

2005

Translation as Transmission and Transformation

Jay L. Garfield

Smith College, jgarfield@smith.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/phi_facpubs

Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Garfield, Jay L., "Translation as Transmission and Transformation" (2005). Philosophy: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

https://scholarworks.smith.edu/phi_facpubs/17

This Article has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophy: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu

Translation as Transmission and Transformation*

**Jay L Garfield
Smith College
University of Melbourne
Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies**

**ROUGH DRAFT—COMMENTS INVITED
DO NOT QUOTE WITHOUT PERMISSION**

1. Historical Context and Scope

This is not a general essay on the craft and institution of translation, though some of the claims and arguments I proffer here might generalize. I am concerned in particular with the activity of the translation of Asian Buddhist texts into English in the context of the current extensive transmission of Buddhism to the West, in the context of the absorption of cultural influences of the West by Asian Buddhist cultures, and in the context of the increased interaction between Buddhist practitioner communities and academics in Buddhist Studies. These three phenomena and their synergy are very much a phenomenon of the late Twentieth and early Twenty-first Centuries, so I am talking about a particular scholarly activity engaging with a particular literature and extended community at a very particular time.

* Thanks to the members of the Smith College Kahn Institute on TransBuddhism: Translation, Transmission and Transformation, 2003-2004 for the stimulating discussions that provided the matrix for these thoughts. Special thanks to fellow translators Peter Gregory, Andy Rotman, Tom Rohlich for sharing their insights on the craft of translation and to Nalini Bhushan, Connie Kassor and Ji-Eun Lee for astute comments. Thanks also to Mario D'Amato for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Each of the phenomena to which I advert requires a bit of comment, and each has a role in determining the nature of the activity of translation as it is undertaken at this moment in intellectual spacetime. First, it is important to note that we are the midst of a massive missionary religious transmission that carries with it a great deal of not specifically religious cultural baggage (including secular philosophy, medicine, art, music, literature, food, etc). Buddhist religious teachers and texts are being exported from Burma, India, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, Sri Lanka and Thailand and are eagerly being imported by denizens of North and South America, Europe, Australasia and Africa. (Baumann 2002, Wallace 2002) Buddhism is making significant inroads in these new cultural milieus both in immigrant Buddhist communities and in so-called convert communities.(Matthews 2002, Spuler 2002, Clasquin 2002) Often multiple traditions are adopted in the same region simultaneously, and find syncretic adherents. (Prebish 2002, Seager 2002) In every case, we find, not surprisingly that the imported Buddhist teachings are adapted as much as they are adopted, and that host cultural forms and ideologies function as a matrix that determines the nature of these transformations and selections. (Padgett 2002, McMahan 2002, Tsomo 2002, Gregory and Weaver 2004, Wetzel 2002, Metcalf 2002, Harris 2002, Hayes 1999, Snodgrass 2003)

Unlike past intra-Asian transmissions of Buddhism, the present transmission is very much a two-way street. At the same time that Buddhism is transforming Western culture in countless subtle and not-so-subtle ways, Asian cultures, through the global information economy, tourism, education and migration are being dramatically transformed by ideas and cultural forms deriving from the West. (Loy 2003, Keown, Prebish and Husted 1998, Sivaraksa 2004) Many of these ideas and practices are, at least *prima facie*, in serious tension with the

ideologies and practices central to traditional Buddhist life. Among these we might count cosmological views, the rejection of rebirth, consumer capitalism, liberal democratic theory, and permissive attitudes towards sexuality. Others may at first seem peripheral to the religious and philosophical concerns of Buddhism, but on reflection touch on areas of life hitherto dominated by traditions grounded in Buddhism. Among these we might count traditions of medicine, theatre, music, dance and the academic curriculum itself.

While some might regard this cultural globalization as in effect destroying the Asian Buddhist cultures with which it interacts, this is surely incorrect. Buddhist cultures, like all cultures, evolve, and there is no more essential conflict between Buddhism and modernity than there was between Buddhism and medieval Chinese culture, or between Christian culture and modernity. On the other hand, the effect of Western influence in Buddhist Asia is not negligible: it is issuing in the dramatic, rapid transformation of those cultures. Asian Buddhist cultures are not only absorbing Western technologies and popular culture, but also Western approaches to Buddhism itself, and this often mediated by Western Buddhist texts. Dharma centers in Asia offer teachings modeled on those of Western Dharma centers, at which not only Western Dharma pilgrims are found in the audience, but also Asian students eager for a more modern religious pedagogy. One often also finds in these Dharma centers Western teachers teaching in English to Indian, Nepali, Thai or Japanese citizens. The intra-Buddhist multi-traditional syncretism that so often characterizes Western Buddhism is finding its way into Asia, and interpretations of Buddhist doctrine and scripture mediated by Western science, political theory, popular psychology and philosophy are increasingly familiar to Asian Buddhist scholars, monastics and lay practitioners.

There was a time not so very long ago that the communities of Western Buddhist practitioners and of Western Buddhologists were nearly completely disjoint. Where they overlapped, we often found “closet practitioners” among the academics who dared not confess their religious proclivities for fear of losing professional standing. It was a common view that to confess a Buddhist religious practice would be to be regarded as a missionary, not a teacher or a scholar, or at least as one who could no longer pretend to the scholarly distance and objectivity requisite for serious academic work or teaching. So those for whom scholarship and teaching in Western academia was at the center of their lives, the closet was the only option.

Members of the community of practitioners, on the other hand, were concerned to obtain liberation from cyclic existence for themselves or for all sentient beings, and often pursued that goal through devotional practices and recitations of whose content and philosophical underpinnings they had little real understanding. To be sure, there have always been those for whom developing a deep understanding of the texts and doctrines of Buddhism was a central concern. The point is that this was far from universal. Indeed it appears that this academic approach to Buddhism has been growing dramatically in recent years, largely because of the interaction to which I refer here. Nonetheless, it remains true that at least in the earlier years of Buddhist transmission to the West, for many Buddhist practitioners in the West, just as for many of their coreligionists in Asia, their practice involved a set of actions and recitations taken to be soteriologically efficacious independent of any cognitive grasp of their significance. Study of doctrine, philosophy, language was not always a salient feature of Western Dharma centers.

All of this has changed dramatically over the past few decades. Dharma centres of all Buddhist sects and lineages host teachers, offer

classes in Buddhist philosophy, canonical languages and ritual arts and generally take their mission to involve educating their membership in order to facilitate spiritual transformation. Often the speakers and teachers at these centers are in fact academic specialists in Buddhist studies; and a very large proportion of the texts studied in these contexts are translations or textbooks prepared by such academics. On campus more and more Buddhist Studies scholars who happen also to be Buddhist have come out of the spiritual closet. No longer are those who profess faith immediately suspect as scholars, just as Christians are free to teach Christian religion or philosophy without a presupposition of a failure of objectivity. Not surprisingly, we also see increasing collaboration between campus-based and dharma center-based academic programs, with teaching burdens shared and students receiving credit for studies in Dharma centres.

Why is this relevant to translation? For precisely this reason: Translations are not merely completed by translators. They are read; they are read by particular readers; they are read for specific reasons; they have determinate effects on their readers; they are often chosen because of (possibly incorrect) views about what those readers want or need to read, and about the probable effects of those texts on those readers. In the present context we must then ask, “who is reading the texts we translators are producing, and what effects are these texts having on the transmission of Buddhism to the west and on the Asian cultures into which they inevitably percolate?”

2. **Who is translating? What is being translated?**

The translation of Buddhist texts was once the exclusive province of academic philologists. Translations were almost always complex

affairs, involving critical editing of original material, the comparison of multiple editions of the source text, compilation of extensive lexicons, and were texts aimed almost exclusively at other academics, and indeed at other translators.¹ To translate was principally to participate in a dialogue with other translators about translation. The result is that the present community of translators benefits from rich philological scholarship, extensive discussion about how to render particular terms and locutions, as well as a healthy diet of success and failure from which to learn. Texts chosen for translation were texts deemed important objects of study by philologists, that is, typically texts thought to be historically significant for the development of Buddhist literature. This is a reasonable criterion given the role that these translations played in the nascent scholarly enterprise of Buddhist studies. But it is orthogonal to criteria such as philosophical depth, poetic beauty, frequency of study in a home tradition, importance for spiritual practice, etc.

The community of translators of Buddhist texts is now much broader, with a correspondingly broader set of agendas and of target audience. The academic philologists are still at it, and are still producing a substantial set of important scholarly editions. But texts are being translated by scholars who think of themselves very differently as well —philosophers, religious studies specialists, who are not so much concerned with specifically linguistic or text-historical and text-critical issues as they are with the philosophical or religious content of these texts, their cogency, spiritual significance, and so on. (Garfield 1985, Blumenthal 2002, Thurman 1994 or Wallace and Wallace 1997, for instance) These texts often are presented with less scholarly apparatus than those of the professional philologists, but often with substantial

¹ See, for instance, any of the great works by de Jong, May, Frauenwallner, Steinkellner or Le Valle de Poussin, for example.

essays on the texts or issues they raise. Their audience is often broader, comprising not only other academics, but undergraduate or postgraduate students, and an interested, educated non-academic audience, prominently, and significantly, including Buddhist practitioners for whom these texts might have religious significance and use. This is significant precisely because it is at this point that translation becomes most clearly implicated in transmission. Scholars who are producing these texts are not engaged only, or even primarily, in a professional conversation with one another, though to be sure this is still very much an aspect of their activity. They are now producing the body of texts taken as canonical by the current generation of students of and practitioners of Buddhism in the West.

We have been considering the *scholarly* interlopers in the philologists' preserve. But there are other interlopers as well. Buddhist societies or individual practitioners are producing their own translations. Many of these appear with no scholarly apparatus at all, and even with no attribution to particular translators.² Their audience is certainly not the scholarly world, but practitioners. When these translators produce texts they are self-consciously *transmitting* Buddhism to their intended audience. Translation has always been an inextricable part of the transmission of Buddhism, and we should not be surprised to see the activity undertaken in this way in the present context. But it also forces to ask just how much the translation by scholars of Buddhism is also part and parcel of the transmission process, whether or not this is the intent of these translators.

When we ask what is being translated by these translators the kind of answer we will find will be different. Texts are chosen here for their

² See for instance the editions prepared by the Padmakara translation group, including their translation of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* with Mipham's commentary (2002) and their translation of Āntideva's *Bodhicāryāvatāra* (1997).

soteriological efficacy, for their importance for rituals in the traditions in which these translators practice, or because of their role in the relevant teaching lineage. We thus see bookshelves filling with a disparate set of Buddhist texts, translated using a disparate set of methodologies, aimed at a variety of audiences, translated in pursuit of a variety of agendas.

All of this has implications for the nature of the current transmission, inasmuch as transmission, as we have noted, is always dependent upon and deeply influenced by translation. The heterogeneous set of texts translated and the heterogeneous lexicons and methodologies of translation encourage both an intra-traditional syncretism and a robust sense of the autonomy of the translated texts from their source material. Syncretism is encouraged by the sheer appearance at the same time of texts from so many different traditions, and the voracious appetite for texts of any kind among the Buddhist readership. It is simply inevitable that the interested practitioner will be reading Theravada, rDzog chen, dGe lug pa madhyamaka, Zen and Pure Land Buddhism within a short span, and blending the insights and views of these traditions in creative ways. Autonomy is encouraged by the fact that the language and methodology through which texts are presented often renders them so clearly Western objects of study, while nonetheless canonical Buddhist objects. The result of these two kinds of influence is inevitably the emergence of a new Western Buddhism with multiple roots, and the acceptance of a Western Buddhism as an authentic continuation of the Buddhist tradition. More of this below.

3. **Translation as Transformation**

Some naïve readers might read a translation and believe that they are thereby reading the text that was translated. But nobody involved in the translation business could ever take this view seriously. When we read a translation, we are reading a text in a target language composed by a translator or a team of translators who were reading in the source language. To be sure, different translators call the reader's attention to their presence and agency to different degrees, some occluding their presence in a presentation that suggests the presence of the source text, others calling constant attention to their choices and methodology. But whether or not the translator acknowledges this act of transformation, translation is always an act of this kind.

When we translate, we transform in all of the following ways: we replace terms and phrases with particular sets of resonances in their source language with terms and phrases with very different resonances in the target language; we disambiguate ambiguous terms, and introduce new ambiguities; we interpret, or fix particular interpretations of texts in virtue of the use of theoretically loaded expressions in our target language; we take a text that is to some extent esoteric and render it exoteric simply by freeing the target language reader to approach the text without a teacher; we shift the context in which a text is read and used. No text survives this transformation unscathed. (Gómez 1999) Let us consider each transformation in turn.

In many respects the task of the translator is not to succeed, but to fail in as few or in as minimally egregious ways as possible. (Bar-On 1993) When we take a term from a canonical Buddhist text, it will inevitably bear lexical and metaphorical relations to a host of other terms in its home language—whether that be Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan or Chinese. It will also have what we might, for lack of a better term, call its “core meaning” in the context in which it occurs—the center of semantic

gravity we need to preserve in translation. In general, it is impossible to preserve both this semantic core and the complex set of peripheral semantic relationships born by the term in question when we choose a term in our target language.

Let me take an example, chosen almost at random, only because it occurred in a translation I read today. The Sanskrit term *prapañca* has a root that connotes multiplicity, variation, etc. As it is used in Buddhist psychology and philosophy of mind, it denotes the mind's tendency to create ideas and experiences that have nothing to do with reality, to spin out of control, to fantasize, to superimpose its own fantasies on reality. We have chosen to translate this as *fabrication*, which does a good job of capturing the core idea of creating a falsehood, of making things up. (Tsong khapa 2005) Most other translators (including the one I was reading this morning) translate this as *proliferation*. This does a good job of capturing the meaning of the root of the term, as well as the metaphor it involves, but in English provides little of the core. And of course there *is no English term that captures both components of the meaning of this term*. So we are forced to a choice. We can betray the core or betray the root and connections to other terms in the language. To translate a text of any scope is to agonize over countless such decisions.

The important point here is that in either case, when we render the term in English we have *transformed* the text. For the question we are addressing is not, "is the meaning of *prapañca fabrication* or *proliferation*?" We know at the outset that in Sanskrit it is *both*, and that anyone reading the text in Sanskrit receives this full range of resonances. That is what word meaning is like. It is never discrete, and for that reason, never fully translatable. This is the phenomenon of *différence*, the fact that we can never specify the meaning of any one word without specifying the meanings of all of the words to which

it is semantically related, and so on *ad infinitum*. (Derrida 1982) The consequence is both that translation is always *possible*, but always also *partial*. (Bar-On, *op. cit.*) We can always find a term or a circumlocutory phrase that captures a great deal in the target language of the source term, but there will never be a term that shares *all* of the relevant semantic connections. So we make difficult choices, always betraying something important in the original text in order to produce *something* in the target language. *Tradittori Traduttori*. My colleague who chooses *proliferation* has transformed this text from one that is about the fabrication of a false reality to one that is just about the mind spinning out of control. I who choose *fabrication* have transformed the text from one that is about the mind spinning out of control and drawing distinctions and imposing a range of categories that have no basis in reality to one that is just about falsification.

The converse, of course, is also true. *Proliferation* and *fabrication* have their own core meanings and sets of lexical and metaphorical resonances that take them each even further from those of *prapañca*. The former recalls reproduction, fecundity, elaboration; the second mendacity, but also construction. Any reader of either English text that results, whether s/he is reading for scholarly or religious purposes, is reading a specific, new text, that bears only an etiological relation to a text that once contained the word *prapañca*. Multiply this by the tens of thousands of such decisions that determine the content of a complete translation, and we see that the texts read in translation are distant indeed from those composed in their source languages.

This can have surprising consequences in a global academic community. For many of our Asian colleagues, and many of the lay students of Buddhism in Asian countries are fluent readers of English. Often the source texts we choose to translate are forbidding technical documents in their source languages, replete with technical terms and

archaic constructions and terminology. Often those source languages are nearly as opaque to the scholarly or lay Asian reader as they are, respectively, to the scholarly or lay Western reader. A text written in Sanskrit or in Chinese in the 6th Century was no more intended for a contemporary Indian or Chinese reader than it was for a contemporary Canadian, after all, and even classical Tibetan is a difficult language for contemporary Tibetans. But when we translate, we aim for clarity, and for a readable modern idiom. That idiom will often be more accessible to our Asian colleagues and student readers than is the original text, and so we find that contemporary Asian Buddhist readers are reading a great deal of Buddhist doctrine in English. I was interested, for instance, to see a Tibetan colleague preparing to teach a class on the Tibetan and Sanskrit editions of *Mālamadhyamakakārikā* and its canonical commentaries by reading an English translation and commentary on that text. “It’s so much clearer in English,” he said to me. And I noted that many young Tibetans at a recent Kalachakra tantric initiation in India were reading from the English translation of the rite of initiation because the Tibetan was incomprehensible to them. Hence the new “Western Buddhism” emerging on a platform of Western translations is being re-exported into Asia.

Many terms that occur in Buddhist texts are ambiguous, and these ambiguities are often critical to the way they function in the source texts. When we translate into English we often have available no terms that preserve these ambiguities, and perforce disambiguate. Let me choose again one among thousands of good examples: the word *dharma* can mean in Sanskrit *doctrine, truth, virtue, or phenomenon*. Just what term in English can convey *that* semantic range? And this is not a case of simply homonymy, as that between *bank* (financial institution), *bank* (riverside) and *bank* (a pool shot). In this case, the root is one (meaning *to hold*) and this is properly regarded as a single

lexical item, with all of these uses recognizably connected. When we translate into English we disambiguate. We choose one of these target English terms, thereby occluding the others that may well be in play. It is no longer obvious that something is *dharma* (*virtuous—holding one to the right way*) precisely because it is in accord with *dharma* (*doctrine-that to which one should hold on*) and the *dharma* (*truth—that which holds reality in the mind*) about *dharma* (*the phenomena—that which are held together, and which hold properties*). When we choose, we have transformed a text, disambiguating the original, and introducing an entirely new range of determinate meaning.

Sometimes our translation choices amplify these effects in virtue of the fact that the terms we choose are theoretically loaded in particular ways. For sometimes we are translating highly theoretical texts, using technical terms. Translation demands that we translate these into technical terms in our target languages. But as any student of the philosophy of science is aware, technical terms derive their meanings from the theories in which they are embedded. The Buddhist technical terms we find in our source text thus have their meanings determined by the ambience of a Buddhist theory of mind or of the external world, or ethics; the meanings of the Western technical terms we have at our disposal are determined by their own very different theoretical ambience. For example, when we translate the Sanskrit term *ākāra* as *representation*, we do a pretty good job. But not a perfect job. For the Sanskrit has a very imagistic component to its meaning, while *representation* is deliberately neutral between imagistic and verbal connotations. *Representation* involves *re-presentation*, and hence suggests something standing in for something else. *Ākāra* might be present even though there is no object for which it stands. And so on. A text so translated has been transformed, and is now read alongside

other Western discussions of representation, such as those of Kant, Schopenhauer, or contemporary cognitive scientists.

A Tibetan colleague once told me that he finds the Western approach to texts quite bizarre for the following reason: In the Tibetan tradition, a text is conceived as a support for an oral tradition. One reads a text with a teacher; the text is an occasion for the transmission of an oral lineage, and most of what is important, what is to be learned, is in that oral transmission. He compares the Western reader fixated on the written object and reading it alone with someone who goes into a library, sees books on tables, and studies the grain of the wood in the tables. Importantly, Buddhist texts are composed with this model of reading, transmission and study in mind. Translations of Buddhist texts, however, are aimed at Western readers. When we produce such a text, a condition on its success is that a reader can pick it up, read it, and, if suitably qualified by intelligence and relevant background, understand it. Alone. A text that fails this test is not a candidate for publication, and if the text we produced unadorned does not accomplish it, we festoon it with introductory essays, running commentary, copious footnotes, etc in order to bring it into line with the expectations of a Western reader. And as we have seen, this may have unintended consequences even back in the Tibetan community!

This, of course, is a further transformation, and in a different hermeneutical dimension. We have taken a source object designed to be understood only in the context of an extensive oral commentary imparted by a highly qualified teacher to a selected student, and transformed it into a target object designed to be accessible to any educated reader. Note that this transformation is not simply textual. In translating in this way, we are creating a new Buddhist textual culture. In particular, we are making it possible for students or practitioners of Buddhism to engage with its literary tradition

independently of a teacher or an authority—to choose what to read, and, in bringing these texts into Western literary practice, to choose how to read, how to interpret, and what of each text to accept or to reject. This is a profound transformation not only of these texts but of the engagement with the textual tradition that is so central to Buddhist culture. We are creating, in the act of translation, a new Buddhism.

4. So, What are Translators Doing?

Translators of Buddhist texts are hence not merely involved in an innocent process of passing texts from one hand to another. We cannot pretend that translation is an activity independent of transmission, or that the transmission in which we are implicated is one in which what is received is identical with that which is given. Instead we are creating a set of texts that will be foundational to the emergence of Western Buddhism. These texts will be recognizable descendants of Indian, Tibetan and Chinese texts, but they are Western texts in Western languages. This set of texts is strangely heterogeneous and disjoint, and so will be the Buddhism constructed upon this foundation. That is, we are not seeing all of the texts of any one tradition, or by any one author, or in any one genre translated. Decisions about what to translate and when are made according to the whims of translators, dissertation directors, dharma centres, a variety of teachers, and even movie actors.³

As we translate, not only is a new Western Buddhist canon appearing, but a complex negotiation of terminology is occurring, as a cacophony of translators propose alternative approaches and terminologies. In

³ My colleague and I were recently informed by a leading translator of Tibetan texts that whether it would be considered appropriate for us to translate a particular text we intended to translate would depend on a decision by Richard Gere!

this sense the current wave of translation is very different indeed from previous waves of translation in the history of Buddhist transmissions: The Tibetan translation effort was highly organized and regimented, governed and systematized by a royal translation council, with carefully vetted teams of Indian and Tibetan translators, and all translations carefully edited for uniformity and conformity to official norms by committees of scholars. The result is a highly uniform canon written in a kind of code for Sanskrit. The Chinese translation effort was, like the current case, a more individual and disorganized affair. But it differs in that only Mahāyāna texts were translated, and we do not see the kind of efforts to provide critical editions, introductory essays, etc that we do in the West, and so not the kind of ongoing debate between translators. But as we have seen, this cacophony is more than a war of words, for each word we choose comes with a theoretical background, a set of lexical kin and a new context in which to set the Buddhist texts a reader assimilates. So translators are also choosing the theoretical matrices that will determine the way Buddhism is understood and adopted in the West.

5. Translation and the trope of authenticity

In any discussion of the transmission of Buddhism it is impossible to avoid a discourse about “authenticity,” and what it means for a formulation of Buddhist doctrine or a practice to be authentic. Often this trope is simply a cover for sectarian wrangling, a way of valorizing a particular, typically conservative, policy, or for settling intramural quarrels. But at certain times questions about authenticity become interesting, and a time when such radical change is occurring so quickly and on so many fronts is surely one such time.

It is tempting to think that the translation activity I have been canvassing is new, or revolutionary, or involves a kind of betrayal of “authentic” Buddhism. For authenticity is often understood as involving the “purity” of a lineage, unadulterated by extraneous material, or the preservation of the *identity* of texts or meanings across time and mind. If this is true, “authentic” Buddhism has been betrayed from the beginning, for translation has been part of the transmission of Buddhism from the beginning, and it is impossible to translate without transforming. A central doctrine of Buddhism, we all know, is the impermanence of all phenomena, and as we all know, impermanence must be understood as a middle path: no phenomenon is immutable; but no continuum terminates. Instead, any extended phenomenon is a constantly changing continuum of causally connected, but distinct events. Buddhism is not immune from its own ontology. Authenticity can only be understood in these terms, and the transformation through translational transmission is part and parcel both of maintaining the longevity of the continuum not in spite of, but because of its constant change and adaptation.

How, then, should we understand authenticity in a sense relevant to the transformative transmission of Buddhism to the West and relevant to a consideration of the authenticity of the translations that underwrite that transmission and that catalyze that transformation? There are different understandings of authenticity to which we might turn. *Mahāyānas-trāḷaḷukāra*, for instance, suggests that we treat as authentic any teaching that leads to the alleviation of primal ignorance. This is problematic in at least two ways: first, it relies upon the effect on the recipient of the teaching as a criterion of authenticity: If I fail to be awakened despite hearing a sūtra spoken by Īakyamuni Buddha himself, does this undermine the authenticity of that teaching? Secondly, it is either overbroad or circular: Surely remarks made by

those with no relation to the Buddhist tradition can assist in the alleviation of ignorance. These should not thereby constitute Buddhist teachings, unless one takes their soteriological efficacy as evidence that they must have been inspired by the Buddha, in which case the circularity is uncomfortable.

Others insist on a direct lineage from Buddhavaccana, leaving open two important questions: just what constitutes Buddhavaccana, and what kind of lineage is relevant? Though these problems are notoriously troubling, I think that we can gain some purchase on the question here. First it is important that we re-think the proper subject of authenticity. It is tempting to think about authenticity principally in terms of texts, teachings or explicit discursive or ritual practices, but this is the wrong place to focus, both on general hermeneutical grounds, and from the standpoint of the specifically Buddhist hermeneutical doctrine of the four reliances. For one thing, many of the texts we are considering here are composed not by Íakyamuni, but by later Indian, Tibetan or Chinese scholars. It is more appropriate, and more faithful to Buddhist hermeneutical practice to focus on insights, on realizations. We might imagine a lineage stretching to the historical Buddha. But only if we are relaxed about the notion of lineage. It is unlikely that all lineages involve unbroken personal transmission, though many surely do. It would be unreasonable, though, to stake the authenticity of a teaching on the question of whether there was a resurrection of interest in a text that had lapsed for, say, a generation. Transmission can, after all, be textual as well as personal, if appropriately supported.

I am arguing that we should not treat *texts* as that which is to be transmitted but instead the insights and realizations they may facilitate, and that these should be regarded as authentically Buddhist to the degree that they derive from a lineage of textual or oral

transmission that has its ground in the insights and realizations of the Buddha. On such an understanding of authenticity in the Buddhist tradition, authenticity denotes not the *identity* of a view, text, or formulation with something the Buddha or an appropriate *acārya said*, but rather the fact that an insight is salutary, soteriologically efficacious, and *causally grounded* in a transmission originating with the Buddha.

So, while it is tempting to think of translators as traitors, perhaps we can be loyal after all, and loyal to what counts most. We are traitors only to a mythical original, mythical because its originality is cast as permanence and immutability. But this treason is nothing but the embrace of the heart of Buddhism—impermanence, essencelessness and dependent origination, and the recognition that reality makes sense only in the context of these three characteristics. We have an enormous responsibility as transmitters of Buddhism, a responsibility that forces a certain care and reflectiveness in our practice. But we must remember that that responsibility is the responsibility not to preserve a permanent past, but to manage transformation in a productive way, facilitating change that we can only hope follows a trajectory that, because of the effects these texts and the practices they engender have on future students and practitioners of Buddhism, is recognizably as authentic as were any of the past trajectories followed by the transformation of Buddhism.

References

- Bar-On, D. (1993). "Indeterminacy of Theory and Practice," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53, pp 781-810.
- Baumann, M. (2002). "Protective Amulets and Awareness Techniques, or How to Make Sense of Buddhism in the West," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 51-65. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Blumenthal, J. (2002). *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Īntarakṣita*.
- Candrakṛti and Mipham (2002). *Introduction to the Middle Way*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Clasquin, M. (2002). "Buddhism in South Africa," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 152-162. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Garfield, J. (1995). *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nāgārjuna's Mālamadhyamakakārikā*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gómez, L. (1999). "The Way of the Translators: Three Recent Translations of Īntideva's *Bodhicāryāvatāra*," *Buddhist Literature I*, pp 262-354.
- Gregory, P. and L. Weaver. (2004). *The Gate of Sweet Nectar: Feeding Hungry Spirits in an American Zen Community*. Northampton: Smith College.
- Harris, I. (2002). "A 'Commodius Vicus of Recirculation': Buddhism, Art and Modernity."
- Hayes, R. (1999). *The Land of No Buddha*. Barnett: Windhorse Press.
- Īntideva, (1997). *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. Boston: Shambhala.
- Keown, D., C. Prebish and W. Husted (eds). (1998). *Buddhism and Human Rights*. London: Curzon Press.
- Loy, D. (2003). *The Great Awakening: Buddhism and Social Theory*. Boston: Wisdom Publications.
- Matthews, B. (2002). "Buddhism in Canada." in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 120-138. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- McMahan, D. (2002), "Repackaging Zen for the West," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 218-229. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Metcalfe, F. (2002). "The Encounter of Buddhism and Psychology." in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 348-364. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Padgett, D. (2002). "The Translating Temple," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 201-217. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Prebish, C. (2002). "Studying the Spread and Histories of Buddhism in the West: The Emergence of Western Buddhism as a new Subdiscipline within Buddhist Studies," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 66-84. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Seager, R. (2002). "American Buddhism in the Making," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 106-119. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sivaraksa, S. (2004). *Trans Thai Buddhism and Envisioning Social Resistance: The Engaged Buddhism of Sulak Sivaraksa*.
- Snodgrass, J. (2003). *Presenting Japanese Buddhism to the West: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the Columbian Exposition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Spuler, M. (2002). "The Development of Buddhism in Australia and New Zealand," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 139-151. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Thurman, R. (1994). *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. New York: Bantam.
- Tsomo, K. (2002). "Buddhist Nuns: Changes and Challenges," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 255-274. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Tsong khapa (2005). *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's **Mādhyamakakārikā***. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Wallace, A. (2002). "The Spectrum of Buddhist Practice in the West," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.), *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia*, pp 34-50. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Wallace, A. and V. Wallace (1997). *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life: Īāntideva's Bodhicāryāvātāra*. Ithaca: Snow Lion.
- Wetzel, S. (2002). "Neither Monk nor Nun: Western Buddhists as Full-Time Practitioners," in C. Prebish and M. Baumann (eds.),

Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia, pp 275-284.
Berkeley: University of California Press.