. 說無垢稱經CBETA T09, No. 476, p. 0557c07-0588a15 (6 fascicles)

13. Sheng-yen 1988, 88; Suzuki 1938/1981, 10; Wu 2001; Xing 2006, 515.

14. Thurman 1976/1986, ix; Gajin 1993, 159; Kamata 1994, 14.

15. CBETA T09, T1775-T1782, T2768-2778, T2824, X0338, X0343-X0345, X0347-X0349.

(Mair 1994, 707 — that is, *wen-yen-wen*, or classical Chinese language; Lai and Gao 2010, 6–9; Wang 2009a, 3–10) sources were not used, for example, Seng Zhao's annotation written in the Jin Dynasty, in the fourth to fifth centuries CE, nor were publications dating from before the twentieth century, for instance, those of Ōhara (1898), which are difficult to trace systematically and electronically. Second, essays which have been published in non-academic magazines that do not satisfy the requirements of academic writing formats, such as those lacking citations and references, were also excluded. Third, 'grey literature',<sup>16</sup> which has been informally published without an International Standard Book Number (ISBN), International Standard Serial Number (ISSN), or local registration, which is not easily retrieved was also excluded, such as papers written by Jing-hui and Ming (2005), or Venerable Yue-xia (1998). Fourth, conference papers have been excluded, such as that by Hashimoto (1977), as they have been recorded incompletely. Fifth, sections or sub-sections from book chapters have been ruled out, for instance, those by Hu (1998), Li (2001), Lin (2008a), Mou (1993), Ng (1995; 2006), Ren (1981), Sun (1969), and Yao (1996). Sixth, dictionaries, lexicons, and encyclopaedias were not included, for example, Skilton's (2003, 885). Finally, audio and video materials were also precluded. Moreover, repeated works have been selected only once, such as works by Tschen (1930), and Jin (1959/1981a).

### Search strategy and process

An identical three-level sequence was applied to the reference search across all adopted databases. Publications were listed after the key words were entered. Scanning the titles, descriptors and abstracts preliminarily weeded out the ineligible references. Potential materials were then reviewed in detail. The selected publications were summarised and classified accordingly.

### English resources

Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA/CSA Illumina), under the content pool ProQuest, is a major information provider for English bibliographic sources in the fields of art, the humanities, social sciences, applied sciences, and natural sciences, covering journal articles, research reports, policy papers, conference proceedings, essays, books, book chapters, book reviews, unpublished dissertations, newspapers, and magazines. Fifteen relevant digital databases from this provider were chosen (see Table 1 below), including the Education Research Information Centre (ERIC; mainly for educational publications), the Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE or MEDLARS Online, a prime electronic library for medically related works), the Public Affairs Information Service (PAIS International, which majors in social policies and international affairs), the Published International Literature On Traumatic Stress (PILOT Database, which contains literature on mental health), and databases under the American Psychological Association. The starting year of each database is determined by its own availability, and the end year was standardised at 2011. Furthermore, other electronic databases were linked with Cambridge Scientific Abstracts (CSA) during sourcing; for example, the Elton Bryson Stephens Company Information Services (EBSCOhost, an information management enterprise offering academic

16. Knipschild 1998, 13; O'Leary 2005, 41; McAuley et al. 2000, 1228.

Database	Auto-generated period
ARTbibliographies Modern	1974–2011
ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts	1987–2011
BHI: British Humanities Index	1962–2011
CSA Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts	1973–2011
ERIC	1966–2011
MEDLINE	2001–2011
MLA International Bibliography	1926–2011
PAIS International	1972–2011
PILOTS Database	1871–2011
PsycARTICLES	1894–2011
PsycBOOKS	1806–2011
PsycINFO	1806–2011
Social Services Abstracts (CSA)	1979–2011
Sociological Abstracts (CSA)	1952–2011
Worldwide Political Science Abstracts (CSA)	1975–2011

Table 1 Databases chosen from within Cambridge Scientific Abstracts

library resources), the Journal Storage (JSTOR), and the Ovid (a database platform, limited to HKU Books@Ovid, HKU Journals@Ovid). A wide spectrum of sources in disparate academic fields from across a period of many years was used in order to capture as many potential references as possible. Boolean operators (for example, 'and' or 'or') and a key word (specifically, 'vimalakirti') were used to retrieve potential works, resulting in the tabulation of 414 sources (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

### Chinese resources

The key word '維摩經' (*weimojing*) was used in the Chinese databases, which included: the National Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations in Taiwan (NDLTD) (1955–2011), a gateway to acquire masters' and doctoral theses from tertiary institutions in Taiwan; the Taiwan Electronic Periodical Services (TEPS) (1900–2011), an open access full-text database for Taiwanese periodicals and journals; the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) (1911–2011), an online publishing platform for publications in mainland China, including the China Integrated Knowledge Resources Database (KNS) (1915–2011); China Doctoral Dissertations Full-text Database (CDDFTD) (1999–2011); and Chinese Masters' Theses Full-text Database (CMTFTD) (1999–2011). The starting year relies on the availability of each database and the end year was set at 2011, achieving the retrieval of 721 items of literature (see Table 2 and Figure 1).



Source	Listed publication	Reviewed publication	Selected publication
<i>English databases</i>			
CSA	8	4	3
EBSCOhost	0	0	0
JSTOR	388	8	7
Ovid	0	0	0
ProQuest	18	4	4
Sub-total	414	16	14
<i>Chinese databases</i>			
NDLTD	192	18	18
TEPS (humanities)	0	0	0
TEPS (social science)	8	6	4
CNKI	465	97	84
CDDFTD	21	3	3
CMTFTD	35	6	6
Sub-total	721	130	115
<i>Bilingual databases or channels</i>			
HKALL	113	113	72
Other sources	206	143	55
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>1454</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>256</b>

Table 2 Summary of the search results

### Bilingual resources

The bilingual key words ‘維摩經’ (*weimojing*) and ‘vimalakirti’ were inputted into the Hong Kong Academic Library Link (HKALL), which comprises books, articles, and dissertations supplied by The Chinese University of Hong Kong, the City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong Baptist University, The Hong Kong Institute of Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Lingnan University, and The University of Hong Kong. There were 113 pieces listed (see Table 2 and Figure 1).

### Additional channels

A supplementary search was also conducted as follows: first, reference lists were made from the reviewed materials; second, library and bookshop visits were made; third, expert consultations were carried out; and lastly, Internet ‘surfing’ (Burton 2000b, 143) was utilised, for example, Fisher (2008), and the Library of [the] Luminary Buddhist Institute (undated). The 206 additional sources were retrieved (refer to Table 2 and Figure 1).

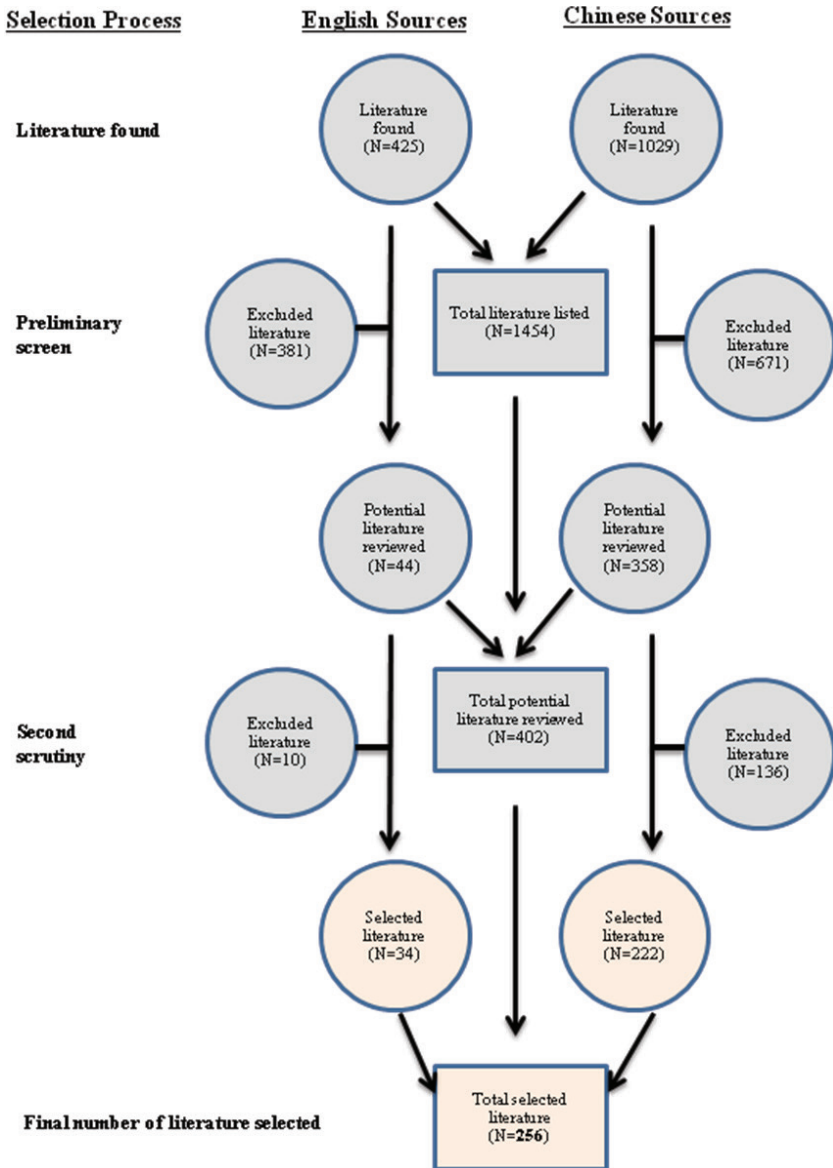


Figure 1 Search Strategy and Process

### Results: Thematic research on the *Sūtra*

The reviewed and selected publications were categorised into eight themes: (1) translation, (2) book reviews, (3) philosophy, (4) linguistic studies, (5) literature,

(6) textual criticism, (7) art, and (8) assorted themes. This was akin to previous research outcomes, such as to that of Chen and Deng (2003, 530), although the classification is not always clear cut and some publications may cover more than one theme. Where this is the case, the publication is classified and grouped according to its dominant theme. The reviewed literature corresponds to academic publications, except in the category of translation, where some translated works might not be designed as research projects: however, they were selected in this review to reflect a wider spectrum in studying the *Sūtra*.

### Translation

The primordial group (n=56; 22%) covers publications related to translations, scriptural exposition and interpretations, annotations, introduction, commentaries, and reading guides for the *Sūtra*. Among the five popular English translations, two are based on the Tibetan version of the *Sūtra* (Lamotte 1962/1976; Thurman 1976/1986), and three on the Chinese versions (Luk 1972; McRae 2004; Watson 1997), specifically on the Kumārajīva translation. Various Western scholars have introduced, explained, analysed, and interpreted the teachings of the *Sūtra* (Anacker 1975; Demiéville 1962/1988; Thurman 2002), and have also compared different translated versions (Whitehead 1978; Williams 1990).

The *Sūtra* has been partially or fully translated and/or annotated into ‘Vernacular Sinitic’ (Mair 1994, 707) or Vernacular Chinese (namely, *pai-hua-wen*, or modern Chinese language) in nearly every decade since its introduction to China.<sup>17</sup> Many Buddhist masters and laity have explained the *Sūtra* in modern Chinese.<sup>18</sup> Unlike the English works, Kumārajīva’s version coincidentally remained the foundation of most modern Chinese translations. However, the recent work by Huang (2011) has produced a critical rendition, not only directly translated from a Sanskrit original that was discovered in 1999 and published by the Taisho University (大正大學) (Huang 2011, 29-30), but which also compares Kumārajīva’s and Xuan Zang’s renditions by listing every paragraph of each side-by-side, through which their divergence and convergence are presented, showing the characteristics of these two significant translators and giving more insight into Vimalakīrti teachings.

In addition to interpreting and applying the *Sūtra* to modern society, as did Kamata (1994), there are plenty of references which extend to various other topics, including comparative studies of Chinese renditions,<sup>19</sup> reading guides (Xu 2008; Tam 2007), and commentary analyses (Zeng 2008; Xiao 2004; Lo 2002). Also, as informed by the selected references, the *Sūtra* has been translated into non-mainstream and ancient languages, such as Vietnamese (Lieu 2004), Tangut (Sun, 2007), and Sogdian (Lamotte 1976/1990).

17. Chen 2010; Chen 2005; Chen and Lin 2005; Cheng 2006; Cheng 2008; Ng 1995; Shi 1977; Shi 1998a; Shi 2009; Tai-xu 1919/2005; Tam and Ip 1996; Wang, Lin, and Sun 2010; Yang 1995; Yong-ming 1986; Yuan-xiang 1998; Lai and Gao 2010; Huang 2008; Li 1992.

18. Shi 1955; Shi 1998b; Miao-Hua 1994; Nan 2006; Ping and Yang 1998; Shi 1978; Tai-xu 1924/2005; Yi 2006; Yi 2001; Yue-xi 1998; Zhi-chong 2006; Zhi-yu 2003; Zhi-yu 2007; Agananto 2005.

19. Chiang 2000; He 2007; Lau 1989; Shi 1998a; Tu 2005; Wu 2005.

### Book reviews

Book reviews (n=7; 3%) on the Lamotte (1962/1976), Thurman (1976/1986), and Watson (1997) translations are prevalent in English language academia.<sup>20</sup> Nattier's (2000) article has warranted more attention, as it was the only work comparing four English translations from which two were taken from Chinese (Luk 1972; Watson 1997) and two from Tibetan (Lamotte 1962/1976; Thurman 1976/1986) editions. Conversely, Chinese sources have focused on reviewing recent scholars' studies on the *Sūtra* (n=4; 1%).<sup>21</sup>

### Philosophy

This category (n=77; 30%) involves dominant topical discussions on: (1) Vimalakīrti's illness,<sup>22</sup> (2) non-dualism, non-abiding or non-abiding base,<sup>23</sup> (3) the *bodhisattva*,<sup>24</sup> (4) *śūnyatā*,<sup>25</sup> (5) *nirvāṇa* (Li 2010; Qiao 2009), (6) Vimalakīrti's silence (Leighton 1998), (7) *prajñā*,<sup>26</sup> (8) *samādhi* (Jian 1997), (9) the Buddha Land,<sup>27</sup> (10) *upāya*,<sup>28</sup> (11) inconceivableness,<sup>29</sup> (12) *lokottara* (Fang 2003), and (13) overviews of Vimalakīrti's or Mahāyāna teachings.<sup>30</sup> Some of these works have attempted to interpret the philosophy from non-Buddhist or western perspectives, such as those of Cole (2005), Liu (2009a), and Xi (2009).

### Linguistic studies

This category (n=11; 4%), which is entirely in Chinese, included etymological, semantic and philological studies, providing scholars who are interested in Chinese linguistics with valuable references for studying the classical Chinese language. Most of the selected papers discuss grammar and language structure (Liou 1995), vocabulary,<sup>31</sup> interrogatives,<sup>32</sup> and punctuation (Woon 2011).

20. Barrett 1999; Bharati 1963; Houston 1978; Mather 1979; Werner 1998; Ziporyn 1998.

21. Xia 1997; Xu 1998; Yang 1997; Zhu 1999.

22. Lau 1995; Liang 2007; You and Chen 2008.

23. Chan 1997; Chen 1998; Hsu 2007; Jin 2003; Jing 2001; Kamata 1986; Liu 2006; Ning 2005; Shi 2006b; Tong 2009; Tsai 2002; Tsai 2011; Wang 2006a; Wang 2008; Wu 2000; Wu 2001.

24. Lin 1994; Mather 1968; Shi 2010b; Sung 2002; Yi 2001; Zhou 2002.

25. Chen 2002; Gajin 1993; Gong 2007; Liu 2008; Shi 2002.

26. Ho 1995; Pu 2008; Tang 1988.

27. Ho 2004; Ho 2005; Hu 1991; Hui-min 1997; Sheng-yen 1999; Wang 2005b.

28. Ghiglione 2009; Hamlin 1988; Lin 1997a; Pye 2003; Schroeder 1996; Schroeder 2001; Zhang 2011b; Zheng 2009.

29. Qiu 2001; Shi 2005; Song 1994.

30. He 2006a; Lam 1980; Lin 2000; Lin 2008b; Ning 2000; Sheng-yen 1988; Shi 1999; Song 2009; Tam 1995; Tam 1997; Tsao 2005; Wang 1996; Wang 2005a; Wang 2006b; Wang 2009a; Wu 1996; Yang 1999; You 1999; Yu 1994.

31. Jiang 2006; Jiang 2007; Shi 2010a; Tao 2011; Wang 2010.

32. Cui 2005; Li 2008b; Wang 2003; Wu 2011.

### Literature

This category (n=24; 10%) discusses what and how the *Sūtra* affects Chinese literature, particularly in the periods from the Wei Jin to the Song Dynasty,<sup>33</sup> with the exception of Chen's work (1999). The literati in those time periods, such as Wang Wei (王維),<sup>34</sup> Du Fu (杜甫) (Zhang 2011a), Su Shi (蘇軾) (Liang 2006), Bai Juyi (白居易) (Zhang 2007), and Wang An Shi (王安石) (Liu 2010), were heavily influenced by the *Sūtra* and Vimalakīrti's teachings. The chosen works were written in Chinese, except for Miller's (1984), whose paper is about the relationship of a particular Japanese poet with the *Sūtra*, reflecting that the *Sūtra* has been a significant text in the Japanese academic community.

### Textual criticism

This group (n=22; 9%) is a collection of studies on textual criticism, literary criticism, emendation, corrigenda, apocrypha, and the scriptural authenticity of the *Sūtra* and its relevant products, such as commentaries.<sup>35</sup> Most of these works deal with ancient manuscripts,<sup>36</sup> archaic documents,<sup>37</sup> and aged fragments or relics,<sup>38</sup> and have been done by Chinese authors, with the exception of Lamotte (1976/1990).

### Art

This group of works (n=36; 14%) assembles the studies of art which are part of the Dunhuang studies (敦煌學), and covers (1) drawing technique (He 1995; Sha 2000), (2) representations,<sup>39</sup> (3) content and features of paintings<sup>40</sup> found in a broad range of geographical locations and caves, for instance, Majishan (麥積山) (Chiu 2011; Wang 2009b), caves 103 and 220 in Mogao (莫高窟),<sup>41</sup> Mount Dazubei (大足北山) (Ji 2010), and Longmen (龍門).<sup>42</sup> Most of them focus on visual art, such as paintings,<sup>43</sup> frescoes,<sup>44</sup> and cliff statues (Wu 1988), however Long's study (1988) is on Buddhist music. In addition, Jiang (1991) compiled a bibliography of Dunhuang manuscripts connected with the *Sūtra*.

33. Cui 2008; Gao 2009; Gong 2008; He 2000a; Hou 1998; Jiang 2005; Li 1994; Li 2007; Lin and Shen 1996; Sun 1993; Sun 2005; Sun 2008; Wang 1992; Wu 2002b; Xu 2005.

34. Chui 2003; Tan 2003a; Yan 1993.

35. Wan 2009; Wan 2010; Wang 2011a; Wu 2003; Xiang 2005.

36. Chen 1987; He 2003; Lin 2001; Tschen 1930; Tschen 1932/1985.

37. Guo, Zhang, and Huang 1989; Guo, Zhang, and Huang 1998; Qian 2007; Yang 1987; Yang 2008; Zhou and Zhao 1985.

38. Fang and Xu 1994; Li and Lin 2007; Wang 2011b; Yuan 2008; Yu and Li 2010.

39. Bunker 1968; Heyrman 1994; Ho 1985; Xiao 1998; Zhuang 1966; Zou 2010a; Zou 2010b.

40. He 1982; Huang 1999; Jin 1959/1981b; Liu 2011; Ning 1990; Tan 2003b; Yu 1986.

41. Hu 2004; Huang 2010; Yu 2010.

42. Jin 1959/1981a; Zhang 1982.

43. Li 1964; Li 1995; Tianjin Renmin Meishu Chubanshe 1980; Wu 2002a; Wu 2008.

44. He 2000b; Xiang 1998; Zhuang 1958a; Zhuang 1958b.

### Assorted themes

Apart from the above seven categories, there are works that do not fall directly into any of them but are likewise not sufficient (n=19; 7%) to make up a separate category of their own; therefore, they are grouped here as assorted themes, consisting of: (1) folk religion,<sup>45</sup> (2) the cultural significance of the *Sūtra*,<sup>46</sup> (3) a play script (Guo 1999), (4) the role of Śāriputra in the *Sūtra* (Lin 1997b), (5) a story about a goddess (Liu 2009b), (6) the primary-secondary relationship between the Buddha and Vimalakīrti (Hsu 2008), (7) gender (Li 2011), (8) the sinicization of Buddhism (Whitehead 1976), (9) text reconstruction (Yuyama 2002), and (10) ancient printing technology (Sun 2007).

### Analysis and discussion

The findings reveal three topics for further discussion: first, the specific features of English and Chinese translations, expositions, and interpretations; second, practical applications of the *Sūtra*'s teachings; and third, different research trends.

#### Features of English and Chinese translations

Disparate features have been observed between the English and Chinese renditions, along with diverse layout that reveal differences in presentation norms. These issues are elaborated upon below, along with the issue of the lower prevalence of Chinese Buddhism in the West.

#### *Layout*

The prevalent English renditions were translated by five leading scholars (Lamotte, Luk, McRae, Thurman, and Watson), implying the particular importance of the *Sūtra* in the Anglophone academic community. The English translations usually start with an introduction to the *Sūtra* prior to the text translation, and also include a glossary at the end. In a contrast, modern Chinese translations are generally presented using a different arrangement.

Modern Chinese translations tend to briefly introduce the *Sūtra*, list a few paragraphs of the original text, and then annotate and render the text into modern Chinese; for example, Chen (2010), Lai and Gao (2010), and Chen (2005), whose translations accommodate readers with no prior knowledge of the *Sūtra*. Furthermore, creative elements, such as pictures and diagrams, are added to explain the profound doctrines effectively, such as in the rendition by Shi (2009).

#### *Buddhist denominations*

Although the five English translations are based on both Chinese (Luk, 1972; McRae, 2004; Watson, 1982) and Tibetan (Lamotte, 1962/1976; Thurman, 1976/1986) editions, they have contributed little to increasing the popularity of Chinese Buddhism in the West, which is not as well known there as Tibetan Buddhism and Theravāda. For instance, Tibetan Buddhism has drawn significant attention within Western academia, featuring in recent Buddhist-related publica-

45. He 2005a; He 2005b; He 2009a; He 2009b; He 2010.

46. Jian 2005; Liu and Li 2008; Sun 1995; Yuan 1993; Wang 1990; Zhang 1996.

tions such as Wallace (2010), or for mental health interventions, such as Plakun (2008). What causes this inattention to Chinese Buddhism in Western academia should be further investigated to provide valuable insight into the development of Chinese Buddhist philosophy from a global perspective.

However, most modern Chinese translations have been based on the text of Kumārajīva, an expert in the school of *prajñā* (wisdom 般若) — an edition from which it is conventional practice to produce annotations and exegeses from the Chinese Buddhist perspective. Nevertheless, modern Chinese researchers have rapidly turned to Sanskrit originals (Lau 2012, 117), and have constructed cross-references between original language editions and the translated Chinese versions; for example, Wan (2010). This change provides Chinese scholars with both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, the Sanskrit original offers the primary data source for researchers to retranslate the *Sūtra* and fine-tune the classical renditions, while on the other hand, this trend urges contemporary scholars to equip themselves with more skills related to academic performance, such as the study of multiple languages, and the use of different research methods.

### Practical applications of the *Sūtra*'s teachings

Numerous selected publications (n=77; 30%) in this review are on the philosophy and doctrines of the *Sūtra* that pertain to key Mahāyāna teachings. Most of the Chinese scholars' works are concerned with and seek to apply the Mahāyāna spirit, which is equivalent to the bodhisattva spirit (Lu 2005, 78), or the attainment of personal growth through helping other people, and interpret these teachings in a practical way that applies the tenets to contemporary contexts, or integrates the interpretation with Western theories. For instance, Kamata (1994) and Yi (2001) attempted to interpret the *Sūtra* in light of relieving suffering and coping with life's difficulties. These examples reveal the applicability of the teachings to daily life, and a realisation of the Buddha's aspiration — a humanistic concern. These concerns have been driving Chinese Buddhist proponents towards a rapid development of humanistic Buddhism over the past hundred years, an innovation initiated by Master Tai Xu (太虛大師) (Tai-Xu 2011, 247–248, 270).

Similar references, though not from the *Sūtra*, can be retrieved from Western research on Buddhist-influenced or Buddhist-referenced intervention approaches; especially for the helping professions, including psychotherapy, counselling, and medical services.<sup>47</sup> Among Chinese cultural communities, Taiwanese researchers and practitioners have been pioneering Buddhist applications to palliative care; for example, Heng-chu and team members (2006). Other scholars, such as Liu (2008), Shi (2006b), and You (1999), have reformulated these teachings to be applicable for everyday life. However, these attempts have remained within the arena of traditional philosophical discussion without integrating relevant theories, such as those from psychotherapy and thanatology, into studying the *Sūtra*. A cross-disciplinary approach between these fields may delve further into modern interpretations and applications of the *Sūtra*. Lately, scholars like Zhu (2008) have been

47. Bränström et al. 2010; Duncan, Coatsworth, and Greenberg 2009; Gilpin 2008; Blando 2009; Cooper 2005; Groves and Farmer 1994; Magid 2002; Kraus and Sears 2009; Evans, Shenpen, and Townsend 2008; Hofmann, Grossman, and Hinton 2011; Bankart 2006; Gilbert 2009.

exploring modes of ‘inter-disciplinary cooperation’ (Zhu 2008, 232) or ‘inter-disciplinary coordination’ (Zhu 2008, 232) in Buddhist studies, and have been using the *Sūtra*’s teachings in every area of their research, from theory to practices, including psychotherapeutic interventions in social work, counselling and caring services. Their attempts have opened up diverse possibilities for future research, apart from the phenomenological interpretation used traditionally (Lau 2012, 116). However, these plausible research topics are not exclusive to humanistic issues, and the application of the wisdom expressed in the *Sūtra* can be expanded more broadly into various fields; for example, its aesthetics (Chen 2002) can be applied to architecture, its creativity to drama performance (Cui 2008), and its preaching techniques to educational settings. These proposed topics not only give witness to the richness of the *Sūtra*, but also bring it into closer connection with modern milieus.

### Research trends

An analysis of the research trends, based on the reviewed publications illustrates two aspects. It makes possible a comparison between Western and Chinese academic communities, and, within Chinese academia, illustrates their production periods and research interests.

#### *Western and Chinese academic communities*

In examining the issue of production within Western and Chinese academia, this review draws a picture of the remarkable differences between them. The 34 (13%) eligible English publications indicated that the study of the *Sūtra* by Western scholars began in the 1960s and has reached its peak in the 2000s (see Table 3). The 222 (87%) chosen Chinese references show a re-activation in Chinese academia from the 1990s with a sharp rise appearing in the 2000s (see Figure 2), averaging about 11 pieces of work every year from 2000 to 2009. The trend has continued upward so far, with 14 pieces published on average every year between 2010 and 2011 (only two years). These numbers align with previous research

Year	English publications	Chinese publications
1900–1909	0	0
1910–1919	0	1
1920–1929	0	1
1930–1939	0	2
1940–1949	0	0
1950–1959	0	5
1960–1969	3	2
1970–1979	9	2
1980–1989	3	17
1990–1999	8	58
2000–2009	10	117
2010–2011 (only 2 years)	1	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>222</b>

Table 3 Number of English and Chinese Publications by Decade



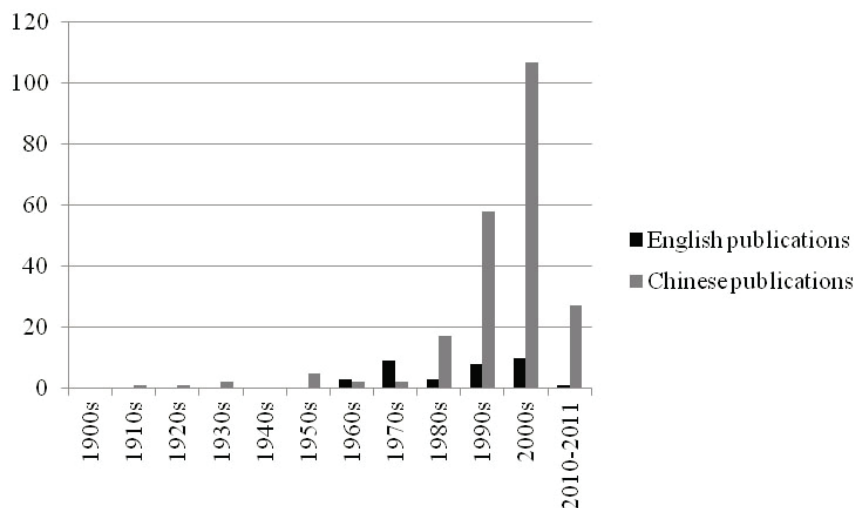


Figure 2 Number of Chinese (right bars) and English (left bars) Publications from 1900 to 2011

Year	Tr	BR	Ph	A	L	LS	TC	AT
1900–1909	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1910–1919	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1920–1929	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1930–1939	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
1940–1949	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1950–1959	1	0	0	4	0	0	0	0
1960–1969	0	1	1	3	0	0	0	0
1970–1979	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	1
1980–1989	3	0	4	7	1	0	5	0
1990–1999	12	7	23	8	7	1	2	6
2000–2009	26	1	45	7	14	5	9	10
2010–2011 (only 2 years)	4	0	4	7	2	5	4	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>

Tr = Translation; BR = Book reviews; Ph = Philosophy; A = Art; L = Literature;  
LS = Linguistic studies; TC = Textual criticism; AT = Assorted themes

Table 4 Categories in Chinese and English Literature

results, including those of Chen and Deng (2003, 505, 508), Hua (2006, 192), and Huang (2002, 1).

The two dominant categories of Chinese and English sources (see Table 4) published from 1990 to 2009 are those on philosophy or Vimalakīrti's teachings (n=77; 30%), and translation related works (n=56; 22%).

Most of the English works consisted of philosophy (n=9; 26%), translation (n=9; 26%), and book reviews (n=7; 21%), with no linguistic studies or textual criticism (see Table 5). Within the category of translation, five of the nine (55%) are the English editions translated by five well-known scholars. The book reviews were for four of those English translations. This likely reflects the research foci of Western scholars.

#### *Within Chinese academia*

This share of the publications consisted of three geographical locations: mainland China (n=125; 56%), Taiwan (n=77; 35%), and Hong Kong (n=20; 9%) (see Table 6). In mainland China, a sudden increase (n=11) appeared in the 1980s following the completely inert period during the two decades of the 1960s and the 1970s, after which publications doubled and tripled over the next two decades. This rising trend has continued, with 6.7 pieces on average published annually in the 2000s, and 9.5 publications on average completed per year in 2010 and 2011 (see Figure 3). A similar pattern is also evident in Taiwan, with 27 pieces in the 1990s and 35 in the 2000s; however, a mere eight pieces were published from 2010 to 2011. In Hong Kong, the production (n=9) peaked in the 1990s.

However, the above analysis does not necessarily indicate their individual significance. The varied number of publications may reflect dissimilarities in population ratio, number of higher education institutions, and other possible complicating factors in these three regions. It is a matter of fact that many valuable essays (that were not selected in this review) regarding the *Sūtra* have been published in Taiwan, such as that of Li (2008a), as well as those in the *Torch of Wisdom Monthly*, a Taiwanese Buddhist magazine. Similarly, the number of literature items produced implies nothing about the quality of work, but merely documents productivity related to publication.

In respect to research interests, researchers in mainland China paid more attention to philosophy (n=28; 22%) and art (n=26; 21%) (see Table 7); Taiwanese scholars to philosophy (n=30; 39%), and translation (n=25; 32%); and Hong Kong researchers likewise to philosophy (n=10; 50%) and translation (n=9; 45%). This may demonstrate research advantages and restrictions in different regions, as discussed below.

Presumably, mainland China researchers have benefited from geographic accessibility, having more convenient opportunities to take field trips to Dunhuang, for instance, to study art related to the *Sūtra* (n=26; 78%) (see Table 7). The academic strengths seen on the mainland are also evident in literature studies (n=19 pieces; 86%) and emendation or textual criticism (n=18; 82%). However, in the areas of translation and interpretation of the *Sūtra*, in Taiwan (n=25; 53%) and Hong Kong (n=9; 19%) the free religion policies there have an obvious effect, along with the prevalence of public Dharma talks in these two locations. Hong Kong researchers have focused mainly on the areas of philosophy and translation (n=10; 50%). In summary, the common interests among these three regions have been philosophy and translation (see Figure 4).

Category	Number of English literature
Art	4
Book reviews	7
Linguistic studies	0
Literature	2
Philosophy	9
Textual criticism	0
Translation	9
Assorted themes	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

Table 5 Number of English Literature items per category

Year	Mainland Chinese publications	Taiwanese publications	Hong Kong publications
1900–1909	0	0	0
1910–1919	1	0	0
1920–1929	1	0	0
1930–1939	2	0	0
1940–1949	0	0	0
1950–1959	2	2	1
1960–1969	0	1	1
1970–1979	0	2	0
1980–1989	11	2	4
1990–1999	22	27	9
2000–2009	67	35	5
2010–2011 (only 2 years)	19	8	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 6 Number of Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong Publications per decade

### Summary

Western scholars began to pay attention to the *Sūtra* starting in the 1960s, after which four English translations were issued from 1972 to 1976, while book reviews were then written for those renditions. The research topics cover most categories, with the exception of etymology and emendation. In the Chinese research

Category	Mainland Chinese publications	Taiwanese publications	Hong Kong publications
Art	26	5	1
Book reviews	3	1	0
Linguistic studies	8	3	0
Literature	19	3	0
Philosophy	28	30	10
Textual criticism	18	4	0
Translation	13	25	9
Assorted themes	10	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>20</b>

Table 7 Distribution of categories among Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong Publications

field, studies on the *Sūtra* resumed in mainland China in the 1990s, and were followed by an acute rise in the 2000s, accompanied by diverse topical studies, such as on popular beliefs and Vimalakīrti<sup>48</sup> the influence of Vimalakīrti on the ancient Chinese elite,<sup>49</sup> the relationship between the *Sūtra* and Vajrayāna (Tam 1995; Tam 1997), and Vimalakīrti paintings (He 1982; He 2000b). The extreme opposite can be seen in the hibernation of the 1960s and 1970s, and in which 20 year period there were no such publications in communist China, due to political factors. Similarly, there were only four publications during these periods in Taiwan and Hong Kong, even though the aforementioned political factors were largely absent there. In such a case, a few questions arise as to the reason(s) behind such low production in these two territories. Political reasons do not suffice to explain this scenario in these Chinese academic arenas, and there have been plenty of opportunities for studying latent agendas. This dormancy was followed by a sudden revival in the 1990s, exposing an explosive appeal for the *Sūtra* in these three regions concurrently. Although the reasons for this sudden change are still under-investigated, the dynamics between academic interest and social phenomena present a feasible research topic which is currently under-researched but worthy of exploration.

### Reflexivity

The present integrative review not only provides an overview of the study of the *Sūtra* over the past eleven decades within Chinese and Western academic communities, but also proposes and illustrates a systematic and structured alternative method for Buddhist studies. Traditional methodology for Buddhist studies in both the East and West is largely based upon the premises of philosophy, philology, linguistics, translation, textual analysis, or art (Ng 2006; Li 2009). Zhu (2008) advocates the use of 'multi-vocality' (Zhu 2008, 233) and 'heterogeneity'

48. He 2005a; He 2005b; He 2006a; He 2009b.

49. Sun 1993; Sun 1995; Sun 2005.

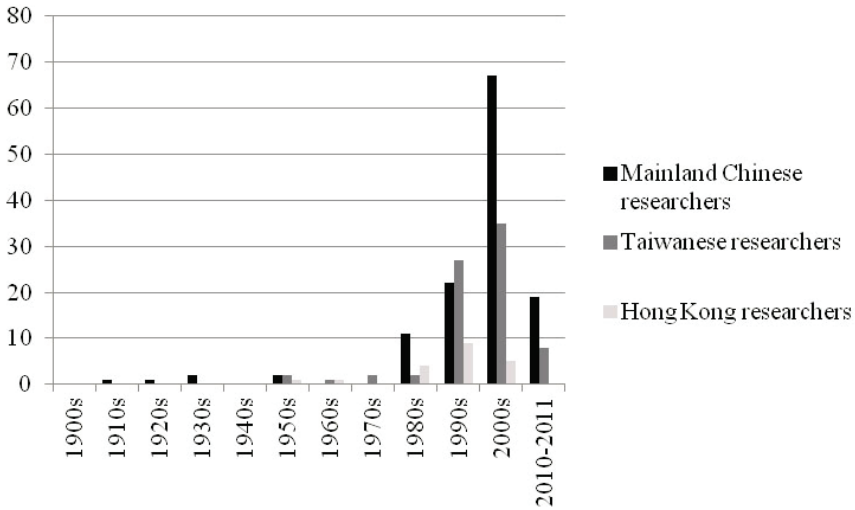


Figure 3 Distribution of respectively Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong researchers per Decade

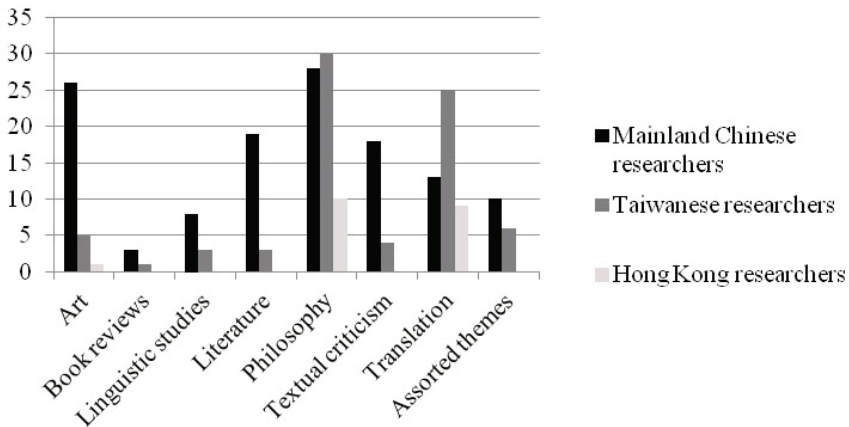


Figure 4 Research interests of respectively Mainland Chinese, Taiwanese and Hong Kong researchers

(Zhu 2008, 233) to study Buddhism in a different way. However, he has not yet elaborated on to what extent this should be carried out, or on how this can succeed. This review has illustrated the use of available sources to achieve a ‘thorough knowledge’ (Burton 2000b, 138) of the *Sūtra* through a ‘body of evidence’ (Borenstein et al. 2009, xxv) resulting in the ‘transferability of the results to other settings’ (Glasziou 2003, 1) from which research gaps can be identified (Evans 2007, 23; Egger and Smith 2001, 139) for future studies.

Reflections in this integrative review include the challenges and opportunities of technology, collaborative research, limitations, and contributions.

### Challenges and opportunities of technology

In order to attain up-to-date and comprehensive (Burton 2000b, 138) outcomes related to a specific research topic multiple databases must be utilised, as searching one database can never fulfil this purpose (Glasziou 2003, 22). With the aid of information technology and electronic devices, digital resources are now widely available for researchers, such as on-line sources (Burton 2000b, 141), which serve as a crucial convenience for Buddhist research projects. Although 25 key electronic databases were employed in this integrative review, many references and materials related to the *Sūtra*, which has been studied for more than 2,000 years, are inaccessible because huge volumes of information has not been digitalised. Only 140 potential publications out of 402 (34.8%) were directly retrieved through electronic channels, while the remainder (65.2%) were sought through traditional methods, mainly from the reference lists taken from the reviewed publications. With the assistance of the Hong Kong Academic Library Link (HKALL), most of these sources were obtainable in hard copies. Other off-line sources (Burton 2000b, 141) were also used, including bookshop visits, and expert consultations, for example, Ho's literature (2005), and liaisons between publishers and authors, such as with Lin (1997a) and Tong (2009). Even though multiple sources were searched, there were a few potential but inaccessible publications (n=57; 3.9%) (n=6 in English; n=51 in Chinese), such as Idumi (1924), as well as others that have been lost by the original owners, like those of Mather (1949) and Paramita (2003). This verifies the fact that collecting all relevant publications is not a realistic goal (Glasziou 2003, 3), and that technology, while offering a primitive help, can never stand as a sole agent for research. The experience gained in sourcing electronic references for this review may signal similar difficulties related to studying other topics in Buddhist studies.

Also, this experience reflects the urge to speed up the digitalisation of Buddhist materials that have the potential to significantly support contemporary scholars (Nagasaki, Tomabechei, and Shimoda 2013). In fact, many academic institutions, such as the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association, the Library of [the] Luminary Buddhist Institute, the American Academy of Religion, the Thesaurus *Literaturae Buddhicae* at the University of Oslo, the Cornell University Chinese-Japanese-Korean Computing and Database Facility, and the Coombs Computing Unit at the Australian National University (McRae 1995, 361–62), have made tremendous efforts towards this task. Yet, the road ahead is not short due to the myriads of texts that make up the Buddhist corpus. Thus, this review proposes collaboration among various intellectual arenas for the purpose of advancing Buddhist studies, not only for sourcing but also for other aspects, such as scriptural analysis (Cheng 2014).

### Collaborative research

Most of the selected works are single-authored. In contrast, co-authored works (n=14; 6%) are extremely limited in number, with 14 co-authored pieces out of 222 in Chinese, and none in English. This may represent a challenge for data man-

agement (O’Leary 2005, 44), especially for sourcing and analysing materials. One researcher is unlikely to become familiar with a sufficient number of different research topics related to the *Sūtra* pertaining to art, philosophy, linguistics, textual criticism or translation. However, a team of researchers from different disciplines will be beneficial to a higher level of investigation; for example, a group of art specialists with expertise in paintings, sculptures and Dunhuang studies, or a company of linguistic experts for philological and semantic studies, or a team of psychologists and cultural studies scholars for gender issue discussions in the *Sūtra*, and so on. Researchers coming from varying disciplines within scientific, medical, social science, art, and humanities faculties may develop a state-of-art modality. Therefore, conducting an integrative review of theoretical studies requires multi-disciplinary collaboration through the efforts of ‘more specialised integrators’ (Mulrow 1998, 2) in order to enrich these all-inclusive achievements.

Collaborative research dismantles the boundaries of knowledge fields or geographical territories, and offers the potential for innovative research interests, such as exploration of physiological reactions during compassion imagery (Rockliff et al. 2008), which is a growing area in the West. Whether studies on Buddhist scriptures can adopt collaborative research methodology has not yet been extensively debated. The current integrative review investigated previous research on a Buddhist text, the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra*, and utilised statistical means for data analysis, resulting in the experience that following structural procedures to study religious subjects may reduce conflicts between science and humanism (Zhu 1994, 9).

### Limitations

The present integrative review has covered substantial English and Chinese publications of the *Sūtra*, but could not prevent involuntary ‘language bias’ (Egger, Dickerson, and Smith 2001, 60), against which it could have attained a fuller picture corresponding to the research objectives had it been possible to include Japanese publications. Japanese scholars, such as Hamada Chijun (濱田智純), Hashimoto Hokei (橋本芳契), Kannon Hiroshi (菅野博史), Ōshika Jisshū (大鹿實秋; 1988), Takasaki (高崎正芳; 1986), and Yuyama (湯山明; 1969), have significantly contributed to the study of the *Sūtra*. Considerable overarching Japanese literature has been published, particularly after the discovery there of a Sanskrit original of the *Sūtra* (McRae 2004, 64; Nattier 2000, 235). Important works have been continuously published at the Taisho University (大正大學) in Japan (Wan 2009, 25). The debut of a comparative study among Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese editions collated by the Taisho University in 1999, and *A Corrigenda to the Tibetan Text of Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa and a Tibetan-Sanskrit Index to the Same Text* (維摩詰經藏文本勘誤及藏梵語索引) written by Ōshika Jisshū (大鹿實秋) (1975) (Li 2009, 68; Huang 2011, 3), have made advanced contributions to relevant research. Notwithstanding, these were not reviewed here, except for those materials that have been translated, such as Kamata (1986, 1994). Again, collaborative research is one of the solutions to the problem of language barriers.

## Contributions

In spite of the limitations discussed previously, which can be made up for through collaborative research, the current integrative review has conducted extensive search of accessible English and Chinese publications related to the *Sūtra*, and has classified them into eight categories. A comprehensive database, extending traditional bibliography lists, would have the ability to support researchers who study the *Sūtra* and need to acquire Chinese and English data. This review not only provides scholars such as Lu (2013) and Zhang (2012) with overall references, academic information, and sources which can help them in further exploration and provide a steady growth in the study of the *Sūtra* but, more prominently, this overview also acknowledges the significance of the *Sūtra* in Mahāyāna and Chinese Buddhism through these prolific publications.

Additionally, this study has demonstrated how an integrative review, as an alternative research method for investigating a topical study on a specific subject, can be applied to Buddhist studies. This demonstration, which displays a structured and systematic review method, may open the door to a non-conventional research method for Buddhist scholars who are preparing to extend their research approaches from disparate perspectives, as part of the modernisation of Buddhist studies.

## Further research directions

In addition to the research gaps addressed previously, by providing an analysis of Chinese and English studies on the *Sūtra* over the past 111 years (1900–2011), this integrative review suggests a research method and/or directions for Buddhist studies that depart from traditional approaches, such as textual criticism and philosophical discussion. Researchers have numerous opportunities to conduct integrative reviews on many other Buddhist canons, scriptures, and texts by duplicating a similar protocol to that shown in this review.

This integrative review also reveals the feasibility of co-research from various academic disciplines regarding any given research topic. An inter-disciplinary project, such as a study on the socio-economic significance of the Buddhist translation consortium in the Tang Dynasty would involve linguists, sociologists, economists, Buddhist studies scholars and textual critics. It is also possible, for instance, to organise a research team with skills in multiple languages so that the team can compare studies on the *Sūtra* among different classical and modern languages. Research involving heterogeneous professionals not only enriches research outcomes, but also strengthens studies on the *Sūtra* that may help promote Chinese Buddhism to non-Chinese academic organisations.

In addition, plenty of Western scholars have been committed to the integration of Buddhist philosophies into mental health; for instance, de Silva (1993), Epstein (2005), Goleman (1981), Kabat-Zinn (2011), Mikulas (1978), and Wallace and Shapiro (2006). Their findings indicate that many researchers study the *Sūtra* based on philosophical premises (n=77; 30%), reflecting the need to use these teachings in everyday life (although this is not the only option). Many also explore its applicability in today's contemporary world as an 'implicit religion' (Bailey 1997, 7), such as life-and-death studies (Tsao 2005; You and Chen 2008) and life



cultivation (Tsai 2013), which returns to the root purposes of Buddhism as regarding cessation of distress, and the pursuit of happiness (Sharpe and Bryant 1999).

### Conclusion

The current integrative review has conducted a search of available literature related to the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* in 25 English (n=19), Chinese (n=5) and bilingual (n=1) databases, covering publications dating from 1900 to 2011, totalling 111 years, together with supplementary channels, such as Internet searches, bookshop visits, and professional consultations, reaching a total of 256 selected English and Chinese publications that were in accordance with the eligibility criteria.

The reviewed literature was classified into eight groups pertaining to art (n=36; 14%), book reviews (n=11; 4%), linguistic studies (n=11; 4%), literature (n=24; 10%), philosophy (n=77; 30%), translation (n=56; 22%), textual criticism (n=22; 9%), and assorted themes (n=19; 7%). Within the 34 chosen English publications, there are five (15%) translations which have been rendered by different renowned scholars since the 1970s, and book reviews (n=7; 21%) on these renditions. This may imply a definite research interest in the *Sūtra* in the West. Findings from this bibliography also reported the major thematic studies, characteristics, and research trends among Chinese scholars in different regions.

The researchers in this integrative review experienced both challenges and opportunities related to technology, in studying a research topic with such a long history as the *Sūtra*. To tackle these challenges, the acceleration of the digitalisation of Buddhist information is suggested in order to offer richer academic resources, and collaborative research is also proposed so that various experts can contribute to specific research projects, through which more studies concerning Chinese Buddhism can be processed differently and be geared to the international arena.

Furthermore, the findings and analyses here reveal that the practical application of the *Sūtra*'s teachings remains a major scholarly concern, implying a quest to incorporate its ideas into daily life, such as in spacial aesthetics, spirituality, mental health interventions, education, and life style.

Notably, there was high period of productivity for both English and Chinese works (including mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) in the 2000s. Research into the causes of this sudden rise is insufficient, and the dynamics between research interests and social phenomena may become a significant research topic. Summing up the results, this integrative review, combining the efforts of such considerable English and Chinese research results, acknowledges the significance of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* in Mahāyāna and Chinese Buddhism. Equally as important, in addition to traditional doctrinal, philological, and phenomenological analyses, this review illustrates an alternative research method by which to extend the horizons of Buddhist studies.

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Listed below in this order: Chinese translations of the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (p.28); Studies concerning the *Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa Sūtra* (p.28) Buddhist studies (p.45); Buddhist counselling (p.47); Integrative review, systematic review and meta-analysis (p.48); Other subjects (p.51).

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