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Conference

Authors and Editors in the Literary Traditions of Asian Buddhism

Guest editors
Cathy Cantwell, Jowita Kramer, Robert Mayer,
and Stefano Zacchetti

Establishing / Interpreting / Translating: Is It Just That Easy?

Jonathan A. Silk

It may well be that nowadays we feel little need to be reminded of what the scholar Louis Hay once said, namely that "Editing has always embodied the main ideological and cultural concerns of its day."[1] But it is good to keep this in mind. One of the things I would like to suggest in these brief remarks is that a spirit of democracy, or even of Libertarianism, if not anarchism, seems to pervade evolving ideas about how to deal with manuscripts, with texts or Documents, and with Works – terms I will define in a moment. And maybe because I am a Child in Time, I relish this spirit.

In the course of the following discussion, I aim to raise a number of questions about how we think about texts, and particularly Buddhist scriptural texts, *sūtra*s, on the basis of the conviction that without giving really serious attention to abstract questions concerning the nature of Buddhist literature, we cannot intelligently go about the tasks of establishing, interpreting and translating any text.

To study Buddhist texts, perhaps needless to say, we need to find them. This, it turns out upon reflection, is quite a bit more difficult than it might at first seem. One approach is to take what we get – a Chinese blockprint copy from a monastery, perhaps. If we are happy with this – whatever criteria for happiness we might have – this is at least methodologically defensible, even if we might want to disparage it as naive. There can in fact be no theoretical objection: we take as our object an *actual* object from an *actual* community. But the moment we wish to consider a unit on an even slightly more abstract level – let us say, to also consider a manuscript copy of 'the same'

[1] Hay 1987: 117, quoted in Tanselle 1991: 114.

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Volume 36/37 • 2013/2014 (2015) pp. 205–226

text, which we might deploy to confirm or correct readings in 'our' text – we begin our head-long slide into a methodological maelstrom.

Following the Israeli scholar Chaim Milikowsky, we might use the following vocabulary, although different scholars deploying somewhat different terms intend much the same distinction.[2] Milikowsky calls a "*Work*" "the author's or editor's product," which "may theoretically never have existed in any concrete mode of expression such as a manuscript or book." A "*Document*," is "a concrete mode of expressing a work." "The *text* of a *work* is the actual word-for-word presentation of the original product, and the *text* of the *document* is the word-for-word presentation found in the *manuscript*." In other words, the highest level of abstraction is that of a *Work*, an entity which is a sort of Platonic ideal. There are, however, also *Documents*, which are physically instantiated in *manuscripts* and printed copies, and of course, we must not forget, also in human *memories*.

Milikowsky, at least here, is a bit too short when he refers in a single breath to an author or an editor. Every text must have an author, in the sense that human utterances require a human to utter them. But as we have learned above all from Albert Lord's studies of Oral Literature, there are kinds of literature which for all intents and purposes in fact do *not* have an author. From a text-critical point of view – to cut short an enormously complicated and contested discussion – their Documents are not amenable to stemmatic analysis; it is not possible to establish an 'original' in the sense of an oldest common ancestor, nor an 'archetype' in the sense of a latest common ancestor to the sources – manuscripts or recitations – now available.

In discussing questions regarding authorship and locating, editing, interpreting and translating Buddhist scriptures, I limit myself here to scriptures, and mostly to Mahāyāna scriptures, but I do think that at least some of the ideas engaged below have wider applicability. It is essential to note, however, that in a number of key respects there are certainly differences, even fundamental dif-

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[2] Milikowsky 1999: 138 n. 4 ≈ 2006: 82.

ferences, with regard to authored literature. I hope that this will become clear in what follows.

Let us begin with a scenario: the Buddha wanders through various regions of the Gangetic plane, sharing his doctrine with a variety of individuals and communities. He does this, beyond a shadow of a doubt, *orally*, and he may have varied his linguistic presentation according to local dialects.[3] We can probably also accept that he had a variety of themes to which he returned again and again. Or to put this another way: it is entirely plausible, if not overwhelmingly likely, that the Buddha, preaching far and wide, presented 'the same' sermon more than once, but in different terms, and perhaps organized somewhat differently. There is absolutely nothing Post-Modern about this scenario, which should be acceptable even to the most conservative and hide-bound traditionalist. But let us think for a brief moment about the implications of this scenario. If we do not want to accept that Ānanda actually memorized every utterance of the Buddha, and that somehow these versions erased all other 'records' of the Buddha's preaching (as perhaps the traditional accounts of the First Council would imply), then it seems entirely acceptable that the utterances of the Buddha, even if remembered by (some) members of his audiences verbatim, nevertheless circulated from the very beginning in *multiform*. It would simply be impossible to take a single presentation of a teaching of the Buddha – a single instance of a sermon delivered at a unique time and place – and then consider that other teachings around the same topic, other instances of preaching on the same subject, given by the Buddha himself elsewhere, constitute mere variants or recensions of that arbitrarily privileged 'original' sermon. There is simply no way to assign such a priority to any given event – and thus, in this scenario, there is just no way to apply a stemmatic analysis to the resultant textual tradition.

Now, I cannot, of course, prove that this scenario really represents the, or a, historical reality of the production of the multiforms

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[3] We do not, and I think we never will, have evidence on this question, although it seems most likely that, depending on how far afield the Buddha may have wandered, some linguistic accomodation did take place.

which we do, in fact, encounter when we examine the diverse world of Buddhist *sūtra* literature. As Indian as it may be, as far away, that is, as it is from the walls of Troy, this world is – mutatis mutandis – the world of Albert Lord, Gregory Nagy and others, the world of Homer and the Multiform text, the world of oral poetry: in this world, there is no such beast as an Ur-text, but only *forms* of a Work, all of which have, in the absence of any possible priority of rights, equal legitimacy.

Some time ago, reading a number of Chinese works traditionally classified as 'Apocrypha,' I came to realize, as did my friend Funayama Tōru, that these texts should not in any meaningful sense be termed 'apocrypha' or 'pseud-epigrapha,' even if the latter is closer to the mark.[4] They should rather be thought of in the way we think of a Honda automobile assembled in Kentucky: it is a car assembled out of parts which come from far and wide, put together in America by a Japanese company. In what sense is it meaningful to speak of the result as a 'Japanese car'? And as I thought about this scenario, I came to the realization that it is not at all limited to *sūtra*s compiled in Chinese. Nearly all Buddhist scriptural literature from the very earliest times follows exactly the same pattern: texts are constructed out of parts, stock phrases, pericopes, elements which are drawn upon to create – with of course new elements as well – new works. It is impossible to read Buddhist scriptural literature without being struck by its often formulaic nature, although of course some genres and some texts are more formulaic and more filled with stock phrases than others. This fact of the modularity and formulaic structure of these texts was of course obvious to traditional scribes as well, and their frequent recourse to the use of abbreviations such as *peyālam* (or simply *pe*) or 乃至 *nǎizhì* illustrate their conscious awareness of the phenomenon. Moreover, we should certainly expect traditional audiences to be (and not only to have been!) able to fill in these truncated references from memory, from each person's own store of such formulaic elements filed away in mind.

This intense intertextuality of Buddhist scriptural literature is moreover crucial (and in this respect, obvious), for if scriptures really

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[4] See briefly Funayama 2013: 173 for his example with a computer.

were entirely new and sui generis works, how would we be able to recognize them as Buddhist scriptures at all? From this I came to a growing conviction that Mahāyāna scriptures and the Āgama literature alike are typologically similar to these medieval Chinese creations in terms of their modular structure. And in this light, they are similar also to Homer in certain ways. This understanding in turn raises a number of text-critical questions about this literature.

If we want to study a text, we need to find it. Or is that the way to put it? Don't we really want to read or study a *Work*? For if we are not content with the single exemplar we have at our disposal, and wish to confront it with another, even nearly identical, text, we open Pandora's box. We move, as editors, from being satisfied with a diplomatic presentation of a single source to the realm of the eclectic edition, the very notion of which has been under furious attack for some decades. For an eclectic presentation cannot but assume an archetype, in pursuit of which certain *readings* are accepted and others rejected. The only criterion upon which such a quest can be carried out is the quest for the author's intention. This, however, leads immediately to the world of what Joseph Grigley called "Textual Eugenics."[5] In this crucible is created the 'engineered superior version' of a work. In the words of the *Mahābhārata* specialist Wendy Phillips-Rodriguez, this is nothing other than "the practice of creating a text using readings from selected sources (what is generally called eclecticism) and the tendency to attribute to this engineered version a superior value than to the text contained in any of the individual manuscripts."[6] In other words, underlying the eclectic edition is the implicit assumption of a synergy, the creation of a whole greater than the sum of its parts. (This is not intended as a rejection of text critique *in toto*, of course, for it is nevertheless essential to detect errors, to determine more likely readings and so on, all of which remain well within the bounds of maintaining respect for individual sources; but stepping beyond the bounds of those individual sources is another matter.)

We certainly do not generally think of our editorial work in such Nietzschean terms, but let us explore this for a moment. What

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5 Grigley 1995, esp. chapter 2.

6 Phillips-Rodriguez 2007: 167.

is the alternative to the creation of an eclectic edition? Or let us turn this question around: What does it mean to read a *Work* when we have contact only with one of its static instantiations? We may believe in the existence of an abstract, Platonic 'Work,' and yet all we ever have is discrete historical instances; it is only these which present themselves to us, only these through which we can access the Work. So our access to the Work is always and inherently partial. The Work exists – in so far as it exists at all – only in the imagination, but – and this is crucially important – not in words, for our diverse sources do not allow us to determine a unique set of words constitutive of the Work to the exclusion of other words. So, if we imagine aiming at a Work, this Work cannot actually even have verbal form. Clearly, something is amiss.

On the other side of this wholesale textual democracy, if not anarchy, is the paternalistic or authoritarian move of positing some form of the Work ourselves, eugenically, as it were, asserting by fiat and by force of our self-appointed scholarly authority the identity between this creation of our own and the otherwise unlocalizable and unconstrainable 'Work.' And I say that this takes place through scholarly authority since if it were to take place through religious authority, it would then have another nature and value entirely, one bestowed by the tradition and its communities.

If this is all so problematic, cannot we represent the Multiformity of our sources by offering an established text along with 'variants'? No, we cannot, for as Albert Lord said emphatically, already in 1960, albeit in the context of oral songs: "we cannot correctly speak of a 'variant,' since there is no 'original' to be varied!"[7] In fact, I think the problem is worse than this. By making something a 'variant,' we hierarchize, and this process is inherently part and parcel of the eugenic program of ourselves assuming and asserting authority over the Work-cum-text. (This does not mean that there can never be any hierarchy at all: we must not forbid ourselves the notion of 'spelling,' for instance, or of metre in verse, as problematic as this can be, nor of basic, inherent plausibility. My point here is rather different.)

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[7] Lord 1960: 101.

The idea of the critical text, a synonym or euphemism for the eclectic edition, has other pernicious problems as well. It is based, as Grigley reminds us, on the metaphor of corruption: corruptions are to be identified and eliminated. The American text critic Fredson Bowers spoke of "the remorseless corrupting influence that eats away at a text during the course of its transmission,"[8] and Paul Maas chose to speak of texts as curable or incurable (*unheilbar*, § 15).[9] The critic's job then is to 'guard the purity' of the text. Guard it from whom? And here again is where we see the imperialism and colonialism of this approach, for the purity of the text is to be protected from, and the text must be healed from the damage inflicted on it by, those who throughout history have transmitted the text – that is, the very communities of copyists and scribes and readers to whom the text actually belongs.

I am well aware that I am here replacing one form of metaphor with another, and in so doing I am shifting the ground of the discussion in a particular direction, one which, no doubt, in fact conforms to the observation noted above – that every philology follows a particular ideology of its times. By rejecting the imagery of corruption and healing and adopting, even if only for rhetorical effect, a language of colonial usurpation I mean, however, to highlight the role of the editor as controller of a text, indeed its very owner.

But who *should* own a text? In the title of this paper I use the term 'establish.' If we seek to *discover* something, that something is something which is out there, which exists in the world already. To *establish* something, on the other hand, is to create anew. Thus, when we speak of *establishing* a text, even if we did not think we meant this, we intend to create something new.[10]

What is it we, as scholars of Buddhist literature, study? If we answer this question by saying not that we seek the Buddha's sublime, transcendent and ahistorical message, but that instead we, even as

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8 Bowers 1959: 8.

9 Maas 1950: 11 = 1958: 12.

10 It does not escape me, by the way, that to claim we mean this even if we do not ourselves know it is an excellent example of subversion of authorial intent!

text scholars, are primarily historians of Buddhist traditions, then instantly any pretense that origins actually matter must disappear like evaporating dew in the morning sun. There is no conceivable objective reason to value the product of one community over that of another, no reason why we should seek the earlier form of a text rather than a later one: why would the form in which Buddhists in 6th century China copied a *sūtra* translation be more valuable to us *as historians of Buddhism tout court*, than the form in which it was copied in the 16th century?

By stating the matter in this fashion, I intend to leave aside the use to which such translations may be put in comparative study with Indic and Tibetan versions, for example, for which we should quite legitimately maintain that the form of the translation as it left the translator's brush is the only form of the text of value, and therefore the later history of that translation within China is correspondingly not important *in that context*.

A rejection of historical hierarchy has profound implications for text editing, in particular with regard to questions of authors and their intent. For we have learned from the New Philologists, and indeed even from the Deconstructionists, that each scribe, each copyist, and even each reader is an author. From the non-polemical and non-apologetic perspective, what follows from this is that the product of any given author must be of a value equal to that of any other author. As again Wendy Phillips-Rodriguez says: "Every manuscript matters, even if only as an exemplar to study the vicissitudes of the transmission process. All witnesses of a tradition must have the right to pass on their readings and to stand next to each other in some sort of equality, even if their aesthetic or critical value is disparate according to the different editorial theories."[11] And Matthew Driscoll reminds us that, while not all MSs may be equally 'good,' all may be equally interesting – "for what they can tell us about the process of literary production, dissemination and reception to which they are witnesses."[12] For David Greetham:[13]

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[11] Phillips-Rodriguez 2007: 171.

[12] Driscoll 2010: 91–92.

[13] Greetham 1995: 103.

> [I]f the grail of intention and origins is not the focus of our editorial ministrations, then ironically it may well be that the lower, better-attested, even more "corrupt" witnesses (as measured in terms of the putative distance from the archetype or fair copy or in terms of the adaptability and cross-fertilized state of the text) could become more culturally significant than the single, lone exemplar with no relatives and no descendants. … Under such a socialized view of descent and survival and authority, the more a document may show signs of its adaptation to new contexts – the more it departs from a putative originary form – the lower on the *Stammbaum* it is to be placed and the more iconic it becomes of the biological condition: adapt or die.

In this regard we should recall the rule we all learned about text criticism, namely that we weigh manuscripts, not count them. But if we are interested in something like the dissemination and popularity of a text, for instance, the huge number of manuscripts of the *Aparimitāyurjñāna*, to take one example, is of the greatest interest, despite their even collective low text-critical value. In other words, so much of the rule book (or one rule book) of text criticism makes an entire set of assumptions about the nature of texts, and our relationship to texts and their communities, which upon reflection we may find that we simply cannot share. Some might be as simple as the assumption that mere variant spellings are not worthy of special treatment in an apparatus. William Boltz, on the contrary, speaking in the context of archaic Chinese materials but in a fashion that he himself generalizes, discusses the idea that even orthographic variants might have value.[14] He gives as an example an advertising sign in the Pacific Northwest which spells "Honour" in the British way, indicating that the firm advertising with that sign is Canadian or British, not American. Similarly, trivial orthographic variants such as "center/centre," which may not seem to convey information as such, may nevertheless actually impart information or meta-information of great importance. It simply depends on what questions one brings to the material. Thus, not to pay attention to graphic variation, for Boltz, is to miss the potentiality of "significant temporal or areal variation in the writing system, things that for their part might

[14] Boltz 2007: 471.

bear on the dating or provenance, and in turn the interpretation, of the manuscript in question."

This approach reminds us that we, as editors, can be said to approach texts archaeologically. In some sense this may be so, in that generally speaking we are in search of the layers within a text, which we excavate – another metaphor, of course. Both horizontal and vertical strata of a text are, or should be, of interest to us. But the analogy to archaeology is far from complete, for the material archaeologist digging in the ground is constrained by technological limitations to preserve only the lowest stratum of his dig. He examines, but in doing so destroys and relegates to notes, to records only the specialist can understand, the discoveries of amendments and expansions later than, and thus subsidiary to, his core, his original. No matter how detailed his documentation, what is left from an archaeological dig is only the earliest layer,[15] and one wishing to learn about what once existed above that primitive starting point has to reconstruct it from the notations left by the excavator: the source material is destroyed and no longer available. It is needless to say that even in archaeology this is very often far from desirable.

We students of texts have, however, a great advantage here over the archaeologist: we need not destroy any level of our textual digs, neither vertical levels nor horizontal ones. We can preserve it all, although the trend in text criticism which promotes an eclectic treatment of a text does not do so. The only thing that constrains us, in fact, to present a picture of the 'original,' and correspondingly to silence the voices of the multitude of authors who follow the first author, as well as to subordinate the related parallel materials, is our own ideology, our own fixation with pure origins à la the Garden of Eden. As it was for Paul Maas and others, what came after the original is corrupt, dirty, to be cleansed away like detritus, of interest perhaps to some, such as those who study the sound shifts in a language or to paleographers who delight in the transformations letter formation have undergone, but these are handmaidens to the recovery of the original. (It is certainly not true that all editors act

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[15] I make the assumption here that the excavator is interested in digging down to virgin soil; this is of course not always the case.

in this way, or that all editors present texts in this fashion, but this is – or was – a dominant tradition, though an especially inapt one when dealing with Buddhist scriptural literature.)

Let us think about these problems from another point of view. If, as I have suggested, there is no singular original, no Ur-text, for Buddhist *sūtra*s, neither Āgamic nor those generated by Mahāyāna movements, there can consequently be no archetype. This implies that it is simply not possible to eclectically reconstruct a text. But it does not follow from this that text critical work is pointless, not in the least, nor does it follow that we can never speak of an author. Every text of course *has* an author: creation out of microforms, pericopes and stock phrases, copying and even emending does not deny authorship, much less unity. The overall structure of the Hebrew Bible, despite its process of formation, is characterized by complex chiastic structures, evidence for a strong editorial and thus authorial hand, and recent research by Matthew Orsborn suggests that similar processes may have been at work in the chiastic structures in the Prajñāpāramitā.[16] An editor giving shape to a compilation, so to speak, *is* authorship – each instantiation of a text therefore undeniably has an author. A similar idea is considered from a different point of view by Lieve Teugels, according to whom:[17]

> Classical and biblical textual criticism is based on the assumption that a copyist, despite some 'peculiar errors,' had as a basic goal that he wanted to transmit the same text. It is not assumed that a transmitter, copyist or editor wanted to gloss extensively, correct, emend, reshuffle, or even entirely rewrite (parts of) a text. This is, however, exactly what happened on a large scale with rabbinic texts up to and including the Middle Ages. All this results in an entirely different picture of textual transmission than that which classical and biblical scholars are accustomed to.

The picture that emerges is much closer indeed to one of scribe or copyist as author. Now, such scribes and copyists operating in isolation may tell us little of greater interest. But it is significant when they are representatives of communities. Communities have spe-

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16 Orsborn 2012.

17 Teugels 2003: 211.

cific forms of books they hold as sacred or canonical. Therefore, in part our questions about variation in, to borrow an expression, 'the lives of texts' are products of our drawing too large boundaries around 'communities.' In other words, some of our confusions come from improperly defining our key terms. When we use a term like 'the Buddhist community,' what we seem to mean is 'an abstract cohort of multiple communities.' But then, of course, we cannot expect this abstract cohort to share a text. Or is this wrong? In what sense *do* diverse communities share a text in common? And getting back to one of the most central questions facing editors, is it meaningful to create a text – to, to use conventional vocabulary, 'reconstruct a source' – when we know full well that the result of this reconstruction is not coherent, much less identical, with any text actually used by any of the real communities we know to have existed (much less present-day communities)?

We might learn something, again, by looking toward other traditions. The very different status of canonicity in Buddhist communities, however, and their relations with their sacred texts, render parallels with Jewish or Christian believers and their Bibles (and I suppose Muslims and the Koran) highly problematic. There is a degree of exclusivity in Biblical and Islamic traditions simply absent in the Buddhist case – at least most of the time. If one walks into a synagogue, mosque or church, one expects to find the same sacred text as one would find in any other, respectively, synagogue, mosque or church, with some latitude for minor exceptions.[18] But back to exclusivity: it is emphatically not the case for Buddhist sacred institutions that one will find the same text everywhere. Buddhist canonicity does not intend the same texts in the same order and with the same wording.

In what sense then might one understand the very existence of a Work in Buddhist traditions, such that we can meaningfully speak of 'the Lotus Sūtra' in India, Tibet and China, for instance? One way to answer this question is to suggest that our picture of the textual diversity of a Work depends on the scale at which we gaze:

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[18] While at least Jews and Muslims do not accord canonicity to translations, some Christians seem to.

it's almost fractal – it appears uneven, that is to say, no matter the scale. When we look at 'the' Lotus Sūtra, we find that this designates a variety of instantiations in Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese and so on. When we look at 'the' Sanskrit Lotus, we see again a variety of instantiations, and when we look at any given recension we again see variations, down to variations of spelling of a given word, for instance, within a single manuscript. This is not to say that those within the tradition cannot assert that the text has one and only one valid form. Stories found, for instance, in Japanese *setsuwa* 説話 or tale literature emphasize the importance of letter-perfect recitation of the Lotus, thus both promoting and assuming an *invariant* shape of 'the' text, in this case, in the form of Kumārajīva's translation in the form of the *textus receptus* current in medieval Japan.[19] It is also important to recognize that much of the apparent uniformity we perceive – e.g., in Chinese text transmissions – is due to our poverty of evidence, access to materials, and selection of those materials. My own growing experience with both blockprint and manuscript sources of Chinese texts continues to demonstrate the degree to which standard editions have been – and it is no surprise – standardized.

Any traditional concerns such as those evidenced by Japanese *setsuwa* with a specific, verbatim et literatim form of the text is also a limited one. Different linguistic communities canonized different versions of texts, some in their own local language, some in an imported form. Either way, the form selected for canonization became the Church language. Although Sanskrit is, throughout much of the Buddhist world, the sacred language, in the sense of being fetishized, in fact Sanskrit texts are, throughout most of that very same Buddhist world, usually entirely unknown, or if known honored in their phonetic form. This is a process which is also, once again fractally, repeated, such that the Heart Sūtra revered in Japan is a Chinese translation from Sanskrit, pronounced phonetically in Japanese but lexically incomprehensible in this form, and this phoneticization in turn is recited by Western Buddhists, who understand neither Sanskrit not Chinese nor Japanese. For both the

[19] See for instance the story of Kusakabe no Saru in Watson 2013: 38.

Japanese and the Western audience, the text's *meaning* (though not of course *significance*) is entirely beyond the community which uses the text, lay and often times even professional.

Who cares about meaning? One can recite a text, and do all sorts of other things with it, without paying attention to issues of its interpretation. But if *we* want to translate a text, we had better care about its meaning. Interpreting means seeking meaning, but texts only mean something to someone. From and for whom should we seek a text's meaning? The very existence of the multitext, pluriformity of sources which, as an abstraction, constitute a Work, moreover, implies the existence of many texts for many persons. Hence, in making the move from manuscript to Work, we need to accept that the Work has many meanings: there then cannot be one interpretation, and thus it follows that there can be no one translation of a given Work, even setting aside the myriad other challenges presented by translation.

One way to think about this challenge is to ask *for whom* we translate, a question Buddhist scholars seem to ask rarely. Although the situation with Bibles (both Jewish and Christian) is much different, in the Buddhist case, scholars preparing translations for the use of faith communities barely exist. Today's big projects – the BDK English Tripitaka, the 84000 – are at best unclear about their calculus in this regard. As far as I have been able to gather, in fact, what reflection there is on questions of method is offered in such a naive form as to, perhaps, even do more harm than good. The same might be said of the hallowed translations of Pali published mostly by the Pali Text Society. In so far as there is evident reflection on method, the approach seems to waver between an etymologizing literalness and faith in the traditional commentaries.

A very good example here of the immense complications lurking not far beneath the surface is found in the *Udānavarga*/*Dhammapada* literature. We have forms of what is more or less the same Work in Pali, Gāndhārī, Chinese, Sanskrit and Prakrit, with a few others thrown in, and these sources differ, although presenting more or less the same verses, in readings, the order and organization of the verses, and inclusion and exclusion of verses. It

is probably wholly impossible to imagine anything like an Ur-text ever having existed for this corpus, and the only way to understand the unity of the corpus is through the idea of a polythetic class or a family resemblance. This is of course how most things in the natural world are related, and it is no slander to say that the connection between them is not one of monothesis. But this reality has serious implications for our confrontation with the text, and the existence not only of translations but of traditional commentaries further extends the range of interpretive options. Translations are of course commentaries, but also the source of readings, in that it is possible, sometimes, to retrovert the *Vorlage* upon which a given translation is based, such that a Tibetan translation can serve as a source of a Sanskrit reading. This is old hat in Buddhist philology, but some methodological implications thereby generated have not been sufficiently explored.

How might it be possible to read, interpret and thus translate a work whose sources are so obviously diverse as the *Udānavarga*/*Dhammapada* corpus? Does it make sense to choose to translate the Sanskrit *Udānavarga*, without paying attention to the fact that there are, minimally, two recensions of this version of the text, without paying attention to the *Dhammapada* in Pali, without paying attention to known processes of Sanskritization from Middle Indic? While we might be inclined to say no, it does not, the Tibetans did do exactly this; they translated some form of the Sanskrit *Udānavarga* without any of the comparative considerations I just mentioned. One might respond that this is a translation produced by a faith community, it is a vulgate, it is not a scholarly translation. Do, then, popular translations sidestep these problems, and can our translations do the same?

A popular translation seems to assume a popular text, a vulgate. But in fact, it need not. If an edition is eclectic, the translation of that edition may not appear eclectic as such, while still being so in fact, because the text it is a translation *of* is already conflated. To put this another way: no matter how we establish a text – *establish*, not *discover* – our translation of that text we have established, *ex cathedra*, so to speak, does not have to represent any of the complexity which may lay behind the result. Scholarly translations may

be acceptably filled with points of ellipsis, with question marks, and with subordinated renderings from a variety of sources. In the Introduction to his translation of the *Suvarṇabhāsottama*, Ronald Emmerick remarked that Johannes Nobel's 1937 edition of the Sanskrit text is furnished with an elaborate apparatus in which "the words 'verderbt,' 'dunkel,' 'unsicher' and the like are alarmingly frequent."[20] He went on to say, however, that "Nevertheless, the textual corruptions have but rarely, if ever, obscured the meaning beyond discernment. Translation usually highlights textual difficulties, and I hope that by offering a translation I may succeed in attracting scholars to the task of solving them."

This brings us face to face with one question implied in the title of this paper: How is it possible to edit a text without being able to interpret it? How is it possible to translate a text one does not understand? Upon what theoretical basis could one, as Emmerick does, translate from another version (in casu, the canonical Tibetan translation) when Sanskrit material – no matter how it was compiled and edited – is lacking? If one has no theoretical justification for turning from the source one is putatively translating to another source when one's base text eludes one's understanding (or is not extant), of what, in that case, is one actually making a translation? And does not that translation become in fact nothing other than a conjectural emendation of one's sources, albeit without the confidence which would be demonstrated by reconstructing not into English but into Sanskrit?

A translation, we must recognize, can be a stealth form through which one establishes an eclectic text, while hiding the fact that this is indeed what one is doing. From what perspective, then, would we as scholars be justified in producing an eclectic text, one which draws upon diverse sources? When could we justify using one source to correct or emend another, and upon what grounds? Does it make sense to look at form A of a verse, and upon the basis of its reading alter the form of another transmitted version, B? Nāgārjuna in a famous tetralemma asks how one thing could bring about another if they are actually different from one another, and

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[20] Emmerick 1990: vii.

the same logic applies here: either we have the same source, or we have a conjectural emendation – there is no other choice.

More: if it is correct that Buddhist scriptures are essentially modular, is not every form of a pericope or stock phrase, every parallel, logically a *reading* relevant to the establishment of a given text? But then again, there is – or there should be – a direct line between text and meaning. And yet, we know that even in the case of variations in a single work, unrevised parts of a work change meaning because their relationship to the rest is changed.[21] The meaning of a particular pericope or text fragment is not independent of its environment. Therefore, even stock phrases don't always mean the same thing. In what sense then might we be able to make use of parallels and even of readings from elsewhere, knowing that by doing so we are creating meaning de novo? The same situation applies to citations. We often assume or conclude that quotations were made from memory, and on this basis we tend to discount differences. But is not all Indian, if not also Chinese and Tibetan, textual transmission at least possibly also through memory? The existence of written texts does not imply purely written transmission or written engagement with texts (leaving aside all the complications of how scribes work: auto-dictation and so on). The dismissal of such variation then is illogical, but one result of this new inclusivity is that the range of freedom we recognize in our textual corpora has again increased greatly.

It is obvious that different readers want different things from an edition. How can we provide all things for all readers? Perhaps it is not possible – at least, we can never satisfy the specialist in paper, for instance, who demands access to an original item, although theoretically we could imagine, with sufficient resources, providing for every witness an accounting of the physical composition of its substrate – paper so-and-so many percent hemp, and so on – and microscopic photos of that paper, but practically speaking we must realize that this level of presentation is not likely to be possible soon. Still, the 'New Philology's' concern with the physicality of manuscripts is something from which we cannot and should not back away.

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[21] Zeller 1975: 241.

Most readers' wishes, however, might in one way or another be anticipated, starting with a withdrawal from the quest for a eugenically pure and original text, an artifact never existing in the real world, and thus not representative of any real object of scholarly inquiry. In these terms, such an edition is perhaps comparable to economic modeling – so many assumptions are made that the resulting model does not correspond to any real world event. Needless to say that any historical reconstruction, any attempt at any sort of 'thick description,' will always fail to entirely map the richness of reality – a data set that represents reality is as large or indeed larger than reality itself, a physical impossibility. So naturally our ideal of *full representation* is an impossibility. But more importantly, if we do not consider what it is we aim for, we will through mere inertia continue to produce products which, for instance, implicitly hierarchize, despite the fact that we have no neutral standpoint from which to impose judgment. Why is India more valuable than Tibet? Are not Chinese interpretations of an Indian text as legitimate as those of the Indian author's own students? From what standpoint – from what *scholarly* standpoint – could we possibly say that Candrakīrti's interpretation of Nāgārjuna is better than Kumārajīva's? Grigely's suggestion has, in this regard, much to recommend it: "An ideal edition might not be an edition at all, but a guide to historically situated texts, a Baedeker of the diachronic publication history of individual works."[22] This is not to repudiate entirely the role of an editor; after all, even to subdivide a text into paragraphs is a form of commentary.

Although perhaps not more than an anarchist or libertarian attitude toward hermeneutics, I think that any genuine respect for equality and repudiation of hierarchy must lead us to value all approaches to a text as legitimate. This is no approval of Derrida, or at least one reading of Derrida, that all *readers* have equal authority: what I mean rather is that communities have equal authority, even if from one standpoint we might judge this reading negatively.

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[22] Grigely 1995: 49.

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."
>
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
>
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all."[23]

If Humpty homologizes to a representative of a traditional community, from a democratic and egalitarian perspective, indeed he is right – the words of a text *do* mean precisely what he wants them to mean: he becomes their author.

Of course, in the end we may and should return to the question of the author, and his intention. Perhaps we should try to imagine that the author of Buddhist scriptures is indeed the Buddha, but it is well to notice, if we want to take this path, that at least some Buddhist traditions rather explicitly reject it, seeming instead to prefer an almost Mīmāṁsā-like authorless production. In Chapter 7 of the Lotus Sūtra, the Buddha recounts the story of the past buddha Mahābhijñājñānābhibhū, who preaches to the sixteen sons of a king.[24] After the passage of huge periods of cosmic time, this buddha again preaches to these young men, this time the Lotus Sūtra itself, which they memorize. Practicing again for very long ages, the sixteenth of these princes, like his brothers, becomes a buddha himself, none other than our Śākyamuni, who in this self-same Lotus Sūtra recounts this very story. This is not the only example of such attributions of authority for the revelation of scripture, and there is no doubt a great deal to be said about the rhetoric of such moves. But for the time being, I wish to point out only one thing: if we wish to come to terms with Buddhist scriptures, their forms and their authorship, if we wish to think critically about establishing texts, how to interpret texts and how to translate them, there are deep, deep waters into which we must plunge, thinking about and considering issues of authority, of ownership, of intension, of our place in the long – for the Lotus, effectively beginningless – transmission of this literature.

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[23] Carroll 1917: 99.

[24] Eubanks 2011: 37–38.

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