

A Retrospective of the History of the Buddhist Text Translation Society from the Early Years till the Present

以能荷佛難勝事·攝受衆生利益故 ——佛經翻譯委員會的歷史

A talk given by Bhikshuni Heng Chih at the San Francisco Main Library on November 3, 2018

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It's now my turn to talk about the Buddhist Text Translation Society. The best place for me to begin is to give a little of the history from the time it started.

It began as the autumn of nineteen sixty-nine was changing into the winter of nineteen seventy. It was the period of time when the first five disciples went to Taiwan to become fully ordained, and then, we returned to the Buddhist Lecture Hall. The Master immediately gave us a task. He told us that we were going to have an eight to five job; our eight to five job was to translate, and we were to start by translating the *Sixth Patriarch Sutra*.

Before that happened, we had come in the summer of nineteen sixty-eight to the Shurangama Session. We watched translators speaking on the spot with the Master. We had watched that and at the beginning, there had been two young Asians who started the translation and then another five who had come from the University of Washington in Seattle, who were bilingual enough that they were also able to translate for the Master. So all of us watched that.

Especially me, I knew no Chinese when I came to the Shurangama Session. I realized right away how valuable it was to have translation. If we didn't have translation, I would not know what was going on. But, because we did, I had an opportunity to try and understand the meanings of the consecutive passages of text that the Master was explaining.

So I need to tell you here, two of those people who translated back in 1968 are still around. Last time when we had our first



關於佛經翻譯委員，我想跟大家講一點早期成立的歷史。

大概是在1969年秋天到1970年冬天，當時最先出家的五個弟子到台灣受具足戒後，回到佛教講堂。上人隨即指派一項任務給我們，他說：「我們將有一份朝八晚五的翻譯工作，首先要翻譯的是《六祖壇經》。」

在此之前，也就是1968年，我們參加了《楞嚴經》暑期研習班。我們觀察當時上人講經的即席翻譯。做上人的翻譯，並不輕鬆。最先有兩位年輕的亞洲人擔任翻譯，後來有

gathering about the Master, you were introduced to Grandmaster Doc-Fai Wong, who is a very well known martial arts master. He was one of the two young Asians, probably about 13 at that time, who translated in the beginning.

The second one who is still with us is Dr. Ron Epstein. He was actually the one who brought many of us to the Shurangama Assembly in 1968.

So going back to the winter of nineteen seventy, five of us were squeaky clean, new monastics. We were all Caucasian, and Chinese was not our first language.

But, the Master wanted to make us into translators, so he encouraged us, and outlined a process for translation that he wanted us to use. We can call it the simultaneous team translation. So he told us that we would work as a group in picking passages of the sutras sequentially, and then we would all sit around and talk about how to put it into English. Finally he said that once we decided how it should be, it was done. We could move onto the next passage.

The Master had very high hopes that this simultaneous team translation format would succeed, but initially it did not. It did not because there were so many things that we could not agree on. We were only five people and lacked patience. We also lacked tolerance and the virtue to work it out.

During one of our arguments about terminology, the elder Master Hsu Yun's portrait crashed to the ground off the wall of the Buddhist Lecture Hall which silenced us all in our quarreling.

That was the end of the first attempt to have simultaneous teamwork translation, and the beginning of the sequential translation process.

In order to have the sequential process, the Master



五位來自西雅圖華盛頓大學的學生加入，他們的雙語能力足以勝任口譯的工作，也是我們觀摩的對象。

參加《楞嚴經》暑期研習班的時候，我對中文一點也不懂。所以我馬上能看到翻譯的價值所在。如果沒有翻譯，這些對我而言根本是鴨子聽雷：因為有翻譯，我才有機會學習上人講解的經文義理。

我想告訴大家，其中兩位在1968年擔任翻譯的人到現在都還在。上次，我們辦首次上人紀念會時，介紹了一位非常有名的武術大師，叫做黃德輝。他是早期擔任翻譯的兩個年輕亞洲人之一，當時大約13歲。

第二位就是易象乾博士。事實上，在1968年，他帶了很多人都來參加楞嚴講習班。

我們再把時間拉回到1970年冬天。當時我們五個都是剛出家的新鮮人，是白人，中文並非我們的母語。

但是上人希望我們做翻譯，他鼓勵我們，並且規劃了一個翻譯工作的流程，可以稱之為「同步團隊翻譯」。我們按照上

created eight rules for translators, because suddenly the ego was very much involved. Of course it had been involved already, as evidenced by the fact that we couldn't get along, but it was even more involved when I became the translator of some sutra. He also set up the committees which many of you are familiar with, the four committees which are sequential to translate and to ready the Sutra for publication.

So, we began to each have our own sutra to translate. The process was that we would listen to a little passage of Chinese (remember that none of us were native speakers of Chinese), and then we would roll back the tape (that had been used to record the Master giving his original commentary on the Sutra), and we would listen again. Sometimes, we had to roll it back and listen to it again and again. Those poor tapes are in terrible shape now because we rolled them back so many times.

From the nineteen seventies through about the late nineteen eighties, that is what we did. We did it on very low tech apparatus, starting with manual typewriters. Most of you may be too young to know what that is, but we used manual typewriters with which you had to use whiteout to correct mistakes and if you wanted a copy, you had to use carbon paper. So then if you made a mistake you had to erase the original and then also had to erase the carbon paper. We later advanced to electric typewriters on which you could use different fonts and they also had correcting tape so that you didn't have to use the bottle. For listening, we started with reel-to-reel tapes and reel-to-reel players. As I said, we went back and forth so much that we regularly wore out the players as well as the tape. It was eventually hard to find reel-to-reel players as time went on because nobody used



人的吩咐組成一個團隊，挑選經文的段落，然後一起討論如何將其英譯。一旦我們達成共識，翻譯就算定稿，我們即可進入下一段的討論。

上人對我們有很高的期許，他認為同步翻譯的團隊工作一定能夠成功，但事實並非如此。主要是因為我們總是各持己見。雖然我們只有五個人，但是我們缺乏耐心、包容心和德行來完成這份工作。

講了這麼多，有一次，我們正在爭執如何翻譯一個佛學專有名詞時，掛在佛教講堂牆上的虛老德像突然掉了下來，我們頓時鴉雀無聲。

首次嘗試同步團隊翻譯就這樣劃下句點，我們開始進行「逐步翻譯」。

為了能夠進行逐步翻譯的工作，上人立了八條規矩，主要是因為我們的我相都太大了，無法和睦共處。特別是當我參予其中一些經文翻譯時，情況更嚴

them anymore. Eventually many, many years later, we advanced to digitizing everything.

In the nineteen eighties, the middle to late nineteen eighties, two big things happened, at least for me as a translator, they were very big things. The first thing was that by then the Master had many Asian disciples. There were many monastics and laypeople who could speak Chinese. So they could very quickly take the audio tape and turn it into a written Chinese manuscript.

The Master worked with those very skilled people and they revamped how the first translation committee of the four committees worked. Then he gave us a mandate.

We were told that we were to translate not by listening to the tapes anymore, but by looking at the transcript. Well...we had learned classical Chinese, because the sutras were written in classical Chinese. But, I had never learned to read the words of modern, spoken Chinese, because I had only listened to them. All of a sudden, the rug was pulled out from under me and I could no longer go and listen to the tapes (as I had been doing for many years up till this point). I had to learn to read modern Chinese characters (in addition to the classical), and that was very difficult.

It was a very steep learning curve. Now, of course, once we mastered it, we were delighted, because now we could read what the Master had said in Chinese as well as the texts themselves in classical Buddhist Chinese. So it had a happy ending, but it was a difficult process.

The other major thing that happened in the mid-eighties was the computer came along. Now Marian Robertson, Guo Mo, who introduced the advent of the computer age to us. She had learned it before any of the rest of us, and she brought it to the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas and opened a class. I went to the class and was appalled by the computer. I started to cry and left the class. Then, I walked all the

重。上人組成了四個委員會，每個委員會逐步進行從翻譯到出版的工作。

我們開始翻譯經典，流程就是我們會先聽一段中文錄音；因為中文不是我們的母語，我們常常需要倒帶反覆聆聽。因為我們不斷倒帶，那些錄音帶的狀況可能都不是保持得很理想。

從70年代到80年代末期，我們就是用這種方式進行翻譯工作。我們沒什麼設備，是從簡單的手動打字機開始。在座的各位可能都太年輕，不知道什麼叫「手動打字機」。這種打字機，如果打錯字，就必須使用白色修正液；如果需要一份複本，就必須使用複寫紙。打錯的時候，複寫紙也必須清理。後來，我們進化到使用電動打字機。因為是電動的，所以可以使用不同的字體，同時打字機也附有修正帶，就無須再使用瓶裝的修正液。我們最初是使用轉盤的錄音帶和錄音機。就像我之前說的，我們反覆地聽，所以磁帶和錄音機本身都耗損得相當嚴重。現在已經沒有人使用這樣的機器了。一直到多年以後，我們才開始此使用數位的方式進行翻譯的工作。

在80年代中後期，發生了兩件大事，至少對我這個翻譯工作者來說是大事。第一件事就是當時上有很多人很多亞洲弟子或是能說中文的出家眾和在家居士。他們很快就把錄音稿謄寫成中文稿。

上人和這些才能出眾的人一起工作，他們修改並確立翻譯委員會的第一個步驟。

我們被告知，翻譯的時候不需聽錄音帶，而是看著謄稿進行翻譯。藉由閱讀中文佛經，我們學會古典中文；但是我從沒學習過白話文，僅僅是聽得懂。突然間，我再也不能聽錄音帶了，而是要學習這些白話文，這對我來說非常困難。

這是一個非常辛苦的學習過程，但是我們現在已經會了。我們很高興，因為我們可以閱讀上人的中文淺釋，也可以閱讀佛經。雖然過程很艱辛，但是結局很美好。

電腦是80年代中期發生的另一件大事。果摩精通電腦，她象徵計算機時代的來臨。她老早就意識到在這一點，不但自己學了電腦，還到萬佛城開課教授。我去上了課，電腦卻讓我感到非常不安。於是我哭著離開教室，一路走到

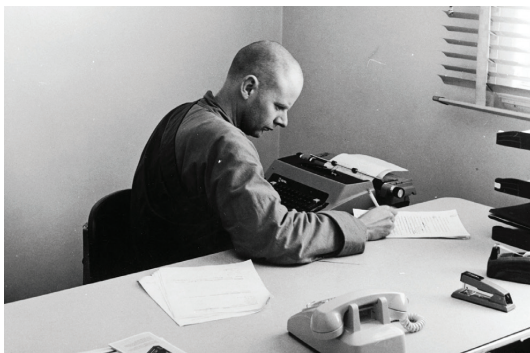


way back up to the Master's house. (We call it "K".) I walked up there, and he wasn't in; so I stood there crying and waiting for him to return. I don't know how long it took, but pretty soon he returned and he said, "Guo Xiu, what's wrong?" I said, "I don't want to use computers." He said, "That's ok, you don't have to."

But as BTTS progressed, if you wanted to keep up, you had to use the computer. Of course, computers have many wonderful assets. There was no more whiteout, no more carbon paper. So I had to learn the computer. Those were the two things that happened in the eighties. Now, it has been 48 years since BTTS began.

I am happy to report that the simultaneous team translation process is now thriving. That was the one the Master first introduced. If you think about it, it seems to me that the Master's disciples are getting better and better. Because (in the early years) we didn't have the patience, tolerance or virtue to do it then. Now the teams are doing it now and they never argue. Those of us who lack those qualities still have the opportunity to do individual translation if we wish and then it will go sequentially through the other committees. So both processes are working, and they are alive and well.

Today, we celebrate the Master's hundredth anniversary and we can say that his initial hope of translating Buddhist texts into the languages of the world is gradually being fulfilled by monastic and lay disciples who volunteer their skills and services in many different aspects in the Buddhist Text Translation Society. 卐



上人的寮房——K House，可是上人不在，我就站在那裡哭著等上人回來。不知道等了多久，上人很快就回來了，他說：「果修，怎麼了？」我說：「我不想用電腦。」他說：「沒關係，妳可以不用電腦。」

隨著佛經翻譯委員會日益進步，如果你想跟上隊伍，就必須使用電腦。當然，電腦有很多方便的地方，不需要修正液，也不需要複寫紙。我不得不順應時勢跟著學習電腦。那是80年代的兩件事，如今距離成立佛經翻譯委員會也有48年了。

我很高興跟大家報告，同步團隊翻譯正在蓬勃發展，這是上人當年講解的方法。想一想，師父的徒弟越來越優秀。當年我們沒有耐心、包容心和德行去做同步團隊翻譯，這些弟子們現在接手了，而且他們從不起爭執。不適合這種方式的其他人，仍然可以通過先個別翻譯，再由翻譯委員會檢視的方式幫忙。這兩種方式都各自發揮作用，並且運作良好。

今天我們慶祝上人百歲誕辰，可以說，上人希望將佛經翻譯成世界各國語言的理想，由一群發心的出家眾和在家居士籍著佛經翻譯委員會的不同面向，將上人的心願逐步實現。卐