

## TAO-AN ON TRANSLATION

### (1)

In A. D. 379 Fu Chien 苻堅 the sovereign of the Ti 氐 kingdom of Former Chin 前秦, who had just a little time before conquered whole Northern China, sent Fu P'ei 苻丕 one of his captains to the south, at the head of an army a hundred thousand strong, and seized the city of Hsiang-yang 襄陽 on Kiang-si, Hu-pei, where Tao-an 道安 with his disciples had been staying since 365, keeping themselves away from the war turmoil of that time. This seizure of Hsiang-yang by Fu Chien was the cause of Tao-an's removal to Chang-an 長安, the northern city of ancient renown and the capital of the kingdom of Former Chin.

At that time Fu Chien's influence had already extended as far as the distant western countries, and, Chang-an, the seat of his rule, was thereby the centre of culture as well as that of politics. The place was the conflux of various routes, east and west, and was thronged with many learned Buddhists, both native and foreign.

It was such a place that Tao-an was invited to come as the most important personage of the Buddhist world of that time—he who had an earnest desire to be ever more enlightened in Buddhist truth. It was quite natural, then, that contact with many learned Buddhists, native and foreign, into which he was now brought, should have proved to be a great advantage in his research of Buddhist teaching and also to be a remarkable improvement in his view of translation.

### (2)

On arriving Ch'ang-an in 379, Tao-an found himself sitting in the actual scene of sutra-translation: for, in the November of that year, translation was started on the Bhikṣu-mahā-śīla-text and also on the Bhikṣuni-śīla-text, with Tan-mo-shih 曇摩侍 as reciter, Tao-hsien 道賢 and Chu Fo-nien 竺佛念 as translators, and Hui-ch'ang 慧常 as transcriber. While these texts are translated, it chanced that he had his hitherto view of translation revised, the circumstances of which was set down by Tao-an himself in the Preface attached to the Bhikṣu-māha-śīla-text now newly-translated. The passage of the Preface concerned reads roughly as follows.

The newly translated Bhikṣu-mahā-śīla-text shows us that there are

many mistakes in the śīla-text hitherto current, some on misunderstanding and some by hasty generalisation. There is another śīla-text which I have formerly presented by Fa-sh'ien 法潛 of Wu-sui 武遂. As to this text, it was my regret that it was so prolix in expression and so simple in contents. Now, to my surprise, I have found that it is in perfect agreement with the newly-translated śīla text. And this made me aware that the real flavour of the way consists in *no-special-flavour*.

(考前常行世戒，其謬多矣。或殊文旨，或粗舉意。昔從武遂法潛 得一部戒。其言煩直，意常恨之。而今侍戒 規矩與同。猶如合符 出門應轍也。然後乃知 淡乎無味 乃直道味也。)

It seems Tao-an expected all the Buddhist texts to be clothed in every kind of the imaginative expression. But, the śīla-text did not answer his expectation. Originally, the śīla text is the collection of rules, with some narrations about the occasions of their formulation. It is a book which should be used as a practical guide as to how we Buddhist should behave in ordinary life. For this reason, it should be exact and detailed; nothing should be there which is liable to be the cause of doubt. These circumstances hitherto not fully comprehended by him was now made clear, when he was brought into contact with those who were concerned in actual translation.

Nevertheless, he was not satisfied with the long-windedness and frequent repetitions of the new translation. He desired it to be made concise. He requested Hui-ch'ang the revision. But Hui-ch'ang flatly refused it. In the Preface above-mentioned, Tao-an has left us a record of Hui-ch'ang's words in some sense of admiration. Hui-ch'ang's words run roughly as follows.

Revision should not be done. For, Buddhist śīla is like Chinese *li* 礼. *Li* is the rules of propriety to be observed; but, in the case of *li*, its reciting is not needed. Śīla, however, is not only to be observed but also to be recited. It has been orally transmitted from teacher to disciple. Therefore, if we make a mistake even by one word in its recitation, we must suffer expulsion from the Order. This is śīla. Does one want to revise those sacred books of China, the Shang-shu 尚書, the Ho-t'u-lo-shu 河圖洛書 and others, because they are plain in style? As they are the teachings of Sages, none dares to revise them. Why, then, do you want to revise this particular śīla-book alone, which is the collection of Buddha's admonition also held in high esteem by

the wise? If we should do such a thing, the fault is ours that we did not follow Buddha's admonition of 'Four Dependence and No Embellishment'.<sup>①</sup> I had rather stick to its original plainness than resort to artificial skill in order to make it smooth.

(大不宜爾。戒猶禮也。禮執而不誦，重先制也，慎舉止也。戒乃逕廣長舌相 三達心制。八輩聖士 珍之寶之。師師相付，一言乖本，有逐無赦。外國持律 其事實爾。此土尚書 及與河洛，其文樸質 無敢措手，明祇先王之法言 而順神命也。何至佛戒聖賢所貴，而可改之 以從方言乎。恐失四依不嚴之教也。與其巧便寧守雅正。譯胡爲秦，東教之士 猶或非之。願不刊削 以從飾也。)

This contention was accepted, and no revision was done to the work. Sentences were translated as they stood in the original. Only word-order was reversed here and there. Tao-an who had hitherto approved a curtailed translation had to give up or greatly improve his attitude.

In 382 Mi ti 彌弟, king of Ch'ien-pu-kuo 前部國, Chêng-Ch'e-shih 正車師, came to Chang-an in order to pay tribute to Fu Chien. He was accompanied by Chiu-mo-lo-fo-t'i 鳩摩羅佛提, (Kumāra-buddhi), State Master. With him a great many Buddhist texts, were also brought. The Abhidharma was thus translated in that summer; and, in the winter, the Agamas-Selections,<sup>②</sup> and in the spring of next year, the Vinaya also. Within two years, "Three Baskets" were thus supplied. Tao-an's knowledge of Sanskrit must have been greatly improved. It was at this juncture that his famous theory of translation, i. e. the theory of Wu-shih-pen 五失本 and San-pu-i 三不易 was published which we see in the Preface attached to the Mo-ho-pan-jo-po-lo-mi-ching-ch'ao 摩訶般若波羅蜜經抄 (Mahā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra-Selections).

(3)

What is meant by 'Wu-shih-pen'? It is the five losses of the original we suffer when we translate Sanskrit texts into Chinese. They are: (1) the word-order of the original is lost; it is reversed; (2)

- ① (1) not to depend on words (語) but to depend on meaning (義);  
 (2) not to depend on knowledge (識) but to depend on wisdom (智);  
 (3) not to depend on incomplete scriptures (不了義經) but to depend on complete scriptures (了義經);  
 (4) not to depend on man (人) but to depend on the law (法).  
 ② 四阿鉢暮抄 Ssū-ê-han-mu-ch'ao

the simplicity of the original is lost; in Sanskrit texts, a simple style is preferred but the Chinese people like a fine style; if it were not for its fine style, the teaching would not be permeated into the Chinese mind; (3) those repeated statements of the original are lost; in Sanskrit texts the statement is full and detailed; in exclamation, it spares no pain in carefully repeating it again and again; but in Chinese translation, these repeated statements are left out; (4) those inserted explanations of the original are lost; in Sanskrit texts, we have many inserted explanatory remarks; apparently they look like irrelevant digressions, though there are no inconsistencies when they are read as a whole; but, in translation, they are all cut off, how many words there may be; (5) the recapitulations of the original are lost; in Sanskrit texts in the beginning of every paragraph we have a summary of the preceding paragraph and then new statement starts; but, in translation, they are entirely omitted.

(譯胡爲秦，有五失本也。一者，胡語盡倒，而使從秦，一失本也。二者，胡經尚質，秦人好文，傳可衆心，非文不合，斯二失本也。三者，胡經委悉，至於歎詠，叮嚀反覆，或三或四，不嫌其煩，而今裁斥，三失本也。四者，胡有義說，正似亂辭，尋說向語，文無以異，或千五百，刈而不存，四失本也。五者，事已全成，將更傍及，反騰前辭，已乃後說，而悉除此，五失本也。)

What is meant by San-pu-i, then? By it is meant three alterations not to be made. Tao-an says roughly as follows. Buddha makes his teaching conform to the times. Custom, however, changes. Consequently, one makes some alterations in things old and proper with the view of making it suitable to the present time. This is the first alteration not to be made (1). There is a great gulf fixed between the enlightened and the un-enlightened. The holy cannot be reached. And now, one wishes to make alterations in fine word of old time in order to reduce them to the level of something commonplace of the later days. This is the second alteration not to be made (2). When Ananda recited Sutras out, it was not much distant from the Buddha's death; and yet, Mahākāśyapa made five hundred Arhats examine them carefully. Now, in these far distant later days, and, in the way of modernised thinking, one arbitrarily curtails them. Those Arhats were so nervously conscientious and these ordinary men are so nonchalantly unscrupulous. How can it be otherwise than the recklessness of those who are ignorant of the great Dharma. This is the third alteration not to be made (3).

(然般若經 三達之心 覆面所演。聖必因時，時俗有易。而刪雅古 以適今時。一不易也。愚智天隔 聖人回階。乃欲以千歲之上微言 合百王之下末俗。二不易也。阿難出經，去佛未久。尊者大迦葉 令五百六通 迭察迭書。今離千年 而以近意量截。彼阿羅漢乃兢兢若之。此生死人而平平若此。豈將不知法者勇乎。斯三不易也。)

## (4)

Now, the first problem is whether these five losses of the original are a kind of forbidden clauses or a sort of licences; in other words, whether they are things which ought not to be done or whether they are things which cannot be avoided. Clearly, they are not the former. Even in the first of them it can be clearly seen. The change of the word-order is never the thing which ought not to be done. If it is the thing which ought not to be done, translation can never be done. At the same time, they are not the latter, the thing which cannot be avoided. In the case of repetitions, and explanatory insertions, we can leave them in translation as they stand in the original. This being the case, if we want to interpret these five losses of the original inconsistently as a whole, they are to be regarded as five things which are allowed to do, though not desired, in so far as they are useful as a means to permeate Buddhism into Chinese mind.

Some supporting remark can be mentioned for this interpretation. It may be firstly said that the reverse of the word order is the limit of allowances. For, it was said by Tao-an himself that only "here and there, the word order is reversed" as the result of Hui-ch'ang's flat refusal of curtailment. A fine style agreeable to Chinese mentality, the leaving out of repetitions, the cutting off of inserted explanations, and the omission of recapitulations,—these can make contents clear; hence, can promote the understanding of Buddhism; and, moreover they are what Tao-an himself experimented and found out to be useful. It is possible, then, that Tao-an admitted the claim of these practices, with a view to propagating Buddhism among Chinese people.

Now, the second problem is how to understand San-pu-i. It is commonly understood as 'three things not easy to do', i. e. three difficulties we experience in translation. This seems to have been the prevailing interpretation. In his Pien-ch'eng-lun 辨正論, Yen-tsung 彥綜 of Sui remarked of Tao-an that Tao-an had made clear the difficulties of Sanskrit texts. Most Japanese Buddhist dictionaries adopt this interpretation. However, I have a doubt in this interpretation. If they mean three difficulties we experience in translation, as they are gene-

rally understood, they must mean three things to be done in translation, though difficult they may be. But, in the passage concerned, we can find no mention of such a thing; on the contrary, we find three things not to be done. These three things not to be done are three reasons for which the original texts should not be altered at will. If they mean three difficulties not easy to do, it must follow that only those who conquer these difficulties can be entitled as a translator. But can they be conquered, these three things mentioned there? Clearly not.

Originally, the word 易 has two separate meanings. It may mean "to be easy", or it may mean "to alter".<sup>①</sup> Consequently, the collocation 不易 has two different readings. When it is read in the first sense of 易, it is "not to be easy (to be or to do)", When it is read in the second sense, it is "not to alter" or "not to be altered". In the case of the present passage, which reading would be better? This must be settled by the context. Let us see the passage following. It runs roughly as follows.

(正當以不聞異言，傳令知會通耳。何復嫌大匠之得失乎。是乃未所敢知也。前人出經，支讖世高 審得胡本 難繫者也。又羅支越，斲鑿之巧者也。巧則巧矣，懼窳成而混沌終矣。若夫以詩爲煩重，以書爲質朴，而翻令合今，則馬鄭所深恨者也。)

"The sole purpose of translation consists in making those who do not understand foreign tongue acquaint with the matter of foreign works. How, then, do we care for the workmanship of the great master? That is not what we concern. Among those who translated sutras, Chih Ch'an 支讖 and An-Shi-kao 安世高 never failed to make the original clear; in that, they have no successor. Mokṣala 無叉羅 and Chih Ch'ien 支謙 are very skilful; but too much skilfulness might be the injury of the original. Let me consider the matter by illustration. If we regard Shih-shu 詩書 as cumbersome and Shang-shu 尚書 as simple, and reduce them to the level of something modern, it should be the cause of great regret of Ma-jung and Chêng-hsüan.<sup>②</sup>"

① Originally, 易 'to be easy', and, 易 'to alter', were two words separated each from the other. It seems the former 易 was pronounced 'i', rhyming with 寘; while the latter 易 was pronounced 'ik', rhyming with 陌. They are now both pronounced 'i' in present Chinese; but, in the Japanese way of pronouncing Chinese character, they are still yet separated each from the other. 易 'to be easy' is pronounced 'i' and 易 'to alter' is 'eki'. In Japanese, therefore, 不易 'not to be altered' is read 'fu-eki', whereas 不易 'not to be easy' is 'fu-i'. Three unalterabilities should be read 'san-fu-eki', and not 'san-fu-i'.

② 馬鄭 i. e. 馬融 Ma-jung and 鄭玄 Chêng-hsüan, two noted scholar of Chinese Classics.

From this we can infer that the purport of his maintenance is to admonish us against treating sutras in an arbitrary manner when we try to translate them,—sutras which are discourses preached by Buddha the Great Holy. Thus, whereas the five losses of the original show us the limit we can be allowed in losing the original form, the three unalterabilities give us the reason why we should keep to the fundamental spirit of the original. But, in fine, the allowable is no more than the allowable; it is not the approved. This is, I presume, what Tao-an was going to say.

## (6)

The theory of five losses and three unalterabilities was not an extempore view. It was the conclusion attained by Tao-an after his long Buddhist career. We find the statement of the same kind in almost every of sutra-prefaces written by Tao-an in his later years. The theory was also the one generally accepted among the learned men of that time. It gave a strong impression on his disciples and exercised a great influence on the posterity. This was not in fact the problem of translation technique; but the problem of spirit seeking the highest truth of Buddhism.

When seen as a whole, Tao-an's position on the theory of translation may be condensed as follows. He kept to the fundamental spirit of the original while he aimed at attaining the balance of form and content. The former comes out of his religious ardour as a serious Buddhist, and the latter is derived from his attainments as a Chinese man of culture. He esteemed the original; hence, the theory of three unalterabilities. At the same time, he had a wish to adapt Buddhism to Chinese mentality; Confucious said: "The solid qualities and attainments must be balanced; then, there is a man of virtue (文質彬彬然後君子)"; true to Chinese mentality, Tao-an could not ignore this ideal; hence, the theory of five losses of the original.

*Enichi Ōchō*