

Some reflections on translating Buddhist philosophical texts from Sanskrit and Tibetan

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON TRANSLATING BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHICAL TEXTS FROM SANSKRIT AND TIBETAN*

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I

It has often been said that translation is an art rather than a science, and even that to translate is to betray. If the first proposition is intended to mean only that translation is not a mechanical activity, this is surely so: the translator has so often to take into careful consideration a number of contextual and cultural factors that are unexpressed or barely hinted at in the text he is translating. Moreover, syntactical and semantic structures frequently cannot be automatically rendered from a source-language into the target-language. As for the proposition that to translate is to betray – ‘*traduttore traditore*’ – even when the translator has proceeded knowledgeably and carefully and succeeds in making what may be called a good and accurate translation, he and his reader might still find that many connotations and meanings of the original have nevertheless been lost in the rendering and perhaps also that new and undesired connotations have been inadvertently introduced. At least to this extent, then, even a competent and careful translator may find that he has betrayed his text or author. Moreover, the translator tends to find himself serving more than one master – namely his author/text, his reader, and eventually himself, that is to say his need to develop his understanding of the text he is translating – and this fact can also place him in a difficult position. It is then no doubt a truism to say that, by its very nature, translation is more often than not also interpretation. Let us not mention here the so-called ‘unfaithful beauties’ (*les belles infidèles*), those egregiously unfaithful translations, or rather confections, in which emulators have reworked, imitated or ‘recreated’ their originals to the detriment of the latter.¹

* The occasion and *nidāna* for presenting these reflections was a conference on translation organized in New Delhi in 1990, and the present paper bears the stamp of its origins. A short abstract of the paper as read at that conference was published in the *Tibet House Bulletin* (Silver Jubilee Issue, 1990), and reproduced in the *Tibetan Review*, September 1990, pp. 11-14.

1 cf. G. Mounin, *Les belles infidèles* (Paris, 1955).

In order to be able to mitigate and, whenever possible, to eliminate such undesired losses or gains of meaning in the process of translation, professional translators, linguists and also some philosophers have devoted numerous studies to the problem of translation. It will of course not be possible to survey this literature here. Suffice it to say that in this manner much valuable work, both theoretical and applied, has been carried out on making translation less of an art that may be more or less haphazard and more of a science that is regular and well-founded.²

- 2 On translation as art and as science — or, more exactly, as art founded on a science — see e.g. G. Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction* (Paris, 1963), pp. 16-17. A handful of publications may be mentioned here. Mainly (but not exclusively) on the linguistic and/or literary sides: I. A. Richards, *Mencius on the mind: Experiments in multiple definition* (London, 1932), and 'Towards a theory of translation', in: A.F. Wright (ed.), *Studies in Chinese thought* (Chicago, 1953), pp. 247-62; B.L. Whorf, *Language, thought, and reality* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956); J.-P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet, *Stylistique comparée du français et de l'anglais* (Paris, 1958); R. A. Brower (ed.), *On translation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); G. Mounin, *op. cit.*; J. C. Catford, *A linguistic theory of translation: An essay in applied linguistics* (London, 1965); E. A. Nida and C. R. Taber, *The theory and practice of translation* (Leiden, 1969) (like Nida's earlier book, *Toward a science of translating* [Leiden, 1964], this book is concerned chiefly with translating the Bible); H. Störig (ed.), *Das Problem des Übersetzens* (Darmstadt, 1973); G. Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of language and translation* (London, 1975); L.G. Kelly, *The true interpreter: A history of translation theory and practice in the West* (Oxford, 1979); M. Snell-Hornby (ed.), *Übersetzungswissenschaft — eine Neuorientierung: Zur Integrierung von Theorie und Praxis* (Tübingen, 1986); *id.*, *Translation studies: An integrated approach* (Amsterdam, 1988); F. M. Renner, *Interpretatio — Language and translation from Cicero to Tytler* (Amsterdam, 1989). The discussion on literary translation from Sanskrit in J. Brough, *Poems from the Sanskrit* (Harmondsworth, 1968), p. 19 ff., seems to lead its author to results that can hardly be applied to the translation of philosophical texts; indeed, it is being increasingly recognized that the translation of philosophical texts poses problems that are distinct (if not totally different) from those encountered in 'literary' translation. (It is nevertheless very interesting to recall that T. S. Eliot has very significantly declared that he made the 1949 version of his rendering of Saint-John Perse's *Anabase* more faithful to the exact meaning, more 'literal', than the first version of 1930 when he was still 'concerned, here and there, less with rendering the exact sense of a phrase, than with coining some phrase in English which might have equivalent value'). — Mainly on the philosophical side (where the question seems to have been clearly thematized only in recent times, there being for example in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [ed. P. Edwards, New York, 1967] no article and no index-entry on Translation), see e.g. D. J. Furley, 'Translation from Greek philosophy', in: *Aspects of translation (Studies in Communication 2, University College London)* (London, 1958), pp. 52-64; H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen, 1960), esp. p. 361 ff.; W. V. Quine, *Word and object* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) (where Chapter Two, 'Translation and meaning', expands Quine's article 'Meaning and translation', in R. A. Brower [ed.], *op. cit.*, pp. 148-172); F. Guenther and M. Guenther-Reutter (eds.), *Meaning and translation: Philosophical and linguistic approaches* (London, 1978); D. Davidson, *Inquiries into truth and interpretation* (Oxford, 1984). See also A. Benjamin, *Translation and the nature of*

II

We are often told that a really good rendering should read as if it had been composed originally in the receptor language, that is, as if it had not been translated at all. Thus literalness and rigid metaphrasis are to be shunned, and what has been termed 'transfusion' becomes the ideal. On the face of it this sounds unexceptionable enough, and no doubt it often proves to be an attainable goal when the original and the translation both belong to a common linguistic and cultural community. But, on reflection, is this always and necessarily to be our ideal for a translation? That is, can – and indeed should – an English rendering of a classical Sanskrit or Tibetan philosophical work read exactly as if it had been composed originally in English?

The further desideratum is, moreover, sometimes specified that the language of the translation should appear contemporary.³ But we must ask whether this desideratum is not perhaps more problematic than it appears at first sight. Should an old work actually read in translation exactly as if it had been written by a contemporary author 'in this present age'?

On consideration, it may turn out that the ancient controversy as to literal vs. non-literal translation has been largely outgrown and transcended by modern specialists in the theory and practice of translation.

Certainly, the opposition between letter (Skt. *vyañjana*, Tib. *tshig 'bru*) and sense (or spirit, Skt. *artha*, Tib. *don*) in the Buddhist theory of the four recourses (*pratisarana*), and between an understanding that is 'literal'

philosophy (London, 1989), who discusses his subject from Plato and Seneca through Sigmund Freud, Martin Heidegger and Walter Benjamin to Jacques Derrida and Donald Davidson. Most of these books contain extensive bibliographies on the problems of translation.

A recent discussion of the translation of some terms in the Buddhist context is K. R. Norman, 'On translating from Pāli', in: *One Vehicle, Journal of the National University of Singapore Buddhist Society*, 1984, pp. 77-87. See also the present writer's articles cited below in notes 7 (at the end) and 30.

- 3 The statement 'I have endeavor'd to make Virgil speak such English as he would himself have spoken, if he had been born in England, and in this present age', made by John Dryden in his 'Dedication to the Aeneis', has recently been cited with approval by M.D. Eckel, *Jñānagarbha's commentary on the distinction between the two truths* (Albany, 1987), p. 9, who makes several judicious observations on translation. However, Dryden was no doubt thinking of literary translation, especially of poetry, and the rendering of philosophical texts certainly appears to raise special problems.

(i.e. word-bound, Skt. *yathārutam*, Tib. *sgra ji bžin pa*) and one that accords with the true meaning (Skt. *yathārtham*) in some theories of the difference between the provisional surface meaning (Skt. *neyārtha*, Tib. *drañ don*) and the ultimate and definitive deep meaning (Skt. *nītārtha*, Tib. *ñes don*) in Buddhist hermeneutics, retains its significance in the matter of intralingual transcoding and interpretation. But the dichotomy word vs. sense seems to have less immediate relevance to interlingual interpreting, i.e. to translation. And the question of literalness has been to a great extent displaced by more refined concepts in translation-theory.⁴

Clearly, if by 'literal' we mean a rendering that is servile and unreflective, and which therefore misses the meaning, the translation will be a poor – and indeed an unserviceable – one however literal (in one sense of this word) it might be. But an emphasis on the question of literalness in either exegesis or translation tends to obscure the inescapable fact that in the case of works more than several decades old all we so often possess is their (intratextual) 'letter', which has then to be understood in the frame of the whole textual corpus in which words, sentences and entire works fit, i.e. their context and intertextuality. And in translation as well as in exegesis neglect of the 'letter', in *this* pertinent sense, inevitably carries with it the gravest danger of arbitrariness, bias and subjectivism. Therefore, whilst a poor translation will indeed be no less bad by being a 'literal' crib, and may indeed be a monstrosity untrue to the original, a translation that is not 'literal' in the appropriate sense of this word is no less an unfaithful monstrosity. Non-literalness is then no more a guarantee of fidelity in translation than is mere literalness. For true faithfulness is neither directly nor inversely proportional to any undifferentiated concept of literalness *per se*: everything will depend on what precisely is to be understood by 'literal'.

As a criterion, either positive or negative, the concept of literalness thus proves to be something of an irrelevance. Rather, in the matter of translating philosophical texts in question here, it is adequateness, regularity and terminological and conceptual systematicalness that constitute more pertinent characteristics. And it is these properties rather than literalness that can then serve as criteria of a good translation.⁵

4 As a substitute for the letter/sense and faithful/free oppositions, the principle of equivalence has been proposed by several writers on the theory and practice of translation. See e.g. M. Snell-Hornby, *Translation studies*, p. 9 ff.

5 Given the problematic nature of the concept of equivalence, e.g. in dynamic equivalence as against formal correspondence (or literalness), it had perhaps better be avoided. On the 'illusion of equivalence', see e.g. M. Snell-Hornby, *op.cit.*, p. 13 ff.

As for the above-mentioned second desideratum set up by some writers on translation to treat for example Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga, or any of their classical followers, as if they had been born 'in this present age' as native speakers of our modern target-languages could easily result in anachronistically presenting them as contemporary thinkers who have however failed to read their fellow philosophers and to acquaint themselves with modern modes of thought! So to present our classical authors and their texts would surely be as unfair and as untenable as to force them into the mould of modern philosophical thinking by making their works 'speak' to us as if their authors were the representatives of some modern philosophical movement.

In view of these considerations it would seem that the matters of literalness and reading smoothly have sometimes been quite misconceived.

What has to be done is to take these works as serious, technical products of the philosophical Śāstra of their own times, and the language used by the translator must take account of this. So to regard them as products of their time and place is certainly not to devalue either the authors or their works. No doubt translators will be well advised to familiarize themselves with philosophy as a subject of study inclusive of its most recent developments. Certainly they can never afford entirely to dissociate the task of translating a work of philosophy from the philosophical content of that work and hence from the philosophical endeavour. When discussing, or perhaps paraphrasing, these works it might even be legitimate for a modern translator-interpreter to 'do philosophy' in the style of the Mādhyamika or Vijñānavādin, of the rÑiñ ma pa or dGe lugs pa. But this should never issue in simply confusing or conflating philosophical translation and 'doing philosophy' in such a style.

Furthermore, if the view that there exists a certain essential link between the levels of expression and content is to be taken seriously (and *signifiant* and *signifié* are, let us not forget, the two faces even of the Saussurean linguistic sign), it is surely less than obvious that the answer to the question posed at the beginning of this section should always be an unqualified affirmative. But this need not necessarily involve espousing the doctrines of linguistic and cultural relativism and the most extreme version of Whorf's theory of the relation between language and cultural categories.

Of course a translator must avoid not only barbarisms and solecisms but also unnecessary – i.e. unmotivated – calques of his source-text. And there is perhaps no reason why a syntactical construction of the source-language should be exactly reproduced in the target-language; but this may not always be so, and even in this matter a translator (especially the

translator of a philosophical text) may sometimes deliberately, and for good reason, choose to follow as closely as possible the syntax of his source.⁶

At all events, it is not clear that the semantic structure of a translation, including its vocabulary, should – or indeed could – be that of some Standard Average European (or English) writing. In other words, there may be place for some kinds of calques reflecting at the very least the semantic fields of the language and representations in the source-text.⁷

It might well be that it is not such things that the advocates of the above-mentioned total Englishing (etc.) had in mind when setting up their ideal of having a rendering read just as though it had not been translated

6 On the question of syntax and translation, see e.g. G. Mounin, *Les problèmes théoriques de la traduction*, Chap. xv.

7 Let us recall here the duality between 'Hellenizers' and 'modernizers' established by T. F. Higham in the introduction to his *Oxford book of Greek verse in translation* (London, 1938), or between a translation that 'colonizes' the source-text's world by adopting a foreign idiom and a translation that makes the foreign author emigrate as it were from his homeland by having him appear to be a native in his new, translated, garb (cf. L. Fulda 'Die Kunst des Übersetzens', in *Aus der Werkstatt* [Stuttgart, 1904]; see B. Morgan's Bibliography in R.A. Brower, *On translation*, p. 279). — With the first approach compare Schleiermacher's concept of 'Verfremdung', where the translation seeks to be 'faithful' rather than 'free'. Compare further H. Gadamer's idea of the fusion of horizons (*Horizontverschmelzung*) in the hermeneutical process of understanding in his *Wahrheit und Methode*. And for a short discussion of Gadamer's concept in relation to the comparative study of Indian philosophy, see W. Halbfass, *India and Europe* (Albany, 1988), p. 164 f.

The distinction in question would then be between what is sometimes termed 'transference' from the source text, culture and world of thought, with attention being concentrated on these, and 'rendering' into the target language and culture, with the emphasis in this case being equally if not more on the latter. Cf. J. Catford, *op. cit.*, p. 43: 'In normal translation ... the T[arget-]L[anguage] text has a TL meaning. That is to say, the 'values' of the TL items are entirely those set up by formal and contextual relations in the TL itself. There is no carry-over into the TL of values set up by formal or contextual relations in the S[ource-]L[anguage]. It is, however, possible to carry out an operation in which the TL text, or, rather, parts of the TL text, do have values set up in the SL: in other words, have SL meanings. We call this process *transference*.' And p. 48: 'In *transference* there is an *implantation* of SL meanings into the TL text.' Such 'transference' is not necessarily to be equated with simple transcoding or 'translation as equivalence', whereas 'rendering' (or 'transfusion') may sometimes approximate 'translation as manipulation'.

The present writer sought to show the relevance of the first approach to the translation of Buddhist philosophical texts in his review-article 'A propos of a recent contribution to Tibetan and Buddhist studies', in *JAOS* 82 (1962), p. 325 ff. There is no reason why a translation following this principle should necessarily have to be dismissed as being in 'translationese': indeed, adherence to the opposite principle of paraphrase or imitation can also produce jargon that is no better than 'translationese'.

at all but had been written by a (contemporary) native speaker of English (etc.). But it is not altogether clear what the proponents of such Englishing do mean, and whether they have given due consideration to the fact that translation – and most certainly non-literary translation – cannot necessarily be expected to read like an original English composition. This is probably a matter that requires further thought. At all events it is well known that biligualism often brings with it interaction and interference between two languages. And a certain biculturalism (or multiculturalism) in philosophy might be expected to have a similar effect. Is such multiculturalism grounded in a really comprehensive history of philosophy something that is antiphilosophical and that is therefore to be rejected?

Let us just note here a further point that is perhaps relevant to this matter. Tibetan colleagues of ours with both an excellent Tibetan education and an outstanding mastery of (e.g.) English sometimes find it possible to say in good English what is written in a Tibetan text that presents difficulties as to its contents – that is, they are able to paraphrase this text – but at the same time they find it hard to translate it in the strict sense. In other words, the Tibetan text is not considered by them to contain something unsayable in English – something that is properly ineffable – but they find they can convey this content to us only in English paraphrase. This curious obstacle in translating and communicating meaning may be purely contingent in the sense that it is due to nothing more than the fact that Tibetan scholars have been translating their literature into Western languages only fairly recently. In other words, it may simply be a matter of acquiring more practice in translation. That it is a real problem, and not one that is experienced solely by our Tibetan colleagues, is nevertheless suggested by the fact that it has been encountered equally by non-Tibetan scholars translating from Tibetan into their native languages; and it therefore does not appear to be simply due to the recognized problem of translating from one's native language into a foreign one. Thus, over a number of decades very competent scholars have published renderings of Sanskrit and Tibetan philosophical works that cannot be described as incorrect, but which nevertheless failed at critical points fully to 'communicate', i.e. to convey the meaning of the original.

III

The question then arises: Where do such problems in translation lie, so that it has sometimes even been held that (perfect) translation is nothing

less than impossible (in theory at least)? And is it poetry alone that is both untranslatable and translatable (being so often translated)?

An answer is no doubt that the problem is not exclusively one of linguistic expression in a text or utterance but also one of style that is culture-bound and of content that is philosophical, religious, etc. This may seem obvious enough, for the level of content is of course generally recognized to be of no less importance for translation than that of linguistic expression: and the problem of the relation of the source-language to the target-language is accordingly not an exclusively linguistic one in the sense of being confined to e.g. morphology and syntax or, indeed, even to vocabulary. To refine our question then: How does the translator implement the conveying of the full meaning of his text to the reader or listener? Or, put in another way, how does he make the text 'communicate' to a new audience in another language?

We soon find that the problem of translation raises the twin questions of transmission and reception, and also the matter of intercultural hermeneutics, which are inescapable in any consideration of how to render Sanskrit and Tibetan works into a Western language. Similar difficulties presumably arise in translating from e.g. Sanskrit and Tibetan into a non-Western language such as Japanese. And one suspects that the problems may not be so radically different even when rendering ancient Sanskrit texts into modern Indo-aryan languages, and that they are only being masked by the practice of many translators from Sanskrit into e.g. Hindi who in fact transpose (using *tatsama* forms and substituting Hindi particles for Sanskrit inflexional endings) more than they actually translate, seemingly on the implicit assumption that the culture and the world of thought of modern Indians are hardly different from those of classical Sanskrit authors, or at least that such transposition renders an ancient Sanskrit work transparently accessible to the modern Indian reader.

IV

A further point often raised in connexion with translating from Sanskrit or Tibetan is the usefulness or necessity of using commentaries and oral tradition. It seems that some uncertainty may still prevail in this matter.

There is, first, the fundamental question of whether commentaries of any kind are to be regarded as reliable guides to understanding and interpreting Sanskrit or Tibetan works, and accordingly whether they can be of any real use to the translator. In the history of Sanskrit studies, early (and

of course some more recent) Indologists had few qualms about making extensive use both of later Sanskrit commentaries and of the oral tradition of the Pandits. Reference can be made for example to Sir William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Horace Hayman Wilson, and also to James R. Ballantyne (whose ultimate interest lay perhaps more in accurately presenting Christian doctrine to an audience of learned *brāhmanas*), as well as to Theodor Goldstücker (whom Ernst Windisch described in this respect as a 'frondeur' in his history of Sanskrit philology⁸ but who did not actually work personally with Pandits in India).⁹ Later on Richard Pischel (whom Windisch also described as a 'frondeur') differed from Rudolph Roth in his considerable regard for commentaries.¹⁰ But increasingly in the nineteenth century a very strong, and sometimes quite violent, reaction took hold with perhaps the majority of Western Sanskrit philologists, and it came to be considered by many as practically axiomatic that little or no reliance is to be placed on commentaries (unless of course they were either autocommentaries or nearly contemporary with the work commented on). The views of Otto Böhtlingk, Rudolph Roth and Albrecht Weber can for instance be cited; and an especially extreme example was William Dwight Whitney. This view was no doubt largely justified with respect to Sāyaṇa's comments on the Vedic Samhitās, but it appears very much less legitimate in the case of classical Sanskrit works.¹¹

8 Ernst Windisch, *Geschichte der Sanskrit-Philologie und indischen Altertumskunde*, Part ii (Berlin and Leipzig, 1920), p. 246.

9 On the case of William Jones and Rādhākānta Tarkavāgīśa, who finally acted as Pandit in advising the Calcutta court of justice on legal matters, see lastly R. Rocher, *JAOS* 109 (1989), pp. 627-33. On the problems raised for *brāhmanas* by working in close contact with non-caste European *mlecchas*, cf. W. Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 260.

10 On this, and on the question in general of the importance to be attached to the Indian commentarial tradition in Vedic studies, see L. Renou, *Les maîtres de la philologie védique* (Paris, 1928).

11 In the foreword to Böhtlingk and Roth's *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch*, part 1 (St Petersburg, 1855), we find expressed a criticism of H.H. Wilson's dependence in his Sanskrit dictionary on indigenous Indian lexicography, and in general of reliance on the traditional learning of the Indian Pandits.

In his memorandum dated 17 September 1830 in support of his candidature for the newly founded Boden chair of Sanskrit in the University of Oxford, on the contrary, Wilson had written: 'I should think it an indispensable requisite in the first Professor of the Sanscrit Language, that he had acquired his knowledge in India. It is true that considerable proficiency has been attained by some learned men on the Continent, but it is evident from their publications that their reading has been very limited... Their knowledge is, in fact, of the most elementary kind, and restricted to the grammar of the language... [Wilson here names F. Bopp and A.W. Schlegel.] With the different departments of Hindu classical literature, with any one of them in a variety of details, and even

A more balanced attitude has since made its appearance in regard to the use of commentaries when interpreting and translating classical Sanskrit works. It can be summed up by saying that a translator must carefully familiarize himself with the cultural and exegetical traditions

with its grammar as studied in India, they are unfamiliar... [T]he Lecturer ... should be familiar not only with the grammars compiled by European scholars, ... but with the original grammars read by the Pundits...' (See 'Appendix F' in A. W. de Schlegel, *Réflexions sur l'étude des langues asiatiques adressées à Sir James Mackintosh, suivie d'une Lettre à M. Horace Hayman Wilson* [Bonn, 1832], pp. 201-02. Cf. also R. Gombrich, *On being Sanskritic* [Inaugural Lecture, Oxford, 1978], pp. 10-11.) Already in 1827, in a letter to H. H. Wilson, H. T. Colebrooke had felt the need to defend himself against criticism by Schlegel concerning the neglect in England of Sanskrit studies (see E. Windisch, *op. cit.*, Part 1 [Strassburg, 1917], p. 36). It is curious, however, that Wilson placed together in exactly the same category both Bopp and Schlegel, failing to notice the very appreciable difference between the latter's emphasis on Sanskrit philology (in the wide sense) and on classical Indian civilization, and Bopp's overriding concern with comparative grammar. See Schlegel, *op. cit.*; cf. E. Windisch, *op. cit.*, pp. 75 f., 206.

Wilson's remarks called forth a long and sharp rejoinder from one of his targets. Schlegel — the occupant since 1818 of the first chair of Sanskrit in Germany at Bonn University who considered G. C. Haughton rather than Wilson as the most suitable candidate for the Boden chair since he was a genuine successor of Colebrooke — wrote (*op. cit.*, pp. 136-7): '[S]' ensuit-il qu'un Anglais, un Français ou un Allemand ne puisse pas acquérir ces connaissances sans quitter l'Europe? Cela aurait pu se soutenir il y a trente ans, mais aujourd'hui tout est changé... [L]a seule chose dont il faille se passer, quand on n'a pas de vocation pour aller aux grandes Indes, ce sont les leçons des savans indigènes. Or, quelque utiles que puissent être, sous plusieurs rapports, leurs communications orales, on sait de reste qu'il faut les recevoir avec une grande circonspection. Dès qu'il s'agit de s'élever à des considérations générales, et d'assigner à l'Inde ancienne sa place dans une histoire philosophique du genre humain, nous ne consulterons plus les Pandits, parce que les points de comparaison leur manquent. Le siège de la critique historique et philologique est en Europe; nous avons vu des exemples qu'on la perd facilement de vue en Asie.' [The reference is to A. Hamilton, with whom Schlegel's brother Friedrich had read Sanskrit in Paris in 1803.] — In the same publication of 1832, pp. 34-37, A. W. von Schlegel has however explicitly recognized the importance of the indigenous Sanskrit grammars, distancing himself on this point from F. Bopp. And over the past century the significance of traditional Indian grammar and the Pāṇinīyas has of course been recognized — against e.g. Whitney — by (amongst others) Ö. Böhtlingk, F. Kielhorn, B. Liebich, B. Geiger, L. Renou, P. Thieme (despite the differences between the last two), G. Cardona, and P.-S. Filliozat. Many of the relevant documents concerning this interesting debate between scholars have been conveniently brought together by J. F. Staal (ed.), *A reader on the Sanskrit grammarians* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972).

The controversy between Schlegel and Wilson dating back more than a century and a half has been recalled here at some length because some of the issues raised in it are still topical and do not seem yet to have been entirely resolved in Indology (partly no doubt because the parties were arguing at cross-purposes), and in order to show that points relevant to the present paper were being vigorously and indeed passionately discussed in the early years of the history of Sanskrit studies in Europe.

relevant to his text and its intertextual corpus and context, even though his task of course continues to be in the first place to understand and translate his particular text in its historical context of time and place without permitting himself to be unduly influenced by later developments that may be reflected in the commentarial traditions. (It is nevertheless coming to be widely recognized at the same time that such developments in interpretation may be of very considerable interest in their own right.) In sum, the value and interest of the commentarial tradition is being accepted by many Indologists; and for many Western Sanskritists working with a learned Pandit has come to be regarded as not unusual.¹²

This applies also (and perhaps to an even greater degree) to many Tibetologists. Most regrettably, however, what is accepted by Tibetologists has yet to be reflected in the academic structure of universities where classical Tibetan may perhaps be taught but where, with only a very few honourable exceptions, little or no provision is made for having represented the living scholarly and cultural traditions of Tibet together with the living language as their vehicle. But it seems clear that in Tibetan studies genuine progress can be efficiently made only in close collaboration with Tibetan scholars, following the model as it were of the Pandita-Lotsāba teams that produced most of the major translations from Indian languages into Tibetan.

As for oral commentary, it has to be said that in very many cases their orality is contingent, or quite accidental, in so far as what the oral tradition in question transmits is in fact rooted in the written tradition and can itself easily be recorded in writing. (Compare for example the recent and very useful commentary by the contemporary *dge bšes* rTa mgrin Rab brten on Tsoñ kha pa's *Legs bšad sñiñ po*.¹³) For reasons not yet sufficiently explored, however, it has very often not been customary to write down these school-traditions. One reason for this was perhaps the fact that they represented the special interpretations of individual seminaries or teachers, and that they had not (yet) achieved the 'official' status, or 'canonicity', that would have warranted their being written down and printed. But the fact remains that such oral commentarial traditions could

12 On the written and oral commentarial traditions of the Indian grammatical Śāstra, compare F. Kielhorn's Preface to his translation of Nāgeśa's *Paribhāseṇḍuśekhara* (Bombay, 1874) and P.-S. Filliozat, Introduction to M.S. Narasimhacharya (ed.), *Mahābhāṣyapradīpavyākhyānāni* (Pondichéry, 1973).

13 The title of this work is *Drañ nes mam 'byed legs bšad sñiñ po dka' gnad mams mchan bur bkod pa. gZur gnas blo gsal dga' ston*.

easily be written down, and that many in fact were sooner or later. (See for example the accounts by Nag dbaṅ dpal ldan [born in 1797] of the varying interpretations current in the sGo maṅ and Blo gsal gliṅ seminaries represented in Urga, where they were established in 1837, and deriving from the 'Bras spuṅs monastery near lHa sa.¹⁴)

Such examples of oral commentarial tradition have therefore to be carefully distinguished from that other form of oral transmission which is properly private and acromatic, that is, which is to be transmitted individually, in the form of a *sñan brgyud*, from a master or *guru (bla ma)* to each disciple (or group of disciples) and which characterizes the Mantrayāna. In principle, such oral tradition is not so much 'secret', or deliberately mystifying, as it is reserved and specific, being destined for individual disciples according to their natures and capacities at a particular time and in specific circumstances. To what extent (if at all) such oral instructions are to be used in preparing a translation is something that has to be decided in each case by their transmitters and translators.

Concerning commentarial tradition, written or oral, in some respects the interpreter-translator of Tsoṅ kha pa (for example) is in a position similar to that of the interpreter-translator of Pāṇini in so far as both can profit by familiarizing themselves with the relevant commentaries. It is true that the Tibetan used in Tsoṅ kha pa's highly compact and pregnant philosophical language is exclusively a natural language — that is, it is composed basically of words employed elsewhere that are to be found in Tibetan dictionaries, and of constructions that belong to ordinary Tibetan syntax — whereas Pāṇini used in part a special formal (and quasi-algebraic) technical language employing numerous technical exponents (*anubandha* or *it*) and abbreviations (*pratyāhāra*) not found in the Sanskrit lexicon outside grammatical usage and which are therefore not included in most Sanskrit dictionaries, and in his syntax he used cases in special senses. But very often Tsoṅ kha pa's idiom is scarcely less terse and technical than Pāṇini's, so much so that it is not immediately intelligible to all educated Tibetans and readers have both to familiarize themselves with his idiom and to acquaint themselves with his system of thought and the exegetical traditions based on it. This necessarily obliges us to consult

14 The title is *Blo gsal gliṅ daṅ bkra šis sgo maṅ grva tshaṅ gi dbu phar gyi yig cha'i bšad tshul bkod pa. Blo gsal dga' ston* (in vol. ga of the author's gSuṅ 'bum). — On the establishment of the sGo maṅ and Blo gsal gliṅ seminaries in Urga, see Tshe tan žabs druṅ. *bsTan rtsis kun las btus pa* (mTsho sñon [Qinghai] ed. of 1982), p. 276, under the year *me bya* (1837).

the commentaries and the transmitters of the exegetical traditions, even in such cases where their explanations may not necessarily be accepted as binding and final if only because the commentators and scholars sometimes differ from each other and reflect later developments in exegesis and hermeneutics.

While good commentators can of course be of very great value to us in understanding difficult Sanskrit and Tibetan texts in prose, commentaries (especially auto-commentaries) are sometimes altogether indispensable for the interpretation and translation of both Sanskrit texts composed in verse and Tibetan versified renderings of *kārikās*.

Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind the value of any 'paracanonical' traditions that may be available. Aside from recensions of a text transmitted elsewhere than in the bKa' 'gyur or bsTan 'gyur editions now available to us, the main source of alternative textual traditions are commentaries either of Indian origin (which are then normally to be found in the bsTan 'gyur) or of Tibetan origin.

V

The references made above to the philosophical, religious and cultural specificity of Sanskrit or Tibetan works in connection with intercultural transmission and reception and hermeneutics inevitably raise the thorny questions not only of linguistic relativism but also of conceptual and cultural relativism. These are topics that have been discussed at great length by linguists, philosophers and anthropologists, and they cannot be gone into in detail here.

To simplify a complex matter, it seems possible to accept the fact of cultural and philosophical specificity – and perhaps even the theory of a certain incommensurability between cultures – together with the reflection of this specificity in the language and conceptual systems of Sanskrit or Tibetan philosophical or religious texts without, however, having to go so far as to maintain the strongest versions of either the thesis of the indeterminacy of translation (Quine), or that of cultural relativism and the influence of language on cultural categories (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis).

Within Buddhism, the Mahāyānists have in fact generally assumed that translation of their canonical Sūtras – the *buddhavacana* – and the Śāstras – from Sanskrit into Chinese or Tibetan, from Chinese into Japanese and Korean, and from Tibetan into Mongolian was both desirable and feasible. It is interesting to observe that in this matter the Mahāyānists have most

often proceeded differently from the Theravādins, who retained the Pali canon and language wherever they migrated in South and Southeast Asia and who, though they once had e.g. an old Sinhalese Aṭṭhakathā, finally transmitted their main commentaries in Pali. (It should however be noted that, even in Mahāyānist traditions, Tibetan has tended to develop into the standard language of 'Lamaism' also outside geographical and ethnic Tibet, for example among the Mongols and in parts of China; and Chinese has been used outside China, including in Japan [though in a Sino-Japanese reading].) The Buddha himself is indeed deemed to have proclaimed that his disciples should have the Dharma available in their respective languages. The use of different canonical languages is moreover in harmony with Mahāyānist docetism according to which the teaching of the Dharma is carried out by a Buddha's *nirmānakāya* in conformity with the capacities and requirements of each of his disciples. For the Mahāyāna, it is true, absolute reality (*paramārtha*) as such is properly inexpressible (*anabhilāpya*). Yet the expositions found in both Sūtra and Śāstra presuppose effability (in the frame of, say, the principles of the **saparyāya-paramārtha* or the *udbhāvanā-samvṛti*). And such effability of course implies translatability.¹⁵

Nevertheless, as already noted, in translating there is frequently to be noticed a serious loss or deficit of meaning, and sometimes also an unwanted gain or surplus of meaning. And even if Sūtra and Śāstra are not to be thought of as untranslatable, it seems that there does often exist a kind of incommensurability between the original and its translation, as exemplified either in the translations of the same text into different languages with their culturally determined matrices or (sometimes) in different translations of a text into the same language. (This will have to do at least in part with the philosopher's problem of synonymy of propositions in natural languages.)

15 For the 'modal' (i.e. conceptualizable and verbalizable) absolute, or **saparyāya-paramārtha* (*mam graṅs dan̄ bcas pa'i don dam pa*), see Bhavya (Bhāvaviveka), *Tarkajvālā* and especially **Madhyamakārtasamgraha*; and Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvaya-vibhaṅga*. For the surface-level indication or 'showing' (*samdarśana*) of what really transcends conceptual constructs (*vikalpa*) and expressions (*ābhiḷāpa*) by means of the 'modes' (*paryāya*) of *sūnyatā*, *tathatā*, etc., or *udbhāvanā-samvṛti*, see e.g. Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāṅgāṭīkā* iii.10.

Mantra, which is usually held to be without reference and discursive significance (*anarthaka*) and therefore to be untranslatable, represents then the reverse case.

VI

In considering the translating of philosophical texts, in addition to the source-language or text and the target-language or text – i.e. to interlingual translation e.g. from Sanskrit or Tibetan into a European language –, it is necessary also to give thought to what Donald Davidson among others has called the metalanguage (on the level of intralingual translation).¹⁶ This metalanguage is ‘the language of the theory, which says what expressions of the subject language translate which expressions of the object language’. Davidson explains: ‘When interpretation is our aim, a method of translation deals with a wrong topic, a relation between two languages, where what is wanted is an interpretation of one (in another, of course, but that goes without saying since any theory is in some language)... In the general case, a theory of translation involves three languages: the object language, the subject language, and the metalanguage.’ And he adds (p. 130): ‘The translation manual churns out, for each sentence of the language to be translated, a sentence of the translator’s language; the theory of interpretation then gives the interpretation of these familiar sentences. Clearly the reference to the home language is superfluous; it is an unneeded intermediary between interpretation and alien idiom. The only expressions a theory of interpretation has to mention are those belonging to the language to be interpreted.’ The implications of this and other philosophical treatments of translation and interpretation for our present purposes will require reflection and discussion.

In any case, in view of the concern with interlingual translating and consequently with the source-language/text and its rendering in the target-language/translation which nowadays characterizes Buddhist studies, consideration of theory – which in Buddhism should of course not be understood as exclusive of and antithetical to practice – tends to be neglected.

It is for this reason that we require more sustained attempts at analysis and synthesis, and more studies of doctrines and terms, with a view to penetrating and interpreting theory and developing an adequate language of philosophy. Among other things this involves building up a detailed knowledge of what the Tibetans call *grub mtha*’ (Skt. *siddhānta*), that is, not merely ‘tenets’ or sets of dogmas and beliefs, but philosophical systems established by analysis (Tib. *dpyad pa*) and reasoning (Tib. *rigs pa*). Exercise in translation into e.g. English from Sanskrit or Tibetan

16 ‘Radical interpretation’, in: *Inquiries into truth and interpretation* (Oxford, 1984), p. 129.

doubtless helps greatly towards this end, and this is of course why translation is practised in university seminars. But necessary though they are such exercises are not sufficient. Sometimes, it seems, the cart has been put before the horse by attempting to translate vast bodies of texts without constructing the firm foundation of a knowledge of the 'meta-language'.¹⁷ Needless to say, in order to be useful translations as well as historical and synthesizing studies require reliable (and, whenever possible, critical) editions of the texts.

Translation of Sanskrit or Tibetan philosophical texts must then involve a very sustained effort toward understanding and interpretation and in the domain of intercultural transmission and hermeneutics. This need can not be met simply by turning out more translations, however worthy these may be. A balance will have to be struck between interlingual translating on the one side and interpretation, analysis and synthesis on the other side. This last activity can be either intralingual or interlingual, and it needs to be both systematic (synchronic) and historical (diachronic).

VII

It was mentioned above that the process of translation is an art in the sense that it cannot be made purely mechanical and automatic.¹⁸ But has it not often been claimed that the Tibetan Lotsābas developed a special form of the Tibetan language in which they imitated and calqued the terminology, and very often even the syntax, of their Indian source-texts? And have we not sometimes heard it said that their translations differ radically for example from the majority of Chinese translations of Buddhist texts, and especially from the earlier Chinese translations using the method of 'meaning-matching' (*ko-i*)¹⁹ by being not only highly technical but also mechanical?

17 As an example from the 1930s in Buddhist studies, Ganganath Jha's translation of Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasamgraha* with Kamalaśīla's *Pañjikā* may be cited as a rendering by a competent Sanskritist that nevertheless failed adequately to communicate to the reader. Jha has of course not been alone in thus failing.

18 This statement is of course not intended to be a judgement on the desirability or feasibility of a science of translation, an *Übersetzungswissenschaft*, as a discipline.

19 See Tang Yung-tung, 'On "ko-yi"', in: W.R. Inge *et al.* (eds.), *Radhakrishnan, Comparative studies in philosophy presented in honour of his sixtieth birthday* (London, 1951), pp. 276-86; Fung Yu-lan, *A history of Chinese philosophy*, vol. 2 (Princeton, 1953), pp. 241-2; and E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China* (Leiden, 1959), p. 184. Cf. W. Fuchs, *Asia major* 6 (1930), pp. 84-103 on the technical organization of the Chinese translations of Buddhist texts.

In the eighth and ninth centuries the Tibetans did indeed develop a very special language – the so-called *chos skad* – used for rendering Sanskrit (and also Middle Indo-Aryan²⁰ and Chinese) texts into Tibetan. And a form of this *chos skad* has survived in use up to the present day for writing treatises and commentaries on the Dharma. In its turn this *chos skad* has left its imprint on the official, chancellery language of non-religious documents and even on the colloquial language. But it would be a mistake to overemphasize the artificiality and mechanicalness of Tibetan translations from the Sanskrit, or to regard the *chos skad* as only barely a natural language. This can be shown by comparing two or more Tibetan translations of (virtually) the same Sanskrit text in the cases (relatively rare it is true) where we have available such parallel translations. (The case of Tibetan translations made from distinct Sanskrit recensions of a work, or that of Tibetan translations made from both the Indian and Chinese versions of works such as the Mahāyānist *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and the *Suvarṇabhāṣasūtra*, will not be considered here.)

For this purpose let us briefly compare two Tibetan versions of the *Prajñāpāramitāstotra*, otherwise known as the *Nirvikalpastava*, attributed to Nāgārjuna but no doubt by (his disciple?) Rāhulabhadra. Translation I is by Sāntibhadra and Tshul khrims rgyal ba (born in 1011) and is found in the Tibetan version of the *Astāsāhasrikā prajñāpāramitā* (as reproduced in the Phu brag/sPu brag bKa' 'gyur [cf. Otani Catalogue no. 734]). Translation II is by Tilakakalaśa (Thig le bum pa) and rNog Blo ldan šes rab (1059-1109) and is found in the bsTan 'gyur (see Otani Catalogue no. 2018).²¹

We find that there indeed exist significant differences between these two versions. Some of them are stylistic; and in II the use of honorific forms is more widespread and consistent than in I. Other differences

20 Including Apabhraṃśa for Dohās, and presumably Pali for the bKa' 'gyur texts P 747-759 (D 31-43). For the latter texts, see the colophon to the *Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra* which mentions as translators Ānandaśrī sprung from a family of 'brahmans' of Siṃhaladvīpa (*siṃ ga gliṅ pa bram ze'i rigs*) and the *mañ du thos pa* Lotsāba Ņi ma rgyal mtshan dpal bzañ po. Cf. A. Csoma de Kőrös and Léon Feer, *Analyse du Kandjour (Annales du Musée Guimet, t. ii, Lyon, 1881), p. 288; T. Skorupski, A catalogue of the Stog Palace Kanjur (Tōkyō, 1985), nos. 289-296, 303-307. But cf. G. Schopen, Central Asiatic Journal 26 (1982), p. 231 n. 9.*

21 The Phu brag/sPu brag bKa' 'gyur version of the Tibetan translation of the *Prajñāpāramitāstotra* has been edited, together with the bsTan 'gyur version and the Sanskrit text, by M. Hahn, in: H. Eimer (ed.), *Indologie und Indo-Tibetologie* (Bonn, 1988), pp. 53-80. Hahn did not make use of the best existing edition of the Sanskrit text published by R. Hikata, *Suvikrāntavikrāmi-pariprcchā Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Fukuoka, 1958), pp. 1-2.

concern vocabulary. And still others involve interpretation. Here are some examples to illustrate these points:

- (i) the word *nirañjanā* as an epithet of Prajñāpāramitā in verse 19 is rendered by *khyad med pa* 'undifferentiated' in I, but more literally by *gos pa med* 'immaculate' in II;
- (ii) the epithet *nirakṣarā* in verse 2 is rendered by *mi 'gyur ba* 'immutable' in I, but by *yi ge med* 'unsyllabified' (i.e. ineffable, cf. *anaksara*) in II;
- (iii) *bhāvena* in verse 2 is rendered by *no bor* in I, but no doubt more correctly by *bsam yas* (PD, read *bsam pas*) in II; cf. verse 14 where *bhāvatas* is rendered by *yañ dag tu* in I (or does *yañ dag tu* belong only to *mthoñ ba*, in which case *bhāvatas* is not translated in I ?), but by *bsam pa yis* in II (both sets of translations are possible, though the version by rÑog probably renders the intended meaning better);
- (iv) *vidhivat* in verse 5 is translated by *cho ga bžin* in I but, more accurately, by *tshul bžin* in II;
- (v) *bahurūpā* in verse 9 is rendered by *dños mañ por* in I, but by *tshul mañ du* in II;
- (vi) in verse 4 *prapadya* is rendered by *bten nas* in both I and II; but in verse 14 *prapadya* is translated by *bsgrubs pas* (I)/*bsgrubs pa las* (II), whereas *prapadyante* is rendered by *grub par byed* (I)/*bsgrubs pa* (II);
- (vii) *paśyanti* in verse 14 is rendered by (*yañ dag tu*) *mthoñ ba* 'see' in I, but by 'khums nas 'understand' in II; but in the same context in verse 15, *paśyan* is rendered by *mthoñ ba* in both I and II (the decision in II to render the connotation 'understand' of *paś-* in verse 14 but not in verse 15 is hard to account for);
- (viii) *sunirvrta* in verse 20 is rendered by *šin tu tshim* in I but by *šin tu mya ñan 'das* in II (which, unlike I, does not render the desiderative sense in *tustūsantas*), both translations being possible but conveying distinct connotations of the word.

These examples of stylistic, terminological and religio-philosophical variations will serve to show that Tibetan translations are not literal to the point of being purely automatic or written in a non-natural language.

When the original Sanskrit text is no longer extant, parallel translations into Tibetan can be of the greatest value to the modern interpreter and translator, an example being the two bsTan 'gyur translations of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*.²² On the contrary, the two translations of

22 Both Kṛṣṇapaṇḍita's and Nag tsho Tshul khriṃs rgyal ba's translation of the *Madhyamakāvatāra* alone (i.e. without the Bhāṣya) as revised by Tilakakalaśa and Pa tshab Ņi ma grags and the translation by Tilaka and Pa tshab based on a Kaśmīri text corrected and edited by Kanakavarman and Pa tshab on the basis of a further manuscript (*ñi 'og śar phyogs pa'i dpe dan gtugs šin legs par bcos te gtan la phab pa*) are to be found in the Beijing edition of the bsTan 'gyur (nos. 5261 and 5262), but not in the sDe dge edition where only the latter version is found (no. 3861). The differences between the two are due only in part to metrical considerations. Although both these versions of the basic text were known to L. de La Vallée Pousin, in his edition of this

Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* present the interpreter and translator with quite daunting difficulties since they diverge to such an extent from each other.²³ Incidentally, some of these examples of parallel translations show us that it is not always possible to restore or reconstruct Sanskrit originals with perfect confidence solely from the Tibetan translations. For the Tibetans also, translation has been an art and not an absolutely regular or mechanical science.²⁴

VIII

This brings us to the question of retranslation (i.e. retro-translation) in relation to what has been known as the 'reconstruction' and 'restoration' of lost Sanskrit works from their Tibetan (or Chinese) translations. After

text together with the Bhāṣya (*Madhyamakāvatāra*, Bibliotheca Budhica ix, St Petersburg, 1907-12) he unfortunately did not reproduce the earlier version of the *mūla* alone. The paracanonical, i.e. non-bsTan 'gyur, text printed at the Žol printing house claims to be based on both versions.

23 Translations of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya* by both Vasudhararakṣita with Ža ma Señ rgyal and Kanakavarman with Dad pa'i Źes rab are preserved in the Beijing bsTan 'gyur (nos. 5700 and 5701 for the two versions of the *mūla*, and no. 5202 for Kanakavarman's translation of the autocommentary); cf. sDe dge nos. 4203 and 4204 (Vasudhararakṣita's translation of *mūla* and autocommentary only).

24 Other cases where the existence of multiple translations of the same text can exemplify this state of affairs are, for example, the Tibetan versions of Nāgārjuna's *Yuktiṣastikā* and *Śūnyatāsaptati*, as well as of Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra* (see above, note 23). There are also Dunhuang fragments of an early Tibetan translation of the *Yuktiṣastikā* (see C. Scherrer-Schaub, 'Some remarks on P.T. 795 and 796', forthcoming in *Acta Orientalia Hungarica*) and of the *Pratītyasamutpādayakārikās* (see C. Scherrer-Schaub, *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 3 [1987], pp. 103-11). On the *Hastavālaprakaraṇa* see below, note 27. A further example is the parallel translation of verses from the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* to be found in the *Chos kyi sku la gnas pa'i yon tan la bstod pa* (P 2007), published by N. Hakamaya, *Journal of the Faculty of Buddhism (Komazawa University)*, 14 (1983), pp. 337-332.

In the case of authors such as Nāgārjuna transmitted in addition in a paracanonical (i.e. non-bsTan 'gyur) text-tradition (as represented for example by the Žol par khañ edition of Nāgārjuna's *rigs tshogs*), the latter too has to be taken into account.

Compare the valuable study of parallel translations of Sūtra-texts by N. Simonsson, *Indo-tibetische Studien* (Uppsala, 1957). See also by the same author 'Zur indo-tibetischen Textkritik', *Orientalia Suecana* 2 (1953), pp. 129-52.

It may be noted that the place of Tibetan translations of philosophical texts in relation to their (lost or preserved) Indian originals is in several interesting respects comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, with that of the Arabic translations of Greek philosophical texts in relation to their originals, on which see e.g. R. Walzer, *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic philosophy* (Oxford, 1962).

the term 'restoration' had been in use for a time some decades ago,²⁵ scholars apparently decided for the reasons mentioned above that this term reflects an unrealistic attitude towards what is possible since it promises more than can in most cases be actually delivered by the philologist-translator and that the most appropriate term would in the circumstances be 'retranslation'. As for the expression 'reconstruction',²⁶ everything will depend on just what is actually to be understood by it. If it means a carefully carried-out 'retro-translation' making use both of attested terms and phrases from other texts of the same category still extant in Sanskrit and of any available fragments of the lost Sanskrit, the term is no doubt acceptable. This is evidently what the term 'reconstruction' (Sanskrit/Hindi *punaruddhāra*) is intended to convey when it is employed for example by the scholars who are at present engaged at the Varanasi Sanskrit University and the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies (Sarnath) in translating back into Sanskrit Tibetan renderings of lost Sanskrit works. Yet these scholars sometimes compare their work with the *punaruddhāra* or rescue of an archaeological site or monument, even though the restoration of the physical remains of an ancient site by the trained archaeologist, or the restorative 'anastylosis' of a badly damaged monument by the archaeologist combined with the art historian, is a process that is altogether different from the philologist-translator's rendering back into its original language of a text now available only in translation. For in the case of archaeology what may be called the medium of expression remains essentially the same — stone, brick, plaster, etc. —, whereas in the case of 'retro-translation' the linguistic medium changes — that is, the Tibetan or Chinese, which as target-languages were substituted at an earlier stage for the original Sanskrit source-language, themselves become in the later stage source-languages and are replaced by Sanskrit

25 See for example P. Bh. Patel, *Cittaviśuddhiprakaraṇa of Āryadeva* (Visva-Bharati, 1949) with the Foreword by Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya, who employed the word 'restore' (p. viii). Compare P. Pradhan, *Abhidharmasamuccaya of Asaṅga* (Visva-Bharati, 1950), who was in a position to make use of the Sanskrit fragments published by V. V. Gokhale in the *Journal of the Bombay Branch, Royal Asiatic Society*, N.S. 23 (1947), pp. 13-38, and who also employed the word 'restoration' (pp. 15, 21). But with good reason Pradhan made it clear that he himself preferred the word 'translation' or (even better) 'retranslation', noting: 'I do not believe that a lost book or portion may be restored even from the Tibetan in the proper sense of the term' (pp. 21-22). Despite its merits, his edition bears out his warning.

26 The most ambitious 'reconstructions' from Tibetan of lost Sanskrit texts to have been published hitherto are no doubt those of the *Akutoḥbhayā*, Buddhapālita's *Vṛtti* and Bhavya's (Bhāvaviveka's) *Prajñāpradīpa* on Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikās* by Raghunath Pandeya (Delhi, 1989).

as the target-language. In textual studies what corresponds most closely to archaeological reconstruction/restoration is of course the philological *reconstitution* of an imperfectly transmitted text from incomplete manuscripts of this text and from fragmentary quotations from it found in other works in the *same* language, i.e. with no interlinguistic change taking place in the medium of expression due to translation.²⁷

- 27 F.W. Thomas and H. Ui were among the first scholars to attempt retro-translation into Sanskrit from Chinese and Tibetan versions in their work on the *Hastavālaprakarana* (*JRAS*, 1918, pp. 267-310). Thomas (who seems to have been unclear about the inter-relation of the two Tibetan translations — one by dPal 'byor sñiñ po edited by dPal brtsegs raksita and the other by Rin chen bzañ po — describing the first as the revised text) characterized the Sanskrit rendering as a 'conjectural reconstitution' (p. 268). H.R. Rangaswamy Iyengar in his work on Dignāga's *Pramānasamuccaya* (Mysore, 1930) employed the term 'reconstruction'. In his edition of Chapters viii-xvi of *Āryadeva's Catuhśataka* with Candrakīrti's *Vṛtti*, where he made use of the fragmentary Sanskrit text published by Haraprasad Sastri (*Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. iii, No. 8, pp. 449-514, Calcutta, 1914), Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya according to the title-page 'reconstructed and edited' these texts (Calcutta, 1931). And on p. xi of his Introduction, he also wrote of P. L. Vaidya's having 'reconstructed' the Kārikās from Tibetan when they were not available in the original Sanskrit in his *Etudes sur Āryadeva et son Catuhśataka* (Paris, 1923), but on p. xii he referred to Vaidya's 'restorations'. Vaidya himself used the expression 'reconstruction' (p. 66). In his Préface to S. Yamaguchi's edition of Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāgaṭīkā* (Nagoya, 1934), S. Lévi wrote of both 'la restauration des lacunes d'après la traduction tibétaine' and of 'restitutions sanskrites des lacunes' (p. iii), while Yamaguchi himself used the word 'reconstituer' in his Avertissement (p. ii). And in the Preface to their joint edition of the same text (*Madhyāntavibhāgasūtrabhāṣyaṭīkā of Sthiramati*, Calcutta and London, 1932), Vidhushekhara Bhattacharya and G. Tucci spoke (p. iv) of 'the restoration or reconstruction of the lost portions of the text'. But in his *Pre-Diñnāga Buddhist texts on logic from Chinese sources* (Baroda, 1929), p. i, Tucci carefully distinguished between restoration, which he considered impossible when only Chinese versions are available, and the retranslation into Sanskrit which he was attempting in his book for the benefit of Pandits. In his *Bhavasāṅkrānti Sūtra and Nāgārjuna's Bhavasāṅkrānti Śāstra* (Adyar, 1938), N. Aiyaswami Sastri wrote (p. xi) of 'restoration' from Tibetan; but in his *Ārya Śālistamba Sūtra* (Adyar, 1950) — where a useful bibliography of earlier retro-translations into Sanskrit is given (pp. xxxii-xxxiv) — the same scholar later wrote (p. x) of 're-rendering' into Sanskrit from Tibetan (while still using the term 'restore' on pp. x and xxxii), and in his *Satyasiddhiśāstra of Harivarman*, vol. 1 (Baroda, 1975), he spoke (pp. vii-viii) of 'rendering' or 'retranslating' lost texts from Chinese into Sanskrit. In retranslating parts of Dignāga's *Pramānasamuccaya* from Tibetan into Sanskrit, Muni Jambuvijayajī has used the word *anuvāda* 'translation' on p. 169 of his *Vaiśeṣikasūtra of Kanāda* (Baroda, 1961); and in his edition *Dvādaśāram Nayacakram of Ācārya Śri Mallavādi Ksamāśramana*, Part i (Bhavnagar, 1966), Appendix, p. 96, the Muni has in addition used the expression *samskr̥tabhāṣāyām parivartitah*.

Evidently, for a number of those scholars who first attempted retro-translating lost works from Tibetan into Sanskrit, the expressions 'restoration', 're(con)stitution', and 'reconstruction' were more or less synonymous and could be used interchangeably as stylistic variants.

Moreover, if it were ever thought that so-called 'reconstruction' restores to us a lost Sanskrit original in the form in which it left its author's hands, the term could well lead to misunderstanding and to the erroneous idea that a 'reconstruction' can for all practical purposes replace the Tibetan or Chinese translation. It must always be remembered that the Tibetan translation will always be one step closer to the original than any such 'reconstruction', however carefully it has been prepared.²⁸ In other words, as a whole — that is, apart from technical terms and individual phrases that it may be possible to retrieve with great accuracy on the basis of parallel texts — such a Sanskrit 'reconstruction' will probably be (in most cases at least) hardly closer to the original than a translation into English, French, German or Japanese when carefully prepared by a competent scholar.²⁹ In one respect, nevertheless, it may be superior to the latter by being able to incorporate into the body of the text itself the technical terms and the semantic systems of the Indian original so that the philosophical structure might appear more clearly.

Retro-translations of lost Sanskrit texts and, especially, reconstitutions/reconstructions of texts only fragmentarily preserved in the original Sanskrit can thus serve not only the needs of traditional Pandits (as noted for example by Tucci) but also the requirements of modern scholars wishing to form as clear an idea as possible of how their texts may have been articulated in Sanskrit.

IX

Through important periods of their history several Buddhist communities have been characterized by their deep commitment to and intense activity in translating Sūtra and Śāstra. A very remarkable feature of Tibetan cultural history that continues to attract the admiration of scholars was the

28 In this connexion, it should be mentioned that in his publication of the commentaries on Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikās* cited above (note 26) Raghunath Pandey has very helpfully published facsimiles of the Beijing edition of the texts along with his 'reconstructions'.

29 Compare E. Steinkellner's good remarks on the retro-translation from Tibetan of lost Sanskrit works of the Pramāṇa tradition in particular in *A corpus of Indian studies (Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri, Calcutta, 1980)*, pp. 97-98. And on the desirability of translating into a modern European language a reconstructed Sanskrit text, rather than e.g. its Tibetan rendering, see E. Steinkellner, 'Methodological remarks on the constitution of Sanskrit texts from the Buddhist *pramāṇa*-tradition', *WZKS* 32 (1988), p. 109.

rapidity with which by the early ninth century the Tibetans had succeeded in producing good renderings of large bodies of these texts. And as is now well recognized, the Tibetan translators have preserved for us many works that would otherwise be lost in their original languages. But even when the original texts are extant, their Tibetan translations – as well as translations into Chinese and other languages – are still of value to us both for the philological task of establishing uncertain and correcting corrupt manuscript readings and (since very often the date of these translations is known) for the historical task of determining the state of a text by a given time.

From early times the Tibetan Lotsābas sought to develop principles of translation that would preclude imprecision and ambiguity in so far as differences of interpretation and the very nature of natural language do not make this goal impossible. These efforts to develop a technical, and truly scientific, system of translating found expression in the introduction to the *Madhyavyutpatti* (*By brag tu rtogs byed 'brin po*), or *sGra sbyor* (*bam po gn̄is pa*), a treatise on translation composed early in the ninth century under the Tibetan monarch Khri lDe sroñ btsan when the translation of Indian texts into Tibetan was reaching its peak during the period of the Early Propagation (*sria dar*) of the Dharma. This manual for translators contains the principles accepted for rendering Indian texts in the 'new language' according to the instructions concerning this decreed standard which were promulgated under the authority of the Tibetan ruler. Much later, in the eighteenth century, these principles were reproduced and expanded in the introduction to the *Dag yig mkhas pa'i 'byun gn̄as*, the Tibetan-Mongolian terminological lexicon prepared when the Tibetan bsTan 'gyur was being translated into Mongolian under the patronage of the Ch'ien-lung Emperor and under the supervision of lCañ skya Rol pa'i rdo rje (1718-1986) and other leading scholars.³⁰

No less important for the translator are glossaries and lexicons which allow him to render the terminology of his texts in as exact, regular and unarbitrary a fashion as is humanly possible. The need for such aids to translation was realized by the Tibetans in the early ninth century also when an invaluable glossary of Sanskrit terms with their Tibetan equivalents, the *Mahāvyutpatti*, was compiled. The *Mahāvyutpatti* or *Bye brag tu rtogs byed chen po* contains the 'official' terminological equivalents

30 See recently D. Seyfort Rugg, 'On translating the Buddhist canon', in: Perala Ratnam (ed.), *Studies in Indo-Asian art and culture*, vol. 3 (Raghu Vira Commemoration Volume, New Delhi, 1973).

accepted for translation according to the principles of the 'new language' as decreed by the Tibetan monarch. Later this glossary had added to it Mongolian and Chinese equivalents.³¹ The main body of the above-mentioned *Dag yig mkas pa'i 'byuñ gnas* is an example of such a Tibetan-Mongolian glossary from the eighteenth century. This is the sort of material that translators will now be placing in their computerized data banks.

X

Today it is hardly possible to regulate translators and their work by decree, nor would it be desirable to attempt to impose uniformity by such means. Yet it will be in the interest of translators and their readers to develop systems of terminological equivalences that are as regular, unarbitrary and well thought-out as is humanly possible. Some progress has been made in this direction, but it would hardly be realistic to expect that one single terminological system can be developed in the foreseeable future for lexicons or databases in any given European target-language.

In view of the inspiring precedents mentioned above – and in view of the favourable attitude to translation adopted in practice by both the Śrāvakayānist and Mahāyānist schools of Buddhism which have not hesitated to render their Sūtras and Śāstras into often unrelated languages in Central and East Asia for the sake of peoples of a wide variety of cultures, and of the fact that these schools are now in the process of doing the same thing also in Europe and America – contemporary translators of Tibetan and Sanskrit texts have behind them a long tradition of Buddhist scholarship on which they can draw and from the experience of which they have much to learn.

An outstanding example of a translation answering the requirements outlined above was the rendering from Sanskrit and Tibetan of twelve

31 The standard editions of this Sanskrit-Tibetan lexicon are R. Sakaki's (Kyōto, 1916), which in addition contains Chinese (and Japanese) equivalents, and *A new critical edition of the Mahāvīyūtpatti* by Y. Ishihama and Y. Fukuda (Tōkyō, 1989), which in addition contains Mongolian equivalents. On the unreliability of the Manchu-period Chinese equivalents in Sakaki's edition, see J. May, *Hōbōgin*, Quatrième Fascicule (Paris and Tōkyō, 1967), Supplément, p. v. On the Mongolian equivalents, see A. Sárközi, 'Some words on the Mongolian *Mahāvīyūtpatti*', *Acta Orientalia Hungarica* 34 (1980), p. 219 ff.; and P. Aalto, 'From Sanskrit into Mongolian', in: E. Kahrs (ed.), *Kalyānamitrārāgaṇam, Essays in honour of Nils Simonsson* (Oslo, 1986), p. 1 ff.

chapters of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* together with the corresponding verses of Nāgārjuna's *Madhyamakakārikās* published in 1959 by the dedicatee of this article.