

## **Methodology for Buddhist Studies: Textual Study and Translation**

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### **Overview**

- ⊃ General Methodologies
- ⊃ Methodologies dealing with Buddhist Texts
- ⊃ Methodologies for Buddhist Text Translation
- ⊃ Thesis Style and format

Friedrich Heiler, the research method in religious studies may draw simultaneously upon all the valuable knowledge supplied by ethnology, philology and psychology.

### **Five conditions that are helpful in religious studies:**

1. A strictly inductive method. It must be based on historical facts.

2. Inductive method requires the investigation of the sources -- the texts and commentaries. That again require language. "The Student of religion should be a student of language too." With an adequate understanding Pali, you will be in a position to at least check on the translation of key terms.

⊃ 3. Religion should not only be studied in books, but in living people, both in individuals and in societies. For example, participating in one session of Vipassana meditation will help one understand better about Theravada Abhidhamma.

⊃ 4. A universal point of view. The greatest danger, however, is that dogmatic view of religion that takes one's own religion as absolute, and regards that religion as a shining light, and all other ones as unrelieved darkness.

⊃ In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha expressed concern over any conclusion based on their own tradition without experiencing or experimenting the truth.

⊃ 5. one goes to the essence. One should penetrate everywhere to the heart of religious experience.

## Methodologies dealing with Buddhist Texts

- ⇒ A Critical Attitude toward the Texts
- ⇒ Linguistic Analysis
- ⇒ Investigating Background

## 1. A Critical Attitude toward the Texts

- ⇒ Any dogmatic view towards the other religions or other schools should be avoided.
- ⇒ Usually, a Buddhist attitude toward the texts of one's tradition are quite different from that of a Buddhist scholar. For research, a critical attitude toward the texts is required and the different functions of a Buddhist and a Buddhist scholar should not be confused. The only kind of truth one can have as scholar is what is subject to discussion and verification in the open arena of the academy.

## 2. Linguistic Analysis

- ⇒ Investigation of the texts and commentaries requires knowledge of language(s). A complete understanding of the texts is possible only through knowledge of the language in question.
- ⇒ It is notable that distinguished Buddhist scholars like Stcherbatsky, Lamotte, Nagao etc., utilized the method of linguistic analysis to make great achievements in Buddhist studies. From their works, it is evident that a commonality among all of them is that they have mastered the Buddhist languages, i.e., Sanskrit, Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan.

- ⇒ Prof. Nagao says "Buddhist studies in the future will have to be based upon a more critical and thorough-going philological analysis of the Buddhist texts that have been transmitted to us through several different traditions. In the present state of Buddhist studies, I feel that philology must precede philosophy or history, but what is even more important is the fact that the former must not nullify the latter.

## 3. Investigating Background

- ⇒ We understand a text or a theory by looking into its background. For example, Nāgārjuna's philosophy of emptiness should be better understood if one knows the background which was the refutation of the Abhidhamikas whose views take the dharmas as reality and recognize the three phases of existence of dharmas.

- ⇒ Understanding a sūtra or a commentary is the ability to contextualize, to place the text under discussion in its historical context, both in the broad sense of tracing continuities and discontinuities with the earlier tradition, and in the narrower sense of seeing how a text fits into the larger corpus of its author.
- ⇒ Contextualization should also, wherever possible, include a placing of the text in its socio-cultural context in an attempt to show how particular forms of thought arose in interaction with particular forms of society.
- ⇒ Investigating background of a text also requires that one must explicitly understand the intentions of the text's author. It is at this point that creative thinking begins to operate, and it is only when this point has been reached that any attempt at interpretation is likely to have success.

## **Methodologies for Buddhist Text Translation**

- ⇒ A Brief History of the Translation of Buddhist Text in the West
- ⇒ New Method of Translation

## **A Brief History of the Translation of Buddhist Text in the West**

- ⇒ 1. The first phase covers the early years of the colonial period on the Indian subcontinent by persons who were influenced by Christianity.
- ⇒ These translations contain a very high degree of Christian coloring in the language of the translations and in the interpretation of the original material. Kern and Rhys Davis belong to this category.

## **A Brief History of the Translation of Buddhist Text in the West**

- ⇒ 2. The second phase covers roughly the first half of this century (1900-1950).
- ⇒ The categories and concepts of traditional western philosophy became dominant.
- ⇒ The translators like Stcherbatsky and Conze were influenced by Kantian ideas. Conze's insistence upon the use of the term "the absolute" to translate paramārtha.

## **A Brief History of the Translation of Buddhist Text in the West**

- ⇒ 3. The new fashion has been to look to western psychology, as taught primarily by Freud and Jung. There also has been a new tendency to adopt the concepts of linguistic relativism, by Wittgenstein.
- ⇒ They have made large-scale use of concepts and terms taken from modern Western psychology and linguistic relativism. The works of Guenther and many others also fall into this category.

- ⇒ What these three phases have in common is the imposition of the Western conceptual scheme upon Buddhist material.
- ⇒ They have looked at the Buddhist texts through some Western spectacle of one color or another. The result has inevitably caused distortion of the original genuine Buddhist message. For example, Buddhist philosophers like Asanga and Vasubandhu have a very different outlook from that of the traditional western idealism.

## **New Method of Translation**

- ⇒ Daboom Tulku: The confusion which arises in attempting to understand translations of Buddhist texts loaded with Christian or Kantian or even Freudian, Jungian or Wittgensteinian concepts and terms must be lessened.
- ⇒ The new approach to translation will speak with a genuine Buddhist voice, presented in a language and style comprehensible to the average educated reader.

⇒ Joe Bransford Wilson: "analysis (philological, historical, and philosophical) is needed in translation, but it should be relegated to the introduction, to the footnotes, or perhaps to annotations."

⇒ Elizabeth Napper says that "the most useful translation is one that simply translates the text as accurately and as literally as possible," not to seek for the elegance of style, nor finding similar Western philosophical term, nor English idioms.

### **Three Criteria**

⇒ 1. The criterion for what gets translated should not be elegance of style, but rather appropriateness as a vehicle to allow full understanding of this Buddhist tradition.

⇒ 2. It is better to translate equivalents that simply translate the term rather than seeking to find a comparable term within the Western philosophical tradition.

⇒ 3. It is not proper to seek to shift Buddhist terminology into the current idiom of western culture. Because languages are in a constant state of change, too much concern with being current leads to translation that are quickly dated.

⇒ A new method suggested by Elizabeth Napper for Buddhist text translation was one in which one translates the text as accurately and as literally as possible, not to seek for the elegance of style, nor finding similar Western philosophical term, nor English idioms.

## **Conclusion**

⇒ For research on Buddhist studies, any dogmatic view to the other religious or other schools should be avoided. Inductive method should be used where the first step is to investigate the sources by using the original language, i.e. Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese.

- ⇒ the method of translation of Buddhist texts should be as literal and accurate as possible, but should be clear, concise and readable English and allow it to speak a genuine Buddhist voice.
- ⇒ Western philosophical analysis should not be applied in the translation of the text. That is, the translation should not be influenced by those terms of the Christian, or those of traditional Western philosophy or those of modern movements in Western intellectual circles.

- ⇒ It is not sufficient to translate a text and to explain briefly some technical terms. Both the introduction and the commentary of a translation ought to give full information on all matters relating to the text.
- ⇒ Whenever possible, the original Sanskrit terms should be provided along with the English translation. It is better to use the Sanskrit terms for some technical terms. commentaries.

## **Finally...**

- ⇒ 1. Have knowledge of the history of Buddhism
- ⇒ 2. Have basic knowledge of Buddhist doctrines
- ⇒ 3. knowledge of Buddhist language, at least a knowledge can use dictionary to check some technical terms.
- ⇒ 4. Respect all traditions
- ⇒ 5. Experience yourself.

## **Thesis Style and Format**

- ⇒ <http://elibrary.ibc.ac.th/Thesis-Guide>