

# Dry Dust, Hazy Images, and Missing Pieces

## *Reflections on Translating Religious Texts*

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*This essay is based on a talk given at Indiana University in the spring of 1998. One of my conscious goals was to play with language in order to indirectly illustrate the multivalence of words, to show how specific words or images can suggest and lead to other words and ideas, and to suggest the implications for translation. The talk itself was an experiment in controlled spontaneity, and an attempt to play with words. The following, then, is an attempt to recast this verbal game in written form.*

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO give a general presentation concerning my research, my first reaction was to find some excuse to decline, since the core of my project is the translation of a highly technical sixth-century Chinese Buddhist text (the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* of Chih-i; T. #1911), and I had no confidence that this material could be presented in a way that would be interesting and useful to a broader audience. After some thought, however, it struck me that, as one who has been translating religious texts (or texts about religious thought and practices)—both modern and classical, both primary texts and secondary studies, from Japanese and Chinese into English—for over twenty-five years, I could try to put together some thoughts on what is involved in the translation of these kinds of texts, and to reflect on the challenges and rewards of this enterprise.

Never having studied translation formally, and hence being all but completely ignorant of the literature on the subject, I realize I may end up repeating what is already cliché to those who know about such things. I was asked to prepare for a general audience, but as I look out over the gathering here today I see many people who have worked in this area longer and harder than I (and who have even published on the subject of the importance of translation in religious studies), and the fear that much of what I have to say today will sound mundane or pedestrian is compounded. “Preaching to the Buddha” (*Shaka ni seppō*; lit., “preaching to Śākyamuni”) is what we call it in Japanese when someone is presumptuous in try-

ing to teach something to someone who is already better informed on the matter. In English it is closer to “beating a dead horse” than “preaching to the converted” (though all these phrases carry a different nuance). Perhaps a better translation would be “lecturing Jesus.” In any case, my careless habit of carrying this phrase into English got me in trouble recently when I was part of a panel discussion being held at the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture.<sup>1</sup> The panel was in Japanese, with a mixture of Buddhist and Christian panelists, and was being taped for future transcription and publication. In a feeble attempt to be suitably humble in the Japanese context, I prefaced some of my remarks to a rather well-known Zen Buddhist monk by saying, “I know this sounds like I’m preaching to the Buddha,” saying in Japanese *buddha ni seppō* instead of the proper *Shaka ni seppō*. I do not know how the Zen monk heard and interpreted my remarks, but when the transcription of the panel proceedings came in, my remark had been transcribed as *buta ni seppō*, or “preaching to pigs,” which perhaps the transcriber took as a clumsy paraphrase of “casting pearls before the swine.” On second thought, the Zen monk did glare at me, though at the time I thought he was only reacting to my disagreement with him.

I mention this incident because I think it illustrates very well how slippery and ambiguous translation and crossing between languages is, how the nuances shift so quickly, how the word associations in one language can lead in different directions in another, how diverse are the implications of words and thoughts in different language contexts. I will go into this in more detail later, but I would like to begin with what I have found to be two cardinal rules about translating words and ideas from one language into another: first, that there is no one-to-one correspondence between words of different languages; and second, there is never only one correct translation.

1. *There is no one-to-one correspondence between words of different languages.*<sup>2</sup> None, never. Beyond the limitations of having to work in specific languages,<sup>3</sup> the cultural background and historical development of a word gives it connotations

<sup>1</sup> The panel was part of the 10th Nanzan Symposium, on the theme “What Does Christianity Have to Learn from Buddhism?” held in 1997. Part of the proceedings have been published in English in earlier *Nanzan Bulletins* (21 and 22), and in Japanese as *Kirisuto-kyō wa Bukkyō kara nani o manaberuka* 『キリスト教は仏教から何を学べるか』 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> It could be pointed out that there is never an exact one-to-one correspondence between different words of the *same* language, but this would bring us into the the broader realm of linguistics and meaning rather than the specific question of translation between languages.

<sup>3</sup> J. J. Clarke writes, “As the American logician Quine has reminded us, there lies at the heart of any attempt to translate from one language to another, a radical and inescapable indeterminacy, for we have no standpoint outside of language from which to judge the adequacy of the procedure, and no access to ‘meaning’ other than through specific languages. This question is especially urgent in the translation of Eastern philosophical texts...” J. J. Clarke, *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 38.

beyond the dictionary definitions that can never be exactly replicated in another language. There may be close correspondences between words in sister languages (e.g., between French or Spanish with English), but these ties weaken as the “distance” between the languages increases, as in those of modern English and classical languages such as Latin or Greek. Still, there is some historical link between Latin or Greek (or even Sanskrit) and English. The cultural and historical gap that separates English and languages such as Chinese, Korean, or Japanese is much greater by comparison. There is also the additional complication that these languages use characters with visual impact and meaning, a factor missing in alphabetic or phonetically transcribed languages. The Chinese characters, with their pictorial and/or immediate visual impact, “work” differently from phonetic words. Besides these complications, the task of translating religious texts involves the problem of dealing with the intricacies and nuances of religious discourse. Descriptive or technical passages (travel guides or instructional manuals, for example) are more likely to have a satisfactory corresponding translation than the kinds of “slippery” subjects one finds in religious, philosophical, or literary texts.

A first corollary to the rule is that there is a great danger of misrepresentation if a given word in one language is always translated with the same word in another, a “foolish consistency” that can only be maintained by disregarding the context. Strict adherence to a “consistent” translation can lead to what one of my acquaintances has called “dictionary fundamentalism.”<sup>4</sup> This does not necessarily advocate arbitrariness or blatant inconsistency. A reasoned consistency is a laudable goal, but only with the caveat that the translator should be open to possible exceptions depending on the context.

A second corollary to this rule is that when you are translating a text, you can never be sure how well you really “got it.” You can always be certain that your translation is not perfect, but never so sure to what extent it is imperfect. Like a jigsaw puzzle that can never be finished, and with many pieces missing, you can sometimes get a good grasp of the picture as a whole, but you never have *all* the pieces, and often some of the pieces just don’t seem to fit.

2. *There is never only one correct translation.* A variety of translations are possible for all texts, without having to conclude that one of them must be “correct” and all the others “wrong.” It is even possible that different translations could all be “right” in different ways; some can be more correct or accurate than others. Or again, they could all be “wrong” or inadequate. A few years ago I was confronted by our copy editor at Nanzan, who pointed out that I had translated the same pas-

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<sup>4</sup> Some characteristics of “dictionary fundamentalism” are the commitment always to use the same word to translate the same term regardless of the context, and to reject the use of a word (or neologism) because “it ain’t in the dictionary.”

sage from a Chinese Buddhist text in quite different ways in two different publications, and he wanted to know which one was “right.” At the time I felt a bit embarrassed, but if I had had my wits about me, I might have argued that both were “right,” given their context. One was a technically precise translation used in the context of an academic essay for a Buddhist studies journal; the other, a much freer translation in a chapter for an encyclopedia intended for a general audience. Both, as far as I could tell, were appropriate for their contexts and purposes.

This ambiguity, imprecision, and multivalence of language (which, as I have said, is compounded in religious texts) is probably good cause to despair of computers ever translating religious texts reliably. There are those who believe that eventually computers will be able to take over the task of translation. I have my doubts—but then, many people said a computer could never beat a master at chess. At the same time, as one who spends much time on the mundane tasks required for translation (looking up words that I have looked up many times before, checking references, trying to remember how the word was translated previously), I must admit I look forward to the day when computers can handle some of these technical aspects and perhaps provide a preliminary translation or suggestions that one could use as one would use other reference works. But we are not there yet, at least not in my judgement. At the Nanzan Institute we have tried out a number of translation programs, but none has even the minimum sophistication for our needs. Recently we were playing with a program that translates between modern Chinese and English. A colleague of mine typed in a number of statements to test the accuracy of the program, including “Paul Swanson has a pony tail.” The translation provided in Chinese was a phrase that (retranslated back into English) could mean “Paul Swanson is a small horse’s ass” 有小馬尻. On second thought, perhaps computers have more insight than we give them credit for.

### *The Interweaving of Three Levels*

To approach this matter from a different angle, we might say that in working with languages and translating texts, there are at least three different levels to consider: (1) particular words and terms; (2) more general concepts and ideas, along with their historical development and implications; and (3) the intended audience, both of the original text and of the translation.

Not so long ago I was struck by these three levels in the course of preparing a paper in English that I had originally prepared in Japanese. I discovered that one cannot give the “same” paper in two different languages.<sup>5</sup> When one works in a

<sup>5</sup> Again, you can probably never give the same paper twice even in the same language, just as you can never step into the same stream twice, but this tempts us to the same digression avoided above.

second (or third) language, not only do the words and ideas fail to carry the same nuances as the first language, but one is pulled in different directions by the force of the words and ideas in the different languages, and by the (perhaps imagined) expectations of the intended audience.<sup>6</sup> Let us look at these three levels.

#### PARTICULAR WORDS AND TERMS

As I said before, and as anyone working in translation quickly realizes, there are no “exact” equivalents for translating words from one language into another. Each word has multileveled meanings and implications that can never be carried over in toto to another language. When a word is used, it carries with it layers of historical development, contextual nuances, and half-hidden associations that are often unconsciously present even to the original verbalizer.<sup>7</sup> Even something as concrete as a pen or a fork can have quite different nuances and carry very different implications in different languages. In English “rice” is “rice”; in Japanese, there is a distinction between *komé* (rice grain), *gohan* (cooked rice), and *raisu* (“rice”); what goes into your mouth is the same “thing,” but as you are pouring it into boiling water it is *komé*, if you eat it with chopsticks from a bowl it is *gohan*, and if you eat it from a plate with a fork it is *raisu*.

#### CONCEPTS OR IDEAS

At the level of ideas, as with individual words, one is often led in different directions by what seem to be near-equivalent terms. For example, if one uses the concept of “scripture” or “canon” for what appear to be somewhat equivalent words in Chinese or Japanese, one is immediately suggesting ideas, connotations, and implications that derive from the use and development of these ideas in the English context, some of which have Judeo-Christian implications that would not be applicable in, for example, a Buddhist or Taoist context. On the other hand, using a term such as *tripitaka* or *daizōkyō* would be confusing to readers not familiar with the technical vocabulary of the field, as well as failing to convey the similarities that these terms do share with English terms such as “canon” or “scripture.”<sup>8</sup>

Another recent example of this issue is the well-known debate over how to translate the Japanese Buddhist concept of *shinjin* 信心 (“trusting mind” or

<sup>6</sup> I have attempted to address these points in a previous essay; see my article “What’s Going on Here? Chih-i’s Use (and Abuse) of Scripture,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20/1 (1997): 1–30.

<sup>7</sup> Specific examples of this are given from my attempted translation of Chih-i’s *Mo-ho chih-kuan* in my article “What’s Going on Here?” 25–7.

<sup>8</sup> I have addressed the question of applying such terms as “canon,” “scripture,” and “apocryphal” to the context of Chinese Buddhism in an essay on “Apocryphal Texts in Chinese Buddhism: T’ien-t’ai Chih-i’s Use of Apocryphal Scriptures”; see *Canonization and Decanonization* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 245–55.

“believing mind”).<sup>9</sup> Some argue that there is sufficient overlap with the English word “faith,” with its rich history and multivalence, to justify translating *shinjin* as “faith”; others argue that “faith” in a religious context implies belief in an almighty God (among other things) and that use of the word would pull the hearer in a direction that would be misleading for the Buddhist context. Those in the second camp use the transliteration *shinjin*, in the hope that it will eventually enter English on its own, keeping all its original implications.

Again, in dealing with the term “mind,” Herbert Guenther warns that language “is a treacherous instrument”:

If it is already difficult to know what we mean by these terms ‘mind’ and ‘mental’ in our own language, it will be readily admitted that it is still more difficult to ascertain the meaning of what is translated by ‘mind’ or ‘mental’ from Eastern texts. The question, whether the authors of the original texts actually meant the same as we do by those words about whose meaning we ourselves are not quite clear, should always be present, not only when translating texts but still more when dealing with a systematic presentation of Eastern philosophies.<sup>10</sup>

In the case of explicitly religious texts, terms can pull the author in a certain direction, sometimes in a way that the translator cannot figure out quite what it is that is guiding the flow of the text or the direction of thought. An awareness of this process may help clarify, or at least relieve anxiety over, passages in which it seems there is no consistent line of thought, or where the argument seems to jump over itself. In any case, some things may simply be lost irretrievably in the past, and it is best to keep this possibility in mind.

#### THE INTENDED AUDIENCE

Finally, and not unrelated to the above levels, is the influence the intended audience has on a text. As mentioned above, I found that preparing a presentation in Japanese for a Japanese academic audience of Buddhologists, and preparing the “same” paper in English for a more general but Western academic audience, affected the content and flow of the paper. Before a Japanese audience one can assume a certain level of knowledge of technical terms that one cannot always assume for a Western audience. On the other hand, one can assume a greater interest among a Western audience in things like general hermeneutical issues, or the history of Buddhism beyond the Sino-Japanese developments. This colors not only

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Luis Gómez’s review article on “Shinran’s Faith and the Sacred Name of Amida,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 38/1 (1983): 73–84 (especially pp. 81–4), and Thomas Kasulis’s review of *Letters of Shinran* in *Philosophy East and West* 31/2 (1981): 246–8, and the reply of the translators in the same journal 31/4 (1981): 507–11.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Guenther, *Tibetan Buddhism in Western Perspective* (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1989), 37–8.

the details one chooses to include, but also the direction one's train of thought takes.

With a translation, there is not only the question of the intended audience of the original text, but also the intended audience of the translation. How much knowledge does one assume on the part of the reader? Does one aim for a strict, literal rendering to remain “true” to the text, or does one aim for a rendering that reads smoothly and meaningfully in the “host” language. How much “extra” information needs to be provided to make the English rendering as intelligible as the original was to its intended audience?

I have often come across passages in my translation of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* where the author, Chih-i, refers to analogies or texts with short, cryptic phrases that do not make any sense until one is familiar with the original source behind them. For example, Chih-i's analysis of a certain meditative state (*Mo-ho chih-kuan*, T. 46.12c) makes reference to six analogies from the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra* (T. 13.905a–b). The first such reference reads:

[Contemplating conventionality] is just as when in a dream one sees the seven [kinds of] jewels and one's relatives, and rejoices; after awakening one tries to remember, but does not know where they are. Be mindful of the Buddha in this way. (T 46.12c8–11)

This abbreviated version makes it difficult to understand what the analogy has to do with being mindful of the Buddha, but the *Daśabhūmika-vibhāṣa-śāstra*, which Chih-i no doubt had in mind, tells us that concentrating one's thoughts on the Buddha is like dreaming and thus “seeing” treasures, friends, etc. In translating this passage, then, either a full explanation must be given in a note, or sufficient paraphrasing must be incorporated into the translation to render the passage understandable.

Let us give another example. Chih-i closes the section with the following exhortation:

If people do not cultivate such a method [of meditation], they forfeit immeasurable, valuable treasures, and [this is a cause for] both humans and gods to grieve. [Their loss] is as if a person with a stuffy nose sniffed sandalwood and could not smell it, or is like a rustic man<sup>11</sup> who [ignorantly] offers [only] one ox for a [priceless wish-fulfilling] *maṇi* jewel. (T 46.13a21–23)

Both similes—the person with a stuffy nose and the rustic man—are references to a series of analogies found in the *Pratyutpanna-samādhi-sūtra*, and can only be

<sup>11</sup> I was tempted to translate this phrase with a local Indiana expression, which is defined in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (p. 1089) as “an ignorant rustic,” but resisted in deference to my listeners. This again serves to illustrate my point that much depends on who's your audience.

fully appreciated by referring to the original source. Chih-i seems to have assumed that his audience would immediately recognize and understand his images, much the same as a modern audience could be expected to supply the emotional and imaginative context needed to understand phrases such as “crying wolf,” “finger in the dike,” “barking up the wrong tree,” “a material girl,” or “Butt-head.” But when faced with phrases such as “a rustic man offering an ox” or “seeing seven jewels and one’s relatives in a dream and rejoicing,” a modern reader cannot make much sense of these without some help.

This leads to a further question. When Chih-i summarizes, or picks up certain phrases and omits others, does he pick up only what he thinks is important, or does he assume that his readers or listeners are familiar with the context and will know how to fill in the details on their own? Is he deliberately emphasizing certain points, or does he intend his summary to stand metonymously for the whole? In some cases, such as the passages cited above, it is obvious that he is using a kind of shorthand for a fuller context known to his audience. But this is not always the case. In either case, the modern reader is likely to be at sea without additional information to understand and interpret the text. In such cases, a merely “accurate” literal translation captures at best only the surface meaning, and at worst leaves only a meaningless jumble of words.

### *A Tale of Three Translations*

In order to bring the above remarks together in a specific context, I would like to lay out three different translations of the same text for comparison: a short passage from the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* (T 46.4a18–25) as translated by Thomas Cleary,<sup>12</sup> a more complete and annotated translation by Neal Donner and Daniel Stevenson,<sup>13</sup> and a still more detailed rendition of my own.<sup>14</sup>

The original Chinese text reads as follows:

就發心更爲三。初方言。次簡非。後顯是。菩提者天竺音也此方稱道。  
質多者天竺音此方言心。即慮知之心也。天竺又稱汚栗駄此方稱是草  
木之心也。又稱矣栗駄此方是積聚精要者爲心也。今簡非者簡積聚草  
木等心專在慮知之心也。道亦有通有別。今又簡之略爲十。

<sup>12</sup> See *Stopping & Seeing: A Comprehensive Course in Buddhist Meditation by Chih-i*, translated by Thomas Cleary (Boston & London: Shambala, 1997), 2.

<sup>13</sup> See *The Great Calming and Contemplation: A Study and Annotated Translation of the First Chapter of Chih-i's Mo-ho chih-kuan*, by Neal Donner and Daniel B. Stevenson (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1993), 140.

<sup>14</sup> From a complete translation of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* I am preparing for publication by Kosei Publishing Company of Tokyo.

## 1. CLEARY'S CONCISE RENDERING

The passage is translated succinctly by Cleary:

First I will deal with the question of awakening the great mind. [The term for the mind of enlightenment in Sanskrit is *bodhicitta*:] *Bodhi* (meaning enlightenment) is called the Path in Chinese. *Chitta* means mind, referring to the mind that thinks and knows. The term *path* also has general and particular meanings. They may be analyzed into ten overall categories.

Rather than a translation, this is more a summary or paraphrase of the original. Cleary leaves out more than half of the text, without informing the reader what he has done (the phrases included in Cleary's translation are underlined in the Chinese text).<sup>15</sup> Also, there is no indication that this is the beginning of a new section; his translation that "First I will deal with the question of awakening the great mind" is an extrapolation based on an outline of the contents in the introduction of the *Mo-ho chih-kuan*. He does add an explanation of the word *bodhicitta* in brackets, but he completely ignores the passages on *hṛdaya* (see the other translations below). There are no other explanatory notes and no help for the reader who would like to compare the translation to the original.

Clearly this translation is intended for a reader who has no interest in technical matters or comprehensive coverage. At this level it succeeds, because it is a clear, straightforward, easily-understood rendition that captures the main points of the passage. There is an audience of such readers, admittedly much larger than that of scholars who do have an interest in technical details. For the translator, the advantages of such a strategy are enormous. One can avoid many difficulties and problems in meaning and translation by simply skipping over them. The danger, of course, is that one may end up misrepresenting the original. For this reason, at the very least, the translator should inform the readers that they are presented with a severely truncated version. Cleary does not do this, neither by using ellipses in his text (which is understandable, given the frequency of missing passages), nor by providing an explanation of his intentions.<sup>16</sup> Readers of this translation who think

<sup>15</sup> In fact, although this is only page 2 of Cleary's English translation, readers are not told that they are already deep into the Chinese text. Stevenson's translation takes over forty pages of printed English translation (97–139) to reach this part of the Chinese text.

<sup>16</sup> The "Translator's Introduction" briefly states, "This volume presents a translation of the first quarter of Chih-i's monumental *Mo-ho Chih-kuan*" (xi). This is misleading at best, and borders on false advertising. It should have been easy for the translator to add a few short remarks informing the readers that this is a selective and partial rendition. Cleary's gift for understanding Chinese and his ability to present it in clear and concise English could then be savored without undue expectations.

they are “reading” the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* would be woefully misled. Donner and Stevenson’s rendition offers a very different presentation.

## 2. DONNER AND STEVENSON’S FULL ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

Neal Donner and Daniel Stevenson have provided an eloquent, accurate, and full translation of the same passage (see the framed text at right). A careful comparison with the original Chinese shows that all of the terms and contents are covered. Various issues (such as the shift in focus from *bodhi* to *tao*, and from *citta* to *hsin*) are noted in brief but adequate textual footnotes. The translators introduce sub-headings to help structure the text, as well as page numbers (e.g., [4a18]) to indicate the location of the passage in the standard Taishō text. Through these aids not only can readers refer to the original Chinese, but they can also get a good idea about what is happening in the text. In this particular passage, for instance, they can see how Chih-i is (perhaps unconsciously) “playing” with language: the original nuances of the Sanskrit *bodhi*, *citta*, and *hṛdaya* are either ignored or replaced with the Chinese nuances of *hsin* 心 and *tao* 道. For example, *bodhi* is translated and interpreted as *tao*, whose own “local” connotations draw the discussion into the categories of *tao* as the “destinies” (of rebirth) or “realms of existence” (Skt. *gati*). This shift of context is, of course, not easy to capture in English. Hence the need for explanatory notes.

In short, what we are given is a full, informative, and reliable text. This is not to say that it is the only possible “correct” translation. If it were, there would have been little point to my laboring over another one. Let us compare this rendering with one that I have prepared.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. AN EXPANDED ANNOTATED TRANSLATION

My own translation of this passage (see the framed text below), for better or worse, is more complicated than that of Donner and Stevenson. I have expanded the notes beyond textual issues to include additional commentary and background information. I have also slipped some Chinese characters into the text where I felt it useful. Some readers may find this an unnecessary distraction that breaks the flow of the English. Recent computer processing and publishing technology has made such additions not only feasible but easy, and the temptation to add more Chinese characters than is necessary or useful is often difficult to resist.<sup>18</sup> At the same time,

<sup>17</sup> I have made similar remarks and done a comparison of other passages in the *Mo-ho chih-kuan* in my review of Donner and Stevenson’s book; see my review article “Understanding Chih-i: Through a Glass, Darkly?” in *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 17/2 (1994): 337–60.

<sup>18</sup> To those who prefer a “clean” text, the introduction of Chinese characters into English may be (to rephrase the words of a modern master of ambiguity), “wasted words that prove to warn he not busy being foreign is busy trying.”

## *Arousing the Great Thought [of Enlightenment]*

[4a18] There are three sections to this chapter on Arousing the Great Thought: first, [the meaning of] the term [*bodhicitta*] in different languages; next, excluding the wrong; and last, revealing the right [arousing of the thought of enlightenment].

### *“Bodhicitta” in Sanskrit and Chinese*

[4a19] *Bodhi* is an Indian term for what is in China called “the way” (*tao*).<sup>1</sup> *Citta* is an Indian term for what is in China called “mind” (*hsin*), that is, the mind of cognitive reflection. But our word *hsin* has another sense<sup>2</sup> — the pure essence of an aggregate or the heart of a plant — which is akin in meaning to the Indian *hṛdaya*.<sup>3</sup>

### *Excluding the Wrong*

[4a23] Now, in excluding the wrong interpretations we dismiss the understanding of *hsin* as the essence of an aggregate or heart of a plant and settle solely on the interpretation of *hsin* as the mind of cognitive reflection. [The term] *tao* or “way” also has universal and particular usages, which we will now go on to exclude on the basis of ten [general topics].<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P’u-t’i is a transliteration of the Indian term *bodhi*, while the Chinese translation for the same Indian term is *tao*. The latter is the older Buddho-Taoist translation of *bodhi*, which by Chih-i’s time was generally rendered by the newer and more accurate translation of *chiüeh*, “awakening.”

<sup>2</sup> Although their meanings in Sanskrit and English are entirely different, *citta* or “mind” and *hṛdaya* “heart” are both translated as *hsin* in Chinese.

<sup>3</sup> Chih-i gives us two transliterations of *hṛdaya*, differing only in the first of the three characters that comprise the word.

<sup>4</sup> As careful as he has been to focus on the correct meaning of *citta*, Chih-i in his discussion of the arousing of *bodhicitta* or the *tao-hsin*—the “thought or mind of the way”—chooses to play on the original polyvalence of the Chinese term *tao*. The ten “ways” or “paths” (*tao*) that he discusses in the passages that follow do not refer to *tao* as an ultimate “sacred order or reality” (i.e., *bodhi*) but to *tao* as unfavorable “paths” or “destinies of rebirth,” hence *gati* in Sanskrit rather than *bodhi*. Thus Chih-i excludes the lesser and wrongful “ways” (*tao*) of false paths and wayward quests in order to illumine the right “way” wherein one seeks the *tao* as *bodhi*—the enlightenment of a Buddha. The first six of these ten wrong “ways” are the same as the traditional six destinies of *saṃsāra* that range from the hells to the deva realms.

### 1. *Arousing the Great Thought [of Bodhicitta] 發心 [4a18–11a13]*

There are three [sections] on arousing the thought [of aspiration for enlightenment]:<sup>1</sup> first, on regional vernacular;<sup>2</sup> next on filtering out the negative 簡非;<sup>3</sup> and finally, on manifesting the positive 顯是.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1. *Bodhicitta in Sanskrit and Chinese [4a19]*

*Bodhi* 菩提 (*p'u-t'i*) is an Indian sound. In this region [China] we call it the Tao 道.<sup>5</sup> *Citta* 質多 (*chih-tuo*) is an Indian sound, which in our [Chinese] regional vernacular is called *hsin* 心, that is, the reflective and cognitive

<sup>1</sup> Appropriately enough, Chih-i enters here into the main body of his work with an exposition on *bodhicitta*, the initial “aspiration for enlightenment” that is so important for a Buddhist practitioner. This term, however, is somewhat ambiguous. It generally refers to the initial aspiration for, or first thought or inclination toward, realizing Buddhahood. Literally, however, it means “the thought (or mind) of *bodhi*-wisdom” itself, thus implying that the final resultant wisdom is included therein. Chih-i often seems to use the terms *bodhi* 菩提, “arousing the thought” 發心, and “the mind or thought of *bodhi*-wisdom” 菩提心 interchangeably, perhaps unintentionally reflecting his teaching that the initial aspiration and ultimate realization of *bodhi*-wisdom are indivisible.

<sup>2</sup> That is, comparing the terms for “the aspiration for enlightenment” or “arousing the *bodhi*-mind” in Sanskrit and Chinese.

<sup>3</sup> Or, “eliminating the non-pertinent,” or “excluding the wrong” with regard to arousing *bodhicitta*.

<sup>4</sup> Or, manifesting the pertinent or the right; that is, the positive factors that encourage or enhance the realization of *bodhicitta*. Though I have chosen the broader and more neutral terms “negative” and “positive” instead of “wrong” and “right” or “non-pertinent” and “pertinent” to translate 非 and 是 in this section, sometimes the context calls for these variations.

<sup>5</sup> That is, *p'u-t'i* is the transliteration of the Sanskrit term *bodhi* (wisdom, awakening), and “Tao” is the Chinese translation. However, as Donner points out (172, note 2), translating *bodhi* as “Tao” was a practice carried over from the early days of Buddhism in China when Buddhist concepts were translated with “matching” Taoist terms, a practice (called “matching terms” 格義 *ko-i*) that was often more misleading than useful. After Chih-i’s day it was more common to translate *bodhi*

mind 慮知之心。<sup>6</sup> In India [*hsin*] is also called *hṛdaya* 汚栗駄 (*wu-li-tuo*), which in [Chinese] vernacular is called the “heart” of grasses and trees. It is also called *yi-li-tuo* 矣栗駄,<sup>7</sup> which in [Chinese] vernacular is *hsin* 心 [the “center”], as in the core of the collective aggregates [that make up a human being].

## 2. Filtering Out the Negative with Regard to Bodhicitta [4a23]

Now in filtering out the negative [with regard to *bodhicitta*], we exclude [the sense of] *hsin* as [the central core of] a collective aggregate and as [the heart of] grasses and trees; only *hsin* as the reflective and cognitive mind is pertinent here.

“Tao” [or “Path”] also has general and specific [meanings], which I shall now selectively summarize in ten parts.<sup>8</sup>

with the character 覺 (*chüeh*; awakening). Nevertheless the use of the compound *tao-hsin* (Jpn. *dōshin*) as a translation of *bodhicitta* persisted, and can still be found today. See, for example, the famous opening lines of Saichō’s *Rokujōshiki* 六條式 (Regulations in six articles; submitted to the court in 818), which ask rhetorically,

What is the treasure of the nation? It is our *religious nature* 道心 [*dōshin*: *bodhicitta*]. Thus those who have this religious nature are the treasures of the nation. Long ago a man said, “Ten large pearls do not constitute the nation’s treasure, but he who sheds his light over a corner of the country is the nation’s treasure.”

[Emphasis mine; translation by Paul Groner in  
*Saichō: The Establishment of the Japanese Tendai School*, 1984, 116.]

<sup>6</sup>心 (*hsin*) has many meanings, including both “heart” and “mind,” “thoughts” or mental and/or emotional functions, the center, and so forth. Here Chih-i limits his discussion to the mental functions, that is, mind that thinks rather than the heart that feels.

<sup>7</sup> Another transliteration of *hṛdaya*. Since Chih-i did not know Sanskrit, the nuances of *citta* and *hṛdaya* are not an issue. Chih-i plays instead with the nuances of Chinese terms such as *tao* and *hsin*.

<sup>8</sup> Chih-i’s explanation of *bodhicitta* as Tao leads him to discuss the issue in terms of the ten destinies or realms of existence or mentalities (*gati*) from hell to Buddhahood, which are also referred to as “paths” (*tao*) in Chinese.

Chinese characters do more than provide the reader with extra information. They offer a good compromise when one is confronted with an ambiguity or a variety of possible translations. It is a way of saying to the reader, if you will, “I’ve chosen to put it this way, but here’s the original, and you can judge for yourself.” It is often more economical than adding another note. Further, it serves to justify apparent inconsistencies in rendering a Chinese term with more than one English term.

A quick comparison shows that I often use different words from those of Donner and Stevenson (D-S). There are also some differences in presentation, such as whether or not to put the terms *tao* and *bodhi* in italics. In general my translation seems to be more literal (despite my avowed preference for clear English rendering), while the D-S translation is “cleaner” and reads better. Some specific examples may help:

D-S combines the two transliterations of *hṛdaya* into a single sentence, whereas I treat them separately.

D-S uses the terms “excluding the wrong and revealing the right,” whereas I use the terms “filtering out the negative and manifesting the positive.”

D-S uses the phrase “different languages” (which is an extrapolation), whereas I use the phrase “regional vernacular” (which is more literal, for 方言).

D-S uses the phrase “Indian term” (which is more elegant), whereas I use the phrase “Indian sound” (which is more literal; the Chinese is 音 not 名) to underscore that this refers to a transliteration.

Once again, it is not a question of which translation is “right” and which is “wrong.” In all the examples above, I believe that both are “correct,” in that they accurately convey the meaning of the Chinese text. The translators’ choices are made through a combination of a number of factors: consistency with previous choices in translating these or similar terms, maintaining a balance between literal meaning and clear English rendering, judgments on how much to rely on explanations through footnotes, perceptions of the needs and wants of the audience, and so forth. It is the translator’s art to make these choices elegantly.

### *Closing Remarks on the Rewards of Translating Religious Texts*

I conclude this short essay with a few remarks on the difficulties, joys, and rewards of translating religious texts, and on the importance of the task. I am convinced of its value and the need for more translation to be done. It is, after all, what I spend a great deal of my time on. At the same time, if you have not already guessed, translating is often a dreary and difficult task, overshadowed by the constant realization that perfection is beyond one’s grasp. It means long hours of sifting through the

dry dust of ancient texts, never quite sure even about how much is being understood (or is possible to understand), always aware that one is perceiving only a partial, warped, and hazy reflection in a darkened glass. My sentiments are captured in a poem by C. S. Lewis:<sup>19</sup>

*A Scholar's Melancholy*

The mind too has her fossils to record her past,  
Cold characters, immobile, of what once was new  
And hot with life. Old papers, as we rummage through  
Neglected drawers, still show us where the pen, fast, fast,  
Ate up the sheets: and wondering, we remember vast  
designs and knowledge gathered, and intent to do  
What we were able then to have done ... something drew  
A sponge across that slate. The ferly would not last.

Though Will can stretch his viaduct with level thrust  
High above shagg'd woods, quaking swamp, and desert dust  
Of changing times, yet he must dig for his material  
In local quarries of the varying moment—must  
Use wattle and daub in countries without stone, and trust  
To basest matter the proud arches' form imperial.

And yet there is so much to be done, so many important religious texts that remain to be translated, so many puzzling words and phrases and ideas that need clarification, so many treasures waiting to be “exhumed.” Translating religious texts is, after all, much like an archaeological dig: many hours of sifting through the dust with often meagre results to show for one's efforts. The results are often uncertain and ambiguous, the work often frustrating and onerous. Nevertheless, the goal—to create successful and meaningful translations—is not hopeless or futile. Translations are possible wherein we can be confident that the original is accurately conveyed (if not fully, at least satisfactorily). The process offers special moments filled with the joy of discovery, and the results, I still hope and believe, offer the reward that the accomplishments are worth pursuing.

<sup>19</sup> From *Poems*: C. S. Lewis, edited by Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 84.