

Study on Xuanzang's Translation of *Heart Sutra* — Concurrently Discuss the “Five Untranslatable Situations” of Buddhist Scripture Translation

Jian Xue

School of Foreign Languages,
China West Normal University,
Nanchong, China
E-mail: 327014370@qq.com

Abstract:

Buddhism has far-reaching influence on religion, philosophy and culture in the East and even the world. The Heart Sutra, namely the Prajna Sutra, is the heart of the Mahayana Buddhism and the center of Prajna's thought in the Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore the research on Xuan Zang's Translation of Heart Sutra can not only explore the spread of Buddhism in China, but also further explore the practical enlightenment on the translation of contemporary Chinese classics of his “Five Untranslatable Situations”.

Key words: *Heart Sutra*; “Five Untranslatable Situations”; Chinese translation of classics

1. Introduction

Prajnaparamita-hrdaya-sutra (Sanskrit: प्रज्ञापारमिताहृदयसूत्र), also known as "Capricorn Prajna Paramita Sutra", referred to as "Plain Heart Sutra" or "Heart Sutra", is a Buddhist classic verse. It is the general outline governing the Mahayana Buddhism as well as the Hinayana Buddhism. It can said to be an introduction of the entire Dharma. As the founder of the sect and the founder of the existence sect and Fa-hsiang sect, Xuanzang devoted his whole life to Buddhist Scriptures Translating.

The most four celebrated Buddhist Scriptures translators in the ancient time are Xuanzang, Kumarajiva, Zhendi and Bukong. They are known as “four greatest translators” in the history of Chinese Buddhist Scriptures translation. During the process of translation, Xuanzang combined his unique Buddhist insights with long-term translation practice and summed up a comprehensive and practical translation theory -The Five Untranslatable Situations. “The Buddhist historians again called the translations made before Kumarajiva as 'ancient translation', and called the ones after as 'old translations', and yet gave the name of 'new translations' to Xuanzang." Visible, Xuanzang really created a new style and new situation in the history of Chinese translation." (Chen Fukang, 2000: 38) Through the study of the Chinese translation of Xuanzang's *Heart Sutra*, we can not only further understand the “Five Untranslatable Situations”, but also can dig out its profound inspiration for the contemporary translation of classics as well as put forward a systematic theory to accelerate the Chinese translation of classics.

2. *Heart Sutra* and its Chinese translation

As the essence of Prajna Sutra, *Heart Sutra* is the general outline governing the Mahayana Buddhism as well as the Hinayana Buddhism. It can said to be an introduction of the entire Dharma. It is an important way for the world to understand the omnipotence of thought. Since its birth, it has been short and easy to understand. Its essence is widely favored by Buddhist lovers. As a Buddhist scripture which has been read, explained and interoperated for the most times, *Heart Sutra* has appeared in a large number of different translations. In Fang Guangchang's *Collection of Interpretations of Maha-prajnaparamita-hadaya-sutra*,¹ there currently exists totally 18 kinds of Brahman and Chinese translations (including Chinese translations, Chinese transliteration, Sanskrit texts, etc.). According to the Fangshan Yunju Temple stone carving Buddhist Tripitaka organization Statistics, there are thirteen kinds of Chinese translations of *Heart Sutra*, among which there are seven popular versions. From point of view of time, the earliest translation version of *Heart Sutra* existing now is *Mounting Prajna Paramita* made by Kumarajiva who lived in Qin dynasty. While in terms of the degree of acceptance, Xuanzang's translation has won the greatest influence. The general Buddhist scriptures are divided into three parts. The first part is the preface, which explains the time, place and audience of the Buddha. The second part is the main content of the Buddhist scriptures. The third part is the circulation points. The baptism of Dharma is very happy. Therefore, in terms of content, the Chinese translation of *Heart Sutra* has been divided into two categories – the simplified version and the detailed version (also known as the simple book and the unabridged book or the small book and the big book). "The difference between the simplified version and the detailed version is that there is an increase of preface and circulation points. There is no essential

¹ Fang Guangchang,(1948-). Expert on Buddhist philology and Dunhuang studies. Now he engages in the study of Buddhist philology, Dunhuang studies and Indian Buddhism. *Collection of Interpretations of Maha-prajnaparamita-hadaya-sutra* has collected thirty-six kinds of translations and interpretations before Tang dynasty and between Tang and Song Dynasties (including two kinds of Brahman). That nearly contains all which can be found in China, and basically no omissions. (Preface of *Collection of Interpretations of Maha-prajnaparamita-hadaya-sutra*)

difference between the authentic points and the originals in this content." (Han Yanjie, 2012: 74) And in the most common seven Chinese translations, only Xuan Zang's and Kumarajir's are simplified versions.

3. Xuanzang and *Heart Sutra*

3.1 Xuanzang and translation

Xuanzang (600-664), a famous monk in the Tang Dynasty, is commonly known as the "Sanzang Rabbi." He chose to be nun at the age of thirteen and received full ordination at the age of twenty-one. On the third year of Zhenguan of Tang Emperor Taizong, he left for Dunhuang from Chang'an, and then arrived in India. He returned to Chang'an in the nineteenth year, and traveled for seventeen years, with a journey of 50,000 miles, which made him a legend. He delved into the doctrine of yoga in India and learned about the sympathy, the meditation and the statement of the ministry. Through hard work, he brought back more than 650 Sanskrit verses, the number and variety are both unprecedented. Tang Taizong wanted to hire him as an official but was rejected. After returning to China, Xuanzang lived in the temple for more than 20 years. He presided over the translation work of seventy-five parts, 1,335 volumes, accounting for more than half of the total number of new Buddhist scriptures in the Tang Dynasty. Therefore, he was called by the Indian scholar Bai Letian as "No.1 translator in the history of translation." Among these Buddhist scriptures are the *Plajolo Polo Heart Sutra*, and the *Heart Sutra*. *Heart Sutra* is of extraordinary status in Xuanzang's translation. It is the Mahayana classic translated by Xuanzang, Holy Scriptures which has been most widely spread and most widely spoken. Though contains no more than 260 Chinese characters, it has rich meanings. The translation is simple and smooth. The content is shallow and deep, with basic primitive Dharma For the sake of the foundation, the Dharma of the Mahayana is the soul. It is shallow when be read by simple-minded people, and deep for wise people." (Sage Master, 2009)

3.2 "Five Untranslatable Situations"

In the process of translating the scriptures, Master Xuanzang proposed the principle of Five Untranslatable Situations", and the accurate record of this principle is only contained in the first volume of "Translation of the Collection" edited by Song Yufa Yun, Zhou Dunyi Yu Shaoxing Ding Chounian (1157) In the preface written:

Master Xuanzang will not do the translation when it comes to any of following five situations: First, with secret, such as "Doroni" (blunt, curse). Second, with multiple meanings, such as "thin gamma", the Vatican has six meanings (free, flaming, dignified, name, auspicious, distinguished). Third, with no reason, such as " Syzygium cumini " (winning gold tree), there is no such wood in the Xiashi. Fourth, with the ancients, such as "Aunt Bodhi" (positively biased), can not be turned,

and since the Moteng, often the Fanyin. Five, with Good fortune, such as "prajna" respect, "wisdom" is light and shallow; and the seven fans' work is called "Sakyamuni", the name "Nengren", "Nengren" is the righteousness of Zhou Kongkong; "Aunt Bodhi", the name is "positively partial", which means Tao Laozi's teaching has the right way to be true and true, and is not different; "Bodhisattva", the name "avenue heart all beings" is inferior. They are all covered and not turned over.

The word "Untranslatable" here does not mean not translating, but rather "not intended to translate", using transliteration. Explain these five principles in modern vernacular are: first, the words with mystery are not translated, as there are many spells in the Buddhist scriptures. For example, if the "Doroni" is translated, it will lose its special meaning, so it will lose its magic; The ambiguous Sanskrit will not be translated. For example, the word "Bhagavan" has six meanings, so the original text is reserved for transliteration. Third, the concept of things which are not found in the original culture of translation will not be translated. For example, the "floating tree" in Buddhism is a tree unique to India, therefore using transliteration; Fourth, the customary words should follow the habit of transliteration. If the ancients have translated some Buddhist special words, such as "Aunt Bodhi", although they can be translated, cause confusion. It is best to use the ancient translation rather than a new translation; Transliteration can make people feel respectful, otherwise it loses its sense of mystery and will be looked down upon by peopel. For example, the meaning of "prajna" in Sanskrit is similar to wisdom, but if you translate "prajna" into "wisdom", it becomes light and shallow, so we'd better use transliteration. It is very important that although these five principles were proposed by the ancient Xuanzang for the translation of Buddhist scriptures, they have had an important influence on other texts and translations for other languages.

3.3 The Practical Enlightenment of the Xuan Zang's Translation of *Heart Sutra*

As for the quality of translation, the Xuan Zang's translation is the peak of Buddhist translation in Chinese translation. In the Tang Dynasty, Gao Shudao Xuan once praised the translation of the teachings in the "Xuan Yu Chuan" in Volume 4 of the Continuation of Gao Biao. "In the beginning, I wrote this article from Sanskrit, and then return it, along with this custom. Then the pen confuses the sentence, the middle increases the damage, and falls into the whole sentence. The rumors are all by purpose, meaning arbitrarily, and the words are written. The word person can write with the words." (Dao Xuan, 2014: 68) that means different from the previous translation according to Sanskrit, word by word and then rewritten according to Chinese grammar, and finally polish the process, Xuanzang ,because of his profound bilingual knowledge and his familiarities with Buddhism, directly formed a chapter during translation. Therefore, its translation has provided valuable practical revelation for the translation of Buddhist scriptures and even the translation of modern classics.

First of all, as for the principle of translation and translation skills, Xuanzang's "Five Untranslatable Situations" principle put forward in the translation of *Heart Sutra* is a good guide for contemporary translators to reasonably deal with cultural and geographical differences in the translation of Chinese classics. These five principles are easy to remember and have strong operability. In the process of Chinese translation of classics, following these principles can greatly reduce the difficulty of the translator's work, save time, improve translation efficiency, and keep the exotic sense of translation which will inspire readers for further exploration. At the same time, in the process of translation of *Heart Sutra*, master Xuanzang comprehensively used the translation techniques such as supplementary ellipsis, morphing, sub-legalization, etc. It can be seen that good translation is scientific and reasonable in translation techniques. It is the result of comprehensive use of translation skills. Second, Xuanzang's translation has important implications for collective translation. Since the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Chinese translation has adopted the "collective translation" method of multi-person cooperation. In the face of the vast scriptures that Xuanzang brought back, he did not rely on only himself, but developed a more rigorous and sound division of labor. According to the record of the *Successful Biography*, Xuan Zang's translation has more than eleven divisions. Such a detailed and scientific division of labor can now guarantee the orderliness, accuracy and fluency of translation work from different levels. In this way, "after ten steps, the accuracy and readability of the translation, even if it is not perfect, are nearly perfect." (Dai Tian, 1986: 34) Finally, solid bilingual ability is the cornerstone of the successful development of Chinese translation of classics. Compared with the *Heart Sutra* of Guangben, the reason why Xuanzang's Chinese translation can surpass the earliest Kumarajiva's is fundamentally attributed to Xuanzang's language superiority and understanding of the source language culture. The master of language, Ji Xianlin, once commented that Xuanzang "has a good command of both Chinese and Sanskrit. He has studied in India for decades and has participated in the great debates on Indian religious philosophy. He has profound research on various sects in India and various sects in Buddhism." Therefore, the translation of Xuanzang's *Heart Sutra* also has profound practical enlightenment on contemporary translation of classics. It likes a bright light inspiring translators from generation to generation.

4. Conclusion

Heart Sutra is an important Buddhist classic. Through the study of Xuanzang's translation, we can roughly sort out the historical process of its Chinese translation. At the same time, studies on the translation process and the "Five Untranslatable Situations" can further explore its enlightenment for modern translation. Good translation is based on profound language foundation, comprehensive application of various translation techniques, and adhering to scientific and reasonable translation principles. Only by this way, can classic translation in China obtain "rebirth". We can also get inspiration to build a better platform for Chinese people to understand other world

civilizations and taste the world's classic culture.

References

Fangshan Research group on inscriptions of classics on stone (1982). Finding two versions of Sanskrit Heart Sutra. *Fayin*(2) ,20.

Fukang, Chen(2000). *A History of Translation Theory in China*. Shanghai : Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.

Guangchang,Fang(2011). *Collection of Interpretations of Maha-prajnaparamita-hadaya-sutra*. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House.

Master Sheng-Yen(2009). *The Classic of the Heart*. Xi'an:Shaanxi Normal University Press.

Tian,Dai(1986). *Deflowering and Honey Making-Talking about Translation Essays Translation* (1), 32-36.

Xianlin ,Ji(2015). *Sixteen Lectures on Buddhism*. Wuhan: Changjiang Literature & Art Press.

Xuan,Dao (2014). *Continuation Eminent Monk Biography*. Beijing : Zhonghua Book Company.

Yanjie, Han(2012). *Study of Sanskrit Buddhist Scripture*. Beijing: Religion and Culture Publishing House.