

Translation as Creative and Dynamic Transformation

—On Translating Christian Spiritual Classics

(An abstract)

Chong Yau-yuk

Associate Professor

Department of Translation

Lingnan University

Hong Kong

Spirituality, as Alister McGrath says, arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life, forged in the crucible of the desire to live out the Christian faith authentically, responsibly, effectively, and fully. In Christian spiritual classics, we witness how great writers recount their experiencing of God, and the transformation of their consciousness and their lives as outcomes of those experiences, which, while serving as guidance for men and women towards their spiritual growth, also illuminates and deepens our understanding of God and the Bible. In this respect, translating Christian spiritual classics involves not only the transport of the signified from one language to another, but more importantly the creative and dynamic transformation of growth, development, and flowering of the lives of writers that are weaved into the fabric of texts.

If translation is conceived of as the afterlife or the continued life of the original, as suggested by Walter Benjamin, the whole translation process should not be viewed as a mechanical transfer of the signified of one language into another. In contrast, it should be perceived as

a birthing or rebirthing process through which the resurrection of the original takes place. Rather than arguing radically from a Derridean perspective that translation transforms the source text so that the original will live on, live more and better, and even live beyond the means of the author, this paper points to the phenomenon that translation, especially when Christian spiritual classics are taken into consideration, provides a stage for survival for the original, giving it shape, spirit, and strength: translation is by its very nature a life-giving activity.

The concept of afterlife also implies that translation behaves like a child, and that translation is not a product subject to the law of reproduction, but has the power to speak on its own in a new and unique fashion. The act of translation is, in this regard, the act of creation — a series of complex processes which the term “translator” may fail to denote. The translator has to, on the one hand, observe the literary, religious, socio-cultural as well as translation norms of his target culture, while, on the other hand, reflect in his translation the ideology and poetics inherent in the text from which he is translating. Caught between conflicting expectations of translation (e.g., adequacy versus acceptability), the task of the translator of Christian spiritual classics has never been simple and easy. To illustrate how such a task is undertaken, a Chinese translation of Dag Hammarskjöld’s *Vägmärkan* has been selected as an example. By describing the translator’s strategies and the reasons for the adoption of those strategies, this paper attempts to explore the possibilities of giving birth to “a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life” in a different language.