

BOOK REVIEWS

THE SHORT PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ TEXTS. Translated by Edward Conze. London: Luzac & Company Ltd, 1973. viii+217 p.

Dr. Conze's enthusiastic devotion to the study of Prajñāpāramitā literature is well known. His research is voluminous and his translations extend over most of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. The present book is his latest publication, and includes shorter sūtras of the same genre. It is sure to be well received by scholars and non-scholars alike.

The Prajñāpāramitā (henceforward abbr. PP) sūtras are known and revered as the first sūtras that appeared in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The name PP or "the perfection of wisdom" means a wisdom that apprehends *śūnyatā* or "emptiness," which represents the fundamental tenet of all Mahāyāna thought. During the course of time, however, sūtras bearing the title PP and expounding the similar PP thought were created one after another. These sūtras are collectively called the PP literature. The bulk is enormous both in the Tibetan and Chinese Tripitakas, involving a variety of texts. The largest of these are the longest of all Buddhist sūtras, and the shortest are perhaps the shortest.

According to Dr. Conze the corpus of this PP literature falls into three parts, composed of the large, medium, and short versions respectively. In his book, *The Prajñāpāramitā Literature* ('s-Gravenhage: Mouton, 1960), he explains these versions one by one, classifying them under forty items. In the larger class are four sūtras, composed in 100,000, 25,000, 18,000 and 10,000 ślokas respectively. One śloka consists of 32 syllables and is used in these cases as a unit for measuring the length of texts; thus the PP sūtras in 100,000 ślokas consists of $32 \times 100,000 = 3,200,000$ letters. The medium version is represented by the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, i.e., the PP in 8,000 ślokas. These five make up the longer class of PP literature. The other sūtras all belong to the short category.

The history and the date of the PP sūtras are not fully clear yet. Again according to Dr. Conze, the oldest text is the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, some parts of which probably date back to 100 B.C. Later on, this text was expanded to form the large versions, and still later, reversely, was condensed into the short versions, summaries, etc. The short versions were made for the sake of readers daunted by texts of such unmanageable lengths. Finally, after the 7th or 8th centuries, much tantricized PP sūtras, mostly short in length, came to the fore.

The large sūtras, that is, the large versions and the medium version, were translated and published by Dr. Conze some years ago, and they were re-

cently republished.¹ The book under review contains his translations of nineteen sūtras selected for their relative importance from among the other short versions. Among these nineteen sūtras are included the popular *Heart Sutra* and *Diamond Sutra*, both of which are widely studied and have been translated several times. The other seventeen texts are here rendered into English for the first time.

The largest single text is the PP in 2,500 ślokas, "The Questions of Suvikrāntavikrāmin." It is one of the most advanced among the regular PP sūtras (regular, compared to the special or tantric PP mentioned below), dating back probably to the 5th or 6th century. The style is full of the paradoxical expressions common in the PP literature. It is also repetitious. Most of the repetitions have been abbreviated in the present translation. The topics in it reflect or are derived from the first and second chapters of the *Aṣṭa*. Recently the same text was translated into modern Japanese, also for the first time.

Next comes the PP in 700 ślokas, or, as the Chinese title reads, the "PP as taught by Mañjuśrī." Not much research has been done on this text. Although its date is probably earlier than the former, the repetitions are much fewer. These two texts, and one other, the PP in 500, are the largest of the "short versions."

The *Diamond Sutra* or the PP in 300 ślokas and the *Heart Sutra* are regarded as "Summaries" in this book. They have enjoyed immense popularity, and Dr. Conze has himself published them together with a lengthy commentary.² Other short texts, eight in number, are grouped under this category of "Summaries."

Under "Special Texts," the author included two texts, both extant only in Chinese; one is Nos. 234 and 220(8) in the Taishō Tripitaka, and the other Nos. 245 and 246. They attract our special attention in that they apply the principles of PP thought to daily life or social affairs. Especially the latter is very popular in Japan under the title *Ninnō-gokoku-bannya* (仁王護国般若), or the "PP sūtra explaining how benevolent kings may protect their countries." In translating, the former is limited to extracts and the latter is summarized to some extent. Profs. Richard Robinson and Lewis Lancaster collaborated with Dr. Conze in preparing these translations.

Four texts are grouped under "Tantric Texts." Among them the PP in 150

¹ *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom*, University of California Press, 1975; *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines, and Its Verse Summary*, Four Seasons Foundation, 1973.

² *Buddhist Wisdom Books*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958.

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ślokas or *PP-naya* is the most celebrated. Under the title *Risbukyō* (理趣經), it is much revered and recited daily by Japanese Shingon Buddhists. Another text expounds 108 PP. Still another, perhaps the shortest of all sūtras, condenses the spirit of PP into the single letter "A."

Most of these texts are equipped with Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese versions, but seven are found only in Tibetan, and two only in Chinese. The author sometimes makes references to these different versions.

The style in the Indian texts is usually very clumsy in that the same passage or sentence is very often duplicated or repeated only replacing its central figure or notion. Conze's translation omits most of these repetitions so as to make the text more concise and readable. Two indexes of Names and Topics and a Glossary make the book accessible to general readers. The term PP is usually rendered as "Perfect Wisdom" or "Perfection of Wisdom." The author, however, employs another rendering too: "the wisdom which has gone beyond." The former is based on the linguistic etymology, while the latter is an interpretation which was derived from a popular etymology and was widely accepted in India and especially in China and Japan (到彼岸). Although I have not examined the translation in detail, the translator seems to have taken pains to give right and accurate, perhaps sometimes slightly too literal, translations. Still, there are some problematical points which I happened to come across. Some of them will be discussed below.

On p. 25, l. 16-17: "For the wisdom which has gone beyond is not *an exposition which implies the real creation* of the five skandhas." "Abhinirvṛtti-paryāpanna-nirdeśa" is the Sanskrit which corresponds to the underlined portion, for which he proposes in this note an alternative reading: "an explanation of that which included in the five skandhas as really created?" I cannot agree with these. My understanding is this: "an exposition as to the state of becoming to which the five skandhas are ascribed."

On p. 60, l. 9-10 appears a passage: "'Thought-construction' is one extreme, 'discrimination' is the second extreme." These two extremes are respectively *kalpanā* and *vikalpanā* in Skt. and they are cognate words, usually rendered by words such as "construction," "discrimination," "imagination," etc. But, in this sūtra, when they are mentioned in succession or side by side, the word *vikalpanā* is understood to be a negative form of *kalpanā*, the prefix "vi-" meaning not, as usually does, distinction, but opposition or negation. Therefore the author is right when, with regard to the above "discrimination," he says in a note: "Here 'non-construction' would clearly better." Then, however, the

same should be applied to all appearances of "discrimination" or "discriminate" on p. 60 up to l. 31. In fact, the author has correctly translated these words as "thought-construction" and "no-thought-construction" on p. 46, l. 24-25. In all these cases, Hsüan-tsang always gives 分別 (discrimination) and 異分別 (different discrimination) respectively, though these renderings do not necessarily afford clear meanings.

On p. 69, l. 1: "(His state of) having His head gazed upon (i.e. revered)," is based upon Edgerton's interpretation of *avalokitamūrdhitā*. But the Ms. and Hikata's text read *anavalokitamūrdhitā* (with negative an-), and this is surely the better reading, I think. It means "(His state of) having His head-top not looked down upon," and this rendering is supported by Tibetan and Hsüan-tsang (無能見頂, unable to see the top). The Buddha is so great that no one can gain enough height to look down at His head.

On p. 69, l. 1-2: "His vision of past, future and present non-attachment" (the same on l. 4) may be better translated: "His unhindered vision of past, future and present." We have here *asaṅgañāna*. *Asaṅga* means not only "unattached" (*cbags pa med pa*) but also "unobstructed, unhindered" (*sbogs pa med pa*).

On p. 70, l. 14-15: "Like the act of gazing at the proceeding of being is that done—no-standing place, or standing place, or firm foundation." The Sanskrit runs: "yathāsatvapravṛtti-saṃdarśanam etat kṛtaṃ asthānaṃ vā sthānaṃ vā pratiṣṭhānaṃ vā." I would translate: "In accordance with the proceeding of (worldly) beings, in their proceedings, is this done...."

I do not understand the passage on p. 84, l. 5: "(bodhisattvas) who lean on a basis." Should not its Skt., *upalambhika*, be understood as: "those who hold (erroneously) that they have obtained something real"? Edgerton's rendering: "characterized by the heresy of *upalambha*" is also not fully convincing; for they are still bodhisattvas, not necessarily heretics.

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