

Study of Translation Strategies for English Version of the Diamond Sūtra from the Perspective of Skopos Theory

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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 trīṣatikā 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.

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 are few studies on the English translation of the *Diamond Sūtra*, as shown in table (1).

table 1

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	A Buddhist Bible, ed. by Dwight Goddard, Based on William Gemmell's translation edited, rearranged and interpreted.
5	Daisetz T. Suzuki	1934	The Diamond Sūtra, Daisetz T. Suzuki, Manual of Zen Buddhism, 1934, pp.43-56., from Sanskrit to English.
6	Hsuan Hua	1974	A General Explanation: Vajra Prajna Paramita Sūtra , 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	The Diamond Sūtra, 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	The Diamond Sūtra, from Chinese to English
17	Charles Luk	unknown	The Diamond Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra, from Chinese to English
18	Charles Patton	unknown	The Diamond Sūtra, 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. Skopos Theory

Skopos is a Greek word for “purpose” (Nord, 2001:27). 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” (Reiss and Vermeer, 1984:96). 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”.

4. Words translation of the English Version of the Diamond Sūtra under the Guidance of Skopos theory

In order to make the translation readable and acceptable, to make the reader understand the content of the original text better, directly and simply, the translator should adjust the words, sentences and paragraphs appropriately in the process of translation. By adding, deleting and transforming words, adjusting sentence patterns and paragraphs, the translator can make the translation accord with the reader. Reading habits, on the basis of maintaining the complete transmission of the original content, make it easier for readers to accept the translation and make the translation readable. Now let's set some examples of the words translation in the English version.

4.1. Features of the Words Translation in the English Version

In translating the Buddhist terms, A. Charles Muller has different features in the following aspects: the translation and explanations to the Buddhist terms, the length of expressions and readability of the words.

There are a lot of Buddhist terms in the Diamond Sūtra, such as the names of Buddha, Buddhist places, the states in practicing Buddhist doctrine. Such as “舍卫国”“涅槃”“佛”“须菩提”“如来”“菩萨”“释迦牟尼”and “世尊”, some of the terms were the transliterated Sanskrit, but some were used free translation.

Examples:

舍卫国: Śrāvastī

祇树给孤独园: Jetavana Grove

须菩提: Subhūti

佛: Buddha

世尊: the World-honored One

如来: Tathāgata

菩萨: Bodhisattva

摩诃萨: Mahasattva

The above religious names are all common to be used in sūtras, not only in Sanskrit text, but also in English text. Except for the examples above, the other Buddhist terms in the Diamond Sūtra appear in different way of translation. For the names of the Buddha, the translation can be divided into three parts.

(1) Translated from Sanskrit.

(2) Sanskrit+English

(3) English

All the Buddhist terms as shown in the table:

Buddhist Names and places in Chinese	expression in English	ways of translation
佛	Buddha	Sanskrit
比丘	Monk	English
世尊	The World-honored One	English
须菩提	Subhūti	Sanskrit
舍卫国	Śrāvastī	Sanskrit
祇树给孤独园	Jetavana Grove	Sanskrit+English
菩萨	Bodhisattva	Sanskrit
摩诃萨	Mahāsattva	Sanskrit
如来	Tathāgata	Sanskrit
须陀洹	Srota-āpanna	Sanskrit
斯陀含	Sakrdāgāmin	Sanskrit
阿那含	Anāgāmin	Sanskrit
阿罗汉	Arhat	Sanskrit
燃灯佛	Dīpamkara Buddha	Sanskrit
佛土	Buddha-lands	Sanskrit+English
释迦牟尼	Śākyamuni	Sanskrit
比丘尼	nun	English
优婆塞	Male	English
优婆夷	Female	English
阿修罗	Titans	English

As we can see from the table, for most of the Buddhist names or places A. Charles Muller expresses in Sanskrit, but some of them is expressed in English, only a few is expressed in Sanskrit plus English, such as “祇树给孤独园” is translated into “Jetavana Grove”, which means the famous Buddhist holy place is located five miles outside the South Gate of Śrāvastī. Actually the Sanskrit of “祇树给孤独园” is “Jetavanavihāra”, “Grove” in English means “a small area of land with fruit trees of particular types on it”, but here Charles make an abbreviation of “Jetavanavihāra” and plus the meaning of “Grove”. “佛土”is also translated

by the way of Sanskrit plus English, which means the kingdom of Buddha, the territory of Buddha, the Buddhist realm and the Buddhist temple. It refers to the place where Buddha lives or the land of Buddhism. It refers not only to the pure land, but also to the real world (filthy land) where ordinary people live. It is also called the Buddhist land.

4.2. The Length of Expressions

For some of the Buddhist terms, especially some terms that has adjective or adverbs in Chinese, however, A. Charles Muller's expressions are totally shorter.

阿耨多罗三藐三菩提: peerless perfect enlightenment (Chapter 2)

不可思量: be incalculable (Chapter 4)

有色: have form (Chapter 3)

清淨心: pure aspiration (Chapter 10)

三千大千世界: a chiliocosm (Chapter 8)/three thousand galaxies (Chapter 11)

一合相: composite (Chapter 30)

In translating Buddhist terms, A. Charles Muller uses two forms in his version that is transliterated Sanskrit or English. Without any note, omission and amplification, his translation is faithful to the Chinese text. It's the direct translation in translation studies.

Translation Techniques of A. Charles Muller's version:

(1) transliterated Sanskrit

(2) English

(3) direct translation

5. Summary

As a modern scholar, A. Charles Muller is interested in Mahāyāna Buddhism and pays attention to translating the Mahāyāna Buddhist Sūtras. Once he said, he had been, throughout his career, deeply involved in the work of translating classical East Asian works for the Western audience. He was really interested in and investigated the meaning and role of Mahāyāna Buddhism. 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.

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