Revised Editions of the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya and Bānrēbōluómìduō xīn jīng
«般若波羅蜜多心經»

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Abstract

There are now dozens of English translations and studies of the Heart Sutra and more appear every year. And yet when we look at the editions that are the basis of these translations, they are problematic in numerous ways (Nattier 1992, Huifeng 2014, and Attwood 2015, 2018a, 2020a, 2021b). In the case of Conze’s Sanskrit edition, these problems make it impossible to parse parts of the text. The Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō edition has been affected by misreadings based on the presupposition that the Sanskrit manuscripts reflect a Sanskrit ur-text. These problems are overlooked by translators, so the casual reader would never know that parts of the source texts are impossible to translate as things stand. This article combines published observations to revise the standard Heart Sutra editions in both Sanskrit and Chinese so that both are fully parsable (possibly for the first time). The revised editions are accompanied by translations that reflect the phenomenological reading of the text that follows from the repairing of the text, an approach first proposed by Huifeng (2014) and developed by Attwood (2022a).

Introduction

“What has not been done needs to be done, and what has been done needs to be done again.” —Roy Norman (2008: 2)

When they learn that I study the Heart Sutra, Buddhists often ask me to recommend an English translation. To date, I have replied that I cannot recommend any translation since all existing translations are based on faulty editions. A common follow-up question has been to ask for my translation. My reply to this has been that, until the source texts have been corrected, no translation is practicable. As these replies have often been met with incredulity, I am happy to say that in this article I (finally) present revised Sanskrit and Chinese editions of the Heart Sutra, accompanied by my English translations.

In 2012, I set out to read Edward Conze’s (1948, 1967) edition of the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya (Hṛdaya) as a way to road-test my newly acquired knowledge of Sanskrit on a real text. I ran into difficulties almost immediately and it gradually became clear that Conze had introduced grammatical errors into his edition (Attwood 2015, 2018a).
Despite the manifest nature of these problems, new studies and translations continue to appear that “translate” the uncorrected passages.¹

Meanwhile, Huifeng (2014) pointed out some problems in the Chinese edition, the Bānrebōluōmidū xīn jīng «般若波羅蜜多心經» (T 251, 8.848.c4-23)(hereafter Xīn jīng), with respect to three expressions found in the Sanskrit text: na prāptir nāpraptih, aprāptivāt, and acittāvaraṇa, which supposedly correspond to wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得, yīwisuōdègǔ 以無所得故, and wú guà’ài 無罣礙. All of these terms have been misunderstood and this has an impact on how the text has been understood. Applying Jan Nattier’s (1992) comparative method, Huifeng explored the origins of these phrases in the wider Prāṇāyāma literature. He showed that the original Sanskrit expressions were: na prāptir nābhīsamayaṃ, anupalambhayogena, and na kvacit sajjati and explained that the alternative Sanskrit terms found in Hṛdāya as artefacts of back-translation via Chinese. Furthermore, Huifeng (2014) argued that the use of the term anupalambhayogena (yīwisuōdègǔ 以無所得故) requires us to adopt an “epistemological stance” towards the Heart Sutra. In my work, this has become a “phenomenological reading” of the Heart Sutra (e.g. Attwood 2022a, 2023). We take the negated lists to be statements about the absence of sensory experience rather than, say, a general denial that anything exists. While the Xīn jīng can be parsed as things stand, the way it is parsed is (mis)informed by the presupposition that the Sanskrit back-translation is the “Sanskrit original”.

Huifeng (2016) also points out that most current approaches to the Heart Sutra conflate Prāṇāyāma with Madhyamaka and promote the idea that the Heart Sutra communicates Nāgārjuna’s metaphysics of emptiness through contradiction and paradox. However, Nāgārjuna himself does not communicate through contradiction or paradox but uses standard logical forms (Attwood 2022a).²

The question of the role of editions—diplomatic, eclectic, and critical—in Buddhist Studies is a deeper topic and not something I can address at this time. On this topic, one might usefully consult recent publications by Jonathan Silk (2015, 2021b, and 2022). Silk is the principal investigator for the Open Philology Digital Humanities Project, which is developing new methods for doing philology on Buddhist texts.³ In this role, Silk has made a strong case that traditional philological methods developed for Biblical and/or legal scholarship, with their exaggerated concern with origins and author’s intentions, are not


² Avi Sion gives us an alternative view on Nāgārjuna’s use of logic: “He uses double standards, applying or ignoring the laws of thought and other norms as convenient to his goals; he manipulates his readers, by giving seemingly logical form (like the dilemma) to his discourse, while in fact engaged in non-sequiturs or appealing to doubtful premises; he plays with words, relying on unclear terminology, misleading equivocations and unfair fixations of meaning; and he ‘steals concepts’, using them to deny the very percepts on which they are based” (Sion 2002: 1).

³ See also the Open Philology Digital Humanities Project website: https://openphilology.eu/ [accessed 28 Apr 2023].

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entirely suited to the study of Buddhist texts. The composite, modular, and—at least in Mahāyāna milieus—ever-changing content of Buddhist texts undermines the relevance of concepts like “original”, “ur-text”, and “author”.4

The philology of the Heart Sutra is complex because it was composed in Chinese using passages copied from a Chinese translation of a Sanskrit Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (pañc) text, i.e. Mōhē bānrēbōluómì jīng «摩訶般若波羅蜜經» (T 223). This is similar, though not identical, to the Gilgit manuscript of Pañc.5 The Hṛdaya is a back-translation from Xīn jīng, and the translator seems to have been ignorant of the idioms of the Sanskrit Prajñāpāramitā tradition (Nattier 1992, Attwood 2021a). The idea of a “Sanskrit original”, let alone an ur-text, of the Heart Sutra, is thus problematic on many levels. Does the “original” reside in the collated whole, or in the copied parts? Is the ur-text of the Heart Sutra in Chinese or Sanskrit (or possibly Gāndhārī)? How far back do we go? Does it make sense to speak of a “critical edition” of the Sanskrit back-translation of a Chinese apocryphon that exists in half-a-dozen different versions, most of which are not attested in Sanskrit? Is the word “apocryphon” even applicable in this context? These are not simple issues and I’m not qualified or resourced to resolve them. The problem I seek to solve here is superficial: despite the unresolved issues in the text, English translations of the Heart Sutra that ignore all the problems continue to appear.

The text is also read (in source languages and translation) in university Buddhist Studies courses. For example, Lock and Linebarger’s (2018) “Introductory Reader” of Chinese Buddhist texts for undergraduates includes the unrevised Xīn jīng. I know of at least one A Level (UK secondary school) “Buddhism” course that requires that “Candidates should be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the Heart Sutra”.6

I do not deny that, despite relying on partially garbled texts, Buddhists and Buddhist Studies scholars have found a variety of ways to make sense of the Heart Sutra over the preceding 1300 years. However, I am also cognizant that the sense made in commentaries continues to diversify, resulting in conflicting explanations of the text. Commenting on the Indo-Tibetan commentaries, some forty years ago, Alex Wayman (1984: 309) noted that:

The [commentators] seemed to be experiencing some difficulty in exposition, as though they were not writing through having inherited a tradition about the scripture going back to its original composition, but rather were simply arranging their particular learning in Buddhism to the terminology of the sūtra.

These words are echoed by Malcolm David Eckel (1987: 69-70),

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4 Despite his own challenge to philological orthodoxy, despite the solid case for Chinese origins, and despite saying that he does not wish to comment on the origins debate, Silk (e.g. 2021a) continues to refer to “the Sanskrit original” of the Heart Sutra.

5 The Gilgit manuscript is assigned by Karashima et al (2016) to the seventh century CE.

6 Welsh Joint Education Committee website: https://tinyurl.com/musve27v [Accessed 28 Apr 2023]. I have doubts about whether any professional scholars could meet these criteria, let alone school children.
...to approach the [Indo-Tibetan] commentaries in the hope that they will somehow yield the ‘original’ meaning of the text is to invite disappointment... what they thought it meant was shaped as much by the preoccupations of their own time as it was by the words of the sūtra itself.

The study and translation of these commentaries by Donald Lopez (1988, 1996) did nothing to dispel this impression. These observations seem to generalise to all commentaries on the Heart Sutra. For example, the Dalai Lama’s (Gyatso 2002) book on the Heart Sutra is largely a breezy introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, with an emphasis on Madhyamaka metaphysics, into which the Heart Sutra is shoehorned. It’s not really a book about the Heart Sutra. The sense that religieux have made of the Heart Sutra is the sense they make of everything: it confirms their religious worldview, whatever that worldview happens to be. There are even Christian commentaries on the Heart Sutra, where it serves to confirm the Christian worldview of the authors (e.g. Keenan and Keenan 2011).

The suggestions for editing and translating the Heart Sutra in this article, then, are superficial interim measures aimed at the many translators, exegetes, and educators who seem unwilling to wait for a reliable edition to appear. They need, arguably they deserve, a text that can at least be parsed in its entirety. I take this unusual step of revising existing editions, without a thorough investigation of the manuscript tradition because, seventy years after he first published his edition, Conze’s (1948) errors remain unchallenged by professional philologists. I see no reason to hope that they will provide us with reliable editions of the Heart Sutra in my lifetime.

Since I started writing this article, Sarah Mattice’s (2021) study of the Heart Sutra as a Chinese text appeared. Nattier first pointed out that the Heart Sutra is a Chinese text some thirty years ago. Mattice gives us invaluable insights into what it might be like to take the idea of the Heart Sutra seriously as a Chinese text. Unfortunately, her translations are from uncorrected canonical texts and thus miss some of the nuances observed by Huifeng (2014). Still, I find her approach informative precisely because she attempts to understand the text from a Chinese point-of-view.

Method

I will begin by giving the text of Xin jīng (T 251) as found in the Taishō edition. I lay out the text and the major variants, outline the problems and how to solve them, and then give the corrected text. The new text is then translated into English. I follow this with a new translation from Chinese into Sanskrit based on copied passages from, and the idioms of, Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (Pañc). This Sanskrit translation aims to show what the Heart Sutra might have looked like if the passages had been copied in Sanskrit as was...

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7 That said, I am familiar with many of the manuscripts that Conze used for his edition, and have transcribed them from the sources (my unedited notes are online: https://prajnaparamitahrdaya.wordpress.com/).
claimed until recently. It highlights how different the idiom of 
Hṛdaya is from the idiom of Pañc.

A similar procedure is applied to the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya. I begin by citing
Conze’s revised critical edition (1967) in full for reference, with variant readings in notes. 
Following recommendations by Jan Nattier and other scholars, I tidy up some of Conze’s
unsystematic editing and, for the first time, offer a fully parsable revised edition of the
Hṛdaya consistent with modern scholarly conventions. University students typically learn to
read Sanskrit through the medium of Devanāgarī but write about it using Roman script. For
this reason, I give the text both in Devanāgarī and Roman transcription using the
International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST). My accompanying translation is
indicative of how I understand the Heart Sutra, based on the hermeneutic outlined in
Attwood (2022a).

Note that the Heart Sutra is a prose text, in both Chinese and Sanskrit, and I present it
as such, avoiding the faux-poetic arrangement of the sentences into “verses” favoured by
some modern editors. I do however introduce paragraph breaks which I have standardised
across the versions and translations.

Before diving in I need to make a few notes on my approach to translating this text.

Notes on Translations

As much as possible I have tried to use the established English vocabulary for translating
Buddhist technical terms from Sanskrit or Chinese. However, there are several instances
where I find this established vocabulary deeply unsatisfactory and this seems like an
opportune moment to address some of these issues.

My approach to translation is based on the phenomenological reading outlined in
Attwood (2022a). The focus here is on the arising and, especially, the ceasing of sensory
experience. Many centuries before the Heart Sutra was composed, Buddhists (and other
Indian religieux) learned the “meditative” techniques of withdrawing attention from sensory
experience, causing it to cease, for that individual. The state of absence following cessation is
a discontinuity in awareness that Prajñāpāramitā Buddhists called “absence” (śūnyatā). The
approach I follow here begins with this fact and then reads the text as a commentary on the
process of bringing about cessation and the insights that can be gained in that way.

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8 For example: Nhât Hanh (2009: 1-2) or Tanahashi (2014: 3-4). Lancaster (2022) takes the “poetic” format to
an extreme.

9 Compare the practice instructions on recognising “emptiness” in Ingram (2007: 247-248). There is a
burgeoning scientific literature on investigation of this state. See, for example, Metzinger (2020) or Laukkonen
et al. (2023).
Anglicised Terms

Where a technical term is commonly found in English dictionaries, I have tried to use the Anglicised form in translation (see also my discussion of translating Sanskrit terms in Chinese translation at the end of this section). For example, the word bodhisattva is found in both Merriam-Webster Dictionary and the Oxford English Dictionary. Bodhisattva is now a loanword in English. To some extent, this obviates the need to be more precise about what bodhisattva means, since the use of the word changes over time and place. Other words in this category include “sutra” and “mantra”. A word like dharma presents potential problems since it is used in many different ways. Fortunately, in the Heart Sutra, dharma is only used to mean “phenomena”.

Names often don’t translate very well. I have left names in Sanskrit untranslated, but have Anglicized them. In most cases, this simply means leaving off diacritics, although š and ś become sh: e.g. “Avalokiteshvara” and “Shariputra”. Chinese names have been transcribed in Pinyin and also Anglicized in translation (tone diacritics are omitted in translation since English does not have tones). Xīn jīng uses the form Guānzìzài 觀自在 though this way of spelling the name never caught on. The older forms—Guānshìyīn 觀世音 and Guān yīn 觀音—remain in popular use.

Prajñāpāramitā

Although the translation of prajñāpāramitā (bānrěbōluómìduō 般若波羅蜜多) as “Perfection of Wisdom” is more or less universal and changing it now will likely be impossible, translating prajñā (bānrē 般若) as “wisdom” is problematic. “Wisdom” is cognate with another Sanskrit word for knowledge, i.e. vidyā (míngzhòu 明呪), which plays an important role in the Prajñāpāramitā texts. I translate prajñā as “insight”. Conze promoted the translation “wisdom” because he associated the Prajñāpāramitā tradition with “Western” esoteric traditions such as Swedenborgianism or Theosophy. This is a red herring. First and foremost, in this context, prajñā is knowledge associated with witnessing the cessation of sensory experience, dwelling in the absence of it, and then watching it arise again (Attwood 2022a).

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10 The word bodhisattva is complicated by the fact that editors universally change the Buddhist spelling bodhisatva to the Classical spelling bodhisattva, without any discussion. The Buddhist spelling is more or less universal in the Prajñāpāramitā manuscript tradition, including Heart Sutra manuscripts (c.f. remarks by Salomon 1998: 96 and Zacchetti 2005: 24). Bhattacharya (2010) makes a good case for using the Buddhist spelling in a Buddhist context.

11 That said, and contra the usual Buddhist explanations, I note that Sanskrit compounds in the form, X–satva usually take the sense of “having X-nature”, “whose essence is X”, and so on.

12 This change was not merely superficial since it seems the name changed in Sanskrit from Avalokitasvara (i.e. avalokita-svara) to Avalokiteśvara (i.e. avalokita-īśvara). On this change and ways of translating the name into Chinese, see: Nattier (2007) and Karashima (2016).
Śūnya, Śūnyatā, Svabhāvaśūnya

Another relatively fixed point of reference is the translation of śūnyatā (kōng 空) as “emptiness”. I have shown that, in Prajñāpāramitā, this term refers to the samādhi state in which all sensory experience has previously ceased (nirodha), leaving the meditator in a state of “contentless awareness” (Attwood 2022a). In Pāli, this state is referred to as suññatāvihāra (e.g. MN III 104) and, in Sanskrit, as śūnyatāsamādhi (compare, Choong 1999: 8-42; Huifeng 2016: 87 ff.).

Sometimes, śūnya does indeed mean “empty”. For example, an “empty village” (P. suññaṃ gāmaṇi; Skt. śūnyagrāma) is a village where no living people are found. This does not imply that no people exist anywhere; only that they are absent from where we expect them to be. Similarly, an “empty house” (P. suññaṃ ghaṇa; Skt. Śūnyāgāra, śūnyageha) is a house where no people live. There is no term to reflect a village or house in which people are living: we simply say “a village” or “a house” and the occupants are implied.

The abstract noun śūnyatā can mean “emptiness” but it can and does also refer to absence, specifically the absence of sensory experience following the cessation of sensory experience (samjñāvedayitanirodhā). Contra Madhyamaka metaphysics, absence is not equated with nonexistence. In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā (Vaidya 1960), for example, asked about some phenomenon, Elder Subhūti (speaking from contentless awareness) repeatedly says “I don’t know” (na vedmi), “I don’t find” (na vindāmi), “I don’t apprehend” (nopalabhe), or “I don’t perceive” (na samanupaśyāmi) that phenomenon. Elder Subhūti does not say, “It doesn’t exist (nāsti).” And when Elder Śāriputra asks him a question framed in terms of the dichotomy of existence/non-existence, Subhūti tells him it’s not relevant (yukta) to speak in such terms.

It is typical to translate svabhāvaśūnya along the lines of “empty of own-being”, though translators have not settled on a translation of svabhāva (zìxing 自性). Unfortunately, svabhāva is used in two entirely different ways in ancient Buddhist contexts that are generally poorly distinguished. Mainstream Buddhists used the term in the sense of sui generis, i.e. that which makes something identifiable. An essential element of most Buddhist soteriologies is that we distinguish between morally good (kuśala) and morally evil (akuśala) mental states since these direct us to good afterlife destinations (sugati) and bad (durgati) respectively. 13 We can make such distinctions because mental states have different characteristics that can be identified, and to the extent that they can be identified, those states possess svabhāva. And this is all that svabhāva means in most contexts, including most abhidharma contexts. Nāgārjuna and his followers, however, use the same word, svabhāva,

13 Though, ultimately, all Buddhist soteriologies aim to end rebirth.
to mean *autopoiesis* or “self-creation”. It is a trivial exercise in logic to show that no phenomenon can be considered *autopoietic*, including those that are *sui generis*.\(^{14}\)

It’s not yet clear to me in which sense Prajñāpāramitā uses *svabhāva*, but my working hypothesis is that it is not in the autopoietic/Madhyamaka sense. The term *svabhāvaśūnya* is problematic in the *Hṛdaya* because the term “self-existent” is absent from the *Xīn jīng*.\(^{15}\) This problem is discussed in more detail in Attwood (2022a and 2024).

The “empty of” idiom seems to be based on (a) slavishly translating *śūnya* as “empty” and *śūnyatā* as “emptiness” no matter the context, and (b) the idea that it is natural on learning that something is “empty”, to ask “empty of what?” or even “emptiness of what?” But this question is underdetermined because empty means “containing nothing”. For example, presently my teacup is empty of tea, but it is full of coffee. Despite being empty of tea—and many other substances that are liquids at room temperature, such as mercury, ethyl alcohol, or sulphuric acid—the fact that it is full of coffee means it is not “empty” at all. To be “empty” in any meaningful way, my teacup needs to be empty of *everything*.

When we compare other Sanskrit compounds of the type X-*śūnya* (where X is a noun) they rarely if ever mean “empty of X”. For example, a eunuch (*muṣkaśūnya*) is not “empty of testicles”, a deaf person (*karnaśūnya*) is not “empty of ears”, a forest clearing (*vrksaśūnya*) is not “empty of trees”, and so on. In such compounds, *-śūnya* refers, often figuratively, to the absence or lack of the first member of the compound. The suffix *-śūnya* might well be translated in these cases as “-less”, e.g. sexless or treeless. “Earless” doesn’t quite work in English because we rarely take “ear” to be a metonym for the faculty hearing (examples of this metonym do occur in, for example, include phrases like “an ear for music”).

**Vidyā**

Like *dharma*, the term *vidyā* (*mingzhòu 明呪*) is polysemic in Buddhist usage. The basic sense concerns knowledge, but more “knowledge that” than “knowledge of”. Factual knowledge is covered by words derived from *jñā*. *Vidyā* generally concerns practical knowledge or knowhow, especially as regards Buddhist soteriology. The opposite, *avidyā* is often translated as “ignorance”, but given the practical sense of *vidyā*, “incompetence” would be more accurate.

At the same time, Buddhists also used this word to refer to certain types of magic, particularly apotropaic incantations. And *vidyā* came to be a synonym of *dhāraṇī*. The back-
transmitter understood the term to be another kind of verbal magic, i.e. “mantra”, though this is anachronistic given the non-Tantric context.

When the core passage, as it occurs in Pañc, refers to Prajñāpāramitā as a mahāvidyā, anuttarā vidyā, and asamasamā vidyā (Kimura 1986-2009: I.1 64) it’s not entirely clear that this distinction applies and if it does which of the meanings is intended. My sense is that this refers to the practical knowledge of Buddhist soteriology.

The Skandhas

Conze’s translation of skandha (yùn 蓮 or yīn 陰) as “heap” and the more usual translation as “aggregate” make no sense to me. An aggregate is a whole formed from loosely connected, roughly similar parts: the word makes me think of sand and gravel. Since the principal topic of the text is sensory experience, particularly the cessation of sensory experience in samādhi,16 and since the etymology of skandha seems to relate to words for “shoulder” and “branch”,17 I have adopted the translation “branch/es of experience”.

The names of the individual skandha—rūpa, vedanā, saññī, samskāra, vijñāna—are typically translated along the lines of “form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness.” All of these translations are problematic. I have adapted the approach to translating the individual skandhas developed by Sue Hamilton (2000) and with input from Tilmann Vetter (2000). In this view, the skandha list is not an ontology or inventory of “all phenomena”, rather…

what [the skandhas] represent is one’s cognitive system: the apparatus by means of which we have all our experiences. The point is not that they offer an analysis of all that we are: in my view there is not even any suggestion [in the Pāli suttas] that this is the case. Rather, they are what one needs to understand about oneself if one is to achieve liberation from the cycle of lives as the Buddha did (Hamilton 2000: 78).

In ordinary Sanskrit, rūpa never means “body” or “matter”. Rather, the basic meaning of rūpa is “appearance”, or more specifically “outward appearance”; this is reflected in the standard Chinese translation: sè 色 “hue; form, appearance, complexion; visual surface quality”. In terms of the (twelve) āyatana and (eighteen) dhātu ontologies: rūpa is to the eye as sound is to the ear; and, importantly, as tangibility (sprāṣṭavya) is to the body (kāya). In these ontologies, “body” is always kāya and rūpa is the visual analogue of sound, i.e. rūpa is what emanates from the object and makes contact with the eye to condition an occurrence of

16 Anonymous Reviewer Two asked “What term in the text means ‘experience’?” But with respect to translating technical terms they also argued that “Meaning is in sentences and the overall semantic effect rather than in individual terms/words.” No single word here means “experience”, it is the overall semantic effect of the text; or, better, the overall pragmatic effect of the text.

17 An early use of the word skandha is found in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad: trayo dharmaskandhāḥ “the three branches of religion” (CU 23.1).
seeing. If *rupa* were some kind of substance, then seeing would be a very different kind of experience. In modern terms, we can understand *rupa* as *reflected light*, though projecting this understanding backwards to ancient India would be an anachronism.

We are told that *rupa* has a completely different meaning in the compound *rūpaskandha* (*sèyǐn 色陰 or *sèyìn 色蘊*), that is “the body” or even “the physical world”. Words certainly can and do change their meaning according to context and we have to be sensitive to this. And Buddhists do make liberal use of “Humphry Dumpy” definitions (words like vedanā or dhāraṇī mean what we say they mean, and that meaning is unrelated to etymology). That said, and in the context of Hamilton’s understanding of the concept of skandha, I am at a loss to explain, in semantic or pragmatic terms, how *rupa* came to mean “body” and/or “matter” in one compound when it does not, and cannot, mean “body” or “matter” as a standalone word. In my view, *rupa* in *rūpaskandha* retains its basic sense of “appearance” but is used metonymically. In other words, we can read *rupa* here as *rupam ādi*, i.e. *rupa*-sābda-gandha-rasa-spraṣṭavya-dharmāḥ “appearance, sound, odour, taste, tangible, and phenomena”. In other words, *rupa* is the branch of experience concerned with “appearances” (the impact of sensory impressions on sensory organs across sensory modalities). The basic fact of all sensory experience is that something has to make contact with our sense organs for us to have a sensory experience (the sense organs are a given here). *Rūpaskandha* is a general way of referring to this fact.

Early Buddhist texts define vedanā (*shòu 受*) as sukha, dukkha, and asukhamadukkha with respect to a sensory experience: i.e. happy, miserable, and neutral. This corresponds to what neuroscientists called “valence”, i.e. the positive and negative hedonic reactions to sensory experience. The standard translations of “feeling” or “sensation” (scholars cannot decide which) do not capture this sense. “Valence” is a neologism in this arena, but it fits. *Samjñā* (*xiàng 想*) is typically an act of recognition rather than mere perception (which is anyway implied by *rupa* qua “appearance”). It connotes putting a name to our experience (in contradistinction to naming the object of experience), which suggests the simple expedient of translating samjñā-skandha as “recognition”.

The connection of *samskāra* (*xíng 行*) and “volition” or “intention” (*cetanā*), and thence to karma doctrines, is fairly well established. Here, again, use is not related to etymology. I understand this term as a loan word from Brahmanism, where a *samskāra* was a rite of passage: for example, the śrāddha or funeral rite. These rites involved numerous ritual actions performed by the priests. Each act was a karman “action”. Buddhists redefined karma as volition (*cetanā*). Hence, a *samskāra* is an occasion for doing karma by forming an intention towards an identified sensory experience.

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18 On “Humphry Dumpy” definitions in Buddhism see also Attwood (2018b).
19 The 2019 special issue of Contemporary Buddhism 18(3), contained arguments for and against “feeling” and “sensation”, as well as some other translations. My contribution argued for a pragmatic approach to vedanā. Since the use of vedanā does not correspond to the etymology, “No matter which word we settle on [as] a translation, if we ever do settle, we will still have to explain what it means. And by explaining, we make it so” (Attwood 2018b: 15).
20 Note that *xíng* also translates cārya, cārmanāḥ, carati, etc.
21 “Intention is what I call an action, monks. Having intended one acts with body, speech or mind.” (*cetanāham, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti – kāyena vācāya manasā.* AN III 414).
Finally, the one thing that *vijñāna* (*shi* 識) cannot be is “consciousness” since there is no parallel abstract concept in the older Indic languages like Sanskrit or Pāli. Ancient Buddhists would have seen the twentieth-century European conception of “consciousness” as an *ātmavāda*.\(^{22}\) Note that, grammatically, *vijñāna* is an action noun, not an abstract noun. The translation “discrimination”, which draws on the knowledge that the prefix *vi*- can mean “divided” (it seems to derive from *dvi* “two”), is better. However, discrimination is a general term and we can be more specific by talking about what is discriminated. The knowledge acquired relates to how experience is connected to the objects of experience. If the sound of a conch reaches my ear, it sets off a chain of events in which I (unconsciously) recognise “There is a sound, it is pleasant, I know I’m hearing a sound.” This sparks off reactions (generating karma) but, eventually, I identify that the sound comes from an external object that is conventionally called “a conch”. It is this process of discrimination and objectification that I take to be the action described by *vijñāna*.

The skandhas as a whole, then, reflect a process of objectifying experience. *Prajñāpāramitā* literature evaluates this objectification in relation to the absence of experience in *samādhi*. In the absence of experience, the objectification of experience necessarily ceases. The way to make sensory experience cease is to withdraw attention from it using meditation techniques (*anupalambhayoga*).

**Sanskrit Terms in Chinese Translation**

Some Chinese terms are translations of Buddhist technical terms. For example: the terms *diāndǎo* 顛倒 and *mèngxiǎng* 夢想. We have two options here. Firstly, we can take a naïve approach and translate the characters as they stand, e.g. “upside down” and “dream thinking”. Or we can translate them in the knowledge that these are translations of the terms *viparyāsa* and *māyā*, respectively. *Māyā* generally refers to “illusions”. *Viparyāsa* is more difficult to translate directly but, in use, it refers to the “delusions” that the unawakened have about sensory experience, e.g. mistaking the impermanent for the permanent, or the ugly for the beautiful.

Similarly, *míngzhòu* 明呪 is Kumārajīva’s translation of *vidyā*. Translating the Chinese expression as two words, i.e. “bright mantra”, is a common mistake for translators who don’t know the history of the word. Several other binomial terms are found in the *Heart Sutra*. I look more closely at these in Attwood (2024).

In these cases, where a Chinese term is a translation of an Indic Buddhist technical term, I have preferred the second approach, prioritising the usual English translation of the Sanskrit term to a literal translation of the Chinese.

The exception is the *dhāraṇī*. Translating a *dhāraṇī* or mantra does not achieve much if anything. Such incantations have little or no semantic content and can be best understood through pragmatics. In other words, rather than asking the semantic question, “What does the

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\(^{22}\) This paradigm is in the process of changing, though the abstract concept “consciousness” is still routinely used in a concrete sense outside of specialist neuroscience literature.
dhāraṇī mean?” (the answer to which also governs the question of how we translate it); we ask, “What does the dhāraṇī do? Or more precisely, “What does the practitioner believe that the dhāraṇī does?” Although I think the back-translator accurately reconstructed the words of the Sanskrit dhāraṇī, right down to the Prakrit (nominative singular) case ending in -e, I find that those who recite the Xīn jīng as Mandarin, mostly recite the dhāraṇī in its Pinyin pronunciation. There might be an argument for reconstructing the Middle Chinese pronunciation, but I don’t have the necessary expertise to do so. Thus in my English translation of the Xīn jīng, the dhāraṇī is given in Pinyin.

We are now ready to turn to the text itself, first in Chinese and then in Sanskrit.

The Chinese Heart Sutra

Background to the Taishō Chinese Edition

The Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō «大正新修大藏経» (hereafter Taishō) was compiled and published in one hundred volumes, in Japan over the period 1924-1932. While not a true critical edition, the editors of the Taishō included many text-critical notes about readings found in previous editions of the Chinese canon of Buddhist Writings. The Taishō has become the definitive edition of the Chinese Tripitaka, especially since it was digitised by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA).23 The Heart Sutra is found alongside other Prajñāpāramitā translations in Vol. VIII. Xuánzàng’s Prajñaḥparaṃitā translations take up Vols. V–VII.

With the Chinese origins of the Heart Sutra now firmly established (Nattier 1992, Attwood 2021b, Mattice 2021), attention should shift from the Sanskrit back-translation to the Chinese source text. The Xīn jīng has been in constant use by East Asian Buddhists for approximately 1300 years. Early inscriptions such as the Fāngshān Xīn jīng (661 CE)24 and the Bēilín Xīn jīng (672 CE)25 have some inconsequential character substitutions (see notes below). Other minor variations are found but, on the whole, the text of Xīn jīng has been stable for many centuries. The earliest known commentaries—attributed to Kuījī (T 1710) and Woncheuk (T 1711)—also reference some minor variations. By contrast, there are some major differences between the Xīn jīng (T 251) and the Mōhē bānrēbōluōmì dāmíngzhōu jīng «摩訶般若波羅蜜大明呪經» (T 250), hereafter Dāmíngzhōu jīng; and the Táng fān fān duì ziyīn bānrē bōluōmiduō xīn jīng «唐梵翻對字音般若波羅蜜多心經» (T 256), hereafter Táng fān xīn jīng.

In places, however, Huifeng (2014) noted that the reading of the Xīn jīng became distorted because the back-translation, i.e. Ṣrdaya, was taken to be authoritative. The problems that need to be addressed are in the expressions wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得, yí wú suǒdé gù 以無所得故, and míngzhòu 明咒. These are discussed in detail below. There are

23 https://cbetaonline.dila.edu.tw/
24 For details of this text, and a transcription, see Attwood (2019).
25 A very detailed study of this fascinating document can be found in De Laurentis (2021).
also some punctuation issues, discussed under the heading “Suggested Changes to the Xin jing” below.

Taishō Edition of the Xin jing.

Notes

a. The title also appears in Chinese literature as Bānrě xīn jīng «般若心經», Duō xīn jīng «多心經», and Xīn jīng «心經».

b. Dàmíngzhòu jìng translates Avalokiteśvara as Guānshìyīn 觀世音.

c. Dàmíngzhòu jìng has yīn 陰 for yùn 蘇n. Kuījī appends děng 等 “and so on, et cetera” here (T 1710, 33.535.b10). Woncheuk appears to argue that this alternate reading with děng 等 is consistent with a “Sanskrit text” (fànběn 梵本), and thus “standard” (zhǔn 准) though it is not included in his embedded text (T 1711, 33.544c.12-13).

d. Dàmíngzhòu jìng inserts 舍利弗！色空故無惱壞相，受空故無受相，想空故無知相，行空故無作相，識空故無覺相。何以故？Dàmíngzhòu jìng also substitutes Shèlǐfú 舍利弗 for Shèlìzǐ 舍利子 throughout.

e. Dàmíngzhòu jìng has fēi sè yì kōng, fēi kōng yì sè 非色異空，非空異色 for sè bù yì kōng, kōng bù yì sè 色不異空，空不異色. Attwood (2020b: 167) showed that T 223 originally had the text found in Xin jīng, but that later canonical editions had the other text (with fēi 非).

f. Kuījī appends děng 等 “and so on” (T 1710, 33.537c15) which should equate to Sanskrit ādi “beginning; used to indicate an abbreviated list”. Woncheuk prefers the standard text but accepts this as a variant reading (T 1711, 33.546a15).
g. Dàmíngzhòu jìng inserts Shi kōng fà, fēi guòqù, fēi wèilái, fēi xiànzài. 是空法，非過去、非未來、非現在。

h. Fángshān Xīn jīng uses the alternate form wú 无 for wú 無 throughout. This is common for inscriptions (Galambos 2012).

i. Dàmíngzhòu jìng has lǐ yīqiè diāndǎo mèngxiǎng kǔnǎo 離一切顛倒夢想苦惱

j. Woncheuk notes: 或有本云「遠離一切顛倒夢想」雖有二本後本為勝。(T 1711, 33.548.c12-13) “A version [of the Heart Sutra] states that ‘[they are] completely free from all perverted views and dreamlike thoughts.’ Although there are two versions, the latter [in other words, the new version] is superior.” (Hyun Choo 2006: 177)

k. Compare the Large Sutra: 般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善，能與一切善法。 (T 223; 8.286b28-c7)

l. Compare the Large Sutra 是般若波羅蜜能除一切不善 (T 223; 8.286b28-c7)

m. Fángshān Xīn jīng has dì 諦 for đì 帝, here and subsequently.

n. Taishō has sēng shā hē 僧莎訶 but sēng 僧 must be an error. The popularly chanted version of the text is shown, i.e. sà pó hē 薩婆訶. On the transcription of svāhā in various Xīn jīng versions see Attwood (2019).

Suggested Changes to the Xīn jīng

Wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得

As mentioned above, where the Xīn jīng has wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得, corresponding to the Sanskrit na jñānaṃ na prāptih, there is a problem. When Huifeng (2014) looked for this passage in Pañc he found something unexpected. The extant Sanskrit Large Sutra texts have na prāptir nābhisamayo “no attainment, no realisation”. Xuánzàng translates this expression as wú dé wú xiàn guān 無得 無現觀 (T 220-2: 7.14a23), which is consistent with “no attainment, no realisation”; and Mokṣala has something similar (T 221; 8.6a11-12). Kumārajīva’s translation, i.e. T 223, is the odd one out. This suggests that either he erred in his translation or he was working from a defective manuscript.

In Pañc, each occurrence of na prāptir nābhisamayo is followed by a list of attainments and realisations:

No attainment, no realisation: no stream-entrant and no fruit of stream-entry, no once-returner and no fruit of once-returning; no non-returner and no fruit of non-returning, no saint and no sainthood, no individual awakening and no one
individually-awakened, no knowledge of the modes of the path and no bodhisatva, no awakening and no awakened.\textsuperscript{26}

This is a Mahāyāna version of a much older list that is found in early Buddhist texts, i.e. the “four pairs of persons” or the “eight noble people” (Pāli cattari purisayugani attha ariyapuggala). Here the list of āryapudgala “noble persons” has been expanded to include pratyekabuddha, bodhisatva, and buddha, making fourteen āryapudgala in total. The two components of the lists are usually known as the path (mārga) and fruition (phala) and it here seems that prāpti and abhisamaya are alternative terms for the more familiar mārga and phala.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>prāpti</th>
<th>abhisamaya</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>srotā āpanna</td>
<td>srotā āpattiphala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sakrīdāgāmin</td>
<td>sakrīdāgāmiphala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anāgāmin</td>
<td>anāgāmiphala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arhat</td>
<td>arhatva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pratyekabuddha</td>
<td>pratyekabodhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bodhisatva</td>
<td>mārgākārajñatā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buddha</td>
<td>bodhi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The list of āryapudgala completes a list of lists that reflect analytical categories (dharmāḥ) common to many Buddhist traditions, i.e.

- five skandha
- twelve āyatana
- eighteen dhātu
- twelve nidāna
- four āryasatya
- fourteen āryapudgala.

Knowing that na jñānam na prāptih is at best a variant reading and more likely a mistake, is also important for any exegetes trying to make sense of the negated lists as a whole. This was not obvious to anyone prior to Huifeng’s (2014) rediscovery of the better reading. These two

\textsuperscript{26}na prāptir nābhismayah na srotā āpanno na srotā āpattiphalam na sakrīdāgāmi na sakrīdāgāmiphalam nānāgāmi nānāgāmiphalam nārhan nārhatvaṁ na pratyekabodhir na pratyekabuddhaḥ na tatra mārgākārajñatā na bodhisatvaḥ na tatra bodhir na buddhaḥ. (My transcription from Karashima et al. 2016, folio 20-1).
terms do not reflect a paradox concerning attainment and non-attainment (na prāptir nāprāptih). The text has been generally misread and the addition of nāprāpti was in error.27

The phrase wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得 first occurs in Kumārajīva’s Large Sutra translation (T 223). The only other place it occurs is in the Heart Sutra itself, which we can date to the mid-seventh century (Attwood 2021b). We can infer that wú zhì yì wú dé 無智亦無得 was first copied into the Xin jīng and then back-translated into Sanskrit for the Hṛdaya as na jñānam na prāptih.

It is worth noting that, contra Conze, the use of prāpti in this context betrays nothing of the Sarvāstivāda, where the word is used as a technical term but not combined with abhisamaya. It does appear to be historically true that Buddhists espousing the doctrine of always exist [dharmas] (sarvāstivāda) were prominent in the Northwest, where the first Prajñāpāramitā sutra was composed.28 However, Onishi (1999) has argued that there is no evidence in the Aṣṭasāhasrikā to suggest that it was “a reaction” to Sarvāstivāda. In my view, the main ideas in Prajñāpāramitā literature, especially the focus on the cessation of sensory experience, are likely to be older than Sarvāstivāda. As Anālayo (2021: 1673) recently observed, “The early discourses present the sphere of nothingness as a pre-Buddhist practice.” And that sphere is a stepping stone on the way to dwelling in emptiness (P. suññatāvihāra; see the Cālalauñata Sutta MN 121).

To resolve the possible confusion, my revised Xin jīng text replaces the traditional expression with the one used by Xuānzàng throughout T 220, which is of a similar vintage, i.e. wú dé wú xiàn guān 無得無現觀.

**Yǐwúsuǒdégù 以無所得故**

Another change, already discussed above, is Huifeng’s recommendation that we adjust the punctuation in Taishō to reflect the true meaning and role of the compound word yǐwúsuǒdégù 以無所得故 in the sentence, i.e. as reflecting anupalambhayogena at the end of the core passage rather than aprāptitvāt at the start of a new paragraph. The idiom of Prajñāpāramitā inevitably places this expression in a sentence-final or paragraph-final position, both in Sanskrit and in Chinese. In Pañc, for example, the four foundations of mindfulness are described, but the text suggests that they are (also) a Mahāyāna practice… “and that by the application of non-apprehension” (tac cānupalambhayogena. Kimura 1986-2009: I.2 86). Kumārajīva uses both yǐwúsuǒdégù 以無所得故 and the exact synonym yìbùkèdégù 以不可得故 to translate this expression (although never both in the same chapter). Both suǒdé 所得 and kèdé 可得 represent upavālabh in T 223. Kuījī (T 1710, 33.541a03)

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27 A similar error occurs with nāvidyā “no incompetence” and nāvidyāksaya “no destruction of incompetence”. In some witnesses, notably the Hōryūji manuscript, we find: nāvidyā na vidyā nāvidyāksaya na vidyāksaya “no incompetence, no competence, no destruction of incompetence, and no destruction of competence”. The interpolation here seems be concerned with stating contradictions where none exist, and thus to miss the point of this whole passage. Seeing Prajñāpāramitā as being concerned with contradiction and changing the text to accommodate this presupposition seems to have been common by the time the Hōryūji manuscript was copied which may have been the ninth or tenth century (Silk 2021a).

Revised Editions of the Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya and Bānrēbōluómìduō xīn jīng

agrees with Huifeng, while Woncheuk takes the more familiar approach in which this phrase opens a new sentence (T 1711: 33.548b26). Throughout his massive compilation of Prajñāpāramitā translations (T 220), Xuánzàng translates anupalambhayogena as yì wūsūdē ēr wèi fāngbiàn 以無所得而為方便 “with nonapprehension as the means”.29

The altered text now reads:

…無智，亦無得，以無所得故。

菩提薩埵…

…wú zhì, yì wú dé, yǐwúsuǒdéguì.

Pūtisāduō...

…no knowledge and no attainment, through the application of nonapprehension.

The bodhisatva…

Míngzhòu 明呪

Attwood (2017, 2020a) showed that the epithets passage was also copied from the Large Prajñāpāramitā (T 223, 8.286b28-c7). The source text reveals that this passage has long been misinterpreted. In the Hṛdaya, zhòu呪 “incantation” was anachronistically back-translated as “mantra”. All the Pañc manuscripts have vidyā rather than mantra. An examination of Kumārajīva’s Large Sutra translation (T 223) confirms that he used míngzhòu 明呪 to translate vidyā.

In the Xīn jīng version of the epithets passage, míngzhòu 明呪 has been shortened to zhòu呪/咒 in two places. We should restore míngzhòu 明呪 and understand it as representing Sanskrit vidyā as found in the Gilgit manuscript of Pañc, i.e.

“Bhagavan, that insight is great know-how. Bhagavan, that insight is unexcelled know-how. Bhagavan, that insight is unequalled know-how.”

mahāvidyeyāṃ bhagavan yaduta praṇāpāramitā | anuttareyāṃ bhagavan 

Note here also the major difference in syntax between Pañc and Hṛdaya. In addition, although there is considerable variation across the Prajñāpāramitā literature, three epithets seem to be the standard. These correspond to Sanskrit mahā-, anuttara, and asamasama. Attwood (2017) argued that the extra epithet in Xīn jīng—dà shènzhòu 大神呪—is simply a synonym of dà míngzhòu 大明呪 (mahāvidyā) since shènzhòu 神呪 also appears to represent

29 My thanks to Matthew Orsborn for advice on how to parse this phrase.
Sanskrit *vidyā* in Xuánzàng’s oeuvre. This leaves open the question of why Xuánzàng chose to employ a fourth epithet and why that particular epithet. There is a clear pattern in the use of the epithets and three is the standard. Kumārajīva’s translation is a much better reflection of this passage as we find it in *Pañc*.

Here, I propose to resolve these problems by restoring the copied passage to the text of Kumārajīva’s translation from which it was originally copied, i.e.

\[
\text{Gù zhī bānrèbōlúomìduō shì dàmíngzhòu, wúshàng míngzhòu, wùděngděng míngzhòu.}
\]

故知般若波羅蜜是大明呪、無上明呪、無等等明呪。

"Therefore you should know that insight is the great know-how, the unexcelled know-how, the unequalled know-how."

**Sēng shā hē 僧莎訶**

As noted above (note m), the transcription of *svāhā* in the *Taishō* edition—sēng shā hē 僧莎訶—is an obvious error: sēng 僧 does not belong here. *Taishō* notes indicate that the Song, Yuan and Ming editions of the Tripiṭaka all had sà pó hē 薩婆訶. The Fangshan stele also has sà pó hē 薩婆訶. Moreover, this is how most Buddhists recite the text.

There is considerable variation in the witnesses. The text embedded in Woncheuk's commentary has shā pó hē 菩薩訶 (T. 1711. 33.551c10), while Kuījī’s commentary has shā hē 菩薩訶 (T. 1710. 33.542c8). The most likely source of the dhāraṇī—the *Tuòluóní jì jīng* 陀羅尼集經 (T. 901), translated by Atikūṭa ca. 654 CE—has shā hē 菩薩訶.

This leaves us with many options for correcting the error, but one more obvious choice supported by the Fangshan stele, medieval editions of the Tripiṭaka, and the popular text, i.e. sà pó hē 薩婆訶.

**Minor Changes**

Two minor changes can be recommended to undo historical inaccuracies or roll back overzealous editing.

1. It is now well established that the *Xīn jīng* is not a translation and thus we can drop the attribution of the translation to Xuánzàng. It seems likely that he is the author of the Chinese text but this is not yet established beyond a reasonable doubt.

2. The *Taishō* edition added minimal punctuation to this text; however, the editors of the digitised version in CBETA added more punctuation marks and a greater variety of them. I have amended the punctuation of the CBETA edition throughout to reflect necessary changes as outlined but have also removed extraneous punctuation such as list separators, exclamation marks after names when someone is being addressed, quotation markers, colons, and semi-colons.

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Following the revised text is my translation into English and a fresh translation of the Chinese into idiomatic Sanskrit. Traditionalists generally acknowledge that certain passages in the Heart Sutra, i.e. the “core section” and the “epithets section” were copied from the Large Sutra. This new Sanskrit translation shows what the text might have looked like in this traditional scenario; here the relevant passages were copied directly from Pañc. I invite readers to compare the “core section” and the “epithets section” in Hṛdaya and Pañc and consider for themselves how they differ. Nattier (1992) explained the differences as typical examples of back-translation. Is there another explanation; a better explanation? Perhaps, but given the evidence we currently have, Nattier’s is still the best explanation.

Revised Bānbrēbōluómìduō xīn jīng.

Chinese text

般若波羅蜜多心經。
觀自在菩薩行深般若波羅蜜多時, 照見五蘊皆空, 度一切苦厄。
舍利子, 色不異空, 空不異色, 色即是空, 空即是色。受想行識亦復如是。
舍利子, 是諸法空相不生不滅不垢不淨不增不減。
是故空中無色無受想行識, 無眼耳鼻舌身意, 無色聲香味觸法, 無眼界乃至無意識界, 無無明亦無無明盡乃至無老死亦無老死盡, 無苦集滅道, 無得無現觀, 以無所得故。
菩提薩埵依般若波羅蜜多故心無罣礙, 無罣礙故無有恐怖遠離顛倒夢想究竟涅槃。三世諸佛依般若波羅蜜多故得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。
故知般若波羅蜜是大明咒無上明咒無等等明咒。能除一切苦真實不虛。
故說般若波羅蜜多咒即說咒曰: 揭帝 揭帝 般羅揭帝 般羅僧揭帝 波羅薩婆訶。

Pinyin Romanisation

Bānbrēbōluómìduō xīn jīng.30

Guānzìzài pīsà xíng shēn bānbrēbōluómìduō shì, zhàojiàn wǔyùn jiē kōng, dù yīqiē kǔ è.
Shèlìzi, sè bù yì kōng kōng bù yì sè sè jì shí kōng kōng jí shí sè. Shòu xiǎng xíng shí yì fū rúshí.
Shèlìzi, shì zhū fū kōng xiāng bù shēng bù miè bù gòu bù jīng bù zēng bù jiǎn.

30 I have followed Stefano Zacchetti (2020) and the Digital Dictionary of Buddhism in transcribing 般 as bān, per the Pinyin scheme. In a Buddhist context, this character is often pronounced as bō.
Shì guò kōngzhōng wú sè wù shòu xiàng xīng shí，wú yǎn ěr bǐ shè shēn yì，wú sè shēng xiàng wèi chǔ jī fā，wú yǎnjiē nàizhī wùyíshi jiè，wú wǔmíng yì wú wǔmíng jìn nàzhī wú lǎo sì yì wú lǎo sì jìn wú kǔ jì miè dào，wú dé wú xiàn guān，yǐwúsuǒdèngū。Pútísàduǒ yī bānrebōluómidūō gù xīn wú guà‘ǎi，wú guà‘ǎi gù wú yòu kōngbù yuānli diàndào méngxiǎng jiùjìng nièpán。Sānshí zhū fó yī bānrebōluómidūō gù dé ànòuduōluó sānmiào sānpútí。Gù zhī bānrebōluómí shì dàmíngzhòu wúshàng míngzhòu wùdéngdéng míngzhòu。Néng chú yīqiè kǔ zhēnshí bù xǔ。Gù shuō bānrebōluómidūō zhòu jì shuō zhòu yuē：jiēdì jiēdì bānluòjiēdì bānluòsēngjiēdì pútí sàpóhē。

English Translation

On the Essence of Perfect Insight.

Practising the deep perfection of insight, Guanyin bodhisattva observed the branches of experience, all were absent and he transcended all suffering.

Śāriputra, appearance is not different from absence and absence is not different from appearance; appearance is only absence and absence is only appearance. Valence, recognition, intention, and objectification are the same.

Śāriputra, all phenomena are characterised by absence that does not arise or cease, is not defiled or pure, and is not declining or growing.

In that state of absence—there is no appearance, valence, recognition, intention, or objectification; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mental sense; no appearance, sound, smell, taste, touch, or percepts; no eye-sphere etc up to no mental cognition sphere; no ignorance or cessation of ignorance etc up to no ageing and death or the cessation of ageing and death; no dissatisfaction, no origin, no cessation, no path; no attainment and no realisation—due to practising nonapprehension.

Since the bodhisatva relies on perfect insight their mind is not attached anywhere; being detached they are not afraid, transcend illusions and delusions, and attain final extinction. Relying on perfect insight, the buddhas of the three times attained full and perfect awakening.

Understand that perfect insight is great know-how, unexcelled know-how, and unequalled know-how. It can remove all suffering; it is true and not false.

Therefore recite the incantation of perfect insight, the incantation that goes: jiēdì jiēdì bānluójìēdì bānluòsēngjìēdì pútí sàpóhē.
Idiomatic Sanskrit Translation.\textsuperscript{31}

āryāvalokiteśvaro bodhisatvo gambhīraprajñāpāramitācaryoṃ caramānḥ
cancaskandhāṃ ca sarvaśūnyān paśyamānāḥ sarvaduḥkham samatikramati
sma ||

na hi śāriputra anyad rūpam anyā śunyatā | nānyā śunyatāṇyad rūpaṃ |
rūpam eva śunyatā śunyataiva rūpaṃ | evam eva vedanā saṃjñā saṃskāro
vijñānaṃ ||

iha śāriputra sarvadharmāḥ śunyatālaḳषaṇā yā śunyatā notpadyate na
nirudhyate na samkliṣyate na vyavadāyate na hiyate na vardhate ||

tasmāc chūnyatāyāṃ na rūpaṃ na vedanā na saṃjñā na saṃskārā na
vijñānaṃ na caksur na śrotarṇa na ghrāṇaṃ na jihvā na kāyo na mano na
rūpam na śabdo na gandho na raso na sprāṭavyam na dharmo na
caksurdhātur yāvan na manovijñānadhātur nāvidyā nāvidyānirvāro yāvan na
jarāmarāṇaṃ na jarāmaraṇanirodhaḥ na duḥkho na samudayo na nirodho na
mārgo na prāpṭir nābhīsamayo ’nupalambhayogena ||

yato praṃjāpāramitām niśrayati tato bodhisatvacittam na kvacit sajjaty
asaktva atrasto viparyāsāmyāvivikito nirvāṇaparyavasānāṃ ca prāpnoti |
atīnāgatapratyutpannāḥ sarvabuddhāḥ praṃjāpāramitām āśrītya anuttarāṃ
samyaksambodhim abhisambuddhāḥ ||

tasmāj jñātavyam mahāvidyeyam yaduta praṃjāpāramitā anuttareyam
vidyā yaduta praṃjāpāramitā asamasameyam vidyā yaduta praṃjāpāramitā |
sarvaduḥkhaśamanah | satyaṃ na mṛṣā ||

praṃjāpāramitāyām ukto dhāraṇī tadyathā | gate gate pāragate
pārasamgate bodhi svāhā ||

iti praṃjāpāramitāḥṛdayaṃ samāptam ||

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\textsuperscript{31} Based on reviewers’ comments it seems to be worth restating that the aim of this Sanskrit translation is to show what the text \textit{might} have looked like if the copied passages had been extracted from extant manuscripts of \textit{Paśc} as implied by the phrase “Sanskrit original”. I have copied the relevant passages directly from the Gilgit
manuscript (Karashima et al 2016) and filled in the blanks using idiomatic Sanskrit.
The Sanskrit Heart Sutra

Background to Conze’s Sanskrit Edition

Given the status of the *Heart Sutra* as a Chinese text, we may wish to re-evaluate the value of doing philology on the Sanskrit back-translation. Assuming that it has any value, there is still some work to do to make the text comprehensible.

Edward Conze’s works on *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* (hereafter *Hṛdaya*) constitute the basis for many translations and commentaries on the *Heart Sutra*. Conze first published a translation of the *Heart Sutra* as part of a three-part article for the *Middle Way*, the journal of the Buddhist Society in London (Conze 1946a, 1946b, 1946c). A four-part commentary on the *Heart Sutra* followed (Conze 1955, 1956a, 1956b, 1956c). This material was later repackaged and published in *Buddhist Wisdom Books* (1958; revised 1975), which included some minor variations in the edited text as well as more use of English punctuation and irregular hyphenation of compounds. Conze’s critical edition of *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya* with scholarly apparatus was first published in 1948. This edition supplanted the existing diplomatic edition by Müller and Nanjio (1884) and has been the standard text ever since. Conze published a revised Sanskrit edition in 1967, which noted a few more Nepalese manuscript witnesses (of the extended text) and made more minor adjustments to the text. A variant translation was included in his anthology of short *Prajñāpāramitā* texts (Conze 1973) which appears to be based on another variant of the Sanskrit. A close reading reveals that Conze’s “edition” is not one text but a set of at least three contradictory and unexplained variant texts all of which continue to circulate. Despite revising and publishing several times, Conze never eliminated the grammatical errors he introduced into the text. He also made some problematic editorial decisions.

In his edition of the canonical Tibetan *Heart Sutra*, Jonathan Silk referred to Conze’s Sanskrit edition as “chaotic” (1994: 32) and lamented that “…due to the lack of anything approaching a complete and reliable [Sanskrit] edition, nothing can be said about the possible affiliations of any of our Tibetan recensions or sub-recensions with any given Sanskrit tradition” (1994: 40). Gregory Schopen noted many of the same kinds of problems in Conze’s edition of *Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā*:

“The edition of the late Edward Conze… is of very dubious value from a text critical point of view… [regarding] the Gilgit text it should be noted that Conze’s notes to his edition reproduce all the errors in Chakravarti’s edition,

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32 Anonymous Reviewer Two was critical of “[laying] the blame for the linguistic problems of the Sanskrit text and their interpretation squarely at the feet of Conze.” They also argued that scholars who failed to notice his mistakes might have been following “Buddhist traditions”. In the first place, in this article I am trying to repair mistakes in Conze’s edition. In the second place, I know this is de rigueur in our field, but I don’t understand why an academic philologist would follow a religious hermeneutic tradition instead of using the methods of philology when editing a text (recent criticism of those methods notwithstanding).

33 I outlined a draft stemma for the known *Heart Sutra* variants, including the two Tibetan recensions in *Attwood* (2021a).
and that there are a number of cases in which Conze’s notations in regard to
the Gilgit text are wrong or misleading” (Schopen 1989: 96).

Harrison (2006) showed that Conze and others had misread some compounds in Vaj causing
them to exaggerate the level of contradiction in the text. Schopen’s (1977) review of Conze’s
Large Sutra translation takes a similarly critical approach (and is broadly reflective of the
reception of this eagerly anticipated volume). Singling out Chapters Three and Four, Schopen
offers seventeen pages of corrections and critical observations. Schopen concludes: “There is
both much to be criticized and much to be praised” (1977: 151), but he doesn’t mention
anything praiseworthy beyond noting that a lot of work goes into a translation. On the
evidence of his editions, what stands out for me is Conze’s lack of attention to detail. In his
memoir, Conze says of himself:

“I am constitutionally incapable of registering meaningless details correctly
(that is the price of being an intuition type). Even when reading proofs I miss
most of the misprints, because I automatically read not what is there, but what
ought to be there. In addition, both my interest and my training in grammar
leave much to be desired…” (1979: I 92)

Robert Thurman’s (1993: xvi) comment on Conze is perspicuous: “[his translations] resemble
cookbooks full of recipes translated with a dictionary by someone who has no idea what the
foods and spices are, who has never cooked or never eaten such a meal.”

Edward Conze is often praised as an editor and translator in the literature. Where his
faults are recognised, they are tacitly forgiven and he is credited as a “pioneer” and the
foibles of “pioneers” are seen as less egregious. In my view, Conze the pioneer set back
progress in editing, publishing, and understanding this literature by at least a century. Total
ignorance would be a preferable starting point to the firmly established nonsense that
currently fills Buddhist Studies textbooks, thanks mainly to Conze.

In editing the Hṛdaya, Conze has failed to register some details that are far from
“meaningless”. At two points they render his text meaningless. This did not stop him—and
has not stopped anyone else—from translating the garbled passages as though they do make
sense. The surprise is not so much that Conze erred but that the many eminent scholars now
associated with the text—including Fukui Fumimasa, Leon Hurvitz, Donald Lopez, Jan
Nattier, Jonathan Silk, Watanabe Shōgo, and Alex Wayman—did not seem to notice Conze’s
errors, let alone correct them.

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34 For example: “Conze’s pioneering accomplishment is still hailed as a model of meticulous scholarship, and he
ranks among the greatest and most prolific modern translators of the Buddhist tradition” (Zsebenyi 2004). “To
this day, many of his publications on Buddhist Philosophy and his masterful translations of key Prajñāpāramitā
sutras are considered classics in the field” (Heine 2016: xiii). “This genius… can be regarded as a formidable
scholar with no comparison, surpassing all past, and perhaps even future researchers in his achievement” (Ji
2018). And so on.

35 For my assessment of Conze’s contribution to Prajñāpāramitā studies and his personality generally, see
Attwood (2020c). More recently, Attwood (2022a) shows that the views that Conze attributes to Prajñāpāramitā
were already fully developed in his thinking before he learned Sanskrit.
Conze’s edition, as well as several Japanese editions (see Saitō 2021 and his sources), rely heavily on one source: the Hōryūji manuscript (previously held in Hōryū Temple but now in the National Museum, Tokyo\textsuperscript{36}). Nattier (1992: 208, n.39) notes that the “traditional” date for this copy, i.e. 609 CE, was first published in a Japanese publication in 1836. In comments accompanying the Müller and Nanjio diplomatic edition, Georg Bühler (1884) dated the Hōryūji manuscript to the eighth century “on palaeographical grounds”. Samuel Beal (1885), who made the first English translation of the Heart Sutra (1865), had already questioned the traditional date and Bühler’s remarks about it, but his contribution has been overlooked. According to Silk (2021a), Japanese scholars now consider the Hōryūji manuscript to date from the 9\textsuperscript{th} or 10\textsuperscript{th} centuries, which seems plausible. Saitō (2021: 103) also reports that Matsuda Kazunobu has proposed (in Japanese) that the Hōryūji manuscript was reconstituted from a Chinese transliteration of the type found in T 256, i.e. the Sanskrit text written using the sounds of Chinese characters to represent it. It’s not clear what the basis for this claim is or what the implications of it are.

To the best of my knowledge, no new Sanskrit manuscript of the standard (or shorter) Heart Sutra has been discovered since Conze produced the first version of his edition in 1948. By contrast, I can see many probable manuscripts of the extended Heart Sutra in the list of titles in the University of Hamburg’s Nepalese-German Manuscript Cataloguing Project.\textsuperscript{37} These are unlikely to shed the kind of light we seek, however, because the Nepalese Heart Sutra manuscripts all seem to have been copied without error checking for several generations (of copying). Errors have reached such proportions that my unpublished diplomatic edition of the newly discovered British Library Manuscript EAP676/2/5 required over 140 notes.\textsuperscript{38} Given the amount of time and resources it takes to obtain access to manuscripts held in far-flung library collections, to transcribe and edit them, the result is hardly worth the time (which may explain why the manuscripts, though easily available, have long languished). The Heart Sutra documents in the Dunhuang cache may shed light on the development of the extended version, and some preliminary work has been done in this area (Nourse 2010)\textsuperscript{39} but we await a published study of them.

In the meantime, students continue to struggle with Conze’s faulty Sanskrit and his execrable translations. This article aims to fill the gap by minimally revising the existing edition to the point where each sentence in it is at least a properly formed sentence; and by explaining the text (largely) in terms of the phenomenology of meditation.

\textsuperscript{36} High resolution photos were available some years previously, but have since been removed from the Museum website. They reappeared for a time in the 2020’s but as of writing (13 May 2023) they have once again been removed.

\textsuperscript{37} https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/ngmcp.html [accessed 1 July 2022]

\textsuperscript{38} A draft of this diplomatic edition can be found online:
https://www.academia.edu/9889701/Ārya_Pañcavimśatikā_Prajñāpāramitā_Mantrānāma_Dhāraṇī_aka_Prajñāpāramitāḥṛdaya_EAP676_2_5_Draft

\textsuperscript{39} My thanks to Ben Nourse for sending me a copy of his fascinating conference paper.
Conze’s Edition

Oṃ namo Bhagavatyai Ārya-Prajñāpāramitāyai. Ārya-avolokiteśvaro

Notes on Variants of Conze’s Edition

(Dates refer to Conze’s publications in the Bibliography)

a. 1948: āryāvalokiteśvara
b. 1975: prithak
c. 1948: tasmac-Chāriputra
d. 1975: full stop after jarāmaraṇaṃkṣaya
e. 1948, 1975: bodhisattvasya
f. 1975: nishtā-nirvāṇa-prāptaḥ
g. 1975: ‘nuttara-mantro’, i.e. the apostrophe representing the avagraha of ‘samasama-mantro’ (समसमामन्त्र:) was printed as a closing single quote attached to the previous word
h. 1973, 1975: oṃ omitted
i. 1975: ārya- omitted
j. 1975: hridaya for hṛdaya
Necessary Corrections

The first problem to resolve occurs in the first sentence. Here, again, is the passage in question accompanied this time by Conze’s translation.


Avalokita, the Holy Lord and Bodhisattva, was moving in the deep course of the Wisdom which has gone beyond. He looked down from on high, He beheld but five heaps, and He saw that in their own-being they were empty (1975: 77-8).

Conze’s published translations (1973, 1975) break this single sentence into two and add an unnecessary extra verb. This suggests that he experienced some ongoing difficulty in parsing this passage. Rather than the more conventional, Madhyamaka-inspired, metaphysical reading which denies that the skandhas (or any dharmas) have svabhāva, Conze opts to say here: “…in their own-being they were empty”, suggesting that the skandhas do have svabhāva but that it is “empty,” whatever that might mean. Attwood (2015) identified three related grammatical problems in this passage:

1. Conze incorrectly treats the vyavalokayati sma as an intransitive verb meaning “he looked down”. The verb is transitive and means “he examined [something]”. The object of examination is missing in Conze’s Sanskrit text.
2. Conze gives pañcaskandha in the nominative plural case: pañcaskandhāḥ. In this grammatical case, the word has no obvious relationship with the rest of the sentence.
3. Conze emphasises his perception of the lack of relationship between vyavalokayati sma and pañcaskandha by inserting a colon between them.

Examination of the Sanskrit manuscripts revealed an alternative reading in which pañcaskandhāḥ was in the accusative plural, pañcaskandhān (Attwood 2015). The accusative case is used, amongst other things, to indicate the object of a transitive verb, i.e. pañcaskandhān is the missing object of vyavalokayati sma. If we substitute the accusative plural, the sentence reads: vyavalokayati sma pañcaskandhān “[Avalokiteśvara] examined the five branches of experience”. This solves all the problems noted above in one stroke or, in fact, with the addition of a single dot. If the accusative case is correct, and it must be, then the original error was leaving off an anusvāra (nasalisation), i.e. writing the aksara ndhāṃ न्त््ध as ndhā न्त््ध. The accidental omission or addition of anusvāra is probably the most common scribal error in Buddhist manuscripts.

The revised first sentence, with my translation, now reads:
Āryāvalokiteśvaro bodhisattvo gambhirām prajñāpāramitācaryāṃ caramaṇo vyavalokayati saṃ pañcaskandhāṃ tāṃsā ca svabhāvaśūnyān paṣyati saṃ.

Practising the deep practice of perfect insight, Noble Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva, examined the five branches of experience and saw that they lacked self-existence.

The revised sentence now consists of three well-defined clauses with no need for punctuation except for a full stop at the end of the sentence. The change looks slight, but it makes the difference between a sentence that cannot be parsed or translated and one that can be.

The other main error in Conze’s edition is a wrongly placed full stop between acittāvaraṇaḥ and cittāvaraṇanāstiṃvāṃ. The “sentence” following the full stop—Cittāvaraṇa-nāstitvāṃ atrasto viparyāśa-atikrānto niṣṭhā-nirvāṇaḥ.—is a fragment with no subject and no verb, consisting merely of a connecting abstract noun in the ablative case and three adjectives in the masculine nominative singular (Attwood 2018a). That is to say, it is not a sentence at all.

Conze was ambivalent about this passage in two respects. At different times he has given the word bodhisattva with genitive singular (-sya) and nominative singular (-aḥ) case endings, reflecting various readings in his witnesses. Note that when he (correctly) chooses the nominative, he gives an incorrect sandhi for it, viz. final -aḥ followed by any word beginning with /p/ is unchanged. Conze also equivocated on the addition of prāptaḥ to the adjectival compound niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ. Thus we have three variants of this passage, all with a wrongly placed full stop.


The difficulty with this part of the text must have been obvious to ancient scribes as the surviving manuscripts exhibit a great deal of variation at this point. Aside from the title, this seems to be the most confusing passage in the manuscripts. Conze may have been influenced by Müller and Nanjio’s (1884) diplomatic edition of the Hōryūji manuscript which has a daṇḍa between acittāvaraṇaḥ and cittāvaraṇanāstiṃvāṃ, though none is used in their source. The problem ought to have been obvious since, for example, niṣṭhānirvāṇaḥ is declined in the masculine and nirvāṇaḥ is a neuter noun. The masculine declension can only mean that the
compound is being used as an adjective, i.e. that niṣṭāhānirvāṇah is a bahuvrīhi compound meaning “one whose extinction is complete” (See notes in Conze 1967:152). It is exceedingly rare, possibly unique, for nirvāṇa to be used adjectivally. Similarly, atrastāḥ “fearless” and viparyāsātikrāntaḥ “has overcome delusion” are both adjectives declined in the masculine nominative singular. In Sanskrit, an adjective takes the gender, case, and number of the noun it describes. There is only one noun in the masculine nominative singular in this whole section, i.e. bodhisatvah.

We can repair the text simply by removing the full stop. The correct reading of this passage, then, is:

tasmāc chāriputra aprāptitvād bodhisattvah prajñāpāramitāṃ āśritya viharaty acittāvaraṇaḥ cittāvaraṇanāsītītvā atrasto viparyāsātikrānto niṣṭāhānirvāṇah.

Therefore, Śāriputra, in the absence of attainment, the bodhisattva who is without mental obstructions dwells having relied on perfect insight, [and] being free of mental obstructions he is unafraid, has overcome delusions, and his extinction is complete.

The resulting sentence is far from smooth or unambiguous, is jargon-laden, and contains some odd idioms (such as –nāstitvāt) but it is at least a well-formed sentence with a subject, verb, and required sandhi.

Incidentally, Attwood (2015) showed that the Tibetan canonical versions of this passage also contain at least one error. In the Hṛdaya, we find a pair of verbs meaning “examined” or “observed” (vyavalokayati sma) and “saw” (paśyati sma), as in “Avalokiteśvara observed the skandhas and saw they lack svabhāva”. In paragraph E of the Tibetan text (Silk 1994: 174-5), the equivalent of “saw” has been inadvertently replaced with a second occurrence of “observed”.40 Silk’s translations, with my added emphasis, reflect this: “[Avalokiteśvara] observing the practice itself of the profound Perfection of Wisdom, observed that even those five aggregates are intrinsically empty” (Recension A. Silk 1994: 174) or “[He] observed the practice of Perfection of Wisdom, and with respect to the five aggregates observed that they are inherently empty” (Recension B. Silk 1994: 175).

**Editorial Corrections**

In addition to these simple but important grammatical errors, some questionable editorial decisions mar Conze’s edition. Some of these have been commented on already in the literature, but one or two have escaped notice till now.

1. Conze’s edition includes the maṅgala or auspicious salutation: Oṁ namo Bhagavatyai Ārya-Prajñāpāramitāyai! All evidence points to the Heart Sutra being

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40 Paragraph E in Recension A has rnam par lta and rnam par lta’o; Recension B has rnam par blta and rnam par blta’o. (Silk 1994: 110-111). We expect rnam par [b]lta “observed” and mthong “saw”.

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a Chinese text (Nattier 1992, Attwood 2021b) and no Chinese version of the text includes a maṅgala. The Sanskrit sources of the standard text either have no maṅgala or they begin with namas sarvajñāya “Homage to knowledge of all” (where sarva “all” has the esoteric meaning of “all dharmas”).\(^{41}\) Sarvajñā is treated as a synonym of prajñāpāramitā in the Prajñāpāramitā literature.\(^{42}\) The maṅgala chosen by Conze only occurs in the late Nepalese manuscripts of the extended text and this reflects the retrospective influence of Tantric Buddhism. In other words, Conze’s maṅgala is a culturally inappropriate anachronism. Given this, I suggest we omit the maṅgala as part of the edition. If a religious salutation is required then one to sarvajñā would be more appropriate.

2. Jan Nattier (1992: 204, n.19) already pointed out, thirty years ago, that yad rūpaṁ sā śūnyatā yā śūnyatā tad rūpaṁ has no counterpart in Chinese texts and is, in fact, absent from “a substantial majority” of Conze’s witnesses.\(^{43}\) Nattier omitted it from her text on this basis. We know that this section of the Heart Sutra is part of a reused passage from the Large Prajñāpāramitā Sutra. When we examine the relevant passage in the extant versions of the Large Sutra in Sanskrit and Chinese, this phrase (yad rūpaṁ...) does not occur: it is not part of the core passage except in Hṛdaya. We can infer that it is a relatively late interpolation and I suggest we follow Nattier’s suggestion and omit this passage from the edition.

3. In all of his published Sanskrit editions, Conze finishes the section variously labelled as IV or V with “na jñānaṁ na prāptir na-aprāptiḥ”.\(^{44}\) This is the end of the “core” section and (as above) we can check Hṛdaya against the extant versions of the Large Sutra in Sanskrit and Chinese. Huifeng (2014) did this and showed that na-aprāptiḥ does not occur in any version of the Large Sutra. Conze himself notes (1967: 155) that na-aprāptiḥ is not found in the Chinese Heart Sutra texts until the later Chinese translations of the extended versions i.e. T 255 translated from the Tibetan by Chos grub ca. 856 CE and T 257 translated from Sanskrit by Dānapāla, ca. 1005 CE.\(^{45}\) Furthermore, the inclusion of this expression creates a contradiction where none need exist: it is illogical and needlessly convoluted to say, as Conze does, “no non-attainment” and follow it by saying that the bodhisattva “attains nirvāṇa because of his non-attainmentness”. Even if we stipulate that “non-attainmentness” is a word, this is simply nonsense and not what the text is getting at anyway.

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\(^{41}\) Compare this with the Sabba Sutta (Sāmyutta Nikāya 35.23) in Pāli and the Chinese counterpart the *Sarva Sūtra* (T 99 #319, 2.91a24-b03), which is attributed to the Mūlasarvāstivāda School and widely considered to have been translated in the period 435-443 CE from a Sanskrit Sāmyukta-gama brought to China from Sri Lanka (Bucknell 2011).

\(^{42}\) “sarvajñāñāparinispattirbhagavan prajñāpāramitā, sarvajñatvaṁ bhagavan prajñāpāramitā.” Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā, Chp VIII (Vaidya 1960: 86).

\(^{43}\) Attwood (2022a: 239-240) noted that there is confusion in some quarters (e.g. Tanahashi 2014, Watanabe 2021) about how the pairs of phrases in the different versions of this passage relate.

\(^{44}\) See also the discussion of wú zhī yì wú dé 無智亦無得 in the Chinese text above.

\(^{45}\) As noted in Attwood (2021a), I don’t know the source of the attributed dates of the Heart Sutra texts or how reliable they are. An English language study of these attributions and dates by a qualified Sinologist is a desideratum.
Huifeng (2014) showed that from the extant Sanskrit and Chinese Large Sutra documents, we should expect this line to be na prāptir nābhisamayah “no attainment, no realisation”. As noted above, in Pañc, this pair of terms refers firstly to the attainment of the path (mārga) of stream-entry, once-returning, non-returning, arhatship, bodhisatvahood, and buddhahood; and secondly to the realisation of the fruit (phala) of each (Attwood 2020a). The terms that appear in Kumārajīva’s Large Sutra translation—yì wúzhì yì wúdé 亦無智亦無得 (T 223; 8.223.a20)—are either based on a faulty text or were mistakenly translated. And the resulting misreading was copied from there into the Xīn jīng and thence into the Hṛdaya and became canonical. Again, na-aprāptih should be omitted from the revised edition. The traditional Sanskrit text should read na jñānam na prāptih (retaining Kumārajīva’s original error), but in my new Sanskrit translation from Chinese, I follow Pañc, viz. na prāptir nābhisamayah. Either way, we should understand this line as a summary form of the list of āryapudgala.

4. As discussed above under the heading “Notes on Translations”, Conze, like many editors of his generation, has silently emended the spelling to the Classical Sanskrit, bodhisattva, in all cases. I use the Buddhist spelling in the edition and the Anglicised dictionary spelling in the translation.

5. Conze (1967) begins the final dhāraṇī with om. The only Chinese version of the Heart Sutra that includes om is T. 257, translated by Dānapāla in the eleventh century. Most of the Sanskrit manuscripts do not include om, notably, the Hōryūji manuscript does not. Of Conze’s late Nepalese manuscripts, only two—Nb and Ne—do include it. In Conze’s critical apparatus, he labels om with note 60, but neither version of his critical edition (1948, 1967) has any notes for this number (they both stop at 58). As with the maṅgala, the inclusion of the om here speaks to a late interpolation by Tantric Buddhists, for whom all mantras start with om. Conze (1975: 101) leaves om out of his translation and commentary and this is preferable. The Heart Sutra is emphatically not a Tantric text, even though Tantric Buddhists have, with typical eclecticism, adopted it and used it in Tantric rituals. And the incantation is a dhāraṇī rather than a mantra (Attwood 2017).

6. The name of the sutra is problematic because practically every Sanskrit witness has a slightly different title: compare Conze’s notes (1967: 153) and Watanabe (2016: 23-24). The Nepalese manuscripts of the extended text mainly have variations such as Pañcavimśatikā prajñāpāramitā-hṛdaya-dhāraṇī and Pañcavimśatikā prajñāpāramitā nāma dhāraṇī. The Sanskrit word pañcavimśatikā means “consisting of twenty-five”, i.e. consisting of twenty-five “lines”. Based on the early Chinese versions (notably the Fangshan stele; dated 13 March 661) and the Hōryūji manuscript, the earlier Sanskrit title of the text is simply Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya.

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46 Such numerical terms offer a format-independent measure of the length of a text, given that the number of characters per line differs markedly across manuscripts depending on the size of the leaves and the hand of the scribe. Terms such as astasahasrikā “consisting of eight thousand” and pañcavimśatikā “consisting of twenty-five” refer to number of units of thirty-two syllables, the number of syllables in a verse in śloka meter. Apart from the Ratnagunāsamsāgavātī, Prajñāpāramitā texts are prose.
This is a translation of the Chinese title Bānrěbōluómìduō Xīn jīng 心經 «般若波羅蜜多心經» which means something like, “The Epitome of Perfected Insight Text”. In Sanskrit, Prajñāpāramitā text titles tend not to include the word sūtra, e.g. Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā or Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā.

Conze (1948) prefixes the title with Ārya- but this seems to be overkill and, again, based on the late Nepalese manuscripts and Tibetan sources. The title Heart Sutra is an English translation of the abbreviated Chinese title Xīn jīng 心經. We often see Heart Sūtra (with long ū), which translates xīn 心 into English and jīng 經 into Sanskrit.

7. Conze was inconsistent in his use of hyphens to separate the parts of compounds. While hyphens can improve the readability of compounds, they should be used consistently and without breaking sandhi. I have worked on the principle that the primary audience for a Sanskrit edition is people who know or are learning Sanskrit. They should not need compounds to be hyphenated generally, though where there are long dvandva compounds it does improve readability without sacrificing other important conventions of Romanised Sanskrit.

8. In 1967, Conze only used initial capital letters for names and pronouns related to Avalokiteśavara.47 In his “popular” version of the text (1975), Conze introduced capitals for the first words of paragraphs (not sentences), a lot more punctuation, and for some reason spelled ṛ as ṛi or ri while including proper diacritics for other akṣara. I implement the relevant typographical conventions.

9. In Conze (1975) there is a typographical error: ‘nuttara-mantro ’samasama-mantraḥ has become ‘nuttara-mantro’ samasama-mantraḥ, i.e. the apostrophe representing the avagragaha has been attached to the end of the previous word as a closing single quote. It is important to correct this because this version of the text is widely used.

These small adjustments make for a more readable and comprehensible version of Conze’s edition of the received Sanskrit text. Below I give the revised text first in Devanāgarī and then Romanised according to IAST. I have added minimal punctuation for sentence breaks. My indicative translation follows.

**Revised Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya**

**Devanāgarī Text**

आर्धावलोकितेश्वरो बोध्सत्वो गम्भीरधां प्रज्ञधपधरममतधचर्धां
चरमधणो व्र्वलोिर्तत स्म
पञ्चस्िन्त््धां स्तधां श्च
स्वभधवशून्त्र्धन्त्पश्र्तत स्म
।।
इह शधररपुर
रूप मेव
शून्त्र्तध
शून्त्र्तैव रूपां
रूपधन्त्न
पृथक्शून्त्र्तध
शून्त्र्तधर्ध
न पृथग्रूपां
एव मेव
वेदनधसांज्ञधसांस्िधरववज्ञधनां
।।
इह
शधररपुर
सवा्मधाः
शून्त्र्तधलक्षणध
अनुत्पन्त्नध
अतनरुद््ध
अमलध
अववमलध
अनूनध
अपररपूणधाः
।।

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Practising the deep practice of perfect insight, noble Avalokiteshvara bodhisattva, examined the five branches of experience and saw that they lacked self-existence.
Obviously, Śāriputra, appearance only is absence; absence is only appearance. Absence is not different from appearance; appearance is not different from absence. The same applies to valence, recognition, intention, and objectification.

Obviously, Śāriputra all dharmas are characterised by absence that does not arise or cease, is not defiled or pure, and is not deficient or complete.

Therefore, Śāriputra, in that state of absence there is no appearance, valence, recognition, intention, or objectification; no eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mental sense; no appearance, sound, smell, taste, touch, or percepts; no eye-sphere, and so on up to, no mental-cognition-sphere; no ignorance or destruction of ignorance, and so on up to, no ageing and death or the destruction of ageing and death; no dissatisfaction, no origin, no cessation, no path; no knowledge and no attainment.

Therefore, Śāriputra, in the absence of attainment, the bodhisattva who is without mental obstructions dwells having relied on perfect insight, [and] being free of mental obstructions he is unafraid, has overcome delusions, and his extinction is complete. Having relied on perfect insight, all the buddhas appearing in the three times fully awakened to the unexcelled perfectly complete awakening.

Therefore, know that perfect insight is a great mantra, a great mantra of mastery, an unexcelled mantra, an unequalled mantra that allays all suffering and it is true and without wrongness.

Concerning perfect insight, a mantra goes like this: gate gate pāragate pārasamgate bodhi svāhā.

This Epitome of Insight is complete.

Conclusion

I found Conze’s edition impossible to parse in places. Eventually realising that the errors were due to his incompetence rather than mine, was not just a relief. Realising that the edition of such an important and famous text had been botched and that, for seventy years, not a single academic stepped forward to say so, gave me severe cognitive dissonance. I realised that, despite lacking all credentials and qualifications, I would have to take matters into my own hands.

48 In philosophical texts, iha is very often construed as iha loke “here in this world”. Usually it refers to something existing that is in the presence of the speaker and their audience, i.e. something obvious (at least once it is pointed out).

49 Thích Nhất Hạnh pointed out in a 2014 blog post that the two statements rūpaṃ śūnyatā and śūnyatāyām na rūpaṃ appear to be contradictory (https://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/letters/thich-nhat-hanh-new-heart-sutra-translation/). Nhất Hạnh (2017) changed his popular English translation (2009) to try to resolve this anomaly. I critiqued this approach in a blog post, (http://jayarava.blogspot.com/2016/03/thich-nhat-hanhs-changes-to-heart-sutra.html), but the issue has not been dealt with formally.
I believe that the cult of obscurantism that surrounds the Heart Sutra and Prajñāpāramitā generally has been profoundly counterproductive. While there is some traditional justification for an obscurantist approach, based on commentarial traditions dating back to the eighth century, it has hampered progress in understanding Prajñāpāramitā on its own terms.

It is now possible to cut through a lot of the smoke and mirrors and see the Heart Sutra for what it is: a Chinese text; a digest text composed of passages from Pañc, some of which were independently circulating (See Attwood 2020b). The Heart Sutra was formed during a tumultuous period in Chinese political history, i.e. the rise of Wǔ Zhào 武曌 (624–705) from low-ranked concubine to Empress Consort (650–655), amidst bitter and violent court factionalism.

The Heart Sutra is not a Madhyamaka or Yogācāra text; much less a restatement of the Perennial Philosophy. Contra Karl Brunnhölzl (2012), the Heart Sutra is not “crazy”. Contra Edward Conze (1973), the Heart Sutra is not illogical and the Prajñāpāramitā is not concerned with “the Absolute”. Contra almost everyone, the Heart Sutra is not incomprehensible (especially when we fix the textual problems). By repairing the texts, and eschewing the sectarian commentaries, we allow the Heart Sutra to speak for itself, perhaps for the first time.

No doubt some readers will want to translate the editions in their own way. I welcome this. I hope the translations I have supplied accurately convey my understanding of the text as principally concerned with the cessation of sensory experience in deep meditative states. I hope that this will eventually make sense to other scholars and come to be seen as a valid reading of the text, even if it does not supplant the various religious traditions associated with the Heart Sutra. At the very least, I hope that educators can now supply their students with a text that can be parsed.

### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>Aṅguttara Nikāya</td>
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<td>Hṛdaya</td>
<td>Prajñāpāramitāḥṛdaya</td>
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<td>MN</td>
<td>Majjhima Nikāya</td>
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<td>P.</td>
<td>Pāli</td>
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<td>Pañc</td>
<td>Pañcavimśatisāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skt.</td>
<td>Sanskrit</td>
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<tr>
<td>T.</td>
<td>Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō «大正新修大藏経»</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vaj</td>
<td>Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā</td>
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**Bibliography**

Chinese texts are cited from the CBETA version of the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō 奈良大藏聖教大總持院大藏經*, Tokyo: Taishō Issaiyō Kankōkai, published 1924-1932.


