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THE CHINESE VERSION OF DHARMAPADA

Translated with introduction and annotations

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Introduction

1 Statement of scope and methodology

The *Fa Jyu Jing* (T no. 210) is the earliest (circa 224) of the Chinese versions of the *Dharmapada*. According to its preface, the first translation consisted of 26 chapters, with about 500 stanzas. It was subsequently revised, with the addition of 13 chapters, thus giving us the text more or less as we have it today, with 39 chapters and about 760 stanzas. As will be shown below, its core of 26 chapters (= *Dh(C)*) correspond quite closely to the Pali *Dhammapada* (= *Dh(P)*). They appear so closely related in fact that many scholars are led to believe that the Chinese text was translated from the Pali. While not wishing to rule out this possibility altogether, we have not fully subscribed to this view owing to the presence of a number of counter-indications which we have discussed in the last chapter of this Introduction³. Nevertheless, the undeniable fact remains that it thereby has a special significance for the comparative study of the history of the Pali *Dhammapada* in particular. Moreover, since other subsequent Chinese versions of the *Dhammapada* were strongly influenced by it, borrowing heavily from it directly or indirectly, it may be considered as a *sine-qua-non* for the study of the Chinese *Dharmapada* literature, and hence also the comparable study of the *Dharmapada* literature in general. It is in the hope of contributing to such a comparative study that we have presented here a translation of *Dh(C)*, together with annotations.

Samuel Beal⁴, as far back as 1878, drew our attention to its special relationship with *Dh(P)*, and emphasized its significance in this context. Reacting to some cynical view current at the time (and probably not entirely extinct even today) on the value of the non-Theravada Buddhist literature, he states: "Take for example, the remarks of Childers ("Contemporary Review", February 1876) that 'the Northern books (so-called) [which of course include the Chinese], are of as little value for a critical examination of Buddhism, as works found in Abyssinia bearing on the Christianity'. It is plain, however, that the Buddhist works in China are of great value for an exact knowledge of that religion, because they are faithful versions of works everywhere known in India, not only during the early period of its history but also throughout its development".

Beal, however, with an interest different from ours, did not translate the *Dh(C)*, but the *Fa Jyu Pi Yu Jing* (= *DhAv(C)*) T4 pp. 609b-776a⁵, which was the