

Translation Strategies in Dharmarakṣa's Version
of the *Lotus Sutra*,
with Special Reference to Chapter 3 'Parable'

Jean-Noël A. Robert (École Pratiques des Hautes Études)

Of the many minor mysteries that surround us, the quasi alchemical process that brings about the general recognition of a text as a sacred text would be one of the most tempting to explore, all the more so in a religious milieu like the world of Mahāyāna Buddhism where prevailed what we might call a kind of free concurrence, where the whole field of the sacred was not dominated by a unique scripture, but where a whole range of teachings and preachings were vying for a place in a canon whose limits were constantly moving. The process is all the more complicated when those scriptures underwent the ordeal of translation into not only another language, but into an altogether different cultural universe.

From that point of view, I have always felt that what has taken place when, in the course of centuries, the major part of Indian Buddhist scriptures was transferred from Indic languages to such a different language as Chinese, with the totally different world view it entailed, was much more of a religious quantum leap that, say, what happened in the Mediterranean world when the Hebrew (and Aramaic) scriptures were translated first into Greek and then into Latin. Those three languages belong actually to an area where linguistic contacts have been so constant and pervasive that they have come to share many common concepts ; Alexandria first for Hebrew and Greek, and then Rome for Greek and Latin, and finally Hebrew, were philological melting pots which gave birth to the Septuagint and the Vulgate, but on a linguistic common ground which had been prepared for a long time through areal contacts.

As I am not here to discuss Mediterranean topics, I will only mention two examples to demonstrate my point. Every so often, some theologian or another seems to rediscover the wheel by explaining that the Hebrew word for « spirit », *ruah*, not only means « spirit », but « wind » and « breathe » as well, and thus expresses an altogether different religious worldview from the one that became the common representation in the Christian world, exemplified by the Holy Spirit (I rather like the older term « Holy Ghost »). Only a blessed ignorance of ancient tongues can bring someone to profer such enormities, as the quickest glance in a dictionary would show that the Greek *pneuma* and the Latin *spiritus* have precisely the same shade of meanings. The question to ask should rather be the reverse : how can this almost perfect semantic superposition be explained ? If we compare that to the nearest equivalents in the Buddhist vocabulary, say the Sanskrit *ātman* vs. the Chinese *qi* 氣, the difference becomes pretty obvious : there is a gap between the religious and cultural backgrounds of the two words, while the three Mediterranean terms obviously stand in a semantic continuum.

Another favourite of the theologians is the stress on the differences between the Hebrew word for « sin », *hata*, and the Greek and Latin respective verbs which render it ; it is often argued that the Hebrew word, meaning originally « to strip or stumble », « to miss, to go amiss », does not convey the same moral sanction as the hristian renderings, but it is merely to forget that the Greek *amartanô* simply means « to miss the mark » before getting to mean « to sin », and that the basic meaning of the Latin word *pecco*, being related to *pes* « foot », was, just as in Hebrew, « to stumble », and then « make a mistake ». Only the further historical development of Christian doctrine brought about the seemingly radical difference between the Greco-Latin terms and the Hebrew one, the three being originally much closer to one another. Here again, the quickest comparison between Sanskrit *pâpa* and Chinese *zui* 罪 will show how much deeper is the basic discrepancy of their meanings.

It might thus not be too much of a hyperbolic exaggeration to say that the history of translation of the Buddhist canon into Chinese is one of the great intellectual adventures of mankind. It was so successful that we have seen all along the XXth century religious thinkers from the Chinese-language sphere of Buddhism, especially Japan, repeatedly stressing the near-impossibility they felt in conveying even basic tenets of the Buddhist teachings from Chinese or Sino-Japanese into western languages, forgetting that it is so much easier to translate directly from Sanskrit or Pâli into any European languages than from those to Chinese, or Japanese. That the appropriation of the Buddhist scriptures was perfected to the point of considering that the Chinese, or East Asian, version of Buddhism was the definitive one, as seems often to be the case in East Asia, gives the measure of the success of the generations of translators who paved the way for the original personalities who sprouted afterwards on their works.

In that regard, the fortune of the *Lotus Sutra* in the Chinese language sphere, what I call broadly the 漢文文化圈, is a very rewarding story to study. Nobody could seriously deny that a great part of its success is due to the sheer excellency of Kumârajîva's translation : the most superficial comparison between his version and the one of his great predecessor Dharmaraksa shows a definite improvement in the efficiency of expression. I would readily characterize Kumârajîva's main quality as a harmonious blend of conciseness in Chinese with an erudite flair for the grammatical subtleties of the Sanskrit language, the former being made to the best possible use for rendering the latter. By contrast, Dharmaraksa's text present the precisely reverse characteristics : it is, to my sense at least, diffuse, prolix to the point of being garrulous, and betrays a definite lack of understanding of the Sanskrit language that cannot be explained away by manuscript variants.

I will here rely on chapter III of Dh.'s translation of the *Lotus Sûtra* to exemplify what we can call at best his creativity in translating the Sanskrit text, and I must of course, first of all, acknowledge here Prof. Karashima's epoch-making *Glossary of Dh.'s Translation of the Lotus Sutra* ; it is definitely thanks to his work that I could make so bold as to attempt to translate this previously formidable text.

And, being almost totally innocent of Sanskrit, I must warn that every reference I make to that language should be subject to the scrutiny of those who know better.

The very translation of the title of the third chapter of the *Zhengfahuajing*, Dh.'s translation of the *Lotus Sutra*, is puzzling : why 應時, which means « seize the opportunity » or « respond at the proper time », while the obvious meaning of the Sanskrit *aupamyā(-parivarta)* is « comparison, similitude » and was aptly rendered as 譬喻 by Kumârajîva ? Even if we take into account the variant *anupamyā* given by Prof. Karashima, this choice of words becomes still more intriguing, as this word should mean « uncomparable ». It is true that the verbal form in the passive voice seems to mean « to be useful », a meaning that could explain in a far-fetched way the Chinese rendering, but it is unlikely, given what we can measure of Dh.'s grammatical skills, that this is the right explanation. Or we can estimate that he expatiated on the basic meaning of « adaptation » for 應, which can account in some way for the Sanskrit *upamâ* : « comparison, analogy », and meaning, as an adjective, « resembling, looking like ». But I think, rather, that we have here a clear hint at the general method that presides to Dh.'s work¹ : he chooses his words from what he previously knows of the text he purports to translate. As everyone knows, the IIIrd chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* (« Parable » or « Comparison ») describes how a rich *pater familias*, father of an undetermined number of children and possessor of a vast but decayed manor, tries and rescues his sons, absorbed in their childish games, from the raging fire that threatens to burn them together with the mouldering buildings. As they are too unconscious of the danger to be warned to escape, their father resolves to lure them out of the mansion by promising them marvelous toys, especially three different kinds of carts drawn each one by a sheep, a deer and an ox. The stratagem works, the children rush out of the fire and ask for the promised carts, but are instead offered a single kind of carts, far more splendid than those they expected. This is of course a metaphor for the three lesser vehicles and the one great Vehicle. It is thus clear that Dh.'s phrasing of the title does not purport to be a translation, but is an outline of the content of this IIIrd chapter : the « response to opportunity » is the way thought out by the father to save his children in a time of distress, and the word can be considered as a synonym for « salvific expedient » 方便.

The title of the first chapter, translated more appropriately « Preface » or « Prologue » 序品 by Kumârajîva for the Sanskrit *nidâna*, is rendered, much along the same way of thought, 光瑞 « auspicious sign » by Dh., who chose the title from the main event occurring in that chapter, the ray of light emanating from the Buddha's tuft of white hair between the eyebrows. Interestingly, Kumârajîva renders a kind of tacit homage to his predecessor by using the very same word inside his own version² to refer to this phenomenon, this being the only occurrence in his text.

¹ It is perhaps superfluous to precise here that by the name 'Dharmarakṣa', I mean not only one man, but the whole 'workshop' that took part in the translation of the *Lotus Sutra* ; the same is to be said of Kumârajîva.

² T IX p. 5 b 16 : 我見燈明本光瑞如此.

I will not dwell here on minor discrepancies with the Sanskrit original, although they are interesting in their own right, and telling as well. As for instance with the curious substitution of 法要 « essential of the Law » for 法音 « sound of Law », without valid reason, at the very beginning of the chapter, where the *dharmā-ghosa* of the original text is abandoned to some conception of the Dh.'s own, perhaps the very one that presided to his paraphrastic title : he is interested in summarizing the essential, rather than in transmitting the words. And then, as in some afterthought, we see him immediately afterwards reintegrating the appropriate translation of *ghosa* as 音 « sound, voice » inside a compound, but this time there is no corresponding *ghosa* : here 佛音 stands very problematically for *buddha-nāma*. Indeed, the whole sentence reveals a clear misunderstanding of the Sanskrit text ; translated more or less literally, it runs thus : « *Hearing constantly the Dharma-preaching from the Buddha who guides the vehicle of bodhisattvas, and seeing the other gentlemen of Overture heeding to the Buddha's voice and, by their merits, acceding to the true Awakening, (I) am greatly distressed, feeling that (I) alone am not concerned.* »³ Only reference to the Sanskrit can show that it is the first person and the past tense that are to be understood, all the more so as the first word that ushers Çâriputra in his grievance is « now » 今, so that the Chinese reader is bound to understand the whole passage as being in the present. By contrast, we see Kumârajîva rectifying Dh.'s shortcomings by inserting the past adverb « formerly » 昔 and the first-person pronoun « I » 我, and, more than all, giving the sentence its real meaning but translating simply the second part as « *I saw the bodhisattvas receive the announcement that they would become buddhas.* »

It is however interesting to notice that neither Dh. nor K. took notice of the wee prefix *a-* in the participle *açrutva* that makes its meaning negative « *having not heard* », thus ignoring the contrast between the two verbs 聞 and 見 « *having not heard..., (but) having seen...* » I do not think that we have to infer from this mistake common to both translators that they had before them a Sanskrit manuscript with *çrutva* and not *açrutva* ; I'd rather think they mistook the negative prefix for some indication of past tense, even if it is impossible with a participle. Let me say here that we have another evidence for the fact that sometimes both Dh. and K. had not their Sanskrit conjugations right : in their translation of verse 15 of Çâriputra's grief, where the Sanskrit says clearly : « *Wouldn't it be Mâra the Wrongdoer / having transformed himself on earth in the guise of Buddha ?* »⁴, here again both Chinese translators fail to translate « *on earth* » and the reason for this omission is to my mind evident : they could not analyze the Sanskrit *bhuvî* as the locative of *bhû* « earth », but probably thought it was some form of the root *BHÛ* « to be » relating with the participle *abhinirmivâ* just preceding. There is no need then to assume different lessons in the Sanskrit manuscripts.

³ 常從佛聞說法 化導諸菩薩乘 見餘開士聽承佛音 德至真覺 甚自悼感獨不豫及

⁴ Dh. : 波旬時化 變為佛形 無得為魔 之所燒害 K. : 將非魔作佛 惱亂我心耶

As my purpose is not to dwell too long on Dh.'s grammatical deficiencies, I will draw attention only on another blatant example of his indifference to morphological niceties : most of the time, when he meets a word he can safely reduce to the verbal root *drç*, he translates it with some verb meaning « to see », even if it a noun or an adjective ; thus, in verse 11, we have twice the noun *drstī* « (heretic) view » in nominal compounds, that can in no way be understood as « to see », yet Dh. manages to translate them both by this verb : where the Sanskrit says : « *I was formerly attached indeed to (heretic) views* », Dh. translates : « *I saw a manifold variety of (idolatrous) priests* »⁵ and, a few lines below, for the Sanskrit « *For the sake of deliverance from (heretic) views he speaks of serenity [= nirvâna]* », Dh. gives : « *Considering the gate of deliverance, he then preaches extinction* »⁶. Even worse, where we have in Sanskrit the adjective *sa-drçā* « such a » in a sentence like : « *In this very place, in the threefold-world similar (sadrçe) to a burning house* », Dh. goes unperturbed : « *Yet again, he sees, all aflame, the sentient beings in the three worlds grieving and painfully striving.* »⁷ And let us notice moreover that he achieves this meaning only by dropping the negative particle *na*, duly rendered by K. Here again, we do not need to presuppose a manuscript variant, as there are other instances, as we have just seen, showing that Dh. considers such minor grammatical details as negations quite dispensable.

Rather than dwelling on those shortcomings, important as they are if we consider that the main aim of a translation is to convey the correct meaning of a message from one language to another, I would like to insist on the characteristics of Dh.'s version that make of it a literary piece interesting in itself and that raise, to my mind, from two different causes : an inadequate understanding of the original coupled with literary overcreativity, the latter possibly generated by the former.

The mere fact that Dh. chose, in translating Sanskrit *çloka*, Chinese stanzas of eight verses (sometimes six or ten) with four characters each, as against four five-characters verse for K., is an incitation to unnecessary padding and an invitation to verbal prolixity, in the same way that K.'s choice led to a stern conciseness of expression⁸. For example, in the inflated ten-verse stanza that corresponds to the eighth one of the Sanskrit original, while there is only one participial verb (*vicintayantah*) meaning « to think, to reflect », duly rendered by the simple 思惟 of K., Dh. has to rely on no less than three different verbs meaning the same : (內)思惟, 料計, 忖度. Moreover, he seems to take the causative form of the verb *ksapayati*, simply meaning here, if I am not mistaken « to pass (days and nights) » in its root-meaning of « making penance », which certainly explains the verse « Yet again I reprove myself »⁹ but raises the question of the redundancy of the verse « tossing and

⁵ 觀若干種 諸所祠祀

⁶ 觀見脫門 即說滅度

⁷ 復見燒然 三界眾生 勤苦之患 (T IX, p. 75 c 22)

⁸ We shall not deal here with the problem of K.'s own idiosyncrasies as exemplified in the passage on the « Ten suchnesses » 十如是.

⁹ 又自剋責

flinging myself about »¹⁰ : we could assume then that it is another rendering of « to think ». If we consider the final result of the Chinese rendering independently of whether or not it translates correctly the Sanskrit original, we have then five verbs related to mental activity and its bodily expression as against one in the original and one in K.'s version.

Sometimes this prolixity is put to good use, as when, in the prose part of Çâriputra's grievance, the Sanskrit says : « *I seek endlessly , to stop there for the day, mountains, caves in mountains, vast forests, hermitages, rivers, trunks of solitary trees* »¹¹ ; K. leaves things at a chaste « *I dwell constantly in solitary places, under forest trees* », whilst Dh. translates lavishly : « *Although I return to mountains and forests, cliffs and thickets, under trees in the wilderness, abiding in solitude, dwelling alone...* »¹². We have barely time to marvel at Dh. accuracy that we see him already lapsing in one of his so interesting translatorial extravagances : « *If I find myself in a banquet room, I restrain myself diligently and observe continence (to the difference of the other guests)* »¹³. Although the Chinese word *yàn* could mean « leisure », the meaning « feast » seems to be unquestionably its most obvious acceptation ; we jump thus from the hermitage to the merry life. If we go a little further, we find an expression like « *the poison of grief* » which is an embellishment springing from Dh.'s mind¹⁴ and then an interesting exemple of how he can rebound on an erroneous understanding of the Sanskrit yet to make out something meaningful and not too far from the mark : he does not perceive the meaning and function of Skr. *nâma*, here an interjection meaning « true, indeed, 'namely' » and rendered in Iwamoto Yutaka's Japanese version as 結局, but, defying syntactical evidence, he produces a compound « appellation of Law » 法號 that somehow contrives to bring out the general meaning : « *The title of Dharma being equally assumed (by us)* »¹⁵, but he has to leave out the second term of the compound *dharma-dhâtu*.

Sometimes, though, he fails completely, and inexplicably, to get the right meaning and wanders off into noncommittal generalities, as when, where the Sanskrit uses the compound *samdhâ-bhâsya* « intentional, conventional, enigmatic speech », which Dh. knows perfectly, as we may assume from his correct translation elsewhere « expediential and adapted guidance »¹⁶, he suddenly fails to see it and, probably mixing *bhâsa* « speech » with *vâsa* « clothes », slips down an endless flight of mistakes. Thus from the very long Sanskrit sentence¹⁷, stepping back from his usual profusion, he

¹⁰ 反側婉轉, the literary flavour of which is enhanced by its reminiscence of a verse from the 詩經 : 輾轉反側.

¹¹ From Burnouf's French (p. 38) ; see Hurvitz, p. 353.

¹² K. : 我常獨處 山林樹下 ; Dh. : 假使往返 山林巖藪 曠野樹下 閑居獨處

¹³ Dh. : 若在讌室 謹敕自守 (一身經行) ; K. : 若坐若行

¹⁴ Dh. : 益用愁毒 深自惟言 ; K. : 每作是念

¹⁵ Dh. : 法號等入 ; K. : 我等同入法性

¹⁶ 方便隨宜(誼)順導 ; K. : 隨宜所說, and here K.: 方便隨宜說

¹⁷ Translated by Hurvitz as : « (...)As soon as the Dharma doctrine (...) had been spoken, no bodhisattva being near at hand, it was heard by us, and, having heard it, we immediately took it up, bore it, realized it, considered it, and took it to heart, ignorant of the intentional speech of the Blessed One and consumed by haste... » K. drops the allusion to bodhisattvas but otherwise conveys the meaning.

makes a steep : « *We obeyed him and put on the [monastic] garment ; the vows we established not in a frequent way [?]* »¹⁸, which, though having plainly nothing to do, or only in a remote fashion by alluding to the Small Vehicle, with the Sanskrit text, is somehow easily inserted in the context.

Let me now quote two full stanzas, among many others, where we can safely assume that Dh. had before his eyes a Sanskrit text very close to the one we know, but which he made into a wildly aberrant translation due to his utter failing to perceive both the conjugations and the vocabulary. I give first a literal translation of the Sanskrit original of stanza 19 :

In the same way that by you such a practice, / since you left your family, has been well known / and since was understood by you in such a way the Wheel of Law, / thus by you was established the teaching of Law.

I am sorry for this terrible translation, which hardly gives me authority to criticize Dh., but I wanted to outline a nice example of what is a recurring stumbling-stone for him : he almost always fail to perceive the Sanskrit correlatives, be it, like here *yathâ...tathâ...* or any other. If we add that, as usual, he mistook the adjective *yâdrça* with the verb « to see », here translated as « discern » 分別, that he did not get the right meaning of *abhiniskramat* « leaving the family » (correctly translated by K. as 出家), but linked it to its etymological meaning « step, grade » 次第, we can understand more easily how he contrived this version :

According to his bodily likeness¹⁹ transformed by his wisdom-practice, he discerns the totality, in their order, of the buddha-dharmas and he teaches them ; (I) readily assent to the Holy One and receive his turning of the Wheel of Law.²⁰

We can here almost point to every Sanskrit word through their Chinese translation, but the whole piece is utterly wrong.

The following stanza (number 20) is linked to the former. Here again is a literal translation from the Sanskrit :

Therefore I know that it is not the Evil One / (but) the Lord of the World teaching the real practice, / indeed this place (atra) is not the Way (gatî) of the demons ; / it was that (eva) doubt had took hold of my mind.

Dh. enthuses in much the same way as before :

The hero of the world, our guide, has presented a true and elegant teaching, and thus it is for me as well : thanks to his likeness, that crowd of devils would not dare confront me and my mind does not shelter any longer (?) the obstacles of doubt.²¹

¹⁸ 我等所順 而被衣服 所建立願 不以頻數

¹⁹ For *âtman* « yourself » (!), possibly conflated with the first *yâdrç*, which means that he could, if he would, analyze it correctly.

²⁰ 隨其體像 化以慧行 悉而分別 次第所有 諸佛之法 所當教誨 尋即承聖 受轉經輪

²¹ 世雄導師 現真雅訓 吾亦如是 依蒙其像 彼諸魔衆 而不敢當 心未嘗(常)懷 邪疑之礙

We can see that here, in a reverse way but along the same expedient lines, Dh. has a negative spring up in the last verse in order to convey the meaning he thought he had understood, and that, very ironically, for once he mistakes the causative of « to see », *darçayi*, meaning « let see > teach », for the adjective *yâdrç* « such ».

Although by no means unique, these two stanzas are exemplary by their thoroughness in misunderstanding the Sanskrit original and gives a good hint of the way Dh. perceived it : wherever he is not led by the general logic of the narrative he knows of course well, but has to rely on the internal and grammatical logic of the text, he seems to be at a loss and he has to have recourse to padding through the staple rhetorics of religious encomium, of which, admittedly, the *Lotus Sutra* gives elsewhere many examples.

If we come to the prose part of the narration, the famed parable of the Burning House and its explanation by the Buddha, our feeling that Dh. proceeds according to a rather intuitive understanding of the text guided only by his previous knowledge of the episode is strengthened. If the general tenor of the story more or less coincides with the Sanskrit, all the more so in the doctrinal morality drawn by the Buddha, which would be easier to understand, there are far too many aberrations in the details of the narration to be explained only by bad pronunciation, bad reading or bad manuscripts.

Let me give an example of ornamental padding that may have some semantic relation with the text, but appears definitely aberrant as a final result : in the explanation of the parable given by the Buddha after the narrative, we have the following sentence in Sanskrit (my translation here from Burnouf, p. 49) : « *The Tathâgata, too [...] is free from all terror, entirely, completely, perfectly delivered from every injury, disaster, despair, pain, grief, deep blindness rising from the thick darkness and obscurity of ignorance.* » K.'s translation is rather accurate²², as almost always, but Dh. once again submerges his reader in an ocean of wonder by giving him this rendering : « *The Thus Come One has arrived to true, correct and equal awakening, transcending the ten directions, illuminating all darkneses [or : ignorance], liberating from grief and fear, extirpating root and sprout, branch and leaf, flower and fruit.* »²³ It is difficult to decide whether he choose to abbreviate the original text, estimating that « to illuminate darkness » and « liberate from grief and fear » was enough for the avalanch of ominous Sanskrit terms ; in this case, the vegetal imagery should be considered as a flowery rendering of the treble adverbial locution *sarvena sarvam sarvathâ*, as this descriptive usage is found in other Chinese texts, or if - and here one shudders - his translation was motivated by finding all that vegetation in the Sanskrit text itself, and mixing *timira* « blindness » with *timîra* « name of a tree » [Ogiwara, p.539b], *patala* « roof, lid » with *pâtala* « *Bignonia suaveolens* », or even confusing it with *patra* « leaf », and, why not, seeing a forest, *vana*, in the word *pariyavanâha* « covering ». Whatever be the case, we are rewarded with a nice image completely absent in the original.

²² 如來亦復如是 (...) 於諸怖畏 衰惱憂患 無明暗蔽 永盡無餘

²³ T. IX p. 75 c 11 : 如來至 真等正覺 超越十方 光照衆冥(無點) 解脫憂恐 拔斷根芽 枝葉華實

In the narrative proper as in the explanation made by the Buddha, we have an allusion to the physical strength of the father, who could easily use it to save his children. Curiously enough, Dh. does not translate the first occurrence, duly rendered by K.²⁴, but the second occurrence appears in a curiously distorted way ; where K. gives us a fair translation : « *Like that householder, though he had strong body and arms, did not use them...* »²⁵, Dh. offers a troubling divergence : « *As in the instance of the householder, who established strong and bold gentlemen of much strength to save those children and have them escape the conflagration...* »²⁶. Here again, only reference to the Sanskrit can explain the reasons both for this translation and for the omission of the first occurrence : he manifestly mistook the two Sanskrit words *bâhubalikah* « someone of much strength » and *bâhubalam* « much strength », both singular and related to the householder, for a plural form and connected them somehow with the bodhisattvas who appears some lines further as one of the three vehicles. It is then understandable that he had no place for them in the first instance and chose to drop them altogether. But how could he contrive a word for « establish » where K. has « did not use » ? Here again, Dh. saw in the Sanskrit causative participle *sthâpayitvâ*, meaning « having made stand aside », i.e. « having put aside, having discarded », merely the root meaning « to stand » > « to make stand » > « to establish ». But here again, the loss in meaning is made good by a step up in religious rhetorics.

Very many details of the narrative are translated wrongly by Dh. I give a tentative translation in appendix with the Chinese text for everybody to judge, but I will just, as one last example, point to a passage that would seem to go against the deeper meaning of the parable. When the father has succeeded in luring his children out of the burning house by his promised toys, they finally rush out in a stampede, which K. thus renders : « *They were each of them enheartened and, pushing one another, vying together in their dash, they strove to get out of the burning house.* »²⁷ We have here a good overall idea of the disorderly and unreflecting reaction of the children. On the other hand, Dh.'s version induce a very different impression : « *Each one of them zealously and largely took dispositions, putting earth together and pouring water, they were able to rush out.* »²⁸ Even if there is the possibility that the words *tübèn shuǐjiāo* are some adverbial locution meaning « like sprinkling earth (or dust) with water », whatever may be its true sense, the choice of words « zeal, earnest » and « take dispositions », as they imply conscious and rational efforts, seems contradictory with the narrative on that precise point, which describes a bunch of children wildly running, but does not impair the general purport.

There is another facet to the question of assessing Dh.'s translation on which I will not be able to expand here, though its importance is not to be neglected : there are many instances where we can

²⁴ 我身手有力

²⁵ 如彼長者 雖復身手有力 而不用之

²⁶ T. IX p. 76 a 2 : 譬如長者 立強勇猛 多力諸士 救彼諸子 使離火患

²⁷ 心各勇銳 互相推排 競共馳走 爭出火宅

²⁸ T. IX p. 75 b : 各共精進 廣設方計 土盆水澆 奔走得出

say that his translation might be justified as a word-for-word rendering of the Sanskrit, a kind of crib preceding the true work of translation, but, taken *tel quel* into Chinese, can only be understood along the lines of Chinese grammar, and thus misunderstood *qua* translation. I will give a simple and very telling example from stanza 11 I quoted partly above : we have the words 解佛言(音)教 ; if we refer to the Sanskrit original, the characters *jiěfó* are obviously a direct rendering, as done by someone who would follow the text with his finger and give the Chinese meaning for each Sanskrit word, of *jñātva nātho* « The Lord, knowing (my state of mind) » ; thus, the Chinese should be understood as a determinative compound : « The Buddha who understands », but every reader who is not aware of the original intention of the translator and his aids, that is to say almost everybody, would take these two characters at their face value in Chinese as a syntagm verb + object : « Understanding the Buddha (‘s preaching) », an interpretation further entailed by the context. There are thus in many places two levels of interpretation for the Chinese text : either as a direct rendering of the Sanskrit and in this case having to be interpreted according to Sanskrit syntax as transposed into Chinese, or as a Chinese text understood in itself, and thus deviating considerably from the meaning it purports to convey.

When we read the narration as rendered by Dharmaraksha, we have definitely the feeling that the translator is zigzagging between a text he does not fully understand and the *a priori* knowledge he has of its content, always struggling to make both coincide, but still giving preference to the elaboration of some sense in Chinese, even when there is no justification for it in the original, the safer solution for him being to escape into religious utterances.

All the same, I would like to underline some points that makes Dh.’s version a literary piece not deserving the indifference or even contempt scholars have poured on it for many centuries. Of course, once again we should acknowledge here the yeoman’s service brought to this rehabilitation by Karashima Seishi and Daniel Boucher in permitting a reassessment of Dh.’s work.

For one thing, the sheer richness and versatility of Dh.’s vocabulary makes it worth its while to study his translation. It reflects ideas that we should think were more accorded to the Chinese than to the Indic worldview ; a good example is the rendering of the Sanskrit *sattva* « sentient being » : apart from the use of 衆生 that became the standard translation henceforwards, or 衆情, which is a comparably all-encompassing term, we have not only very broad terms like 萌類, 群萌類 or 品類, 群品, but also more resolutely human-oriented, and even more political, vocabulary, like 黎民, 黎庶, 人民, 蒸民, 庶民 : Dh. is either keen to emphasize that human beings are at the centre of the Buddhist teachings, and not only « sentient beings » in general, or he (or his Chinese translational ‘workshop’) is so deeply imbued with Chinese values that he simply cannot envisage another dimension than the human one as the target of salvation. He makes full use of the Chinese vocabulary that gives a definite flavour to his text ; I like very much, for example, stanza 16 of the Sanskrit text, where, instead of the precise, but rather flat translation of K. « *The web of doubts has been cut off* », Dh. uses a much more

typical expression : « *I got rid of vulpine doubts* »²⁹. I am of course aware that Dh. was not unique in using this vocabulary, but I find that such a versatility in only one work is very remarkable indeed.

On the other hand, what we may call in many places a lack of understanding of the Sanskrit original by Dh. has been made good by this linguistic exuberance : there is definitely much padding in his translation, but that is just what gives it its so peculiar flavour. As this padding more often than not goes in the sense of religious hyperbole or rhetoric embellishment, the general result is an inflated sacred scripture that, so to say, out-lotuses the *Lotus* itself : what is lacking in philological accuracy is compensated by textual exaltation.

Now, I may not be the only one to think that Dh.'s text is interesting in itself and deserves full study in its own right, but the fact is that it has been completely superseded by Kumârajîva's version and that there is no exegetical tradition based on it ; we could take this fact as evidence that there is after all some objectivity in assessing the value of a translation according to its accuracy and that every work of translation is not a desperate attempt at the impossible, although we should not overlook that K. took a lot from Dh. into his own translation. For all its intrinsic worth, Dharmaraksa's version was not deemed a good one ; I think I have made clear some arguments for this judgment, but I hope I have shown, however briefly, other reasons for studying his version as a work in itself.

²⁹ Dh. : 除諸狐疑 ; K. : (我聞)疑網斷

