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Past and present in translation collaborative practices and cooperation

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Collaborative Translation of Buddhist Texts: Ancient Chinese Assemblies and Contemporary Organizations

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Abstract

The translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, which began in the Eastern Han Dynasty and continued until the twelfth century, may be considered as the first large-scale translation project in China's history. Initially carried out by individual foreign monks, the translations gradually became more organized and collaborative, as is well recorded in Chinese historical documents. Thereafter, the translation of Chinese Buddhist scriptures into English began at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and new Buddhist text translation organizations – including the Buddhist Text Translation Society, established by Xuan Hua, a monk of Chinese origin, and the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai in Japan – were subsequently founded. Using the translation of the Lotus sūtra as a case study, this paper surveys the working practices of Buddhist text translation assemblies in ancient China, then compares their operations with those of their modern counterparts. By exploring the similarities and differences between the two eras, it demonstrates that the ancient translation teams' methods can still be of benefit to today's translators, but also acknowledges that new forms of collaborative translation are sure to emerge.

Keywords: collaborative Buddhist text translation, ancient Chinese translation assemblies, Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai, Buddhist Text Translation Society, comparative study.

1. Introduction

The translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese has a long history, beginning in the mid-second century CE and continuing steadily over the course of the next millennium. Initially, individual monks from the Western Regions [西

域][1] traveled to China and translated Buddhist sūtras written in the Hu language [胡語][2] into Chinese. As these sūtras gradually gained popularity among the Chinese literati, local Chinese scholars started to undertake their own translations, with some of them, such as Zhu Shixing [朱士行] (203-282), Faxian [法顯] (ca. 337-ca. 422 CE), and Xuanzang [玄奘] (600/602-664 CE), even making perilous journeys in search of more original texts. However, these Chinese translators may have faced some significant problems – such as the language barrier, limited knowledge of Buddhist doctrine, and so on – which led them to seek collaborations with foreign translators in the hope of producing better-quality translations. These collaborations reached their peak after the imperial court sponsored the establishment of a series of large translation assemblies [譯場] with dozens or even hundreds of members, usually under the supervision of one eminent monk. However, many of the participants in these projects were neither translators nor monastics, with the administrative positions often filled by high-ranking, secular imperial officials. These organizations eventually produced thousands of Chinese versions of Buddhist texts that were passed down from generation to generation and ultimately had a profound impact on the cultures of East Asia.

More recently, attention has turned to translating the Chinese Buddhist canon into English and other Western languages. Although this process began in the nineteenth century, it has gained considerable momentum since the Second World War (Pan 2021: 55). The work has been undertaken by both individual translators and translation teams who employ a wide variety of different techniques. Two of today's most renowned translation teams – the Buddhist Text Translation Society and the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) – share the same goal: to translate and then disseminate a large number of Chinese Buddhist texts throughout the English-speaking world. Of particular relevance to this study, both have produced their own English-language versions of the *Miaofa lianhua jing* [妙法蓮華經] (Skt. *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka sūtra*; now

[1] In Chinese historical documents, this term refers to the area west of the Yumen Gate [玉門關], including what is modern China's Xinjiang Province, parts of Central Asia, and beyond.

[2] In Chinese historical documents, this collective term refers to the languages of Central Asia. The main source languages of Chinese versions of Buddhist sūtras varied considerably across the generations. For a discussion of this complex linguistic situation, see Cheung 2010: 6-7.

usually known as the *Lotus sūtra*), an important sūtra that the eminent monk Kumarājīva [鳩摩羅什] and his team translated into Chinese at the start of the fifth century CE.

Many scholars (e.g., Yuan 1982; Wang Wenyan 1984; Shao 2004; Liu 2007) have studied the translation of Buddhist texts in ancient China; however, few have explored the similarities and differences between these early endeavors and the much more recent translation of the same texts into English. This article first traces the methodologies of a number of ancient Chinese translation assemblies, with an emphasis on the team led by Kumarājīva, then compares their working practices with those of the Buddhist Text Translation Society and the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai. The ultimate aim is to highlight techniques that may prove useful in future efforts to translate the whole of the extensive Chinese Buddhist canon into English.

2. The translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese in ancient times

2.1. From individual work to collaboration

The translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese – which comprised the first large-scale, long-term translation project in Chinese history – began during the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE). Most of the scriptures were translated by translation assemblies, although some individual foreign or Chinese translators would occasionally undertake such work alone either on account of a perceived pressing need to translate a particular Buddhist text or because of their inability to find competent assistants (see Wang Wenyan 1984: 129-130). For example, one of the earliest Buddhist text translators – An Shigao [安世高], a prince of the ancient country of Parthia [安息國] who renounced the throne to devote himself to Buddhism – was solely responsible for the first Chinese version of a Buddhist sūtra, the *Sūtra on the fifty schemes of the perfection of wisdom*[3] [明度五十校計經] (Cheung 2010: 53), which he translated after traveling to the Chinese capital Luoyang around 148 CE and mastering the local language. More than a century later, another monk, Dharmarakṣa [竺法護] from Tianzhu [天竺] (India), transported a large number of Buddhist texts from the Western Regions to China,

[3] The English title of this sūtra is taken from Cheung (2010: 53).

translating them into the language of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-317 CE) while still en route from Dunhuang to Chang'an (see Huijiao: 326). Individual translators were also active outside of China. For example, while visiting the Western Regions, the renowned Chinese monk Xuanzang translated the *Ten-volume extensive treatise in one hundred verses* [廣百論十卷] during a recitation of the sūtra (see Wang Gu: 618). Similarly, Xuanzang's near-contemporary Yijing [義淨] (635-713 CE) translated the *Five-volume sarvāstivāda vinaya gātha* [根本說一切有部毘奈耶頌五卷] within the confines of the Nālandā Temple in northeastern India, then corrected the text following his return to China (see Zhisheng: 568). However, these diligent individuals were responsible for no more than a tiny proportion of the Chinese Buddhist canon, as the vast majority of the translation work was undertaken by large, state-sponsored teams of monastics and secular officials (Wang Wenyan 1984: 130).

The collaborative translation of Buddhist texts began in the early stages of the transmission of Buddhism to China. For example, after arriving in Luoyang in 167 CE, Lokakṣema [支婁迦讖], a native of the Kingdom of Yuezhi [月支] (the Kushan Empire), not only translated Buddhist texts unaided but also collaborated with a monk from Tianzhu named Zhu Shuofo [竺朔佛] (also known as Zhu Foshuo [竺佛朔]; fl. second century CE) and the Chinese scholars Meng Fu [孟福] and Zhang Lian [張蓮]. Later, when Buddhism became widely accepted in China, and especially after it gained imperial patronage, these modest translation teams were superseded by large translation assemblies. The scale and precise nature of these groups evolved over time. For instance, the earliest assemblies included masters who studied and lectured on Buddhist doctrine in addition to the translation teams themselves, as epitomized by Kumarājīva's vast organizations, which boasted hundreds or possibly even thousands of members in a wide variety of roles. By contrast, later assemblies were more streamlined as the majority of their participants – who tended to be fluent in a number of languages and/or well versed in Buddhist teaching – were engaged in the main task of translation itself (see Wang Wenyan 1984: 148-153). Such assemblies were institutionalized by the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE) (Wang Wenyan 1984: 152), with a number of

eminent monks, such as Xuanzang and Yijing, leading typical examples over subsequent generations.[4]

2.2 Collaborative translation in Kumarājīva's assemblies

Chinese versions of the Buddhist sūtras have had a profound impact on East Asia for more than a millennium, as illustrated by the *Miaofa lianhua jing* [妙法蓮華經], which Kumarājīva translated in 406 CE. This sūtra is still widely chanted in Buddhist temples throughout China, Japan, and other East Asian countries to this day. One of Kumarājīva's disciples, Hui Guan [慧觀], describes the text's translation in the preface to his work *Doctrinal essentials of the lotus sūtra* [法華宗要]:

> A foreign Buddhist monk Kumarājīva […] in the summer of the eighth year of the Hongshi reign of the King of the Later Qin State, gathered over two thousand learned monks from all quarters together in the grand monastery of Chang'an, and studied this sūtra in detail with them to bring forth a new translation. While holding the Hu-language version of this sūtra in hand, he translated it orally into Chinese.
> [有外國法師鳩摩羅什[…]秦弘始八年夏。於長安大寺集四方義學沙門二千餘人。更出斯經。與眾詳究。什自手執胡經口譯秦語。] (Sengyou: 57)

The "grand monastery of Chang'an" here refers to the Xiaoyao Garden [逍遙園], where several assemblies led by Kumarājīva engaged in a series of translation projects. The large number of participants and Kumarājīva's oral translation of the *Lotus sūtra* indicate that the translation process typically involved recitations of the text to an audience. This seems to be confirmed in the preface to another Chinese translation of a Buddhist text, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* [摩訶般若波羅蜜經], which Kumarājīva and his team had completed three years earlier. The master's foremost disciple Seng Rui [僧睿] writes:

[4] For details of Xuanzang's translation assembly, see Huili: 253-254; for details of Yijing's translation assembly, see Zanning: 710-711.

> On the twenty-third day of the fourth month in the fifth year of the Hongshi era [403 CE], this sūtra was translated in the Xiaoyao Garden in the north of the capital. The dharma master [Kumarājīva] held the Hu-language version in his hand, declaimed the Chinese translation, explained the differences between the two languages, and analyzed the textual meaning. The King of the Later Qin State studied the earlier translations of this sūtra in person. The merits and faults were examined. The reasonings were consulted. The fundamental essence was brought to light. Kumarājīva, together with over five hundred learned monastic acquaintances, including Hui Gong […] and others, studied the meaning of the sūtra, considered the appropriateness of words used, and then wrote them down. The translation was completed on the fifteenth day of the twelfth month of the same year, and was proofread and examined until the twenty-third day of the fourth month of the next year. The text was more or less final; however, when examined against its explanatory text, *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śastra*, it was found that many points were still not thoroughly considered. Therefore, the *śastra* was also translated while this sūtra was checked against it. When the translation of the *śastra* was completed, the translation of the sūtra was finalized.
> [以弘始五年歲在癸卯四月二十三日。於京城之北逍遙園中出此經。法師手執胡本口宣秦言。兩釋異音交辯文旨。秦王躬攬舊經。驗其得失。諮其通途。坦其宗致。與諸宿舊義業沙門釋慧恭[…]等五百餘人。詳其義旨。審其文中。然後書之。以其年十二月十五日出盡。校正檢括。明年四月二十三日乃訖。文雖粗定。以釋論撿之猶多不盡。是以隨出其論隨而正之。釋論既訖。爾乃文定。] (Sengyou: 53)

As Seng Rui explains in this passage, Kumarājīva's team not only translated the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā sūtra* but then tested it against their own translation of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā śastra*, an explanatory treatise written by the eminent Indian monk Nāgārjuna between the mid-second and the mid-third century CE. However, it should not be assumed that this was a routine part of the translation process, as far from every sūtra had an accompanying explanatory treatise, let alone a Chinese version of such a text. Moreover, it is doubtful that the King was an active participant in all of the Xiaoyao Garden's translation projects. Nevertheless, it seems certain that Kumarājīva and other learned monks, including his disciples, were similarly meticulous in their translation of the *Lotus sūtra*, even though they were unable to examine the end result with reference to a *śastra*.

Translation assemblies' division of labor was probably still quite fluid in Kumarājīva's time. However, the various positions had become firmly established by the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 CE).[5] The eminent monk Zanning [讚寧] (919-1001 CE) provides a useful summary of the ten most common posts and their corresponding responsibilities in his *Biographies of eminent monks composed in the Song Dynasty* [宋高僧傳]:[6]

1. the Presiding Translator [譯主];
2. the Recorder [筆受], sometimes known as the Syntax-Reverser [綴文], established during the Western Jin Dynasty [265-316 CE];
3. the Interpreter [度語] or Translator [譯語], also known as the Word-Transmitter [傳語];
4. the Examiner-of-the-*Fan*-Sources [證梵本], with subdivisions including the Examiner-of-the-*Fan*-Meaning [證梵義] and the Examiner-of-Religious-Meaning [證禪義];
5. the Stylist [潤文];
6. the Examiner-of-Meaning[-of-the-Chinese-Translation] [證義];
7. the Gatha-Reciter [梵唄], established during the Yongtai era of the Tang Dynasty [in 765 CE];
8. the Collation-Officer [校勘];
9. the Superintendent [監護大使]; and
10. the Examiner-of-Transliteration [of Sanskrit Words] [正字]. (Zanning: 724-725)

The position of Presiding Translator – effectively the leader of the translation assembly – was usually occupied by a renowned monk who was well versed in Buddhist doctrine, such as Kumarājīva during the translation of the *Lotus sūtra*. Moreover, Hui Guan's record of this project suggests that Kumarājīva, along with other members of the assembly, also fulfilled the roles of Interpreter, Examiner-of-the-*Fan*-Meaning, and Examiner-of-Meaning [-of-the- Chinese-Translation]. In addition, he may have been the Examiner-of-Transliteration [of Sanskrit Words], given that the sūtra's mantras had to be transliterated rather than translated. It is highly likely that two or more of Kumarājīva's foremost disciples occupied the positions of

[5] For the study of Buddhist translations in the Song Dynasty, see, for example, Sen 2002 and Orzech 2006.

[6] English translations of the posts are taken from Cheung 2010: 189-190. For details of the tasks associated with each post, see Zanning: 724-725.

Recorder and Stylist, as the assembly's translations are renowned for their elegant style,[7] while responsibility for collation of the translated sūtra was probably shared by the whole team. The role of Superintendent was usually awarded to a high-ranking secular official, but the King himself may well have fulfilled this function in the case of the *Lotus sūtra*. Finally, it is not known if Kumarājīva's translation assembly engaged in the ritual recitation of gathas (Buddhist hymns) prior to undertaking their translation duties.

3. The translation of Chinese Buddhist texts into English

The translation of Chinese Buddhist texts into English dates back to a partial translation of the *Extended annotations to śrāmaṇera disciplines overview* [沙彌律儀要略增注] within Charles F. Neumann's *The catechism of the shamans, or, the laws and regulations of the priesthood of Buddha in China*, published in 1831. More recently, several scholars have studied the history of the translation of Chinese Buddhist texts into English (e.g. Li 2009; Ban 2014; Zhu 2019; Pan 2021; Xu and Liu 2023), while a number of websites provide lists of all existing translations for reference. For instance, the website established by Marcus Bingenheimer in 2001, which comprises a comprehensive bibliography of translations of Chinese Buddhist texts into several Western languages, including English, demonstrates a significant increase in translation activity since the 1970s (see Bingenheimer).

There have been more than ten English versions of the *Miaofa lianhua jing* [妙法蓮華經] – one of the texts that Kumarājīva's assembly translated into Chinese – since the first (partial) translation by Samuel Beal (1825-1889) was published in his 1871 work *A catena of Buddhist scriptures from the Chinese*. Of these, one was produced by the Buddhist Text Translation Society (hereafter BTTS) and another by the Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (hereafter BDK).

[7] Kumarājīva was reportedly unhappy with one sentence in the Chinese version of the *Lotus Sūtra* – "Men can see devas, and devas can see men" [人见天, 天见人]) – as he felt it was rather unrefined, even though the meaning was clear. Seng Rui suggested an alternative – "Men see devas and meet them across the divide between heaven and earth" [人天交接, 兩得相見] – which Kumarājīva praised for its elegance. See Huijiao: 364.

4. Collaborative translation in the BTTS and comparison with the work of ancient Chinese translation assemblies

In 1970, a Chinese monk named Xuan Hua [宣化] (1918-1995) founded the BTTS as a subsidiary of the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association, which itself had been established in the United States some eleven years earlier. The new society immediately set about translating Buddhist scriptures into English, publishing its first text in 1972. It claims to "emulate" the ancient translation assemblies, in part by refusing to publish any translation until it has passed scrutiny by four committees – primary translation, revision, editing, and certification (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.) – each of which is headed by an esteemed monk or nun. Most of the BTTS's sūtra translations are accompanied by commentaries based on Xuan Hua's lectures, including its English-language version of the *Miaofa lianhua jing*. A team of translators began working on the latter text shortly before the society was established and – in an echo of earliest stages of the transmission of Buddhism to China – had to overcome both language barriers and difficulties in understanding complex Buddhist concepts in order to finish the project. In marked contrast to every other complete English translation of the sūtra, each of which is contained within a single volume, the BTTS's version was finally published in no fewer than sixteen volumes between 1977 and 1999.

After arriving in the United States in 1962, Xuan Hua's first task was to lecture on Buddhist sūtras. In November 1968, he started to present daily lectures on the *Lotus sūtra* at the Buddhist Lecture Hall in San Francisco, with interpreters providing simultaneous translations. It was two years before he delivered the final lecture in the series. In order to reach a wide audience, and mindful that his translators were unfamiliar with arcane Buddhist terminology, Xuan Hua always endeavored to keep his explanations of the text as simple as possible. Nevertheless, in the early days of the lecture series, a number of translators found the task so difficult that they resigned, leaving Xuan Hua provide the translations himself, despite his limited knowledge of English. Only three people attended the first lecture, but the numbers gradually grew, with some of the attendees eventually becoming Xuan Hua's students. From 1968 to 1969, to improve these new disciples' Chinese, Xuan Hua launched nightly lessons in which he used Chinese sūtras as textbooks. Later, he set up language classes in which the students learned Sanskrit, French, German, Spanish, Japanese, and English. In addition to helping his students improve to their language

skills, he established the aforementioned four committees and drafted eight guidelines for the translation of Buddhist sūtras. Finally, in 1993, the BTTS's translation and publication process was formally defined under Xuan Hua's guidance (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: *City of ten thousand Buddhas* for further details).

The BTTS's translation of the *Lotus sūtra* into English is entitled *The wonderful dharma lotus flower sutra*. All of the members of the translation team, and their respective roles, are listed on the final pages of the first volume. A total of thirty-six people contributed to the project, with some of them serving on more than one of the four committees (see Table 1), and there were twenty-two discrete steps in the translation process. First, recordings of Xuan Hua's lectures on the sūtra were transcribed in Chinese, with the transcription then checked, proofread, and polished. Next the Chinese transcription was translated into English, with the resulting text then checked against the Chinese original, proofread, and polished. Then the English translation was transferred to a computer, laid out, proofread, and corrected. Finally, a sample text was produced, artwork was added, and the book was printed (see Table 2).

Positions	**Number of Members**	**Composition**
Chairperson	1	1 monk
Primary Translation Committee	14	10 monks and nuns plus 4 laymen and laywomen
Revision Committee	17	7 monks and nuns, 8 laymen and laywomen, and 2 university professors
Editorial Committee	20	11 monks and nuns, 8 laymen and laywomen, and 1 university professor
Certification Board	11	6 monks and nuns plus 5 laymen and laywomen
Others (Dharma Postman)	1	1 layman

Table 1: Roles in the BTTS's translation of the *Lotus sūtra* (Source: Buddhist Text Translation Society 1977)

1) Transfer (the Master's lectures) from reel-to-reel tapes to cassette tapes	2) Transcription (of the Master's Chinese lectures from cassette tapes)
3) Chinese data entry	4) Checking Chinese transcription
5) Proofreading the Chinese (several times)	6) Polishing the Chinese (several times)
7) Certifying the Chinese	8) Translation into English
9) Bilingual review	10) Polishing English translation (several times)
11) Certifying the English	12) Bilingual review (several times)
13) Bilingual certification	14) Initial layout on computer
15) Proofreading (several times)	16) Corrections on computer
17) Second layout	18) Proofreading (several times)
19) Corrections on computer	20) Sample (silver-print)
21) Artwork/graphics	22) Printing

Table 2: Steps in the BTTS's translation of the *Lotus sūtra* (Source: Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: "About Us"

Table 3 compares the tasks undertaken by Xuan Hua and his associates during the BTTS's translation of the *Lotus sūtra* with Zanning's description of the division of labor in a typical translation assembly in ancient China.

Posts in an Ancient Translation Assembly	**Corresponding Translation Steps / Responsibilities in the BTTS**
1) Presiding Translator	Xuan Hua explaining and interpreting sūtras
2) Recorder	Recording Chinese in Steps 1, 2, and 3 Recording English in Steps 8, 14, and 17
3) Interpreter or Translator	Step 8
4) Examiner-of-the-*Fan*-Sources	Examining and proofreading the Chinese sources in Steps 4 and 5 Certifying the Chinese in Step 7 Certifying the Chinese and English in Step 13
5) Stylist	Polishing the Chinese in Step 6 Polishing the English in Step 10
6) Examiner-of-Meaning	Certifying the English in Step 11 Certifying the Chinese and English in Step 13 Proofreading and corrections in Steps 15, 16, 18, and 19

7) Gatha-Reciter	No equivalent
8) Collation-Officer	Bilingual review in Steps 9 and 12
9) Superintendent	No equivalent
10) Examiner-of-Transliteration [of Sanskrit Words]	No equivalent

Table 3: Comparison between the BTTS and an Ancient Translation Assembly

Several significant differences are immediately apparent:

1. The ancient translation was from Sanskrit or Hu-language to Chinese, while the BTTS translated a Chinese text into English.
2. The Recorder's main function in an ancient assembly was to write down the target text – that is, the Chinese translation. Similarly, the Stylist and the Examiner-of-Meaning respectively polished and checked the Chinese translation. By contrast, those occupying equivalent positions in the BTTS recorded, polished, and examined *both* the source text (the Chinese transcription of Xuan Hua's lecture series) *and* the target text (the English translation).
3. A number of Buddhist nuns and laywomen participated in the BTTS project, whereas ancient translation assemblies very rarely recruited women.
4. Large ancient translation assemblies led by eminent monks invariably enjoyed generous patronage from the imperial court, and the post of the Superintendent was usually occupied by a high-ranking government official. Of course, no such support was available to the BTTS, and the post of Superintendent was filled by a monk or a nun.
5. According to Zanning, some ancient translation assembly had Gatha-Reciters who sang these Buddhist hymns before work began, perhaps to calm the translators' minds and prepare them for the day ahead. By contrast, members of the BTTS's translation team would begin each day with a quiet, personal recitation of "Homage to the eternally dwelling Buddhas of the ten directions. Homage to the eternally dwelling Dharma of the ten directions. Homage to the eternally dwelling Sangha of the ten directions" (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: *City of ten thousand Buddhas*) These "three jewels" of Buddhism – the Buddha, the dharma, and the sangha – are revered by all the religion's devotees.

6. The final three steps in the BTTS's production of the English-language version of the *Lotus sūtra* concern the design and printing of the proofread and corrected text. There is no equivalent in Zanning's account of the division of labor in ancient translation assemblies, as the tenth and final role he describes relates to checking the transliteration of Sanskrit terms.
7. In the BTTS, Xuan Hua insisted that each section of the text should be read to everyone present three times once the translation had been completed. Then everyone was invited to give their opinions until they all agreed that the translation could not be improved (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: *City of ten thousand Buddhas*). There is no evidence of a similar procedure in ancient translation assemblies.

Notwithstanding these differences, the BTTS still resembles ancient translation assemblies in several respects. First and foremost, the leader of the organization, Xuan Hua, was a modern counterpart of the Presiding Translators of ancient China, not least because he was far from fluent in the language of his new environment and therefore had to collaborate closely with locals to fulfill his translation projects. Indeed, this "modern Chinese missionary" (Buddhist Text Translation Society 1977: ix) brought the Chinese translation tradition to a new continent by gathering together a group of converts and establishing what was effectively a latter-day translation assembly. Furthermore, the BTTS's procedures and regulations are entirely in keeping with the Chinese translation tradition. For example, the final pages of its translation of the *Lotus sūtra* enumerate the eight guidelines that the translators were expected to follow. An updated version of these rules (which acknowledges the work done by female as well as male translators) was subsequently uploaded onto the society's website:

> 1. A translator must free him/herself from motives of personal fame and reputation.
> 2. A translator must cultivate a sincere and reverent attitude that is free from arrogance and conceit.
> 3. A translator must refrain from aggrandizing his/her work and denigrating that of others.
> 4. A translator must not establish him/herself as the standard of correctness and suppress the work of others with his/her fault-finding.

5. A translator must take the Buddha-mind as his/her own mind.
6. A translator must use the wisdom of Dharma-Selecting Vision to determine true principles.
7. A translator must request Virtuous Elders of the ten directions to certify his/her translations.
8. A translator must endeavor to propagate the teachings by printing Sūtras, Shastra texts, Vinaya texts, and other Buddhist texts when the translations are certified as being correct. (Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.)

It is surely no coincidence that the BTTS's translators are obliged to follow these eight rules. Yancong (557-610 CE), an eminent monk during the Sui Dynasty (581-618 CE) who was fluent in Sanskrit and participated in several major translation assemblies, wrote a well-known treatise entitled *Bian zheng lun* [辯正論] (*On the right way*) that included eight prerequisites for Buddhist translators:

> First, a translator must sincerely love the dharma, devote [him/herself] to benefiting others, and not mind spending much time. Second, as a person who is going to step on the place of enlightenment, a translator should firmly obey the rules of abstinence and not be contaminated by the bad habits of ridiculing others. Third, a translator must be well read in Buddhist Tripiṭaka, understand both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism, and not be intimidated by difficulties. Fourth, a translator must study the Chinese classics and Chinese history and be well versed in letters to avoid clumsiness in [his/her] translations. Fifth, a translator must have a broad, fair, and compassionate mind instead of a stubborn one. Sixth, a translator must devote [him/herself] to practicing, be indifferent to fame and wealth, and have no desire to show off. Seventh, a translator must study Sanskrit to sustain the right translations and should not lag behind in the Sanskrit knowledge. Eighth, a translator must be well acquainted with the lexicon of ancient Chinese writings such as *Cangjie pian* 倉頡篇 and *Erya* 爾雅 and Chinese scripts such as seal script and official script, and should not be ignorant of the Chinese knowledge.
> [誠心愛法志願益人不憚久時其備一也。將踐覺場先牢戒足不染譏惡。其備二也。筌曉三藏義貫兩乘不苦闇滯。其備三也。旁涉墳史工綴典詞不過魯拙。其備四也。襟抱平恕器量虛融不好專執。其備五也。沈於道術澹於名利不欲高衒。其備六

> 也。要識梵言乃閑正譯不墜彼學。其備七也。薄閱蒼雅。粗諳篆隸。不昧此文。其備八也。]. (Daoxuan: 439)

Therefore, both the BTTS and Yancong stress the importance of maintaining righteous attitudes and virtues, although the latter places more emphasis on studying Buddhist doctrine and becoming fluent in source and target language alike. These discrepancies are understandable, as the recently established BTTS probably would have found it very difficult to recruit translators who fulfilled all of Yancong's rather stringent requirements. Instead, to ensure that its work is of a consistently high quality, every member of the team reads through each translation three times and makes corrections as necessary.

Further evidence of the profound influence of the Chinese translation tradition on the work of the BTTS comes in the form of the three principles to which the society adheres – faithfulness, elegance, and clarity, with faithfulness paramount (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: *City of ten thousand Buddhas*). There are echoes here of three principles proposed by the renowned Chinese scholar Yan Fu [嚴復] (1853-1921) – fidelity [信], expressiveness [達], and elegance [雅][8] – which gained wide popularity in China during the twentieth century.

In summary, although the BTTS does not slavishly follow all of the working practices of the ancient translation assemblies, as an organization led by a Chinese monk, it undoubtedly follows the long-established Chinese Buddhist translation tradition. In this respect, it stands in marked contrast to another modern translation organization – the BDK.

5. Collaborative translation in the BDK and comparison with the work of the BTTS

The Japanese industrialist and Buddhist missionary Yehan Numata (1897-1994) established the BDK in 1965, but it was another seventeen years before the organization set up the Editorial Committee of the English Tripiṭaka Translation Project to oversee the publication of English-language

[8] These three words were first grouped together in Zhi Qian's [支謙] (fl. c. 222-252) "Preface to [the translation of] the [Buddhist sūtra] *Dharmapada*" [法句經序], although in a different sequence. Yan Fu reordered them to highlight what he perceived as fidelity's primacy (Chen 2000: 106-107).

versions of the Buddhist sūtras. Its ultimate aim is to translate all 3360 works in the 100-volume *Taishō* canon into English. In 1991, a Publication Committee was established at the Numata Center for Translation and Research in Berkeley, California, to coordinate this mammoth task. Thus far, the Editorial Committee has selected 139 works for translation, 69 of which have been completed, while the remaining 70 are currently "being translated by Buddhist scholars in over ten countries throughout the world" (see Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai n.d.: "English Translation of the Buddhist Canon and Publication Project"). The BDK's English-language version of the *Lotus sūtra*, translated by Tsugunari Kubo (b. 1936) and Akira Yuyama (b. 1933), was published in 1993.

In the organization's 2019 newsletter, the chair of the Editorial Committee, Kenneth K. Tanaka, highlighted the support that the ancient translation assemblies received from emperors and governmental institutions (Tanaka 2019: 6), so he is clearly familiar with the history of Buddhist translation in East Asia. However, the BDK operates in a completely different way from its renowned predecessors. For example, in an earlier newsletter, dating from 2008, the organization enumerated sixteen guidelines for the English translation of the Chinese Buddhist canon. These elaborate the project's primary aims, source texts, rules to be followed with regard to titles, introductions, notes, glossaries, and bibliographies, translation strategies (including transliterations of mantras and proper nouns), submission requirements, expected time frames, and remuneration and crediting procedures. In addition, Guidelines 13 and 16, respectively, assert that the editorial decisions of the Editorial and Publication Committees are final, and that copyrights are held by the BDK and the Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research (Editorial Committee of the English Translation of the Chinese Tripiṭaka 2008: 5-7).

It is noteworthy that the BDK generally employs no more than two translators for each text – or each section of a large text – and that these are usually eminent Buddhist scholars, in contrast to the monastics and Buddhist laypeople who mostly comprise the translating teams at the BTTS. As a result, the BDK's translators tend to be highly knowledgeable about Buddhist doctrine and fluent in a variety of languages, including Chinese, English, Sanskrit, and others. In other words, the BDK gathers together dozens of experts in Buddhist text translation from around the world, assigns each (or pairs) of them individual tasks, then works with them towards the ultimate goal of translating the whole Chinese Buddhist canon into English.

In 2013, the chair of the Publication Committee, Charles Muller, highlighted one important aspect of the BDK's work – the application of digital tools. Understanding the urgent need for a comprehensive Chinese-English dictionary of Buddhist terminology, Muller set himself the task of developing the *Digital dictionary of Buddhism*, which by 2013 comprised some 60,000 entries, including many supplied by its users (Muller 2013: 2). This has proved to be an invaluable resource for the BDK's translators, especially when used in conjunction with the Saṃgaṇikīkṛtaṃ Taiśotripiṭakaṃ (SAT) Taishō Text database, which contains 85 complete volumes of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* [大正新脩大藏經]. Moreover, in addition to publishing print editions of all its translations, in 2014 the BDK announced that it would be making the texts available online in order to increase their availability among the target audience (Yonezawa 2014).

Generally speaking, then, the BTTS is very traditional in comparison with the more innovative BDK. In addition, the members the BDK's Editorial and Publication Committees, like the translators themselves, tend to be Buddhist scholars who are still active in universities and other areas of academic research, rather than monks, nuns, or Buddhist laypeople. Hence, the BTTS's project could be described as more "religious" than that of the BDK. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the BTTS's translators quietly pay homage to the "three jewels" of Buddhism prior to starting work each day, and the society's eight guidelines focus on the participants' integrity and principles, rather than their aptitude for translation. In other words, the BTTS's translation project may be viewed as an extension of Buddhist practice. Furthermore, because they are practicing Buddhists, the society's members should not expect any remuneration for their work (see Buddhist Text Translation Society n.d.: *City of ten thousand Buddhas*). Because of this, in the eleventh and all subsequent volumes of *The wonderful dharma lotus flower sutra*, the eight guidelines refer to the "volunteers" who have produced the text, rather than the "translators" (see Buddhist Text Translation Society 1998: vii). Clearly, the BDK, which characterizes itself as a "non-sectarian organization" (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai n.d.: "Message"), has no such expectations of its translators, and it fully remunerates and credits them for their work.

The final notable difference between the BDK and the BTTS concerns the amount of collaboration within each organization. The BTTS's more "traditional," collaborative approach means that each Buddhist text is translated in precisely the same, meticulous way, and in almost identical style. By contrast, as each BDK text is the work of just one

or possibly two translators, who may be based anywhere in the world, there is no discernible "BDK style." The BTTS emphasizes the importance of cooperation among a tight-knit team of translators who are all devoted to increasing access to Buddhist texts throughout the English-speaking world, whereas the BDK's committees assign individual translation tasks to a disparate group of individual scholars. Therefore, the BTTS may be viewed as more traditional (Chinese) and collaborative, and the BDK as more modern and non-religious.

6. Conclusion

The modern era of the transmission of Chinese Buddhist texts into the West can be traced to the first translations of such texts into English almost two centuries ago. Although this new phase contains obvious echoes of traditional Chinese Buddhist translation, today's translation projects are far more diverse than was ever the case in the thousand-year history of ancient translation assemblies. For instance, there are notable differences in terms of personnel and working practices between the BTTS and the BDK. Due, in part, to the founder's Chinese background and the strength of the participants' devotion to Buddhism, the BTTS operates in much the same way as an ancient Chinese translation assembly. In comparison, the BDK is less collaborative, less "religious," and more willing to utilize modern technology. Given these contrasting approaches to the task of translation, it is hardly surprising that their English versions of Chinese Buddhist texts – including the *Miaofa lianhua jing* – are far from uniform.[9] As a result, their respective publications probably appeal to different types of reader, but that merely aids the transmission of Buddhism to an ever-wider audience throughout the English-speaking world.

Abbreviations

L *Qianlong edition of the canon* [乾隆大藏經]. Taibei: Xinwenfeng

[9] Unfortunately, space constraints mean that this paper is unable to explore the specific textual differences between the two organizations' English-language translations of the *Lotus Sūtra*. However, as mentioned earlier, the BTTS's version includes the society's eight guidelines to highlight the translators' devotion to Buddhism.

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