

Khyentse Foundation Translation Conference
TRANSLATING THE WORDS OF THE BUDDHA
March 15-20, 2009, Bir, India

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This conference can be thought of as an informal strategic planning session for Tibetan-English translation activity, to explore the direction, scope, and focus of Dharma translation in the coming century and to ensure the most effective transmission of Dharma to the West, just as translators played an essential role in bringing the Dharma from India to Tibet.

Key objectives of this conference are to ensure:

- The highest standards, authenticity, accuracy, and quality of Dharma translation for the coming century and beyond,
- Translation of the key texts needed to give practitioners and scholars access to the complete Buddhist canon
- Preservation of current knowledge while knowledge of classical Tibetan itself remains

These objectives will contribute to making the Dharma available in pure form to individuals and institutions, and also as a major contribution to contemporary thought in the world.

Given this immense challenge, how can we make the best use of our limited resources (funding, technology, limited number of skilled translators)? Our goal is to expand those resources to develop the community of translators so that it is able to accomplish what is needed, in terms of quality, skills and experience, collaboration, and building on best practices to facilitate productivity, with focus on a shared big picture.

To this end, Khyentse Foundation has invited a small number of top translators from the major traditions, translation schools, and academic centres engaged in this work, as well as publishers and patrons, to Deer Park Institute in Bir, India, to facilitate intensive discussion among all sectors involved in this common endeavour. The invitees were chosen for their dedication to the translation of the Buddhadharma.

In bringing all these leaders together in Bir, we hope to envision where we want the translation field to be 100 and even 200 years from now, and to explore what concrete steps can be taken now and in the next 10 to 20 years to move toward that goal.

In short, the conference aims to bring together a **vision** with a **strategic plan**.

KEY CONFERENCE THEMES

1. Translating the Buddha's Words: Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche and Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche share the vision that all the words of the Buddha, including the entire

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Kangyur, should eventually be available in English (and hopefully other languages as well). They want to discuss with the world's top Tibetan-English translators the medium-term and long-term feasibility of this undertaking, including the means, collaboration, resources, and time frame required to accomplish it, and the short-term steps to get started. This massive project can also create the seeds for other major collaborative projects.

2. Discuss text priorities: Before the conference, the lineage heads, honorary patrons, and participants will be polled to identify the three not-yet-translated texts to which they would give the highest priority. The conference will include discussion of these choices and the reasons for them. Short term: Following the conference, Khyentse Foundation is committed to funding one such high-priority text translation, and it is hoped that other organizations and patrons will commit to funding other high-priority texts.

3. Improve communication and collaboration: A key conference objective is to expand and deepen collaboration within the community of translators with a view to achieving shared goals — sharing knowledge and resources, and building on each others' work while avoiding duplication. Medium-term issues include exploring models of group dynamics, such as lamas working with translators, Tibetan natives working with English-speaking translators, and academics paring with practitioners.

Short-term possibilities for discussion include:

- Creating a network or association of translators (hopefully under the patronage or even the active participation of the four lineage heads)
- Starting a translators' review or journal
- Scheduling regular gatherings in different locations, possibly every two years

As a possible conference outcome, Khyentse Foundation is willing to work with other patrons and organizations, to act as an office or secretariat for a new translators' association or network, to facilitate different translators' projects, to help with fundraising, and to aid communication and collaboration.

4. Develop and expand resources: This includes availability of tools, technology, databases, and so on, and also an adequate pool of trained translators (currently very small). One intended short-term conference outcome, which Khyentse Foundation is also committed to support, is the development of a database of texts that have already been translated and published. Before the conference, information will be gathered about databases that are already under development. The conference will examine alternative systems and potential ways forward.

5. Conference participants' ongoing roles: It is envisioned that the 35 or so leading translators participating in this conference will become the representatives of the conference vision in their own influential networks, associations, departments, and

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countries. This may be connected to the creation of a new translators' association or network. It may also in the long term lead to very practical resource outcomes, such as scholars involving their university graduate students in aspects of translation under their supervision.

These should not be viewed as five separate themes, but as highly integrated. For example, the Kangyur project raises and potentially unifies all the key conference objectives: It will require massive collaboration among all traditions and between the academic and devotional traditions; priorities must be set for which parts and texts should be translated first; and, as a multigenerational project, it will also require massive resources and some form of collaborative organizational effort. It also raises highly challenging issues not on this conference agenda, such as some movement toward the standardization of terms.

FRAMEWORK

To assist in accomplishing these objectives, the conference will address three key aspects of the translator's world, all of which must be developed to move toward shared goals and outcomes:

1. Translator's job and craft—roles and responsibilities
2. Translator's tools—resources and technology
3. Translator's mandala—lamas, publishers, patrons, practitioners and users, and the academic/scholarly-devotional/practitioner nexus

CONFERENCE FORMAT

Types of sessions: There will be a flexible mix of talks and presentations, panels, and small group discussions, subject to change depending on how conference proceeds. Talks will generally be followed by Q&A. Panels will be 15 minutes per speaker, followed by a 45-minute plenary discussion. Two hours on most days (3 to 5 PM) will be dedicated to four or five break-out groups (about 8 people each), which will report back to the plenary.

Daily progression: Without being rigid about it, there will be an effort to move from a discussion of vision, to where we are today, to key challenges and sensitivities, to how we can begin to overcome those challenges and move to where we want to be. Therefore days 1 and 1 will focus on long-term vision and a definition of issues and the current state of key conference themes (for example, what still requires translation, and the current state of communication, collaboration, duplication, technology). Day 3 will explore challenges, opportunities, and sensitivities in each key area. On day 4 the group will discuss practically how these opportunities can be used and challenges met and will develop a small number of key desired outcomes. On day 5 we will consider concrete action steps that can be initiated without delay to achieve these outcomes.