

Usefulness of Chinese Translations for the Study of Buddhism

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In the academic study of Buddhism, Chinese texts constitute the primary source-material for East Asian Buddhism. However, regarding Indian Buddhism, how useful are Chinese translations, considering that texts in Indo-Aryan languages form the primary material? We can postulate the following cases:

1. When the Indian original or its translation in Tibetan or other languages is lost, the Chinese translation is indispensable as the only surviving version.
2. When the Indian original is extant but the Chinese translation is based on a different (and often earlier) version, discrepancies in the texts can occasionally provide valuable information.
3. When the Indian original is extant and the Chinese translation corresponds to the same version, the translation is helpful in editing and understanding the original.
4. Records about the Chinese translation give us important information such as the latest possible date for the formation of the Indian text.

I will discuss problems concerning these aspects and the possibility of further study, with concrete examples of texts.