

# Traditional Chinese Translation Discourses in Translation of Buddhist Texts—A Case Study on the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*

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The Chinese translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*—*Dafoding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanhang shoulengyan jing* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經—is a unique classical work that articulates a specific Buddhist worldview, its recondite principles, and ways of practice. Unsurprisingly, it has attracted the attention of almost every school of Buddhism. The first full English translation of the *sūtra* was published by the Buddhist Text Translation Society (BTTS) in the 1970s—a decade when a number of newly established institutions embarked on the project of translating Buddhist texts into English for the first time. By contrast, China has been translating Buddhist scriptures for more than 1,000 years, which has given rise to a variety of translation discourses. Therefore, it makes sense to utilize these discourses when analyzing the recent translation of Buddhist texts into English. From the perspective of the three traditional Chinese translation discourses—Yan Fu's three principles of fidelity, fluency, and elegance; Sengrui's matching term and meaning; and Xuanzang's five guidelines for not translating a term, this paper discusses translation issues by comparing the Chinese and English versions of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. This analysis reveals that the traditional Chinese translation discourses are valuable resources that should be respected in the contemporary translation of Buddhist texts into English.

**Keywords:** *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, fidelity, fluency, and elegance, matching phrase and meaning, five guidelines for not translating a term

## Introduction

Over recent decades, a number of Buddhist scriptures have been translated into English and subsequently disseminated throughout the Western world. One such text is the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*—*Dafoding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanhang shoulengyan jing* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經—an important classical work that has had an influence on almost every school of Buddhism. The Buddhist Text Translation Society (BTTS) translated this text in full in the 1970s.

The support of translation and/or theoretical discourses—and especially traditional Chinese discourses, given China's long, eminent history of translating Buddhist scriptures—is essential for thorough analysis of the translation of religious *sūtras* into any language. Therefore, the principal aim of this paper is to assess the

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quality of the BTTS's English translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, and more broadly all of the contemporary English translations of Buddhist scriptures, from the perspective of traditional Chinese translation discourses. A secondary aim is to highlight the instructional role that these discourses may play in the English translation of Buddhist *sūtras* and encourage their use in the future.

This paper utilizes three traditional Chinese translation discourses—matching term and meaning, as proposed by Sengrui; Xuanzang's five guidelines for not translating certain terms; and the three principles of fidelity, fluency, and elegance, as proposed by Yan Fu—to discuss and analyze the BTTS's English translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss every aspect of the English version of this *sūtra* (for example, the translation of terms, sentences, mantras, verses, and narratives), so I focus exclusively on a handful of the translation of terms, sentences, and a small part of mantra.

Comparative analysis is employed throughout the paper, with detailed comparisons made between the source text (ST) and the target text (TT). In addition, since any discussion of the translation of a religious text requires some explication of Buddhist doctrine, and given the esoteric nature of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* itself, Buddhist dictionaries and previous studies of the *sūtra* have been consulted and cited to complement my comparative analysis of the Chinese and English texts and discussion of the translation issues.

The general structure of the paper is as follows: Firstly, I introduce the Chinese *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and provide some useful information about the BTTS and its English translation of the text; secondly, I trace the origins of the three traditional Chinese translation discourses and outline my reasons for choosing them as the theoretical perspective of the paper; thirdly, I analyze the translation cases in the English version of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* from the perspective of these three discourses; and finally, I summarize my findings and make some suggestions regarding the study of English translations of Buddhist texts in the future.

## **The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* and Its English Translation**

### **The *Śūraṅgama Sūtra***

The Chinese version of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* (*Sūtra of the Indestructible*)—the full title of which is *Dafoding rulai miyin xiuzheng liaoyi zhu pusa wanhang shoulengyan jing* 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經—comprises about 62,000 Chinese characters in 10 volumes. It contains some of the principal beliefs of the Chan school, the Pure Land school, the Vinaya school, and the Esoteric school as well as practical guidelines on the attainment of enlightenment, explicit instructions on practice and how to identify demonic states, and the *Śūraṅgama mantra* (the longest mantra in the Buddhist scriptures). In addition, it elucidates a Buddhist worldview based on doctrines, such as causality in the past, present, and future, the cycle of death and rebirth in six destinies, origination due to pre-existing causes and conditions, the emptiness of nature, and so on. In short, it is unique in its integration of a specific Buddhist worldview, recondite principles, and practical guidelines in a single text.

In the history of Buddhism in China, the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is renowned as “Buddhism's compass, a valuable summary of unconditioned and conditioned existence, the essence of the Buddhist Dharma, and a representation of the authenticity of the attainment of enlightenment”.<sup>1</sup> Because it crosses the boundaries of several Chinese Buddhist schools and presents an extremely detailed and painstaking analysis of religious

<sup>1</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Zhixu 智旭 (Ed.). *Yue zang zhi jing* 閱藏知津 (Reading Tripiṭaka and Knowing the Compendium). J32, No. B271, p. 25, b14-16: 此宗教司南，性相總要，一代法門之精髓，成佛作祖之正印也。

thought and practice, like unwinding silken thread from a cocoon, it occupies a unique position in the huge canon of Buddhist scripture. In addition, it displays a wide variety of literary styles, ranging from argument and narrative to poetry and mantra, and presents strict logical analyses alongside inductive demonstrations. At times, the arcane idiom makes interpretation difficult, but this means the text is ideal subject-matter for an exploration of the validity of recent translations of Buddhist scriptures into English.

### **Brief Introduction to the BTTS and its English Translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra***

The Buddhist Text Translation Society is a subsidiary of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA), which was established in the United States in 1959. In the early 1970s, the DRBA founded the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas as its headquarters in California, making this “the first large Buddhist monastic community in the United States”.<sup>2</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1973, it set up the BTTS, which has since translated over 200 texts—including Buddhist scriptures and a number of books related to Buddhism—from Chinese into English and other languages.

Though translations of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* were published in 1871, 1893, 1938, and 1966, all of these were incomplete. Therefore, the only complete English translation is the BTTS version, first published in 1977, then revised in second and third editions in 2000 and 2009, respectively. This paper focuses primarily on the third edition, although a number of examples are drawn from the second edition to aid analysis of specific points.<sup>3</sup> The source text for the BTTS’s English translation is a Chinese document that was translated from the original Sanskrit text in the early eighth century by the Monk Pramiti 般刺密帝, and polished by Fang Rong 房融, who served as chancellor of the Tang Dynasty between 704 and 705.

It should be noted that the original Sanskrit text has long since vanished. Therefore, this paper focuses exclusively on the English translation of the Tang-era Chinese text.

## **Traditional Chinese Translation Discourses**

### **Reasons for Employing Traditional Chinese Translation Discourses**

The list of translation theories—whether old or new, ancient or modern—is extensive, in part due to the rapid development of translation studies since the middle of the 20th century. Western translation theories have made a significant and valuable contribution to this list, and many are well supported by scholars. For instance, the dynamic equivalence theory, developed by Eugene A. Nida (1914-2011), Jacques Derrida’s (1930-2004) concept of deconstruction in translation, and Walter Benjamin’s (1892-1940) work on the dynamic mutual interpretation of source texts and target texts, which is based the “pure language” hypothesis, have all enriched the field of translation studies. However, while all of these theories help to explain certain translation phenomena, they did not originate within, and hence cannot be specifically applied to, the translation of Buddhist texts. Therefore, when studying the English translation of Buddhist scriptures, the application of a modern Western translation discourse is akin to scratching an itchy foot from outside the boot. As the vast majority of the source texts for English translations of Buddhist scriptures were written in Chinese, and because Buddhist theology has a strong Eastern flavor, it seems much more appropriate to employ traditional Chinese translation discourses instead.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.cttbusa.org/cttb/history&background.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> The author acquired the third edition of the English translation of this *sūtra* on 12 June, 2015 from <http://www.bttsonline.org/english-sutras/the-surangama-sutra/?mobile=0>.

Here, it should also be mentioned that most of the translation of Buddhist scriptures into English and other European languages that has taken place over the last 40 to 50 years has occurred in Western countries. We may have expected some new discourses to aid the translation of Buddhist texts during this period, but unfortunately, as yet, none has emerged. Moreover, there has been little appreciation and even less application of traditional Chinese translation discourses in the West. That said that a few European language translators are finally starting to adhere to the translation protocols and guidelines that their Chinese predecessors followed over 1,000 years ago.

Against this background, I believe it is not only reasonable but necessary to highlight the enduring value and relevance of Chinese traditional translation discourses in the study of contemporary English translations of Buddhist scriptures.

### Summaries of the Discourses

**Yan Fu's three principles—*Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya*.** After gaining a wealth of experience and assimilating the ideas of many of his ancient Chinese predecessors on the subject of Buddhist translation, Yan Fu 嚴復 (1853-1921) proposed a condensed translation standard—fidelity (*Xin* 信), fluency (*Da* 達), and elegance (*Ya* 雅)—that has since become a widely accepted guideline for generations of translators. These three principles first appeared in Zhi Qian 支謙's (fl. c. 222-252) "Faju jing xu" 法句經序 (Preface to [the Translation of] the *Dharmapada*), but Yan Fu was the first person to arrange them in this particular order, which he chose to highlight their relative importance when translating any text (Chen, 2000, pp. 106-107).

Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) reported that Yan Fu gathered as much information as he could on the conventions that scholars followed when translating Buddhist scriptures in the Han, Jin, Northern, and Southern dynasties (Lu, 2011, p. 223). Meanwhile, in the preface to his translation of T. H. Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (1898), Yan himself wrote,

Translation involves three difficult requirements to fulfill: fidelity (*Xin*), fluency (*Da*) and elegance (*Ya*). Fidelity is difficult enough to attain but a translation that is faithful but not fluent is no translation at all. Therefore, the importance of fluency must be acknowledged.<sup>4</sup> (Yan, 2010, p. 5)

Later in the same preface, he wrote:

The *Book of Changes* says: "Fidelity is the basis of writing." Confucius said: "Writing should be comprehensible." He also said, "Where language has no refinement, its effects will not extend far." These three dicta set the right course for literature and are the guidelines for translation.<sup>5</sup> (Chan, 2004, pp. 69-70)

I believe that Yan's three principles of *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya* may be applied and developed in order to assess the quality of English translations of Buddhist scriptures. *Xin* may be construed as the body, *Da* as the function of that body, and *Ya* as its appearance. If it is impossible to attend to all three simultaneously, precedence should be given to *Xin* and *Da*. Moreover, the connotation and denotation of these two principles should be extended when translating scriptures. For a profound religion, such as Buddhism, it is crucial to maintain *Xin* not only in terms of individual words and phrases, but also in terms of doctrine. A translated text will promote

<sup>4</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Yan Fu (2010), p. 5: 譯事三難，信，達，雅。求其信已大難矣，顧信矣不達，雖譯猶不譯也，則達尚焉。

<sup>5</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Yan Fu (2010), p. 5: 《易》曰：修辭立誠。子曰：辭達而已。又曰：言之無文，行之不遠。三者乃文章正軌，亦即為譯事楷模。The English translation is taken from Chan, *Twentieth-century Chinese Translation Theory: Modes, Issues and Debates*, 2004, pp. 69-70.

faith among the readers only if it is faithful to the original doctrine. Therefore, it is easy to see that the principle of *Xin* places considerable pressure on translators to comprehend Buddhist doctrine. Adhering to it involves assimilating the correct interpretation of the source text, which in turn leads to correct production and transmission of the target text. Meanwhile, the connotations of *da* should also be extended when translating Buddhist texts. Given that the ultimate purpose of Buddhist scriptures is to help sentient beings overcome illusion and achieve enlightenment, *Da* should help those scriptures “reach”<sup>6</sup> believers, direct them to the right path, and enable them to appreciate the essence of the religion by practicing Buddhist doctrine correctly. Finally, the language of the translated text may be refined to achieve *ya*, as long as this is not to the detriment of either *Xin* or *Da*.

To summarize, I believe that all translators of Buddhist scriptures should try to adhere to the three principles of *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya*, and that all critics who judge their work should base their assessments on the same principles.

**Sengrui’s principle of matching term with meaning.** Sengrui 僧叡 (351-417), a disciple of Dao’an 道安 (312-385) who later helped Kumārajīva (344-413) translate Buddhist scriptures, addressed the issue of terms and meaning, and proposed the technique of scrutinizing the meaning and establishing the connotations of the source text and the target text during translation. When translating alongside Kumārajīva, he asserted, “The differences in the classics are due to differences in customs and traditions [between the two lands], while inadequate understanding of the meaning of the concepts embodied in the terms is due to imprudence”.<sup>7</sup> He also insisted,

If language is not commensurate with meaning, then feelings cannot be expressed; if feelings cannot be expressed, we cannot rely on words to express our thoughts; if words and meanings do not match, how can different languages express the same meaning?<sup>8</sup>

It may be inferred that Sengrui believed that different means could be used to achieve the same goal, that is, different languages could express the same meaning, so Buddhist doctrine could be accurately transmitted to every being on earth, regardless of the language they spoke, to help them achieve enlightenment. This correlates with the principles of *Xin* and *Da*. When translating Buddhist scriptures, either in ancient times or today, it has always been imperative to ensure that each term or phrase is commensurate with the original meaning.

Here, it should be pointed out that Sengrui’s comments were unconnected with *geyi* 格義, which is often rendered as “matching concepts” or “matching meanings”. In his paper “What is *geyi*, after all?”, Victor H. Mair (2012) cited references both within and outside the Buddhist canon to prove that “matching concepts/meanings” is an incorrect rendering of *geyi*, which was in fact an ephemeral method for *explaining*, rather than translating, lists of ideas and concepts for several hundred years following the arrival of Buddhism in China, however, the rendering of *geyi* as “matching concepts” or “matching meanings” continued into the

<sup>6</sup> The most common English translation of the Chinese character 達 is “to reach” or “to arrive”.

<sup>7</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Sengrui 僧叡. “Dapin jing xu” 大品經序 (Preface to [the Translation of] the Larger Division of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*). In *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripiṭaka) ed. by Sengyou 僧祐, T55, No. 2145, p. 53a14-15: 典摸乖於殊制。名實喪於不謹。

<sup>8</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Sengrui 僧叡. “Dazhi shi lun xu” 大智釋論序 (Preface to the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra*). In *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripiṭaka), ed. by Sengyou 僧祐, T55, No. 2145, p. 75b2-4: 苟言不相喻則情無由比。不比之情則不可以託悟懷於文表。不喻之言亦何得委殊塗於一致。

twentieth century due to modern historians' misinterpretation of the term. Moreover, use of the *geyi* method was not restricted to the explication of Buddhist texts: It has been suggested that members of the literati used it to redefine Confucian orthodoxy after it was abandoned by Buddhist Ābhidharmikas prior the empire's reunification under the Sui Dynasty (Dessein, 2016, p. 291). Some outstanding monks, including Sengrui, actually criticized the use of *geyi*. He asserted that, as the breeze of wisdom had blown to the east and Buddhist doctrine had been widely disseminated throughout China, while there were different interpretations of Buddhism, *geyi* was unhelpful because it obscured the original meaning of the texts.<sup>9</sup> As a result, it could prevent people from grasping the true essence of the Dharma. Sengrui's criticism of *geyi* and its failure to transmit the true meaning of the ST to the Chinese TT allowed him to highlight the importance of establishing the original meaning of every text, and then matching meaning with the terms used to express that meaning.

In this paper, matching meaning with term encompasses correct interpretation of the words, phrases, and grammar of medieval Chinese translators, the huge conceptual system of Buddhism, and the absolute truth of Buddhist doctrine. All of this must be taken into account, which makes the accurate translation of Buddhist scriptures into English no easy task.

**Xuanzang's five guidelines for not translating certain terms.** The eminent scholar Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664) set down five guidelines for not translating but rather transliterating certain terms during the translation of Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures: First, "if a term partakes of [is associated with] the occult" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157), such as *tuoluoni* 陀羅尼, a transliteration of *dhāraṇī*; second, "if a term has multiple meanings" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157), such as *bojiafan* 薄伽梵, which has six meanings in Sanskrit, "sovereignty, glory, austerity, name, fortune, and honour" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157); third, "if the object represented by a term does not exist in this part of the world" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157), such as *yanfu shu* 閻浮樹, which was unknown in China in the Tang era; fourth, "if a previous rendering of a term has become established and accepted" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157), such as *anou puti* 阿耨菩提, which was translatable, but the transliteration had been in common usage since the time of Kāśyapa-Mataṅga 迦葉摩騰 (Jiayemoteng); and fifth, "if a term elicits positive associations" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157), such as *bore* 般若, which "carries a sense of authority and has weight" (Cheung, 2010, p. 157) whereas the meaning becomes lighter and shallower when the term is translated into *zhihui* 智慧 (wisdom).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Xuanzang cautions that no attempt should be made to translate any of these terms.

These five guidelines still exert a strong (although not absolute) influence on the translation of Buddhist scriptures today. For instance, translators of Buddhist texts into English still wrestle with the problem of whether to use transliterations of certain Sanskrit or Indic words or the closest English equivalents of the original terms. Each of these decisions demands careful consideration of the pros and cons of using translation

<sup>9</sup> For the original Chinese text, see Sengrui 僧叡. "Pimoluojieti jing yishu xu" 毗摩羅詰經義疏序 (Preface to a Commentary on the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra). In *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (A Collection of Records on the Emanation of the Chinese Tripiṭaka), ed. by Sengyou 僧祐, p. 59, a1-3: 自慧風東扇法言流詠已來。雖曰講肆格義迂而乖本六家偏而不即。

<sup>10</sup> In Cheung's English translation of Xuanzang's text, the key Chinese term for each guideline is given alongside a Pinyin transliteration, as shown in the main text. However, in Xuanzang's time, they were most likely pronounced in an Early Middle Chinese (EMC) manner, as Edwin G. Pulleyblank explains in his *Lexicon of Reconstructed Pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese, Late Middle Chinese, and Early Mandarin*. Hence, in order to reconstruct their pronunciation at that time, for each of these key words—i.e., 陀羅尼, 薄伽梵, 閻浮樹, 阿耨菩提, and 般若—I provide both the corresponding Sanskrit word and its EMC pronunciation here: 陀羅尼, Sanskrit *dhāraṇī*, EMC *dalanri*; 薄伽梵, Sanskrit *bhagavān*, EMC *bakɣiabuan<sup>h</sup>*; 閻浮樹, Sanskrit *jambū*, EMC *jiambuwd*; 阿耨菩提, abbreviated from Sanskrit *anuttara-samyak-saṃbodhi*, EMC *ʔanəw<sup>h</sup>bɔdɕj*; 般若, Sanskrit *prajñā*, EMC *paɲia<sup>ʔ</sup>*.

or transliteration, and it can be extremely difficult to find the right balance. For instance, if a translator favors semantic translation<sup>11</sup> over transliteration even when a word or phrase falls within one of Xuanzang's five guidelines, the end result might be significant deviation from true Buddhist doctrine. On the other hand, if a translator insists on using transliteration when an acceptable term is available in the target language, the end result may be faithful to the original text but not expressive, or even tantamount to not translating the text at all. Hence, Xuanzang's five guidelines are entirely consistent with the principle of *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya*.

Finally, it should be emphasized that every decision to translate or transliterate a particular word or phrase should be maintained throughout the whole text, unless there are very strong reasons to do otherwise. This is because switching from translation to transliteration and back again inevitably causes confusion among readers.

**Application of the three discourses.** These three theoretical discourses may appear to be discrete; however, we should maintain a “dialectical” view on their application. History shows that traditional Chinese translation discourses developed as a result of a splendid cultural enterprise in the ancient East. The translation of Buddhist scriptures continued in China for about a millennium, which allowed plenty of time for a wide variety of theories, guidelines, and protocols to emerge. Therefore, the theoretical discourses that feature in this paper are but three of dozens. Given their equal originality and the dialectical relationship among them, this paper uses them both individually and collectively. Under certain circumstances, two or even all three are employed to address a single translation issue, whereas elsewhere just one is sufficient to cover the subject. Adherence to the general standard of *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya* forms the basis of the analysis in almost all of the examples, with the principle of matching term and meaning and/or the five guidelines for not translating introduced when necessary.

### Case Study on the English Translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*

The Buddhist scriptures contain terms, sentences, and even genres that are endowed with meanings that are specific to Buddhism. This section discusses the BTTS's translation of terms, sentences, and one specific genre—dhāraṇī, in the English version of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*. Where there exists a deep meaning in Buddhist doctrine, brief explanations and definitions are provided.

#### The Translation of *liu du* 六度

Two sentences that contain the term “*liu du*” 六度 in both ST and TT are first given below:

ST: 如來藏本妙圓心……即檀那、即屍羅、即毗梨耶、即羼提、即禪那、即般刺若、即波羅蜜多。  
(Jing & Shao, 2002, p. 154)

TT: It is all of the six perfections—giving, following precepts, vigor, patience, mindfulness, and wisdom.  
(BTTS, 2009)

The above underlined terms in the ST sentence are all translated semantically, however, since all the terms meet the requirement of the five guidelines for not-translating a term, this translation method does not seem appropriate, and transliteration should be the best choice.

In the ST, the underlined seven terms are translated semantically in the TT. The first six terms refer to the six kinds of practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism that compose *liu du* 六度, *pāramitā* in Sanskrit, which refers to “a virtue or quality developed and practiced by a bodhisattva on the path to becoming a buddha” (Buswell &

<sup>11</sup> In this paper, this term is used to mean paraphrase or sense-for-sense translation; it is unconnected with Peter Newmark's notion of “semantic and communicative translation” in *Approach to Translation*.

Donald, 2014, p. 624). In *liu du* 六度, *tannuo* 檀那 means giving alms, *shiluo* 尸羅 means obeying Buddhist precepts, *piliye* 毗梨耶 means vigor, effort, or diligence, *chanti* 羼提 means patience or forbearance, *channuo* 禪那 means practicing meditation or concentration, and *bolare* 般刺若 means practicing what the Buddha calls wisdom (Chen, 1996, pp. 87-88).

The word *Channuo* 禪那, whose corresponding Sanskrit word is *dhyāna*, refer both to “the practice that leads to full absorption and to the state of full absorption itself”, and involves “the power to control the mind and does not, in itself, entail any enduring insight into the nature of reality” (Buswell & Donald, 2014, p. 256). *Dhyāna* is classified into two types, *rūpāvacaradhyāna* and *ārūpāvacaradhyāna*, each of which is subdivided into four stages or degree of absorption, giving a total of eight stages. Because of the deep meanings and the effect of eliciting positive associations, since the mastery of the two types can result in rebirth as a divinity (Buswell & Donald, 2014, p. 257), transliterating the word *channuo* 禪那 seems to be a better way. When Xuan Zang explicates the fifth guideline for not-translating a term—if a term elicits positive associations, it is not-translated, he even directly stated that *bore* 般若 “carries a sense of authority and has weight” but if it is translated as *zhahui* 智慧, its meaning becomes “lighter and shallower” (Cheung, 2010, p. 157). The same goes for the translation issue of the word *channuo* 禪那. Besides, the term “禪”, a name adopted by an important school of East Asian Buddhism, is just the Chinese phonetic transcription of the Sanskrit term *dhyāna* (Buswell & Donald, 2014, p. 257), which make more sense if *channuo* 禪那 is transliterated.

When Sanskrit Buddhist scriptures were translated into Chinese, terms related to *liudu* 六度 were either transliterated or translated semantically. In the Chinese *Śūraṅgama Sūtra*, these terms are all transliterated, which can be counted as the most precise and the strictest way of following five guidelines for not-translating a term, that is, for the terms concerning practice methods and content, no matter they are monosemous or polysemous, as long as they can elicit positive associations, they are transliterated. In some scriptures, the first four terms among the seven terms in this example are semantically translated as *bushi* 佈施, *chijie* 持戒, *jingjin* 精進, *rengru* 忍辱, but the last three terms are transliterated as *chanjuo* 禪那, *bolare* 般刺若 (or *bore* 般若), and *boluomiduo* 波羅蜜多. The reason for this may be that the meanings of the former four terms are all monosemous and closely related to practical activities. The concreteness of the meaning is conducive to the reduction of difficulty of semantic translation, resulting in the consequence of the principle of *Da*. However, meanings of the last three terms are more complicated and abstract, which increases the difficulty of semantic translation. Therefore, though in some scriptures, transliteration is not adopted for the translation of all the seven terms, it has always been kept in the translation of the last three terms.

Here, I am inclined to think that the terms concerning *liudu* 六度 discussed in the example should be wholly (not partially) transliterated instead of semantically translated, since this is a more accurate way that follows the five guidelines and embodies the consistency of the translation method through the text. Though semantic translation of some of the terms seems to more explicitly convey the meaning of the terms, the result can lead to inaccurate translation, which goes against the principle of *Xin*, or the matching of terms and meanings. From this case, we can see that even in the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, the methods of translation of terms were sometimes varied and not perfect, let alone the English translation of Buddhist scriptures in contemporary times, which is still in its fledging stage. However, this is just a historical process, and the Chinese traditional translation discourses, thought ancient they seem, still hold their place in contemporary times.



### The English Translation of Sentences

Due to the limited space of this paper, only one sentence is analyzed in this section, however, the similar way of analysis can be applied for other sentences.

ST: 當知如是精覺妙明非因非緣，亦非自然非不自然，無非不非無是非是，離一切相即一切法。(T19, No. 945, p. 112, c27-29)<sup>12</sup>

TT: Therefore, you should understand that the existence of the essential, wondrously understanding, enlightened visual awareness is not dependent for its existence on causes and conditions, nor does it exist in and of itself. Nevertheless, one cannot say that it does not exist in and of itself, nor can one say that it is independent of causes and conditions. Statements that account for its existence cannot be negated, yet one cannot say that they cannot be negated. Such statements cannot be affirmed, yet one cannot say that they cannot be affirmed. What is entirely beyond all defining attributes—that is the entirety of Dharma (BTTS, 2009).

ST: 即一切法離一切相，唯即與離二無所著，名如相迴向。(T19, No. 945, p. 142, c2-3)

TT: While experiencing oneness with all phenomena, they are nevertheless apart from the attributes of phenomena. Further, they are without attachment either to oneness with phenomena or to separateness from them. This stage is called “Dedicating the Suchness of Reality within All Phenomena” (BTTS, 2009).

In the first Chinese sentence, the underlined part appears again in the second one, only with reversed order. However, they are translated totally different in the TTs. In the contexts of these two sentences, by examining the meaning of key words in the STs and the doctrine behind, the English translation of the sentences seems to go against both the principle of matching “terms” and meanings and the principles of *Xin* and *Da*.

The context of the first Chinese sentence is that in the dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda about the nature of visual awareness, the Buddha points out dialectically that the essence of visual awareness (which means the ability of our sight to perceive things) is not the perceived objects per se, however, its existence is not isolated from or independent of those objects. The example states that the source of the essence of visual awareness, i.e., “精覺妙明” in the ST, is in fact the reality of true thusness, which is of metaphysics and without form and attributes. The reality of true thusness is not located in the chain of causes and effects, a chain that rules the realm of phenomena (or the conditioned world), nor does it exist separately from the realm of phenomena. The meaning of the sentence is profound and closely related to the utmost truth.

The context of the second Chinese sentence is that the Buddha gives instruction on practicing “Dedicating the Suchness of Reality within All Phenomena” when he states the 57 stages of the Bodhisattva’s path. The sentence “即一切法，離一切相” in the example is an elucidation by the Buddha about the reality of the true thusness, and it is just the sentence “離一切相，即一切法” in the first example with a reversed form. The Buddha here further points out that Bodhisattvas practicing “Dedicating the Suchness of Reality within All Phenomena” should be without attachment either to oneness with phenomena or to separateness from them.

Under the context above, the first example of the ST should be interpreted as follows:

Therefore, you should understand that the existence of the essential, wondrously understanding, enlightened reality is not dependent for its existence on causes and conditions, nor does it exist in and of itself. Nevertheless, one cannot say that it does not exist in and of itself, nor can one say that it is independent of causes and conditions. Statements that account for its existence cannot be negated, yet one cannot say that they

<sup>12</sup> Dafoding rulai xiuzheng liaoyi zhupusa wanhang shoulengyan jing 大佛頂如來密因修證了義諸菩薩萬行首楞嚴經 (Śūraṅgama Sūtra). Translated by Pramiti 般刺密帝, T19, No. 945.

cannot be negated. Such statements cannot be affirmed, yet one cannot say that they cannot be affirmed. It transcends (or sublates) all attributes, but is in oneness with all the dharma (the realm of phenomena).

The second example of the ST should be interpreted as follows:

(Bodhisattvas) should realize that the reality of the true thusness is in oneness with all the dharma (the realm of phenomena), but transcends (sublates) all attributes. Meanwhile, they should not be obsessed with the state of oneness and the state of transcendence. This stage is called “Dedicating the Suchness of Reality within All Phenomena”.

By comparing the ST and the TT in the two examples above, it can be found that the character “即” in the first example is translated as a verb “is”, but in the second example, it is translated as “experiencing oneness with”. In the dictionary of classical Chinese language, the second interpretation of the character “即” among several meanings is “approaching” or “being close to”, and the sixth interpretation is “to be” or “being” (Shi, 1985, p. 204). What the character “即” means in the above examples is controversial. The controversy is closely related to the writing structure and the meanings of characters of the classical Chinese language. I deem that the meaning of “即” in both STs should be “approaching” or “being close to”. Since in the second ST, the expression “唯即與離” immediately follows the sentence when it appears in a reversed form, the meaning of “即” is unlikely to be interpreted as an affirmative verb “is”. The two characters “離” and “即” illuminates a dialectical relation between the reality of true thusness and the phenomena, that the reality of true thusness transcends phenomena, but meanwhile, it is not isolated from phenomena. This relation is a pivot connecting metaphysics and physics. By comparing the TTs of the two examples, we can still find there is a difference between the translation of the same character “離”. In the first example, “離” is interpreted as “beyond”, but is translated as “apart from” in the second example. The character “離” is a word in constant use in Buddhist scriptures. It seems inappropriate to simply interpret it as “apart from”. In light of the transcendental interpretation of true thusness and the illumination of the dialectical relation between true thusness and phenomena in the above examples, it is more accurate to interpret “離” as “transcendental”. In the TT, the translation of “beyond” is accurate, while the translation of “apart from” goes against the principle of being fidelity, i.e., *xin*, to doctrines. By the way, the character “法” is translated as “Dharma” in the first example, but is translated as “phenomena” in the second one. Since the word *fa* 法 is a very complicated word and has multiple meanings, it should be transliterated as “dharma” according to the five guidelines by Xuanzang.

In the first example of the ST is that, the subject in the sentence “離一切相，即一切法”，which is the reality of true thusness, is left out. This subject is translated in the first TT as “what”, hiding the subject of the sentences in both the ST and the TT leaves readers more space for thought and appreciation, veiling the reality of true thusness with more wondrousness. On this aspect, the translation of the sentence is praiseworthy from the perspective of the principle of *Ya*.

### The Translation of Mantra

The mantra or dhāraṇī in the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* is the longest one among all the Buddhist scriptures. Because of the specialty of its status and effect, I treat mantra as a unique genre, and choose a small part of it for the analysis of its English translation by BTTS. In order for the comparison of the two texts, the numbering is in line with those of the TT.

ST: 1. 南無薩怛他; 2. 蘇伽多耶; 3. 阿羅訶帝; 4. 三藐三菩陀寫; 5. 薩怛他;<sup>13</sup> 6. 佛陀俱胝瑟尼釤; 7. 南無薩婆; 8. 勃陀勃地; 9. 薩跢鞞弊. (CBETA, T19, No. 945, p. 139a14-16)

TT: 1. na mo sa dan tuo; 2. su qie duo ye; 3. e la he di; 4. san miao san pu tuo xie; 5. na mo sa dan tuo; 6. fo tuo ju zhi shai ni shan; 7. na mo sa po; 8. bo tuo bo di; 9. sa duo pi bi. (BTTS, 2009)

I deem the transliteration of the *Śūraṅgama Mantra* by applying Chinese pinyin system here is the most appropriate method of translation. It not only goes with the five guidelines for not-translating a term, but with the principles of *Xin* and *Da*.

One of the five guidelines for not-translating a term is that if the term partakes of the occult. Xuanzang directly gives the example of *tuoluoni* 陀羅尼 to explain this guideline. The main reasons for not semantically translating mantra since ancient times are: First, the ghosts and spirits stated in the mantra cannot be understood by the real world; second, similar to the command in an army, the mantra is of no necessity to be told to the outsiders; third, for the devils in different beings' minds, the effect of the mantra is different; forth, the inherent meaning of mantra is the occult among disciples of Buddha, which no one can understand except the saint person (Jing & Shao, 2002, p. 277). The third edition of the English translation of *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* by BTTS adopts the Chinese pinyin system to transliterate the *Śūraṅgama Mantra*.

There is no controversy about the transliteration of the mantra according to the five guidelines for not-translating a term. However, it is of necessity to discuss which system should be adopted for transliteration. In the second edition of the English translation of this sutra by BTTS, translators choose another unique method for the transliteration of the mantra. The TT (second edition) that corresponds to the above ST is given below.

TT (second edition): 1. na mwo sa dan two; 2. su chye dwo ye; 3. e la he di; 4. san myau san pu two sye; 5. na mwo sa dan two; 6. fwo two jyu jr shai ni shan; 7. na mwo sa pe; 8. bwo two bwo di; 9. sa dwo pi bi.<sup>14</sup>

Why would the translators of the third edition abandon the transliteration method of the mantra adopted in the second edition? By comparing the TTs of the second and third edition, we find that the pronunciation marking system of the second edition contains some familiar English words, such as “two”. It is easy for English readers to pronounce it as /tu:/ at the first glance; however, the right pronunciation of it should be that of “tuo” according to the standard Chinese pinyin system, which is the constant pronunciation of the character “他” in Buddhist mantra. If English readers want to correctly read the pronunciation of “two”, they have to be instructed by someone. Also, the consonant group like “jr” rarely can be seen in English. It is unlikely that English readers can pronounce it as the pronunciation of “zhi” under the pinyin system. Faced with the problems above, without an instructor's face-to-face direction, English readers can hardly read the mantra correctly.

The starting point of the transliteration of mantra is to help readers correctly read it, so as to gain merits and virtues, such as having achievements and profits, subsiding or eliminating misfortunes or disasters, subduing demons and evil mantra, and gaining auspices (Jing & Shao, 2002, p. 277). In other words, the incorrect pronunciation of the mantra directly leads to incompleteness of merits and virtues, and is not favorable for the dissemination of Buddhist scriptures into the west. Since the original Sanskrit *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* no longer exists, closely following the pronunciation of the Chinese characters of the mantra as much as possible is the only way to meet the requirement of principles of *Xin* and *Da*. In this regard, transliteration of

<sup>13</sup> Compared with the TT, two characters “南無” are missing here.

<sup>14</sup> This section of mantra comes from the website: <http://www.cttbusa.org/shurangama/shurangama25.asp>, accessed July 16, 2019.

the mantra according to the standard Chinese pinyin system has an irreplaceable advantage. Since the pronunciation marking method in the TT of the second edition belongs neither to the pinyin system, nor to the English system of phonetic symbols, it is easy for readers to astray from the pronunciation of the ST, and is hard to be accepted by readers. All the above considerations lead to the reasonable decision of the transliteration of the mantra by adopting Chinese pinyin system in the TT of the third edition.

Regarding the transliteration of the Buddhist mantra, besides the instruction given by the five guidelines for not-translating a term, the principles of *Xin* and *Da* can give the right instruction on the translation. Because of the occult explanation of the efficacy of mantra in Buddhism, faithful and accurate pronunciation in translation is an embodiment of fidelity to the religious doctrines and purposes. Meanwhile, the Chinese pinyin system is well accepted more and more internationally, on which aspect, it would play a good role in the dissemination of Buddhist texts. Considering the large amount of mantra in the Buddhist scriptures, the standard Chinese pinyin system can be widely adopted as the best way in the transliteration of Chinese Buddhist mantra, thereby unifying the translation method of the mantra.

### Conclusion

The preceding discussion of the translation and transliteration of terms, sentences, and mantra in the English version of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* indicates that the primary concern of the translator must always be transmission of the whole meaning of the ST into the TT. It reveals that Xuanzang's five guidelines for when to transliterate rather than translate are still valid for the translation of Buddhist texts. Moreover, when the text fails to meet one of those five guidelines, Sengrui's concept of matching term with meaning and Yan Fu's three principles of *Xin*, *Da*, and *Ya* can guide the translator to the most appropriate translation.

There is no doubt that the BTTS's translation of the *Śūraṅgama Sūtra* into English was a worthwhile enterprise, and it has subsequently made a valuable contribution to the dissemination of Buddhism in the West. For that reason alone, the quality of the translators' work merits careful consideration. Unfortunately, the limits of space have meant that this paper has had to focus exclusively on the translation or transliteration of only a handful cases. Therefore, further research into the translators' treatment of *gāthās* or verses, narrative and other aspects in this *sūtra* would be most welcome.

Moreover, I was able to discuss only three of the many theoretical discourses that were formulated during the translation of Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese. The others certainly merit consideration, too. For centuries, all of these traditional discourses were neglected and dismissed as "outdated". However, as this paper has shown, they demand serious reappraisal as their careful application would certainly help to ensure more accurate translation of Chinese Buddhist scriptures in the future.

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