

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH VERSIONS OF THE DIAMOND SŪTRA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SKOPOS THEORY

D.Badmaanyambuu⁴⁶

Mi Tingting⁴⁷

Abstract: *The Diamond Sūtra is written in Sanskrit originally, which was translated into Chinese afterwards. Kumarajiva's version is the most popular one. Most of the English versions of the Diamond Sūtra that are widely spread in western countries are all translated according to Kumarajiva's Chinese version. This thesis aims to make comparative studies on the Chinese version and English versions to summarize the words translation techniques, explore the factors that affect the translators' translation.*

Keywords: *The Diamond Sūtra, A. Charles Muller, Kumarajiva, translation*

1. Introduction

The Diamond Sūtra, also known as *the Diamond Prajna Paramita Sūtra*, is the essence of Mahāyāna Buddhism prajna sūtra. Its Sanskrit name is vajracchedikā nāma trīsatikā prajñāpāramitā. It plays an important role in the Buddhist and secular circles, and has a great influence on the development of Zen Buddhist and neo-Confucianism in the song and Ming dynasties. In Chinese culture, *the Diamond Sūtra* is a Buddhist sūtra with great influence. Over the past thousand years, so many people have become enlightened because of *the Diamond Sūtra*. Nan huaijin (a contemporary Chinese poet, Buddhist scholar, educator, disseminator of ancient Chinese culture) once said, “*The Diamond Sūtra* transcends all religions and contains all religions.” Wu zetian, the empress of China, once praised this sūtra: “It is the most profound and subtle law. Now that I have seen my troubles sustained, I wish to understand the truth and righteousness of the Tathagata.”

The Diamond Sūtra is mainly discusses about empty wisdom in the form of questions and answers between Buddha and his elder disciple Subhuti. It focuses on the problem that all the things in the world are not real or non-existent. It is generally believed that the former part is about non-existence of living beings, and the latter part is about non-existence of Dharma. The concept of non-existence in Buddhism is the essence of Buddhist religion. Kumarajiva was the first one who translated *the Diamond Sūtra* from Sanskrit to Chinese.

⁴⁶ Доктор /Ph.D/, МУИС, ШУС, ХУС-ын Ази судлалын тэнхим

⁴⁷ МУИС-ийн Күнзийн Институт

2. English Translation of *The Diamond Sūtra*

As been mentioned above *The Diamond Sūtra* plays an influential role in Buddhist sūtras, there are several Sanskrit to Chinese versions, Chinese to English versions and Sanskrit to English versions of *the Diamond Sūtra*. According to the data collected online, there were few studies on the English translation of *the Diamond Sūtra*.

2.1 Table (see the table)

1	Samuel Beal	1865	E. S. Beal, Vajra-chhedika, the “Kin Kong King” or Diamond Sūtra , in Journal of Royal Asiatic Society, N. S. I., pp.1-24, 1864-1865, from Chinese to English.
2	E.B.Cowell, Friedrich Max Muller, J. Takakusu	1894	DIAMOND-CUTTER, Translated by E.B. Cowell, F. Max Muller, and J. Takakusu, from Sanskrit to English.
3	William Gemmel	1912	William Gemmel: The Diamond Sūtra or Prajna-Paramita, London, Trubner 1912, from Chinese to English.
4	Dwight Goddard	1931	<i>A Buddhist Bible</i> , ed. by Dwight Goddard, Based on William Gemmell’s translation edited, rearranged and interpreted.
5	Daisetz T. Suzuki	1934	<i>The Diamond Sūtra</i> , Daisetz T. Suzuki, Manual of Zen Buddhism, 1934, pp.43-56., from Sanskrit to English.
6	Hsuan Hua	1974	<i>A General Explanation: Vajra Prajna Paramita Sūtra</i> , from Chinese to English(Unknown Chinese Basis)
7	Schopen Gregory	1989	Studies in the Literature of the Great Vehicle: Three Mahāyāna Buddhist Texts, from Sanskrit to English.
8	Thich Nhat Hanh	1992	The Diamond that Cuts Through Illusion, from Chinese to English (unknown Chinese basis)
9	Mu Soeng	2000	The Diamond Sūtra: Transforming the Way we Perceive the World, from Sanskrit to English
10	Edward Conze	2001	Buddhist Wisdom: The Diamond Sūtra and The Heart Sūtra, from Sanskrit to English.
11	Red Pine	2001	The Diamond Sūtra: The Perfection of Wisdom; Text and Commentaries, from Sanskrit to English
12	A. F. Price, Wong Mou-Lam	2004	<i>The Diamond Sūtra</i> , A. F. Price, Wong Mou-Lam, Published by Kessinger Publishing, 2004, from Chinese to English.
13	Paul Harrison	2006	Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā: A New English Translation of the Sanskrit Text Based on Two Manuscripts from Greater Gandhara, from Sanskrit to English
14	Chung Tai Translation Committee	2009	The Diamond of Perfect Wisdom Sūtra, from the Chinese translation by Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva

15	Plum Village and SUNY Stony Brook BSPG	2010	The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion, Provided by The Plum Village and SUNY Stony Brook BSPG
16	A. Charles Muller	2013	<i>The Diamond Sūtra</i> , from Chinese to English
17	Charles Luk	unknown	The Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra, from Chinese to English
18	Charles Patton	unknown	<i>The Diamond Sūtra</i> , from Chinese to English
19	Lobsang Chunzin, Michael Roach	Unknown	The Diamond Sūtra (Tibetan-English), Lobsang Chunzin & Michael Roach, from Tibetan to English.

According to the table above, the author finds nineteen English versions of *The Diamond Sūtra* from now on. There are seven versions are translated from Sanskrit to English. At the same time, there are scholars translated *The Diamond Sūtra* on the basis of Tibetan or English versions. There are nine versions are translated from Chinese to English, and there is only one version translated on the basis of English version.

3. Research on English and Chinese Translation of *the Diamond Sūtra* in China

The author has searched the latest articles related to the English version's research of the Diamond Sūtra. Such as, Yang Yan and Jia Dejiang's *The Similarity of Translation Strategies of Chinese and English Religious Works from the Perspective of Adaptation Theory From the Theological Perspective*, this paper makes a comparative study of the English version of the Diamond Sūtra and the Chinese version of the Bible New Testament from the linguistic, literary and cultural perspectives, and finds that both Chinese and English religious works are adapted to different degrees in their translation. The linguistic and cultural contexts of the target language are discussed. Yang Dongmin's *Study on the Translation of Kumarajiva from the Perspective of Translation Norms: Taking the Diamond Sūtra as an example*, argues that Rush "pays attention to retaining the "interest" of the original text, and that his own experience, beliefs and understanding of the functions of the Buddhist Sūtra also make him comply with professional norms. Jiang Chunlan's master's thesis *On the Theory and Practice of Buddhist Sūtra Translation of Kumarajiva* discussed the theory of "translation taste" in Kumarajiva's translation. Jiang Zhejie's doctoral dissertation "Cultural and Linguistic Activities in the Six Dynasties of Wei, Jin and Late Rome" compares Roche's and Jerome's translation methods, and holds that both of them adopt free translation based on their respective situations and conform to the development of religion and have achieved success. Wang Dongping's doctoral dissertation "Study on the Tradition of Chinese Translation of Buddhist Scriptures" classifies Kumarajiva's Buddhist Sūtra translation thoughts into five aspects: untranslatability, literary school, honesty, simplicity and opposition to Ge Yi. It is believed that the application of translation field will help to improve the quality of Kumarajiva's translation. He Aijun's doctoral dissertation *Social Discourse Analysis of Translator's Subjectivity: Focusing on Buddhist Sūtra Translation and Modern Western Studies Translation*, he holds that

Kumarajiva's "new translation" style and its "authenticity" translation method effectively curb "Geyi", which makes Buddhist doctrine manifest and gradually becomes the main body of Chinese language, standing firmly in Chinese culture.

3.1 Choices of the Chinese version and English version of *the Diamond Sūtra*

Since the Diamond Sūtra was introduced into China, there are six Chinese versions from Eastern Jin Dynasty to Tang Dynasty in which the one translated by Kumarajiva is most popular and widespread one. Jiva's translation tries to ensure the original purpose, while retaining the features of the original text and conforming to the language features of the target text. This kind of free translation on the basis of preserving the meaning and style of the original text to the greatest extent indicates that Buddhist sūtra translation at that time has gradually become mature, laying a foundation for later translators and exerting great influence on the latter ages. Jiva's translation of sūtra has laid a solid foundation for the development of Chinese translation literature and opened a new situation of Chinese Buddhist culture. Therefore, this paper takes Kumarajiva's version as the object of study.

As for the English version, the author takes A. Charles Muller's one as the research object, using Skopos theory criteria to study the English versions. The reasons are as follows. First of all, the English version of the Diamond Sūtra is translated on the basis of Kumarajiva's Chinese version. A. Charles Muller's English version is the latest translation of the Diamond Sūtra, over the years, if the westerners' understanding of the Diamond Sūtra has been changed, and their understanding of the Diamond Sūtra will be reflected in the translated text. In addition A. Charles Muller is a scholar who majored in Buddhism studies, so he has a basic understanding and knowledge of Buddhism and Buddhist scriptures.

4. Skopos Theory

Skopos is a Greek word for "purpose"⁴⁸. As Vermeer puts it, "any action has an aim, a purpose". Thus, the word Skopos is "a technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation"⁴⁹. Vermeer founded the Skopos theory that applies the notion of Skopos to translation. In the framework of this theory, every translation is directed at an intended audience, and translation means "to produce a text in a target setting for a target purpose and target addressees in target circumstances". Vermeer points out the three possible kinds of purposes in the field of translation. First, the general purpose aimed at by the translator in the translation process (perhaps "to earn a living"); second, the communicative purpose aimed at by the TT in the target situation (perhaps "to instruct the reader"); and third, the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategies or procedure (for example, "to translate literally in order to show the structural particularities of the source language").

⁴⁸ Nord, Christiane. *Translating as a Purposeful Act-Functionalist Approach Explained*. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishing Company, [M]. 2001, 27-28.

⁴⁹ Reiss, K. and Vermeer. *Groundwork for a General Theory for Translation*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, [M]. 1984, 96.

4.1 Three Rules and Their Relationship

Skopos rule is the theme of the top ranking rule in Skopos theory. It declares that any translational action is determined by its skopos; that is, “the end justifies the means”. Vermeer’s skopos rule reads as follows: Therefore, each text is produced for a given purpose and should serve this purpose. We should translate/interpret/speak/write in a way that enables your text/translation to function in the situation in which it is used and with the people who want to use it and precisely in the way they want it to function⁵⁰. It means that a translator must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principle respecting to the TT. The principle is decided in specific situation and determined by translation commission and brief. At translational action has various translation skopos, which are in a hieratical order and determine the translation methods and strategies.

Besides Skopos rule, Skopos theory includes two other rules: the coherence rule and the loyalty rule. The first states that the translation should “be acceptable in a sense that is coherent to the receivers’ situation”. By coherence rule the translator is expected to produce a text conforming to the expectation of the target readers. The text should be interpretable to the readers given to their background situation and knowledge and the latter concerns intertextual coherence between the TT and ST. Its form depends on how the translator interprets the ST and the translation skopos. So to be more specific, it means coherence between the ST information received by the translator, the interpretation the translator makes of the information and the information that is encoded for the TT receivers⁵¹. In skopos theory, intertextual coherence does not always mean a maximal imitation of the ST. But as Vermeer suggests, it is a goal or the form expected in literary translation. Of the three, skopos rule is the predominating rule. Intertextual coherence rule (Fidelity) is considered less important than intratextual coherence and both are subordinate to the skopos rule.

4.1.1 A Function plus Loyalty Principle

The loyalty principle was put forward by Christiane Nord in view of the limitations of skopos theorie. Skopos theory is criticized as dethroning the original, for in skopos theory ST is regarded as only “an offer of information” (Nord, 2001: 31) intended for the TT receivers from which the translator makes select in accordance to their needs and expectation. The fidelity rule is put into a secondary place. In Nord’s opinion, loyalty is the “responsibility translators have towards their patterns in translational interaction and refers to the interpersonal relationship between the translator, the ST sender, the TT addressees and initiator.” Loyalty means that the translator should mediate between the expectations of the initiator, the target text receivers and the original author. It stresses that the TT purpose should be compatible with the original author’s intentions. The loyalty principle demands the translator’s respect for the author and limits the excessive practice of subjectivity in translating.

⁵⁰ Nord, Christiane. *Translating as a Purposeful Act-Functionalist Approach Explained*. Manchester, UK: St. Jerome Publishing Company,[M]. 2001,29.

⁵¹ Munday, Jeremy. *Introducing Translation Studies, Theories and Application*. London and New York: Routledge.[M] ,2002,80.

4.2 On Translation from the Perspective of Skopos theory's Loyalty Principle

In order to fully reflect the cultural background and significance of the original text, and to fully consider the cultural background of the target readers and other relevant aspects, attention should be paid to the use and adjustment of words, sentences and paragraphs in the process of English-Chinese translation. So that both the original text can be expressed and the reader can be considered. Let the ideological meaning of the original text reappear and close the gap between readers and their cultural background.

4.2.1 Features of the Words translation in the English Version

From the whole text of the English translation, Muller's translation is faithful to the original text, accurate choice of words, full consideration of the cultural background and significance of the original text, as well as the cultural background of the target readers, thus narrowing the gap between the original author and the target readers. The translation techniques A. Charles Muller uses is mainly direct translation.

Examples:

① 合掌恭敬而白佛言、有世尊。

...clasped his hands together and respectfully addressed the Buddha, saying: "How rare is the World-honored One! (Chapter 2)

In this sentence, A. Charles Muller has used "addressed" first, which means "tell sb. sth.", but then he adds the word "saying", which is so loyalty to the original text. Some other examples such as the follows:

② 須菩提白佛言。世尊。頗有衆生得聞如是言說章句生實信不。

Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One, will there be sentient beings who are able, upon hearing these words and sentences, to give rise to true faith?" (Chapter 6)

③ 爾時須菩提白佛言。世尊、當何名此經、我等云何奉持。

Then Subhūti addressed the Buddha, saying: "World-honored One, what should we call this scripture, and how should we practice it?"

④ 若菩薩有我相人相衆生相壽者相。卽非菩薩。

If a bodhisattva abides in the signs of self, person, sentient being, or life-span, she or he is not a bodhisattva.

In Chinese text, it is not clear of the bodhisattva's sex, so when translated into English, A. Charles Muller use "she or he" to make it clearer.

⑤ 我皆令入無餘涅槃而滅度之。

I save them by causing them to enter nirvana without remainder. (Chapter 3)

In Chinese, "令" means "let or make someone to do something", but in the Diamond Sūtra it is a Buddha action for the disciples, actually "save" if proper to express the Buddha doctrine to the English readers.

⑥世尊。佛說我得無諍三昧人中最為第一、是第一離欲阿羅漢。

World-honored One, you have said that I am the most proficient in terms of the attainment of the meditative absorption of no-contention, and that I am the arhat most free from the desire. (Chapter 9)

In Chinese, “離” means “leave”, but here A. Charles Muller translates the word as “be free from”. It can not only make the target readers understand, but also convey the meaning and culture of the original translator.

⑦是故須菩提、諸菩薩摩訶薩應如是生清淨心。

And so, Subhūti, the bodhisattvas and mahasattvas should give rise to the pure aspiration in this way...(Chapter 10)

“清淨心” means Buddha’s mind, the bodhicitta inherent in human’s nature. There is no corresponding word in English to express the meaning of the word. A. Charles Muller use the “pure aspiration” to translate it, which is proper to this situation.

⑧若有善男子善女人、以七寶滿爾所恒河沙數三千大千世界。

If a good son or good daughter filled three thousand galaxies with the seven jewels equal to the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers. (Chapter 11)

In Buddhist sūtras, “七寶” translated by different sūtras are different. The “七寶” the Diamond Sūtra are gold, silver, glaze, coral, inkstone, red beads and agate. A. Charles Muller use direct translation technique to translate it as “seven jewels”; whereas “三千大千世界” is Buddhist cosmology. Three thousand worlds are one thousand worlds. A. Charles Muller translates it as “three thousand galaxies”, which is common for the English readers to understand.

⑨translation of “法” and “法相”

In the Diamond Sūtra, the word “法” appears seven times, “法相” appears sixty-nine times. However, in A. Charles Muller’s version the same word has different kinds of translations.

Table:

法相:

Chinese sentences	English translation	times	Chapter
1. 無法相亦無非法相。 2. 若取法相即著我人衆生壽者。何以故。若取非法相。即著我人衆生壽者。	1. Nor do they abide in the notions of the dharma , or the notions of non-dharma . 2. If they grasp to the notions of phenomena , they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span. Why? If they grasp to the denial of phenomena , then they will attach to self, person, sentient being, and life span.	4	6

不生法相。須菩提、所言法相者。如來說即非法相。是名法相。	One should not give rise to signs for phenomena . Subhūti, the Tathāgata has explained that these so-called signs of phenomena are precisely not signs of phenomena . Therefore they are called signs of phenomena .	4	31
Total		8	

As we can see above, “法相” appears eight times, which means that believers adhere to the superficial truth of Buddhism. “非法相” is the negative form of “法相”, which means one does not adhere to the principles of Buddhism. In A. Charles Muller’s translation, he uses two words to refer to “法相”, one is “dharma”, and the other one is “phenomena”. The author checked the word “dharma” in WIKIPEDIA, it says that in Buddhism, dharma means “cosmic law and order”, and is also applied to the teachings of Buddha. In Buddhist philosophy, dharma is also the term for “phenomena”. Therefore, if the “dharma” or “phonology” in the original text refers to Buddhist Dharma, the translation will be more accurate. The use of these two words to translate can better reflect the diversity of English language and the intention of the author of the original text.

It is the same situation of “法”, which appears sixty-five times, now the author will give some representative examples as follows:

① 所謂不住色布施。不住聲香味觸法布。

This is what is called “practicing charity while not abiding in form,” and “practicing charity while not abiding in sound, odor, taste, touch, or conceptions.” (Chapter4)

② 不入色聲香味觸法。

One does not enter form, sound, odor, taste, touch, or concepts. (Chapter9)

③ 不應住聲香味觸法生心。

They should not give rise to the aspiration while abiding in sound, odor, taste, touch, or concepts. (Chapter10)

④ 法尚應捨、何況非法。

If even my correct teachings are to be abandoned, how much more incorrect teachings? (Chapter6)

⑤ 如來有所說法耶。

And does he have a teaching that he explains? (Chapter7)

⑥ 若菩薩心住於法而行布施、如人入闇則無所見。

If a bodhisattva practices charity while abiding in notions of the teaching, it is like a person in the dark who cannot see anything. (Chapter14)

⑦如來昔在然燈佛所、於法有所得不。

When the tathāgata studied under Dīpaṃkara Buddha, did he gain any attainment in the dharma? (Chapter10)

⑧無有定法名阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。

There is no determinable phenomenon called peerless perfect enlightenment. (Chapter7)

⑨一切有爲法。

All conditioned phenomena. (Chapter32)

In the above example sentences, the “法” of the original Chinese text is the same, but the meaning in the Scriptures is different.

In the first three sentences, “法” is used in the special sentence “色聲香味觸法”, in which “色、聲、香、味、觸、法” is Buddhist terminology of “Six Dusts” (六尘). Among them, “法” refers to mental concept, which is the object of consciousness, so A. Charles Muller translated into “concept” is suitable.

In sentences ④⑤⑥, “法” means some doctrines the Buddha teaches, so A. Charles Muller translated into “teaching” is suitable.

In sentences ⑦⑧⑨, “法” means Buddhist dharma, so A. Charles Muller translated into “dharma” or “phenomena” is also suitable.

Summary

Skopos theory allows the possibility that the same text is translated in different ways according to the purpose of the translator. Then in *the Diamond Sūtra*, the translators use different translation techniques, which may be caused by distinctive translation purposes. A. Charles Muller is interested in Mahāyāna Buddhism and pays attention to translating the Mahāyāna Buddhist sūtra. He once said, he had been, throughout his career, deeply involved in the work of translating classical East Asian works for the Western audiences. He translated the sūtras for common readers, not for Buddhist professionals. Thus, in his translation, except for the names of Buddhas or places, most of the Buddhist terms are in English, not in transliterated Sanskrit, which is totally convenient for understanding. Meanwhile, his translation is popular and easy to understand. Both the forms and content are faithful to the original text. Besides, he also translated several Chinese classics, such as the Analects of Confucius, Great Learning and Mencius. His translation style is similar to the above classics, totally faithful to the form of the original text without footnote and amplified contents. Thus, in translating *the Diamond Sūtra*, he commonly uses literal translation.

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