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The Infinite Life Sutra:

A preliminary comparison between the Compilation version and
the five original versions—

Focusing on Nineteenth and Twentieth Vows

1. Introduction

The Infinite Life Sutra (無量壽經) is the central text of the Pureland School. It recorded in Sanskrit how the monk Dharmakara (Treasury of the Dharma) Bhikshu (the name of Amitoufo prior to his attaining Enlightenment, 法藏比丘) made and fulfilled his great vows; the environment of the Pure Land; the true merits of the Bodhisattvas there; the immigrant condition of the Bodhisattvas from the ten directions; explaining the damage of doubting the Buddha's wisdoms and capability of sentient beings to have access to the Pureland. Besides, it also stated The Three grades of aspirants¹. By contrast, to make practitioners let go of the world we live in here, it described the Five Evils of the Saha world². This Sutra clarified the whole picture of the Pureland. This classic was introduced into Chinese in the Han Dynasty (206BC-220AD). In the long river of history, there were twelve translations published but only five survived. The differences between each version are quite large. It is very difficult to read every version, but if we read-only one version, it is probable to miss important details. Consequently, during these thousands of years, there are not many people who read this *Infinite Life Sutra*.

In the early years of the Republic of China (1912-?), Buddhism Master Xialian Gong (夏蓮居) worked hard, to change the manuscript ten times and combined five original translations of Han, Wei (220-266), Wu (222-280), Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279), after several years, *The Buddha Speaks the Mahayana, Infinite Life, Adornment, Purity, Impartiality, and Enlightenment Sutra* (佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經) had come out.

The interpretation is concise which is easy to remember and read; therefore, it widely spread and benefits many people, so it is praised that this is an excellent edition. If we cannot study the difference between this version and the five original translations, we do not know the deep meaning behind his translation. Only if we achieve an in-

¹ The method how to attain rebirth in the PureLand.

² The world where Śākyamuni promotes his teachings.

depth study of the Great Forty-eight Vows of Amituofo can we have wholly understood the Buddha's generosity which can lead to believing a practitioner vows to have the rebirth in the Pureland and chanting the Buddha-name. Today, I collect the nineteenth and twentieth vows of the sixth chapter of Master Xia's translation and compare it with the five original versions, trying to analyse and summarize the advantages of his edition. First, I shall compare the text of the compilation and the original translations; using his version, I shall analyse and summarize the characteristics of this text; and finally, come to a conclusion.

2.Comparison between the compilation version and the five original texts

According to the outline of forty-eight vows that made by Master Ching Kong, the texts I shall discuss below are named 'Awakened aspiration upon hearing the Name (the nineteenth vow)' and 'Receiving to Pure land upon one's demise (the twentieth vow)': 'Provided I become a Buddha, the beings of the ten quarters after having heard my name, develop the mind of Bodhi, resolutely cultivate the various meritorious virtues, practice with sincerity the six paramitas without regression, dedicate all virtuous roots to the true cause of rebirth in my land and wholeheartedly concentrate on the invocation of my name day and night unceasingly (the nineteenth vow); at the moment when their deaths arrive, I shall be accompanied by an assembly of great Bodhisattvas to appear before them, and in a split-second they are received to my land and all become Avaivartika Bodhisattvas; should this not be fulfilled (should it not come to pass that), then may I not attain perfect Enlightenment (the twentieth vow)³.'

Next, I shall respectively list each comparison of the five original translations with the compilation version.

In general, the translation version of Han Dynasty which named *The Buddha Speaks Infinite Purity, Impartiality, and Enlightenment Sutra* (佛說無量清淨平等覺經) is similar to the compilation edition except for a little wording difference⁴.

As for the translation version of Wu Dynasty (佛說阿彌陀三耶三佛薩樓佛檀過度人道經), the relative texts in it with compilation edition are the sixth vow, the seventh vow, and the second half of the fourth vow⁵. What is more, the texts here which are

³ The texts in Chinese of nineteenth and twentieth vows of compilation version made by Master Xia are: '我作佛時，十方眾生，聞我名號，發菩提心，修諸功德，奉行六波羅蜜，堅固不退，復以善根迴向，願生我國。一心念我，晝夜不斷。臨壽終時，我與諸菩薩眾迎現其前，經須臾間，即生我剎，作阿惟越致菩薩，不得是願，不取正覺。'

⁴ The translation version of Han Dynasty in Chinese: '十七：諸天人民蠕動之類聞我名字，皆悉踴躍來生我國，不爾者我不作佛。十八：我作佛時，諸佛國人民有作菩薩道者，常念我淨潔心。壽終時我與不可計比丘眾，飛行迎之共在前立，即還生我國作阿惟越致，不爾者我不作佛。'

⁵ (二) The translation version of Wu Dynasty in Chinese: '諸天人民，蜎飛蠕動之類聞我名字，莫不慈心歡喜踴躍者，皆令來生我國，得是願乃作佛，不得是願終不作佛。(第四願後半)第六願：使某作佛時，令八方上下，無央數佛國，諸天人民，若善男子善女人，欲來生我國，用我故益作善。若分檀佈施、繞塔燒香、散花然燈、懸雜繒彩、飯食沙門、起塔作寺、斷愛欲，來生我

more complicated explains the meaning further than other versions.

Then, let us see the translation version of the Wei Dynasty, overall, the compilation translation fit the meaning with this text; however, the two vows of the corresponding scripture opposite to each other⁶.

After that, here comes the translation version of the Tang Dynasty. The texts of the first-half nineteenth vow and twentieth vow express the meaning of the nineteenth vow in the compilation version 'Awakened aspiration upon hearing the Name'⁷, at the same time, the second half of the nineteenth vow show the meaning of the twentieth vow(compilation version); that is, the nineteenth vow of Tang's edition's meaning including these two vows' meaning.

Lastly, here list the translation version of the Song Dynasty, it similar to the condition of Wei Dynasty's translation, these two vows are in opposite order⁸.

Through preliminary comparison, I find out three points:

- (1) Besides the editions of Han and Wu, the vow texts of the rest three versions here are in different order.
- (2) Sometimes, the original versions have the condition that one vow's texts include two vows' meaning of compilation version, like the edition of Tang; sometimes, the texts of compilation version include two vows' range, like the edition of Tang Wu.
- (3) The five versions are consistent with respect to the core meaning, however, there are little different between each version; some versions' texts are simple, yet some are more complicated in words.

In next chapter, I shall excerpt each word in Chinese of Master Xia's edition to analyse where are the origins of these pieces from, and further, understand the deep meaning behind Master Xia's compilation.

3.Texts analyse

國作菩薩。得是願乃作佛，不得是願終不作佛。第七願：使某作佛時，令八方上下，無央數佛國，諸天人民，若善男子善女人，有作菩薩道，奉行六波羅蜜經，若作沙門不毀經戒，斷愛欲齋戒清淨，一心念欲生我國，晝夜不斷絕。若其人壽欲終時，我即與諸菩薩阿羅漢，共飛行迎之，即來生我國，則作阿惟越致菩薩，智慧勇猛。得是願乃作佛，不得是願終不作佛。'

⁶ The translation version of Wei Dynasty in Chinese: '設我得佛，十方眾生聞我名號繫念我國殖諸德本，至心回向欲生我國，不果遂者，不取正覺。(二十)設我得佛，十方眾生發菩提心修諸功德，至心發願欲生我國，臨壽終時，假令不與大眾圍繞現其人前者，不取正覺'。(十九)

⁷ The translation version of Tang Dynasty in Chinese: '若我成佛，於他剎土有諸眾生發菩提心，及於我所起清淨念，復以善根迴向願生極樂(十九前半)。若我成佛，無量國中所有眾生聞說我名，以己善根迴向極樂。若不生者，不取菩提(二十)彼人臨命終時。我與諸比丘眾。現其人前。若不爾者。不取正覺'。(十九後)

⁸ The translation version of Song Dynasty in Chinese: '世尊，我得菩提成正覺已，所有十方無量無邊，無數世界一切眾生，聞吾名號發菩提心，種諸善根隨意求生，諸佛剎土無不得生，悉皆令得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(十三)世尊，我得菩提成正覺已，所有眾生求生我剎，念吾名號發志誠心堅固不退。彼命終時。我令無數苾芻現前圍繞來迎彼人，經須臾間得生我剎，悉皆令得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。'(十二)

In this section, we shall discuss the sources of the two vows and the characteristics of the compilation version.

The scripts ‘Provided I become a Buddha’(我作佛時) was taken from the Han edition. ‘The beings of the ten quarters after having heard my name’(十方眾生、聞我名號) This sentence was chosen from the version of Wei, compare to other versions, the characters ‘ten quarters’(十方) indicates the widest range and the words it used is the simplest, therefore, is good for reading. The term ‘Develop the mind of Bodhi, resolutely cultivate the various meritorious virtues’(發菩提心，修諸功德) selected from the Wei translation (the nineteenth vow) which is common to the Tang and Song. As for the translations of Han and Wu, the words they use are not so obvious for practitioners to realize the meaning of ‘generating the bodhi mind’⁹, but to generate the bodhi mind, single-mindedly chant “Amitufo” is the essential teaching in Pure Land School. Therefore, the former version is suitable. Yet, the term ‘cultivate the various meritorious virtues’ in the rest four translations, each has its statement¹⁰. In general, the utmost virtues for practitioners in Pureland School is to chant “Amitufo” which can include all virtues.

The texts ‘Practice with sincerity the six paramitas without regression’(奉行六波羅蜜)came from the Tang translation which has a subtle differences from the compilation version¹¹, in Tang’s edition, it refer to the text *Prajñāpāramitā sūtra om de seks pāramitāer* (大乘理趣六波羅蜜多經). Because the content mainly discusses the wisdom of Prajna by talking about six paramitas; in addition, the use of six paramitas can highlight the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism. According to the statement above, therefore, in my opinion, this is the reason why Master Xia simplify the Sutra’s name into ‘Six paramitas’.

Next, the scripts list as follow: ‘dedicate all virtuous roots to the true cause of rebirth in my land and wholeheartedly concentrate on the invocation of my name day and night unceasingly’(復以善根回向，願生我國，一心念我，晝夜不斷)

About the ‘virtuous roots,’ it original from the Tang version, and only the Song edition recorded¹²mentioned it. Compare this two version, although the word ‘dedicate merits to be reborn’(回向) is similar to ‘with one’s expectations to be reborn’(隨意求生), it seems that the attitude of the former one is more determined for the practitioners.

⁹ The texts they use in the translations of Wu and Han are ‘皆悉踴躍來生我國’(Han edition), ‘莫不慈心歡喜踴躍者。皆令來生我國。’(the fourth vow) and ‘若善男子善女人。欲來生我國’(the sixth vow) (Tang edition), respectively.

¹⁰ The scripts in Chinese of the translations are ‘諸佛國人民有作菩薩道者’(Han edition), ‘用我故益作善，若分檀佈施、繞塔燒香、散花然燈、懸雜繒彩、飯食沙門、起塔作寺、斷愛欲’(Wu edition), ‘及於我所起清淨念’(Tang edition), ‘種諸善根’(Song edition) respectively.

¹¹ The text they use in the translations of Han, Wei and Tang are: ‘諸佛國人民有作菩薩道者’, ‘植諸德本’and ‘修諸功德’ and ‘及於我所起清淨念’ respectively.

¹² 種諸善根隨意求生

‘Rebirth in my land’(願生我國) came from Wei’s translation, due to the scripture seems to have duplicates part¹³, the compilation version are more simplified into one vow. Each version’s meaning is very close, nevertheless, it actually comes from the vow in Tang’s translation ‘If one mindful chanting of “Amitufo” ten times at the end of one’s life one can attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land.’(十念必生) which complies with these two vows each version.

‘Wholeheartedly concentrate on the invocation of my name day and night unceasingly’(一心念我，晝夜不斷)

Only the Wu’s translation recorded this sentence, based on this term; Master Xia simplified it to highlight the merits of chanting Buddha’s.¹⁴ Because the origin texts are ‘One wholeheartedly concentrate on one’s mind to wants to give rebirth in my land’(一心念欲生我國). This is very similar to the way that the Master Kumārajīva(鳩摩羅什) translated the name of *Amitabha Sutra*. In Pureland School, one of the practice methods is chanting “Amitoufo,” when Master Kumārajīva translated *Amitabha Sutra*, he hides its name into one aspect and changing the title to ‘*Amitabha*.’ This makes everyone who sees or reads this title directly be enhanced by the supportive powers of Amitabha Buddha and all other Buddhas in the ten directions. The term ‘At the moment when their deaths arrive’(臨壽終時) original from the Wei translation. ‘I shall be accompanied by an assembly of great Bodhisattvas to appear before them’(我與諸菩薩眾迎現其前) This sentence was the combination of the three versions of Wei, Wu and Tang. The editions of Han, Wei, Tang, and Song only refers to ‘bhikkhu’ (比丘) whereas Wu’s translation version specially added the Bodhisattvas¹⁵. This highlight the supportive powers and vows of Amitabha Buddha ‘in a split-second they are received to my land’(經須臾間，即生我刹)The sentence came from the Song translation, there are only subtle differences in meaning. ‘All become Avaivartika Bodhisattvas; should this not be fulfilled (should it not come to pass that).’ (作阿惟越致菩薩，不得是願) Originally came from the translation of Wu, there is no such statement in the version of Wei, and Tang, but existed in the Han and Song version¹⁶, Avaivartika means non-retrogressions which on behalf of them will become Buddha in one life. The last term ‘Then may I not attain perfect Enlightenment.’ Came from the Wei’s translation.

3. Conclusions

¹³ The piece of scripts of the nineteenth and twentieth vows of Wei’s translation in Chinese are as follow: ‘至心發願欲生我國’，‘至心回向欲生我國’

¹⁴。晝夜不斷絕。

¹⁵ The texts of Wu’s translation: ‘我即與諸菩薩阿羅漢共飛行迎之’

¹⁶ The texts of Han’s translation ‘即還生我國作阿惟越致’ and Song’s translation ‘悉皆令得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提’

Through the comparison and analysing, we can get some points from the cooperation between Master Xia's compilation and the five original translations. Firstly, Master Xia's compilation version not only makes texts more smoothly and clearly but also can make texts more concise and follow the original meaning of the texts. Secondly, although the two vows which I have chosen from the five original translations have different positions in these translations, Master Xia combine the two vows to one and explain the relationship between the two vows, which can make the meaning of the Pure Land School easy to understand. Finally, the Master Xia's compilation version not only saves the unique and significant contents of the five original translations but clarify their essences. I find some advantages of the compilation version after I study the two vows: first, it is easy to remember, read and cultivate; secondly, its texts are simple but rich in meanings. Thirdly, its words are fluent and self-contained. Because of limited time, I have to choose only two vows from the forty-eight vows to research. If more people can join this project and compare whole contents between Master Xia's compilation and the five original translations, it will help us to understand Master Xia's thoughts and find the breakthrough: Master Xia's compilation is an excellent version of *The Infinite Life Sutra*.

Table:

The comparsion of the 19th and 20th vows of the *Infinite Life Sutra* between Xia Lianju's Compilation version and the Five Original Translations

The name of the vows	Compilation version 《佛說大乘無量 壽莊嚴清淨平等 覺經》	the translation version of the Han Dynasty 《佛說無量清淨平 等覺經》	the translation version of the Wei Dynasty 《佛說阿彌陀三耶三佛 薩樓佛檀過度人道經》	the translation version of the Wu Dynasty 《佛說無量壽 經》	the translation version of the Tang Dynasty 《大寶積經·無量壽 如來會》	the translation version of the Song Dynasty 《佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴 經》
the nineteenth vows -Awakened aspiration upon hearing the Name	我作佛時，十方眾 生，聞我名號，發 菩提心，修諸功 德，奉行六波羅 蜜，堅固不退，復 以善根迴向，願生 我國。一心念我， 晝夜不斷。	十七：諸天人民蠕動 之類聞我名字，皆悉 踴躍來生我國，不爾 者我不作佛。	諸天人民，蜎飛蠕動之類 聞我名字，莫不慈心歡喜 踴躍者，皆令來生我國， 得是願乃作佛，不得是願 終不作佛。(第四願後半) 第六願：使某作佛時，令 八方上下，無央數佛國， 諸天人民，若善男子善女 人，欲來生我國，用我故 益作善。若分檀佈施、繞	設我得佛，十方眾 生聞我名號繫念我 國殖諸德本，至心 回向欲生我國，不 果遂者，不取正 覺。(二十)	若我成佛，於他剎土 有諸眾生發菩提心， 及於我所起清淨念， 復以善根迴向願生極 樂(十九前半)。 若我成佛，無量國中 所有眾生聞說我名， 以己善根迴向極樂。 若不生者，不取菩提 (二十)	世尊，我得菩提成正覺 已，所有十方無量無邊， 無數世界一切眾生，聞吾 名號發菩提心，種諸善根 隨意求生，諸佛剎土無不 得生，悉皆令得阿耨多羅 三藐三菩提。(十三)

			塔燒香、散花然燈、懸雜 繒彩、飯食沙門、起塔作 寺、斷愛欲，來生我國作 菩薩。得是願乃作佛，不 得是願終不作佛。			
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the twentieth VOWS Receiving to Pure land upon one's demise	臨壽終時，我與諸菩薩眾迎現其前，經須臾間，即生我刹，作阿惟越致菩薩，不得是願，不取正覺。	十八：我作佛時，諸佛國人民有作菩薩道者，常念我淨潔心。壽終時我與不可計比丘眾，飛行迎之共在前立，即還生我國作阿惟越致，不爾者我不作佛。	第七願：使某作佛時，令八方上下，無央數佛國，諸天人民，若善男子善女人，有作菩薩道，奉行六波羅蜜經，若作沙門不毀經戒，斷愛欲齋戒清淨，一心念欲生我國，晝夜不斷絕。若其人壽欲終時，我即與諸菩薩阿羅漢，共飛行迎之，即來生我國，則作阿惟越致菩薩，智慧勇猛。得是願乃作佛，不得是願終不作佛。	設我得佛，十方眾生發菩提心修諸功德，至心發願欲生我國，臨壽終時，假令不與大眾圍繞現其人前者，不取正覺。(十九)	彼人臨命終時。我與諸比丘眾。現其人前。若不爾者。不取正覺。(十九後)	世尊，我得菩提成正覺已，所有眾生求生我刹，念吾名號發志誠心堅固不退。彼命終時。我令無數苾芻現前圍繞來迎彼人，經須臾間得生我刹，悉皆令得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。(十二)
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Bibliography

Book (Chinese)

1. Compiled by Xia Lianju, *The Buddha Speaks the Mahayana, Infinite Life, Adornment, Purity, Impartiality, and Enlightenment Sutra* 《佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經》 (Taipei: The corporation Republic of Hwa Dzan Foundation, 2016).