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Comparative Research Between *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) Compiled by the Eminent Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居居士) and the Original Five Versions of *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經)

—comparing from the 28th vow to the 30th vow

1. Introduction

The Infinite Life Sutra (無量壽經) is the succinct outlines and central text of the Pure Land school. There are original five versions of *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經), which are the translation versions of Han Dynasty(漢譯), the Wu Dynasty(吳譯), the Wei Dynasty(魏譯), the Tang Dynasty(唐譯), and the Dynasty(宋譯). However, there have been no universally accepted versions since ancient times because of the great differences in these original five versions of this sutra. So *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經) has not been widely used or circulated. The eminent Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居居士) compiled all five versions into one version, which is called *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), without changing a single character during the early 20th century. The words of this compilation version are elegant and easy to read and understand. So it is now the universally accepted version of *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經).

The core of *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經) is the great vows of helping all sentient beings made by Dharmakara Bodhisattva (the name of Amitabha Buddha before attained enlightenment 法藏菩薩). In the compilation version, these vows are in chapter six: The Forty-eight Vows of Amitabha Buddha. These forty-eight vows represent the cornerstone of Pure Land Buddhism. However, in the original five versions, the number of these great vows that Amitabha Buddha made is different. The translation versions of the Han and Wu Dynasties(漢譯和吳譯) list twenty-four vows; the translation versions of the Wei and Tang Dynasties(魏譯和唐譯) are forty-eight vows; the translation version of the Song Dynasty(宋譯) has thirty-six vows. When the eminent Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居居士) compiled, he not only paid attention to the 24 vows of the ancient translations but also attached importance to the forty-eight vows of the widely-circulated Wei Dynasty(魏譯). So he used

the twenty-four as the outline, and subdividing them into forty-eight, compiling the essence of each vow wonderfully into Chapter Six.

With regards to the forty-eight vows in the compilation version, the content of the twenty-eighth vow is to be free from even a hint of evil, even an evil name; the content of the twenty-ninth vow is to abide in the certainty of attaining enlightenment; the thirtieth vow is to enjoy the same bliss as a bhikshu without outflows. These three vows are the great vows made by Amitabha Buddha for all sentient beings in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, which represent attaining wondrous merits and virtues and benefits when being reborn in the Western Pure Land. This essay will compare the compilation version of the Eminent Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居居士) with the Original Five Versions of *The Infinite Life Sutra* (無量壽經), and explore the source and main meanings of these three vows, in order to show that this compilation version is the best version.

2. Comparative Research of Three Vows

2.1 The Twenty-eighth Vow

In the Compilation, the scriptures of the twenty-eighth vow are: When I attain Unsurpassed Bodhi, my land will be free from even a hint of evil.[1] Among the original five versions, only the translation version of Wu Dynasty(吳譯) does not have this vow, and other four original versions all have this vow. The words "be free from even a hint of evil" [2]in the translation versions of the Wei, Tang and Song Dynasties(魏譯、唐譯、宋譯) are the same as the words in the compilation version, which means that even evil words do not exist in the Pure Land.

The Compilation takes the same translation as these three versions, because there were many profound meanings about no evil words existing in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, as explained in the Buddhist sutras and annotations of past patriarchs and eminent masters. For example, the *Amitabha Sutra* (阿彌陀經) states that "Even the names of the Three Evil Paths are unknown in this Buddha's land; how much the less could they actually exist! Wishing to proclaim the Dharma's sound far and wide, Amitabha Buddha created these multitudes of birds by transformation."[3] These scriptures show that

[1] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, The international buddhist's Archiver: Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching On Amitabha《阿彌陀經》 http://www.guojifojiao.com/archiver/tid-50971.html, 21 Sep 2018.

the names of Three Evil Destinies, asuras and rakshasas(羅剎) are non-existent in the Western Pure Land, and it is even more impossible to have evil real-things. What's more, in chapter seventeenth of the Compilation, it states that "They will not hear of names such as The Three Evil Paths, defilements, anxieties, tortures and sufferings. In fact, there would be no examples of those names, much less will one have to undergo such sufferings. But all will hear of the sounds of perfect happiness naturally. That is why that Land is entitled as The World of Ultimate Bliss."[4] These scriptures are the accomplishment of this vow. The words "the sounds of perfect happiness naturally"[5] refer to seven jewelled lagoons, flowing water and trees speaking the Dharma. Additionally, great master Lianchi told us that only Buddha-names with all virtues, names of Bodhisattvas, sound-hearers, heavenly and human beings could be heard in the ears, but three kinds of evil names cannot be heard at all in the Pure Land. Here three kinds of evil names refer to the two vehicles, women and defective in faculties. Therefore, as can be known from the above, what all beings in the Land of Ultimate Bliss hear in their ears does not leave the Dharma without even for a moment.

It can be seen from the above, if a person with evil causes attains rebirth in the Western Pure Land, one's bad retributions will not materialise. Because there is no evil name, which means no adverse conditions in the Pure Land. Therefore, even if hell beings attain rebirth in the Pure Land, they will never again fall back into three evil paths, because evil mentally factors in the store consciousness no effect. The compilation version takes the appropriate words expressing the meaning of no evil names in the Land of Ultimate Bliss, in order to further reveal the wondrous merits and virtues.

2.2 The Twenty-ninth Vow

In the Compilation, the scriptures of the twenty-ninth vow are: All sentient beings who are reborn in my land shall be united in proper virtue and purity.[6] Among the original five versions, the translation versions of the Han, Wei and Tang Dynasties(漢譯、魏譯、唐譯) do not have this vow. The translation versions of the Wu and Song Dynasties(吳譯和宋譯) have this vow.

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[4] Contemporary Buddhist Book: *The Infinite life Sutra* 《無量壽經》 http://www.fjtsw.org/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=10967&id=156212, 21 Sep 2018.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

In the Compilation, the words "All sentient beings"[7] derived from the translation version of Song Dynasty(宋譯). With regards to the source of words "who are reborn in my land"[8] in the Compilation, these words appeared from the second vow of no evil and suffering to the seventh vow of the all-knowing heart, although the translation version of the Han Dynasty(漢譯) does not have this vow. In the translation version of Wu Dynasty(吳譯), its scriptures of this vow are "Bodhisattvas and Arhats reborn in my Land"[9], the meaning of which is the same as the meaning of this vow in the compilation version. Furthermore, the combination of the translation versions of Wu and Han Dynasties(吳譯和漢譯) makes the scriptures of this compilation version contain a wider range of sentient beings than the translation version of Wu Dynasty(吳譯), which refers to all sentient beings reborn into the Western Pure Land. What's more, the words in this Compilation are more concise and succinct.

The words "shall be united in proper virtue and purity"[10] refers to all beings in the Pure Land be of the same mind and dwelling in right concentration[11]. The meaning of the same mind is from the translation version of the Wu Dynasty(吳譯). "The same mind"[12] means the true mind, not the false mind. All the beings in all the Dharma Realms, from Bodhisattvas of Equal Enlightenment to the hell beings, have the same mind after seeking rebirth in the Western Pure Land. The words "dwelling in right concentration" [13]refers to abide in the certainty of attaining enlightenment. In Buddhist sutras, capacities of all sentient beings can be divided into three groups: correctly determined sentient beings; aberrantly determined sentient beings; sentient beings of the undetermined class. In *Hui Su*(會疏), beings who are determined to attain enlightenment refer to Mahabodhisattvas(阿惟越致菩薩) who are no retrogression.

Therefore, the words "shall be united in proper virtue and purity"[14] in the Compilation is derived from

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[7] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[8] Ibid.

[9] My translation. Translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 in Chinese, the translation version of the Wu Dynasty of the Infinite Life Sutr《無量壽經》吳譯本, CBETA：http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T12n0362_001, 22 Sep 2018.

[10] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[11] Contemporary Buddhist Book: *The Infinite life Sutra* 《無量壽經》 http://www.fjtsw.org/e/action/ShowInfo.php?classid=10967&id=156213, 21 Sep 2018.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: The Buddha Speaks the Mahayana, Infinite Life, Adornment, Purity, Impartiality, and

the translation version of the Wu Dynasty(吳譯) and the scriptures meaning of the Wei Dynasty(魏譯). The scriptures of the translation version of the Song Dynasty(宋譯) are not the same as those of the compilation version. However, the meaning of these two is same. The translation version of the Song Dynasty(宋譯) took the word "firm", which refers to the mind never changing and unmoved. So practising the teachings of Buddha firmly means never retrogression. Seeking rebirth in the Pure Land will definitely succeed in attaining supreme enlightenment. This is in line with the meaning of "determined class of beings" as explained in *Hui Su*(會疏). Therefore, the compilation version using one word to all subsumed the whole meaning of the translation version of the Song Dynasty(宋譯). This really can be said that the words in the Compilation are concise, but rich in meanings.

In the compilation version, the fifth vow of equal appearances: "all sentient beings from the ten quarters who are reborn in my land shall all assume majestic appearances as fair as the finest gold. They will be regal in countenance and possess all of the Buddha's thirty-two fine features. Furthermore, their bodies will be upright, pure and without outflows. The splendour of their appearances shall all be equal. If some are beautiful while others ugly, may I never attain Unsurpassed Bodhi."[15] Because there are no different appearances in the Pure Land, the minds of all beings are the same minds, whose minds are true mind. So when the six faculties [that is, six sense organs] of all beings come into contact with six objective realms, they do not give rise to any thought. This is abiding in the certainty of attaining enlightenment. Therefore, the twenty-ninth vow and the fifth vow echo each other to manifest the wondrous merits and virtues in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. In original five versions, the translation versions of the Han, Wu, Wei and Tang Dynasties (漢譯、吳譯、魏譯、唐譯) all have the vow of equal appearances. However, only translation versions of the Wu and Song Dynasties (吳譯和宋譯) have the vow of abiding in the certainty of attaining enlightenment. Therefore, only the translation version of the Wu Dynasty(吳譯) reflects the responding relationship between these two vows. The compilation version continues such relationship to reveal the wondrous merits and virtues in the Pure Land.

2.3 The thirtieth Vow

The scriptures of the thirtieth vow in the compilation version are: "They will be forever free from

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Enlightenment Sutra《佛說大乘無量壽莊嚴清淨平等覺經》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[15]Ibid.

afflictions and attachments. Moreover, they will enjoy the same bliss as a bhikshu without outflows."[16] Among the original five versions, only the translation version of the Wu Dynasty(吳譯) does not have this vow. Other original four versions all have this vow.

The scriptures "They will be forever free from afflictions and attachments"[17] in the compilation version were derived from the translation version of Song Dynasty(宋譯). In the Saha world, all sentient beings suffer physically and mentally. They have numerous worries, so their minds labour and their bodies suffer. However, *Amitabha Sutra*(阿彌陀經) told us "All living beings of this country never suffer, but enjoy every bliss."[18] Therefore, the minds of all beings in the Land of Ultimate Bliss are pure, impartial and enlightened. Their bodies and minds also attain great freedom. In the translation version of the Tang Dynasty(唐譯), the scriptures describing the happiness of all beings in the Pure Land are "They all attain pure mind, peace and happiness". The words "pure mind" refer to stay away from all pollutants and afflictions. The words "peace and happiness" refers to one's mind attain freedom and is not contaminated even in the slightest way. Therefore, the scriptures of this Compilation also contain the meaning expressed in the translation version of Tang Dynasty(唐譯).

What's more, in this one scripture, the first half describes the suffering of all beings in the Three Realms, and the second half describes the purity and happiness of all beings in the Western Pure Land after they have been free from the sufferings. By comparing, this can more manifest the wonderous benefit of being reborn the Pure Land.

The scriptures "Moreover, they will enjoy the same bliss as a bhikshu without outflows"[19] in the compilation version were derived from the translation versions of the Wei and Tang Dynasties(魏譯和唐譯). The words "a bhikshu without outflows" refer to the monk who has extinguished all contamination and completely eradicate all afflictions.

However, the translation version of the Han Dynasty(漢譯) is different. Its translation of this vow is

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[16] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Translated by the Buddhist Text Translation Society, The international buddhist's Archiver: Sutra of the Buddha's Teaching On Amitabha《阿彌陀經》 http://www.guojifojiao.com/archiver/tid-50971.html, 21 Sep 2018.

[19] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

"People in my Land all enter complete extinction".[20] The words "complete extinction" refer to the parinirvana, which means to have ceased the afflictions and transcended the cycle of birth and death. The compilation version chose the words "a bhikshu without outflows", rather than the words "complete extinction". In my opinion, one of the reasons is that two of the original three versions of this vow took the words "a bhikshu without outflows"[21]. Huang Nianzu(黃念祖居士) pointed out another reason in *the Annotations of 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科註). Amitabha Buddha made vows to let all beings in the Western Pure Land enjoy endless happiness. Although they enjoy bliss, their minds do not cling to this happiness, which as if arhat attain the supernatural power of the complete extinction of afflictions. Therefore, "a bhikshu without outflows"[22] is a metaphor for the happiness of being reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss. For the choice of the compilation version, it more shows the deep meaning of enjoying the bliss but being free from them.

3. Conclusions

The Infinite Life Sutra(無量壽經) is the number one sutra in the Buddha's forty-nine years of teaching, which represents the Buddha's highest wisdom. The reason why this sutra hidden in the Tripitaka for thousands of years is that the contents of the original five versions are quite different. For example, vows made by Amitabha Buddha in the original five versions all differed vastly from one another. Therefore, compiling *the Infinite Life Sutra*(無量壽經) is really important. Through comparing the compilation version and the original five versions of these three vows, it can be seen that every word is truly derived from the original five versions. The words of the Compilation are concise, but all subsumed the whole meanings of the original five versions. The Compilation is an amalgamation of the excellent qualities of the original five versions. Therefore, *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) compiled by the eminent Upasaka Xia Lian Ju (夏蓮居居士) is the best one of all *the Infinite Life Sutras*(無量壽經).

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[20] My translation. Translated by Zhi Lou Jia Chen 支婁迦讖 in Chinese, the translation version of the Han Dynasty of the Infinite Life Sutr《無量壽經》漢譯本, CBETA：http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T12n0361_001, 22 Sep 2018.

[21] Translated by Brian Chung, Internet Archive: 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》https://archive.org/details/infinitelifesutra2014, 20 Sep 2018.

[22] Ibid.

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