

Tempering *Belles Infidèles* and Promoting *Jolies Laides*: Idle Thoughts on the Ideal Rendering of Buddhist Texts and Terminology¹

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The paper argues for the suitability, or at least acceptability, of a translation style which I call *jolie laide*, i.e. a rendering which is not necessarily exquisite in its aesthetic quality but is as faithful as possible to the original and perfectly intelligible in the target language. This is not a mechanical process, and in order to meet these standards, the translator should allow for flexibility and make full use of the critical apparatus. I do not rule out, however, other rendering strategies, and the last part of my contribution illustrates the possibility of having *jolies laides* side by side with free translations. The article also contains an appendix on Dao'an's 'five [points of permissible] deviation from the original and three [points which should remain] unchanged' and Xuanzang's 'five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated'.

Strutting and Fretting Our Hour Between the Rock of Graceful Freedom and the Hard Place of Lacklustre Literalness

To add or not add? – that is the question awaiting any translator! Is it nobler to suffer the slings and arrows of hard-core philologists mercilessly unleashed against

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graceful free renderings? Or should one take arms against a tedious sea of lacklustre literal translation? In one form or another, the question has been around for quite a while. The awareness of the need to make a responsible choice is already discernable in Cicero's and Horace's exhortations to avoid word-for-word renditions.² A continent apart and centuries later, one recognises similar concerns in Daoan's 道安 (312-385) counsel to the translators of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese to depart from the Indic originals in some regards but stay close to them in others.³ According to George Steiner (1998, 251), the essence of the argument has been repeated again and again over the centuries 'with identical theses, familiar moves and refutations in debate'.⁴ The lines below can hardly aspire to bring something original, let alone solve the perennial dispute of literal vs free rendering (if it is solvable at all!). Apart from a few idle thoughts on the theoretical framework of translation, they will mainly attempt to connect these basic questions and some derived problems to the task of rendering traditional Buddhist sources and terminology into modern languages.⁵

While extreme forms of literal or free renderings of Buddhist texts may not be so frequent, there is an entire spectrum of degrees between these two poles. And there seems to be no consensus as towards which pole and in what degree one's translation should be geared. The problem is further compounded by the lack of objective criteria for defining and assessing the degrees of literalness. What may be a perfectly understandable rendering for some (usually the translator himself/herself!) could make quite a few puzzled eyebrows rise.

Even with all these provisos, some renderings do, however, strike us as unnecessarily literal. Alex Wayman's study, partial edition, and translation of the *Śrāvakaḥmūmi* (1961) or *The Foundation of the Disciples* [*Path of Spiritual Cul-*

²Cicero's famous *verbum pro verbo* occurs in the *Libellus de optimo genere oratorum* (Hedicke ed. 1889, 6). In the *Ars Poetica* (verses 133-134), Horace similarly advises: 'as a faithful translator, you will take care not to translate word for word' (*nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus interpres*; see Coleman ed. and tr. 1783).

³These are the 'five [points of permissible] deviation from the original and three [points which should remain] unchanged' 五失本三不易 (see Appendix I). Equally relevant for the discussion are Xuanzang's 玄奘 'five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated' 五種不翻 (see Appendix II).

⁴Steiner is actually commenting here on Ronald Knox's *On English Translation* (1957, p. 5).

⁵Many of the examples selected here are taken from Yogācāra sources, one of the two major Mahāyāna schools of thought in India, but the vast majority of my comments apply, I believe, to any genre of Buddhist literature as well as basically to all classical and traditional texts across the entire spectrum of human culture.

tivation],⁶ an otherwise noteworthy pioneering contribution, provides some relevant examples. In spite of its merits, Wayman's style sometimes displays what Edgerton (1962, 308) describes as 'wooden literalness'. The epithet is specifically used to qualify Wayman's rendering of the Sanskrit phrase *bhojanemātrajñātā* as 'knowing the amount in food'. In plain English, this amounts to saying 'moderation in eating' or, as suggested by Edgerton (ibid.), 'moderation in food'.

At the opposite pole, we find adaptations like Dwight Goddard's *Self-*

⁶ Another possible rendering of the title is *The Disciples' Level*. The primary sense of °bhūmi in the titles of the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, especially in the early phases of their textual history, appears to have been that of 'foundation' or 'source' rather than 'stage'. The latter is, to be sure, one of the meanings of the word, and this semantic sphere becomes more prominent in works such as the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* or *Scripture on the Ten Stages [of the Bodhisattva's Path]*. We must note, however, that as also argued by Itō (1968; 1970), even in the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*, one of the basic senses of *bhūmi* appears to have been that of *ākara* 'a rich source of anything, place of origin' (Itō 1968, 134).

The meaning of 'foundation' in the title of the *Yogācārabhūmi* is also attested in later commentarial works like the **Yogācārabhūmivivākhyā* or *Exposition upon the Foundation [or: Stages] of Spiritual Practice* (T 30.884c25-26) (see Deleanu 2006, 48, n. 3). Similarly, in his *Sūtrālamkāravṛttibhāṣya* or *Gloss upon the Ornament of [Mahāyāna] Scriptures*, the Yogācāra exegete Sthiramati (ca 510-570) glosses the term *pañcavidhā yogabhūmiḥ* (ad MSĀ 65.16ff.), usually construed as 'five types of stages of spiritual practice', as follows: 'The[se] five types of factors are called "foundations of spiritual practice" (*yogabhūmi*) due to [their] being the basis (**āśraya*) and the ground (**nidāna*; or: **adhiṣṭhāna*) of the cultivation (**bhāvanā*) of spiritual practice (*yoga*)' (*chos rnam pa lnga rnal 'byor bsgom pa'i rten dang gzhir gyur pas na rnal 'byor gyi sa zhes bya'o* || D Mi 189a4-5). The polysemy of the word *bhūmi* is undeniable, and it is not excluded that even in the same context, more than one denotation or connotation may have been present. It seems to me, however, more natural to construe the original meaning of the titles of the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* as 'The Foundation of the Disciples['] Path of Spiritual Cultivation]' and 'The Foundation of the Bodhisattvas['] Path of Spiritual Cultivation]' respectively.

However, it is quite possible that °bhūmi in the sense 'stage', i.e. a semantic line which may have originally been a secondary, even dormant, semantic line in the title of the two texts, may have gradually gained prominence over the meaning of 'foundation' once the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* became part of the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the latter continued its expansion into a mega-encyclopaedia of spiritual and doctrinal lore. But even in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, the term °bhūmi does not have a straightforward, unequivocal meaning of 'step' on a ladder of spiritual progression. There is no implication, for instance, that a yogi must first practice according to the Śrāvakayāna, then follow the Pratyekabuddha's path, and then engage in the bodhisattvic course of salvific activity and spiritual cultivation. If there is a sense of *bhūmi* as 'level' in the context of the titles of the textual units making up the *Yogācārabhūmi*, then it must be one of hierarchical evaluation of religious ideals from the perspective of the Great Vehicle: Śrāvakayāna, the lowest Vehicle, is placed first; this is followed by the path of the Solitary Buddhas; and finally the Mahāyāna course of praxis is set forth in the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*.

Realization of Noble Wisdom (1932)⁷ which drastically abridges, edits, thematically re-arranges, and renames the chapters of D.T. Suzuki's (generally faithful, if at times controversial) English translation (1932) of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* or *Scripture upon [the Buddha's] Entry into the Island*.⁸ This not only blasts the original flow of ideas and themes into a new structure which bears little resemblance to the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* itself but sometimes also tampers with the very message of the text.

Let us take, for instance, the Chapter on the [Undesired] Consequences of [Postulating] the Permanence or Impermanence of the Tathāgata (*Tathāgata-nityānitya-prasaṅgaparivarta*).⁹ The gist of this very brief chapter is that the Tathāgata is neither permanent nor impermanent (*na [...] tathāgato nityo nānityāḥ*)¹⁰ and the true understanding of the meaning of this statement can only come 'from the destruction of the conceptual knowledge' (*vikalpabuddhikṣayān*).¹¹

⁷Dwight Goddard (1861-1939) played a major role in the introduction and popularisation of Buddhism, especially Zen, in the United States. Though not a Buddhist scholar in the strict sense of the word, his publications, especially *A Buddhist Bible* (1932), were instrumental in familiarising the American public with the basic teachings of Buddhism. My remarks below, not always exactly flattering, are not meant to slight Goddard's otherwise impressive achievements.

⁸My usage of 'adaptation' here follows Bastin 2009, 3, and refers to an act of altering and rewriting the text mainly in order to make it accessible to larger or different sections of the public. Scholars like Eco 2001, 67-77, 106-117; Eco [2003] 2004, 123-126, 127-132; etc. (on the basis of Roman Jakobson 'Linguistic aspects of translation', 1959) prefer to label this genre 'rewording' or 'intralinguistic translation'. (For Eco's assessment of 'rewording', see below.) Eco employs 'adaptation' (also called 'transmutation') for a reformulation of the original which implies a change of the semiotic system, such as the adaptation of a film to a novel (see Eco 2001, 119; Eco [2003] 2004, 158-165). Last but not least, for a classification of the types of interpretation and change from one semiotic system to another, translation being a particular case of this more general phenomenon, see Eco's outstanding classification (2001, 99ff.).

⁹LĀv 217-219, corresponding to Suzuki's translation 1932, 187-189.

Tathāgata, literally and often rendered as 'Thus-gone', is an epithet of an Awakened One, and is another, actually a favourite, appellation for the (or a) Buddha. I find the literal translation rather opaque for those not familiar with Buddhism and prefer to stick to the Indic form which, by the way, is now registered in most of the large English dictionaries. The downside of this choice is that it, too, is admittedly unintelligible to the wider public. If a more intelligible equivalent is to be provided, I would rather opt for something along the lines of C.A.F. Rhys Davids' 'he who has won through to the truth' (see Rhys Davids and Stede [1921-1925] 1986, s.v. *tathāgata*) or I.B. Horner's 'Truthfinder' (e.g. Horner tr. [1951] 1993, 13 rendering Vin I 12-13; etc.).

¹⁰LĀv 217.4-5.

¹¹LĀv 219.1. Suzuki (1932, 189) renders Skt. *vikalpabuddhi* as 'knowledge that is based on discrimination', an equally possible translation.

By restructuring the argumentation line of the chapter and conflating it with passages from other chapters, Goddard (1932, 109-110) not only departs from the original arrangement of ideas, but ends up giving the unsuspecting reader a rather different, if not wrong, description of the basic purport. For a page or so, Goddard sticks to the basic structure of the original, presenting the arguments leading to the conclusion that as far as linguistic formulations are possible, the Tathāgata can only be declared to be neither permanent nor impermanent. The American author ends the third paragraph of his account more or less faithfully stating the message of the sutra itself: ‘when discrimination is done away with, Noble Wisdom [...] will be established’ (ibid. 110). Goddard, however, does not stop here and returns to the statement made by the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* that the Tathāgata can also be said to be permanent, a statement which is basically directed at those who become too much attached to the equally wrong view that It is impermanent. The stress in Goddard’s account is now on ‘the eternal-unthinkable of the Tathāgatas [which] is the “suchness” of Noble Wisdom’ (ibid.). The addition of this paragraph, which concludes with declaring this exalted state to be ‘truly eternal’ (ibid.), is not only superfluous but also erroneous in its stress on the permanency of the Tathāgata rather than on the need to transcend any duality, including permanence and impermanence, as well as conceptual cognition – the basic message of the chapter in its original as well as in Suzuki’s translation.¹²

¹²To make things worse, Goddard further spoils the consistency of this chapter, which is exceptionally unitary in the otherwise jumbled collection of doctrinal snippets representing the bulk of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*. He continues his section (ibid. 111) with an account of the destruction of the ‘twofold egolessness’, which leads to the attainment of the ‘self-nature of the Tathagatas’, and of the ‘four kinds of sameness relating to Buddha-nature’, a topic taken from a totally different part of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, i.e. LĀv Chapter III, pp. 141-142 (corresponding to Suzuki tr. 1932, 122-123).

Furthermore, while Suzuki correctly renders these four kinds of sameness (*samatā*) as ‘sameness of letters’ (*akṣarasamatā*), ‘sameness of words’ (*vāksamatā*), ‘sameness of teachings’ (*dharmasamatā*), and ‘sameness of the body’ (*kāyasamatā*) (Lāv 141.10-11 = Suzuki tr. 1932, 123), Goddard takes the liberty to alter the last two items into ‘sameness of meaning’ and ‘sameness of essence’ respectively. This is an unnecessary change which actually blurs the meaning of the original. The *dharmasamatā* is clearly explained by the text itself as referring to being conversant with the thirty-seven factors conducive to Awakening (*saptatṛiṃśatāṃ bodhipakṣyāṇāṃ*; LĀv 142.10-11), a spiritual and doctrinal category which hardly accounts for the rendering of ‘meaning’ (for this category, see the excellent monograph by Gethin [1992] 2003). Likewise, the translation of *kāyasamatā* as ‘sameness of essence’ is (at least half) problematic. The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* spells it out as referring to the *Dharmakāya*, which admittedly could be rendered – *inter alia* – as ‘essence’. But this covers only half of the semantic sphere of the compound, which is defined in the same passage of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* as also covering the thirty-two signs (*lakṣaṇa*) and eighty minor traits

Goddard's work is thus not so much a faithful summary of the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* as an attempt to rewrite Suzuki's translation, an attempt which sometimes is even misleading in its description and restructuring of ideas and sections. Admittedly, the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* is a jungle of doctrines and themes, and introducing some order does help the reader in gaining a better view of the purport of the text. In this sense, Goddard's 'epitomised version', to use the subtitle of his work, may have some merits. However, if one wishes to get a bird's eyeview of the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* which does not take dangerous shortcuts, turns and rolls, then relying upon a traditional commentary like Kokan Shiren's 虎關師鍊 (1278-1346) *Butsu go shin ron* 佛語心論 (*Treatise on the Essence of the Buddha's Words*) or one of its modern versions such as Jikidō Takasaki's (1980, 19-54) excellent synoptic presentation is a far wiser choice.

Theoretically, one can only with agree with Eco ([2003] 2004, 127-132) that 'rewording is not translation'.¹³ If anything, Goddard's work is an adaptation comparable to such genres as the *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Marry Lamb (1807) or the *belles infidèles*, a popular style of translation thriving in France during the 17th-18th centuries. The latter were works, mainly by classical authors, adapted to suit the tastes and moral standards of the age, with translators often taking such liberties as heavily doctoring the style, censoring, and even correcting the originals (see Salama-Carr 2009, 406-408).

Goddard's 'epitomised version' is, however, an extreme example, and most modern translators are found somewhere in between the poles of *belles infidèles* and what one may label *laides fidèles*. Following different strategies and philosophies, everyone trying his or her hand at rendering a foreign source, especially a classical one, is most probably striving to become what Horace named *fidus interpres* or 'faithful translator'. The ideal of fidelity, however, is not something easy to define, let alone achieve. The 'in-between' the two extremes is not a simple straight line easily quantifiable or divisible into clear discrete units. It rather seems to be a hugely complex space with multiple dimensions related to subjectively and historically determined values. Translation does imply an intricate play between invariants, i.e. elements remaining unaltered in the source language as well as the target language, and shifts, i.e. necessary changes to make the rendering intelli-

(*anuvyañjana*) characteristic of the physical body (*rūpa*[...] *kāya*^o) (LĀv 142.7) of the Tathāgatas – a meaning which is not exactly evoked by 'essence'.

¹³See also Bastin 2009, 3: 'Adaptation [...] is not generally accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text'.

gible.¹⁴ The core of the problem is to identify what precisely are invariants and shifts as well as how the latter are to be implemented.¹⁵

In the present state of consent over the importance of faithfully communicating the purport of the original, on the one hand, and disagreement as to how exactly this is to be achieved, on the other, it seems wiser to keep an open and flexible attitude in one's own approach and embrace, or at least admit of, the possibility of plurality. We have seen and most likely will continue to see a wide range of translation approaches in all areas of Buddhist studies. Although one is entitled, I believe, to criticise (what he/she may regard as) excesses, it is more constructive to accept the principle of plurality and whenever necessary (in lexicographical contributions, for instance) to duly reflect the variety of translations and styles.

Based upon an admittedly impressionistic assessment, I would, however, say that the balance in such areas as Yogācāra and Abhidharma research tends to tip in favour of near-literal renderings of different degrees and hues – something which is not exactly describable as *laides fidèles* but rather, to once again use a French phrase, as *jolies laides* or 'plain-looking ladies nonetheless exuding charm'. Here I shall use the latter collocation to refer to such translations which are not exactly exquisite in style but succeed in conveying the purport of the original (arguably better than the *belles infidèles*) and in being intelligible (perhaps occasionally with some difficulty...) – features which make them attractive enough for a devoted reader.

As intimated above, I do not deny the rights of free translations and wish to emphasise the importance of maintaining this tradition, too. The only point I would dare to make here is that hard-core proponents of this approach should, nonetheless, try to temper their *belles infidèles*. Too much *beauté* might spoil the very meaning and *raison d'être* of the entire enterprise of translation. On the other hand, advocates of the rival strategy of literal or near-literal translations should make serious efforts in creating acceptable *jolies laides* and promoting them to the general public.

¹⁴For these concepts, see Bakker, Koster, and van Leuven-Zwart 2009.

¹⁵Ideally, one could conceive of a translation that is both extremely faithful to the original and exquisitely outstanding in style. The modern Chinese thinker and pioneer translator of Western culture, Yan Fu 嚴復 (1852-1921) expressed a similar ideal in his triple principle aiming at faithfulness 信, intelligibility 達, and elegance 雅 (see Lackner 2001, 365-366). Fascinating as it may be, this remains, however, a remote ideal probably attainable only in a few exceptional cases.

Since my own very modest attempts at translation tilt in the direction of the latter approach, I shall concentrate here more on the problems raised by the *jolies laides*, as well as some possible compromises (a word which sounds better than solutions – the latter being hardly possible in a strong sense).¹⁶

Before tackling these issues, it is, however, important to state the basic premises of what I regard as a *jolie laide* translation.

(1) Faithfulness to the original.¹⁷ Staying as close as possible to the original both lexically and grammatically presupposes perfect understanding of the source in linguistic, doctrinal, and cultural terms and conveying its message with as little interference on the part of the translator as possible. Needless to say, the process cannot and should not be mechanical. Understanding implies interpretation, and conveying it in an intelligible form requires making changes in the target language which cannot be controlled simply by the translator's choice.

(2) Intelligibility in the target language. This is a criterion at least as important as fidelity. Actually, whenever a choice has to be made between faithfulness and intelligibility, I believe the latter should be given priority. The bottom line of any translation is to convey the basic message of a text. If structural, even lexical, fidelity cannot be achieved in the target language, awkwardly close faithfulness to the original can and should be sacrificed on the altar of intelligibility. After all, no translator, let alone reader, would like to be told something similar to what the classicist Robert Yelverton Tyrell (1844-1916) remarked about the English render-

¹⁶No matter how close we may endeavour to stay to the original, there is no doubt that a subjective, interpretative element will remain. In this sense, one is reminded of Gadamer's conclusions on the subject: 'Translation cannot be a reproduction of an original, it can only be an interpretation reflecting both empathy and distance' (Hermans 2009, 132, referring to Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, 1960). See also Eco's excellent discussion of translation and interpretation (Eco 2001, 65-132; Eco [2003] 2004, 123-145; etc.)

¹⁷The word 'faithfulness' may seem outdated but I see no cogent reason for avoiding it both in theoretical discussions and practical attempts to achieve a good translation. And I do not seem to be the only one who sticks to this term. The eminent theoretician and skilled translator (as well as marvellous writer) Umberto Eco ([2003] 2004, 4-5) cherishes a similar ideal: 'It seems that to respect what the authors said means to remain faithful to the original text. I understand how outdated such an expression can sound [...]. But the concept of faithfulness depends on the belief that translation is a form of interpretation and that (even while considering the cultural habits of their presumed readers) translators must aim at rendering, not necessarily the intention of the author (who may have been dead for millennia), but the *intention of the text* – the intention of the text being the outcome of an interpretative effort on the part of the reader, the critic or the translator.' Cf. also *ibid.* 190-192.

ing of the *Agamemnon* made by Robert Browning in 1887: ‘The original Greek is of great use in elucidating Browning’s translation of the *Agamemnon*’.¹⁸

(3) Use of a critical apparatus even in translations designed to reach the general public. Many unnecessary headaches on how much fidelity is to be sacrificed for intelligibility, or the other way round, can be avoided by not shying away from the use of a full critical apparatus and the philological conventions currently accepted in the scholarly community but frequently shunned by both publishers and readers. The downside of this premise is that although translators may rejoice in the sharp decrease of their purchase of aspirin, publishing houses and the general public may be less willing to face their share of headaches. More details on this and the other premises will be discussed in the pages below.

Terminology As It Is (*yathābhūtam!*)

Ideally, we should be able to find perfect, or at least satisfactory, equivalents for each term in the vast technical vocabulary employed in Buddhist sources.¹⁹ The quest is far from new. The same Sisyphean task has been faced by all traditional civilisations in which Buddhism left an impact deep enough to lead to the production of literary sources. Most notably, the Chinese and Tibetans have struggled for centuries to find optimal solutions. And in spite of all the failures and extravagant attempts, the process has had profound and enriching effects not only for the Buddhist communities but also for the languages and cultures of these countries.²⁰

¹⁸Cited from Ratcliffe ed. 2006, 460. Browning’s translation, which is easily available on the Net (<http://www.archive.org>), is indeed fraught with hundreds of examples of awkward turns of phrase which require checking the original or another more intelligible translation.

¹⁹Needless to say, the issue of equivalence is not limited to Buddhist sources. It is a general problem applying to all cultures and ages. For theoretical discussions, see Koller 1989; Gutt 1991, 10-17; Eco 2001, 9-21; Eco [2003] 2004 9-31; etc.

²⁰For a very good discussion of the historical background and various types of Buddhist terminology in Chinese translations, see Deeg 2010. For Tibetan Buddhism, see the outstanding contributions of Scherrer-Schaub 1999; Seyfort Ruegg 1992; etc. Quite a few contributions dedicated to various aspects of rendering Tibetan texts and terminology as well as studies dealing with problems linked to Buddhist translations in general are found in Doboomb Tulku ed. 1995. On the other hand, scholars like Griffiths (1981, 17) deplore the effects Buddhist translations had on the languages of Tibet and China (as well as of India, since Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit is declared ‘barbaric’). This view (as well as a few other points made by Griffiths in this article) is, I believe, at best controversial and unless backed up by serious linguistic and stylistic evidence, only applies to one side of a very multifaceted process of textual production.

A one-to-one equivalence pleasing every single reader, let alone scholar in the field, remains, however, a distant dream at best. In tune with the philosophy we are studying, it would actually seem more appropriate to describe it as mere illusion (*māyāmātra!*). Let us look at some reasons underlying this predicament.

(1) Needless to say, technical terms, as any other words in natural languages, are both context-determined and history-dependent. Perfect symmetry between the source language and the target language, presupposing one-to-one equivalence in all contexts and texts, is hard to achieve, to say the least. More often than not, both languages confront us with lexical material which is polysemic, and this plurality of meanings has quite different histories.

Let us take a key Buddhist term like the Sanskrit *dhyāna* (Pali, *jhāna*). Already in the early Pali Canon, *jhāna* appears to have a wide semantic sphere and usage. In a narrow technical sense, it refers to the four levels of ‘meditative absorption’ leading to heightened states of emotional balance.²¹ There are, however, textual witnesses pointing in the direction of a different and most probably wider understanding. For instance, the verses uttered by the Buddha during the night of his Awakening declare that victory over Māra, the Evil One, i.e. the symbol of death,²² occurs to him who is ‘ardent[ly] meditating’ (*ātāpino jhāyato*).²³ This must be either a general meaning or a reference to meditation on the chain of dependent arising (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), upon which the Buddha had concentrated his attention (*manasā ’kāsi*) at least in the account given by the *Vinayapīṭaka* or *Book of Monastic Discipline*.²⁴ The cognate verb similarly appears to be used with a broad meaning in the *Dhammapada* or *Verses of the Teaching* which exhorts ‘meditate, mendicant, and do not be careless’.²⁵

This polysemy is inherited and further amplified in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Yogācāra included. The *Abhidharmasamuccaya* or *Compendium of Philosophy*, for instance, often construes *dhyāna* as ‘(the four levels of) meditative absorption’.²⁶ However, the same text also tells us that while in *dhyāna*, the Buddhas

²¹The description of the four *jhānas* is a frequent pericope in the Canon (see DN I 73-75; DN II 313; MN I 21-22, etc.). Later scholastic texts like the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī* (§§ 167-175) divide the meditative progression into five stages of absorption by splitting the first *jhāna* into two levels.

²²For the multifaceted meanings and symbols of Māra in Buddhism, see Windisch 1895, Ling [1962] 1997; etc.

²³Vin I 2.

²⁴Vin I 1. Cf. also Ud 1-3; etc..

²⁵Dh 371a: *jhāya bhikkhu mā ca pāmado*.

²⁶E.g. AbhSamBh 78.23-79-2; 79.15-80-3; etc.

and bodhisattvas attain all sorts of contemplations [or: meditative concentrations] (*samādhi*), which are not even known, let alone accessible, to disciples (*śrāvaka*) and solitary Buddhas (*pratyekabuddha*).²⁷ For the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, *dhyāna* is thus no longer a mere experience of meditative absorption but rather the locus or foundation upon which contemplative states peculiar to Mahāyāna are generated and practised.

The latter usage becomes even more obvious in the definitions given to the *dhyānapāramitā* or ‘perfection of meditation’, which is construed in a most comprehensive sense. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* or *Foundation of the Bodhisattvas* [‘*Path of Spiritual Cultivation*’],²⁸ for example, *dhyāna* is categorised as meditation for blissful dwelling in the present life (*drṣṭadharmasukhavihārāya dhyānam*), meditation for triggering the qualities [necessary for] the bodhisattva’s contemplation [or: concentration] (*bodhisattvasamādhiguṇanirhārāya dhyānam*), and meditation for [accomplishing] acts for the benefit of [all] sentient beings (*sat-tvārthakriyāyai dhyānam*).²⁹

The *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* goes one step further and classifies *dhyāna* into four types:

1. Simpletons’ meditation (*bālopacārikam dhyānam*), i.e. the typical tranquility (*śamatha*) meditation practised by disciples and solitary Buddhas, which culminates in the attainment of cessation (*nirodha[samāpatti]*), i.e. the last of the traditional nine stages of absorption.
2. Meditation investigating the [cognitive] object [or: sense] (*arthapravicayam dhyānam*), which focuses on the characteristics of the essencelessness of phenomena (*dharmānairātmya*) and the stages (*bhūmi*) of the Bodhisattva path.
3. Meditation [taking] Suchness [i.e. Supreme Reality] as its object (*tathātā-lambanam dhyānam*).
4. Tathāgata’s meditation (*tāthāgataṃ dhyānam*) accessible only to the Awakened Ones and consisting in various unfathomable (*acintya*) altruistic acts undertaken for the sake of sentient beings.³⁰

Obviously, the sense of meditative absorption is discernable only in the first category, the rest consisting in cogitation, contemplative states, or salvific activity. The latter can hardly be connected to the old technical meaning of *dhyāna* as

²⁷ AbhSamBh 81.7-12.

²⁸ The title can also be construed as The Bodhisattvas’ Level; see note 5 above.

²⁹ BoBh-W 207.9-208.9; BoBh-D 143.9-144.4.

³⁰ LĀv 97-98.

‘absorption’. It seems more likely that they are a development from the general sense of the word, development which, however, went far beyond the semantic limits that the early Buddhist communities could have imagined.

To complicate matters, scholastic analysis adds a further meaning to *dhyāna*, that of birth and existence in heavenly spheres obtained in accordance with mastery of different levels of meditative absorption. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* or *Commentary on the Thesaurus of Philosophy*, for instance, tells us that ‘briefly stated, [one can speak of] two sorts of *dhyāna* due to the distinction [made between] *dhyāna* as birth and [*dhyāna*] as meditative attainment’.³¹ The same usage can be ascertained in Yogācāra sources such as the *Śrāvakabhūmi*³² and the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*.³³

Last but not least, a further ramification in the semantic history of the word is brought by Tantric Buddhism. We find, for example, in Āryadeva’s *Caryāmelāpaka-pradīpa* or *Lamp on the Integration of Practice* a technique called ‘the twofold meditation’ (*dvividhaṃdhyānam*). This refers to two steps of yogic praxis implying the dissolution (*anubheda*) and grasping of a globe (*piṇḍagrāha*) (of light?), which makes it possible for the contemplative to dissolve into the Brilliance, i.e. the Ultimate Reality.³⁴ The methods are not described in detail in Āryadeva’s opus, but in all likelihood they represent advanced forms of Tantric meditation consisting in visualisations and control of subtle energies. Although the general rendering of ‘meditation’ may be used in this context, too, the term can be more precisely rendered as ‘meditative visualisation’ or even ‘meditative technique [of dissolution into the Brilliance]’.

(2) We should add here the obvious fact that polysemy is not confined to the source language. One of the most frequent and certainly justified renderings of *dhyāna* is ‘meditation’, but the English word itself is far from being monolithic.³⁵

³¹ AKBh 432.4-5: *samāsato dvividhāni dhyānāny upapattisamāpattidhyānabhedāt* (sentence which comments on verse 1a in Chapter VIII: *dvividhā dhyānāni* “of two sorts is *dhyāna*”).

³² ŚrBh 438.12. See also Deleanu 2006, 318 (critical edition), 446 (English translation), 476, n. 28 (containing further details).

³³ AbhSamBh 81.1-6.

³⁴ CMPr 442-443.

³⁵ Let us cite here one of its uses in the Christian tradition. Richard of St Victor divides the ladder of the contemplative life into three steps: (1) cogitation, i.e. unsystematic pondering; (2) meditation, i.e. systematic application of mind requiring effort; and (3) contemplation, i.e. effortless abiding in the bliss of the Truth (see Kirchberger tr. 1957, 136-138). The issue and stages of the contemplative life is also discussed in detail in St Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* (2.2.Q.180; for English translation, see Fathers of the English Dominican Province tr. 1911, Question 180). Cf.

Depending on the translator, different shades of meaning could be present, and ideally (i.e., whenever the publisher does not impose space limitations!), basic definitions of one's usage of key terms in the target language, too, should be provided.

(3) The semantic complexity of most technical terms in both the source and the target languages requires flexibility and openness: flexibility in finding the proper rendering(s) fit for each specific usage (even if this means a departure from one-to-one equivalence) and openness to the presupposition that one's choices may not be the only possible ones, let alone the best. This does not invalidate the need for effort on the part of the translator to look carefully into each context and find what he/she believes to be the best rendering. Yet the sheer complexity of each language, exponentially augmented in the process of translation, makes 'perfection' and 'definitive solutions' difficult, if attainable at all.

To return to the example of *dhyāna/jhāna*: together with many Buddhist scholars, I believe that rendering the term as '(meditative) absorption' in its strict technical sense and 'meditation' in a more general usage is basically correct. On the other hand, I do not think that T.W. Rhys Davids' translation of *jhāna* as 'rapture' ([1899] 1977, 84, etc.), Woodward's 'trance' ([1934] 1979, 272, etc.) or 'musing' ([1936] 1972, 106, etc.) are necessarily wrong.³⁶

Furthermore, when we come to far more difficult and controversial terms such as *adhimukti* ('conviction', etc.),³⁷ *vijñapti* ('representation', etc.), *prājñā* ('wisdom', etc.) and so on, or even the ubiquitous 'five aggregates' (*pañcaskandhāḥ*),³⁸ we must be open to plurality. What the scholarly community and public at large

also the title of Descartes' famous *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* or *Meditations on First Philosophy*. For an excellent overview of the semantic range of the term 'meditation' in the Western as well as Indian (mostly Brahmanic) tradition, see Bader 1990, 25-44.

³⁶There are also traditional glosses which construe *dhyāna* as *upanidhyāna* or 'reflection' in spite of its basically non-reflexive nature. See ŚrBh 450.14-16; Deleanu 2006, vol. 2, 331, 454, and note 171 (containing further details).

³⁷I discuss the term and the previous research on it in detail in Deleanu 2006, vol. 2, pp. 470-473 (note 15).

³⁸The recent attempt of the scholars attending the Symposium on Yogācāra Terminology (held at Mangalam Research Center for Buddhist Languages, Berkeley, November 2012) to discuss and come to a common set of translations for the five aggregates proved extremely fruitful but could not lead to complete agreement. While a certain degree of common understanding, or at least awareness, may have been achieved, none of the participants could secure unconditional support for all his/her choices, each being reasonable enough in its own way, from all the members of the otherwise small group of a dozen or so specialists present at the Symposium. This shows how remote the ideal of singular, universally acceptable translations is. If anything, such academic debates and

badly need are extensive and reliable lexicographical tools collecting all (or at least the major) translations attempted by scholars over the centuries.³⁹ We find some of them in works like Edgerton's classical *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary* ([1953] 1985) or Dayal's old but still valuable study on the Bodhisattva doctrine ([1932] 1978). Fortunately, more recent projects such as the *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* (<http://buddhism-dict.net/ddb/>), whose initiator and main editor is Prof. Dr A. Charles Muller (University of Tokyo), or the *Buddhist Translators' Workbench* (<http://www.mangalamresearch.org/>) undertaken by the Mangalam Research Center for Buddhist Languages (Berkeley, California) under the direction of Mr Jack Petranker, are making impressive progress and will one day come to answer this need in a thorough and highly professional manner.

The Yoga of Terminology Propping

Another way to help flexibility as well as ensure more palatability to Buddhist studies is to combine the use of (at least some of the) well-established renderings with the readiness to paraphrase them. For instance, the key Yogācāra term usually rendered as 'three natures' (*trayaḥsvabhāvaḥ*; *trisvabhāva*) or 'threefold nature' (*trividhaḥsvabhāvaḥ*; *svabhāvastrividhaḥ*)⁴⁰ has the double benefit of being faithful to the meaning of *svabhāva* in Sanskrit and having a long, well-established use easily recognisable by almost any student of Buddhism.⁴¹ On the other hand, it cannot be denied that 'nature' (not to mention 'self-nature'!) in the particular sense meant in Yogācāra philosophy may be a rather puzzling use for quite a few members of the general public. If the results of Buddhist scholarship are to reach wider audiences, as I believe they should, then using only 'three natures' may be

discussions, though quite useful in themselves, can only lead to a higher level of well-organised and well-informed disagreement.

³⁹The criteria for deciding what makes a 'major' translation are arguably and controversially impressionistic. In the absence of objective standards for deciding them, the more renderings are collected the better, even if equivalents considered inappropriate by the editor(s) end up side by side with excellent translations. Ideally, detailed lexicographical sources should also contain the assessment and comments of their author(s)/editor(s) no matter how controversial the latter may themselves turn out to be.

⁴⁰In Yogācāra, these are also known as the 'three characteristics' (*trīṇi lakṣaṇāni*) or 'triad of characteristics' (*lakṣaṇatraya*).

⁴¹The translation appears to be fairly old in Buddhist studies. A very brief and most likely insufficient check led me to ascertain that the rendering is at least as early as Yamakami [1912] 1976, 106, 196, 204.

insufficient. In this case, I suppose adding a paraphrase like ‘three modes of consciousness functioning’, whether in square brackets or notes, would open more minds and hearts to what Yogācāra has to say. Similarly, while Frauwallner’s *Elemente der Gegebenheiten*, rendered into English by LodröSangpo as ‘elements of the factors’, is a faithful literal translation of Skt. *dharmadhātu*, it becomes fully intelligible to the non-initiated if paraphrased as ‘the ultimate state of being’, as actually done by Frauwallner himself.⁴²

Paraphrasing may, however, become insufficient when one is faced with much more complex terms and phrases or feels the need to further elucidate the ‘hidden’ (*saṃdhi!*) meanings of words and wording. In such cases, making full use of the critical apparatus to bring forth the entire semantic field, with its historical and cultural ramifications, becomes imperative. Many Buddhist scholars, especially the clearly distinguishable sub-species of ‘hard-core’ philologists, do, of course, make extensive use of it. We do not have to tell them to augment their annotations – they anyway do so by their very nature (*svabhāvenaiva!*), so to speak. If further efforts are required, then these should be towards increasing the public awareness of the necessity of or at least acceptability of the critical apparatus.⁴³ I see no reason why publishers and the general readership should *a priori* reject annotations, bracketing, parallel translations, etc. They are admittedly more difficult to follow than, say, comics or gossip columns, but those who set their mind on reading Buddhism will probably be willing to spend some more time and energy on the intricacies of reading annotations and also accepting some exotic notations. Whether or not every single reader makes full use of it, the critical apparatus should, I believe, be an integral part not only of academic publications but also of books geared to general audiences.

Without the help of annotations (a German invention, as they often say!), I cannot see how we could come as close as possible to restoring the original colours of the blurred fresco of ideas and details lying beneath the surface level of a text. The full import, for instance, of a diatribe voiced by the authors of the *Śrāvaka-bhūmi* against ‘one’s own body, material, coarse, made of the four elements, growing upon boiled rice [or] coarse gruel, always requiring ointment, bathing, and massage, [yet] bound to breaking, splitting, scattering, and destruction’ can only

⁴² See Frauwallner 1969, 148, etc. = Frauwallner 2010, 160, etc.

⁴³ See also the apt remarks made by Gómez (1996, XIII-XIV) on the subject.

be grasped by providing annotations.⁴⁴ These will reveal most, or at least the basic, ideas, socio-cultural background, and paronomastic use of the imagery which is opaque to most modern readers but would have been quite obvious to an educated audience in ancient India.⁴⁵ It does require some effort on the part of the reader, not to mention of the translator, to cover this intricate web of information, but correct understanding in depth does come at a price.⁴⁶ Serious reading arguably is not only a delight but also to a certain extent a form of ascetic practice (*tapas!*).

One question arises here. If we are to rely on heavily ‘armed’ critical apparatuses, how close should we stay to the original? In other words, can we produce *laides fidèles* propped up by page after page of annotations? Controversial as it may be, my choice would be to give intelligibility and a minimum degree of good style in the target language priority over unnecessarily obedient fidelity. Rather than ‘ugly (hyper-)faithful renderings,’ I believe the translator’s efforts should concentrate on producing *jolies laides*—not exactly beautiful pieces of writing but faithful enough and, one hopes, reasonably attractive.

A similar conclusion comes out of Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty’s (1971; 1987) experience (experiments?) in and reflections on rendering Sanskrit literature. In an early article published in 1971, the American Indologist advocates a new approach which presupposes ‘a very literal, word-for-word translation, retaining the long, multiple compounds, and bracketing pairs of words to represent the puns and *doubles entendres* with which Sanskrit abounds’ (Doniger O’Flaherty 1987, 123). This resulted, as the author herself admits, in a ‘highly unorthodox form of English *verse*’ (ibid. 124), which in turn, ‘called upon the reader to do a great deal of work indeed’ (ibid. 123). Later on, Doniger O’Flaherty came to criticise her earlier over-literal, rather unintelligible style, admitting that she failed to realise ‘that anyone who was interested in fighting through that sort of translation would be likely to go ahead and *learn* the original language’ (ibid. 124).

⁴⁴ Skt. *kāyasyādhyātmikasya rūpiṇa audārikasya caturmahābhūtikasyaudanakulmāṣopacitasya nityotsadanānapanaparimardanabhedanacchedanavikiraṇavidhvamsanadharmaṇa* (Deleanu 2006, vol. 1, p. 322).

⁴⁵ Paronomasia (*śleṣa*) is a major figure of speech in Indian literature, including Buddhist sources, and is also discussed at length in traditional Indian poetics (*alaṃkāraśāstra*) (see Gerow 1971, 38-42, 288-306; etc.).

⁴⁶ Speaking of efforts on the part of the author, it took me seven notes and three and a half pages to provide explanations to the phrase cited above (see Deleanu 2006, vol. 2, p. 449; notes 79-85 [pp. 497-501]). Whether this is too much or too little annotation admittedly represents a controversial issue.

The conclusion provides further argument for avoiding literal translations as well as extravagant notation systems. What distinguishes a *jolie laide* rendering from a *laidefidèle* is the degree of intelligibility of the translation itself. Although an in-depth understanding of a *jolie laide* will most probably need the backing of annotations and bracketing, the basic comprehension of its main ideas should be possible just by reading the translation itself with no or little help from footnotes.

Prudent Loving-Kindness For (Almost...) Any Translation Style

I must reiterate that my arguing in favour of *jolies laides* does not mean that this should be the only style to be followed by all translations. Generally speaking, it is wiser to accept a functionalist approach implying that ‘the linguistic form of the target text is determined by the purpose it is meant to fulfil’ (Schäfner 2009, 115). Free renderings are not bad in themselves, especially as long as the translator clearly states his/her method and goals.⁴⁷ If we temper the excesses of the *belles infidèles*, i.e. if we do not let them run into the domain of sheer adaptations, they can remain an equally viable way of transmitting Buddhist lore and culture to the readers of our age.

And if publishers and audiences are bodhisattvic enough, putting *jolies laides* and *belles infidèles* side by side in the same volume may be an appealing, even preferable, alternative. The translator may hope that his/her entire volume will be perused, but depending on their interests and needs, the readers may choose to focus on either of the renderings. And needless to say, readers should consult annotations only to the extent they find necessary to disambiguate the message and background of the text. (Confidentially, I must add that even scholars may skip some notes, but don’t ask how many and how often....)

Though far from being gifted with poetical talent (or any talent, for that matter), I take the liberty of taxing the reader’s patience with a clumsy attempt to see how a *jolie laide* translation can co-exist side by side with a free rendering which I hope can be qualified as remotely *belle infidèle*.⁴⁸ For this purpose, I have chosen

⁴⁷In this and many other senses, Gómez 1996 is a very good example of a more or less free translation, as clearly acknowledged by the author (see especially pp. X-XIV), and perfectly fulfils its purposes.

⁴⁸On the very thorny issues raised by translating poetry, see Eco’s pertinent remarks ([2003] 2004, 137-156; cf. Eco 2001, 40-45, on translating rhythm; etc.).

Stanza 30 of Vasubandhu's (ca 350-430)⁴⁹ *Triṃśikāvijñaptimātratāsiddhi* or *Thirty [Stanzas on] the Proof [that Everything is] Representation-Only*.⁵⁰ The verses conclude the celebrated philosophical treatise with a statement on the ultimate goal of Buddhist practice, i.e. the locus and experience of Awakening attained after a long, arduous path of spiritual cultivation.

So let me start with a *jolie laide* translation of the stanza (*jolie* enough for most readers, I dare hope...)

That alone is the uncontaminated Realm, inconceivable, wholesome,
lasting,⁵¹
Blissful; this is the Liberation Body, it is called the Truth (*dharma*) of
the Great Sage.⁵²

⁴⁹The dates of Vasubandhu, the great Indian philosopher and patriarch of Yogācāra Buddhism, remain a controversial issue. The dates given above are based on a series of conjectures which I share with a few more scholars (see Deleanu 2006, vol. 1, pp. 186-194). It must be added, however, that placing Vasubandhu between 400 and 480 has for more supporters in the academic community.

⁵⁰Sanskrit original (Trim 14; TrimBh-B 138.8-9):

*Sa evānāsravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ /
Sukho vimuktikāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yaṁ mahāmuneḥ //* [Kārikā 30]

Tibetan Translation (TrimBh-B 139.12-15):

*de nyid zag pa med dang dbyings /
bsam gyis mi khyab dge dang brtan //
de ni bde ba rnam grol sku /
thub pa chen po'i chos zhes bya //*

(NB: I have followed Buescher's text but converted its transliteration into the Wylie system.)

Chinese translation (T 31.61b):

此即無漏界 不思議善常
安樂解脫身 大牟尼名法

⁵¹The Sanskrit word *dhruva*, which also means 'stable', is glossed by Sthiramati in his *Triṃśikāvijñaptibhāṣya* or *Commentary upon the Thirty [Stanzas on] Representation[-Only]* as follows: '[the word] stable [is used] because [the uncontaminated Realm] is permanent through its inexhaustibility' (*dhruvo nityatvād akṣayatayā*; TrimBh-B 142.7). Cf. Xuanzang's Chinese rendering cited in note 49 above: 常 'permanent'.

⁵²Sthiramati (TrimBh-B 142.10) explains *dharma* here as *dharmakāya* or 'Dharma-Body', i.e. the Ultimate Truth itself. The **Vijñaptimātratāsiddhiśāstra* 成唯識論 or *Treatise on the Proof [that Everything Is] Representation-Only*, a commentarial opus surviving only in Chinese translation, similarly explains the term as the 'Dharma-Body of the Great Sage' 大牟尼名法身 (T 31 51a19).

As for my vain lumbering into the poetical world, the *belle infidèle* translation reads:⁵³

Long lasting is *that* Realm, beyond what mind can fathom or attain,
And wholesome in its nature, full of bliss, and well above all stain.
Indeed the Freedom Body 'tis, cut loose from woe and more rebirth,
Which oft they name the Truth and Norm of the Great Sage of Ut-
most Worth.

The doubtless clumsy attempt to attain a more pleasing effect through rhythm and rhyme has resulted, however, in quite a few deviations from the original. First, Sanskrit verse basically relies only (or at least mainly) upon rhythm, i.e. patterns of regular succession of long and short syllables. Most of classical Indian poetry, including the stanza above, does not exploit the aesthetic dimension of rhyme.⁵⁴ However, rendering into a modern Western language in rhythmical prose without rhyme would, I surmise, reduce the literary value of a *belle infidèle*, especially if the latter is also intended to evoke an aura of ages bygone.

The second, more obvious deviation in my translation is the addition of words which do not appear in the original such as 'cut loose from woe and more rebirth', etc.⁵⁵ These, however, are more or less harmless changes against which I believe Vasubandhu would not have protested too much (though he might have told me 'to mind-only' the task of rendering faithfully!). The basic Buddhist understanding of the word 'Liberation' (*vimukti*) does entail becoming free from the cycle of

⁵³I must express here my warmest thanks to my friends Miss Amanda Anderson and Mr Mike Fessler, who kindly assure me that this *belle infidèle* translation sounds more pleasing to (at least two pairs of) native English ears on both sides of the Atlantic.

⁵⁴Figures of expression like paronomasia, alliteration, etc. are often employed in Indian literature, and some varieties such as *yamaka* may approximate the effects of rhyme. Gerow (1971, 23) defines the term as follows: '*Yamaka* ('cadence'), the most maligned of all the figures [of speech], is basically the Indian correspondent to our rhyme: the repetition of a sequence of syllables at predetermined positions in a metrical pattern, but not restricted to the end of lines as in most Western poetry'. A few subtypes of *yamaka* such as *pādāntayamaka*, for instance, imply the use of the same word at the end of each verse (*pāda*) in a stanza – though this would hardly qualify as rhyme, let alone good, in Western poetry! (see *ibid.* 231). The device is not, however, central to Sanskrit poetry, and even considered to be a low figure of speech (for a detailed discussion and varieties, see *ibid.* 223-238). The pleasing aesthetic effect that verse has on Indian ears is, first and foremost, derived from rhythm.

⁵⁵On the possibility of inventing verses for approximating the prosodic dimension of the original, see Eco [2003] 2004, 146-147.

rebirths and suffering. Of course, there are differences, sometimes vast, amongst the various strains of Buddhist thought as to what exactly this Liberation means and how It is brought about. Yet to the best of my knowledge, there is complete agreement that Its attainment signifies the end of ‘woe and more rebirth’, at least as these are experienced by deluded beings.

Such harmless changes appear, therefore, to be both acceptable and actually unavoidable if a *belle* (not too) *infidèle* is to be produced. What ought to be avoided at all costs is omission of terms and phrases in the original other than semantically unimportant grammatical elements. The real challenge, especially for verse, remains to come up with close enough renderings which are at the same time written in a style capable of inducing aesthetic feelings akin to the original.

I do not wish to test any longer the reader’s efforts to cultivate the perfection of patience (*kṣāntipāramitā!*), and I shall now rest my quill, which can hardly boast of any originality. The idle thoughts set down above actually draw on long practice in trying to stay as close as possible to the Buddhist sources and conveying this in an intelligible and reasonably good style. If anything, my attempt here has been to put in a wider theoretical context some of the aspects and problems entailed by this practice. To some, if not many, of the readers of this humble essay (in case there are any at all....), these will be matters of course, probably not worth spelling out in any detail. It thus only remains for me to express my apologies for trying to take coals to Newcastle or, as we say in Japanese, attempting to give a Dharma-talk to Śākyamuni himself.⁵⁶

Appendix I

Dao’an 道安 (312-385) is one of the central figures in early Chinese Buddhism whose efforts to understand the true message of the new religion left a deep impact on the course it would take in the next centuries.⁵⁷ His ‘five [points of permissible] deviation from the original and three [points which should remain] unchanged’ 五失本三不易 reflect a genuine concern to make translation both faithful to the Indic original and intelligible to Chinese audiences and readers.⁵⁸

⁵⁶The original Japanese wording of the saying is: 釋迦に説法 *Shaka ni seppō* (literally, ‘Sermon to Śākyamuni Buddha’).

⁵⁷For details on Dao’an life and activity, see Zürcher 1972, vol. 1, pp. 184-204; Kamata 1982, 355-393; etc.

⁵⁸Another way of construing the last part of the phrase, i.e. 三不易, is ‘three difficulties’. The two possible interpretations derive from the Chinese character 易 (*yì* in Modern Mandarin) which

The passage expounding Dao'an's views on this matter is found in his 'Preface to the *Compendium of the Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*' 摩訶鉢羅若波羅蜜經抄序 (T 55.52b-c) recorded in the *Chu sanzangjiji* 出三藏記集 or *Collection of Notes Concerning the Translation of the Tripiṭaka [into Chinese]*, a major historical source compiled by the scholarmonk Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518). Dao'an's theory of translation expressed in this short passage has been the subject of many modern studies and translated into quite a few languages. Here I shall list only some of the most important contributions which have come to my attention: Satō 1952; Ui 1956, 130-137; Ōchō 1958, 247ff.; Robinson [1967] 1978, 77-79; Zürcher 1972, 203; Hurvitz and Link, 1974, 425-432; Held 1980; Kamata 1982, 387-388; Wang 1984; Aramaki and Kominami. 1993, 70-74; Lackner 2001; Cheung ed. 2006, 79-83.⁵⁹

Since the reader can find very good translations into English (especially Hurvitz and Link, 1974, 426-428 [complete rendering of the Preface]; Robinson [1967] 1978, 77 [partial translation of the key passage]; Lackner 2001, 362-363 [partial rendering of 'the five losses']; etc.), I shall limit myself here to a brief presentation of the gist of Dao'an views.⁶⁰

has two different meanings (as well as pronunciations in Classical Chinese): (1) 'easy' (whose reconstructed pronunciation in Early Middle Chinese is /*jiäh*/ or /*jih*/ [see Pulleyblank 1991, s.v.]); and (2) '(to) change' (/ *jiajk*/ [ibid.]). The passage itself does not help much for disambiguation. The three points adduced by Dao'an here are intimately connected to the essence of the scriptural truth, and they can be construed as either textual elements which are 'not [to be] changed' 不易 (/ *p̥t̪ jiajk*/) or which are 'not easy' 不易 (/ *p̥t̪ jiäh*/) to render into Chinese. The problem has been recognised and discussed in modern scholarship, but no agreement appears to have been reached so far. While scholars like Ui 1956, 134; Ōchō 1958, 250-251; Robinson [1967] 1978, 77-79; Hurvitz and Link, 1974, 427-428; Wang 1984, 206; etc. favour the rendering 'three difficulties', others such as Zürcher 1972, 203; Kamata 1982, 388; Aramaki and Kominami tr. 1993, 72-73; etc. prefer to construe the phrase as points which should not be changed in the Chinese translation. It is not easy (not easy indeed!) and probably not even possible to give a final verdict, but if one presupposes that Dao'an had the factor of stylistic symmetry in mind – a rhetorical aspect which the Chinese greatly admire and use –, then '[points which should] not [be] change[d]' 不易 contrasted to '[permissible] deviations from [literally, losses of] the original' 失本 make more sense. Anyway, the passage bears both readings, and to all intents and purposes, I adopt the latter in my discussion here.

⁵⁹I am sincerely grateful to Prof. Dr Stefano Zacchetti, who has most kindly helped me to add more bibliographical information to this list and provided me with Pdf files of some of the contributions.

⁶⁰Whether these views represent a general theory of translation, a practical guide for translators, or observations linked mainly to the *Compendium of the Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (whose Preface Dao'an actually is writing) has been a debated topic. For a very good discussion and sound conclusions, see Lackner 2001, 261–262.

The five [points of permissible] deviation from the original 五失本:

(1) Departing from the word order in the original and following the natural rules of the Chinese syntax in translation is a liberty which one has to take when rendering from the totally different language(s) of the Western regions 胡語.⁶¹

(2) ‘The scriptures of the Western regions esteem [plain] substance, [whereas] the Chinese are fond of [elegant] style’ 胡經尚質，秦人好文。 It is, therefore, permissible to depart from the Indic original and adapt the style of the translation to the tastes of Chinese audiences and readers.⁶²

⁶¹ I render 胡語 *hu yu* as ‘languages of the Western regions’, which from Dao’an’s and his contemporaries’ perspective encompassed Central Asia and India. The Chinese Master must have known that (most of the) Buddhist scriptures were composed in the language(s) of India, but he uses the character 胡 *hu*, which does not refer specifically to India. Originally, it denoted the ‘barbarian’ tribes living north or west of the ancient Chinese heartland. Even later the word would retain its pejorative, racist connotations typical of the Sinocentrist feelings entertained by many orthodox Chinese intellectuals. Whether Dao’an as well as the vast majority of Chinese Buddhists shared these feelings or not remains, however, controversial. Scholars like Yang (1998) argue that 胡 *hu* did retain a ‘strong racist sense’ even in Buddhist sources, and it came to be replaced with 梵 *fan*, which specifically denotes Sanskrit (and/or Indic languages in languages in general) without any disparaging nuance (for more on this character, see note 72 below) only around the beginning of the Sui and Tang periods (6th to 7th century), when Buddhism came to be fully accepted in the Chinese society and culture. Yang’s views have been criticised by Boucher (2000), who argues that though not always consistent, the dichotomy 胡 *hu* – 梵 *fan* refers to texts written in *kharoṣṭhī* script vs those in *brāhmī* script. Furthermore, the preference for the latter character in later Chinese sources reflects the fact that by the 5th century, *kharoṣṭhī* (=胡 *hu*) became obsolete and replaced with *brāhmī* (=梵 *fan*) in Northern India and Central Asia (Boucher 2000, especially pp. 17-19). More importantly, Boucher remarks that ‘*hu*, when referring to scripts, languages, texts, is not used in any overtly derogatory manner – neither by the critics of Buddhism nor by Buddhist exegetes themselves’ (ibid. 23). This applies, I believe, to the use of this character in Dao’an’s Preface too. His sincere belief, so often openly expressed, that the ultimate truth came from the lips of an Awakened Man and His Disciples who had lived in a Western land makes it quite unlikely that 胡 *hu* evoked any pejorative, racist tones for Dao’an and his audiences.

⁶² The character 質 *zhi* also implies the nuance of crude, unpolished nature, being opposed to 文 *wen*, which is the adorned, the refined, that which is acquired as a result of training, and basically associated with urban civilisation. Confucius 孔子 (551-479 B.C.E.) contrasts the two in a famous saying: ‘[When] there is a preponderance of [the unrefined qualities of] natural disposition 質 over [civilised] refinement 文, then [the result] is [boorish] rusticity. [When] there is a preponderance of [civilised] refinement over [the unrefined qualities of] natural disposition, then [the result] is [behaving like a pedantic] clerk. [Only] after [the unrefined qualities of] natural disposition and [civilised] refinement [become] equally blended, [will the result be achieving the status of] a true gentleman’ 質勝文，則野。文勝質，則史。文質彬彬，然後君子。 (*Analects* 論語, Ch. VI 雍也, § 16; the Chinese original based on Cheng 1990, vol. 2, p. 400 [although it must be said that there are no var. lec. and the saying is the same in any edition; the English translation is mine but I

(3) The Indic originals are too detailed, especially when it comes to exclamations, 嘆詠 which are often repeated 反覆. In order to conform to Chinese

have also consulted the renderings of Legge, [1893] 1991, 190; Lau 1992, 51; Yoshikawa 1978, vol. 1, 187-188; as well as the very useful Chinese traditional commentaries collected in Cheng 1990, vol. 2, p. 400-401).

Another hint as to what Dao'an may have meant by the stylistic preferences of the Chinese as well as to what 質 *zhi* meant to Chinese intellectuals (as well as connoisseurs of the subtleties of the language) is suggested by Ui (1956, 133). This is an episode concerning the famous Kuchean Buddhist Master and translator Kumārajīva (344-409) 鳩摩羅什, who is also said to have attained a very high proficiency in the language of the Middle Kingdom, and his prominent Chinese disciple Senrui 僧叡, recorded in the Biographies of Eminent Monks 高僧傳, an early ecclesiastical history written by the scholar monk Huijiao 慧皎 in 519. It goes like this:

[Seng]rui participated in the correction of the scriptures translated by [Kumāra]jī[va]. In the earlier rendering of the Lotus Sutra of the True Teaching, Chapter on the Prediction [of Future Buddhahood], done by Dharmarakṣa, it is said: 'Deities see human beings, [and] human beings see deities'. Having arrived with [his own] translation of the [Lotus] Sutra at this place, [Kumāra]jī[va] said: 'This word[ing of Dharmarakṣa's version] is identical with the meaning of [the original text of] the Western Regions, but as far as the style is concerned, it is exceedingly crude.' [Seng]rui said: 'Then why not [something like] "Deities and human beings come into mutual contact, and [thus] are able to catch sight of each other"?'. [Kumāra]jī[va] gladly said: 'Verily so!'

什所翻經，叡並參正。昔竺法護出『正法華經』「受決品」云：“天見人，人見天。”什譯經至此，乃言：“此語與西域義同，但在言過質。”叡曰：“將非《人天交接，兩得相見》？”什喜曰：“實然！” (T 50.364b2-6; the punctuation is mine)

The episode may have happened in fact, but the account contains a rather puzzling detail. True, Kumārajīva did translate the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* under the title of *Miao fa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 or *Lotus Sutra of the Wondrous Teaching*. Equally true, Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (233-ca310) had rendered the text into Chinese as the *Zheng fa hua jing* 正法華經 or *Scripture of the [Lotus] Flower of the Right Teaching* some two centuries earlier. But the sentence cited above, i.e. 天見人，人見天, does not occur in the extant version of Dharmarakṣa's translation. Kumārajīva's rendering does contain the sentence 人天交接，兩得相見 (T 9.27c25), as apparently suggested by Sengrui. And one can trace it back to the Sanskrit original, where it reads: *devā api manuṣyān draṣyanti, manuṣyā api devān draṣyanti* (SadPuṇ 202.3-4) 'deities will see human beings, and human beings will also see deities'. The problem is that the same sentence is rendered in the extant version of Dharmarakṣa's translation of the *Lotus Sutra* as: 天上視世間，世間得見天上，天人世人往來交接。 (T 9. 95c28-29) – not exactly the crude sentence Kumārajīva is said to have seen. Furthermore, the Chapter on the Prediction [of Future Buddhahood] is given above as 受決品, which again does not correspond to our extant version, which reads: 授五百弟子決品 (T 9.94b26). The only explanation I can think of is that Kumārajīva had access to a different (earlier, unedited?) redaction of Dharmarakṣa's translation which has not survived to later ages (though Huijiao must have known it as he does not seem to mind the discrepancy).

stylistic preferences, it is allowed to delete these superfluous rhetorical elements.

(4) The scriptures of the Western regions often contain prolix explanatory additions (or what we would call today exegetical interpolations) which should be distinguished from the scriptural text proper and can therefore be excised.

(5) The Indic style finds it acceptable to complete the exposition of one topic and then after embarking upon a new subject to reiterate a few phrases or sentences concerning the topic just explained above. Such repetitions can, of course, be omitted.

The three [points which should remain] unchanged 三不易:

(1) The Holy One 聖, i.e. the Buddha, preached the scriptures in conformity with his times. Customs 俗 do change over the years, but one should not ‘expunge the elegant ancient [wording conveying the message of the Holy One] only to fit [the tastes of] the present age’ 刪雅古以適今時.

(2) ‘Ignorance and wisdom are Heaven[-made] distinctions’ 愚智天隔, and one should accept that ordinary people cannot understand all subtleties contained in the scriptures. The translator should not sacrifice these subtle nuances and make alterations only to agree to the customs of later ages 末俗.

(3) The Buddha’s foremost disciples Ānanda and Mahākāśyapa as well as the Five Hundred Arhats, traditionally believed to have compiled the Canon after the Buddha’s demise, were extremely cautious 兢兢 in their transmission of the scriptures. How can deluded people living one thousand years after the Buddha and his direct disciples be so complacent 平平 as to believe that they can ‘fathom and judge [the original meaning] with their modern ideas’ 近意量裁?⁶³ Obviously, the basic wording of the scriptures should not be changed.⁶⁴

⁶³Together with Hurvitz and Link 1974, 448, n. 129, I prefer the reading 裁, attested by the Song, Yuan and Ming Canons (see T vol. 55, p. 52, n. 21), instead of 截, adopted by the Taishō edition on the basis of the Korean Tripitaka.

⁶⁴The Chinese original of the key passage reads: 譯胡為秦 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 至於嘆詠，丁寧反覆，或三或四，不嫌其煩，而今裁斥，三失本也。四者、胡有義記 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。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 聖人叵階。乃欲以千歲之上微言，傳使合百王之下末俗，二不易也。阿難出經去佛未久，尊大迦葉 令五百六通 迭察迭書。今離千年 而以近意量裁。彼阿羅漢乃

*

In a nutshell, what Dao'an is trying to say is that while translators are allowed to (or rather should) make some grammatical and stylistic changes, mainly excising repetitious and superfluous passages, it would be unwise to presume that they could tamper with the substance and basic wording of the scriptures, no matter how abstruse these may appear to them.

Appendix II

Xuanzang's 玄奘(602-664) translations represents the pinnacle of the centuries-long travails to render the Buddhist Dharma into the language of the Middle Kingdom. The Master's obsession with getting to the very root of scriptural accuracy and faithfully conveying it to his country fellowmen led not only to a long, arduous journey of studies and pilgrimage to India but also to an amazingly prolific activity in translating thousands of manuscript leaves into Chinese.⁶⁵ Linguistically, this passion for the original message resulted in some of (if not) *the* most faithful (as well as intelligible) translations in the history of Buddhism on Chinese soil. Xuanzang has not left much by way of a theory of translation, but the 'five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated' 五種不翻, allegedly advocated by him, offer a glimpse into some of his ideas concerning the proper rendering of Buddhist terminology. We find a sketchy description of these principles in the *Fanyimingyiji* 翻譯名義集 or *Collection of Translations of Names and*

兢兢若此，此生死人而平平若此。豈將不知法者勇乎？斯三不易也。(T 55.52b23-52c9; my punctuation).

⁶⁵According to Kamata 1999, 251 (on the basis of the *Kaiyuan lu* 開元錄 or *Catalogue of the Kaiyuan Era*; see also Kamata 1999, 306-307), Xuanzang and his team translated 76 Indian texts amounting to 1347 scrolls 卷 of Chinese text. This surpasses the 1222 scrolls representing the total number produced by the five most celebrated translators (excluding Xuanzang) active on Chinese soil, i.e., Dharmarakṣa 竺法護 (233-ca.310), Kumārajīva (344-409) 鳩摩羅什, Paramārtha (499-569) 真諦, Yijing (635-713) 義淨, and Amoghavajra 不空 (705-774). According to one calculation, this means that in the eighteen years after his return from India, Xuanzang translated at the stunning pace of about one scroll every five days (Kamata 1999, 251, on the base of a study by Matsumoto Bunzaburō published in 1925).

Meanings,⁶⁶ a Sanskrit-Chinese dictionary compiled by the scholarmonk Fayun 法雲 in 1143.⁶⁷

The ‘five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated’ refer to those categories of lexemes for which the translator should provide phonetic transcriptions, i.e. use Chinese characters for the phonetic value only, rather than offer semantically meaningful equivalents. A case in point is *prajñā*, for which Xuanzang prefers the phonetic transcription 般若 (*/pa-ŋia’/* in Early Middle Chinese pronunciation [see Pulleyblank 1991, s.vv.]; *bōrě* in modern Mandarin Pinyin transliteration), both characters being used here for their phonetic value, i.e. pronunciation, while their meaning is completely ignored. The semantically transparent equivalent 智慧, a binome in which both characters mean ‘wisdom’ (thus conveying the basic sense of the Sanskrit word), is discarded as an inferior rendering. Xuanzang’s reasons for this as well as other judgements will become apparent from Fayun’s account of the ‘five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated’:

Master [Xuan]zang of the Tang [Dynasty] elucidated the five types [of Indic words which should] not be translated. (1) [Words which] are esoteric [should] not be translated;⁶⁸ [magical formulae like] *dhāraṇī*s 陀羅尼 are such [examples].⁶⁹ (2) [Words which] are pregnant with

⁶⁶This work should not be confused with the Sino-Japanese title by which the *Mahāvvyutpatti* is known, i.e. 翻譯名義集 (*Hon’yaky myō gi shū*, in Japanese pronunciation). The famous *Mahāvvyutpatti* (Tib. *Bye brag tu rtogs par byed pa chen*) is a Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicographical work (compiled by the beginning of the 9th century; see Seyfort Ruegg 1992, 389; etc.) which lists words and phrases recommended as standard renderings for the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Tibetan. In the course of time, Chinese and Mongolian equivalents were also added to the basic list, but (as far as I know) there seem to be no clear records as to their author and date of incorporation. Sakaki (1916, V-VI) conjectures that the Chinese equivalents may have been added much later, probably over a long period between the Yuan (1279-1367) and Qing (1662-1911) dynasties.

⁶⁷The same principles, described in very similar words, are also found in Zhou Dunyi’s 周敦義 Preface to this dictionary, i.e. *Fanyi ming yi xu* 翻譯名義序 (T 54.1055a13-18).

⁶⁸Here and below a more literal translation of the Chinese syntax would be ‘because [they] are esoteric, [they] are not translated’, and so on.

⁶⁹Another possible way of construing the sentence 陀羅尼是 (literally meaning ‘*dhāraṇī* is this’) would be to take the word *dhāraṇī* itself as the example given for this category. The Chinese equivalent for *dhāraṇī* used here is indeed a phonetic transcription, which makes such an interpretation not completely impossible. However, I think that the meaning of the statement is more general. The thousands of particular *dhāraṇīs* covered by this category are esoteric by definition, and each should therefore be transcribed with Chinese characters rather than trying (whenever possible!) to render them into meaningful phrases or sentences.

many meanings [should] not be translated, like *bhagavat* 薄伽梵 [which] encompasses six meanings.⁷⁰ (3) [Words which denote objects] inexistent [in China] [should] not be translated, like the *Jambu-tree* 閻浮樹.⁷¹ (4) [Words for which it is preferable to] follow the old [tradition] [should] not be translated, like *anu[ttarasamyaksam]bodhi* 阿耨菩提,⁷² [which] can actually be rendered [into Chinese] but have been in usage with their Indic pronunciation [transcribed by means of Chinese characters]⁷³ since the time of Mātāṅga.⁷⁴ (5) [Words which] generate [more] good [in phonetic transcription should] not be translated, like [*prajñā* transcribed as /pa-ṣia/, i.e.] 般若 [which sounds more] dignified [when compared to] ‘wisdom’ 智慧 [i.e. the translation proper which sounds] shallow; [the former] makes people [feel more] respect [for the term], and therefore should not be translated.⁷⁵

The citations from or references to Sanskrit and Pali sources show the page number after the abbreviated title and, whenever relevant, volume number. Often I also give the line number, which follows a dot placed after the page number. For

⁷⁰The six meanings of the Sanskrit word *bhagavat* are detailed in the entry dedicated to this term in the same *Fanyī míng yī* (T 54.1057b-c). Actually, the very account of Xuanzang’s five principles is part of this entry.

⁷¹This is the rose-apple tree (*Syzygium jambos*) which does not grow in the Chinese climate.

⁷²This is the ‘unsurpassed perfect Awakening’, which is also translated into Chinese by fully meaningful equivalents such as 無上正等覺 *wushang zhengdeng jue*, etc.

⁷³The Chinese character 梵 *fan* basically represents a phonetic transcription of *Brahman*, *Brahmā*, *brāhmaṇa*, *brāhmī* (script or text written in it; see note 60 above), etc. It is also often used to refer to the language used by the Brahmins, which in orthodox terms should, of course, be Vedic and Classical Sanskrit. However, in Chinese sources the character seems to be used less strictly and most probably covered any Indic language, whether Classical Sanskrit, Hybrid Sanskrit, or forms of Prakrit, in which the Buddhist scriptures were written.

⁷⁴This is one of the missionaries said to have brought the Scripture in Forty-two Sections 四十二章經 to Luoyang 洛陽, the capital of the Chinese Empire at that time. Traditional accounts place the translation of this text into Chinese in 67 C.E. The story of the missionaries and, more conspicuously, of the text is most probably a legend. The earliest reliable sources concerning organised activities of translation and systematic propagation of Buddhism in Luoyang date from the middle of the 2nd century (see Zürcher 1972, vol. 1, pp. 28-30; etc.).

⁷⁵The Chinese original reads: 唐奘法師明五種不翻。一、祕密故，不翻，陀羅尼是。二、多含故，不翻，如薄伽梵含六義故。三、此無故，不翻，如閻浮樹。四、順古故，不翻。如阿耨菩提，實可翻之，但摩騰已來存梵音故。五、生善故，不翻，如般若尊重，智慧輕淺，令人生敬，是故不翻。(T 54.1057c7-12; my punctuation).

Tibetan sources, I have used the *sDe dge Canon* (abbreviated as ‘D’). The syllable following ‘D’ shows the traditional Tibetan numeration symbol and is followed by the folio number, ‘a’ = recto or ‘b’ = verso, and line number. For Chinese sources, I have relied upon the *Taishō Canon* (abbreviated as ‘T’). The number following the siglum ‘T’ indicates the volume in this Canon, followed by a dot and then by page, segment (‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’), and column number.

AbhSamBh	<i>Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya</i> (Tatia ed.)
AKBh	<i>Abhidharmakośabhāṣya</i> (Pradhan ed.)
BoBh	<i>Bodhisattvabhūmi</i>
BoBh-D	Dutt ed.
BoBh-W	Wogihara ed.
Ch.	Chinese
CMPr	<i>Caryāmelāpakapradīpa</i> (Wedemeyer ed.)
D	<i>sDedgē Canon</i> (Takasaki et al. ed.)
LĀv	<i>Laṅkāvatārasūtra</i> (Nanjio ed.)
MSĀ	<i>Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṅkāra</i> (Lévied.).
SadPuṇ	<i>Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra</i> (Kern and Nanjio ed.)
Skt.	Sanskrit
ŚrBh	<i>Śrāvakabhūmi</i> (Shukla ed.)
T	<i>Taishō Canon</i> (Takakusu and Watanabe ed.)
Tib.	Tibetan
Trim	<i>Triṃśikāvijñaptimātratāsiddhi</i> (Lévi ed.)
TrimBh	<i>Triṃśikāvijñaptimātratābhāṣya</i>
TrimBh-L	Lévi ed.
TrimBh-B	Buescher ed.

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