The *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith*（*dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論) [1] represents a classical example in the formulation of the distinctly East Asian Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-nature. This doctrine asserts the innate purity of mind and, on that basis, promises enlightenment or “salvation” indiscriminately to all sentient beings. It appears in the treatise as the doctrine of “inherent awakening”（*benjue 本覺*) and, in that form, contributes to the adaptation of the originally Indian Buddhism to the religious, philosophical, and cultural milieu in East Asia.

The treatise was first introduced to the West, as is well known, through Suzuki Daisetsu's 鈴木大 拙 English translation in 1900.[2] It was looked upon as a representative work of the Eastern thought,[3] and has since remained a well-known subject in the Western study of Buddhist and East Asian philosophy. Apart from the high-profile debates over the provenance of the treatise,[4] Western scholars have also been drawn to various other topics about or related to the treatise, such as the sinification of Buddhism in Chinese Huayan, the practical soteriology in Korean Hwaem, the transformation of medieval Japanese Buddhism, and the debates over the nature and identity of Buddha-nature thought in the modern intellectual movement called “Critical Buddhism,” to name just a few examples.[5]

Despite such scholarly attention, however, there has not yet appeared a definitive English translation of the treatise. The best Western translation to date is actually in French (Frédéric Girard, 2004), and the most well-known and most widely used English translation (Yoshito Hakeda 羽 毛田義人, 1967) is not only dated, but also filled with numerous translational infelicities.[6] Other English translations thereafter are generally not adequate introductions to the treatise.[7] There has thus long been a call for a new English translation, a call that recently received an excellent response in an Oxford Chinese Thought project under the title of *Treatise on Awakening Mahāyāna Faith*, which is the object of the current review.

This new translation is the work of four leading scholars in the field—John Jorgensen, Dan Lusthaus, John Makeham, and Mark Strange—who have been writing prolifically on Buddhist and East Asian philosophy and are thus ideal translators for the treatise. The translation is the product of a long process of concerted effort, starting as a workshop exercise in 2012, growing over the years to incorporate researches from various perspectives, and eventually appearing in 2019 as the second of the Oxford Chinese Thought series, a series aimed to introduce the riches of Chinese thought to the West.
The translation is a relatively small book of 162 pages, consisting of a substantial introduction in seven sections (55 pages), a richly annotated translation (83 pages), and a number of supplementary materials for the translation. The introduction opens with a detailed discussion of the title of the treatise in its several components, which, in itself, may also serve as a brief thematic analysis. It continues naturally from the title to the author in the second section, but the discussion transitions quickly from the author to the question of provenance. In a thorough, in-depth, and well-organized presentation of new scholarship, the third section expands the isolated issue of provenance to the much broader topic of its “historical and intellectual contexts.” Following this discussion of contexts, the introduction turns its attention to the treatise itself in section 4, focusing on its theories of the basic human problem (ignorance) and the proposed solution (practice). Section 5 takes a step further to outline the key models in which such theories are formulated. In the last two sections, the introduction shifts its attention again from the treatise itself to its classical commentaries, with section 6 introducing a few such works and section 7 comparing them in terms of their interpretations regarding the movement of Suchness.

Like most commentaries and translations, this translation also uses the first of the two versions of the treatise. There appears to be no room for the Chinese text in the book series, so the translation has created a companion website to provide such resources. It includes the apocryphal preface by Zhikai 智愷, which was often excluded in other translations, and provides two maps, two tables, and two glossaries (i.e., two-way between English and Chinese) to supplement the translation. The translation itself establishes its textual correspondence with the Chinese text by applying the Taishō serial numbers in the latter—at the beginning of each of the three columns on each page—to the English translation. And, primarily in the section Xianshi Zhengyi 顯示正義, it provides some outlining in places of relatively more complex structures, delineating as much as three layers of a textual hierarchy therein. Notably, the translation is heavily annotated, with 222 footnotes for 83 pages. This new translation is marked by thorough engagement with ongoing research, comprehensive and in-depth discussions, balanced approach to the interests of both specialists and general readers, and innovative use of tradition.

The most well-known topic in the modern study of the treatise is the issue of its provenance. This topic has given rise to numerous studies in both East and West since Mochizuki Shin'ō 望月信亨 began to question the authenticity of the treatise in the early twentieth century. Of the many proposed answers to the question, one looks at the Buddhist world in sixth-century northern China, focusing on the influence of the great translator Bodhiruci 菩提流支, his followers and rivals, their works and debates, as well as the thought of the Dīlu School 地論宗. This thread began to become an important topic after Takemura Makio’s 竹村牧男 1985 book, Daijōkōshinron dokushaku 大乗起信論読釈, and has since attracted increasingly greater scholarly attention. This new translation drew extensively on such scholarship, thoroughly absorbed them, and deftly and clearly incorporated them into its introduction, translation, and annotations.

Equipped with the current scholarship, the translation provides a comprehensive and thorough-going presentation of the theoretical issues of the treatise unseen in previous English translations. Its introduction touches upon all the important topics of the treatise, such as its provenance, concepts and theories, ways of their formulation, and their interpretations. It summarizes the major debates between the two main doctrinal approaches of the time (Tathāgatagarbha vs. Yogācāra) and among various schools or sub-schools derived therefrom. It delves deeply into the philosophy of mind in their various formulations, and systematically singles out for scrutiny some of the most well-known but also most difficult con-
cepts. And, last but certainly not the least, it situ-
ates the isolated question of provenance in its lar-
ger historical and intellectual contexts, and ex-
tends its theoretical investigation from the treatise
itself to its exegetical traditions.

Portrayed as the representative work of East-
ern thought, the treatise has been translated in the
West primarily for general readers.[15] This neg-
lects the simple fact that the treatise is not a suit-
able object for such introduction, because it is
made up almost completely of abstract concepts
and theories, because its structure is complex and
sometimes ambiguous, and because it requires too
much background knowledge to achieve any de-
gree of effective understanding. Anyone who has
ever attempted teaching the treatise in an under-
graduate class may readily attest to such a fact.
This new English translation is clearly guided by
the same principle of popularization,[16] but it
also takes great care to “strike a reasonable bal-
ance between” the two sides (p. 10). Thus we see
not only introductory explanations designed to
help general readers, but also scholarly discussions
based on current research and traditional exegesis
as well as discussions that transition from the in-
troductory to the scholarly. Such examples are
found in the introduction, but abound primarily in
the footnotes.

Also, this new translation is marked by a con-
scious effort to innovate on the basis of tradition.
Its introduction starts with the title and author of
the treatise, apparently following the format of
traditional commentaries, but quickly moves on
to the topics and methods in its modern studies,
such as the question of authenticity, and the ap-
proaches of historical and intellectual contexts. It
has been a general practice in most translations to
discuss important concepts of the treatise, but the
presentation in this translation is the most com-
prehensive, most systematic, and most skillfully
designed. In its discussions of the key conceptual
models of the treatise,[17] the introduction quite
consciously employs the format Fazang 法藏 in-
vented in a thematic statement he made in his
commentary,[18] but freely inserts other topics to
suit the translators’ own needs of explication. And,
it’s introduction is not the first to discuss the issue
of authenticity and that of the historical and intel-
lectual context, but it is the first to emphatically
and conspicuously situate and expand the former
in the latter.

There are, however, a few places in the trans-
lation where I would make different choices. The
translation does not contain the Chinese text (ap-
parently the decision of the publishers)—I would
not only add it, but also correlate the two texts
passage-for-passage or even line-for-line. The
translation often rearranges sentence structures,
sometimes merging parallel structures,[19] some-
times creating a different structure,[20] and other
times inverting a structure[21]—I would prefer to
maintain the original structure as much as pos-
sible. The translation tends to be literal with tech-
nical terms and thus often creates long expres-
sions—I would choose to simplify such transla-
tions.[22] And, in treating the structure of the treat-
ise, the translation does not have an overall out-
line attached before the text,[23] nor one actually
applied to the text itself, and says nothing about
the internal outlines that implicitly correlate the
introductory chapters[24] to the main body of the
treatise[25]—I would include all of this.

There are also a few places where the transla-
tion is not sufficiently precise. The word “ding” 定,
for example, is translated once as “inevitable”[26]
and another time as “absorption,”[27] but in both
cases it describes the group of beings “certain to
achieve awakening” (zhengding ju 正定聚).[28] The
expression “faqu dao” 發趣道, for another example,
consists more specifically in first “aspiring” (faxin
發心) and then “progressing towards” (quxiang 趣
向) rather than merely “embarking on the way.”[29] And, faith in the Three Treasures, for still
another example, is faith in the treasures of
Buddha, Dharma, and Sāṃgha, which are excel-
ent, rather than faith in the fact that these treas-
ures are excellent.[30]

There are also places in the treatise that require further explication in translation. For example, the word “da” 大 in the Liyi 立義 chapter is the characterization of the One Mind, is used in conjunction with “cheng/sheng” 乘 in the obvious wordplay of “da-sheng” (mahā-yāna大乘).[31] and is so used with a less obvious purpose of reproducing such self-glorification discourse as the “seven aspects of greatness in nature” (qizhong da xing 七種大性).[32]—such possible usages of the word “da” have not been sufficiently explored. For another example, the word “yi” 义, also in the Liyi, refers to “purport” in the phrase “liyi,” but may be intentionally ambiguous in “moheyan (i.e., mahā-yāna) yi” 摩訶衍義, because on the one hand it refers to the “meaning” of the word “mahāyāna,” hence the wordplay on “mahā” and “yāna,” but on the other hand also refers to “attributes” (de 徳), for the “yi” of “mahāyāna” (i.e., as “great”) is eventually the characterization of the One Mind—these possible meanings of the word “yi” have not been fully teased out.[33]

Over the last half-century, English-speaking students of the treatise have been relying primarily on the Hakeda translation in their study of the text, with many complaints but without any satisfactory replacement. This Oxford translation is thus a timely and long-awaited event in the field. It is well informed with current research, and well designed in its presentation of the important issues of the treatise; it is lucid in language, and explains difficult concepts and complex background in an in-depth, well-organized, and accessible way; it is thoroughly annotated, providing detailed discussions and explanations to almost all problems in the text. Thus marked by erudition, insightfulness, and clarity, this translation—despite differences in the understanding of individual details—makes an important contribution to the study of the treatise as well as Buddhist and East Asian philosophy, and will find its place on the bookshelves of all those in the field for years to come.

Notes
[1]. All translations will be from the book under review unless otherwise noted.

[2]. Aśvaghoṣa’s Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1900), though in its less well-known version, and though Timothy Richard’s 1907 translation, The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine—The New Buddhism (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1907) was, according to its cover page, actually completed in 1894.

[3]. In the intellectual encounter between East and West in the early twentieth century, the West looked for a window into Eastern thought, and the East sought to respond to the introduction of Western thought with its own classics; hence the translation of the treatise by Suzuki at the request of Paul Carus. See Frédéric Girard’s discussion of the construction of an “Eastern philosophy” (philosophie orientale) in his 2004 French translation, Traité sur l’acte de foi dans le Grand Véhicule, Bibliothèque Izutsu de philosophie orientale 2 (Tokyo: Keio University Press, 2004), xv-xvii; Gong Jun’s 寵儷 2012 study on the creation of an “East Asian concept of Mahāyāna” 東亞大乘觀念 in Suzuki’s English translations (“Lingmu dazhuo yu dongya dasheng guannian de queli: cong yingyi dashengqixinlun [1900 nian] dao dasheng-fojiaogangyao [1907 nian] 鈴木大拙與東亞大乘觀念的確立—從英譯《大乘起信論》[1900年] 到《大乘佛教綱要》[1907年], Taida foxue yanjiu 臺大佛學研究 23 [2012]: 75-118), and Ishii Kösei’s 石井公成 2012 lecture on the “reception” 受容 of the treatise as an expression of the East Asian nationalism (“Kindainihon ni okeru daijishinron no juyō” 近代日本における大乗 起信論の受容, Ryūkoku daigaku Aija bukkyō bunka kenkyū senta 2012-Nendo dai 10-kai zentai kenkyūkai 龍谷大学アジア仏教文化研究センター2012年度第10回全体研究会, Kindainihon bukkyō kenkyū dai 2-kai 近代日本仏教研究・第2回).


[8]. That is, the so-called Paramārtha 真諦 or Liang 梁 (Dynasty) version, collected in the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大蔵経 as T32n1666.


[10]. Take, for example, the serial numbers for the three columns on the Taishō page 575, namely, 575a, 575b, 575c: They are applied to mark the translation on, respectively, pages 56, 60 and 64.


[13]. Particularly noted among the many contributions to this subject are the works of Ishii, Ōtake, and the two books compiled by the Geumgang Daehak bulgyo munhwa yeonguso 金剛大學仏敎文化研究所 on the Dīlūn School and its thought in, respectively, 2010 (*jirōn shisō no keisei to hen'yō* 地論思想の形成と変容) and 2017 (*jirōnshū no kenkyū* 地論宗の研究).

[14]. Hakeda, for example, introduces only the “history” and “content” of the treatise, skimming through only some of the most obvious topics. Hakeda, *Awakening*, 3-19.

[15]. Or, for “any educated man,” in Wm. Theodore de Bary’s words (see Hakeda, *Awakening*, v).

[16]. For it is a part of the Oxford Chinese Thought series, which is aimed to “make available to the general public, university students, and scholars a treasure trove of materials that has previously been largely inaccessible” (x).

[17]. That is, “one mind two gateways, the three greats, three bodies, four characteristics of awakening, five names of mentation and six types of defiled mind, ten bhūmis” (25-36).

[18]. That is, “one mind, two gates, three (aspects of) greatness, four (kinds of) faith, and five practices” (一心, 二門, 三大, 四信, 五行, T44n1846p241a27-a28).

[19]. For example, “If one knows that, although all dharmas are spoken of and conceived, there are in fact no speakers and nothing that might be spoken of, and no conceivers and nothing that might be conceived” 若知一切法雖說無有能說可說，雖念亦無能念可念 (70).

[20]. For example, “One should know that the self-nature of suchness is not existent, non-existent, both existent and non-existent” 當知真如自性，非有相、非無相，非非有相、非非無相 (70).

[21]. For example, “[Sentient beings] are only able to presume that names and definitions serve to explain true awakening because there is the non-awakened and falsely conceptualizing mind” 以有不覺妄想心故，能知名義，為說真覺 (79-80).

[22]. For example, “exhortation to practice and to reap the benefits” 勸修利益分; “the aspiration to awakening through the consummation of faith” 信成就發心; and etc.

[23]. A practice invented in the Buddhist exegetical tradition and quite popularly adopted in modern translations (sometimes in the form of a table of contents). For examples in the latter, see Richard, “Translator’s Synopsis,” in *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana Doctrine*, xvii-xxv; Hakeda, “Contents,” in *Awakening*, ix-xi; Girard,

[24]. That is, the chapters of Prayer of Homage (*guijing ji* 归敬偈), Reasons for Composing the Treatise (*yinyuan fen* 因緣分), and Establishing the Meaning (*liyi fen* 立義分).

[25]. Many classical commentators, including 曇延 X45n0755, 元晓 T44n1844, and 法藏 T44n1846, make a point to explicitly point out such correlations. For a detailed analysis of various outlines in the treatise, see my 2017 article, “The Self-Imposed Textual Organization (*Kepan* 科判) in “Qixinlun: Some Major Forms and a Few Possible Problems,” *Fagu foxue xuebao* 法鼓佛學學報 21 (2017): 1-39.

[26]. See “inevitably establish a non-relapsing commitment to faith” 必定不退信 (64).

[27]. See “stay in correct meditative absorption” 住正定故 (136).

[28]. The “zhengding ju” 正定聚 is to be achieved in the first of the three stages of practice (*xinshengjiu faxin* 信成就發心); in the case it fails there, there is a set of make-up practices in the fourth major chapter (*xiuxing xinxin fen* 修行信心分); and, at the end of these make-up practices, the chapter teaches the additional practice of mindfulness of Buddha (*nianfo* 念佛), the goal of which is the “ding” 定, abbreviating “zhengding ju” 正定聚, in the two preceding examples. For further clarification, readers are invited to compare the texts surrounding the following expressions:

(a) “the group of beings certain to achieve awakening” 正定聚 (115);
(b) “indeterminate group” 不定聚 (116);
(c) “sentient beings who have not entered the group certain to achieve awakening” 未入正定眾生 (124).

[29]. See “the Way realized by all buddhas, which all bodhisattvas aspire to awaken, to cultivate, and to progress towards” 一切諸佛所證之道，一切菩薩發心修行趣向義故 (113).


(a) “The second is faith that the Buddha has countless qualities” 二者信佛有無量功德;
(b): “The third is faith that the Dharma has great benefits” 三者信法有大利益;
(c) “The fourth is faith that the Monastic Community is able to practice correctly” 四者信僧能正修行.

There are other examples of imprecision:

(d) The relationship between the two parts of the statement in each of the four kinds of faith (of which the three were just discussed) is not that of “because”—it is rather that of “so” (see Fazang, T44n1846p282a7) (125);

(e) The “da” 大 in “sizhong da yi” 四種大義 is “great,” characterizing the greatness of the One Mind, and so “sizhong da yi” cannot be “four significant senses” (77)—see discussions of “da” below;

(f) The translation of “ruo rushi yi” 若如是義 into “this is the meaning of ‘suchness,’” i.e., translating a mere conjunction “ru” 如 into “Suchness,” is a case of over-interpretation—indeed, it subsequently also misses “ruo” 若 in the translation (70).
[31]. That is, the three aspects of “great” (da 大) and two types of “ride” (cheng/sheng 乘) (67).


[33]. Other examples in need of further explanations (I mentioned the first two examples previously in my 2014 translation, note 3):

(a) The translators noticed that the Chinese word for Suchness, i.e., zhen-ru 真如, is intentionally discussed in its two component words (see note 41) but stopped short of discussing its implications—the wordplay on both components of the word allows us to at least surmise that the treatise could not be composed in the language (i.e., Sanskrit) in which the word has only one component (i.e., tathātā) (69);

(b) The definition of “calming” (zhi 止, or śamatha) and “discernment” (guan 觀, or vipaśyāna) has similar implications when “zhi” and “guan” are explained with “śamatha” and “vipaśyāna,” a thing that would not happen if the treatise was composed in Sanskrit (127);

(c) The “three kinds of aspiration to awakening” (sanzhong faxin 三種發心) is obviously a simplified version of the 52-stage model of religious practice in Mahāyāna Buddhism, and so an explanation of the correlation between the 3 and the 52 is necessary—the translation, however, has only a section in the introduction on the Ten bhūmis (34-36), which is the last part of the 52 stages, but does not have an explicit discussion of this correlation between the two systems;

(d) There is a conspicuous textual discrepancy between the two versions of the treatise—words are apparently missing from the older version collected in Taishō in the passage on “yi xiangying” 已相應 (ellipsis mine to indicate the missing words): 二者已相應，謂法身菩薩，得無分別心，...; ...
与諸佛智用相應 (T32n1666p579a4-a6). Fazang and earlier commentators did not seem to know this in their discussions of the passage, but the treatise inserted into the Fazang commentary by Zongmi does—so the revision of the flawed passage or the recovery of a few lost lines happened around that time. This discrepancy has been noted in many translations, but was not mentioned in this one (102). See Fazang at T44n1846p273a19, and Śikṣānanda at T32n1667p587b9-b11. Also see Hakeda, Awakening, 65; Girard, Traité sur l’acte, 79; Vorenkamp, An English Translation, 236; and Jin, “The Awakening of Faith: Part I,” 291.
If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at
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