



Sacred Classics Translator Program - Term 1 (Fall term), 2004

‘How to be an Effective *Lotsawa*’

Geshe Michael’s Principles of Effective Translation

- 1) Define your audience. Who are you wishing to reach out to with your translation?
- 2) Ensure that you have an accurate version of the book to be translated. Compare multiple versions of the text, where available.
- 3) Develop a passion for translation and translate a book that you are passionate about, so you will complete the translation project with joy and accuracy. Become excited about how your translation can help many people.
- 4) Endeavor to get your translation 90% complete on your first time working through it. You will not have time to go back later and clean up large sections of your translation.
- 5) When using a computer to work on your translation, save your work frequently to avoid loss of your valuable work.
- 6) Translate foreign names into English rather than leaving in the original language. For example, use ‘Gentle Voice’ instead of Manjushri or Jampel Yang in order to capture in English the meaning and imagery of the original Sanskrit and Tibetan.
- 7) Standardize the use of personal names in your translation and be consistent so as not to confuse your readers. For example, consistently use ‘Loving Eyes’ or ‘Gentle Voice’ throughout your translation.
- 8) Avoid foreign words as much as possible as they generally deter your readers. Some foreign words which are more commonplace in our Western parlance are acceptable in translation (for example, ‘Lama’.)
- 9) If you must use a foreign word in the translation then use the most simple form and most accurate pronunciation of the language being used (***) Avoid diacritical marks. For example, if you use the word ‘bodhichitta’ then spell it so and not as ‘bodhicitta’.

- 10) Do not introduce new English words or phrases in your translation. Use existing commonly used words and phrases.
- 11) Know the difference between pronunciation and transliteration and never confuse the two.
- 12) Identify errors in the inputted version of the text to be translated by checking with the most accurate scanned version of the text available, and amend these errors in the inputted text version as you go.
- 13) Define your style of the book cover and such.
- 14) Decide on the level of detail you want in your references and endnotes and be consistent.
- 15) Do not make sentences too long.
- 16) Avoid dharma cliches.
- 17) Ensure that your translation reads not so much as a translation but as if it were originally written as such in that language.
- 18) Imbue the text with energy.
- 19) Define your layout. Do not necessarily follow the author's outline of the text as your chapter outline. For example, the author may identify four general sections for the work, but three of them are only 1-2 pages in length whilst one is many hundreds of pages.
- 20) Be very careful about adding extra words to the translation which do not appear in the original text because there is a danger of distorting the true meaning of the original. It is often preferable to insert any additional information required in some end notes or a reference section of your translation. Limit your use of extra material in parentheses in the translation.
- 21) If the original author seemingly makes an error (i.e., in citations or the like) do not correct the author's work simply make a footnote.
- 22) When you come across something that sounds a little unusual or weird in the original (for example, 'suchness'), do not unweird them. Translate it as such.
- 23) As you work through the translation, accurately state (typically in an endnote) the full title of other works referred to and cited by the author.
- 24) Likewise, where appropriate, (again, typically in an endnote) explain who the author is referring to with poetic titles - for example, 'the realized Father and Son'; 'the two Princes'.
- 25) Try not to lose fine points such as puns in the original language. Endeavor to keep the pun in your translation to the extent possible with the change of language.