

# A Project for a Buddhist Chinese Dictionary

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Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures are very important not only for Chinese philology, but also for Buddhist studies. They greatly predate most of our extant Sanskrit and Tibetan manuscripts, and may provide substantial clues to the origin and development of Buddhist scriptures. Particularly, early Chinese translations, ranging from the 2nd to the 4th century of the Common Era, are primary sources for studying the formation of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.

The proper study of such texts, based on a critical comparison of Chinese, Sanskrit and Tibetan versions, has just begun. However, the extensive usage of neologisms—most of them, Buddhist technical terms—and of vernacular expressions in Chinese Buddhist translations, makes their study difficult. Fortunately, an increasing number of sinologists are taking an interest in this field. Most of their studies on this topic, however, show a tendency to ‘pick’ only the most interesting colloquial words and usages from a large amount of vernacularisms. Apart from this, these scholars devote themselves to piecing together instances of vernacularisms from various Buddhist scriptures or comparing them with similar expressions in Chinese secular literature. This is done in order to define their meaning inductively, without making the best use of the special character of Buddhist scriptures, i.e., without taking into account that they are translations and that in most cases there are corresponding texts in Sanskrit, Pāli or Tibetan as well as alternative translations in Chinese. Vernacularisms and neologisms in Buddhist texts may be clarified through comparison with their equivalents in such materials.

In view of all this it becomes clear that a detailed glossary is greatly needed for each Buddhist scripture which lists and defines medieval vernacular words and usages, semantic peculiarities, Buddhist technical terms, transliterations, etc. On the basis of such glossaries, one could further imagine larger compilations that would cover all translations done by a particular translator (or team of translators).

My first attempts in this direction were *A Glossary of Dharmarakṣa’s Translation of the Lotus Sutra* (1998) and *A Glossary of Kumārajīva’s Translation of the Lotus Sutra* (2001). At present, I am in the process of writing *A Glossary of Lokakṣema’s Translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* and *Lokakṣema’s Translation of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā: Annotated Text*, both of which are to be published in the coming academic year. Apart from these, I am planning to compile *A Philological Study and Glossary of Non-Mahāyāna Translations from the Eastern Han*, which will mainly deal with translations by An Shigao 安世高. This project will involve collaboration with Chinese specialists of the history of the Chinese language and western Buddhist scholars, and should be completed in three or four years. If this unique collaboration works out well we shall compile additional annotated texts and glossaries of Chinese translations by Lokakṣema 支婁迦讖, Zhiqian 支謙 and so on in a similar way with the aim of completing a Chinese Buddhist Dictionary.