

Theorizing Buddhist Scripture Translation as an Act of Giving: a Buddhist Perspective

Sai Cheong Siu
Chinese University of Hong Kong

ABSTRACT

Buddhist scripture translation, the first of the three large-scale translation activities in China, enhanced the propagation of Buddhist doctrine in East Asia and the development of Chinese literature in the first millennium. It was different from other forms of translation activities due to its religious nature. Sometimes it was even considered by Buddhists to be an act of charity, rather than a mere act of translation. It was also closely related to a wide range of Buddhist activities, such as chanting scriptures and holding lectures on the Dharma.

To study scripture translation in the social and historical context, my paper explores the potential offered by the “theory of giving (*dāna*)” in Buddhism. This paper first introduces the basic concepts of the theory, such as “donors”, “recipients”, and “gifts”. It then re-describes scripture translation using these terms. By defining sutra translation as an act of “giving”, it casts translators’ sponsors and teachers as “primary donors”, translators as “primary recipients” as well as “secondary donors”, target readers as “secondary recipients”, and both donors’ support and translated texts as “gifts”. The paper finally suggests ways in which the “theory of giving” can contribute to the studies on scripture translation by discussing Kumārajīva’s translation project in Chang’an in the early 5th century CE.

KEYWORDS: Buddhist scripture translation, History of translation, *dāna* (an act of giving) translation team, Kumārajīva

Introduction

Buddhist Scripture Translation (or BST), which took place in the first millennium, is one of the earliest large-scale translation activities in China. It was featured by the large number of translation teams involved, the sheer volume of Buddhist texts rendered, and the great impact on Chinese culture. In its long history, generations of translator monks and lay disciples devoted themselves to translating sutras from Sanskrit and Central Asian languages into Chinese. With their collaborative effort, scripture translation not only facilitated the dissemination of Buddhist thoughts in East Asia, but also enhanced the development of Chinese literature, art and philosophy.

The translation of Buddhist scriptures was also characterized by its diverse religious functions. In addition to translating sutras, it was often considered by Buddhists an act of charity, which meant that one might receive blessing by sponsoring or participating in it. BST was also so closely

connected with other Buddhist activities, such as lecturing on the Dharma (Buddhist teachings) and chanting scriptures, that they were often incorporated into the process of translation. In other words, the translation of sutras is indeed an integration of a spectrum of religious activities.

To examine, in the historical and religious context, sutra translation and its interaction with other Buddhist activities, this paper theorizes it as an act of charity by borrowing the concept of *dāna* from Buddhism. The paper first explains the details of *dāna*. This is followed by a modification to the idea, where BST and its relevant activities are redescribed through *dāna*'s components. Finally, to show how the theorization assists in the studies on sutra translation, it discusses the translation project led by Kumārajīva, a prominent translation team leader in the fifth century CE, from the perspective of *dāna*.

***Dāna* Explained**

According to Monier-Williams's definition (2006: entry of "dāna"), the Sanskrit word "dāna" refers to "the act of giving". But in the context of Buddhism the word means more than that. Both Theravāda Buddhism and Māhayāna Buddhism substantially develop the concept of *dāna* in scriptures such as *Itivuttaka* and *Anguttara Nikāya* in the Pāli Canon and the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* and the *Lotus Sūtra* in the Māhayāna Tripiṭaka. Theravāda Buddhists believe that *dāna* ensures that a person will get a fortunate rebirth which is beneficial to his/her spiritual progress towards the enlightenment (Bhikkhu Bodhi 2006:145). In Māhayāna Buddhism, *dāna* is one of the "six perfections (*pāramitā*)" (*Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*: CBETA, T05, no. 0220; *Mahaprajñāpāramitāsāstra*: CBETA, T25, no. 1509), and practising it is a way to enlightenment.

To further clarify the meaning of *dāna*, we need to consider another fundamental concept, *karma*. Buddhism suggests that "karma" (action) leads to "*phala*" (literally means "fruit"). Putting them together results in two possible "karma-phala" pairs: (1) good karma leads to favourable, or joy-causing, *phala* and (2) bad karma to unfavourable, or sorrow-causing, *phala* (Fo Guang 1988:2293). Take the first pair as an example. If someone did good deeds, there would be good karma, which would then result in favourable *phala*.

Dāna is generally considered to be good karma leading to favorable *phala*. Muller (2007: entry of "dāna") defines *dāna* in the context of Buddhism as follows:

A gift; generosity, donation, charity, almsgiving, i.e. of goods, or the doctrine, with resultant benefits now and also hereafter in the forms of reincarnation, as neglect or refusal will produce the opposite consequences.

From the above definition, *dāna* in Buddhism is more than just giving because the *dāna* may affect one's "benefits" (or favourable *phala*) and reincarnation. The "fortunate rebirth" in Theravāda Buddhism and the "way to enlightenment" in Māhayāna Buddhism are the favourable result of *dāna*.

In Buddhism, an instance of *dāna* comprises four components: *donors*, *gifts* (or *donations*), *recipients*, and *phala* (as shown in Figure 1 below). *Donors* are the ones who practise *dāna* by donating or offering something to their recipients. *Gifts* or *donations* are what donors give to their

recipients. The gifts are not limited to physical objects like money, food and clothes (Fo Guang 1988:1901). Abstract things, such as wisdom, labour, faith in Buddhism, Buddhist teaching and one's intention to become enlightened, are also donations. *Recipients* are the ones who receive gifts from donors. Since recipients may make further donations, they are potential donors of other instances of *dāna*. *Phala*, as discussed above, is the result of *dāna* and, more specifically, refers to what recipients do for donors in return. *Phala* can be further classified into two types: *merit* and *virtue*. *Merit* is blessing that one gains after practising *dāna* (*Liuzu Dashi Fabaotanjing*: CBETA, T48, no. 2008:351-2). Merit can be wealth, intelligence and good fortune. Other instances of merit include the alleviation of one's pain and even the abatement of disasters. *Virtue* is power leading to enlightenment. With the help of *dāna*, a donor may realize that nothing can be craved; he or she may then understand the Dharma and become enlightened. Such impetus towards enlightenment is virtue. It should also be pointed out that *phala* in Māhayāna Buddhism is featured by its transferability. Mahayanists believe that both merit and virtue are transferable (Fo Guang 1988:3784), and a donor may transfer the *phala* gained to others.

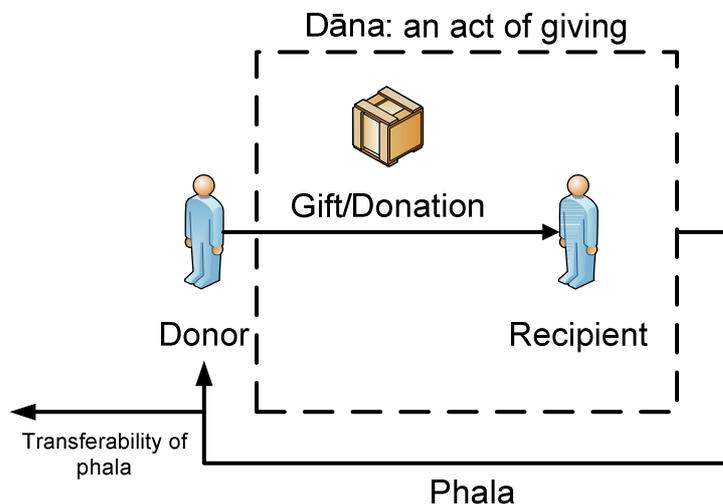


Figure 1: Components of *dāna*

Basically, *dāna*, depending on what the gift involved is, can be classified into two categories: *Dāna of Money* and *Dāna of Dharma* (*Mahaprajñāpāramitāsāstra*: CBETA, T25, no. 1509). *Dāna of Money* includes the donation of money, clothes, and food. *Dāna of Dharma* suggests that a donor “donates” Buddhist doctrine to other people by making efforts to protect and assist Buddhism (Muller 2007: entry of “offerings of the dharma”) or by explaining Buddhist teaching to them.

Ideally speaking, donors should attain the “Emptiness of the Three Wheels” in order to be true practitioners of *dāna*. The “Three Wheels” represent three of the *dāna* components: donors, gifts and recipients. Achieving such “Emptiness” suggests that donors should understand that *all* donors, gifts and recipients are “empty”, with no intrinsic nature. This means the following: *firstly*, donors should not think that they, as donors, are superior to their recipients. *Secondly*, they should try not to attach to the *dāna* they have practised. This is to say that they should avoid putting too much emphasis on what they have donated. *Finally*, they should not care too much

about the merit and virtue they can gain from *dāna*. Meeting these three requirements is the way of giving in Buddhism (*Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*: CBETA, T05, no. 220:737, b15-19).

Greater BST: Theorizing the Translation of Buddhist Scriptures and its Related Activities as Acts of *Dāna*

The concept of *dāna* in Buddhism originally aims at encouraging people to be generous so that they can be enlightened one day. Consequently, it focuses on such practical aspects as why donations should be made, what should be donated, and what attitude should donors take. Moreover, the *dāna* is regarded as good karma that leads to favourable *phala*; therefore, it tends to cover only donations with good intention.

But this is an ideal way to make donations. To cover as many instances of giving as possible, we need to adapt the notion of *dāna*. In this regard, the following broader definition is adopted here: *Dāna, irrespective of donors' attitude towards it (i.e. whether it is good karma or not), is an act in which "donors" give "gifts" to "recipients", with the formation of "phala" including (1) feedback and reward from the "recipients" and (2) "merit" and "virtue" gained by or transferred from the "donors".*

According to this definition, the translation of Buddhist scriptures may be re-described as *dāna*. I refer to my earlier discussion of the concept of *Dāna* of Dharma, which is about the donation of Buddhist doctrine. Sutra translation, which involves the propagation of the Dharma by introducing Buddhist scriptures into the target culture, is also an instance of *Dāna* of Dharma.

The modified *dāna* not only covers BST, but also takes relevant Buddhist activities into consideration. These activities, which are related to the donation of money and the dissemination of doctrine, are also *dāna* actions. Some of them cause scripture translation to take place, and some are induced by it. As a result, we may further categorize them into pre-BST *dāna* and post-BST *dāna* respectively.

It would be beneficial to introduce a three-tiered framework which connects pre-BST and post-BST *dāna* with BST. The three types of *dāna* (pre-BST, BST and post-BST) are here renamed primary *dāna*, secondary *dāna*, and tertiary *dāna*. These acts of *dāna* are collaboratively called "greater BST", which may be visualized in the following chain:

Greater BST = Primary dāna (pre-BST) → Secondary dāna (BST) → Tertiary dāna (post-BST)

The three levels of *dāna*, which cover a number of Buddhist activities, are examined as follows:

1. Primary *dāna*

Primary *dāna* refers to *dāna* actions leading to BST. Like any other acts of *dāna*, primary *dāna* consists of the four components; the donors, gifts, recipients and *phala* involved are defined as *primary donors*, *primary gifts*, *primary recipients* and *primary phala* respectively. Translators who receive donations from their donors are included in the group of primary recipients.

Primary *dāna* can occur in various forms. The first form is the support of translator monks, which is an instance of *Dāna of Money*. The primary donors here offer financial support (primary gifts) to the monks so that the monks can translate sutras. In ancient China, the primary donors were mainly royal family members, government officials, and intellectuals. Their support usually included money, food, accommodation, clothing, and medicine. Another form of primary *dāna* is working for translators or translation teams. The primary donors make donations by providing voluntary assistance to translators. Here, the primary gifts can be physical strength or expertise in Buddhism, literature and translation. Compiling Buddhist Scriptures in source languages, as a case of *Dāna of Dharma*, is also primary *dāna*. Authors of Buddhist scriptures like the Buddha, his disciples, and Buddhist scholars are the primary donors. Historically, they “donated” source texts (hereinafter ST), which are regarded as primary gifts here, to translators. The final example of primary *dāna* is preaching the Dharma to translators, which is also *Dāna of Dharma*. The primary donors may include translators’ teachers, who are mostly Dharma Masters. The Dharma explained by them, which is the primary gift, enables translators to understand STs and to interpret the ideas involved. Thus, translation training in scripture translation can be viewed as primary *dāna*.

2. Secondary *dāna*

Secondary *dāna*, which is induced by primary *dāna*, refers to *dāna* actions involved in scripture translation itself. The four *dāna* components here are: *secondary donors*, *secondary gifts*, *secondary recipients*, and *secondary phala*.

If there is only *one* translator in a translation project, the translator is the secondary donor, who disseminates Buddhist doctrine by producing target texts (hereinafter TT), or secondary gifts. In this regard, TT users, including TT readers, chanters and copyists, are secondary recipients. (The TT users are to be further discussed in the next section.) The secondary *phala* is the feedback from TT users and the merit and virtue gained by the translator.

Secondary *dāna*, however, more often refers to *multiple* acts of giving, instead of a single instance of *dāna*. In the history of BST, Buddhist scriptures were usually translated by translation teams, rather than by individual translators. With the involvement of a large number of translators, a translation project was divided into different parts. The team members cooperated with each other, and they produced and revised TT drafts to obtain a final TT. Under such circumstances, secondary *dāna* should be a chain of *dāna* actions among these members. To illustrate this, let us imagine a team of translators. The first translator, who produces a draft TT, is the first donor. Afterwards, the first recipient, who is the second translator, revises the TT. The new translator later passes the new TT to another team member and becomes a donor. This process is repeated until a final TT is produced by the *last* translator. Each of these *dāna* actions is *Dāna of Dharma* and contributes to the production of the final TT. In this case, the translation team as a whole is a secondary donor, comprising intermediate secondary donors (translators producing new TTs), intermediate secondary recipients (translators working on the previous drafts of TTs), and intermediate secondary gifts (draft TTs). TT users are the end recipients of secondary *dāna*.

In brief, scripture translators are not only primary recipients of the previous *dāna* actions, but also secondary donors here. Meanwhile, secondary *dāna* *externally* link translators and readers and *internally* connect translators themselves.

3. Tertiary dāna

Tertiary dāna is dāna actions induced by scripture translation. Its four components are *tertiary donors*, *tertiary gifts*, *tertiary recipients*, and *tertiary phala*. Similar to primary dāna, there are instances of tertiary dāna. The first example is chanting and reciting scriptures in public. Monks or lay disciples who chant or recite translated scriptures are the tertiary donors. Their tertiary gift can be an audio version of TT, and the audience are the tertiary recipients. Explaining translations to others, which is Dāna of Dharma, is also tertiary dāna. The tertiary donors are TT readers who explain the meaning of scriptures to others by giving lectures or by writing commentaries. Their explanations to the TTs are tertiary gifts. The tertiary recipients include the audience of the lectures and the readers of the commentaries. Copying scriptures is another example of tertiary dāna. Before the invention of printing, copying TTs was crucial to the circulation of translated Buddhist scriptures. Nowadays, there are still some calligraphers who copy sutras. In this case, the tertiary donors are the ones copying the TTs, and the new copies of TTs are tertiary gifts. Another form of tertiary dāna is “worshipping” scriptures. “Worshipping”, which helps one develop his or her faith in the Dharma, requires the “worshippers”, the tertiary donors, to place the TTs at a place adorned with jewels, fruits, and flowers. After that, the donors put the palms together in front of the TTs respectfully. The gifts here are the adornments and the respect shown by the donors.

4. Summary of the three-tiered structure of “Greater BST”

Figure 2 summarizes the above discussion on “Greater BST”, a three-tiered structure of dāna.

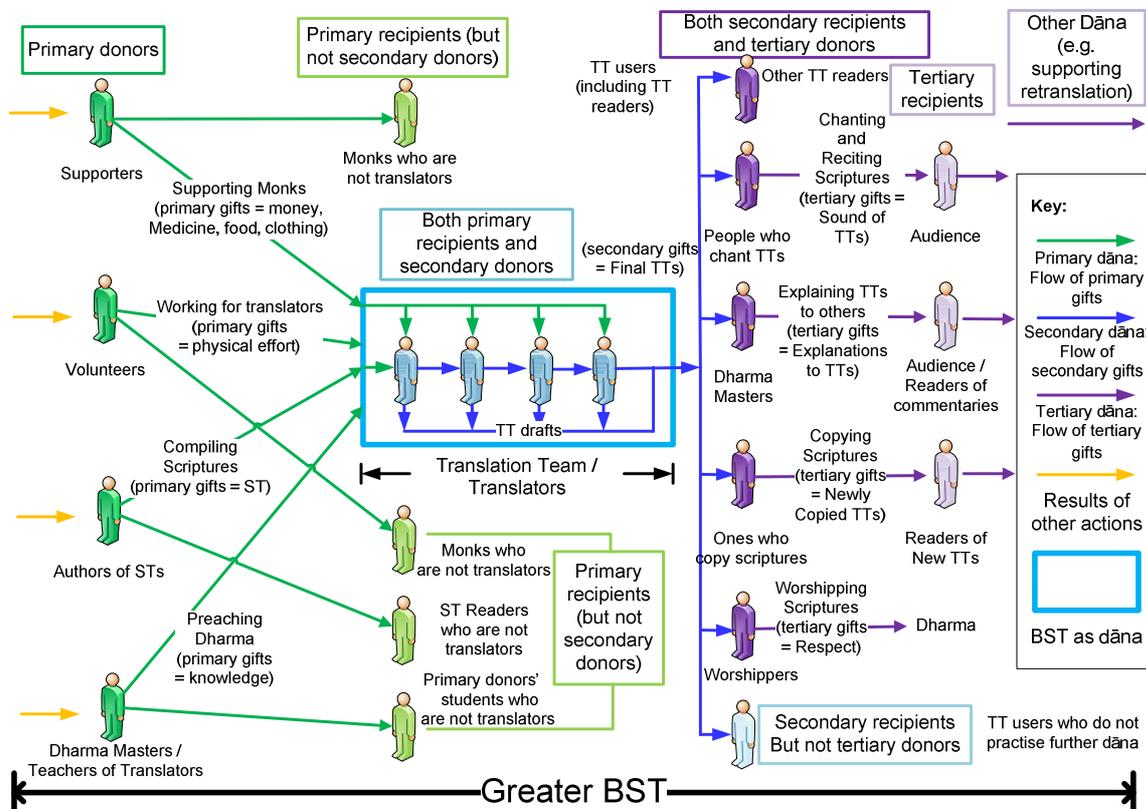


Figure 2: Greater BST as three tiers of dāna

The arrows in Figure 2 indicate the flow of gifts from donors to recipients, with the details of the gifts annotated. Possible types of donors and recipients are also tagged in the text boxes with coloured borders. For example, the light green boxes show that there is a special type of primary recipients who are not secondary donors and do not translate. The blue rectangle in the middle signifies only the translation of scriptures itself, while the entire diagram is the scope of “Greater BST”, which includes both BST and BST-related dāna actions.

Application of the Dāna Framework to BST Studies: Kumārajīva’s Translation Team as an Example

In the three-tiered framework of dāna, there are altogether 12 elements, which may also be represented in the form of the following grid:

Table 1: Different components of the three-tiered dāna framework

	Donors	Gifts	Recipients	Phala
Primary Dāna	1. Primary Donors	2. Primary Gifts	3. Primary Recipients	4. Primary Phala
Secondary Dāna	5. Secondary Donors	6. Secondary Gifts	7. Secondary Recipients	8. Secondary Phala
Tertiary Dāna	9. Tertiary Donors	10. Tertiary Gifts	11. Tertiary Recipients	12. Tertiary Phala

The above 12 components resulting from the new dāna framework and “Greater BST” offer us a fresh approach to the studies of scripture translation. Firstly, the modification of the dāna concept not only helps us understand more about translators, translations, and readers, but also enables us to explore the roles of relevant parties, such as voluntary assistants, teachers of translator monks, Dharma masters, sponsors, scripture copyists, calligraphers, painters, and sculptors. Their roles may be expressed in combinations of the 12 components. Similarly, we can study different issues of translation by taking the combinations into account. Secondly, the dāna framework may close the gap between Translation Studies and Buddhist Studies by connecting BST activities with a wide range of Buddhist concepts through the components. For example, we may explain translation phenomena and translation decisions by considering the components related to them and examining how these components are influenced by (1) factors in dāna itself, such as the transferability of phala and the “Emptiness of the Three Wheels”, and (2) other dāna-related Buddhist ideas like “dependent origination” (the Buddhist law of causality) and “skilful means” (a way of propagating the Dharma). The following discussion on Kumārajīva’s translation team demonstrates how dāna contributes towards the studies of scripture translation.

Of all the Buddhist monks leading scripture translation projects, Kumārajīva (343-413) was a towering figure. He was a prominent Indian Mahayanist who was born in Kucha (today’s Xinjiang). The monk was famous for his profound understanding of both the Theravāda teaching and the Mahāyāna doctrine, even at a young age. He stayed in Chang’an from 401 to 413 at the request of Yao Xing (366-416), the emperor of the Later Qin as well as an devout Buddhist. With the support of Yao Xing, Kumārajīva established a large-scale translation team. The major participants included Kumārajīva and his disciples, and Yao Xing and other royal family members sometimes worked as their assistants. The team translated 300 fascicles of scriptures into Chinese. Most of them, such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Amitabha Sūtra*, and the *Diamond Sūtra*, are still popular today.

To discuss their translation activities with the help of *dāna*, we need to determine the 12 components. To begin with, it is necessary to first consider the secondary *dāna* (BST proper) and the secondary donors (translators). Obviously, members of the team were the donors, including the core members (Kumārajīva himself and his disciples (*Gaoseng Zhuan*: CBETA, T50, no. 2059:363-7)) and the assistants (Yao Xing and other royal family members (*Chusanzan Jiji*: CBETA, T55 no. 2145:53; *Longxing Biannian Tonglun*: CBETA, X75, no. 1512:172)). After identifying the secondary donors, we can then consider the remaining 11 components relative to the secondary *dāna*. Some possible *dāna* components in the case of Kumārajīva are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Different *dāna* elements with respect to Kumārajīva’s team

	Major Donors	Major Gifts	Major Recipients	Major Phala
Primary Dāna				
1. Supporting translator monks	Yao Xing (<i>Gaoseng Zhuan</i> : CBETA, T50, no. 2059:332, 363-4)	Financial support	Kumārajīva and his disciples	Primary Phala: Merit/Virtue/ Feedback from recipients
2. Working for translators and translation teams	Yao Xing and royal family members (<i>Chusanzan Jiji</i> : CBETA, T55, no. 2145:53; <i>Longxing Biannian Tonglun</i> : CBETA, X75, no. 1512:172)	Voluntary assistance	Kumārajīva and his disciples	Same as above
3. Compiling Buddhist Scriptures in SLs	The Buddha, his disciples, and Buddhist scholars	1. Buddhist thought 2. Buddhist scriptures in SLs	Readers of the scriptures (including Kumārajīva)	Same as above
4. Preaching the Dharma to translators	Teachers of Kumārajīva and of his disciples	Buddhist thought	Kumārajīva and his disciples	Same as above
Secondary Dāna				
1. Scripture Translation Proper	Core members of the team: Kumārajīva and his disciples Assistants: Yao Xing and royal family members	Translated scriptures	Readers of the translated scriptures	Secondary Phala: Merit/Virtue/ Feedback from recipients
Tertiary Dāna				
1. Chanting or Reciting Scriptures	Some of the readers of the translated scriptures	An audio version of TT	The audience	Tertiary Phala: Merit/Virtue/ Feedback from recipients
2. Explaining Translated Scriptures to Others	Kumārajīva and his disciples (<i>Gaoseng Zhuan</i> : CBETA, T50, no. 2059:363-4; <i>Chusanzan Jiji</i> : CBETA, T55, No. 2145:101)	Explanations of their translations	Yao Xing and other royal family members	Same as above

3. Copying Translated Scriptures	Yao Xing (<i>Fahua Zhuanji</i> : CBETA, T51, no. 2068:80)	Copies of the newly translated scriptures	Readers of the new copies of the scriptures	Same as above
4. "Worshipping" Translated scriptures	Yao Xing and other royal family members (<i>Fahua Zhuanji</i> : CBETA, T51, no. 2068:94-5)	1. Jewels used for the decoration of the scriptures 2. Respect towards the Dharma	The Dharma	Same as above

The identification of the twelve basic *dāna* components – there are indeed 36 in total in Table 2 because of multiple primary and tertiary *dāna* actions – enables us to study more about scripture translation. There are three issues that are worth discussing: (1) the selection of scriptures, (2) the translation strategies adopted, and (3) the imperial support received by the team.

1. Selection of scriptures

Kumārajīva’s team translated a wide range of scriptures, including a significant portion of Theravāda texts, although Kumārajīva favoured Mahāyāna Buddhism. But this practice, as shown in Figure 3, was not very common among early translation teams. The teams often focused on either Theravāda scriptures or Māhāyāna texts, mostly depending on the preference of the team leaders.

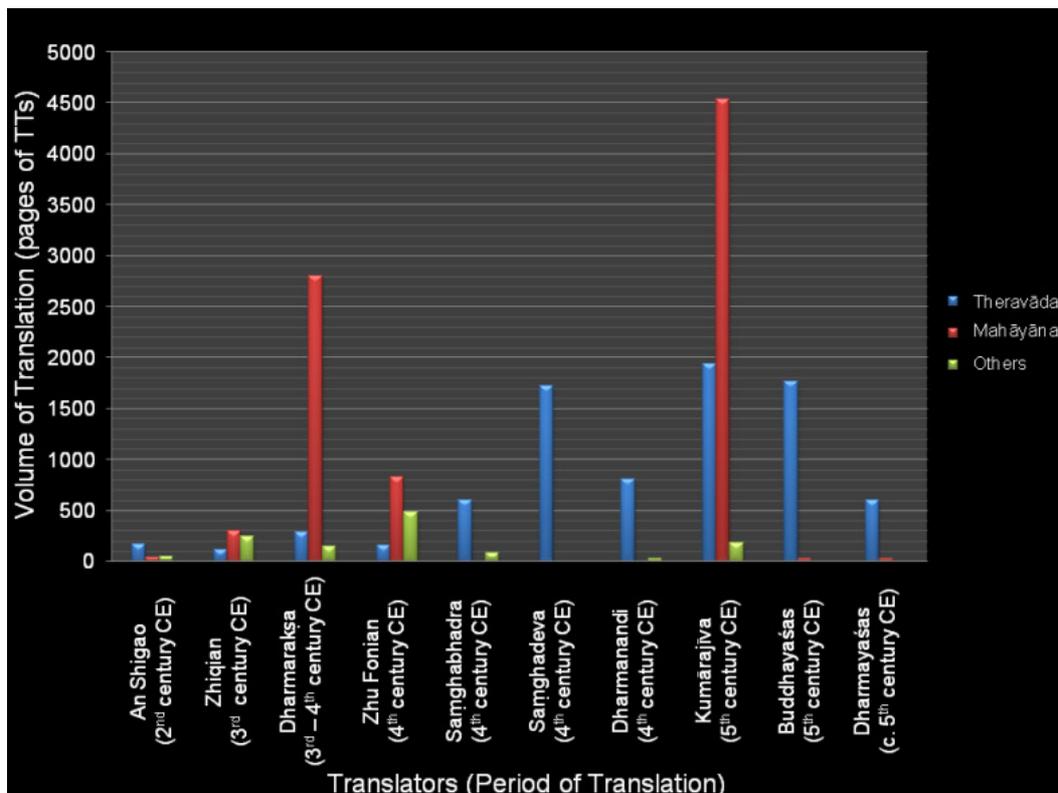


Figure 3: The volume of Buddhist scriptures translated by Kumārajīva’s team and other early translation teams (Siu 2008:100)

The team's diversity of translations leads to the following question about the selection of original texts: why did the team translate scriptures of different schools, even though Kumārajīva, the leader, was a Mahayanist? This can be explained by examining the primary donors. According to Table 2, there are four major primary donors: (1) the Buddha, (2) Teachers of Kumārajīva and his disciples, (3) Yao Xing, and (4) the royal family members.

Here we focus on the Buddha, or more specifically, his primary gift of "skilful means". "Skilful means" (*upāya*) is an important concept developed by the Buddha, and it may be defined as follows:

A method, means; skill-in-means; *expedient means* (Skt. *upāya*, *upāya-kauśalya*; Tib. *thabs*). A method that is convenient to the place, or situation, — opportune, appropriate. A stratagem, device. Teaching according to the capacity of the hearer, by any suitable method, including that of device or stratagem where there is benefit to the recipient. (Muller 2007: entry of "fangbian" (skilful means))

To put it differently, although certain Buddhist ideas are seemingly not in line with, and sometimes even contradictory to, the ultimate idea of enlightenment, these ideas are simply skilful means which help various types of persons understand the Dharma more easily. The co-existence of the Theravāda school and the Māhāyāna school can also be regarded as a result of such skilful means. The schools exist for different types of followers and aim at the same goal – enlightening people. Their texts, which are also skilful means, suit the needs of monks and lay disciples from different backgrounds.

We now return to Kumārajīva's team: Kumārajīva supported the notion of "skilful means" (Siu 2008:125-6). Under the influence of this primary gift, translating texts of various schools was acceptable to the team since the translations still served the ultimate purposes of dissimilating the Dharma and leading their readers to enlightenment. The idea of skilful means here helps justify why Kumārajīva and his disciples translated Theravāda scriptures.

2. Translation strategies

Another feature of the team is the "free translation" approach adopted. Generally speaking, in the history of scripture translation, translation strategies taken by translator monks changed from literal translation to free translation, and Kumārajīva, according to Hung and Pollard, was a pioneer of adopting the free translation approach:

The translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit into Chinese can be divided roughly into three phases: Eastern Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms Period (c. 148–265); Jin Dynasty and the Northern and Southern Dynasties (c.265–589); and Sui Dynasty, Tang Dynasty and Northern Song Dynasty (c.589–1100) [...] Generally speaking, translations produced in the first phase were word-for-word renderings adhering closely to source-language syntax. The second phase saw an obvious swing towards what many contemporary Chinese scholars call *yi yi* (free translation, for lack of a better term). Syntactic inversions were smoothed out according to target language usage, and the drafts were polished to give them a high literary quality. Kumārajīva [sic] was credited as a pioneer of this approach. (Hung and Pollard 2001:366-8)

This leads to the following question: Why did Kumārajīva's team abandon the old word-for-word approach to translation? In other words, why did the team members "swing towards" free translation?

Again, we focus on the influence of the Buddha, a primary donor, on the translation team. The Buddha's views on language, which are also primary gifts, had an impact on the team. They are marked by two points. The first point is that the Buddha stressed the comprehensibility of the discourse. To make sure that the audience understood the Dharma, the Buddha delivered speeches in Indian dialects and banned his disciples from using languages which were only spoken by nobles (Ji 2007:46-7). The second point is that language can also be regarded as a skilful means. Muller discusses this issue as follows:

The notion of skilful means is something distinctive to Buddhism as compared with other religions, and is related to the fundamental view expressed in the earliest Buddhist teachings that the actual content of the Buddha's enlightenment is not expressible in language. In this sense of the term, any sort of teaching that occurs through language can be seen as a skilful method. (Muller 2007: entry of "fangbian" (skilful means))

This means that language is simply a carrier of the doctrines, and language itself never fully represents the doctrine. For instance, one may consider a piece of text to be guidance to the truth, but the text itself is *not* the truth. Thus, to become enlightened, one should never attach too much to scriptures, which are only message carriers.

The above ideas influenced Kumārajīva and his disciples. They believed that conveying the essence of Buddhist thought in TT was more important than adhering to the form of ST (Siu 2008:129). It was, therefore, not suitable to translate scriptures word for word. Instead of adhering closely to source-language syntax, they adjusted the syntax for Chinese readers (*Chusanzan Jiji*: CBETA, T55, no. 2145:57). Indeed, "word-for-word" translation reduced the effectiveness of TT in propagating the Dharma and violated the purpose of translating sutras. To maintain the comprehensibility of the target text and to express Buddhist teaching in the target language, swinging towards "free translation" was necessary for the team. This again reveals the effect of primary gifts on the team.

3. Imperial support received by the team

Kumārajīva's team was the first scripture translation team in China that was directly supported by the emperor, so the imperial support received by the team is also worth studying. The focus here is Emperor Yao Xing, who supported the team in the following ways:

- i. Offering accommodation
 - ii. Providing necessities
 - iii. Conferring national titles on Kumārajīva and his disciples
 - iv. Participating in the team
 - v. Helping to organize the team
- (*Gaoseng Zhuan*: CBETA, T50, no. 2059)

Interestingly, despite Yao Xing's imperial status and generous support, he, according to the biographies of Kumārajīva in *Gaoseng Zhuan* (CBETA, T50, no. 2059:330 -3) and the prefaces of the scriptures in *Chusanzan Jiji* (CBETA, T55, no. 2145:52-78), did not attempt to take much control of the team. He allowed Kumārajīva to freely make translation decisions, including how and what to translate. He even followed Kumārajīva's instructions when compiling and editing the newly translated texts.

The extent of Yao Xing's manipulation may be analyzed by exploring his role in the team from the perspective of *dāna*. As shown in Table 2, the emperor participated in a number of *dāna* actions and established multiple identities. In addition to being a primary donor, he was also a secondary donor, a secondary recipient, a tertiary donor, and a tertiary recipient. He was involved in all the three levels of *dāna*, including both *Dāna of Money* and *Dāna of Dharma*.

Yao Xing's multiple identities made him care less about his power over the team. To begin with, his minimal control and great support were indeed part of his donations. As a donor, he had to provide the team with freedom and assistance, and following the team's decision and contributing himself to the production of the final TT were his gift. Moreover, the minimal control enabled him to get more *phala*. He was concerned about the *phala* that he was able to gain after *dāna*. From the dialogues between Kumārajīva and Yao Xing recorded in *Fahua Zhuanji* (CBETA, T51, no. 2068:80, 94-5), Yao Xing wanted his *phala* to be transferred to his parents by participating in such Buddhist activities as copying and worshipping translated scriptures. Under such circumstances, the correctness of the translations was of great significance to him since correct and readable translations facilitated the propagation of the Dharma, which made his *Dāna of Dharma* valid and secured his *phala*. He, therefore, needed to rely on the expertise of Kumārajīva and that of his disciples to create good translations. This finally led to his minimal intervention.

The "Emptiness of the Three Wheels" might have had an impact on Yao Xing as well. According to the "Emptiness" principle, donors should practise *dāna* without attaching to their identity. Since Yao Xing was an devout Buddhist who cared about his *phala*, it was also possible that he would like to have his merit and virtue maximized by minimizing his control over the team.

4. Other possible issues

The above issues can also be discussed by considering the interaction among the twelve components. For example, the selection of scripture may be studied from the perspectives of "primary recipients" and "tertiary donors", and the strategies adopted can be examined by referring to both "secondary gifts" and "tertiary *phala*". In addition to these issues, other translation phenomena, such as the workflow of the team, the training of the translators, and the motivation for translating scriptures, may also be investigated by exploring all the 12 components and their combinations.

Conclusion

The concept of *dāna* may assist in studying sutra translation, one of the most significant translation activities in China, in its religious and historical context. This paper theorizes sutra translation and the relevant activities as acts of *dāna* and proposes a three-tiered *dāna* framework comprising levels of donors, gifts, recipients, and *phala*. Taking the Buddhist background into consideration, the *dāna* framework offers new ways to study scripture translation. The 12 basic components in Greater BST and their combinations help identify the role of a participant. Yao Xing, for example, was a supporter of the team. With the help of these components, one can now depict his role more precisely from *at least* 12 directions. The modified *dāna* may also play a role in identifying and explaining translation issues. By connecting scripture translation activities with various Buddhist concepts, such as karma, *phala* transfer, skilful means and emptiness, it may

help justify decisions made by translators, by their supporters, and by other related participants. Issues arising from the interaction among the dāna components may also be discussed. It is hoped that the theorization will enhance the understanding of sutra translation in the Buddhist context.

Author's address
Room 127, 1/F., Humanities Building,
New Asia College, CUHK, NT,
Hong Kong
e-mail: siusaicheong@yahoo.com.hk
Tel: (852)98062456

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