Usurping or Enchanting: Re-examining Ethical Duties of Arthur Waley as a Scholar-cum-translator in Translating Dunhuang Bianwen

Peng Yin[1, 2]

1. College of Foreign Languages and Literature, Northwest Normal University, Lanzhou 730070, Gansu, PRC

2. Department of Translation Instruction and Research, State University of New York at Binghamton, Binghamton 13790, NY, USA

Abstract

The assessment of translators' ethical duties lies in the hands of the professionals, and it seemingly has nothing to do with translator's own educational and academic trajectory. However, some specialists translate works in their expertise, how do their academic trajectory and standings affect the evaluation of their ethical duties? This paper, through a case study on Arthur Waley's translation of Dunhuang Bianwen敦煌变文, investigates how Waley's academic perspectives play a role in implementing his translation ethics. The paper finds that Waley, instead of merely assuming the ethical duties to the target readers, attempted to make ethical commitments to the source and target texts alike. The paper finally suggests that the translators' academic trajectory and standings should be given due attention in making ethical judgments to scholar-cum-translators such as Arthur Waley in this case.

Keywords: scholar-cum-translator, assess, ethical duties, Bianwen

1. Introduction

The discovery of medieval Chinese manuscripts at Dunhuang in the early 20th century attracted explorers and scholars to read, interpret and circulate the documents internationally. According to literary historians (Mair, 1983; Xiang, 1989), Bianwen, a literary genre in the Dunhuang manuscripts which alternate between prose and verse, exerts influences on the development of Chinese vernacular literature, especially in Yuan and Ming dynasties. The translation of Bianwen started in the middle of the 20th century, and the first English translator is Arthur Waley who served as a curator to British Museum when doing his translation. He first translated twenty-six Bianwen texts into English, which were published in his *Ballads and Stories from Tun-huang*.

Waley's translation, in terms of reception, received favorable comments from the English-speaking world: they are "in the astonishingly simple but masterful style" (Crump, 1962, p. 389), "charming and enchanting" (Hudspeth, 1961, p. 632), and "of high literary quality" (ibid.). Scholars from the field of Chinese literary history, however, found that Waley's translations are "rather free which skips many sections" (Kanaoka, 1987, p. 279), and didn't represent the original stylistics (Xiao, 2017, p. 17). The reviews reveal that Waley adapted and altered the original text in order to accommodate the target readers, and that he has an ethical obligation to the English readers, which implies that the translator usurped the source text for the sake of the target culture. Does the author usurp the source text to enchant the target audience? Why, in terms of the translator's ethical obligations, do scholars from the source and target cultures alike come up with two totally opposite conclusions? How are ethical judgements towards a translator made?

Before elaborating these questions, the paper will first trace how different ethical models address and evaluate the ethics of a translator. Since the call of "Return to the ethics" in translation studies (Pym, 2001), translation ethics has been explored from different perspectives, and the scholars have come up with different ethical duties translators are expected to have. These models, however, revolve the two essential questions, namely, who the translator should be ethical to and who makes the ethical judgements.

2. Translation and Ethics

Ethics in translation studies is the "subfield that aims to understand what is good and bad, right and wrong in translatorial praxis" (Koskinen and Pokorn, 2021, p. 3).

Translators are the key elements in discussing translation ethics, because any translation, once finished, is subject to assessments from professionals[1] which may reveal the quality of the translation. The translator is, of course, the center of the discussion because he/she is expected to demonstrate ethical responsibilities or duties in the process of translating. The responsibility, or the translator's ethics, according to Inghilleri (2020), becomes a key issue in translation studies, especially after the release of the special issue dedicated to translation ethics in *The Translator* in 2001. Scholars have come up with ethical duties translators are expected to abide by, and those ethical duties are "implied in every conception of translation" (Van Wyke 2013, p. 111).The discussions on ethical duties of the translator, with the developing understanding of the notion of translation, also have also undergone a series of changes since the 1960s.

In literal and linguistic approach, translation is the replacement of the literal or linguistic makeups in the source text with that in the target text (Catford, 1978). The source text has the supreme position compared with the target text, and it is expected to have fixed features that need translators to identify and represent them in translation. The ethical responsibilities translators are endowed with is the fidelity to the source text, that is to say, the assessment of a translator depends on how faithful he/she can represent the source text. In assessing the ethical responsibilities, the researchers or the reviewers, by dividing the source text into different parameters (House, 1997; Munday, 2008), make the decisions based on the extent these parameters represent linguistically in the target text.

The literal and linguistic approaches assume that translation happens in a vacuum, however, all translations take place in the certain social, cultural and historical situation. The functional approach emphasizes the importance of the context in the translation and argues that ends determine the means. The functional approach frees translators from chains of fidelity but runs the risk of producing "mercenary experts" to fight "under the flag under any purpose to pay them" (Pym, 1996, p. 338). In response to this criticism, Nord (2002) proposes that loyalty is the translation ethics in functional approach, especially in Skopos theory, arguing that the translator should be loyal to all the parties involved in the translation. In assessing the loyalty of translators, the researchers rely on their understanding and perception about the parties involved in the communication to judge whether translators fulfill their ethical obligations, as indicated in Nord's justification of deleting the crude words such as "their positivism makes him vomit"(p. 38) in terms of the translators' ethical obligations. Nord, in this case, argues that different social status of the scholars across two cultures makes translation ethical in rendering it from Spanish into German. In other words, the translator has no choice but to please all the parties involved in the translation process. Translation scholars made ethical evaluations based on their analysis how the translator pleases all the parties involved.

The cultural turn in translation studies further expands the boundary of translation. Translation is no longer linguistic transfer or an communicate event, and it has become cultural products in the target culture. Translation is considered a norm-governed activity, and norms determine the status and shape of translations (Toury, 2012). Translators are ethical if their translation can achieve the expectancy of the target culture set by the norms. The assessment of their translation is left to the hands of qualified researchers who make made ethical judge on the translator based on their observations in the target culture and the contribution of translation in the target culture.

The sociological approach considers translation as a social activity which is constrained by the socio-culture. Instead of focusing on how we translate, this approach emphasizes why we translate. Translation ethics in this approach is related to the question why we translate, as Pym claimed that he didn't want to judge the ethical obligations of translators but only "offer a set of questions to ask in each particular situation" (Pym, 2012, p. 11). In this approach, the translation ethics are concerned with what a translator should do in concrete situations. Translators can be ethical if they can meet the expectancies set by the concrete sociological situation.

The translation ethics, or deontic logic in Chesterman's term, is not automatic.Rather, it is normed governed, and it embodies the values the translators hold dear, such as clarity, truth, trust, and understanding (Chesterman 1997, pp. 150-56). Based on the analysis of the shortcomings in the four current models of translation ethics (representation, service, communication, and norm-based), Chesterman (2001) proposed that professional commitment is the ethical obligations translators should have, which are judged by a set of professional codes.

Deconstructionist thought in the late 20th century revolutionizes the notion of translation. The source text doesn't possess fixed meanings, and translators do not so much represent the source text as bring new interpretations to the source text in the translation. In Benjamin's words, translation is the afterlife of the original.

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[1]Professionals, according to Lefevere (1992), are literary critics, book reviewers and university professors specialized in the similar topic.

Translators have more freedom according to this thought, however, it doesn't mean that translators can do whatever they want to do without ethical concerns. Here, the ethical obligations of translators lie in their responsibilities towards the possible effects of their translation action. In this context, we can say that a translator is ethical if he/she can resist the power by preserving the differences (Venuti, 2008), representing the other in the target culture (Berman, 1992, as cited in Hermans, 2009), or making a difference in a social, political and ideological sense (Spivak, 1993, Flotow, 1997, Tymoczko, 1999, as cited in Hermans, 2009).

Despite sharp differences in these ethical models, each model assumes that translators should have ethical obligations on one or several parties involved in the process of translation, for instance, the source text and the author in literary and linguistic approach, all the participants in the functional approach, norms and values in cultural approach, professional codes in the sociological approach and consequences of their actions in the philosophical approach. The fulfillment of translators' ethical duties is measured by scholars who make judgments via their detailed studies. In all these theoretical models, the scholars, in order to make the ethical decisions, rely on how the translator responds to the external factors, namely the faithful representation in linguistic approach, the loyal service to all the agents in the translation process in functional approach, ability to address the target social and literary expectancies in the cultural and sociological approaches, as well as achievement of the planned effects in the deconstructionist approach. They all ignored the academic and educational trajectory of the translator in making the final ethical evaluations.

Some translators[2], however, have expertise in the fields they translate, and this complicates the process of evaluating their ethical duties. In case of Arthur Waley's translation of Bianwen, the ethical evaluations from both the source text and the target text are made without taking account the fact that Waley has expertise in Dunhuang studies. If the scholar-cum-translators, who have different scholastic perspectives towards the original topic, represent his/her standings in his translation, how can their ethical duties be measured? In the following part, I attempt to investigate the ethical duties of Waley in translating Bianwen via the case of *Wu Tzu-hsuBianwen伍子胥变文*. The case was adopted because the text came into being when "genuine Bianwen became popular" (Mair, 1983, p. 26), and as it can serve as an exemplar of this type of writing. The story of Wu Tzu-hsu appeared in *The Spring and Autumn Annals* and *Historical Records*, but the *Wu Tzu-hsu* Bianwen in Dunhuang manuscripts came from the folk artists' repeated performances of the story. It is the retelling of Chinese historical stories in Bianwen style.

3. Discrepancies in Scholarly Understanding of Bianwen

Bianwen is prosimetric literature genre in Chinese Tang Dynasty (618 AD to 907 AD), and it was discovered from the Dunhuang manuscripts in the early 20th century. Seemingly distant from us, it is, however, worthy of investigation due to its crucial importance in Chinese literary history. It helps scholars understand "the development of a wide variety of popular literary genres, including various types of fiction, drama, and recitatives or chants" (Mair 1983, 1), and answer "where popular narratives and stories in Song and Ming Dynasties were originated, the question puzzling scholars for a long time" (Zheng, 2005, p. 162).

Bianwen was firstly named by Zheng Zhengduo, however, no consensus on its definition and its corpus have been reached among the scholars to date. All the scholars agree that *wen* means *texts*, but they differ in the understanding of Chinese character *bian*. *Bian* literally means *change* or *alter*, but scholars hold dissident opinions on what is altered. Some scholars (Zheng, 2005; Wang, 1982; Zhou, 2016) claim that Bianwen is an alteration in styles, namely a text changed from formal to colloquial language, or from canonical to popular literature. This understanding implies that Bianwen subsumes popular literature and oral literature. Scholars like Zhou Yiliang and Guan Dedong contend that the character *bian* was originated from Buddhism, and it means *transformation*. Victor Mair further point out that it came from *nirmana*, a Sanskrit term that means "a changed state" and "a magical creation" (Mair, 1983, p. 3). According to them, Bianwen is one of the channels to publicize Buddhism in medieval China, and it is, therefore, didactic in nature. *A magic creation* implies that Bianwen also emphasizes the theatricality and performativity. Waley argued that Bianwen"is similar to those of folk literature of peasant Europe and of folk-tales in many parts of Asia" (Waley, 2005, p. 239), characterized by "the use of parallel phrases" and "the rhymed couplets" (ibid.). Compared with other scholars, Waley does not see the literary significance of Bianwen in Chinese, treating it as a kind of folk literature of the peasant Europe.

Various definitions are reflective of different interpretations of the genre, which contributes to the significant disparity in the coverage of its corpus. Wang Chongmin et al, out of 187 pieces of Dunhuang manuscripts, sorted out 78 texts for the first time in the world to sort out and collate Bianwen, which were included in *An Anthology of Dunhuang Bianwen*.

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[2] In this paper, I use "scholar-cum-translator" to refer to the specialists who translate books from the own area of expertise.

Wang did a pioneering work in the field, and his anthology has become a springboard for numerous subsequent collations, which are shown in Table 1. The process of annotating and collating is still afoot. The latest is by Xiang Chu, who is undertaking a key project of Bianwen collating sponsored by China Social Sciences Fund. Xiang's results are expected to be published in the form of an anthology by the end of 2018.

Scholars also have various interpretations on stylistic features of bian-wen. Eoyang thought that Bianwen is "oral forms of storytelling" (Eoyang, 1971, p. 53) and that it possesses the features like repetition, formulas to engage the audience (ibid.). Crossland-Guo (1996) identified its oral tradition as shown in formulas, themes and story patterns. Mair identified Bianwen style as (1) prosimetric style with the verse portions chiefly heptasyllabic; (2) semi-colloquial language; and (3) formulaic expressions occurring before verse passages (Mair, 1983, p. 5). Waley argued that Bianwen is similar to folk literature of peasant Europe and folk-tales in many parts of Asia, and he also found some striking features of Bianwen: (1) Constant repetition of stock passages, (2) Asides in which the story is related to the origin of place-names, or of rites and customs, (3) Disregard of real chronology and typography […]. (4) The name of the author is hardly ever known. (Waley, 2005, p. 239)

The above discussions reveal that no consensus, as regard with the definition and stylistic features of Bianwen, is reached among the various scholars. Waley's interpretation of Bianwen as an equivalent of Europe peasant folk literature, and his identification of Bianwen stylistic features, serve as a guiding force to address the various problems arising in translation. In exploring the ethical duties of Waley in translating Dunhuang Bianwen, we should bear in our mind the double roles Waley played. On the one hand, he is a specialist in Dunhuang studies. For these literary texts from Dunhuang manuscripts, Waley investigated the definition, corpus and stylistic features of this genre, and he published *Karlgren Festschrift* to discuss the linguistic features in these texts. On the other hand, Waley is an excellent and qualified translator in rendering these texts into English. He is acclaimed for his numerous translations of Chinese and Japanese literature, especially Chinese classical works, ranging from poetry, novels to philosophy.

4. Re-examing Arthur Waley's ethical responsibilities

Taking into account of Waley's academic trajectory, this paper will revisit the two opposing ethical evaluations to address the question whether Arthur Waley usurped the orginal text to enchant the target readers.

4.1. Unfaithful to the Source Text?

This paper rests on contents and styles to address whether Arthur Waley is faithful to the source text. In terms of the contents, the original Bianwen depicts the legendary life of Wu Tzu-hsu as a fugitive and a prime minister. The story starts with the King's indulgence in women and his ignorance of the court. The Prime Minister Wu She, the father of Wu Tzu-hsu, warned the King of the potential danger of so doing, which made the King so furious that he killed the father as well as the brother of Wu Tzu-hsu. Tzu-hsu was wanted man throughout the Kingdom of Chu. The King claimed that whoever found Tzu-hsu would be rewarded and whoever hid him would be severely punished. Wu Tzu-hsu had no choice but to escape. In the course of escaping, he suffered hunger and fears, he had to beg for food, and he was even chased by his nephews. He finally escaped to the Kingdom of Wu and was promoted to be the Prime Minister there. Tzu-hsu used his wisdom and knowledge to help the King of Wu govern his Kingdom, and within five years, the Kingdom became prosperous in economy and stable in politics. Tzu-Hsu then waged wars against the Kingdom of Ch'u to revenge his father and brother. He was subsequently promoted to grand Minister due to his achievements and efforts. Unfortunately, Tzu-hsu was finally executed because his interpretation of the King's dream irritated the King of Wu.

These encounters and wars followed a similar story structure. Each encounter starts with a description of setting in figurative language, and then moves to Wu's encounter and begging with one of four persons before being recognized by them. When he was helped by them, he would be either moved, or shamed, or appreciated, and thus express his emotions by saying a song or by ruminating on the encountering in his mind. Finally, he would choose to escape again in a cautious way.

Similarly, the descriptions of wars also follow the same pattern. What is first described in each war is the powerful army led by Wu Tzu-hsu, who afterward waged wars against the enemy or suspended the wars through negotiations. The last part of the plot is that Wu rewarded the soldiers, paid back to his encounters and took revenge for his father and brother.

In his translation, Waley includes the four encounters but skipped several wars because Waley thought the description is not necessary to translate them because they "repeat what we have already been told" (Waley, 2005, p. 49). Generally speaking, the translator didn't translate something from nothing, instead, he expressed the truth as indicated in the target text. Concerning the content, the translator is faithful to the source text.

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Most of the criticisms for Waley's translation are the failure to represent the stylistic features in the source text, a unique feature making Bianwen significant in Chinese literary history. Before judging Waley's ethical duties to the source text, his academic opinions on Bianwen should be paid due attention to. Waley considered Bianwen as folk literature of peasant Europe, and it is understandable that he attributed little significance in its literariness. He observed that parallelism and seven-syllable verse lines are the main literary features of Bianwen, which he thought that is "a considerable influence of upper-class, ornamental literature" (Waley, 2005, p. 239).

Despite numerous alterations, Waley attempted to preserve the parallelism and the effects of verses in his translation, which is shown in the following example.

Source text: 吾上不貪明君重賞，下不避誅戮之愆. (Xiang 1989, p. 57)

Literal translation: I up not greedy for Sovereign's heavy reward, below not avoidbeing punished or sentenced.
Waley translation: I care nothing for the King's reward any more than I am afraid ofthe punishments he threatens. (Waley, 2005, p. 38)

The source text used 上不 and 下不 to create a parallel structure, and the meanings of the two parts are similar. In translation, Waley preserved the Chinese feature of saying the same thing twice.

Verses in Bianwen are either to describe the emotional state of the characters, or to repeat what already happened, or to describe the setting of the story. Of twenty-four verses in *Wu Tzu-hsu*, Waley translated eleven verses, deleting verses that repeat the plot and describe the story setting, the specific reason for which will be discussed later in this paper. Waley recognized the stylistic features of verses in Bianwen: heptasyllabic with the even lines rhymed, however, he didn't closely appropriate the rhyme and rigid metrical tradition when rendering Chinese poems, as he claimed:

I have not used rhyme because it is impossible to reproduce in English rhyme-effects at all similar to those of the original, where the same rhyme sometimes runs through a whole poem. Also, because the restrictions of rhyme necessarily injure either the vigor of one's language or the literalness of one's version. I do not, at any rate, know of an example to the contrary. (Waley, 1932, p. 20)

Instead, Waley adopted free verse to translate Chinese verses, and he represented its chantable feature by resorting to the writing tradition of the Epic, which, according to his research, is a major characteristic for Dunhuang Bianwen.

When commenting on Waley's ethical duties towards the source text, the researchers should consider Waley's expertise in Dunhuang studies, otherwise, the judgment is possibly unfair. If the researchers use the stylistic features identified by specialists other than the translator himself to evaluate Waley's translation, Waley is, of course, found to show less ethical duties to the source text. However, Waley rendered the original storylines with fewer alterations and represented the prominent stylistic features he identified based on his academic study. In this sense, we may possibly criticize his research ethics negatively, but we can not conclude that he is not ethical to the source text. As a matter of fact, the translator demonstrated strong ethical obligations to the source text both in contents and stylistic features.

4.2. Targeted Readers in Mind

Waley's translation was first published by George Allen and Unwin Ltd in 1960, and the expected customers are general English readers. Waley also articulated this point in his preface, saying that "the book is meant for the lover of stories and ballads...the references given in the notes are meant for specialists" (Waley, 2005, p. 7). With the general English readers in mind, his criteria for selecting texts to be translated are threefold. First, he chose texts that interested him and discarded those that "lose interest for me at any rate" (p. 247). Second, his selected texts were all popular literature. He justified himself of not translating *Wang Zhaojun*王昭君变文by asserting that it "shows a strong influence of ornate upper-class (as opposed to popular) style" (p. 249). Third, he determined to introduce the new stories to general readers throughout the world, for he mentioned that only one text was translated before he started his translation (p. 238).

In order to accommodate the general English readers, he altered the source text in the expressive approach and the organization in *Wu Tzu-hsu*Bianwen.

Plaks argued that Chinese literature, which originated from poetry, is "expressive-oriented", while the western literature, which developed in the sequence of epic-romance-novel, is "narrative in nature" (Plaks, 1994, pp. 9-11). The expressive feature of Bianwen is embodied in setting descriptions, soliloquies, and repetitions.

Soliloquies, most written in verse, are used to evoke or strengthen the reader's emotions. In *Wu Tzu-hsu*Bianwen, there are altogether five soliloquies, which help the audience catch the inner world of the heroes and thoroughly understand the plot.

Setting descriptions are abundant in Bianwen, and they are conducive to the understanding of the plots and the moods of the stories. In *Wu Tzu-hsu*, there are setting descriptions before each act of the story with luxuriant and emotive diction, and one indication is the descriptive passage about the scenery Wu came across by the river bank after Wu painfully denied the marital relations with his wife, where birds and fish compete with each other on the surface of the vast and silent river. The scenery produces a kind of desolateness which conforms to and strengthens the emotional state of Wu Tzu-hsu.

Repetitions are another technique to emphasize the expressiveness in Chinese literature. Apart from similar story structures in all the encounters and wars mentioned in the previous sections, the source text tends to dramatize the consequence of expressiveness by repeating the previous storylines. For example, Wu, after victories in a series of wars, returned to the Kingdom of Wu and proceeded to report the process of the wars to the King. The source text strengthened the audience's understanding of Wu's achievements by repeating what had been told previously.

In Waley's translation, he deleted the above mentioned three techniques that help make Bianwen expressive-oriented. By doing so, he recreated the story in English narrative tradition as stipulated by Plaks. He, therefore, demonstrated his ethical duties to the target readers, which makes them understand the remote stories from ancient China rather than trap in the professional literary jargons.

In terms of overall organization of Bianwen, Waley made numerous changes for the sake of the general English readers. He added typical story markers in the translation, as shown in the introduction part of the story: the source text used four paragraphs to describe the geographical, political and cultural backgrounds of the story in 450 words, whereas Waley summarized this part into a single paragraph of 62 words, beginning with "Once upon a time there was a King of Ch'u…".

Paragraph organization is another way that Waley changed the Bianwen into a style recognized among the general English readers. The original *Wu Tzu-hsu*Bianwen in the Dunhuang manuscripts doesn't have distinct paragraph markers, and it presented all prose passages in solid paragraphs. The available Chinese anthologies and English translations divided prose into paragraphs, but the ways they did vary substantially. The source text, for instance, has altogether 43 paragraphs in Xiang Chu's annotated anthology, but Waley's translation has 115 paragraphs. As we mentioned previously, Waley skipped quite a few sections in translation, so the paragraph organization in Waley's translation is totally different from the source text, which is shown in the following example.

Source   text:
其王见女，姿容丽质，忽生狼虎之心。魏陵曲取王情：”愿陛下自纳为妃后。东宫太子，别与外求。美女无穷，岂坊（妨）大道。”王闻魏陵之语，喜不自昇（胜），即纳秦女妃，在内不朝三日。(Xiang, 1989, p. 4)

Waley's translation:

 When the King saw the girl, she was so beautiful that he suddenly felt a wolfish, a tigerish desire for her. Wei Ling was quick to play up to this feeling.

"Why don't you take her for a consort yourself?" he said. "We can look elsewhere for a bride for the Crown Prince; there are plenty of girls. Surely this would be no crime?"

*When the King heard Wei Ling's words, he was beside himself with joy. He at once took the girl from Ch'in as a consort and for three days on end stayed in the inner palace, never once holding the audience. (*Waley, 2005, p. 26*)*

The source text has only one paragraph in Xiang Chu's anthology, but Waley adopted the English style of paragraph organizing and divided the source paragraph into three English ones because English often uses short paragraphs in narratives.

The translator indeed assumes his ethical duties to the target readers, and he expected his translation to help the target readers understand the story told in Bianwen rather than the specialist knowledge in this genre of writing.

5. Conclusion

Without considering Waley's academic expertise in Dunhuang studies, the scholars find that the translator is ethical to the target readers but almost has no ethical obligation to the source text. The reason behind this decision is that the scholars framed the studies in Chinese literary history and ignored the translator's standings and knowledge in this field of study. However, a different picture comes into being when Waley's scholarly standings are considered in evaluating the translator's ethics. Waley has different interpretations of Bianwen, and in his translation, he attempted to make ethical commitments to both the source text and the target readers. In assessing the ethical duties, especially those of the scholar-cum-translators, the translators' academic trajectory and standings should be given due attention in making ethical judgments.

Table 1
Annotations and Collations of Bianwen

Scholars	Anthology	Number	Date
Wang Chongmin	*Anthology of Dunhuang Bianwen*	78	1957
Pan Chonggui	*New Anthology of Dunhuang Bianwen*	86	1983
Victor Mair	*Popular literature in Tang Dynasty*	7	1983
Xiang Chu	*Annotations of Selected Dunhuang Bianwen*	27	1989
Xiang Chu	*Annotations of Selected Dunhuang Bianwen (revised)*	44	2006
Zhou Shaoliang	*Supplements to Anthology of Dunhuang* $(2^{nd}$ *edition*$)$	15	2016

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