

## BOOK REVIEWS

*MURYŌGI-KYŌ AND KANFUGEN-GYŌ*. (The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings and The Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal-Virtue). Translated by Yoshirō Tamura and Kōjirō Miyasaka. Tokyo: Risshō Kōseikai, 1974, xi+78 pp.

In China, Korea, and Japan, where the role played by Buddhism in the faith, thought, and culture has been incalculable, all Buddhist schools have of course regarded the Chinese versions of the Buddhist texts as standard. Consequently, in those countries, the form of Buddhism developed inseparably from the thought structure inherent in the Chinese language. Over a period of many centuries, the Chinese, and later the Korean and the Japanese, have read, studied, and recited these texts, the results of which can be seen in the voluminous amount of essays, commentaries, and subcommentaries in the Chinese Buddhist canon. It is upon this corpus of literature—not the Sanskrit—that the Buddhist traditions were founded and from which the traditional understanding of the texts thus evolved. It is significant that in preparing the present translations, the translators have followed the traditional understanding of the Chinese texts. In view of the influence exerted by the Chinese versions of Buddhist texts, particularly in the case of the *Lotus Sutra*, I think that an English translation made from the Chinese version can be said to have its own significance apart from a translation made from the Sanskrit original.

The “Threefold Lotus Sutra” or “*Hokke-sambukyō*” 法華三部經 is a designation traditionally said to have originated with Chih-i 智顛 (538–597), the celebrated founder of the *Lotus*-oriented T’ien-t’ai school. It refers to the *Lotus Sutra* and two shorter Mahayana works, the *Muryōgi-kyō* and the *Kanfugen-gyō* (hereafter referred to as *MGK* and *KFG*), which function as opening and closing sutras to the central *Lotus Sutra*. This was for the most part the form in which the *Lotus* teaching was propagated and became widespread. In this regard, further study of the development of the Threefold Lotus tradition as well as the roles of the two shorter sutras within this context would be helpful to the understanding of Far Eastern Buddhism.

To begin with the *MGK*, there is no contemporary evidence that the text of the *MGK* existed in China in the early part of the fifth century A.D. The likelihood that it was created in China sometime after the appearance of Kumārajīva’s Chinese version of the *Lotus Sutra* in 406 has recently been suggested by some scholars. However, an account of its translation in 481 and a statement

identifying it with a sutra of the same name mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra* are found in a preface to the *MGK* written by Liu-ch'iu 劉虬 (438-495).

In that preface Liu-ch'iu seeks to establish first the authenticity of this version of the *MGK*, then its historical proximity to the *Lotus Sutra*, and finally the common emphasis of the doctrine of sudden attainment of Buddhahood. The first he attempts to do by way of a quotation from the introductory chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*: "the Great-vehicle sutra called Innumerable Meanings, the law by which bodhisattvas are instructed as well as buddhas and which buddhas watch over and keep in mind." The sutra mentioned in this stanza is, he states, the *MGK*. He then tries to establish the *MGK*'s historical proximity to the *Lotus Sutra* by referring to the famous passage in the *MGK*, "In my forty years and more of preaching, the truth has not yet been revealed," and declaring that it is indicating the preaching of the *Lotus Sutra* as the culmination of the Buddha's lifetime of teaching. Liu-ch'iu's preface further asserts that the *MGK* preceded the *Lotus Sutra* historically, that is, that it was preached by Sakyamuni immediately prior to the *Lotus Sutra*. Third, he tries to show that the direct relation of the *MGK* to the *Lotus Sutra* is established by virtue of their common emphasis of the doctrine of sudden attainment of Buddhahood.

The doctrine of sudden attainment of Buddhahood is a topic which has been given lengthy treatment throughout the history of Chinese Buddhism. Liu-ch'iu's advocacy of this doctrine is believed to stem from the thought of Tao-sheng 道生 (d. 434) which advocates the doctrine of sudden enlightenment, and in some way a basis for this tenet must have been evident to Liu-ch'iu in the *MGK*. The doctrine of sudden attainment was later taken up by Chih-i and as a result of his acceptance of it and the subsequent flourishing of his T'ien-t'ai school, the *Lotus Sutra* and the *MGK* came to be widely regarded as directly related sutras.

For Chih-i the significance of the triad is that they represent a historical series of sermons delivered by Sakyamuni that highlight the *Lotus Sutra* which Chih-i was partial to. The notion that the true teaching was contained in the *Lotus Sutra*, rather than in the Buddha's final sermon, the *Mahāparinirvāna-sūtra*, was no doubt used to advantage in Chih-i's formulation of the T'ien-t'ai system of classification of the Buddhist canon.

Regarding the *KFG*, the similarity of its contents to the final chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* imparts an inner unity to the two works. The primary interlocutor, the Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue 普賢 *P'u-brien* (in Sanskrit, *Samantabhadra*),

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who appears as the protector of the *Lotus Sutra* in the final chapter of that work, appears once again in the *KFG* as a guardian who vows to protect and encourage all who practice the Lotus samadhi. It is believed that the practical methods delineated in the *KFG* inspired Chih-i to give the Lotus samadhi an important role in his T'ien-t'ai system though, paradoxically, it is hardly made mention of in the *Lotus Sutra* itself.

The *KFG* is a sutra with an esoteric strain expounding the bodhisattva ideal. It deals with certain levels of meditation conducive to raising the mind of the bodhisattva in the seeker through the assistance of the Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue. This assistance is in accordance with the fulfilment of the vow made by the Bodhisattva of Universal Virtue in the final chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* and reiterated in the *KFG*. There are two aspects in the performance of penances by the seeker that have attracted considerable attention in China, Korea, and Japan. These are Repentance in Practice 事懺 *sbib-ch'an* which describes practical forms of meditation aimed at removing karmic impediments of the six sense organs, and Repentance in Principle 理懺 *li-ch'an* which is concerned with meditation on reality to attain the truth of the void or *śūnyatā*. In addition, the content of this sutra is related to the tenth and eleventh chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*.

I would like to make a few observations in passing regarding some of the significant terms that appear in such Chinese Buddhist texts. The terms 相 *bsiang* and 法 *fa* play vital roles in clarifying the idea of emptiness or *śūnyatā*. An example of this is a key phrase in the *MGK*, and one which well represents its teaching in principle, 諸法實相 *chu-fa sbib-bsiang*, which could be rendered as "emptiness is the true aspect of all things." The significant terms in this phrase, however, have a wide range of connotations and can be translated in a variety of ways. The term 相 *bsiang*, for example, is commonly rendered "form" or "aspect" as in 性相 *bsing-bsiang* "nature and form" (p. 3). "Form" is also used for 色 *sé* as in 色身 *sé-sben* "form and body" (pp. 42 and 47). The distinction between the two terms is obscure to the reader who has no knowledge of the Chinese language. The term 法 *fa* on the other hand is almost invariably rendered as "law" in this translation. This is another term holding vast implications, and renderings such as "existence," "thing," etc., are found in the present work. While they certainly could not be called incorrect, at the same time they cannot avoid limiting the meaning of the original Chinese word.

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