

## BOOK REVIEWS

*THE MAHATANA MAHAPARINIRVANA-SUTRA*. A Complete Translation from the Classical Chinese Language in 3 volumes. Annotated and with Full Glossary, Index, and Concordance by Kosho Yamamoto. The Karin Buddhological Series No. 5. The Karinbunko, Oyama, Ono-ku, Ube City, Yamaguchi-ken. Volume one, 1973, xxxiii+356 pp. Volume two, 1974, viii+358-757 pp. Volume three, 1975, vi+758-1052 pp.

The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra is one of the most famous Mahāyāna-sūtras. In the beginning of the fifth century three translations appeared one after the other: Fa-hsien's translation (Taishō no. 376), Dharmakṣema's translation (Taishō no. 374) and the "Southern text" (Taishō no. 375). The Nirvāṇa school, the teachings of which were based on this text, flourished especially in Southern China in the fifth and sixth centuries, and the doctrines of the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra were studied and discussed by many scholars with great vigour. Although the Nirvāṇa school was later absorbed by other schools, its teachings have continued to exercise great influence on Sino-Japanese Buddhism. According to the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra all living beings, including the greatest sinners, the *icchantika*, possess the Buddha-nature. Nirvāṇa is said to be permanent, blissful, the self and pure; the Dharmakāya is eternal and the existence of the Tathāgata is eternal and unchanging.

Yamamoto's translation is based upon the "Southern text." Fuse Kōgaku who has compared in detail the "Northern text" and the "Southern text" has shown that the editors of the latter have very freely dealt with the "Northern text" and made many stylistic changes (*Nebanshū no kenkyū*, Tōkyō, 1942, 2nd ed., 1973, vol. 1, pp. 192-406). The "Southern text" is written in excellent Chinese, which has certainly contributed to its popularity in China. Fa-hsien's translation fell soon into oblivion, although it is probably closer to the Indian original than the other translations. Both the Northern and Southern texts are much more extensive than Fa-hsien's translation. The Northern text occupies 239 pages in the Taishō edition (vol. XII, pp. 365-603), the Southern text 248

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pages (pp. 605–852) and Fa-hsien's translation 47 pages (pp. 853–899). Fuse's book contains a comparative table of the chapters in the three translations (*op. cit.*, pp. 83–84).

According to the preface, Yamamoto commenced his translation in the autumn of 1970. One is amazed to see that in such a short space of time he has been able to translate the entire text, to type it and to see it through the press. A few months after the publication of the third volume, in the beginning of this year, Yamamoto passed away without having finished the fourth and concluding volume which was to contain a glossary, an index and a concordance. It was his original plan to include these supplements in the third volume but their size made this impossible. It is to be hoped that the fourth volume will be published in the near future. The translation contains only very few notes and in most cases references are made to the glossary.

The translation is based in the first place on Shimaji Daitō's Japanese translation in volumes eight and nine of the *Kokuyaku daizōkyō*. Yamamoto has also made use of the translation by Tokiwa Daijō in the *Kokuyaku issaikyō*. The usefulness of these so-called *nobegaki* translations consists mainly in the fact that, if correct, they can be of assistance in analysing the structure of the Chinese sentence. However, they cannot be considered translations in the true sense of the word since they usually maintain the same Chinese characters. Often, these translations are made more or less mechanically without a serious attempt to bring out the meaning of the text. How necessary an English translation can be, has been convincingly shown by Kanakura in comparing the *nobegaki* translation of a passage of the *Sban-chieu P'i-po-sba* with the English translation by Bapat and Hirakawa (*Suzuki gakujutsu zaidan kenkyū nenpō*, vol. 8, 1971, pp. 92–93).

Yamamoto's task was indeed a large one, but he accomplished it successfully. It was not his intention to produce a translation meant in the first place for scholars. This is obvious from his remarks in the preface in which he points out that from an academic point of view the Northern text is to be preferred. A scholarly translation would have required a comparison of the Northern text with the Southern text and for the first part of the text (chapters 1–17) a comparison of all three Chinese translations and the Tibetan translation (Peking no. 788). Moreover, it would have been necessary to trace the quotations and to provide detailed notes. This would have been a long and exacting labour and would probably have been beyond the powers of a single scholar. However, it would not be impossible to make a translation of the first part of the text based upon Fa-hsien's version and the Tibetan translation. All the existing Sanskrit

fragments appear to belong to this part of the text and a translation of it would enable the reader to obtain an idea of the Indian original.

Yamamoto's choice of the Southern text is justified by the fact that it was this version which enjoyed great popularity both in China and Japan. His English translation will be of great help to those who are unable to read the Chinese translation. Yamamoto's English is perhaps not always idiomatic but, on the whole, his translation does justice to the original. Sometimes the English equivalents are not very satisfactory as, for instance, the rendering of *fan-nao* (Jap. *bonnō*; Skt. *kleśa*) with "illusion." However, mistakes are very rare. On p. 16 of volume one the *dānava* kings have become *danavat* kings and a note explains that they are abounding in gift. Yamamoto's translation occupies more than one thousand pages and, going through it with a fine-tooth comb, one would certainly be able to find a number of inaccuracies and infelicities. However, in comparing the first hundred pages with the Chinese text, I was surprised at the small number of corrections which might be suggested.

In the margin of the first volume references are given to the page numbers of Shimaji Daitō's translation in the Kokuyaku daizōkyō but, from the second volume, page and column of the Taishō edition are also indicated. A comparative table of the page numbers of the English translation, the Kokuyaku daizōkyō and the Taishō edition for volume one is to be found in volume three. This volume contains also several appendices: a brief explanation of the contents of the chapters, a bibliographical note, a linguistic note, a list of books consulted and corrigenda for volumes one and two. To the bibliographical note one can add a few publications in Western languages on the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra: P. Demiéville, *Le bouddhisme, sources chinoises, L'Inde classique*, vol. II (Paris-Hanoi, 1953), pp. 435-436; Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 113-116, 128-129; Nakamura Hajime, "A Critical Survey of Mahāyāna and Esoteric Buddhism," *Acta Asiatica* 7 (1964), pp. 49-51; Takasaki Jikidō, *The Tatbāgatagarbha Theory in the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies*, XIX (1971), pp. 1024-1015 [abridged English translation of the first five sections of his chapter on the Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra in the *Formation of the Tatbāgatagarbha Theory* (in Jap.), Tōkyō, 1974, pp. 128-190].

J. W. DE JONG.