

Ungarbling Section VI of the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*

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Abstract

A number of lexical and syntactic problems have already been identified in Section VI of the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* (Conze 1948, 1967, Nattier 1992, Huifeng 2014, Attwood 2018a). A close parallel reading of the Chinese and Sanskrit texts reveals still more problems of both kinds in this passage. The unidiomatic and at times garbled Sanskrit text is consistent with predictions of Nattier’s Chinese origins thesis (1992). The result has been persistent confusion about how to interpret the *Heart Sutra*. The most egregious misinterpretation has been that the negations in Section V represent a metaphysical stance, e.g. that the *pañcā skandhāḥ* etc. *do not exist* full stop. The ungarbled text reveals that the “negations” are phenomenological absences: in the meditative state of emptiness, the *pañcā skandhāḥ* are absent, they do not arise. I try to show that the ideas in the Chinese *Heart Sutra*, appropriately contextualised, can easily be expressed in idiomatic Sanskrit. Finally, I reflect on the historical significance of the Sanskrit translation.

¹Comments by the first anonymous reviewer saved me from a major blunder for which I am grateful.

Introduction

The 《般若波羅蜜多心經》 *Bōrēbōluómìduō-xīnjīng* or *Heart Sutra* is a text with a reputation for being mysterious. However, a number of articles have appeared in the last few years that undermine this reputation and make the *Heart Sutra* seem more like a victim of obscurantism. Grammatical errors in the standard Sanskrit edition produced by Edward Conze (1948, 1967) have made that version of the text impossible to parse in places (Attwood 2015, 2018a). Jan Nattier (1992) showed that the Sanskrit text is actually a Chinese production based on quotes from Kumārajīva’s translation, the 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》 *Móhē-Bōrēbōluómì-jīng* (T 223) or *Large Perfection of Gnosis Sutra* (generically *Dājīng* or *Large Sutra*).² Kumārajīva’s source text must have closely resembled an early version of what we now call the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* or *Perfection of Gnosis Sutra in 25,000 Lines (Pañc)*. Nattier, Matthew Orsborn (writing as Huifeng 2014), and Jayarava Attwood (2017a, 2018b) have further shown that the Sanskrit text contains Chinese idioms and calques.

Being a compilation of reused passages, the *Heart Sutra* fits the early medieval Chinese bibliographical category of *digest text* (抄經 *chāo jīng*), though this is not widely appreciated.³ Hundreds of digest texts were in circulation according to bibliographies of Buddhist texts composed from the 4th to the 7th Century (Storch 2014, Tokuno 1990).

Traditional commentaries have not clarified the meaning of the *Heart Sutra*. Despite all commenting on the same text, exegetes do not seem to have a common point of reference but use the opportunity to expound sectarian doctrines (Wayman 1977: 136; Eckel 1987: 69-70). In other words, the *Heart Sutra* does not provide a common point of reference for commentaries on itself. Modern commentaries have followed this sectarian trend but have also traded on the idea that apparent obscurantism in the *Heart Sutra* was deliberate. In particular, D. T. Suzuki (1934) promoted what he called the “logic of sokuhi”

² “Kumārajīva” is a cipher for a large group of Buddhist monks, led by the Kuchan monk Kumārajīva, who worked collectively to produce the translations that bear his name. His Chinese collaborators had a great deal to do with these texts becoming classics. It is possible that the *Large Sutra* text used to create the *Xīnjīng* was the one embedded in the *Upadeśa* (Commentary) i.e. 《大智度論》 *Dāzhìdùlùn* (T 1509) translated by Kumārajīva concurrently with the *Dājīng* (T 223).

³ Nattier mentions a private communication from Robert Buswell suggesting that the *Heart Sutra* is such a text (1992: 210, n.48). Ji Yun (2012) also argues that the *Heart Sutra* is a digest text.

(i.e. A is not A, therefore it is A) based on his reading of the *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā* as the key to approaching *Prajñāpāramitā* generally. This “logic” was taken up enthusiastically and applied to the *Heart Sutra* by his disciple Edward Conze (1953, 1958) and has become a prominent feature of modern *Heart Sutra* commentaries.

Another contribution to the mystery has been decontextualisation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. The appropriate context has been recovered, to some extent. For example, Matthew Orsborn’s (Huifeng 2014) study of the vocabulary of the *Xīnjīng* revealed that the Translator⁴ misconstrued the Author’s 以無所得故 (*yǐwúsuǒdégu*) as Sanskrit *aprāptivād* “because of a state of non-attainment”. In Kumārajīva’s *Dājīng* (T 223), 以無所得故 regularly represents the Sanskrit word *anupalambhayogena* “by the yoga of nonapprehension”. Where metaphysical readings commonly treat the *Heart Sutra* as an exercise in negation, Orsborn says that this discovery points to the need for an epistemological reading of the *Heart Sutra*. In other words, the *Heart Sutra* does not assert “there is no form” in an unqualified way. Rather it tells us that for one who is engaged in the yoga of nonapprehension there is no experience of form.

Attwood (2017b) picked up this theme, showing that the enigmatic phrase “form is emptiness” (*rūpaṃ śūnyatā*) etc., traced back via *Pañc* to the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (*Aṣṭa*), was originally: “form is an illusion” (*rūpaṃ māyā*). This allows us to read it as a modified version of the well-known Buddhist simile that the experience of form (i.e. the appearance as opposed to the thing itself) is like an illusion (*rūpaṃ māyopamaṃ*). Again this suggests the need to think about the *Heart Sutra* in terms of epistemology rather than metaphysics.

We have a model for this kind of approach in Sue Hamilton’s (2000) epistemological reading of the Pāli suttas in which, the five *khandha* (Skt. *skandha*) are characterised as the apparatus of experience. Our *experiential* world is created by the operation of the five *khandha*. Hamilton shows that the Pāli words *dukkha*, *khandha*, and *loka* all refer to experience, “... all three terms refer in effect to the way one’s experience (*dukkha*), the apparatus of which is one’s *khandhas*, is one’s world (*loka*)” (2000: 205). This hermeneutic may also

⁴ I will use “the Author” to refer to the author, redactor, or composer of the Chinese *Heart Sutra*; while “the Translator” refers to the person who translated it into Sanskrit from Chinese. We have no information about either and cannot even assume that single individuals were responsible, so my use of the singular is simply a narrative device.

be applied to *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. In this view, the point of the *Heart Sutra* is not negation per se; rather, it is describing a state of mind and/or point of view that is only reached through the persistent practice of the yoga of nonapprehension, i.e. by withdrawing attention from sense experience. In the absence of attention, there is no contact (*sparśa*) and *dharma*s qua mental objects do not arise. In this situation, the apparatus of sense experience ceases to produce experiences and one's phenomenal world disappears without the loss of consciousness. This state is emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Thus, when the *Heart Sutra* says, *in emptiness (śūnyatāyām)* there are no *skandhas* (*na rūpam... na vijñānam*) this is not a metaphysical statement of the unreality of the *pañcā skandhāḥ*, rather it is an assertion that they stop working, stop producing sensory experiences, in the state of emptiness.

More broadly, the *Heart Sutra* reflects, in microcosm, some of the main currents of early Medieval Chinese Buddhism: the cult of Avalokiteśvara; *Prajñāpāramitā* scholasticism based on Kumārajīva's translation of *Pañc* (T 223) and, more especially, its commentary (T 1509); the inscription and/or chanting of magic spells (*dhāraṇī*, *vidyā*);⁵ and the creation of digest texts from larger texts.

The text of the *Heart Sutra* consists of four main parts, which Conze (1948, 1967) divided into nine sections.

Part 1. (Section's I–II). Section I is the *māṅgala* or auspicious invocation, although no Chinese version of the text has one. Section II is a brief introduction probably inspired by the opening of Chapter 3 of T 223, replacing the generic *bodhisatva* of the Indian *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition with the Chinese *bodhisatva* par excellence, Avalokiteśvara.

Part 2. (Sections III–V). These sections are a single passage quoted from Chapter 3 of T 223 and comprises about half the text.

Part 3. (Sections VI–VIII). These sections incorporate material from or inspired by Chapters 19 and 32 of T 223.⁶

⁵ On the subject of medieval Chinese *dhāraṇī* inscriptions see Copp (2014).

⁶ See Attwood (2017a) and (2017b).

Part 4. (Section IX). Finally, this section is the *dhāraṇī*,⁷ including an introductory phrase.

Punctuation was added as it came into vogue, although in Asia the *Xīnjīng* is still often written without it. There are eight versions of the *Heart Sutra* in the Chinese Canon. Four are translations from the Sanskrit extended version (T 252, T 253, T 254, and T 257) and one is from the Tibetan translation of the extended version (T 255). The provenance of the extended version is unknown, though we can state that all of the Indian commentaries preserved in Tibetan translation are on the extended version and none of the preserved Chinese commentaries is (Lopez 1988, 1996). T 256 is a standard version in transliterated Sanskrit with a Chinese text that resembles T 251 but which appears to have been influenced by the Sanskrit translation. It is now thought to have been created by Amoghavajra (705-774 CE) and thus postdates the earliest evidence by around a century. Most importantly, we have the standard text that is universally considered *the* text throughout East Asia, i.e. the 《般若波羅蜜多心經》 *Bōrēbōluómīduō-xīnjīng* or *Xīnjīng* (T 251).⁸ Chinese Buddhist tradition sees the *Xīnjīng* as a translation from Sanskrit completed in 649 CE by Xuánzàng, though the Chinese is clearly not a translation and is best described as a digest text. We know that the digest must have been assembled in the mid-7th Century after Xuánzàng returned from India in 645 CE⁹ and before the earliest dated *Heart Sutra* on the Fangshan Stele, i.e. 661 CE.¹⁰ Lastly, there

⁷ Fukui and McRae (cited in Nattier 1992: 211, n. 52) point out that the same *dhāraṇī* is found in the 《陀羅尼集經》 (*Dhāraṇīsamuccaya*; T 901) translated by Atikūṭa 653 CE. In a future article I will make the case that this is, in fact, the source of the *dhāraṇī*. Similar *dhāraṇī* can be found in the 《東方最勝燈王陀羅尼經》 *Agrapradīpadhāraṇīvidyārāja-sūtra* (T 1353) translated in the Sui Dynasty (581– 618 CE) by **Jñānagupta* and in the 《大方等無想經》 *Mahāmegha Sutra* (T 387) translated by Dharmarakṣa ca. 414 – 442 CE and “the striking similarities between them suggests that a number of variants of this [*dhāraṇī*] must have been circulating out of the context of the *Heart Sutra* itself” (Nattier 1992: 211, n.53).

⁸ Despite being standardised there are a number of variants, mainly using alternative characters. As yet there is no systematic study of the Chinese *Heart Sutra* text in English.

⁹ We know this because the *Xīnjīng* uses new “spellings” of the names Guanyin and Śāriputra that were introduced by Xuánzàng after his return from India.

¹⁰ The Fangshan stele has not previously been discussed (in English) in connection with the history of the *Heart Sutra*. It has been discussed in a number of Chinese language publications, from at least 1958. It has been discussed in English language articles written by art historians, e.g. Lothar Ledderose (2004: 395) and Sonya Lee (2010: 55). For a transcription and study of the stele see the forthcoming issue of the *Journal of Chinese Buddhist Studies* (Vol.32).

is the 《摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經》¹¹ *Móhēbōrěbōluómì-dà míngzhòujīng* or *Dà míngzhòujīng* (T 250) apocryphally attributed to Kumārajīva (early 5th Century). The received explanations about the relationship between the *Dà míngzhòujīng* and the *Xīnjīng* have been called into question by modern scholars (summarised by Nattier 1992: 182-189) and the true connection, if there is any, is at present unknown. Since the *Xīnjīng* and the *Dà míngzhòujīng* are almost identical with respect to the passage in question, and the variant in the latter is inconsequential (I will note it when it occurs), I will focus on the *Xīnjīng* in this article.

In reading the *Heart Sutra* we face a problem that frequently occurs in Chinese Buddhism Studies. The words we meet are early medieval Chinese and have to be read as Chinese in order to appreciate how Chinese Buddhists understood them at the time. At the same time, Chinese Buddhist vocabulary developed from translating Buddhist texts that were composed in a variety of Indic languages (and sometimes transmitted via Central Asian translations), and thus it contains many neologisms, calques, and transliterations that can only be understood with reference to Indic languages. We may also benefit from tracing the extracted passages back to their original context: understanding the *Heart Sutra* requires a good understanding of the *Large Sutra*, which is itself an expansion of a (likely) singular text from an earlier phase that also evolved into *Aṣṭa*. A comprehensive reading of the text requires us to shift between languages and registers in a way that can be extremely challenging, even before we attempt an exegesis.

In this article, I will take up, evaluate, and extend Matthew Orsborn's assessment of the vocabulary in Section VI of the *Heart Sutra*, comparing the Sanskrit and Chinese texts. I move through the passage citing problems previously identified by Nattier (1992), Orsborn (Huifeng 2014) and Attwood (2018a) and introducing several further problems with the text before considering Section VI as a whole and proposing a hermeneutic based on Sue Hamilton's approach to the Pāli *suttas*. Taking all of these observations into account I will show how the Chinese text might be translated into more idiomatic Sanskrit. I then reflect on the relationship between the Sanskrit and Chinese versions of Section VI and what this implies for the historiography of the *Heart Sutra*.

¹¹ The title corresponds to Sanskrit **Mahāprajñāpāramitā-mahāvīdyā-sūtra* "the *Sutra of the Great Spell of the Great Perfection of Wisdom*" although no Sanskrit manuscript of this text is extant or known to have existed.

Parsing Section VI

While we are mainly concerned with Section VI, the passage of interest takes in the end of Section V and the boundary between the two sections is disputed. The Chinese passage from the printed *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* with Matthew Orsborn's (2014) corrections and English translation is:

V. 是故空中。... 無智亦無得。以無所得故。

VI. 菩提薩埵。依般若波羅蜜多故。心無罣礙。無罣礙故。無有恐怖。遠離顛倒夢想¹²。究竟涅槃。

[V] Therefore, Śāriputra, in emptiness... no gnosis, no realization; due to engagement in non-apprehension.

[VI] The Bodhisattvas, due to being supported by transcendental knowledge, have minds which do not hang on anything; due to their minds not hanging on anything, they are without fear; removed from perverted perceptions and views, they ultimately realize nirvāṇa.

The Sanskrit counterpart to this is represented by Conze's edition (1948, 1967) and translation (1958):

V. *Tasmāc Chāriputra śūnyatāyām ... Na jñānam. Na prāptir na-aprāptiḥ.*

VI. *Tasmāc chāriputra aprāptivād bodhisattvo Prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ. Cittāvaraṇanāstivād atraastro viparyāsātikrānto niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ.*

Therefore, O Śāriputra, in emptiness.... There is no cognition, no attainment and no non-attainment.

Therefore, O Śāriputra, it is because of his nonattainmentness that a Bodhisattva, through having relied on the perfection of wisdom, dwells without thought-coverings. In the absence of thought-coverings he has not been made to tremble, he has overcome what can upset, and in the end he attains to Nirvana. (1975: 89, 93)

¹² In T 250 this phrase is augmented: 遠離一切顛倒夢想 “from *all* (一切) perverted perceptions and views”.

The two English translations given here look at the *Heart Sutra* from quite different points of view. Conze was an early-mid 20th Century German Sanskritist living in England. His background was in Philosophy, with a strong personal interest in astrology and Theosophy. He was translating from a Sanskrit text that he edited (with less than 100% fidelity) under the influence of D. T. Suzuki's Prajñāpāramitā hermeneutic. By contrast Orsborn, a contemporary New Zealand Sinologist and Chinese Prajñāpāramitā specialist, who was at the time a Buddhist monk living in Taiwan. He was translating a Chinese text having just pointed out longstanding problems with the traditional interpretations of it. Still, such circumstantial differences cannot satisfactorily explain why these translations are so very different. To understand the mismatch we must examine and compare the Chinese and Sanskrit versions of the passage in detail.

1. No non-attainment.

The first problem we encounter is in the reused passage from the *Large Sutra* at the end of Section V. In Conze's edition we find the phrase, *na prāptir nāprāptiḥ*, which he translates as, "no attainment and no non-attainment" (1975: 89). The phrase *nāprāptiḥ* is absent from both recensions of *Pañc* and from the *Xīnjīng* and *Dàmíngzhòujīng* (Huifeng 2015: 75). Conze had already flagged it as a "late addition" (1967: 155) but nonetheless retained it in his edition.¹³ The obvious problem is that it is illogical to suggest in one sentence that there is "no non-attainment" and then in the next claim that it is because of "non-attainmentness" that the bodhisatva *attains nirvāṇa*. Conze is aware of such contradictions (1958: 97-8) and prepared to tolerate them. For example, in his *Heart Sutra* commentary, he says, echoing Suzuki, "Obviously the rules of ordinary logic are abrogated in this *sūtra*" (1967: 155). Attwood (2015) argued that exactly this expectation of nonsense led to the propagation of simple grammatical errors in Conze's Sanskrit text.¹⁴

The addition of *nāprāptiḥ* here is the result of overzealous editing by someone who saw the negations in isolation and took them as having a metaphysical connotation despite the context in which they occur (cf. Attwood 2017b: 71-2). I've already introduced Orsborn's argument that negation is *not* the point of this

¹³ The phrase is found in T255 translated from the Tibetan by Fāchéng 法成 in 856 CE, but this reflects the late addition of the phrase.

¹⁴ Compare comments along the same lines by Paul Harrison (2006: 137 ff.) and Richard H. Jones (2012: 22 ff.).

text and will expand on this below. Nattier (1992) simply left this phrase out of her text. I suggest that we formalise this and remove it from the Sanskrit edition.

2. No knowledge, no attainment.

The next problem was identified by Matthew Orsborn (Huifeng 2014) and involves the same, now amended, passage: *Na jñānam, na prāptir*. Orsborn showed that based on the recensions of *Pañc*, we should expect *na prāptir nābhisamayaḥ* “no attainment, no realisation”, which in *Pañc* is followed by a standard list of Mahāyāna Buddhist attainments and realisations, which is an extended version of the Pāli list of the eight *ariyapuggala*.¹⁵ Chinese translations by Mokṣala and Xuánzàng also reflect *Pañc* texts with *na prāptir nābhisamayaḥ* and a list of such attainments.¹⁶ The pair of terms is found many times including several times in *Aṣṭa* (e.g. Vaidya 1960: 94, 151). Abbreviating all but the first and last attainments and realisations, the actual passage from the Gilgit manuscript (with its idiosyncratic spelling), therefore, reads

*na prāptir nābhisamayaḥ na srota āpanno na srota āpattiphalaṃ...
na tatra bodhir na buddhaḥ |*

In other words, the text seems to imply that the “attainment” is stream entrant (*srotāpanna*) and the “realisation” is the fruit of stream-entry (*srotāpattiphala*). In Pāli, the eight *ariyapuggala* are divided into the one who has attained the path (*magga*) and the one who has attained the fruition (*phala*) of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, and arahantship. The pair *na prāpti* and *na abhisamaya* (or *aprāpti* and *anabhisamaya*) are also used this way in *Pañc* (Kimura 2009: 1-2.165). However, at other times the terms are used with a broader reference, for example, a long list of *dharma*s including the *skandhas*, the sense organs and objects, the six perfections, and the eighteen kinds of *śūnyatā* (Kimura 2009 2-3: 160).

¹⁵ *na prāptir nābhisamayaḥ na srota āpanno na srota āpattiphalaṃ [na sakṛdāgāmī] [na sakṛdāgāmī]phalaṃ nānāgāmī nānāgāmiphalaṃ nārhan nārhatvaṃ na pratyekabodhir na pratyekabuddhaḥ na tatra mārgākārajñatā na bodhisatvaḥ na tatra bodhir na buddhaḥ*. My transcription of the Gilgit manuscript, Folio 21 verso/recto from Karashima et al. 2016. C.f. Kimura (2009: 1-2: 65)

¹⁶ Mokṣala: 亦無所逮得 亦無須陀洹 (T 221: 8.6a.11-12); Xuánzàng: 無得 無現觀 (T 220: 7.14a.23).

Kumārajīva’s group translated this phrase as 無智亦無得 (*wú zhì yì wú dé* T 223: 8.223a.20), which would conventionally be understood to say “no knowledge and no attainment”.¹⁷ Here 無 = Sanskrit *na* = English *no*, 智 “knowledge” and 得 “attainment”. This is inconsistent with all other texts in either Sanskrit or Chinese. However, Orsborn showed that Kumārajīva used a variety of translations for the pair of words (2014: 89 n.23) and suggested that the terms were seen as interchangeable.

Xuánzàng’s *Dàijīng* translation regularly uses the translation 無得無現觀 (e.g. T 220: 7.14a.23), where 得 and 現觀 represent *prāpti* and *abhisamaya* respectively.¹⁸ In the *Heart Sutra*, the Translator, conventionally enough, read 無智亦無得 as, *na jñānaṃ na prāptiḥ*. This quirk shows that Part 2 (sections III-V) in the *Heart Sutra* was copied from Kumārajīva’s translation of *Pañc* (T 223) and then translated into Sanskrit without reference to Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā conventions. The expression could not have moved the other way and given the same result. Indeed, the expression *na jñānaṃ na prāptiḥ* is a calque of Kumārajīva’s Chinese (mis)translation of *Pañc*.

Orsborn argues that if the terms in Kumārajīva’s text were inverted to 無得亦無智 then we could understand them as equating to the Sanskrit *na prāptir nābhisamayah*, consistent with the Sanskrit and Chinese *Pañc* (Huifeng 2014: 84-5, 90-1, 102). However, the fact that the phrase was used repeatedly suggests that Kumārajīva intended the present reading, as perverse as this seems.

3. Reliance

In the *Heart Sutra*, the bodhisatva is said to “rely on perfection of gnosis”, 依般若波羅蜜多 (*yī bōrēbōluómìduō*), where the verb “rely” is conveyed by 依 (*yī*). The Translator chose to represent this by: *prajñāpāramitām āśritya viharaty* “he dwells relying on perfection of gnosis”. *Āśritya viharaty* is a very cumbersome way to render 依.

The phrase, 依般若波羅蜜多 is not common in Kumārajīva’s *Dàijīng* (note that his usual translation omits the last character). He uses it three times, two of which correspond to *prajñāpāramitām niśrāya*.¹⁹ The other doesn’t have a clear counterpart in *Pañc*. We don’t find *āśraya* used in this sense in Kimura’s edition of *Pañc*. Some derivative of *niśrī* is used instead.

¹⁷ Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Upadeśa*, 《大智度論》, agrees: 亦無智、亦無得 (T 1509: 25.328a.4).

¹⁸ The idiom occurs 46 times in Xuánzàng’s *Prajñāpāramitā* translations (T 220).

¹⁹ E.g. T 8.288b16-17, b18 = Kimura 2009: II-III:78.

A far more common idiom is seen in the passage from earlier in the *Xīnjīng*, i.e. 行般若波羅蜜(多) “practices perfection of insight”, which is used hundreds of times in the *Dājīng*. In Sanskrit, we see *prajñāpāramitāyām* (in the locative case) with various derivatives of \sqrt{car} which in this context means “practising”, e.g. *prajñāpāramitāyām caran*. Similarly, *Prajñāpāramitā* is also something the *bodhisatva* “trains in” ($\sqrt{śikṣ}$)²⁰, the phrase 學般若波羅蜜 (*xué bōrěbōluómi*) “trains in the perfection of insight” is also used over a hundred times in Kumārajīva’s *Dājīng*. In Sanskrit, we see a similar format, e.g. *evaṃ śikṣamāṇo bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyām śikṣate, anupalambhayogena*. (Kimura 2009: I-1: 187) “So training, Bhagavan, the *bodhisatva mahāsatva* should train in the perfection of insight through the yoga of nonapprehension.”²¹ The *bodhisatva* is typically more active in their relation to *Prajñāpāramitā*.

Mention of the yoga of nonapprehension (*anupalambhayogena*) brings us on to the next problem.

4. Through the exercise of non-apprehension

In moving onto Section VI, we leave behind the reused passage from the *Large Sutra* and venture into the conclusion composed by the Author (though with Kumārajīva’s *Dājīng* still firmly in mind). The *Xīnjīng* does not have anything corresponding to *tasmāc chāriputra* and for *aprāptivād* has 以無所得故.

Orsborn’s analysis (Huifeng 2014) reveals a deeper problem. In Kumārajīva’s oeuvre, the Chinese phrase 以無所得故 does not correspond to Sanskrit *aprāptivād* but to *anupalambhayogena*. The word *anupalambhayogena* can be parsed as a negative particle *an-*; a verbal noun *upalambha* “seizing; apprehending, perceiving” (deriving from the verbal root *upa√labh*); another verbal noun *yoga* “connecting, engaging”; and an instrumental case ending *-ena*. It thus means something like “by engaging in non-apprehension”, with the implication of being engaged in the non-apprehension of *mental objects* (*dharmāḥ*). We can parse the Chinese along the same lines. According to Orsborn, the particles 以 and 故, taken together, indicate a noun in the instrumental case;²² 無 is a negative

²⁰ The verb *śikṣati* is properly a desiderative of $\sqrt{śak}$ “be able”.

²¹ *evaṃ śikṣamāṇo bhagavan bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ prajñāpāramitāyām śikṣate, anupalambhayogena*. (Kimura 2009: I-1: 187)

²² Compare Lock and Linebarger (2018: 22 n.2): “以 X 故: literally ‘with X as cause’, i.e. because of X.”

particle corresponding to *an-*. Orsborn reads 所 as indicating a nominal form of the verb and 得 here as representing some derivative of *upa√labh* rather than *pra√āp*. This is counter-intuitive since the same character appears to represent two distinct Sanskrit verbs in two adjacent words. However, there is another, more intuitive, way to explain the morphology of the Chinese.

Kumārajīva's *Dājīng* uses two translations of *anupalambhayogena* interchangeably (though never both in the same chapter), i.e. 以不可得故 (*yībūkēdégù*) and 以無所得故 (*yīwúsuōdégù*).²³ This suggests that 可得 and 所得 both represent Sanskrit *upa√labh*, i.e. both are binomial verbs and thus, rather than 得 twice in the *Heart Sutra*, in fact, we first have 得 representing a derivative of *pra√āp* and then the binomial 所得 representing a derivative of *upa√labh*. The use of the case-like markers 以 and 故 themselves tell us we are dealing with a nominal form since verbs don't take inflections. Kumārajīva's translation group always leave off *yoga*, perhaps because it was obvious to them that *anupalambha* was a kind of Buddhist *practice* and *anupalambha-yoga* seemed like a tautology.

In the final analysis, 以無所得故 means *anupalambhayogena* "through the exercise of nonapprehension" and not *aprāptivād*. The Translator should not have inserted *tasmāc chāriputra* before *aprāptivād* at the beginning of Section VI.

Orsborn makes the additional suggestion that since 以無所得故 means *anupalambhayogena* it makes more sense if we read it as the end of section V. Kuījī and Woncheuk are split on this issue. Kuījī (T 1710: 33.541a03) agrees with Orsborn and treats 以無所得故 as the end of Section V, while Woncheuk takes the more traditional approach in which this phrase opens Section VI (T 1711: 33.548b26). The Rev. Samuel Beal's 1863 translation takes 以無所得故 as belonging to section V, despite reading 所得 as "attain" (Beal 1865).²⁴

The *Dhāraṇī Saṃbhāraḥ* chapter of *Pañc*²⁵ gives us further reason to think that Orsborn's suggestion was the right one. At the beginning of the previous chapter, Subhūti asks what Mahāyāna is. The *Dhāraṇī Saṃbhāraḥ* chapter continues the Buddha's answer by describing twenty-one kinds of practice, the

²³ I take this to be indicative of different scribes working on different parts of the text based on Kumārajīva's exegesis over a period of some years.

²⁴ Beal's translation predates 20th Century scholarship on the Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* tradition and is thus a valuable record of how the text was understood in China prior to being encumbered by the presuppositions such scholarship generated.

²⁵ The *Dhāraṇī Saṃbhāraḥ* of *Pañc*, corresponding to Chapter 19 of T 223 and to Chp 16 in Conze's translation (1975: 153ff).

first seven of which constitute the well-known list of *bodhipāṅsika dharmas*. For example, the chapter begins with a brief description of how a bodhisatva practices the four foundations of mindfulness (*catvāri smṛtyupasthānāni*; 四念處 *sì niànchù*). The description ends with the statement “and that by the exercise of nonapprehension” (*tac cānupalambhayogena*). In Kumārajīva’s *Dāṅjīng* (T 223), *tac cānupalambhayogena* is translated by 以不可得故.²⁶

In this chapter, the phrase always comes at the end of explanations of practices suggesting that we should expect this phrase to be sentence-final in the *Heart Sutra*. Reading *anupalambhayogena* this way means that it qualifies all of the negated lists and this changes the sense of them. The Sanskrit of section V ought to read (abbreviating the lists):

*śūnyatāyām na rūpam na vedanā... na prāptir na abhisamayo
‘nupalambhayogena |*

In emptiness, there is no form, no feeling ... no attainment, no realisation, *through the exercise of nonapprehension*.

This also clarifies that by “in emptiness” (*śūnyatāyām*) the text means “for a person in the meditative state of emptiness”, rather than some more metaphysical reading. I will say more about the relationship between emptiness and the yoga of nonapprehension below.

The text in the printed *Taishō* is ambiguous as to sentence structure here since it only uses a single type of punctuation mark, i.e. “。” and does not indicate paragraphs. CBETA, the electronic version of the *Taishō*, breaks the text into paragraphs and adds additional punctuation:

...無智亦無得。以無所得故，菩提薩埵...
...No knowledge and no attainment. By the exercise of nonapprehension, the *bodhisatva*...

We can now say that this should be:

...無智亦無得，以無所得故。菩提薩埵...
...no knowledge and no attainment, through the exercise of nonapprehension. The *bodhisatva*...

²⁶ It is used twenty-eight times between 8.253b.21 and 8.256a.6

This resolves another problem that Conze wrestled with. In Section V, as noted above Conze has, at different times, given the word *bodhisatva* with genitive singular *-sya* (1948, 1958)²⁷ and nominative singular *-aḥ* (1967) case endings, reflecting an ambivalence on this issue in his witnesses. In his translation, “Therefore O Śāriputra, it is because of his non-attainmentness...” (1975: 93). Conze construed the sentence as meaning that the *bodhisatva* possesses *aprāptitva* (hence the use of the genitive case). If we replace *aprāptitvād* with *anupalambhayogena* and move it to the end of the previous section, then *bodhisatva* begins a new sentence and is clearly the agent of the verb *viharati* “he dwells” and must, therefore, be in the nominative singular, *bodhisatvaḥ*. *Anupalambhayoga* is something the *bodhisatva* does rather than something they possess.

While I am on the subject of the *bodhisatva*, and leaving aside the possibility of hyper-Sanskritisation, I note that in Buddhism we mainly treat the word as a *karmadhāraya* compound, i.e. a *bodhisatva* is a kind of being (in the sense of “living thing”). An electronic search of Monier-Williams’ *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* reveals that compounds ending in *sattva* are *bahuvrīhi* compounds in which *sattva* means “nature” or “essence”. Therefore *bodhi-sattva* should mean “one whose nature is awakening”, rather than “an awakening being”.

5. Mental Obstacles

Orsborn (Hui Feng 2014) further observed that there is a mismatch between the Sanskrit *acittāvaraṇaḥ* and the Chinese 心無罣礙 (*xīn wú guà-ài*).²⁸ The opening of the sentence says 菩提薩埵。依般若波羅蜜多故。心無罣礙。²⁹ i.e. “Since 故 the *bodhisatva* 菩提薩埵 relies on 依 Prajñāpāramitā 般若波羅蜜多... then 心無罣礙”. What does 心無罣礙 mean? The Chinese character 心 means “heart” and it is routinely used to translate both *hṛdaya* “heart” and *citta*

²⁷ Conze 1958 was reprinted in 1975 with *bodhisattvasya*.

²⁸ A previous attempt by Wu Bai-Hui (1992) to essay the word *cittāvaraṇa* (in Max Müller’s 1884 diplomatic edition of the Hōryū-ji manuscript) argues both for and against reading the compound as *citta-āvaraṇa* and succeeds in showing that Müller mistranslated the word in English, but in retrospect, adds little to our understanding of the text.

²⁹ The punctuation here seems superfluous. Certainly the first “。” is superfluous because 菩提薩埵 is the subject, while 依般若波羅蜜多 are the verb and object of the same sentence. No hiatus is needed or wanted in any language.

“thought, mental event, mind” elsewhere.³⁰ The *Xīnjīng* uses the character in both senses. 無 is a negative particle. The basic meanings of the two characters 罣 and 礙 are, according to Kroll (2015):

罣: catch fish; enmesh, ensnare, entangle.

礙: impede, hamper, hinder; obstruct, block off.

The two are both primarily verbs, and here working together as a single word, i.e. another binomial verb. The Chinese phrase 心無罣礙 means something like “mind unhindered” and the Translator has opted for *a-citta-āvaraṇa* “without a mental obstacle”.³¹ Despite Conze’s plural translation “thought coverings”, the term is singular in Sanskrit. Also since *āvaraṇa* is a neuter noun we have to read *acittāvaraṇaḥ* (masculine nominative singular) as an adjective of *bodhisatvaḥ*: i.e. “the *bodhisatva* without a mental obstacle”.

The two terms, 心無罣礙 and *acittāvaraṇa*, could easily be taken for translations of each other. However, Orsborn points out the Chinese characters 罣礙 are routinely associated with another Sanskrit phrase. For example, he cites an illustrative passage from Kumārajīva’s *Dājīng*:

Then Śakra, Lord of the Gods, said to Subhūti: Whatever Subhūti has stated is only for the sake of emptiness, without being hung-obstructed [sic] (無罣礙). Just as an arrow shot up into empty space is not obstructed (無礙), so too is Subhūti’s Dharma teaching not obstructed (無礙). (2014: 92)³²

³⁰ Modern translators seem to be caught in a cleft stick between the assumptions of Romanticism (*citta* = heart) and those of Scientific Rationalism (*citta* = thought). In fact it means both. Ancient Indian Buddhists had many words for emotions, but did not have separate categories for affective and cognitive mental activity.

³¹ Conze’s (1958) discussion of his translation of this part of the passage is not very illuminating. He mainly discusses *āvaraṇa* in relation to the sense of “obstruction”, but does not justify choosing “coverings” as a translation.

³² Orsborn (Huifeng 2014) shows that this passage is also found in *Aṣṭa* (see Vaidya 1960: 224). He conflates it with another simile drawn from archery, in which a skilled archer might keep an arrow from falling by shooting it with a series of subsequent arrows. These look unrelated to me except for the fact that they both involve archery – a common source of metaphors and similes for Buddhists.

In the Sanskrit version of this passage in *Pañc*, the parallel for 無罣礙 is the phrase *na kvacit sajjati* “it is not stuck anywhere”. We need to say a few words about Orsborn’s translation “hung-obstructed”. Orsborn argues that 礙 may mean “hang”; he adopts and defends this translation, going so far as say that the Sanskrit verb √*sañj* or *sajjati* may also mean “hang” (92, 93). While I can see what Orsborn is getting at, I cordially disagree with him. The main sense of the word 礙 is “impede” and this sense fits the context. Neither Apte nor Monier-Williams refers to √*sañj* meaning “hang” in their Sanskrit-English dictionaries. Mayrhofer (1976: 419; s.v. *sájati*) gives the definition “heftet an, hängt an” but translates the latter as “fastens on”. Mayrhofer also notes that *sajjati* is likely a Prakritised passive, from the classical *sajyáte* “hängen, hängen bleiben” i.e. “stuck, caught; to be stuck”. And this is how the word is used in the simile.

Kuñjī’s *Heart Sutra* commentary glosses these terms: 罣 means 障 “barrier, hinder”; and 礙 means 拘 “seize; restrain”. He says, “If one does not rely on enlightened gnosis, attaching to (滯) forms etc, one constantly becomes mired (拘溺) in many hardships and fears.”³³

If we were translating the Chinese phrase 心無罣礙 back into idiomatic *Prajñāpāramitā* Sanskrit we would want to use some combination of the noun *citta* and the verb *sajjati* to convey the sense that the mind of the bodhisatva who relies on *Prajñāpāramitā* is not hindered by or attached to sense experience (because through practising non-apprehension they have bought sense experience to a halt, at least temporarily). This is very different from what we find in the actual Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*.

6. The Non-existence of Mental Obstacles

Attwood (2018a) pointed out that Conze mistakenly places a full stop after *acittāvaraṇaḥ* in his Sanskrit edition (1948, 1967) creating a second sentence: *cittāvaraṇanāstivād atraastro viparyāsātikrānto niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ*. This second sentence has no verb or agent, making it impossible to parse. This has caused great difficulty for translators, though it has not stopped many of them from publishing translations.³⁴ The solution here is to simply remove the full stop

³³ 罣者障。礙者拘。未依慧悟。滯色等有拘溺眾苦畏懼恒生 (T 1710: 33.541a7-9)

³⁴ Honourable mention should go to Red Pine who at least acknowledges that there is a problem, although his grasp of *vyākaraṇa* is tenuous and his solution disallowed by the requirements of Sanskrit grammar: “I have read both *viparyasa* (delusion) and *nishtha-nirvana* (finally nirvana) as objects of the verb *atikranto* (see through), which is allowed by the vagaries of Sanskrit grammar in the absence of *prapta*” (2004: 137).

since it is clear that that the adjectives in the second part of the sentence relate to the *bodhisatva* in the first part.

*tasmācchāriputra aprāptivād bodhisatvaḥ prajñāpāramitām
āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaś cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvād atrasto
viparyāsa-atikrānto niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ.*

Therefore, Śāriputra, in the absence of attainment, the bodhisatva who is without mental obstruction dwells having relied on perfect understanding, [and] being free of mental obstruction he is unafraid, overcomes delusions, [and] his extinction is complete.

Once we resolve the punctuation problem then the passage becomes comprehensible, if odd, Sanskrit. There are significant differences between the Sanskrit and Chinese texts at this point but with respect to the issue of punctuation we can say that where Conze had a full stop, the *Taishō* uses a generic punctuation mark “ ° ” and CBETA has replaced this with a semicolon. This suggests that the latter source at least understood that the Chinese passage is one long sentence rather than two.

As we have seen, *viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ* is a poor translation of 心無罣礙 that ignores the conventions established by Kumārajīva (and other Chinese translators) and ignores the sentence structure of the *Xīnjīng*. Having made this choice, the Translator now faces a further problem with the sentence structure. In Chinese, the clause boundary between 心無罣礙 and 無罣礙故 is clear (even without punctuation) because of the repeated verbal form 罣礙 with a qualifier 故 “since”. To get the same clarity using the word choices of the Translator we might have expected them to use the gerund of the main verb, for example:

viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ vihr̥tya tathā...

i.e. [the bodhisatva] without mental obstruction dwells, dwelling this way...

Instead, having translated the verb as a noun, the Translator opts to provide a connection after the hiatus with *cittāvaraṇanāstitvāt* “because of the non-existence of a mental obstacle”.³⁵ This is unusual, to say the least. *Nāstitvāt* can be parsed as an abstract noun derived from the action noun *asti* “existence,

³⁵ Sanskrit sandhi rules cause the final *t* to become *d* when followed by a vowel, and to *c* when followed by *c*.

existing”,³⁶ with a negative particle, declined as the ablative of cause (i.e. *na-astitva-āt*). On one hand, it is a creative application of Sanskrit morphology to make a neologism. On the other hand, one can do this more elegantly using idiomatic Sanskrit, for example, the “non-existence” of *cittāvaraṇa*, cited as the reason for something, could have been conveyed by the ablative *acittāvaraṇāt*, perhaps with the addition of *ca* “and” to mark the clause boundary: ...*acittāvaraṇo ‘cittāvaraṇāc ca*....

Even better would have been to translate 心無罣礙 as something like *asya cittam na kvacit sajjati* “his mind does not stick anywhere” and then link the following clause using the gerund *asaktvā* “not being stuck” or “being unattached”.

7. ‘Removed from’ versus ‘going beyond’

Another difference between the two texts is that the binomial 遠離 (*yuǎnlǐ*) “far removed” does not correspond to the Sanskrit *atikrantaḥ* “gone beyond”.³⁷ Clearly, there is some semantic overlap, i.e. in order to be “far removed” from something, one must first “go beyond” it, but as a translation of 遠離, *atikrantaḥ* is a poor choice.

The *Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* has a wide range of possible senses for 遠離, including “distancing, breaking off, removing, surpassing, and escaping” and an equally wide range of possible Sanskrit counterparts. Lokakṣema established the use of the two characters to represent words from *vi√vic* e.g. *viveka* “separation, detachment” *vivikta* “isolated, detached” (Karashima 2012: 633-5) and, here, *vivikta* would clearly be a better translation.

In the *Large Sutra* translation (T 233) Kumārajīva used the binomial to represent *parivarjayitavyam* (8.241c7-9, corresponds roughly to Kimura 2009: I-II, 17).³⁸ In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (T 262) he uses it in the phrase: 遠離於法我 = *dharmātma-vivarjita* (Karashima 2013: 959). The Sanskrit root *√vrj* basically means “bend” but with the prefixes *pari-* and *vi-* it can mean “avoid, exclude”.

³⁶ Alternatively *asti* can be seen as a present participle.

³⁷ My attention was first drawn to the mismatch by an anonymous reviewer of an earlier version of this article. Orsborn (Huifeng 2014) has accurately translated 遠離, but does not discuss this difference between the versions.

³⁸ Cf. Conze (1975: 116)

We don't find the exact phrases 遠離顛倒夢想 “far removed from delusions and illusions” or 遠離一切顛倒夢想 “far removed from all delusions and illusions” elsewhere, but we do occasionally see 遠離顛倒 “far removed from delusions” in T 233. At 8.257a18 (= Kimura 2009, I-II: 90) and 8.258c08-10 (Kimura 2009, I-II: 99) the expression translates *saṃjñādṛṣṭi-vivarta* “turning away from perceptions and views”. Here it seems that Kumārajīva is using 遠離 to translate *vivarta* “turning away” rather than anything meaning “far removed”.

If we assume, for the sake of argument, that the *Heart Sutra* was composed in Sanskrit and translated into Chinese, it seems highly implausible that a translator of the calibre of Kumārajīva or Xuánzàng would have chosen 遠離 to translate *atikranta*. For example, in the first sentence of the *Heart Sutra* the idea of “going beyond” is represented by the move conventional 度 *dù*, though this has no counterpart in the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*. Taking the opposing view, we would still say that *atikranta* is not the best translation of 遠離 when a word like *vivikta* would be more accurate, but it is at least plausible.

8. Delusions and Illusions

In the state of emptiness, with no attachment to any sensory experience, the *bodhisatva* is “far removed from” 顛倒 and 夢想 (*diān-dǎo* and *mèng-xiǎng*). Some translators opt to give literal translations of these words along the lines of “upside down and dreamlike thoughts”; however, these terms are intended to convey well known Buddhist Sanskrit technical terms, i.e. *viparyāsa* (顛倒) and *māyā* (夢想). The former is “delusions” about unawakened experience,³⁹ while the latter refers to unawakened experience as an “illusion”. Hence we can succinctly translate both Chinese and Sanskrit expressions into English as “delusions and illusions”, relying on context to convey the exact Buddhist nuances.

Māyā occurs in the Chinese text, it is important for *Prajñāpāramitā* generally (c.f. Attwood 2017b), and it is a very commonly used Buddhist term. Given this, it is curious that the Translator decided not to include it in their Sanskrit translation. An accurate translation of the Chinese into any language would include the word.

³⁹ Specifically: regarding the impermanent as permanent, the painful as pleasant, the insubstantial as substantial, and the ugly as beautiful; and vice versa.

9. Final Extinction

Attwood (2018a) reminded us that *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* is a *bahuvrīhi* compound that describes the *bodhisatva*, whose extinction is complete. Conze's editions give the word as *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* though he notes that many of his witnesses have *niṣṭhānirvāṇa-prāptaḥ* along with other variants (1948: 152; 1967: 36). In his popular presentation of the text (1958: 93), Conze has added *-prāptaḥ* to the end of the compound and translates "and in the end, he attains to Nirvana". He may have been forced into this because his wrongly placed full stop stranded this adjective without a noun or verb.

Nattier identifies *niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ* as "abbreviated at best" and seems to accept that adding *prāptaḥ* is necessary (1992: 178; 213, n.56). She suggests that the Chinese equivalent 究竟涅槃 (*jiùjìng nièpán*) is more natural than the Sanskrit but does not expand on what she means by "natural". In this context, a word like 究竟涅槃 "ultimate *nirvāṇa*" would not necessarily require the verb "attain" (Skt. *prāp*, Ch. 得) because the context strongly implies it. Like the copular verb in Sanskrit nominal sentences, Middle Chinese allows us to take the verb as read in some cases. Another way of looking at it would be that the distinctions between parts of speech in Middle Chinese are more fluid than in English or Sanskrit so that the adjective could take on a verbal connotation. The Chinese phrase could be parsed as like "[the *bodhisatva*] ultimate-*nirvāṇas*". In English, we would understand this to say "[the *bodhisatva*] attains ultimate *nirvāṇa*". In this sense, it would be similar to the use of denominative verbs where the noun subsumes the verb in an English phrase, e.g. the recent example of sports commentators saying that the winner of a contest "medals" rather than "wins a medal".

Of course, Sanskrit has its own denominative verbs, but these are conjugated as verbs, and the Translator has not done this. Rather, they opted to represent 究竟涅槃 as an adjective (*niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ*) of the *bodhisatva* rather than an action performed by them and Sanskrit adjectives don't have the flexibility of Chinese adjectives. It would be more idiomatic for ultimate *nirvāṇa* to be a noun (*niṣṭhānirvāṇam*) combined with some form of the verb *prāp*, which is what we find peppered through the *Heart Sutra* manuscript tradition (see Conze's critical apparatus in 1948: 36, n.44). A similar idiom can be found in the Pāli *Gaṇakamoggallāna Sutta* (MN 107):

Brahmin, when my disciples are advised and instructed by me, some do indeed *succeed to the ultimate goal of nibbāna* (*niṭṭham nibbānaṃ ārādhenti*), and some do not succeed.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ *Appekacce kho, brāhmaṇa, mama sāvakaḥ mayā evaṃ ovaḍḍiyamānā evaṃ anusāsīyamānā*

The Chinese counterpart of this *sutta* in the *Madhyamāgama* (MĀ 144 = T 26: 1.652.c22)⁴¹, has “some... attain final *nirvāṇa*” (...得究竟涅槃), where 得 is the familiar character for “attain” (NB. here the verb is explicit). Unfortunately, we don’t have an Indic version to shed light on the source vocabulary, though the sense is clear enough.

Note that some Zen commentators are troubled by the idea of attaining *nirvāṇa* since “... this would amount to the attainment of something that cannot be attained” (Pine 2004: 137)⁴², however, the early Buddhist literature does not acknowledge this prohibition. The problem arises from the metaphysical interpretation of Buddhism generally, i.e. using the language of “existent” (*astitā*) and “non-existent” (*nāstitā*), or “real” and “unreal” to describe subjective experience.⁴³ If we treat *nirvāṇa* as real, then something existent has been attained; if we treat it as unreal then nothing has been attained. An epistemological reading allows us to assert that someone has attained *the state of nirvāṇa*. Through the cessation of sensory-cognitive activity, they become unaware of any sensory-cognitive experience while maintaining a bare awareness. To say that sense experience has ceased for a particular meditator does not imply any particular metaphysical conclusions, though of course, the fact that experience can be extinguished without losing basic consciousness is itself fascinating.

The characters 究竟 are often used to translate *niṣṭhā* “state, condition; conclusion, termination”; but they are also used to translate *atyanta* “ultimate, culmination; arrive, reach”, and sometimes *atyanta-niṣṭhā* (*Digital Dictionary of Buddhism* s.v. 究竟). The terms *atyantaśūnyatā* “ultimate emptiness” and *atyantaviśuddhitā* “ultimate purity” are found quite frequently in *Pañc*.

Karashima’s glossary of Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* (*Saddh*) (T 262), offers another possibility (2001: 222-3). Karashima identifies cases where the Chinese phrase 究竟涅槃 stands for *nirvāṇa-paryavasānam*. *Paryavasāna* (*pari+ava√so*) means

accantaṃ niṭṭhaṃ nibbānaṃ ārādhenti, ekacce nārādhenti’ti. (MN iii.4)

⁴¹ Translated late 4th Century CE, probably from Gāndhārī.

⁴² And compare Lock and Linebarger (2018: 22, n.5) commenting on the lack of verb associated with 究竟涅槃: “Note that there is no verb here, In fact, it is hard to think what verb could go here, as from the point of view of emptiness there is nothing to ‘get’ or ‘attain’.

⁴³ Compare the injunction against using the metaphysical dichotomy (*dvāya*) implied by these terms with respect to the world of experience (*loka*) in the *Kaccānagotta Sutta* (SN 12: 15)

“end, conclusion” or “ending, concluding” and thus is a synonym of *niṣṭhā*.⁴⁴ Take this example:

For those following the path of Hearers,⁴⁵ [the Buddha] taught the corresponding Dharma of the four truths, [which] goes beyond (度) birth, old age, illness and death and *culminates in extinction* (究竟涅槃).⁴⁶

The corresponding sentence in the Sanskrit *Saddh* has a slightly different structure.

That Dharma of the Hearers, *culminating in extinction*, dealing with dependent arising connected with the four noble truths of the Hearers, was taught for [the purpose of] *going beyond* (*samatikramāya*) birth, old age, disease, death, grief, lament, misery, despondency, and trouble.⁴⁷

Apparently, Kumārajīva’s source was less prolix than the later manuscripts that form the basis of Vaidya’s edition (1960). Here, 度 (dù) corresponds to *samatikramāya* and 究竟涅槃 to *nirvāṇa-paryavasānam*. The verb is from *sam+ati√kram* and means “going entirely over or beyond”. It is used more often in this context than words from *ati√kram*, which also has the connotation of “transgression”. In his *Saddh* translation, Kumārajīva also translates *nirvāṇa-paryavasāna* with 究竟涅槃 at 9.19c4, 9.50c4, and 9.50c.7. Additionally, he

⁴⁴ It is most often used in *Aṣṭa* as part of the triplet “beginning, middle, or end” (*anto vā madhyaṃ vā paryavasānam* Vaidya 23).

⁴⁵ 求聲聞者 is more literally “those seeking *śrāvaka*-hood”

⁴⁶ 為求聲聞者說應四諦法，度生老病死，究竟涅槃 (9.3c.17). My thanks to Maitiu O’Ceileachair for help with this translation.

⁴⁷ *yad uta śrāvakāṇāṃ caturāryasatyā-saṃprayuktaṃ pratīyasamutpāda-pravṛttaṃ dharmam deśayati sma jāti-jarāvvyādhimaraṇaśoka-paridevaduḥkha-daurmanasyopāyāsānāṃ samatikramāya nirvāṇaparyavasānam* | (Vaidya 1960 12). An anonymous reviewer for an earlier draft pointed out that this sentence must be read in conjunction with the one that follows, which shows that *nirvāṇaparyavasānam* qualifies *dharmam*. There is a similar phrase in *Pañc*, “[The bodhisattva] points out the one path for the purification of beings, for going beyond sorrow and calamity... for the realisation of *nirvāṇa*” (*ekāyanaṃ mārgam upadiśati sattvānāṃ viśuddhaye śokopadravāṇāṃ samatikramāya duḥkhadaurmanasyānām astaṅgamāyāryasya dharmasyādhigamāya nirvāṇasya sāksātkriyāyai*, Kimura 4.100). Interestingly, *samatikramam duḥkhadaurmanasyam* might well be a translation of the missing passage at the end of Section II, i.e. 度一切苦厄.

used these characters to translate synonyms of *nirvāṇa-paryavasāna* such as *parinirvāṇa* (9.7c.2) and *samavasaraṇa* (9.12b.5).

This passage of the *Heart Sutra* is not a quote from the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, but it was very likely influenced by Kumārajīva's translations. And if this is so then we might have expected the Translator to opt for *nirvāṇa-paryavasāna* rather than *niṣṭhā-nirvāṇa* in translating 究竟涅槃. Therefore, *niṣṭhānirvāṇa* appears to be a calque of the Chinese phrase 究竟涅槃 and this is, as Nattier, observed, more “natural” in Chinese.

Translating Section VI

A close reading of Section VI of the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra* reveals the Translator struggling to express the ideas found in the Chinese text. The majority of problems are on the whole idiomatic or aesthetic rather than substantive. If we repair the mistakes made by Conze, the Sanskrit text can be parsed as Sanskrit, albeit rather awkward and lumpy Sanskrit. However, we can also see that the Translator did not quite understand the intent of the Author at times. With so many problems in this short passage, we may wonder if there were problems that went beyond the limitations of the Translator and indicate a problem of translating between two such different languages.

The difficulties are testified to in a *Language Log* blog post⁴⁸ in which Victor Mair posed the question “Are Sanskrit and Chinese ‘congenial languages?’” and supplied answers from various colleagues. His own answer was, “I would say that Chinese is not a particularly suitable language for translating Sanskrit.” The consensus seemed to be that translating Sanskrit into Chinese posed significant difficulties. That said, by the mid-7th Century a huge number of Buddhist texts had been translated from Indic languages into Chinese, often multiple times. The difficulties were surmounted. There can be no doubt that translation in this direction (Indic → Chinese) was feasible although the target language had to be adapted with many neologisms and loan words. Did the Translator face special difficulties going in the opposite direction (Chinese → Sanskrit)?

⁴⁸ <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=6931>

I decided to answer this question through a pragmatic demonstration. Below is my own translation of the Chinese passage into Sanskrit taking into account all the observations and suggestions collated in this article.

The Chinese passage that we wish to translate into Sanskrit is this.

V. 是故空中。... 無智亦無得。以無所得故。

VI. 菩提薩埵。依般若波羅蜜多故。心無罣礙。無罣礙故。無有恐怖。遠離顛倒夢想。究竟涅槃。

I'll begin by sketching my contextual understanding of this passage before offering a tentative Sanskrit translation along with an English gloss. The text assumes that the reader understands that emptiness (空) is a state attained in or through meditation. This state is typically reached by applying the meditative technique of the yoga of non-apprehension. This leads through the sphere of infinite space (*ākāśānantyāyatana*) and via a series of increasing rarefied states (*āyatana*) to emptiness (*sūnyatā*). Such techniques are not explicit in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, which adopt the point of view of a successful practitioner. However, the Pāli *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* (MN 121) outlines a practice that culminates in *suññatāvihāra* “dwelling in emptiness”. The technique is not called *anupalambhayoga* but employs the Pāli term *amanasikāra* “not paying attention to” (in various conjugations), which is synonymous with *anupalambha* “nonapprehension”.

Two Buddhist practitioners, Satyadhana (2014) and Anālayo (2015), describe ways of putting the *Cūḷasuññata Sutta* into practice. We can convey the effect of the practice by analogy with losing track of something and having it disappear from our thoughts. While the object gets no attention from us, we have no conscious awareness of it. It is *as though* it does not exist for us. And I stress that this is an epistemological argument, not a metaphysical (Idealistic) one.

Generally speaking, we think of Buddhist meditation as focussing attention on something in order to keep it at the forefront of awareness. The practice of nonapprehension (以無所得故 *yǐ wú suǒdé gù*) makes use of the flip side of this ability, i.e. while we are focussed on one thing, we are unaware of other things. And the more intense the focus, the more exclusive it is.

Experience requires active attention and by deliberately withholding it, we can lose track of the world to the extent that we bring sensory-cognitive experience to a complete halt. In Buddhist terms, the *skandhas* qua apparatus of experience cease functioning because their mode of existence is dependent on attention

(*maniskāra*) and/or apprehension (*upalambha*). Under these conditions, with no apprehension of sensory or mental activity, no dharmas arise. There is no information by which the practitioner can orient themselves in space or time. The sense of self dissolves. This is *emptiness* (*śūnyatā*).⁴⁹ In this state, nothing arises and nothing ceases. The state itself is unconditioned since it does not require the presence of any conditions to exist. Contrarily, it requires that we stop paying attention to and apprehending any and all potential conditions for the arising of sensory and mental experience.

Emptiness is not unconsciousness since afterwards one can vividly remember having been in that state. Watching sensory-cognitive experience cease and then later arise again can create some ongoing changes in one's perception and interpretation of experience. The practitioner of the yoga of nonapprehension views experience as like an illusion (compare Attwood 2017b). One is less likely to become stuck (*sajjati*) on experience. Someone who is "in that state" (*tathā-gata*) is described as *buddha*, i.e. "awakened". They have attained *nirvāṇa*, i.e. extinction of the conditions for rebirth. In the Prajñāpāramitā literature, the understanding that flows from the repeated and prolonged exposure to emptiness is hyperbolically called *sarvajñā* "omniscience" or *prajñāpāramitā* "supreme insight".

Nor is this a merely theoretical state or only based on descriptions in ancient texts. Meditators are dwelling in emptiness, whether they call it this or not, all the time. Any apt pupil can do the same.

We can now see how to read Section VI. When one's refuge or reliance (依) is supreme insight (般若波羅蜜多) then the mind (心) does get caught up (無罣礙) in the phenomenal world. One achieves a certain detachment from experience. And as a result, one is not fearful (無有恐怖) because the attachment that underlies all fear is absent. The delusions and illusions (顛倒夢想) that keep the unawakened in the rounds of rebirth are left behind (遠離), and

⁴⁹ It is not inconceivable that the yoga of nonapprehension was quite common amongst ancient Indian practitioners of meditation. Such is hinted at in the *Ariyapariyesanā Sutta* (MN 26) with reference to the practices taught by Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. And if so, experience might well be described in Sāṃkhya terms of a real, passive observer (*puruṣa*) of an illusory, active phenomenal world (*prakṛti*). The experience of emptiness could be likened to *puruṣa* seeing *prakṛti* in its quiescent state (*pradhāna*). Even some Buddhists tend to reify the residual awareness present in emptiness. Given that the "experience" of emptiness disrupts spatio-temporal- and self-orientation, a Brahmin experiencing this same state might confirm that they had experienced merging with Brahman.

one is finally extinguished (究竟涅槃) and after that nothing more can be said. The after-death state of the awakened is ineffable (*avyākṛta*).

Taking into account all of the notes and caveats outlined above, one way we could translate the Chinese text into idiomatic Prajñāpāramitā Sanskrit would be:

V. Śāriputra, *śūnyatāyām na rūpaṃ na vedanā... na prāptir na abhisamayo anupalambhayogena* ||

VI. *yato prajñāpāramitām niśrayati tato bodhisatvacittam na kvacit sajjati | asaktvā astrasto viparyāsamāyāvivikto nirvāṇaparyavasānañca prāpṇoti |*

V. Śāriputra, in the state of emptiness, through practising non-apprehension, there is no form, no feeling ... no attainment and no realisation.

VI. Since he relies on the perfection of insight, the mind of the *bodhisatva* does not get stuck anywhere, being unattached he is unafraid, detached from delusions and illusions, and he attains the culmination of extinction.

I do not argue that this is the best translation that could be achieved or that it should replace the existing translation. I argue only that this is a better translation than the one that has come down to us in the *Heart Sutra*. Although there are difficulties in making such a translation, there are no insurmountable problems as long as we correctly parse the ideas being conveyed. These are concepts that ultimately derive from Indian Buddhism and were first expressed in Indic languages, so all the terminology already exists and we have extensive witnesses to the idiom used by the authors.

Conclusions

The Translator did a passable job of translating most of the *Heart Sutra*, even though they didn't manage to reproduce the idiom of a Sanskrit *Prajñāpāramitā* text and inadvertently included some Chinese idioms and calques. However, in Section V/VI the Translator failed to accurately convey the meaning of the Chinese text partly because they misunderstood it and partly because their knowledge of Sanskrit language and literature seems to have been limited. The resulting translation had some influence in China, but from the time of Müller's

1884 diplomatic edition of the Hōryūji manuscript, the Sanskrit text became increasingly important. The Indian origins of the text were unquestioned for over a century despite the many obvious problems with the text in Sanskrit.

This raises the question of why the discrepancies between the two texts did not come into focus earlier. Woncheuk cites a Sanskrit text, but he appears to be the last scholar of the Chinese text to do so until the late 20th Century, despite an ongoing tradition of textual scholarship. Noticing Chinese calques in a Sanskrit text required a particular mindset: one has to first acknowledge that the Sanskrit text is problematic and then be familiar enough with the relevant Chinese literature to see the reasons for it. Jan Nattier put together a lot of hints from her colleagues' (often unpublished) comments, e.g. Robert Buswell (Nattier 1992: 210 n.48), Fukui Fumimasa (175-6, 185), John McRae (211 n.52), Richard Salomon (214 n.57), Alan Sponberg (1992: 207 n.33), and Yamabe Noboyoshi (211-3 n. 54a), and still, she was the first to look *systematically* at the provenance of the Sanskrit text. One has to first admit the possibility that the tradition might have been contrived before we could look afresh at the all too familiar text and see the calques and mistranslations.

The deeper problem with the Sanskrit *Heart Sutra*, to paraphrase Samuel Johnson, is not that it was done badly; but that it was done at all. In the mid 7th Century, Chinese Buddhists would have been familiar with digest texts and understood what it represented. The *Heart Sutra* does not even take the form of a *sūtra*: it does not begin *evam mayā śrutam*; it does not mention where the *sūtra* was preached, the Buddha does not speak or signify his approval of the words spoken, and the recipient of the teaching doesn't celebrate it at the end (all of which features are added to the extended version). No one in the Chinese Buddhist establishment in the early Tang would have mistaken this text for a *sūtra*, except for three things:

1. a Sanskrit version was in circulation,
2. the Chinese text was explicitly labelled as a translation attributed to the famous pilgrim and translator Xuánzàng, and
3. it had the imprimatur of the Emperor.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The Fangshan Stele includes the phrase 奉 詔 譯 “translated by imperial decree”. Meaning that the translation was *approved* by the Emperor without necessarily implying an endorsement of the content. The Emperor in 661 CE, Gāozōng 高宗, was not a Buddhist, though his wife, Wǔ zhào 武曩, was and this was around the time that she was the defacto ruler of China due to

A connection with India, a connection with a named and prestigious translator (both deriving from Xuánzàng), and imperial approval were criteria for authenticity developed by Chinese bibliographers. In this case, they would be the *minimal* requirements to force Chinese Buddhists to consider something other than the obvious conclusion.

That a Sanskrit translation was made at all must be related to this. At least I can think of no other reason for both making a Sanskrit translation of a digest text *and* passing it off as Indian. Going to so much trouble to legitimise one digest text when thousands of genuinely Indian *sūtras* were available must have benefited someone, somehow, although I cannot see who it might have been or how they might have benefited.

Despite promoting a revisionist history of the text, I would still say that the *Heart Sutra* is an important and valuable text. It does indeed represent the essence of *Prajñāpāramitā*, i.e. experience understood from the point of view of the state of emptiness. In particular, it draws our attention to the importance of the previously unappreciated *yoga of nonapprehension* and to the profound experience of emptiness, especially as it was expressed by the authors of the *Pañc*. The *Heart Sutra* presents a fascinating insight into consciousness beyond the dissolution of the ego. It also affords us a glimpse into the social history of Chinese Buddhism in the early Tang Dynasty.

Abbreviations

Aṣṭa	Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra
CBETA	Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (an online version of T.)
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
Pañc	Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya
T	<i>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō</i>

Gāozōng 's illness. One could read all the English language literature on the *Heart Sutra* to date and not encounter Wú zhào, whereas she was, arguably, the most important figure in Chinese history from 655 to 705 CE. For recent critical discussions of the historiography of Xuánzàng see Attwood (2019) and Kotyk (2020).

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