

Computer Translation of the Chinese Taisho Tripitaka

Buddhism has been propagating in Việt Nam for over 2000 years. Mahayana sutras and other sacred texts have often been taken from the Chinese Tripitaka and, until now, Vietnamese Buddhists do not have a complete Tripitaka in Vietnamese. Only a few Vietnamese can read and write Chinese characters. Yet there are still too many sutras and other sacred texts that have not been translated. Members of **Tuệ Quang Wisdom Light Foundation Inc.** have been concerned about this issue and spent considerable efforts during the last several years researching techniques for translating the Chinese sutras into Vietnamese. We recently have access to the original texts in the Chinese Tripitaka from the [Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association \(CBETA\)](#) and we are committed to translate them into Vietnamese. This Chinese Tripitaka contains more than 70 million words in over 2370 sutras. **We have developed an unique computer-based translation software that allows us to perform the translation quickly. It can reduce the Tripitaka translation from decades or even centuries if done manually to a few short years!** In the following sections, we will briefly present the historical development of the Chinese Tripitaka as well as our own translation efforts.

Taisho Tripitaka

The translation of Buddhist sutras and other texts from Sanskrit into Chinese had occurred over 1200 years, from the later Han Dynasty (2nd century) to the beginning of the Yuan Dynasty (13th century). According to Zen Master Thích Thiện Siêu, the first translated sutra was the Forty Two Chapters Sutra in the year 76 CE by two Masters Kasyapa-Matanga and Dharmaraksa who came from Central Asia. The Agama Sutras, the Anapanasati sutra ... were translated by Master An-Shih-Kao from 147 to 167. Afterwards, there were several Masters, such as Kumarajiva (344-413), that came from Kashmir and India. Chinese monks, including most notably the famous Hsuan-Tsang (599-664), traveled to India and brought back several sutras, thereby enriching the Chinese Tripitaka and making it the most complete Tripitaka that was ever translated.

From later Han (58-219) to the Liang Dynasty (502-556) there were 419 sutras that were translated during those 500 years. During the reign of

the first Song Emperor (917), various sutras and sacred texts were, for the very first time, assembled into a Tripitaka. This Tripitaka occurred in Sichuan and, therefore, it was known as the Sichuan Tripitaka. It took 12 years to complete and it included 5000 fascicles. Following the Sichuan Tripitaka, there were several others that were created, including those in 1080 with 6000 fascicles, in 1112, in 1132, in 1231 and in 1277 in Beijing. The Korean Tripitaka was developed from 1011 to 1047. During the Meiji reign (1868-1912), the Japanese Tripitaka was completed with 8534 fascicles.

Various versions of the Chinese Tripitaka were printed but still incomplete, with some sutras missing or damaged with time. These can cause serious difficulties to Buddhist scholars. Two noted scholars from Tokyo University, Takakusu Junjiro (1866-1945) and Watanabe Kaikyoku (1872-1932), had vowed to develop a complete Tripitaka. For eight years (1924-1932), they had collected, researched, investigated, compared, and organized in a systematic manner all the available sutras into a complete Tripitaka that was composed of 85 volumes containing 11970 fascicles and 2920 sutras. This Tripitaka was first printed in 1929 during the Taisho reign, and it was widely known as the Taisho Tripitaka.

Among the 85 volumes, sutras and other texts such as vinayas (precepts) and sastras (commentaries) are in the first 55 volumes. The secular sutras and texts are contained in volume 56 through volume 85. The 2920 sutras (11970 fascicles) are divided into two categories. Category A includes 1692 sutras (6256 fascicles) translated from Sanskrit, with 2/3 are the official texts and the remaining 1/3 contains explanations and works of Indian Masters. Category B includes the commentaries and literary works of Chinese and Japanese Masters. Included in Category B are 1228 sutras divided into 5714 fascicles. The Taisho Tripitaka contains more fascicles than the Sanskrit and Pali Tripitakas, because there are multiple translations of well-known sutras.

CBETA Electronic Tripitaka

In recent years, electronic communication technologies such as computers (PC), Internet, CD and DVD have become more and more popular in several countries around the world. According to Prof. Christian Wittren of Kyoto University, several research programs have focused in applying these modern technologies to the development of an electronic

Tripitaka. In 1993, an association named Electronic Buddhist Text Initiative (EBTI) has been formed to share the experience and technologies among various programs in Japan, Korea and Taiwan. In the U.S., Prof. Lewis Lancaster from UC Berkeley is considered to be to the pioneer in this field. In February 1998, Rev. Heng Ching from Taiwan National University and Rev. Hui Min from Taiwan National Institute of Arts had formed an organization with the name of Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA). CBETA first issued a CD containing six volumes of the Taisho Tripitaka in December 1998. To date, CBETA has completed an electronic Taisho Tripitaka with 56 volumes as mentioned above. This electronic version can be obtained for free from CBETA by either a CD-ROM or downloading from CBETA website (<http://www.cbeta.org>). The Tripitaka contents can be examined from the CBETA Taisho Index available from our website.

Computer Translation of the Tripitaka

Members of the Tuệ Quang Wisdom Light Foundation have been in contact with CBETA since 2002 and have received its Tripitaka CD. Since the Tripitaka has more than 2370 sutras and over 70 million Chinese words, we have spent considerable efforts in researching various computer-based techniques for translating them. **An advantage of computer translation is the translation may have errors but it is always complete, because the computer translates word by word.** We have developed a computer program that uses the Chinese-Vietnamese Dictionary of Thiệu Chử Nguyễn hữu Kha. This dictionary has been widely used over the last several decades. Please read the sample Chinese-Vietnamese transcription of the [Heart Sutra \(Prajna Paramita Sutra\)](#). Our translation utilizes the same words by Rev. Trí Tịnh. Our translated texts are very useful for translation and research purposes, since they contain both the original Chinese texts and the Vietnamese translations. The Thiệu Chử Chinese-Vietnamese Dictionary was first published by Đuốc Tuệ in 1942 and, hence, we have spent considerable efforts in editing and supplementing the translated texts with more modern and updated Buddhist and Chinese-Vietnamese dictionaries such as the Trần văn Chánh dictionary.

Our unique computer program has allowed us to translate the entire Tripitaka quickly with a reasonable accuracy. It reduces the time required for translation from decades or centuries if done manually to a few short years! Encouraged by these results, we have formed a [Program](#)

[for the Development of a Vietnamese Tripitaka](#). Our program is divided into five stages:

1. Develop computerized techniques to transcribe and translate the Chinese Tripitaka into Vietnamese,
2. Transcribe the Chinese Tripitaka by computer,
3. Translate into Vietnamese by computer,
4. Edit and review by the Masters, and
5. Publish through conventional printing and electronic means.

At the present time, we have completed the draft translation (Stage 3 of Program) of all sacred texts in the Taisho Tripitaka (**over 70 million words in 9035 fascicles/files**). **All 2372 sutras in the Tripitaka have been translated by computer in 28 hours.** The translated files are compatible with Microsoft Word and they occupy about 1.4 gigabyte (GB). Please read through the sample translations of the Amitabha Sutra, Medicine Buddha Sutra and the Diamond Sutra that are available from our website <http://www.DaiTangVietnam.com> *These short sutras have been translated in less than 10 seconds. Larger sutras such as Kinh Hoa Nghiêm-Avatamsaka Sutra (80 fascicles) in 11 minutes, Đại Trí Độ Luận-Great Prajnaparamita Sastra (100 fascicles) in 17 minutes and Đại Bát Nhã-Great Prajna Sutra (600 fascicles) in 50 minutes.* We are making corrections to these files and updating them with modern Buddhist and Chinese-Vietnamese terms.

We have contacted several Masters and experts, both overseas and at various Buddhist Institutes in Việt Nam, to organize a systematic and coordinated program to edit, review and approve the translated files. The editing and review of these files (Stage 4 of Program) are ready to begin and **will occur over the next two years. It will only require a relatively modest budget of \$100,000 USD per year for sponsoring about 50 editors in Việt Nam.**

The **Tuệ Quang Wisdom Light Foundation Inc.** hopes for the development of a complete Vietnamese Tripitaka in the near future. In addition to the translated sutras, the Vietnamese Tripitaka will also include commentaries and literary works from contemporary Masters such as Rev. Thanh Từ, Nhất Hạnh, Trí Siêu, Tuệ Sỹ ... Modern dictionaries in

Vietnamese-Sanskrit, Pali, Chinese and English will also be included. The Vietnamese Tripitaka will be composed of about 300 volumes, with 1000 pages per volume. Following its development, we hope to distribute it widely and for free through modern electronic means such as the Internet and CD/DVD.

Our efforts only represent small contributions towards the establishment of a Vietnamese Tripitaka. We hope to receive guidance, assistance, cooperation and ideas from the Masters, respected scholars and other Buddhists so that the Vietnamese Tripitaka will soon be successfully completed.

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March 2006

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