A Space for Translation: Thresholds of Interpretation

Presentation Details	
Title of Paper:	Debating Buddhist Translations in Cyberspace: The Buddhist Online Discussion Forum as a Discursive and Epitextual Space
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Abstract:

Recent research in the field of contemporary Buddhist studies has evinced a growing interest in how Buddhism is constructed and performed in the digital space (see e.g. Grieve and Veidlinger 2015), and how such online spaces intersect with or challenge more traditionally established spaces of Buddhist practice in the offline context. One important area within this "Buddhist cyberspace" is that of translation discussion forums, which play an important part in the construction of particular discourses surrounding the Western reception of Buddhism. These discursive spaces incorporate a complex mélange of doctrinal positions, textual competencies, and levels of Buddhist practitioner experience.

This paper will focus on discussions of two key texts in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Heart Sutra*, both of which have seen numerous translations. The paper will conduct an analysis of two forums, focusing in particular on how intertextual elements – whether in the form of quotation from the translations themselves, their paratexts, or related discussions in other forums (sometimes involving the same participants) – are manipulated by discussants to contest particular claims as to the doctrinal or soteriological authenticity of given translations. The paper will conclude with a reflection on the relationship between the forum as discursive space in its own right and as epitextual space that is both liminal to and shapes interpretation of the sutras which it references.

Reference

Grieve, Gregory Price, and Daniel Veidlinger (eds.) (2015). *Buddhism, the Internet, and Digital Media: The Pixel in the Lotus*. London and New York: Routledge.

Author's Biography

Robert NEATHER is Associate Professor and Head of the Translation Programme at Hong Kong Baptist University. His research has focused mainly on translation in the Chinese museum context, and has explored several areas of interest including verbal/visual interactions in translation, intertextuality in the construction of museum narratives in translation, and issues of expertise and identity in the production of translations involving a number of different participants from different professional communities. More recently, he has been exploring translation in the contemporary Buddhist context. He has published in various journals, including *Meta, Semiotica*, and *The Translator*, and is Co-Chief Editor for the Hong Kong-based journal *Translation Quarterly*.