

## Heart Murmurs: Some Problems with Conze's *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*<sup>1</sup>

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In his critical edition of the Sanskrit text of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, first published in 1948, Edward Conze treated the verb *vyavalokayati* as intransitive and declined *pañcaskandha* as nominative plural, making the first sentence in the text difficult to parse. A comparison of some of the extant manuscripts, the canonical versions in Chinese and Tibetan, the Tibetan manuscripts found at Dūnhuáng, and the Indian commentaries preserved in Tibetan shows that they all understand *vyavalokayati* to be transitive and thus requiring an object. They also show that the most obvious object for *vyavalokayati* is *pañcaskandha*. I show that a simple amendment to the critical edition solves these and two other minor problems with the Sanskrit text. Conze's own translation not only reflects the grammatical problems of his Sanskrit edition, but may give us insights into the reasoning behind his Sanskrit text by highlighting the role his religious faith played in his reading of the text.

### Introduction

In this article I will examine some minor details in Edward Conze's critical edition of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*, or Heart Sutra, with particular attention to the

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short text. The critical edition was originally published along with some critical comments in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1948); then again with minor changes and notes on several more Nepalese manuscripts in *Thirty Years of Buddhist Studies* (1967).<sup>2</sup> A translation and commentary of the short text appears in *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (1st ed. 1958; 2nd ed. 1975a); while in *Perfect Wisdom* (1973) Conze published translations of both the long and short texts (which appear to be based on the 1948 Sanskrit edition). Conze gave each source text a code, and this article uses the codes found in Conze (1967: 154).<sup>3</sup>

The argument presented here is that Conze failed to make a small, but obvious and necessary correction to his Sanskrit short text, at some cost to the sense of the passage concerned. Since the alternate reading occurs in several of his sources we want to try to understand why he made the choice he did. I argue that Conze's choice was motivated by his Buddhist faith as expressed in his translation and commentary of the *Heart Sutra*. That philology lost out to mythology. We'll begin by examining Conze's short text, then move on to his long text, the Chinese and Tibetan versions, and Indian commentaries preserved in Tibetan before suggesting a solution to the problems identified.

In producing a critical edition of this text Conze had access to two previously published editions (Müller 1881, Shaku 1923) as well as many manuscript and epigraphic versions of the Sanskrit: twelve Nepalese versions; six from China; two from Japan (in several transcriptions); as well as translations from the Chinese and Tibetan Canons. The two Japanese manuscripts were the basis of editions of the short and long texts by Max Müller (1881<sup>4</sup> = Conze J<sup>a</sup>, J<sup>b</sup>). The edition by Shaku Hannyā (1923 = Conze J<sup>b</sup>) is largely based on the same Japanese manuscripts as Müller, but also references a Tibetan Canonical version.<sup>5</sup> Though Conze cites D. T. Suzuki (1934) as an "edition" in fact, it merely reproduces Müller's short text. Vaidya's (1961) edition is also based on Müller (1884) and is not mentioned by Conze. In preparing the following analysis, Conze's sources were rechecked directly where possible rather than relying on his notes – see *Editions of the Sanskrit Text* below.

<sup>2</sup>The 1967 article has more sources, but the 1948 ed. gives much fuller bibliographical information; and there are minor differences in some passages, so the two are generally used together.

<sup>3</sup>In this code N=Nepalese; J=Japanese; and C=Chinese. The superscript letters are sequential.

<sup>4</sup>Müller had access to a photograph of the manuscript, as well as two copies, one made before considerable damage had occurred to the manuscript.

<sup>5</sup>Shaku does not specify which he used. Comparison with Silk (1994) shows that his version is a variant of Recension A, but it does not precisely match any of Silk's exemplars.

As Conze's notes show, variations occur at every point in the text. Even the earliest extant Sanskrit manuscript, from Japan and traditionally dated 609 CE, is obviously corrupt in places.<sup>6</sup> Bendall's (1883) catalogue of Sanskrit manuscripts describes one of the Nepalese manuscripts:

“Our black-paper MS., Add. 1485 (A.D. 1677), has the appearance of being written to be looked at rather than to be read. The usual case, indeed, with these MSS. is that the letters are hard to distinguish and the readings corrupt and barbarous.”<sup>7</sup>

This judgement is probably overly harsh. The text is certainly difficult to read and contains some mistakes, but it is far from barbarous. The idea that a text would be written to be looked at, however, is not far-fetched. A text like the *Heart Sutra* was most likely learned and commented on primarily as an oral text.<sup>8</sup> As Donald Lopez says, “It is recited daily in Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean temples and monasteries, and we have evidence of its recitation in India”. (1996: 5) However, it also existed in an atmosphere described by Gregory Schopen (1975) as a “cult of the book” where sutras themselves were the object of worship.<sup>9</sup> As such, copying the text was also seen as an important practice.<sup>10</sup>

The variety in the “corrupt and barbarous” manuscripts meant that the task of creating a critical edition was difficult. The editor was forced to make many decisions about the correct reading. The decisions that concern us here relate to the first sentence of the short text, but also have implications for the long text.

## Conze's text

Conze's Roman script Sanskrit (1948) and translation (1975a) read:

<sup>6</sup>The date, four decades before Xuánzàng's Chinese version T 251, is dubious as well. Georg Bühler notes in Müller (1881) that a comparison of the script with Indian manuscripts and inscriptions argues for a date in the 8th century. He hypothesises that all of those later scribes and stone masons of other editions were deliberately using archaic forms, but this is rather far-fetched. The simpler hypothesis is that the Hōryūji manuscript is late, though it is still probably the oldest extant Sanskrit manuscript. Note also that the same ms. contains a copy of the *Uṣṇiṣavijaya-dhāraṇī Sūtra*, which was not translated into Chinese until 679 though it may have been known much earlier. (Copp 2014: 158)

<sup>7</sup>Conze himself refers to the “the execrable nature of the Nepalese Mss.” in the preface to *The Large Sutra on perfect Wisdom* (1975b: x)

<sup>8</sup>This is how the present author first learned it.

<sup>9</sup>For a summary of the cult of the book see also Nattier (2003:184-86).

<sup>10</sup>Many fine examples of calligraphy of the *Hṛdaya* can be seen in Stevens (1995).

ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitā-caryāṃ  
caramāṇo vyavalokayati sma: pañca-skandhās tāṃś ca svabhāva-  
śūnyān paśyati sma.

Avalokita, the Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was *moving* in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond. He *looked down* from on high, He *beheld* but five heaps, and *saw* that in their own-being they were empty. (Emphasis added; verbs are in italics to facilitate the discussion below)

The problems that concern us here involve the verb *vyavalokayati sma*, particularly whether or not it is transitive; the declension of *pañcaskandha*; the way editors have punctuated the Sanskrit; and the placement of *ca*.

Note that in translation Conze breaks the compound name Āryāvalokiteśvara into its major units: *ārya*, *avalokita* and *īśvara*; then takes *ārya* and *īśvara* together as epithets, “Holy Lord”, and *avalokita* as a proper name. There are of course precedents for treating the name as Avalokita. Though the *Heart Sutra* doesn't use this form, Śāntideva cites it in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*: “And the Lord Avalokita...” (*taṃ cāvalokitaṃ nāthaṃ...* 2.51). This detail is important partly because it allows Conze to highlight the *ava-* prefix that generally means “downwards”. In fact he glosses the name: “Avalokiteśvara is called Avalokita because he ‘looks down’ compassionately on this world” (1975a: 78). By isolating and emphasising the name *Ava-lokita* Conze is (probably consciously) invoking the myth of Avalokiteśvara. This sense is reinforced by his capitalisation of the pronoun, “He”, when referring to the bodhisattva in imitation of Christians referring to their god.

Monier-Williams' *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (MW) and Edgerton's *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary* (BHSD) agree that *avalokita* means “seen, viewed, observed; a look, gaze”. Peter Alan Roberts (2012: 236-7) points out that the word *avalokita* has a different meaning in the *Mahāvastu*, which contains two sub-texts both called *Avalokita Sutra*. According to Roberts, because the *Mahāvastu* is the product of the Lokottaravādin branch of the Mahāsāṅghika sect, it may well represent a kind of proto-Mahāyāna view of what the word means. “In the *Avalokita Sūtras*, *avalokita* does not refer to a being, but means that which has been seen by those who have crossed over *saṃsāra*, and is therefore a synonym for enlightenment.” (Roberts 2012: 7).

Despite this “looking down” is a broadly accepted translation of *ava√lok* apparently based on the elements *ava-* “downwards” and *√lok* “to look”. This is confirmed for example by the Indian commentaries preserved in Tibetan, viz. “Because he looks down on all sentient beings at all times and in all ways with great love and compassion, he is the one who looks down (*avalokita*)” (Lopez 1988: 43); “Because he is superior and is the lord who looks down, he is called the ‘Noble Lord Who Looks Down (*Āryāvalokiteśvara*)’” (Vimalamitra in Lopez 1996: 52). Looking down on the world and its inhabitants is one of the prominent characteristics of this figure in Buddhist mythology.

This observation about the story of Avalokiteśvara provides a clue to understanding how Conze translates this passage. It may well have been this that led Conze to treat *vyavalokayati sma* as an intransitive verb meaning “he looked down”. The verb *vyava√lok* is clearly related to *ava√lok* as it simply adds the prefix *vi*. BHS D suggests that it means “inspect, examine, scrutinise”. MW does not list *vyava√lok*, but the entry in the *Pali Text Society Dictionary* for the Pāli equivalent, *voloketi*, confirms the usage. BHS D gives several examples of the verb that show it being used transitively. Contrarily, according to Conze’s translation, the gaze of Avalokiteśvara has no specific object. “He” is simply “up there”, looking down in a general kind of way seeing “but five heaps”. Treating *vyava√lok* as intransitive causes several downstream problems.

The next word in the sentence appears in the various manuscripts in two forms (with *sandhi* changes and scribal errors): nominative plural (*pañcaskandhāḥ*) and accusative plural (*pañcaskandhān*). Conze chooses the nominative even though in his translation the *skandhas* are “beheld” implying that they are the object of a verb “to see” or “to look” and thus that they ought to be in the accusative. Thus, it’s not clear how Conze arrives at “He beheld but five heaps”. Also, the implication of “but” in the translation is that Avalokiteśvara could *only* see “five heaps”. The text does not state such a limitation, though it is consistent with Buddhist doctrine generally.

Another consequence is that Conze sees *vyavalokayati sma* as the end of a sentence and chooses to mark the perceived hiatus after *vyavalokayati sma* with a colon. Most of the long text manuscripts have a *daṇḍa* here, though most of the short texts have no punctuation at all, e.g. there is none in Müller (1881), Milloué (1883), Mironov (1933) or Benveniste (1940) (Conze’s J<sup>a</sup>, J<sup>b</sup>, C<sup>b</sup>, C<sup>c</sup>, C<sup>d</sup>, C<sup>e</sup>, and C<sup>g</sup>). Thus Conze may merely be repeating the practice of previous redactors or editors who added punctuation, but it must have made sense to him to retain their

additions here.

Making *vyavalokayati sma* the end of the sentence also creates a problem with the placement of *ca*. Here *ca* seems to be joining two sentences each with its own verb. Conze's commentary confirms that he sees *pañcaskandhās* as forming part of a "second sentence" (1975a: 79). If this is so then the second sentence must begin with *tāmś* because of the position of *ca*. In Conze's translation there are four verbs (highlighted above), while in Sanskrit there are three verbal forms: *caramāṇaḥ*, *vyavalokayati sma*, and *paśyati sma*; and thus three phrases. *Pañcaskandhāḥ* cannot be the agent of the sentence with the verb *paśyati sma*, since clearly it was Avalokiteśvara who "saw". And thus, *pañcaskandhāḥ*, a nominative plural in Conze's edition, has no obvious relationship to the words around it. It is perhaps this that forces him to use four phrases in English where the Sanskrit has three.

There is one more problem that emerges from Conze's translation of this passage that is incidental, but worth noting. Where Conze has "... and saw that in their own-being they were empty." it suggests that the *skandhas* have an "own-being" (*svabhāva*) which is empty. In Prajñāpāramitā thought generally we expect to read that *dharmas* and *skandhas* lack (i.e. are empty of) *svabhāva*. Donald Lopez, for example, uses the phrase "empty of intrinsic/inherent existence" throughout his studies of the Tibetan translations of the Indian *Heart Sutra* commentaries (1998, 1996). Also compare Conze's translation of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*: "Since therefore *all dharmas are without own-being*, what is that form, etc., which cannot be seized, and which is something uncreated? Thus the fact that *all dharmas are without own-being* is the same as the fact that they are uncreated." (2006: 92. Emphasis added). Surely *svabhāvaśūnyān* must be a *tatpuruṣa* meaning "the *skandhas* are empty of *svabhāva*" rather than the "*skandhas* have *svabhāva* which is empty".

Since Conze understands the short text to be a condensation of the long text (1948: 34; 1967: 150) it may be that his edition of the long text sheds light on these problems.

### Long text

The phrase we are interested in occurs in two variations in the long text: first in a description of what Avalokiteśvara is doing; and second in response to the question posed by Śāriputra about what a practitioner ought to do.

In the first case – describing the activity of Avalokiteśvara – Conze (1967: 149) has:

*tena ca samayena Ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo mahāsattvo gam-  
bhīrāyāṃ prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caryāṃ caramāṇa evaṃ vyavalokayati  
sma: pañca-skandhās tāṃś ca svabhāva-śūnyān vyavalokayati.*

Conze retains more or less the same syntax as the short text with two changes. Firstly the addition of *evaṃ* after *caramāṇa*; and secondly the verb *paśyati sma* is replaced by *vyavalokayati* with dropping of the periphrastic past particle *sma*.

Regarding the latter, Müller's long text has the same change of verb (1881: 51-54; = Conze J<sup>b</sup>). The two Tibetan recensions seem to reflect a similar change (see below). There are no Sanskrit manuscript sources that do not have a change in verb from *paśyati sma* to *vyavalokayati* suggesting that it occurred in the progenitor of all the extant versions of the long text. In the short text in its most basic sense, Avalokiteśvara *looked* (*vyava√lok*)<sup>11</sup> and *saw* (*√drś*); but in the long text, he *looked* and *looks*. Conze's choice of two different translations of *vyavalokayati* in his long text – "looked" and "surveyed" (1973: 140) – obscures the problem of exchanging *paśyati* for *vyavalokayati*.

At first glance, the dropping of the particle *sma* from the second occurrence of *vyavalokayati* looks like a change of tense. However, as noted in Speyer (1886), the use of *sma* in an historical present is variable. It can be and is dropped in many situations when the context makes it redundant.<sup>12</sup> Arguably, this is true of the present passage. That said several of Conze's manuscript sources have *vyavalokayati sma* here (e.g. Nb, Ne, Ce, Jb) and he retains *sma* in the counterpart of this passage in the short text. It would have been more consistent to retain it here also. It's possible that the two Tibetan recensions of the long text display different ways of dealing with this problem (see note 22 below).

In the second case – in response to Śāriputra's question – Conze's two editions (1948, 1967) and the translation (1973) show him equivocating. His translation of the long text (1973:140) contains two phrases cut into two paragraphs:

“The son or daughter of good family who wants to course in the  
course of this deep perfection of wisdom should thus consider:

<sup>11</sup>I am aware that *vyava√lok* does not simply mean 'to look' but I want to highlight the fundamental difference between a verb deriving from *√lok* and one deriving from *√drś*; and *vyava√lok* retains a clear semantic relationship to the act of looking.

<sup>12</sup>I'm grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing out this nuance.

There are the five skandhas, and those he sees in their own-being as empty.”

In the earlier Sanskrit edition (1948: 34) he gives the first part of the passage as:

*yaḥ kaścic Chāriputra kulaputro vā kuladuhitā vā asyāṃ gambhīrāyāṃ  
prajñāpāramitāyāṃ caryāṃ cartukāmas tenaivaṃ vyavalokitavyaṃ.*

This, Conze tells us, concludes the introduction of the long text, and he ends with a full stop. He says the short text condenses the whole introduction to “*ārya-avalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitā-caryāṃ caramāṇo vyavalokayati sma.*” Again with a full stop in (1948: 34) though this is replaced with a colon in (1967). The text common to both then continues:

*pañca skandhās tāṃśca svabhāva-śūnyān paśyati sma.*

Conze is aware that there is a variant reading in two manuscripts (N<sup>b</sup> and N<sup>c</sup>) which add “*pañcaskandhān svabhāvaśūnyān vyavalokitavyaṃ*” after the first *vyavalokitavyaṃ* (1948: 35: n.7-8). In 1948 he appears to conflate this variant with the phrase from the short text, i.e. *pañca-skandhās tāṃś ca svabhāvaśūnyān paśyati sma.* He includes it in the translation of the long text in a way that suggests a hybrid of the two: “There are the five skandhas, and those he sees in their own-being as empty.” (1973: 140)

That this is a conflation is indicated by his translation note that the verb is “*vyavalokayati*” (1973: 140, n. 3) which is not “to see” but “to look”; and by the fact that the edition footnote is connected with the beginning of the short text, rather than the end of the long text; and we know that the short text definitely has *paśyati*. Also the translation begins a new paragraph with “There are the five skandhas...” but equivocates by ending the previous paragraph with a colon rather than a full stop. It is as though Conze unconsciously sees the problem in ending the sentence where he does, but cannot see an alternative, so he tries to mitigate the problem using punctuation.

Despite the two manuscript sources for the variant reading both having *pañca-skandhān* (the accusative plural) agreeing with *svabhāvaśūnyān*, Conze opts to read it as nominative. Sanskrit convention then allows him to infer a verb “there are” (such as *santi* or *bhavanti*) to account for the nominative case. The phrase becomes a simple assertion of the existence of five *skandhas*. This is not implausible, but there is a more straightforward reading, which I will give below.

In the later edition (1967), the second phrase is dropped altogether from the long text. The introduction of the long text ends with *vyavalokitavyaṃ* followed by a full stop. The short text “condensation” of the introduction now includes the phrase beginning with “*pañca-skandhās*”. So we can see that the 1973 translation of the long text comes from the 1948 text.

What all this shows is that Conze is committed to treating *vyavalokayati* as an intransitive verb, and *pañcaskandha* as a nominative plural despite it causing him difficulty, and despite his attempts to resolve the problems in his translations.

Since, following Nattier (1992), we now know that the prototype for the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* was most likely Xuánzàng's Chinese short text, it may be profitable at this point to examine the Chinese recensions.

### Chinese texts

Xuánzàng's Chinese version (T 251), has:

觀自在菩薩行深般若波羅蜜多時，照見五蘊皆空，度一切苦厄。

*Guānzìzài púsà xíng shēn bōrěbōluómìduō<sup>13</sup> shí, zhàojiàn wǔyùn jiē kōng, dù yīqiè kǔ è.*

When Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva practised the deep perfection of wisdom, he clearly observed that all the five *skandhas* were empty, and went beyond all states of suffering.

As noted by others the last phrase in Chinese, 度一切苦厄, has no corresponding phrase in any Sanskrit source.<sup>14</sup> In the first two phrases there are two verbs: firstly 行 *xíng* “practice” which (construed with the character 時 “time”) means “while/when practising” and corresponds to *caramāṇa*; and secondly 照見 *zhàojiàn*, a difficult term<sup>15</sup> corresponding probably to *vyavalokayati sma*, but

<sup>13</sup>般若波羅蜜多 *bōrěbōluómìduō* transcribes *prajñāpāramitā*. The Pinyin transcription does not, of course, capture the pronunciation of Xuánzàng's (pre-Mandarin) Early Middle Chinese accurately.

<sup>14</sup>To my knowledge, there is no plausible explanation for the absence of this phrase in the Sanskrit. It seems likely that the Chinese archetype used for the first Sanskrit translation lacked this phrase and thus cannot have been either T 250 or T 251.

<sup>15</sup>The *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* definition (sv. 照見) includes, “To shed light on; to observe clearly; to come to understand. To take a view. To distinguish; to determine by seeing.”

incorporating *paśyati sma*, i.e. both looking and seeing. 照 can also have a sense of “reflecting”, or “illuminating”, or perhaps “comparing”; while 見 just means “to see”; and on its own would usually correspond directly to *paśyati*. The two characters can be read like a verbal compound “illuminate and see”, or 照 can be adverbial, giving meanings of the type “clearly see, distinguish”. In Yu (2000) several experts in Chinese literature with varying knowledge of Buddhology approach the *Hṛdaya* as literature and are split on how to interpret this phrase. Stephen F. Teiser (Yu 2000: 113) translates 照見 as “illuminating vision” (照 as an adverb), while Stephen H West (116) opts for “Shining upon and making manifest” (照見 as a verbal compound). Michael A. Fuller does not translate, but expresses the ambiguity: “I encounter a metaphor when it would have been simpler *not* to have one: why *zhao* [i.e. 照]? What is the lore here? Does the wisdom emit light? That is, is such wisdom an active use of the mind that engages the phenomena of the world, or is it simply receptive?” (119).

The Chinese has a two phrase structure: practising deep perfection of wisdom and observing/seeing the *skandhas*. The difference is that the Sanskrit short text uses two separate verbs for “looking” (*vyava√lok*) and “seeing” (*√drś*). We have to keep in mind that while much of the text is a quotation from existing Buddhist texts, this introductory passage appears to have been composed in China by a Chinese Buddhist. We cannot simply treat 照見 as a translation of a Sanskrit term because Nattier (1992) showed that the opposite is more likely to be true. However, for the Sanskrit text to be a plausible translation, the translator who made it must have understood 照 as an adverb.

The version attributed to Kumārajīva (T 250), and traditionally dated ca. 400 CE<sup>16</sup> begins:

觀世音菩薩，行深般若波羅蜜時，照見五陰空，度一切苦厄。  
Guānshìyīn púsà, xíng shēn bōrěbōluómì shí, zhàojiàn wǔyīn kōng,  
dù yīqiè kǔ è.

The relevant phrase is 照見五陰空 “He observed that the five skandhas are empty.” Though there are minor differences between the two versions, such as a different transcription for Avalokiteśvara, dropping the last character of 般若波

<sup>16</sup>This date is disputed as this text is absent from earlier catalogues which list Kumārajīva’s translations. It’s likely that this text has been edited to more closely conform with Kumārajīva’s *Long Perfection of Wisdom* text translation and attributed to him in retrospect (Conze 1948: 38; Nattier 1992: 184ff.).

羅蜜多, a different character for *skandha* (陰 instead of 蘊) and dropping the redundant 皆 “all”, the two versions are essentially the same in this passage.

The remaining Chinese versions are all long texts. T 253, translated by Prajñā ca. 788 CE, follows Xuánzàng where possible and his phrasing here is very close to T 251: 名觀自在。行深般若波羅蜜多時，照見五蘊皆空，離諸苦厄。 This is more or less identical to the opening of Xuánzàng's short text.

T 252, translated by 法月 Fǎyuè (Skt. \*Dharmacandra?), reads:

照見五蘊自性皆空。彼了知五蘊自性皆空

“Clearly observing (照見) that the five skandhas were empty of self-existence (自性); he knew (了知) the five skandhas were empty of self-existence.”

This appears to involve the widely used metaphor that *seeing is knowing*. When Avalokiteśvara “sees” that the five skandhas are empty of self-existence in Sanskrit, we understand him to “know” this. Fǎyuè concretises the metaphor. If we take seeing and knowing as synonymous, then T 252 appears to replicate the Sanskrit verbal distinction between looking and seeing, whereas Xuánzàng's version does not.

T 254 (translated by Prajñācakra, 861 CE) and T 257 (translated by Dānapāla, 1005 CE) have 照見五蘊自性皆空 “He observed that the five skandhas were all empty of self-existence” without the follow-up provided by T 252.

T 255 (translated from the Tibetan by Fǎchéng 法成 856 CE) has another variation: 觀察照見五蘊體性悉皆是空. This largely seems to add reinforcement to a text like T 257: here 觀察 means “perceive, investigate” and is thus a synonym of 照見; 體 and 性 can both mean *svabhāva*; while 悉 “fully, wholly” is a synonym for 皆 “all”.

This brief survey shows that in each case the verbs for looking and/or seeing are transitive and that Avalokiteśvara's gaze is specifically on the *skandhas* in the Chinese texts.

## Tibetan Texts

No translation of the short text version of the *Hṛdaya* was included in the Tibetan Kanjur. However, a number of manuscripts of a translation of the short text into Tibetan were discovered at Dūnhuáng. Of these, just two have been published in any form: Or8212/77 is dated to the 9th century and appears as an

image in Zwalf (1985) and another (high resolution) image on the International Dūnhuáng Project website; and India Office Library (IOL) catalogue #120(26) is transcribed and commented in Ueyama (1965).<sup>17</sup> Jan Nattier has examined several other manuscripts and confirms that IOL #120(26) is typical. Nattier transcribes and translates:<sup>18</sup>

*'di ltar 'phags pa kun du spyang ras gzigs gyi dbang po byang chub sems dpa' shes rab gyi pha rol du phyin pa zab mo spyad pa spyod pa'i tshe // rnam par bltas na lnga phung de dag ngo bo nyid gyis stong par mthong ngo //*<sup>19</sup>

“In this way, at the time when the Noble Avalokiteśvara bodhisattva was practicing the practice of the profound *prajñāpāramitā*, when he looked (*rnam par bltas na*) [at them] he saw (*mthong ngo*) the five *skandhas* as devoid of essence (*ngo bo nyid, svabhāva*).”

Here the verb “when he looked” (*rnam pas bltas na*) does not have an explicit object, but it need not be read as intransitive since, as Nattier’s translation suggests, there is an implied object, i.e. when he looked *at the five skandhas*. Also note that this text has two different verbs: *rnam pas bltas* corresponds to Sanskrit *vyava√lok* and *mthong* corresponds to *√dṛś*. Thus, the Dūnhuáng texts confirm the observations made in looking at the Chinese texts.

IOL #120(26) would seem to be a translation from a Sanskrit source rather than either of the extant Chinese short texts (T 250 and T 251), but certain features suggest a Chinese influence. The addition of the particle *na* with the verb *rnam pas blta* which conveys “when” is suggestive of the Chinese texts which use the two characters 行 and 時 to convey, “when he was practising”. Also in paragraph L (Silk 1994: 124-125) IOL #120(26) has *kha dog dang... myed* “and no colours” for A *gzugs med* “without form” or B *gzugs med do* “it is without form”. This is

<sup>17</sup>I’m grateful to the anonymous reviewer for bringing these references to my attention and outlining what the text says.

<sup>18</sup>Jan Nattier, personal communication, 7 Feb 2015.

<sup>19</sup>Ueyama (1965: 781) transcribes, *ḥdi ltar ḥphags pa kun tu spyang ras gzigs kyi dbaṅ po byaṅ chub sems dpaḥ śes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa zab mo spyad pa spyod paḥi tše // rnam par bltas na lña chuṅ de dag ṅo bo ṅid kyis ston par mthon ṅo //*. Or8212/77 omits *rnam par bltas na* from beginning of the last sentence and reads: *'di lta 'phags pa kun tu spyang ras gzigs gyi dbang po byang chub sems dpa' shes rab gyi pha rol tu phyin pa zab mo dpyad spyod pa'i tshe // [rnam par bltas na] lña chuṅ de dag ṅo pa ṅid kyis ston par mthon ṅo //*. My thanks to Joy Vriens for help with transcribing Or8212/77.

reminiscent of T 251 無色 *wú sè*, where 色 is the standard translation for Sanskrit *rūpa*, but literally means “colour”.

As with the Sanskrit and Chinese, comparing the Tibetan translations of the long text is less straight-forward.<sup>20</sup> The long text was preserved in the transmitted Tibetan canons in two major recensions (A and B) and multiple variations associated with different editions of the Kanjur. The history of the text in Tibetan is almost as complex as the history in Sanskrit. However Silk (1994) has provided us with a thorough critical edition based on exemplars of 14 editions. Tibetan canonical versions of the Heart Sutra have a significant difference to the Sanskrit in the passages we are considering. In the first case, describing the activities of Avalokiteśvara (Recension A; paragraph E):

*yang de'i tshes byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug shes rba kyi pha rol tu phyin pa zab mo spyod pa nyid la rnam par lta zhing | phung po lnga po de dag la yang rang bzhin gyis stong par rnam par lta'o |* (Silk 1994: 110)<sup>21</sup>

Now, at that time the Bodhisattva, mahāsattva Ārya Avalokiteśvara, observing the practice itself of the profound Perfection of Wisdom, observed that even those five aggregates are intrinsically empty. (Silk 1994: 174-5)<sup>22</sup>

Here Avalokiteśvara's gaze has a definite object. He observes “the practice of the profound Perfection of Wisdom”. Tibetan *spyod pa nyid la* “practice itself” (A) or *spyod pa* “practice” (B) represents Sanskrit *caryā* and is the object of the verb in the first phrase of the sentence. It seems that Vimalamitra, who translated this text into Tibetan, had a version with the present participle *caramāṇo* missing (as do N<sup>b</sup> and N<sup>c</sup>). Both Tibetan recensions only say “the practice of...” and not “practising the practice of” (*caryāṃ caramāṇo* = Tibetan *spyod pa spyad par*). With *caramāṇo*

<sup>20</sup>I'm reliant on the excellent translations and studies by Lopez (1988, 1996) and Silk (1994) to facilitate access to the Tibetan texts. My thanks again to Donald Lopez and Jonathan Silk for generously replying to email queries on the Tibetan text and Tibetan grammar.

<sup>21</sup>Recension B has a *shad* after *chen po*; replaces *rnam par lta zhing* with *rnam par blta ste*; replaces *de dag la yang rnga bzhin ghyis stong* with *dag la de dag ngo nyid kyi stong*. These differences are not significant to the present article.

<sup>22</sup>Silk provides a reasonable disclaimer that his translations are provided as a “guide to the two different recensions for those who do not know the Tibetan language” (1994: 171). His translations are cited in this spirit.

missing, it may well have seemed natural for *caryāṃ* (accusative singular) to be the object of *vyavalokayati sma*. In any case it shows that Vimalamitra understood the verb *vyava√lok* to take an object, and this is true in both recensions and all the variant readings.

The verb “observe” is *rnam par lta* (A) or *rnam par blta* (B), where *rnam par* is used to indicate the prefix *vi-* in its sense of “completely, fully”; and *lta* or *blta* means “to see”.<sup>23</sup> Thus *rnam par lta* translates *vyavalokayati* and this tells us that the Tibetan texts also had the verb change from *paśyati* to *vyavalokayati* discussed above. The second time it is used, the object observed is “those five skandhas” (*phung po lnga po de dag la*).

In the second passage, the response to Śāriputra’s question (Recension A, Paragraph I) the text says:

*shā ri'i bu rigs kyi bu 'am rigs kyi bu mo gang la la shes rab kyi pha rol  
tu phyin pa zab mo spyod pa spyad par 'dod pa des 'di ltar rnam par  
blta bar bya ste | phung po lnga po de dag kyang rang bzhin gyis stong  
par rnam par yang dag par rjes su blta'o ||* (Silk 1994: 118)

Śāriputra! Whichever gentle son or daughter desires to practice the practice of the profound Perfection of Wisdom should observe thus, and he will behold that even those five aggregates are intrinsically empty. (Silk 1994: 176)

Here the situation is complicated by differences between the recensions. The phrase *'di ltar rnam par blta bar bya* might at first glance appear to have an intransitive verb. The instruction is simply that “he should observe *in this way*” (*'di ltar*). In fact there is an implied object here, “he should observe [things] in this way”.<sup>24</sup> Recension B also continues as per manuscripts N<sup>b</sup>, N<sup>e</sup>, and Vaidya (1961), with a further injunction to observe the five skandhas and in this phrase, the verb is clearly transitive.

<sup>23</sup>The anonymous reviewer points out that *lta* is the present stem of the verb and that *blta* is actually a future stem. They further suggest that at the end of passage E in Recension B (*rnam par blta 'o*) the future form might be the result of miscopying. An original *rnam par bltas 'so* (past stem) is typically abbreviated in manuscripts as *rnam par bltas'o* and may subsequently have been miscopied as *rnam par blta 'o*. This could indicate that the two recensions attempt to handle the dropping of the periphrastic past marker *sma* in the Sanskrit text in different ways.

<sup>24</sup>I'm grateful to the anonymous reviewer for alerting me to this reading.

Recension B is the same up to “...*'dod pa des |*” but misses out “*di ltar rnam par blta bar bya ste*”, and continues “*phung po lnga po de dag ngo bo nyid kyis stong par yang dag par rjes su mthong ba de ltar blta bar bya ste |*”. The result is similar however.

Śāriputra! Whichever gentle son or daughter desires to practice the practice of the profound Perfection of Wisdom, he remarks that those five aggregates are intrinsically empty, and he should observe thus: (Silk 1994: 177)<sup>25</sup>

Again the verb “to see” (*lta ba*) is used intransitively “he should see thus” (*blta bar bya ste*). And thus the two Tibetan recensions agree on this point. Presumably, the Tibetan text faithfully records the usage in a Sanskrit original that is different from our extant versions. The structure of these sentences is less problematic than the Sanskrit in the same way that Conze’s English is – they have been constructed to make sense of the difficulty. Note that in Recension B, Paragraph I that, as in Conze (1973), the implied object of observation is the content of the rest of the text.

Paragraph I may have been an influence on Conze, though it’s not clear from his notes whether he consulted the Tibetan, let alone which recension. A Tibetan translation is noted in the Bibliography of Conze (1948) in two Kanjurs – the Peking and Derge.

The Indian commentators recorded in Tibetan translation have very little to say about this part of the sutra. Only two comment directly on the words of this passage. They both take *vyava√lok* as transitive and its object as the five *skandhas*. “Here, the Bhagavan, the noble Avalokiteśvara, views the categories of phenomena with the supramundane wisdom of subsequent attainment (*prṣṭalabdha-jñāna*)” (Kamalaśīla in Lopez 1996: 107). “The object that is viewed is the aggregates” (Śrīsimha in Lopez 1996: 111). Thus, the Indian commentators whose work is preserved in Tibetan also understand *vyava√lok* as a transitive verb.

Having assembled the evidence we can now proceed to revisit the problems that were outlined at the beginning of this article and see how Conze might have made a better choice.

<sup>25</sup>The anonymous reviewer comments that “remarks” is an unusual translation for *rjes su mthong ba* where *rjes su* is the regular equivalent of the Sanskrit prefix *anu-* and *mthong ba* means ‘to see’ and is the equivalent of Sanskrit  $\sqrt{dr̥ṣ}$  or  $\sqrt{paś}$ ; we expect *anu√paś* ‘he looks at’, ‘he perceives’ or ‘he notices’.

## Solution

Beginning with the interpretation of *vyavalokayati sma* as intransitive, Conze sets in motion a domino effect producing further problems in understanding the rest of the words in this sentence and how they fit together. These problems caused him some difficulty judging by his treatment of the long text. There is a simple solution to all of these problems which is suggested by his sources themselves. This is that *vyavalokayati sma* is a transitive verb; and *pañcaskandhās* is in fact an accusative plural, *pañcaskandhān*, and the object of *vyavalokayati sma*. Although usual Sanskrit word order is “subject object verb” this is not fixed and there is no reason it should not be “subject verb object” as here.

This change can be accomplished simply by adding an *anusvāra* above *dhā* in the existing text; *pañcaskandhās* (nominative) is transformed into *pañcaskandhāṃs* (accusative).<sup>26</sup> The loss or addition of *anusvāra* is one of the most common errors that occur in copies of Sanskrit manuscripts, and is rife in the manuscripts of the *Heart Sutra* itself, so it is plausible that our text lost one; and several of our sources have *-dhāṃs* or *-dhān*. We now also see that *tāṃs* refers back to *pañcaskandhān*.

This tiny change improves the text considerably and allows us to dispense with extraneous punctuation, since now *ca* unequivocally marks the boundary of the two sentences. The amended passage now reads (with my translation):

*āryāvalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo gambhīrāṃ prajñāpāramitācaryāṃ  
caramāṇo vyavalokayati sma pañcaskandhāṃs tāṃs ca svabhāva-  
śūnyān paśyati sma.*

Practising the deep practice of the perfection of wisdom, the bodhisattva Noble Avalokiteśvara examined the five *skandhas* and saw them to be empty of self-existence.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Sanskrit *sandhi* rules demand that *-ān* followed by *t* should change to *-āṃs*, just as *tān* changes to *tāṃs* when followed by *ca*.

<sup>27</sup>I've left “*skandhas*” untranslated because the single word translations employed to date do more to obscure the meaning than reveal it. “Aggregates”, though widely used, is particularly opaque and unhelpful. In my view the best explanation of what the *skandhas* (Pāli: *khandhas*) represent is Sue Hamilton (2000). Hamilton shows that in the Pāli texts the *khandhas* represent the “factors of experience” or even the “experiencing factors” with the emphasis on experience rather than on reality. Gombrich links the *skandhas qua* experiencing processes to extended use of fire as a metaphor for unawakened experience, drawing on Vedic imagery and visible in the characterisation of the

Not only is the grammar of the Sanskrit improved, but the result is now more clearly consistent with the Chinese short texts.

The proposed amendment allows us to see something else that has been obscured by Conze. We now see that what Avalokiteśvara was doing when he practiced the perfection of wisdom was examining the *skandhas*. This is consistent with Xuánzàng's Chinese, and also with Śrīsiṃha's reading as mentioned above. It is also implied in Vimalamitra's commentary: "The very practice that has that object or purpose is *viewing*... In order to indicate how many objects were viewed, it says five aggregates" (Lopez 1996: 54).<sup>28</sup> Examining the *skandhas* is a living practice in Buddhism. For a detailed study of this practice based on Pāli sources see Anālayo (2003: 201ff).

Part of what makes this problem interesting is the possibility that Conze's beliefs about Avalokiteśvara, his faith in the *bodhisattva* looking down from on high, appear to have led him to overlook the grammatical or syntactic problems in his text. The solution was available to him in several of his sources, but he did not employ it. This vividly demonstrates that the redactor/editor/translator is not a neutral player in the process of transmitting texts. As philologists, we are always at risk of believing we know what the text says without being entirely sure why it says that, the more so with a familiar text. It was the student exercise of attempting to parse the grammar of this passage that led me to question Conze's Sanskrit text, which, to my knowledge, had been unchallenged for some sixty years, despite being the subject of intense fascination and scrutiny. For as almost every writer on this text reminds the reader in their introduction: this is probably the most popular Mahāyāna Buddhist text for both scholars and practitioners. Did our very familiarity with the text lead to complacency?

In any case, Conze's work requires checking and updating, since this study has not highlighted all the apparent flaws in his text, or his translations and commentaries. We need a new critical edition of the *Hṛdaya*, which takes into account recent scholarship: especially Nattier's (1992) discovery that the text was composed in Chinese, work on the Tibetan recensions by Jonathan Silk (1994), and the Indian commentaries preserved in Tibetan (Lopez 1988, 1996). The editions of the Chinese Canon no doubt also include variations that ought to be noted in a critical

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*āyatanas* as being aflame (*āditta*) and in such Pāli terms as *upādāna(aggi)khandha* and *nibbāna*. (2009: 111 ff.)

<sup>28</sup>And this is despite the fact that Vimalamitra's text is missing *caramāna* and takes *caryāṃ* as the direct object of *vyaavalokayati sma*.

edition. Considerable attention has been paid to the *Hṛdaya* by Japanese scholars, but almost none of that work is available to non-Japanese speakers. An English language survey of the Japanese literature would be very welcome if anyone were to undertake it. A survey of the Tibetan short texts is also highly desirable to give us a more complete history of the *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*.

## Abbreviations

BHSD	Edgerton's Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary
MW	Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English Dictionary
PED	Pali Text Society, Pali-English Dictionary
T	Taishō Tripiṭaka (CBETA Ed.)

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