THE LOSS OF NARRATIVE FLOW: CODIFICATION OF TENSE IN JAPANESE TRANSLATIONS OF SINITIC AND SANSKRIT RENDITIONS OF A BUDDHIST STORY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese monk Yijing (Jp. Gijō 義浄, 635–713) highlighted the importance of internalizing Sanskrit's inflectional morphology to properly translate Buddhist texts. However, grammatical categories explicitly expressed in Sanskrit, such as tense, are often left to context and word order in Chinese. In Japanese, on the other hand, the grammatical marking of time is mostly obligatory, but in narration tense can also be extended into other discursive functions, such as being used as a framing device.

This paper focuses on the embedded tale of the tigress in three Japanese translations of the *Golden Light Sutra* (Jp. *Konkōmyō saishō ō kyō* Ch. *Jīnguāngmíng zuìshèng wáng jīng* 金光明最勝王経, Sk. *Suvarṇaprabhāsottama sūtra* सुवर्णप्रभासोत्तमसूत्रेन्द्रराज)—one ninth-century CE translation from Literary Sinitic and two early twentieth-century CE translations from Literary Sinitic and Sanskrit. While the premodern Japanese rendition, which was translated via a system of interlinear glossing upon a Literary Sinitic source text, contains a mostly natural use of tense to ground the tale in the past, the latter two translations show either paucity of tense marking (from Literary Sinitic) or explicit marking on every past situation, regardless of how unnatural this is in Japanese narrative (from Sanskrit). All three translations share premodern tense markers due to both modern renditions using archaic literary forms.

By comparing these Japanese translations, this paper finds that the translation strategy of Buddhist sutra narrative passages has become codified with regards to how tense is depicted in the source text. It concludes by arguing that the goal of adhering to the "original," whether Literary Sinitic or Sanskrit, and the loss of native intuition regarding archaic Japanese tense markers, led to a loss of discourse complexity in the translation of Buddhist narratives.

2. THE *GOLDEN LIGHT SUTRA* IN TRANSLATION

The *Golden Light Sutra* was likely completed in Sanskrit by the turn of the fifth century CE (Buswell & Lopez 2014: 877). In 703 CE, the

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Chinese Buddhist monk Yijing produced a 31-chapter Literary Sinitic translation. According to Sango (2007: 35), the Yijing translation of the sutra was likely imported to Japan by the monk Dōji 道慈 in 718. It "had already been copied for circulation in Japan in 725 [and] inspired Emperor Shōmu to erect Tōdaiji and state temples in every province dedicated to the sutra" (Abé 1999: 116). Hence, the sutra was recited in temples throughout the kingdom by imperial decree in 741 to project centralized authority and protect the state. The earliest extant Japanese translation of the *Golden Light Sutra* is a text translated via vernacular glossing of the Yijing text in the ninth century at Saidaiji 西大寺 temple in present-day Nara. In 1942, Kasuga Masaji 春日政治 (1878–1962) produced a detailed transliteration of the glossed Literary Sinitic script into more readable Japanese script (Jp. *kakikudashi* 書き下し). This same Yijing text was translated in the early-Showa period by a team of translators led by the Buddhist monk Mitsui Masashi 三井晶史 in 1928. Just five years later, in 1933, Izumi Hōkei 泉芳璟 (1884–1947) published the first Sanskrit to Japanese translation of the sutra, noting that he merely edited a near-complete translation by his teacher Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄 (1849–1927), an early Japanese authority on Sanskrit Buddhist texts.[2]

Although there is some variation between the Sanskrit and Literary Sinitic renditions, all three of these texts share the same emotionally charged embedded story of self-sacrifice, found in chapter 19 of the Sanskrit rendition and chapter 26 in the Yijing Literary Sinitic translation.

3. THE EMBEDDED TALE IN THE JAPANESE TRANSLATIONS

Like most Buddhist sutras, the *Golden Light Sutra* is framed as a witnessed conversation between the Buddha and a gathering of monks and greater beings. The Buddha occasionally responds to queries with tales in which a buddha to-be does a great deed (Sk. *jātaka*). One such *jātaka*-style tale in the *Golden Light Sutra* is that of literal self-sacrifice, in which a young prince gives his life to feed a starving tigress and her cubs. This chapter is called "Self-sacrifice" in the Yijing rendition and its subsequent Japanese translations and "The Tigress" in Sanskrit and its subsequent translations.

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[2] The Sanskrit *Golden Light Sutra* had become fragmented by the nineteenth century. Izumi published the first modern complete Sanskrit rendition of the sutra in 1931, created primarily by Nanjō assembling fragments of the sutra found in London, Cambridge, Paris, Kyoto, and Tokyo and cross-referencing Chinese and Tibetan translations.

This tale contains the most emotional dialogue in the sutra. It is narratively complex, with a detailed orientation and plot progression, making it an ideal target for investigating the relationship between temporality and narrative flow. The tale begins with the Buddha showing a gathered assembly of monks and other beings a stupa containing holy relic bones. He then explains their origin in the following tale.

> There was a great king who had three sons. They all travel to a forest and after the king returns home the remaining three princes find a starving tigress and her cubs. The older princes become fearful and leave, but the youngest prince remains. Deciding to save the tigers, the prince jumps off a cliff and stabs himself to sacrifice his life to feed them. The heavens rejoice at his selfless act and the earth tremors. The two older princes become uneasy upon feeling the earthquake and return to find their younger brother's remains. They and their parents, the king and queen, lament and place the remaining bones in a stupa. The Buddha then affirms that he was the youngest prince in a past life and that self-sacrifice was how he attained enlightenment.

He then repeats the story in verse, and the chapter concludes with the assembled monks raising their thoughts to supreme enlightenment. With an outline of the tale in mind, we will now compare how parts of the narrative are presented in each rendition.

The tale begins with the Buddha explaining to his disciple Ānanda the origin of the holy relic bones. The following are three examples of the opening of the embedded tale.

(1) Ninth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

> 過去の世（の）時に、一の國王、名をば大車と曰ふが巨に富（み）て財多（く）して、庫藏に盈滿シ、軍兵武勇にして衆に欽伏（せ）所レ、常に正法を以て、黔黎を施化し、人民熾盛にして、怨敵有（る）こと無（から）しむルと、國の大夫人と有（り）キ。誕生せる三（はし）ラの子の顔容端正にして人に觀ぬと樂（は）所ルが、太子をば名（づけ）て（曰）摩訶波羅といヒ、次の子をば名（づけ）て（曰）摩訶提婆といひ、幼キ子をば名（づけ）て（曰）摩訶薩埵といふありキ。是の時に大王遊觀せむと欲すが為に、縦マに山林に賞シビたまひキ。(Kasuga

1942: 189)[3]

‘In a past era, there was a king named Mahāratha who had great wealth, whose stores were full, whose soldiers were brave and to whom all surrendered, who bestowed the teachings to the people always using the proper dharma, whose populace flourished, who allowed there to be no enemies, and who was with a great queen of the kingdom. The beautiful complexion of the three children born to them was such that people could not help but feel joy upon looking at them. The eldest prince was named Mahāpraṇāda, the second was named Mahādeva, and the young prince was named Mahāsattva. At this time the great king wanted to travel so they visited a forest.’

(2) Twentieth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

過去世の時、一國あり。王の名を大車と曰ひ、巨富にして財多し。庫藏盈滿し、軍兵武勇にして、衆に欽伏せられ、常に正法を以て、化を黔黎に施す。人民熾盛にして怨敵有ること無し。國の大夫人三子を誕生す。顔容端正にして人樂ひ觀所なり。太子の名を摩訶波羅と曰ひ、次子の名を摩訶提婆と曰ひ、幼子の名を摩訶薩埵と曰ふ。是時大王、遊觀して縦に山林を賞せんと欲す。 (Mitsui 1928: 507)

‘At a time in a past era, there is a country. The king is named Mahāratha and has great wealth. With full stores and brave soldiers to whom all surrender, he bestows the teachings to the people always using the proper dharma. The populace flourishes, and he has no enemies. The queen of the kingdom gives birth to three sons. They have beautiful complexions and people cannot help but feel joy upon looking at them. The eldest son is called Mahāpraṇāda, the second son is called Mahādeva, and the youngest son is called Mahāsattva. At that time the great king travels and wants to visit a forest.’

(3) Twentieth-century Translation from Sanskrit

往昔、過去世に多くの財穀車乗群團を有せる、無礙勇遭者なる、

[3] See the introductory remarks (Jp. *hanrei* 凡例) in Kasuga (1942) for his orthographic conventions.

> 大車と名づくる王ありき。かれに天子に比すべき三人の王子ありき。大響、大天、大有情これなり。時に王は遊觀のために園林に出行せり。(Izumi 1933: 173)

> 'Formerly, in a past time, there was a king called Mahāratha, who was possessed of much wealth, grain, chariots, power, and whose power and prowess were unobstructed. He had three sons who resembled princes of the gods: Mahāpraṇāda, Mahādeva, and Mahāsattva. Then the king went out to a place in a park for sport.' (Emmerick 1970: 87)[4]

At first glance we can see that the ninth-century translation from Literary Sinitic and the twentieth-century one from Sanskrit both begin in the past tense with predicates marked by *ki*. The twentieth-century translation from Literary Sinitic, however, shows no such temporal distinction. The present tense in the English rendition of (2) above reflects this grammatical difference. The line depicting the king venturing into the forest shows the greatest variety among the translations, so we will focus on it here.

To begin, the Literary Sinitic translation by Yijing presents this line as 是時大王為欲遊觀縱賞山林. The earliest Japanese translation we have of this line, found in (1), is *kono toki ni daiō yūkan.semu to hossu ga tame ni, hoshiki mama ni sanrin ni tanoshibi-tamahi-ki*.[5]

We see a clear difference in sentence structure in the twentieth-century translation from the same Literary Sinitic source text, found in (2)—*kono toki daiō yūkan.shite hoshī mama ni sanrin o shō.sen to hossu*—with *hossu* being outside of the first clause. However, the translation from what is more likely the original version in Sanskrit, found in (3)—*toki ni ō wa yūkan no tame ni enrin ni shukkō.seri*—shows past tense marking. The auxiliary verb *(a)ri*, here following *shukkō.su* to form *shukkō.seri*, is used as a past-tense marker in this translation.

It must be noted that the Showa-period translations use archaic tense markers. Both Mitsui and Izumi use past tense *ta* in their respective prefaces, but use *ki*, *(a)ri*, and *tari* to indicate past tense in their translations. However, these newer translations use these based solely on

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[4] Emmerick (1970) is an English translation of a Sanskrit rendition of the *Golden Light Sutra*. His translation matches Izumi's Japanese one, so I use it here. Translations without citations are my own.

[5] Although modern Japanese romanizations do not accurately represent the phonology of how the ninth-century text was pronounced when it was translated, I use them in this paper for clarity to better contrast with the twentieth-century modern Japanese translations.

verb form rather than for their original semantic differences. In other words, where we find *(a)ri* and *tari* marking stativity in Heian period texts, they are most often used as simple past tense markers in Izumi's translation from Sanskrit and occasionally for stativity in embedded clauses in Mitsui's translation from Literary Sinitic.

The three translations differ in both the overarching tense of the narrative and how they use grammatical material to foreground and background sentences. For example, the following examples depict the scene when the princes first see the starving tigress and her cubs.

(4) Ninth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

一の虎有（り）て、七の子を產み生（し）て、纔に七日經にたり。諸の子に圍遶（せ）ラレて、飢渴に逼（め）所レて、身形羸レ瘦セて死（な）むと將ること久（しく）あるマジキを見つ。 (Kasuga 1942: 189)

'There was a tiger and just seven days had passed since she had given birth to seven cubs. Surrounded by her cubs, afflicted with starvation and thirst, and having a frail and withered body, they saw that it would not be long until she would die.'

(5) Twentieth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

一虎の七子を生產して纔かに七日を經たるあるを見る。諸子圍遶して、飢渴に逼められ、身形羸瘦して、將に死せんとする久しからず。 (Mitsui 1928: 507)

'They see a tiger who bore seven cubs and had just seven days pass. Surrounded by cubs, afflicted with starvation and thirst, and having a frail and withered body, it surely is not long until she will die.'

(6) Twentieth-century Translation from Sanskrit

一牝虎の仔を産みて七日なるが、五仔に圍遶せられ、飢渴のために牽かれて極めて身衰へたるを見たり。 (Izumi 1933: 174)

'[The princes] saw such a tigress as had given birth seven days ago, surrounded by her five offspring, tortured by hunger and thirst, her body extremely weak.' (Emmerick 1970: 87)

The ninth-century translation, (4), uses *henitari* to show the state resulting in seven days passing. This is embedded in the more recent translations, although we do see *hetaru* in Mitsui's translation from Literary Sinitic, (5). Of greater interest is the way *miru* ('see') is rendered in each. We see *mitsu*, *miru*, and *mitari,* respectively. While the twentieth-century translation from Literary Sinitic follows the tenseless pattern of using the verb in the plain form, the other renditions use auxiliaries of differing semantics. The auxiliary following *miru* in (4), the ninth-century translation, is *tsu*, a perfective aspect marker. It signifies the completion of an action. In (6), the twentieth-century translation from Sanskrit, on the other hand, the auxiliary *tari* is being used as a simple past marker. The distinction we see in temporal marking here affects how the events are backgrounded and foregrounded throughout the narrative.

Paul Hopper has written that background is "language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events," whereas foreground is the "language of the actual story line" (Hopper 1978: 213). The most common discourse function of the stative auxiliaries in ninth-century Japanese is to pause the narration and provide background information to the scene, which the stative auxiliary *tari* does in (4). Its use in a foregrounded event in (6), the twentieth-century Sanskrit translation, shows how the auxiliary has shifted over time. *Tari*'s meaning has changed from the result of a completed action to the completion of the action itself. This is why we see it performing different grammatical roles in the premodern and modern texts. *Tari* is nominalized as *taru* in (5), the twentieth-century Literary Sinitic translation, which is a common rhetorical strategy to background completed events, making it a grammatical perfect. As previously mentioned, the perfective *tsu* marks events that move the narrative forward as both realized and complete and, by extension, foregrounds the events and draws the listener into the action.

Below are the representations of the conclusion of the tale in the three translations with relevant grammatical information underlined. The king and queen have placed the remains of the third prince in a pagoda and express their grief; then the Buddha, who is narrating the story, concludes by commenting on how his self-sacrifice brought him to his current position of being able to rescue beings from the recurring pain of hells.

(7) Ninth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

尒時大王及於夫人并（せ）て二の王子、哀ヲ盡クシ號ビ哭キ、
瓔珞をも<u>御（せ）ず（不）なりヌ</u> [. . .] 我レ（於）昔の時に煩惱

貪瞋癡の等キ具せりキと雖 [. . .] 救濟（し）つゝ出離を得令（め）キ。 (Kasuga 1942: 195)

'At that time the great king and queen along with the two princes cried, exhausting their pathos, and removed [their] jewels. [. . .] although I was carrying suffering, greed, aversion, delusion, and such at a time long ago [. . .] I was able to rescue [the people of the world] over time and make them escape [the pain of hells and such].'

(8) Twentieth-century Translation from Literary Sinitic

爾時、大王及び夫人並に二王子、哀を盡くして號哭して瓔珞を御せず。[. . .] 我れ昔時に於て煩惱、貪、瞋、癡等を具せりと雖も [. . .] 救濟して出離することを得しむ。 (Mitsui 1975: 206)

'At that time the great king and queen along with the two princes cried, exhausting their pathos, and do not have [their] jewels. [. . .] although I carried suffering, greed, aversion, delusion, and such at a time long ago [. . .] I am able to rescue [the people of the world] and make them escape [the pain of hells and such].'

(9) Twentieth-century Translation from Sanskrit

時に王と夫人とは種種悲歎して泣き、彼等の裝飾を解き [. . .] せり。[. . .] その時われ貪瞋癡を捨てざりしも、哀愍によりて世間は地獄等の苦より攝受せられたり。 (Izumi 1933: 186)

'Then the king and the queen cried, making laments of many kinds. They removed their ornaments [. . .] Then, even though I did not discard passion, hatred, and folly, with [my] compassion the people of the world were converted from the pain of hells and such.'

We see the earliest translation, (7), using temporal morphemes to distinguish each line's role in the narrative. For example, *nu* depicts a change of state. The auxiliary *nu* is another perfective like *tsu*, discussed above. The predicate *seri*, composed of the verb *su* ('do') plus the auxiliary *(a)ri*, in both the pre-modern and modern translations from Literary Sinitic are statives, showing the ongoing action of carrying. As we can see, the oldest translation, (7), shows a completed action, ending in *nu*, which is in

the present tense, then concludes the tale in the past, which is marked by *ki*. The modern translation from Literary Sinitic, (8), only shows aspect marking in embedded clauses, as we see with *(a)ri* here, and is completely unmarked for tense. The modern translation from Sanskrit, (9), while showing different past tense morphemes depending on the verb class, with *(a)ri* following what today are u-verbs, *ki* or *shi* following statives, and *tari* following ru-verbs. We most often see *ki*, but *shi* is used in (9) due to the past-tense clause being nominalized, like adding a *no* to a verb in Japanese today.

We thus find the following use of temporal marking in each translation of the tale. The ninth-century Japanese translation from Literary Sinitic uses past-tense *ki* to frame the tale in the past, but soon switches to unmarked verb forms with perfectives *tsu* and *nu* for foregrounding actions and scene changes and statives *(a)ri* and *tari* for backgrounding, or scene depiction. The twentieth-century Literary Sinitic to Japanese rendition is primarily unmarked grammatically with occasional perfect *(a)ri* and *tari* to mark things that have been the case over time. The twentieth-century Sanskrit to Japanese rendition is completely past tense outside of quotations, using *ki*, *(a)ri*, and *tari* all to denote past-tense and only distinguishing their use based on the predicate type. Given these differences, how should we understand the changing temporality reflecting narrative flow in the Heian-period translation? Regarding such a phenomenon, Suzanne Fleischman writes the following.

> In narrative discourse, time reference is normally established at the outset of the text, and since it tends to be a property of large stretches of discourse, or even of entire texts, it need not in principle be reiterated in each successive clause. [. . .] One result is that in the narrative grammars of many languages tense is in large measure freed from its primary referential function of locating events in time, and the available morphology is pressed into service for other, notably pragmatic, purposes. (Fleischman 1991: 28).

We see this in the ninth-century Japanese translation from Literary Sinitic. However, we do not find this discourse strategy in the twentieth-century Japanese translations. In the following section we discuss how the more recent translations have lost such narrative flow.

4. THE LOSS OF NARRATIVE FLOW IN THE MODERN TRANSLATIONS

According to Kobayashi Yoshinori 小林芳規, by the eleventh century there came to be a general loss of discourse-level translation techniques because Japanese translators of Literary Sinitic could no longer internalize the linguistic nuances of the texts and had to disregard narrative structure (Kobayashi 2012: 326–340). Furthermore, although there remain a variety of strategies for rendering texts written in Literary Sinitic into Japanese, the most predominant methodology for translating such texts is largely characterized by minimizing supplemental Japanese words or morphemes not found in the Sinitic source text. Translating this way, without adding native morphology, such as Japanese tense markers, remains the predominant strategy today, which we see in Mitsui's translation as well.

In Sanskrit, on the other hand, tales from the past are almost exclusively written using past tenses. The modern-day Japanese translation by Izumi and Nanjō attempted to replicate the original as closely as possible, hence the lack of the natural tense-switching that we see in Japanese stories today.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the Sanskrit rendition of the *Golden Light Sutra* consistently uses past tense in its embedded narratives. When translated into Literary Sinitic by Yijing in the eighth century, there was no option in Chinese to produce tensed sentences, but lexical items are used effectively to bring these narratives into past contexts and show narrative flow. The monks in ninth-century Japan chose to use vernacular narrative strategies to present the flow of time in their translations. In other words, stories were framed with past tense marking at their orientations and conclusions, but the story within quickly shifted to a historical present where morphology was used to foreground and background information throughout the tale. The early twentieth-century translation of the Yijing Literary Sinitic rendition into Japanese generally lacks overt tense marking, reflecting the lack of such explicit markers in Literary Sintic. On the other hand, the twentieth-century translation from Sanskrit to Japanese takes utmost care to follow the tense marking found in the Sanskrit original rather than shift the flow of time to a more natural Japanese vernacular.

By comparing these Japanese translations, this study finds that the translation strategy of Buddhist sutra narrative passages has become codified with regards to how tense is depicted in the source text. The goal of adhering to the "original," whether Literary Sinitic or Sanskrit, has resulted in a loss of discourse complexity in the translation of the Buddhist

narratives investigated in this paper. However, some more recent translations have attempted to construct a more natural Japanese narrative in their renditions, and should be rich targets of inquiry on how translators may break from rigid traditions going forward to better draw the audience into this tale of tragedy and glory.

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