

The Wondrous and Profound Dharma-Door of Sutra Translation

■ By James Lin

殊勝奧妙的譯經法門

■ 林鼎富 文



翻譯緣起

在上人道場學習了許多年，第一次參與翻譯的工作是翻譯《王鳳儀言行錄》。個人對佛法認知粗淺，平時也用功不足，還記得一聽到要翻譯佛典，想到因果責任重大，又想到法界佛教譯經會嚴謹的態度以及對翻譯工作者素質的要求，就有些怯場了。不過考慮到《言行錄》是最為淺顯易懂的世間法，應該可以勝任，我就決定接下第一份翻譯工作了。

又過了幾年，在2011年我有幸能到萬佛聖城全程參與聞名已久的萬佛寶懺法會。法會結束後，我認識了致力於翻譯工作的近巖法師。在法師的鼓勵之下我透過網路，聆聽了恒實法師每週主持的《華嚴經》新版英文翻譯討論會，並加入了巖法師的翻譯小組。很巧的，我們小組接下的正是翻譯萬佛懺的工作。

經文簡介

萬佛寶懺是明朝的明心法師以《佛說佛名經》為基礎，參照天台懺儀編成的。大部分的經文都是佛名，共有一萬一千多個名號。佛的名號通常表現出他的功德，願力或是往昔修習的法門。佛陀講了這麼多的名號讓我們了解到諸佛功德之深廣。每拜完一百尊佛，會有一段發願文，回向發願自己與所有眾生將來皆能得到佛的每個相好。每段文求三十二相八十隨形好的其中一相。整部經拜完就圓滿了一百一十二個相好的願。



How I Began

I took on my first translation project, *True Stories About Wang Feng-yi*, after years of learning in the Dharma Realm Buddhist Association (DRBA). Knowing no more than the basics and being far from a diligent practitioner, I first felt unsure about the task. I thought about the weighty responsibility of cause and effect and about the noble guidelines for BTTS translators. But, the *True Stories* are the simplest of worldly dharmas. I assured myself that I could handle the task and thus started the project.

Another few years went by; in 2011, I was fortunate enough to attend the Ten Thousand Buddha Repentance ceremony that I had always longed for. At the end of the repentance, I met Dharma Master Jin Yan, a dedicated senior translator. He encouraged me to participate in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* translation meeting held by Dharma Master Heng Sure and to join his own translation team. Surprisingly, our team was translating the “Ten Thousand Buddha Repentance.”

About the Sutra

The “Ten Thousand Buddha Repentance” was compiled by Dharma Master Mingxin of the Ming Dynasty, from *The Buddha Proclaims the Names of Buddhas Sutra*, in accordance with the Tiantai Repentance Ritual. Most of the texts are the names of Buddhas, more than 11,000 in total. The name of a Buddha usually symbolizes his merit and virtue, vows or how he practiced. Shakyamuni Buddha spoke these many names to show us the sheer magnitude of the Buddhas’ merit and virtue.

After bowing to every one hundred Buddhas, there is a passage with which participants vow on behalf of all living beings and themselves to obtain

一年一度，長達三個多星期的萬佛懺法是萬佛聖城的一大盛事。每年都有世界各地的虔誠信眾前來共襄盛舉。如果將這部懺文翻譯成英文，我們相信許多信眾在拜懺的過程中更能被攝受，更受益。

我從這次的翻譯經驗中得到了莫大的收穫，尤其是對佛理、經藏，和語言有了進一步的體悟。在翻譯的過程中，原本自己以為了解的義理，我發現其實只是一知半解而已。以前自己研讀的時候，似懂非懂卻不自覺。等到要把文句用另一個語言寫出來的時候，才知道自己還沒有融會貫通。翻譯像是考驗我對名相義理的理解，每個字、每個細節，都馬虎不得。還有，許多意想不到的各門學問都有機會發揮。



數字

其中一個學問就是記數法。數字應該是最明白，沒有需要費神思考的空間吧？事實上，經文中常見的「恒河沙」或「不可說」這些詞除了字面上的意義之外，有時也能表示特定的數字。這些詞隱藏的含義恐怕就無法輕易地在英文中表達。佛教中時常描述極大的天文數字。漢字文化圈各語言最大的數都是佛教用語，如「阿僧祇」、「那由他」、「恒河沙」等。由此可見，當初的翻譯者們很巧妙自然地將印度的用語融入中文，擴大中文能記載數字的量，並傳到鄰近國家。不過這些數量詞在不同時代也有不同的定義，要判斷出實際的值不是一件輕鬆的事。

另外，幾千年下來古文中的有些數字有被重新定義過，過去的語法跟現代也有出入。例如《佛名經》中，有萬，也有十千。通常小的數字排在大的數字前，兩者是相乘。例如五百是五乘以一百。大數在小數前兩者則是相加。十三是十加三。然而，《佛名經》中有許多例子跟現代人所熟悉的中文記數法有差異。例如「南無二十億千怖畏聲王佛」，在到億這麼大的數後加上一千似乎很難說得通。我們翻譯小

every hallmark of a Buddha. Every passage is associated with one of the Thirty-Two Hallmarks and Eighty Fine Features. At the end of the entire repentance, they will have completed 112 vows.

This repentance ceremony is held once a year for three weeks and is a major event at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas. Each year, people from all over the world come to take part in this special occasion. We translators believe that an English version of the repentance will be of greater help to participants and attract more attendees.

I gained invaluable benefits from this project as well, especially a deeper appreciation of Buddhism, Sutras and languages. There were many instances where I rediscovered the actual meaning of principles that I thought I had understood. When studying alone, I found it difficult to tell whether I had completely grasped the ideas. Only when I am to put the words in another language did I realize I had not. Translation is almost testing my comprehension of principles and terms — every word and detail of them. It also surprised me how wide a range of skills it asks for.

Numerals

One of the skills is numbering system. It is easy to assume that numbers are the least ambiguous and painstaking to translate, but in reality, common terms in the Sutras like “Asamkhyeya,” “Ganges sands,” or “ineffable” sometimes refer to a specific number, besides their literal meanings. This layer of meaning is not at all obvious in English. Buddhist texts often use astronomical numbers in description. The largest numerals in Sinosphere are Buddhist terms—*asamkheya*, *nayuta*, *Ganges sands*, etc. Evidently, the early translators skillfully incorporated Indian expressions into Chinese to expand its capacity to describe numbers and later influenced neighboring countries. Moreover, these numerals may have different definitions in different eras. It is not a trivial job to determine their values.

In addition to the evolving definitions, how numerals are written has also changed. For example, in the Sutra, there are instances of *wan* (ten thousand in Modern Chinese), as well as *shi-qian* (literally ten thousand). In Chinese, when a smaller number comes before a larger one, the two multiply. *Wu-bai* is five (*wu*) multiplying one hundred (*bai*). When a larger number comes before a smaller one, the two add. *Shi-san* is ten (*shi*) adding three (*san*). Yet, we suspect that the word order in the Sutra is not identical to what Chinese speakers now are familiar with.

In “Namo to the two hundred billion Buddhas named King Frightening Sound,” the numeral in the original text is *er-shi-yi-qian* (two, ten, one hundred million, one thousand), we found it difficult

組決定把這些數字全部相乘，翻成「二十千億」。另一個例子是「南無億那由他百千覺華佛」。「那由他」的其中一個定義為十的五十一次方。這個數字跟後面接的百千差距更加的大。我們一樣將其定義為全部相乘後再翻譯。

佛經中的數字其實是很特別的。



語言迥異的難題

中英翻譯難度高有許多原因。兩者語法、文化、思考模式都迥然不同。首先，中文古文極為簡潔，富有詩意，省略了很多主詞，所以有許多詮釋的空間。中文文句架構也很自由，可長可短。英文則較為冗長，偏重於理法，注重許多細節：時態、冠詞、單複數等中文沒有的問題。例如，要翻譯「南無眼佛」，中文沒有一隻眼或多隻眼的區別，英文卻一定要明確表達。或者，「南無見義佛」中的動詞「見」該作英文的不定形，過去分詞或是動名詞呢？決定英文翻譯的時候就需要花時間來評估考量這些問題。

背誦口傳經典是過去印度的傳統。為了方便記憶，經文結構用詞重複性非常高。佛經翻譯成中文的時候也保留了這些特徵。不過，英文文章卻是講求多樣性，大部分的文章都會刻意避免反覆使用同一個詞。保留原來的文風也配合英文的習慣，保持這兩者的平衡點也是很有挑戰性的。

再舉一個困難的例子，「然燈」。雖然這是許多佛教徒耳熟能詳，極為常見的詞，可是要用英文來表達一點也不簡單。

「然」這個詞可以是及物動詞的「點燃」，也可以是不及物動詞的「燃燒」。所以「然燈」可以是描寫點燃燈的動作，也可以是一個被點燃或是在燃燒的燈。而且，《佛名經》中，「然燈」這個詞用法很自由，可置前置後，有「南無然燈堅固佛」，「南無然燈作佛」，「南無無邊然燈佛」，「南無破諸闇然燈佛」等。英文沒有一個如此泛用的詞能表現出這些意義。要保留含有

to justify adding one thousand to a number in the order of hundred millions, so we decided to multiply all the numbers and translate it as “two hundred billion.” Another example is “Namo to the one hundred million one hundred thousand *nayutas* of Buddhas named Flower of Awakening.” The original numeral is *yi-nayouta-bai-qian* (one hundred million, one *nayuta*, one hundred, one thousand) One possible interpretation of a *nayuta* is 10^{51} . This number is drastically larger than the one hundred thousand that follows. Similarly, we multiplied all the values.

Numbers in Buddhist Sutras are in fact very unique.

Vastly Different Languages

There are many reasons why translating from Chinese to English is so challenging. The two languages drastically differ from the obvious syntax to the writer's thinking patterns. First, classical Chinese is known for its conciseness and is highly poetic. The subjects are often omitted, which allows much room for interpretation. The sentence structure is very versatile. Sentences can be anywhere from one word to more than a hundred. In contrast, sentences in English are usually much longer than their Chinese counterpart. English is more logical and focused on numerous details absent in Chinese: verb tenses, articles and plurals, among others. When translating “Namo Eye Buddha,” we had to make a choice between the singular “Eye,” or the plural “Eyes.” The difference does not exist in Chinese, but it must be clearly stated in English. For “Namo Perceiving Meaning Buddha,” we discussed how the verb “to perceive” should be inflected. Verbs do not inflect in Chinese. We spent much effort on evaluating these choices and making such decisions.

Oral transmission of texts was India's ancient tradition. To aid memory, the texts contain repetitive patterns. These characteristics have been preserved in the Chinese. However, English values diversity in its diction as much as possible. A good balance between maintaining the original style and appealing to the habits of English readers was another challenge for us.

Let us consider another problem—*ran-deng*. Translating this to English is difficult even though this is a common term that most Chinese Buddhists are familiar with. *Ran* is a word that can be used as a transitive verb “to light (something)” or as an intransitive verb “to burn.” The compound *ran-deng* can be interpreted as the action of lighting a lamp or as a lit or burning lamp. Furthermore, this term is used very freely throughout the Sutra, forming more than one hundred different combinations with other words. Some examples include “Namo Steadfast Shining Lamp Buddha,” “Namo Practice Like the Shining Lamp

「然燈」這個詞的許多佛名的關聯性又不讓翻譯過於含糊，我們只能作取捨，放棄一些含義。

有些初學佛教的人認為佛教名相多而艱深，尤其是因為有「多含不翻」——具多種含義而只以音譯翻成中文的——梵文譯語不易理解。同樣的詞在不同的經典，音譯也會有不同的字。對一些英文的讀者，這個問題更是艱深，因為除了梵文以外，還有不少中文直譯的詞彙。整部經中，我們整理出約有三百多個不同的梵文名相。有少數名相連熟悉梵文的資深翻譯者也無法確切判定意義。許多英文裏無法表達的詞除了用最接近的字來替代之外，可能也只能以原文音譯表達並靠讀者的努力學習及隨著時間讓更多人接受吧。



科技

另外一個有趣的領悟就是了解科技能如何幫助我們的翻譯工作。

通常老舊的軟硬體設備都能勝任文書處理的作業。一直以來，翻譯工作跟新科技並沒有太多交集。而我加入這次翻譯工作的時候剛好是各小組剛採用線上文書處理軟體的階段。大部分小組成員都住在世界的不同角落，但是我們透過網路可以多方通話並且同時間一起檢視，編輯同一個文件。近幾年來才有的這些科技服務讓我們能夠與各地的義工合作，成立前所未有的多國團隊。

剛開始翻譯的時候我們就發現，經中十分相似或是完全重複的佛名非常的多。我們常用的文書處理軟體並不適合整理大量文字再從中清楚的列出相似的片段。後來我們決定把整部《佛名經》中的佛名統彙成電子試算表，並且將每尊佛名、每段經文都加上編號以便整理、查詢和參照。根據簡易資料化後的經文可以很輕易地做出各種編排，依照編寫日期或英文字母順序等。如此一來，我們得以保持前後卷佛名的一致性還有相似佛名的連貫性。

Buddha,” “Namo Boundlessly Shining Lamp Buddha” and “Namo Shining Lamp Shattering All Darkness Buddha.” Although these names could have been interpreted in many other ways, we decided to select the most adaptable term that can best accommodate all the combinations.

Beginners to Buddhism often find many of the Buddhist terms to be difficult and profound, particularly the Sanskrit transliterations that have various meanings. The same term may even have different spellings and correspond to dissimilar Chinese characters, depending on the Sutra. The situation becomes even more complicated for English speakers when we include also the transliterations of terms unique to Chinese Buddhism. Our list of the Sutra's Sanskrit terms contains more than three hundred distinct items. Even senior translators who are knowledgeable in Sanskrit were unable to decipher the meaning for some of the terms. For expressions that have no equivalents in English, we can only hope that the transliterations will be gradually accepted in the future as more people study Buddhism.

Technology

I have another interesting observation: seeing how technology can aid our translation work.

Word processing usually can be handled by even decade-old computers. Translation work and new technology have never been closely associated with one another before. The time when I began this project was coincidentally a new stage of online document collaboration. Most of our team members live in different parts of the world, but we could discuss freely, view and edit the same document simultaneously over the internet. These online services which have been available only in recent years enabled us to form the first-ever international translation team with volunteer members across the globe.

At an early stage of the project, we recognized that there are a large number of similar or identical names in the Sutra. The word processing software which we were accustomed to was not fit for organizing enormous amount of words and displaying related lines. Later, we adapted Spreadsheets for such task. We arranged the entire Sutra into cells in the spreadsheet and numbered each name and passage of the sutra. With the texts converted into data, we could easily reference our work and rearrange according to date modified, alphabetical order, etc. This way, we were able to achieve a level of consistency across all volumes much higher than before.

Collaborative software development share many things

團隊開發軟體和團隊編寫文稿有許多相似之處，尤其是多人重複修改同一個檔案。如果文字工作者也能有適當的軟體工具和程序來做有系統的管理，再配上雲端時代的資料共享及共同作業，我相信再來翻譯工作的腳步會走得更穩更快。

in common with team translation, especially version control, maintaining shared files and merging people's works. If translators have the appropriate software tools and organized development procedure, to complement the file sharing and collaborative editing of the cloud computing era, I believe our translation work will soon become more efficient and effective.



跨宗教合作

在我們的小組當中有位不同信仰的成員。在討論中，他的意見其實特別有價值，因為他了解哪些辭彙更能讓西方讀者理解接受，同樣的理念在西方主流的信仰中是如何表達的。我很感謝他的參與。宣公上人說過，西方宗教傳教能如此成功要歸功於他們所致力於的翻譯，所以翻譯佛典要效法他們的精神。如同中國佛教跟儒家道家思想共通之處能讓中國人更容易理解佛法，在西方的跨宗教交流說不定也能成為弘揚佛典的助力。

原本我對英文寫作是完全沒有自信的，但經過幾年翻譯經驗的累積，我發現自己語言能力終於有一點進步了。我對佛典也有了更進一步的理解。這都要感謝諸位法師和善知識給我的支持。我相信由翻譯工作所培養出的語感與分析思考能力對學習外語的莘莘學子們也會有很大的幫助。

翻譯佛典遇到的許多難題，過去譯經的高僧大德們應該都有遇過：用詞、語言差異、文化差異、一致性等。我體會到他們的智慧與能力是多麼令人敬佩。譯經，在中國古代經過了幾百年的努力和進步，中文佛典裏的許多用詞早已完全融入中華文化之中。即使是非佛教徒，在日常生活中多少也會用到佛教的用語，可見譯師們的遣詞用字深植人心，被社會接納，通過了時間的考驗。比起中譯，英譯佛典還只是剛起步而已。希望法界佛教總會的各譯經團隊能有更多種不同背景的人才加入，譯經事業能邁向新的裏程。



Interfaith Collaboration

In our translation team, there was one member who is of a faith other than Buddhism. I found his opinions especially valuable, because he knew well which phrases Westerners would appreciate better and how the comparable ideas in the Western religions would be expressed. I am very grateful of his contribution. The Venerable Master credited the success of Western missionaries to their translation work. He encouraged Buddhists to follow their example when doing Sutra translation. Akin to how Confucianism and Taoism had prepared the Chinese to embrace Buddhism, interfaith collaboration may be a new driving force in spreading the Buddha's word in the West.

I was never confident in composition in English at first, but after years of translation experience, I realized that my language proficiency has improved. I have also gained a better understanding of Sutra texts. These are possible because of the support from the Dharma Masters and my good advisors. I believe that students studying foreign languages would greatly benefit from translation work, which develops their feel for the language and analytical skills.

The great Sutra translators of the past likely faced the same questions that we are facing now: choice of diction, discrepancy in language and culture, and consistency, etc. I have come to admire their wisdom and abilities more than ever before. Sutra translation in ancient China underwent centuries of effort and development such that Buddhist terminologies have long been assimilated into Chinese culture. Even non-Buddhists would use them in their daily lives. It is evident that the ancient translators' work was able to resonate with people hearts, win the society's acceptance and pass the test of time. In comparison, Sutra translation in English is merely in its infancy. I hope that more talents of different backgrounds will join the translation teams in Buddhist Text Translation Society, bringing this undertaking to a new milestone.

