



THE VALUE OF EASTERN WISDOM IN TODAY'S WORLD

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Translated by MPI Translation Center

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Living in this era is quite challenging. While material and technological advancements have made life more convenient, they have also brought environmental issues such as pollution and global warming, as well as psychological disorders like anxiety and depression. Moreover, frequent international conflicts contribute to an unsettled world. The rapid pace of change makes the future increasingly uncertain. We used to think the world would remain the same for hundreds of years, but the current situation is completely different. It is hard to even imagine what the world will be like in just ten years.

I

THE WEST AND THE EAST

Western civilization relies on external achievements to find happiness. When the world is relatively stable, this dependency seems reliable. With effort, happiness can be within reach. However, when the external world is full of uncertainties, everything one depends on becomes increasingly fragile, and happiness seems more elusive. In this context, only by understanding oneself and becoming stronger can we reduce our dependence on the outside world and minimize the impact it entails.

How do we understand and improve ourselves?

It is precisely the strength of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. As Chinese, we share a common ancestry, but more importantly, we inherit the traditions of Eastern culture. This inheritance allows us to develop a positive mindset, a noble spirit, and an admirable personality. This is particularly significant today. Without exposure to Buddhist teachings, some might dismiss these as mere concepts. However, through dedicated practice, it becomes evident that these are not just words but represent the continuous qualities we have striven for and must persistently pursue in the endless future.

II

CONFUCIANISM AND BUDDHISM

Practicing Buddhism involves understanding ourselves and improving the quality of our lives. This life goal and value orientation are in line with Chinese native culture. Buddhism, having been introduced to China for over two thousand years, has a longer transmission period in China than in its birthplace, India. Why is Buddhism so well-received in China? The reason is that Buddhism not only shares commonalities with Confucian thought but also supplements the areas where Confucian philosophy might be lacking.

Confucianism emphasizes learning to become a virtuous person. From a personal standpoint, it requires

self-cultivation and nurturing one's character to become a person of virtue and even to achieve the status of a sage. From an external perspective, it focuses on harmonizing one's family relations, governing the country, and bringing peace to the world, aiming to benefit society. These two aspects align entirely with the Buddhist aspirations of benefiting oneself and others and awakening oneself and others.

Buddhism emphasizes attaining wisdom and embodying the qualities of buddha and bodhisattvas, focusing on both self-benefit and self-enlightenment. It also stresses the cultivation of bodhicitta¹ to benefit all beings, highlighting the importance of benefiting and enlightening others. The reason why these teachings can be applied effectively and not just remain as words is because the Dharma encompasses the profound wisdom of life. It offers clear insights into the way life develops and

1. In Buddhism, bodhicitta is a spontaneous wish to attain enlightenment motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings, accompanied by a falling away of the attachment to the illusion of an inherently existing self.

continues. Furthermore, it presents a practical approach for cultivation, just as the two forms we are currently utilizing to self-evaluate our practice: one for mindfulness, essential for liberation, and the other for altruism, crucial for developing compassion. These are the two main qualities to achieve in Buddhist practice. However, Confucian thought faces challenges to achieving such goals due to its lack of focus on the nature of the mind and theories of causality.

As we benefit from learning and practicing Buddhism and see the importance of preserving and passing down Eastern wisdom, we should further vow to help all beings. This includes native Chinese, overseas Chinese, and even foreigners because everyone, regardless of cultural background, is equally plagued by greed, hatred, and ignorance and troubled by delusion and afflictions. All need self-redemption and illumination, yearning for enlightenment and liberation. Yet, Western culture, focusing on rationality, often lacks insight into the nature of the mind and does not include meditation practices in its tradition.

It was in the last century that a growing number of Westerners began to learn Theravada, Tibetan, and Chan (Zen) Buddhism. Especially in recent decades, the spread of Buddhism has established a considerable influence in the West.

III

ENLIGHTENMENT AS HUMANITY'S GREATEST VALUE

A media outlet once listed the world's top ten luxuries, placing the awakening of life at the top. The question is: how to become awakened? Without the wisdom of Buddhism, awakening or enlightenment is just a concept, an unattainable luxury. Fortunately, understanding oneself and resolving afflictions are precisely the strengths of Buddhist teachings. Therefore, as Chinese, we are fortunate to have more access to Buddhism. More importantly, we have the virtuous roots and merits, causes and conditions for such a systematic Buddhist program to succeed through us, allowing us to truly set forth on the journey

toward enlightenment.

Many people nowadays also participate in Buddhist practices but seldom truly understand its essence. When facing a chaotic mind, one must abandon the mundane mind and step out of confusion; meanwhile, when confronted with the vast teachings of Buddhism, one must identify and choose an effective approach. Without clear guidance, obstacles will abound, and one might even stray onto the wrong path. Through extensive exploration, we have developed clear pathways, workflows, methods, and criteria for assessing the effectiveness. Following these systematically guarantees steady and proper progression.

Life includes diverse elements, such as the mental factors related to samsara and those linked with liberation and compassion. Developing the qualities of the Buddha and bodhisattvas, or ending up a life like a demon, both follow distinct patterns. The primary obstacle for many is insufficient self-awareness. Hence, delving into Buddhism is essential, for it helps us comprehend and discern different

mental factors, aiding in identifying what should be let go of and what should be adopted.

For people today, this choice is especially of great significance. With the rise of artificial intelligence, what is the unique value of human life? Neglecting this can lead humanity to feel increasingly adrift, losing sight of the direction with each passing moment. Many people now live in material comfort, but that doesn't guarantee them happiness. Have you seen photos of space? Earth, amidst its vastness, travels rapidly without a known destination. In the solar system, Earth is but a speck; in the galaxy, the sun is equally inconsequential. Without recognizing the infinite value of life, regardless of wealth, our existence is insignificant in the face of a limited life span. Moreover, everything is subject to impermanence, with changes becoming faster and increasingly difficult to control.

IV

FROM SELF-BENEFIT TO BENEFITING OTHERS

Hence, it is crucial to deeply understand the significance of inheriting Eastern wisdom for both ourselves and humanity. In today's world, even the slightest events elsewhere would create ripple effects, impacting everyone to various degrees. This interdependence has been particularly noticeable in recent years. As people grow increasingly restless and aggressive, we must question how we can live well in such an environment.

Therefore, we should cultivate the bodhicitta for both the world and ourselves. From the Buddhist perspective,

all lives are fundamentally interconnected and mutually influence each other. Through learning and practice, we recognize the troubles caused by delusion, see the hope in life, and find solutions. We should then use our learning to illuminate more people's hearts.

Enlightenment and affliction, Buddha and demon, all hinge on a single thought – the concept of “becoming a Buddha or a demon in an instant.” When a person receives positive guidance, they can become a kind person, a sage, or even attain Buddhahood. Conversely, without such guidance, one might become a demon, bringing harm to oneself and the world.

V

CREATING A MINDFUL PEACE ACADEMY, ILLUMINATING MORE HEARTS

How can we help more people illuminate their hearts? Over the past few decades, we've gained a wealth of experience in spreading the Dharma and hope everyone can participate in it, allowing the culture of wisdom to reach countless homes. With increasingly more people moving abroad in recent years, there has been a significant rise in the number of overseas Chinese. When they leave their homeland, they often feel unsettled and lack a sense of security.

Where are the roots of Chinese people? They lie in the cultural heritage. Our goal is to establish a spiritual home for overseas Chinese, which naturally extends to foreigners, as well. As the ultimate problems faced by humanity are the same, the wisdom of Chan, which addresses these common problems, can naturally satisfy everyone's needs. Similarly, Chan-inspired spaces, like our retreat centers, are also boundaryless. Like the Amrita Retreat Center we have created, everyone likes it regardless of cultural differences. The primary challenge for modern people is the lack of spiritual support. Although their material life is abundant, there is no corresponding spiritual substance. The Chan-inspired spaces we create embody a materially sufficient life yet rich in spiritual essence. We aspire to build Mindful Peace Academies of varying sizes in various cities, countries, and continents. We also plan to encourage volunteers to participate in and support this process.

With such spaces, people can gather regularly, fostering a sense of community and cohesion that is often missing in solitary practice. During my early days of spreading the

Dharma overseas, I observed many elderly Chinese people visiting temples every weekend for vegetarian meals, chanting, worshiping, and listening to teachings. For newer emigrants who may not be religious, we should minimize religious aspects and diversify activities to meet their physical and mental needs. Nowadays, many temples in China still primarily focus on rituals, catering mainly to the older population, somewhat failing to keep pace with the times. In contrast, those visiting our retreat centers are often from mainstream social groups who are younger, more culturally engaged, career-oriented, and aspirational.

The main problems of modern people are twofold: first, they are often confused about the future, and second, they are plagued by various negative emotions. When Mindful Peace Academies are established overseas, I believe they will attract many people. Of course, the environment is just a contributing factor; the key is the content, such as courses on Wisdom Living and the mindful and slow-paced lifestyle we currently promote. They

include mindfulness, tea meditation, vegetarianism, Danshari (minimalist decluttering), Qigong Baduanjin, acupressure massage, etc. In the future, we will also develop courses on Confucianism. Reading Confucian classics under the umbrella of Buddhist wisdom can be very powerful.

Such a combination enables the Mindful Peace Academies to serve as a platform for spreading Chinese culture internationally and a spiritual home for overseas Chinese. Everyone can regularly visit to enjoy vegetarian cuisine and experience tea meditation. The reason Buddhism became popular in Japan was through the vehicle of tea ceremonies. From royalty and nobles to ordinary citizens, all are captivated by the cultural richness expressed in the tea ceremony, thereby bringing the wisdom of Chan into countless homes and serving the public by providing peace of mind and body.

VI

BRINGING TRADITIONAL CULTURE INTO FAMILIES

Therefore, we need a suitable environment to help everyone learn traditional culture and adjust their lifestyles. While such a foundation is established through the Mindful Peace Academies, we must also bring the culture of wisdom into families. Currently, excessive smartphone usage leads to poor family communication. Chinese culture emphasizes sequential life goals, progressing from self-cultivation and family harmony to governance of the country and peace in the world. Among these, self-cultivation and family harmony are fundamental. However, most people are unaware of how to engage in

self-cultivation, harming their bodies through unhealthy diets, daily routines, and mindsets. As for harmonizing the family, while families in the past often had three or even four generations living under one roof, many families now struggle to even bring two people together, facing numerous issues in marital relationships, child education, and elderly care.

What is the reason behind this? It is because there is no cultural inheritance upon which common beliefs and family norms can be established. Confucianism teaches us about becoming a refined person, informing us that fathers and sons, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters all have corresponding responsibilities, duties, and codes of conduct. Understanding these rules allows us to know what to do and what not to do within the family. In traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are unified. Famous literati like Wang Wei, Bai Juyi, Liu Yuxi, Su Dongpo, and Wang Anshi were both Confucians and devoted Buddhists. It is said that without the wisdom of Buddhism, life for Chinese people would

be very exhausting, for Confucian philosophy tends toward utilitarianism. The teachings of the bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness in Buddhism, on the other hand, allow active engagement in the world while imparting the idea that all phenomena are akin to dreams or illusions and should not be held onto. With such insights, one can remain open-minded, transcendent, and unaffected when facing all situations.

How do we integrate such a culture of wisdom into families? We encourage those who are equipped to create a mindful tea room at home. This not only serves as a personal practicing space but also as a platform to pass down Eastern wisdom. Typically, family gatherings focus on eating, drinking, and playing mahjong. A tea room, however, offers a space for more meaningful gatherings, such as hosting weekly events with relatives and friends featuring tea, vegetarian meals, acupuncture massage, Qi-gong Baduanjin, reading sessions, and mindfulness practices. Many such initiatives are already underway, and we plan to continue further to blend traditional culture into

various courses tailored to individual needs and strengths. As these practices are adopted, they will naturally transform the ambiance and energy at home.

VII

ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES, BENEFITING SOCIETY

Moreover, we should engage with other community groups. There are many Chinese associations overseas, typically building relationships through eating and drinking, which lack quality. We can empower these community groups with the concept of a mindful, slow-paced lifestyle. For instance, my series of lectures on Wisdom Living covers topics like perspectives on wealth and happiness. After attending these sessions, we can combine our understanding and insights to host book clubs or deliver talks within these associations, disseminating the culture of wisdom and serving the overseas Chinese community. Moreover, this should be purely for public welfare and

altruistic purposes.

If you have the resources, it's ideal to do this yourself; if not, you can invite experts in various fields from within the country to hold lectures and activities for you. For example, one time could be dedicated to teaching tea culture, another to promoting vegetarianism, and then moving on to topics like Danshari (minimalist decluttering) and health and regimen. We have already prepared many related courses, including the interpretation of Chan poetry, youth education, and elderly care, all of which you can choose based on your needs. Noteworthy, many overseas Chinese are concerned about their children's education and hope to instill Eastern wisdom in their upbringing so that the children can foster an early appreciation for Chinese traditional culture, thereby nurturing their sentiments and overall characters.

In the future, we plan to develop more courses and train additional experts to facilitate the launch of these projects. These strategies will enable each Mindful Peace Academy

to make a local impact by offering a space for people to experience Chinese culture and Eastern wisdom. Such activities serve as an entry point, creating popularity and atmosphere and guiding interested individuals towards gradual learning and cultivation. However, we should also notice that, without the right atmosphere, there's no urgency to commence the dedicated classes, as this might create undue pressure for us.

When individuals deeply engage with Buddhist teachings and reap significant benefits, they'll recognize its utmost importance in life and its profound impact on both themselves and the world. When resources are insufficient and merits are lacking, we must cultivate a vast mind and diligently pursue our studies. Our mind follows the law of attraction: when you truly develop a strong aspiration and compassion, when the Dharma displays its power through you, your transformation becomes evident to those around you. And resources will naturally gather, too. In contrast, if your approach to learning is inconsistent and lacks commitment, it is unlikely to attract resources.

VIII

BE SELF-AWARE AND INDEPENDENT, EMBRACE YOUR UNIQUENESS

We aim to create favorable conditions and offer support to encourage more individuals to spread Eastern wisdom overseas. As the promisee, you are the key party to take the initiative, while as the promisor, our role is to provide Eastern wisdom as a priceless product, yet success depends on your ability to receive and integrate it. If you are not ready yet, our services might become a burden. Even though many are eager to lend a hand, efforts may fail if there is a lack of fuel in you.

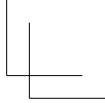
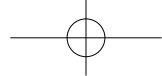
Our focus on developing systematic courses and replicable

models has proven effective throughout the practice. Although there are Learning Support Teams at the back end, the emphasis is still placed on each class and individual. With favorable conditions, each class, as a unit, is encouraged to develop its book club and eventually expand it into a standalone Mindful Peace Academy. Some individuals can already make a lot of differences by themselves, so collaborating with others is optional. Of course, collective efforts can be more impactful; if circumstances don't allow it, you can initiate your projects, provided they follow the specific guidelines. Either way, you must actively nurture the causes and conditions. As more hearts are illuminated, the collective strength will also intensify.

IX

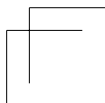
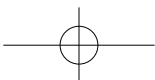
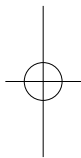
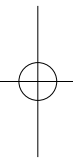
CONCLUSION

Starting is always the most challenging part of any journey. Initially, nothing comes easy; your faith in the Dharma may be weak, and there's little support around you, especially in the Degenerate Age of Dharma, which is particularly unfavorable for practicing. However, It must be understood that without learning and practicing, there is no way out of this chaos of ignorance and confusion. Only through the study and cultivation of Buddhism can you break free from delusion and move towards awakening; this is life's only way out, and there is no turning back. Others can only help by creating favorable conditions; the genuine pursuit of cultivation still relies on your own efforts.



Appendix:

WORDS CONVEY THE WAY,
LIKEWISE FOR TRANSLATION



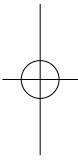
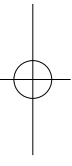
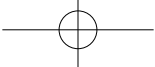
**Discourse given by Master Jiqun
to the volunteer translation team
in the winter of 2015**

The translation work at our Bodhi Academy has been ongoing for more than two years now, and it remains as one of our key projects. Historically speaking, scripture translation has facilitated the spread of Buddhism in various regions. Without the translation of the Tripitaka¹, Buddhism would have been confined to India,

1. The Tripitaka (Sanskrit for “three baskets”) in Buddhism are the traditional divisions of the Buddhist scriptures. These three baskets are Sutra: This basket contains the discourses or sermons of the Buddha; Vinaya Pitaka: This basket comprises the rules of discipline for the monastic community; Abhidhamma Pitaka: This basket contains the philosophical and doctrinal analyses and interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings.

unable to spread to China or other parts of the world, thereby denying the opportunity for countless generations to benefit from the Dharma.

Buddhism spread to China during the Western Han dynasty and reached its zenith during the Sui and Tang dynasties. Throughout this period, there was a continuous effort to translate Buddhist scriptures. Over a thousand years, more than two hundred translators were involved in this massive undertaking, establishing numerous translation centers and a complete set of translation procedures. Moreover, the education provided in these translation centers also played a significant part in the history of Buddhist education. Translating the scriptures was not merely about converting Buddhist texts from Sanskrit to Chinese; it also involved their interpretation by accomplished monks from India and other places, helping students to grasp their essence. It can be said that the propagation of any scripture, as well as the establishment of any school or sect, all began with translation work.



I

TRANSLATION OF BUDDHIST SCRIPTURES IN CHINESE BUDDHIST TRADITION

1. From *Geyi* (“Matching Concepts”) to the Return

In ancient times, translating scriptures was a massive undertaking, requiring significant staffing, material supplies, and financial resources. Hence, many translation projects were patronized by emperors and organized by the government. An instance of this is Master Kumarajiva, who is also revered as one of the four great translators in China. Assisted by a massive team of three thousand individuals, he successfully translated a collection of crucial scriptures,

including renowned Chinese Buddhist texts such as the *Diamond Sutra*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra*. This marked the beginning of a new era for the dissemination of Prajnaparamita teachings in China.

Prajnaparamita scriptures were introduced into China as early as the Eastern Jin Dynasty. At that time, the prevailing trend was to engage with Taoism and its metaphysical discourses. The philosophy of Prajnaparamita, with its exposition on the nature of emptiness, shared similarities with Taoist discussions on emptiness and *Wuwei* (inaction). Therefore, once introduced, it quickly gained popularity among literati and scholar-officials. However, before Master Kumarajiva, the Prajnaparamita philosophy was interpreted differently or even conflictingly through a lot of forced association with local concepts. To make Buddhism more accessible, the revered monks of the time used *Geyi*, a concept-matching approach, to translate Buddhist terms with Taoist concepts. While this approach helped Buddhism gain immediate acceptance,

it often failed to convey the original meanings accurately.

Such shortcomings were soon recognized by several revered monks, who considered *Geyi* to be “circuitous and deviating from the original meaning,” noting that it contradicted the original Buddhist teachings. Noteworthy, this situation arose partly because early translators were not proficient in Chinese. Translation involves converting language, which is the carrier of thought. If this conversion is not done properly, the conveyed thoughts cannot be presented completely and accurately. Therefore, some early Buddhist scriptures were not only difficult to recite smoothly but also posed obstacles to understanding.

Master Kumarajiva, on the other hand, being proficient in both Sanskrit and Chinese, ensured accuracy in translation. More importantly, as a master with extensive knowledge of the Tripitaka and profound achievements in Buddhist studies, he guaranteed authenticity in the elucidation and propagation of the Dharma. While overseeing the translation work, he simultaneously lectured,

nurturing a group of outstanding disciples led by the “Four Sages and Ten Great Thinkers.” Among them, Master Sengzhao was especially notable, acclaimed as “the foremost interpreter of emptiness in the Yao Qin Dynasty.” His work, *Zhao Lun*, is a significant treatise in the history of Chinese philosophy. From then on, the interpretation of Prajnaparamita teachings gradually returned to the essence of Buddhism.

In light of this, we may conclude that the quality of scripture translation affects not only the propagation of Buddhism as a whole but also practitioners’ individual understanding and realization of the Dharma. Scriptures serve as a roadmap for spiritual practice; if the map is inaccurate, where might it lead us? For this reason, later translation projects developed a set of rigorous procedures and carefully selected their participants from across the nation, gathering the best and brightest of the time to jointly contribute to a grand endeavor.

2. Free Translation and Literal Translation

Among the four great translators – Kumarajiva, Paramartha, Xuanzang, and Amoghavajra – Kumarajiva and Xuanzang are more widely recognized, representing two distinct styles of scripture translation: free translation and literal translation.

Free translation emphasizes the beauty and fluency of the language on the basis of the accurate conveyance of the original meaning. It allows a relatively free linguistic expression. For example, Master Kumarajiva's translations of the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, *Lotus Sutra*, and *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra* are not only widely circulated and relied upon in the Buddhist community but also highly revered for their literary excellence by literati and scholar-officials. Literal translation, on the other hand, preserves the original form of the text when converting the languages, and is more faithful to the linguistic expressions.

Take the *Prajnaparamita Sutras* as an example, this

compilation of scriptures occupies a supreme position in the history of Chinese Buddhism. Master Kumarajiva once translated the *The Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Line* into thirty fascicles, and the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra* authored by Bodhisattva Nagarjuna is a commentary of this sutra. According to Master Kumarajiva, a complete translation of the *Mahaprajnaparamita Sastra* would amount to a thousand fascicles. However, considering the Chinese preference for conciseness, Master Kumarajiva only translated the first fascicle in its full length, and the rest were abridged to a total of one hundred fascicles. In fact, as Bodhisattva Nagarjuna's commentary of just the first fascicle of the original work is as extensive as thirty fascicles, by this account, the comments on the thirty-fascicle sutra would indeed come close to a thousand fascicles.

Another Prajnaparamita scripture, the *The Great Prajnaparamita Sutra* translated by Master Xuanzang consists of a colossal six-hundred fascicles, making it one of the “heaviest” classics in the history of Chinese

Buddhism. While preparing its translation, Master Xuanzang also faced the decision of whether to abridge it. According to the *Biography of Tripitaka Master Xuanzang*, “On the first day in Lunar January of the fifth year¹, he began the translation of the *The Great Prajnaparamita Sutra*. The original Sanskrit version contains two hundred thousand verses. Given its extensive content, the disciples often pleaded for an abbreviated version. The master, intending to go along with the majority’s wish, like Kumarajiva did, was ready to remove the redundant and cumbersome parts. Having this thought, he experienced extremely terrifying dreams at night as warnings. He dreamed of walking through dangerous paths or being attacked by fierce animals, sweating and trembling until he escaped. Awakened in fear and sharing this with the disciples, he decided to translate the text in its entirety. That night, he dreamed of Buddhas and bodhisattvas whose foreheads emitted light, bathing and soothing him. The master also saw himself holding a flower lamp

1. The fifth year of Master Xuanzang’s translation project after he returned to Chang’an.

to worship the Buddhas, and in another image, he ascended to a high seat, preaching the Dharma in front of a crowd who surrounded him with praise and respect. Or he dreamed of receiving fruits from people. Having seen these, he woke up in joy.” Due to the revelations in these dreams, he “dared not to abridge and translated exactly as the Sanskrit version.” However, there were three different Sanskrit versions that he obtained from India, so when translating, “if there were doubts or mistakes in the text, he would compare the three versions to resolve them. His meticulous and diligent approach to translation was unparalleled in history.”

These two styles, each with its own merits, remain mainstream even in today’s translation practices. Central to a good translation are “faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance.” Among these, faithfulness is paramount; regardless of whether the approach is sense-for-sense or word-for-word, fidelity to the original meaning is crucial. On this basis, the level of “elegance” achieved is subjective, varying from one translator to another, with no absolute rules.

3. The Procedures of Translation

Buddhist scriptures are carriers of the Dharma and maps for spiritual practice. Therefore, from the collection and translation to the transcription and printing of scriptures, utmost caution is required to avoid the slightest error that could lead to great deviations. Starting from the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the government began to participate in the translation of Buddhist scriptures, not only through funding but also by establishing specialized translation centers. These centers were often operated on a large scale. They brought together renowned monks from all over the country, along with hundreds and thousands of disciples, each contributing through a specific role in a collaborative effort.

The translation process consisted of ten main stages:

(1) Translation Master: The central figure overseeing the translation process, proficient in both the meaning of the scripture and bilingual in Chinese and Sanskrit. He was

ultimately responsible for making decisions.

(2) Verification of Meaning: Ensuring that the translated text accurately reflected the intended meaning of the Sanskrit original.

(3) Verification of Text: Checking for any errors in the original Sanskrit text, considering the possibility of transmission errors in early Buddhist scriptures, and making choices based on doctrinal principles to ensure accuracy.

(4) Transliteration: Recording the pronunciation of Sanskrit words in Chinese characters.

(5) Transcription: Recording the translated content in Chinese.

(6) Adjustment of Language: Adjusting the grammar of the translation to conform to Chinese expression habits.

(7) Comparison: Cross-referencing the translation with

the original text and verifying whether the Chinese translation aligned with the Sanskrit original through back-translation.

(8) Editing: Due to the tendency of Sanskrit expression to appear excessively repetitive to Chinese readers, selectively removing redundant or repetitive phrases while ensuring no compromise to the meaning of the scripture.

(9) Polishing: Introducing necessary connecting words to improve the fluency of the text.

(10) Chanting: Reciting the translated text with the intonation used in chanting scriptures to ensure its smoothness and suitability for recitation.

Through such a meticulous procedure, the translators not only ensured accuracy but also considered fluency, making it a practice worth emulating. Taking the “Comparison” as an example, we can reverse translate the English text into Chinese and compare it with the original

Chinese text, which serves as an effective verification. Discrepancies between the reverse translation and the original remind us to review whether the English translation has potential ambiguities or is prone to misleading readers.

Additionally, ancient translation of scriptures adhered to the “Five guidelines for not-translating a term.” Each term carries its unique cultural background and corresponding connotations. When an equivalent term in Chinese was difficult to find during translation, transliteration was employed. The five scenarios were as follows:

(1) No translation for polysemous terms: Terms such as Bhagavan and Arhat with multiple meanings were not translated.

(2) No translation for occult terms: For example, there are no appropriate Chinese expressions to translate the dharani mantras in the scriptures.

(3) No translation out of reverence: Taking “Prajna” as an example, it cannot fully convey the noble and profound connotation with the single term “wisdom”.

(4) Follow ancient tradition and not translate: For instance, the term “Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi” was particularly preserved as its original pronunciation when translated by an honored ancient translator to emphasize the sublime nature of the Dharma.

(5) No translation due to lack of local equivalent: For example, “Amalaka” is the name of an Indian medicinal fruit that can not be found elsewhere.

While these guidelines may not directly relate to our current translations, understanding them may provide us with additional perspectives for contemplation.

II

PARTICIPATING IN TRANSLATION IS ENGAGING IN THE PROPAGATION OF THE DHARMA

1. Buddhism in the West

Buddhism spread from India to various regions, giving rise to Theravada Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism, also known as the Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan traditions. Today, this ancient Eastern wisdom is being recognized by an increasing number of Westerners. Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism, especially, have made a significant global impact. The reasons are multifaceted, but they are inseparable from cultural exchanges and the

translation of Buddhist scriptures.

In the early 20th century, some Westerners studied in Theravada Buddhist regions and introduced Buddhist doctrines and meditation methods to Europe and America, sparking widespread interest. The venerable Nyana-tiloka Mahathera, born in Germany, is a notable example. The venerable was ordained in Sri Lanka in 1936 and studied Buddhism and Pali. Subsequently, he translated some Pali scriptures into German and taught himself English. In 1958, he co-founded a Buddhist publishing house with friends. During his 30-year tenure as president, a large number of Buddhist books were published, making outstanding contributions to the propagation of Theravada Buddhism in the West.

On the other hand, Tibetan Buddhism expanded its influence as a group of eminent monks traveled to Europe and America to spread the Buddha Dharma. Initially, they encountered language barriers and struggled to move forward. Over time, they mastered English and started

conducting lectures and publishing books in Western countries, attracting many followers as the four groups of disciples. Some Dharma propagators have been active in recent years; since they have long-term residency in the West and possess no language barrier, their method of spreading Dharma has become even more diverse.

In contrast, while organizations like Fo Guang Shan and Dharma Drum Mountain have facilitated the spread of Chinese Buddhism to the West, its influence remains primarily within Chinese communities. This is due to language barriers and different living environments. Considering the large number of Chinese people around the world and the rich foundation of Chinese culture, ample opportunities for propagating Dharma exist without necessarily targeting Westerners. This situation does not pose a need for a breakthrough. However, lack of propagation naturally leads to a lack of Western audiences.

How can we broaden the interaction and change this situation? Language is the primary factor. Therefore,

translation volunteers have much to contribute and the key is that we possess a sense of mission to spread the Dharma and to enlighten oneself and others.

2. Taking Dharma Propagation as Our Mission

Our dedication to propagating the Dharma is not simply because we are Buddhist and wish to attract more followers. In fact, it is because the world truly needs Buddhism and the guidance of this wisdom. Since the 16th century, Western civilization has increasingly flourished, becoming the dominant culture worldwide. Although the rapid development of industry, technology, and commerce has significantly enhanced human material life, it has also given rise to various social issues. These include the deterioration of the ecological environment, mental distress and an increase in mental illnesses, and so on.

Where lies the future of humanity? Liang Shuming once wrote *Has Man a Future?* I believe that without a powerful intervention of the wisdom culture, humanity will

inevitably descend into decay and destruction. It is not alarmist; in fact, frequent natural disasters and human calamities are warning bells. More hidden dangers, like nuclear weapons, are lurking around us. What kind of catastrophic disaster would it bring to humanity if such devices fell into the hands of those with unhealthy mind-sets? Thus, as the world grows more powerful, it also becomes more fragile and fraught with crises.

On the other hand, with the improvement of material living standards, many individuals, after addressing survival issues, begin to contemplate the value of life and the purpose of living. They question the nature of happiness and the meaning of worldly success and ponder over existential inquiries such as who they are, where they come from, and where they are headed after death. Those issues addressed in the book *We Have Misunderstood The World* are also universal rather than individual. Anyone unwilling to live like an animal will inevitably face these questions and seek answers. However, when facing these questions and inquiries, we find no way forward without

the guidance of the ultimate wisdom. Failing to find convincing answers, some artists and philosophers even fall into a deep abyss of agony, leading them to the point of no return or into a state of voluntary degradation.

Where can we find the answers to these questions? Indeed, they lie in the Dharma, because all issues are essentially matters of the mind. When we truly understand the nature of the mind, we understand life and the world. Buddha Dharma is a study of the mind, and the Buddha's understanding of the mind does not arise from reasoning or mystic speculation but from direct experience. Following the guidance of the Dharma, we can also realize and attain the Buddha's wisdom. In fact, this wisdom is inherently within us, only needing to be revealed through cultivation.

Therefore, Buddha Dharma is the hope of this world. Practicing Buddhism isn't just about adjusting our mind-set for a more stable secular life but finding the true path in life and realizing life's greatest value. It is significant not

only for ourselves but also for humanity. We must recognize the importance of our translation work and confidently approach this volunteer activity.

III

HOW TO EXCEL IN TRANSLATION WORK

In practicing Buddhism, having clear goals and employing correct methods are essential for success. This also applies to any volunteer practice. So, how can we ensure effectiveness in our translation work? I believe three main elements are crucial: first, establish a solid organizational foundation; second, focus on developing professional skills; and third, approach your work as a form of cultivation practice. These elements are essential for achieving sustainable progress.

1. Establishing a Solid Organizational Foundation

First of all, we need to establish a team based on the translation process. On the one hand, we can refer to the organizational structure of the Bodhi Academy by setting up several groups within the translation department, with each group forming different teams to complete specific tasks. On the other hand, we can draw upon the historical translation processes and contemporary translation experiences as references. Once the team and processes are in place, it is still necessary to continuously evaluate practices and adjust them accordingly, until the process is the most appropriate and the teams formed according to that process are the most effective.

Next is the growth process for translators. How can we support the growth of volunteers after we recruit them into the translation team? The Bodhi Academy has a Six-Step Development Process for task-related growth and professional development. By aligning our process with these six steps, we ensure each individual clearly

understands their current responsibilities and the direction of their efforts in the future.

The third aspect involves establishing smooth channels for discovering, attracting, nurturing, and appropriately utilizing talents, along with forming corresponding selection criteria and operational standards. With the continuous optimization of the two modes (Three-level study and service-oriented volunteer practice), the number of our students will continue to grow, and talents for the translation team will also emerge accordingly. In this context, we must develop a robust system for identifying and integrating talents into our team, and then provide support to ensure they are on the right track quickly. Translating Buddhist texts needs a certain level of expertise, which requires specialized training for gradual advancement. This process is akin to the growth path where students evolve to assistant counselors, then to intern counselors, and finally to full counselors, in a bottom-up approach.

Given the diversity of everyone's situation, we need to

tailor our approach. For example, some students may have a solid knowledge of Buddha Dharma but average foreign language skills; others may have excellent foreign language skills but a weak foundation in Buddhism. Additionally, students who excel in translation should focus on their expertise without being overloaded with additional responsibilities. Similarly, those skilled in coordination should focus on organizational duties, avoiding excessive translation tasks. This requires team leaders to recognize the unique strengths of each volunteer and assign roles accordingly to maximize efficiency. Otherwise, not only will the tasks become burdensome, but improper arrangements may even cause volunteers to become disheartened and consider quitting.

2. Focusing on Professional Skills as the Key

With the advent of globalization, the prevalence of English continues to grow, and many people are proficient in more than one foreign language or engaged in related professional work. Despite this, translating Buddhist

texts into English remains relatively challenging. The difficulties lie in three main areas. The first is the limited exposure and experience in this specific field. The second is the lack of a solid foundation in Buddhism. If the understanding is not thorough or even biased, proficiency in English alone is insufficient. The third is how to strike the balance in translation and achieve an accurate and appropriate representation.

In the dissemination of Buddhism, the principle of understanding both the doctrine and the audience's mentality is paramount. Being in line with Dharma means accurately grasping the meaning and principles of Buddha Dharma, which is the fundamental premise of propagation. Whether through literal or free translation, it must be based on an accurate understanding. The difference is that free translation allows for a certain degree of flexibility in expression. In reality, this places higher demands on the translator, as they need to be clear about the extent of this freedom to enhance the translation rather than overcomplicate it. The *Records of the Three Treasures*

Throughout the Successive Dynasties contains the following record: “In Dharmarakṣa’s translation of the *Lotus Sutra*, there is one sentence in the chapter Announcement of the Future Destiny of the Five Hundred Monks as ‘Deities see humans, humans see deities’ (in Chinese, ‘天见人，人见天’). When Kumārajīva saw this during retranslation, he commented: ‘This phrase agrees with the meaning of the Sanskrit *sūtra*, but the expression is overly straightforward.’ Monk Rui immediately responded: ‘Could it be translated as humans and deities interact, thus enabling them to see each other?’ (in Chinese, ‘人天交接，两得相见’) Kumārajīva joyfully agreed: ‘Indeed, it is so.’ ” This shows that the key to free translation is capturing the essence. As for literal translation, it is also not necessarily the same as word-for-word translation. Since English and Chinese grammar differ a lot, adjustments are still necessary.

In the “Eight Steps,” the third step discusses understanding, which must be “complete, accurate, and thorough.” This principle is equally crucial in translation, demanding

repeated contemplation and full comprehension of the content. I often say that being a counselor in our program is the fastest way to grow because it involves more responsibilities, which compels them to learn well. Similarly, translation offers an opportunity for significant growth. Without a solid understanding, accurate translation is impossible. One is required to study earnestly to master the materials, not just “kind of knowing the content.”

Additionally, it's essential to consider the audience's mentality and cultural background. Since the English translations are intended for foreign readers, understanding their customary mode of expression is important. I encourage everyone to purposefully read some English originals, especially those with rich literary quality and philosophical depth. The same content can be expressed differently, depending on individual skill levels. While improving English proficiency, we must also familiarize ourselves with Buddhist terminology. In recent years, many English books related to Buddhism have been published, either originally written in English or translated. Some of them

have had a significant impact globally, such as the works of Master Thich Nhat Hanh. We can learn from them, but there's no need to read extensively. Instead, find one or two exemplary books and read them thoroughly. For those Buddhist terms that already have standard translations, we should follow the established conventions and not try to reinvent the wheel. Even though there is not a lot of jargon in my books, the content is deeply rooted in Buddhist principles. It demands deep understanding.

In summary, while accurately conveying the meaning and maintaining fluency, it is essential to remember that the contents are targeted to foreign readers. When I propagate Dharma to the general public, I also consider who the audience is, what content they are interested in, and to what extent they can easily understand and resonate. Only by doing so can I spark their interest in the Dharma, instead of me talking in a self-entertaining manner. Translation is no exception; we do not do it for the sake of doing some activity, but rather, we hope to use this medium to connect more people with the Dharma.

3. Make Doing Things a Form of Practice

We are first and foremost students engaged in study and practice, then volunteers participating in a service-oriented practice mode, and finally participants in the translation work. These priorities must be kept in mind.

Everyone is busy in this fast-paced society, yet it is profoundly meaningful to find time from our hectic schedules to spread Dharma for the benefit of all beings. Meanwhile, it is important to remember that we are all on the path of cultivation, facing various challenges along the way. This becomes apparent when our secular preferences surface when engaging in volunteer work. Without timely recognition and correction of these habits, they can unknowingly foster ego attachment and the negative traits of greed, anger, and ignorance. Even though the tasks have been accomplished, if they don't contribute to mindset growth or, worse, trigger unhealthy emotions, such efforts are not worthwhile.

How to ensure our growth while participating in volunteer translation? It's essential to integrate the two modes and the "Eight Steps and Three Types of Meditation." When translating a book or an article, we should strive to understand the content thoroughly. Our volunteer tasks demand dedicated learning, thus contributing to our practice of wisdom. As we engage in our tasks, we should carry the aspiration to benefit all sentient beings, focusing on others rather than ourselves, and aiming to lead more individuals from confusion to awakening through our efforts. By this endeavor, as we translate, we are nurturing the bodhicitta, cultivating compassion, and practicing altruism again and again.

After establishing this solid foundation, we should also venture into the English-speaking market, which holds boundless prospects. Competition exists in every sector of our society, except in the propagation of the Dharma. Moreover, spreading the teachings of Buddhism is the hope of the world. Without the guidance of such a culture of wisdom, it is difficult for humanity to escape its

current predicaments. Since the root of these problems lies within the human mind, the world will not have a bright future if we cannot find our way out of life's afflictions. Let us all work together and contribute our efforts to changing the world's collective karma and improving the future of humanity.