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Obituaries

Jonathan A. SILK

In memoriam, Erik Zürcher (13 Sept. 1928 – 7 Feb. 2008) 3

Articles

Diwakar ACHARYA

Evidence for Mahāyāna Buddhism and Sukhāvātī cult in India in the middle period – Early fifth to late sixth century Nepalese inscriptions 23

Early Chinese Buddhist translations

Contributions to the International Symposium “Early Chinese Buddhist Translations,” Vienna 18–21 April, 2007

Guest editor: Max Deeg

Max DEEG

Introduction 79

Max DEEG

Creating religious terminology – A comparative approach to early Chinese Buddhist translations 83

Hubert DURT

Early Chinese Buddhist translations – Quotations from the early translations in anthologies of the sixth century 119

Toru FUNAYAMA

The work of Paramārtha: An example of Sino-Indian cross-cultural exchange 141

Andrew GLASS

Guṇabhadra, Bāoyún, and the Saṃyuktāgama 185

Paul HARRISON

Experimental core samples of Chinese translations of two Buddhist Sūtras analysed in the light of recent Sanskrit manuscript discoveries 205

Elsa I. LEGITTIMO

Reopening the Maitreya-files – Two almost identical early Maitreya sūtra translations in the Chinese Canon: Wrong attributions and text-historical entanglements 251

Jan NATTIER

Who produced the Da mingdu jing 大明度經 (T225)? A reassessment of the evidence 295

Jungnok PARK (†)

A new attribution of the authorship of T5 and T6 Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra 339

Jonathan A. SILK

The Jifayue sheku tuoluoni jing – Translation, non-translation, both or neither? 369

Stefano ZACCHETTI

The nature of the Da anban shouyi jing 大安般守意經 T 602 reconsidered 421

ZHU Qingzhi

On some basic features of Buddhist Chinese 485

Book review

Tsunehiko SUGIKI

David B. Gray, *The Cakrasamvara Tantra (The Discourse of Śrī Heruka): A Study and Annotated Translation* 505

•

Notes on the contributors 543

Introduction

Max Deeg

It is certainly by chance that this issue of the *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, containing articles on Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, appears following Prof. Jikido Takasaki's presidential address to the Association's XIVth Conference held in London in 2005, which was published in an earlier issue under the title "Between translation and interpretation – Cases in the Chinese Tripiṭaka."¹ The coincidence referred to by Prof. Takasaki of recent developments in Buddhist Studies was, however, what led to a conference being held on the topic of Chinese Buddhist translations, of which the papers in this issue are the result.²

In recent years there has clearly been a great increase in the number of scholars doing philological work on the early Chinese

¹ Jikido Takasaki, "Between translation and interpretation – Cases in the Chinese Tripiṭaka – (Presidential address at the XIVth Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, London, August 29 – September 3, 2005)," *JIABS* 29/1, 2006 (2008): 3–20.

² It is my pleasure, also on behalf of the participants of the conference, to express my gratitude to Prof. Ernst Steinkellner, who encouraged me to organize this event under the auspices of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna. With support from the team at the Academy's Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia under its new director Dr. Helmut Krasser, the conference was held in a warm and relaxed atmosphere. Dr. Birgit Kellner and Dr. Krasser subsequently offered to publish the resulting articles in this special issue of the *JIABS*. We are grateful for their patience in waiting for the articles and for their diligent editing.

translations of Buddhist texts, texts that had been, albeit not entirely ignored, nevertheless neglected by earlier generations of scholars when compared to the Tibetan translations. Although later products, these were thought to represent more accurate versions of their underlying Indian originals. The appearance of new Buddhist manuscripts from Afghanistan, both in Sanskrit (in the Schøyen Collection) and in Gāndhārī (in the British Library Collection and, more recently, in the Bajaur Collection), has shown the value of Chinese translations, these being closer in time to the original composition of these valuable documents than the equivalent Tibetan renderings. Moreover, the Chinese canon contains, in early Chinese translations, texts that were never translated into Tibetan. Thus, editors of these newly-found manuscripts often find that they must rely on this Chinese material for their work. The traditional focus on the Prajñāpāramitā literature has been expanded upon, and investigation of early Mahāyāna Buddhism and its texts has gained a new impetus. The search for new historical and contextual insights has led to meticulous and detailed studies of individual texts and the problems connected to their transmission and translation into Chinese.

Yet when compared to Tibetan Studies, the philological grasp on the Chinese Buddhist translations seems still to be in its infancy.³ For more than a century, such research was mainly conducted in Japan. The few Western scholars working with these texts were restricted to a few champions of the caliber of Sylvain Lévi, Paul Pelliot, Paul Demiéville, Étienne Lamotte, Ernst Waldschmidt, Erich Frauwallner and Erich Zürcher. This restriction in manpower certainly was not least due to the linguistic unwieldiness of some of the material. Classical Chinese, let alone the far from normative Buddhist Chinese, was to some extent impenetrable. There has

³ Werner Thomas, in an evaluation of the translations of Buddhist texts into Tocharian, obviously had problems in finding recent literature on Chinese translations when he quotes from an article by Kenneth Ch'en from 1960: Werner Thomas. *Probleme der Übertragung buddhistischer Texte ins Tocharische*. Mainz: Franz Steiner Verlag: 7 (Akademie der Wissenschaften und Literatur, Mainz, Abhandlungen der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse, Jahrgang 1989, Nr.10).

been no standard tool for its study; no grammar or dictionary in a Western or even East-Asian language is available that covers the whole range of the texts. The widely used “Soothill-Hodous”⁴ was drafted on the basis of the Song dictionary *Fanyi-mingyi-ji* 翻譯名義集, “Collection of Translated Terms and Meanings,” compiled by Fayun 法雲 (1088–1158), and therefore did not cover the early translations. The Soothill-Hodous also has shortcomings in certain terminological areas.⁵ Terms and syntactical structures that were not understood either from the standpoint of classical Chinese or the underlying Indic text were easily dismissed as signs of poor comprehension on the part of the translator(s). In contrast, the Tibetan translations were appreciated as being at least as what looked like precise renderings of the Sanskrit originals, down to syntax and terminology.⁶ Due to political and social circumstances, the terminology of Chinese Buddhist translations was never standardized in the manner done for the Tibetan, where the terminological *vyutpatti* tradition was established in the period of the “early spread” (*snga dar*) of Buddhism in the eighth and ninth centuries. Attempts at identifying translation idioms of individual translators or groups, or at analyzing terminological and grammatical-syntactical peculiarities are still confined to a small, albeit growing, corpus of studies. There is still need for comprehensive working tools, a *corpus verborum et terminorum*, of the early Buddhist translations into Chinese.

Habent colloquia fata eorum – the first proposal for a discussion forum on Chinese Buddhist translations was submitted during the Conference of the International Association of Buddhist Studies in

⁴ William Edward Soothill, Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 1930.

⁵ See the caveats and remarks by Charles Muller in his “Preface to the Digital Edition” of the dictionary.

⁶ See David Seyfort Ruegg, “On Translating Tibetan Philosophical Texts.” In: Doboorn Tulku (ed.). *Buddhist Translations – Problems and Perspectives*. Delhi: Manohar 1995: 82f. The volume in which this article is published shows the imbalance of perception: despite its general title, it is entirely dedicated to various aspects of translating Buddhist Tibetan texts into Western languages.

Lausanne in 1999. The urge to diminish my own ignorance and difficulties when dealing with Buddhist Chinese texts prompted me to consider convening a conference on the topic, and I gratefully took up the offer of Prof. Ernst Steinkellner, then director of the Institute for the Cultural and Intellectual History of Asia at the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Vienna, to organize such an event at the Academy with its support. I tried to gather as many of the scholars working in this field as possible, and to cover as many aspects of Chinese Buddhist translations as was feasible, but quite naturally I did not fully succeed: because of the usual restraints of academic life⁷ as well as the unforeseeable calamities of nature,⁸ some obvious contributors could not attend the conference. There is, as far as I am aware, no edited volume or monograph on the subject of Chinese Buddhist translations. Hopefully this issue of *JIABS* will reflect both individual and general aspects and problems concerning the study of Chinese Buddhist translations and the language they use, and will lead to a broader awareness of this valuable area of Buddhist Studies as well as more engagement therein.

⁷ I recollect that Seishi Karashima was unable to attend for such reasons.

⁸ When already on his way to Vienna, Dan Boucher was caught in a blizzard on the east coast of the US, and after a considerable amount of patient waiting, frustratingly had to give up ever arriving.