

BOOK REVIEWS

MYŌHŌ-RENĠE-KYŌ. THE SUTRA OF THE LOTUS FLOWER OF THE WONDERFUL LAW. Translated by Bunnō Katō. Revised by W. E. Soothill and Wilhelm Schiffer. Risshō Kōsei-kai: Tokyo, 1971, xii + 440 pp.

THE SUTRA OF THE LOTUS FLOWER OF THE WONDERFUL LAW. Translated by Senchu Murano. Nichiren Shu Headquarters: Tokyo, 1974, xiv + 371 pp.

Kumārajīva's translation of the Saddharmapundarikasūtra is without doubt the most famous Buddhist text in East Asia. However, until recently, no complete translation existed in any Western language. It is good to see the almost simultaneous publication of two translations into English.¹

Katō's translation was made in the years 1922–1925 when he was studying at Oxford University. W. E. Soothill, professor of Chinese in the University of Oxford, revised Katō's English version and in 1930 published excerpts from it under the title *The Lotus of the Wonderful Law* (Oxford, Clarendon Press). Revised once more, this time by the Reverend Wilhelm Schiffer, Katō's complete translation has now at last been published with a brief introduction by Professor Tamura Yoshiro.

Professor Murano's translation is accompanied by a brief introduction and contains two glossaries and an index. The first glossary lists Sanskrit words, English Buddhist terms and translated proper names. The second glossary gives Chinese Buddhist terms arranged according to Japanese pronunciation.

Kumārajīva's translation dates from 406 A.D. For many centuries it has been studied and explained by Buddhist scholars in China and Japan. In this century several Japanese translations have been published, one of the most recent and authoritative being due to the late Professor Sakamoto Yukio (Iwanami Bunko

¹ A third translation, made by Professor Leon Hurvitz, is due to appear in the series *Oriental Classics* edited by Th. de Bary of Columbia University, cf. *Hokke Bunka*, no. 22 (Tokyo, Sept. 1972), p. 6.

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Nos. 6531–6540, 3 vols., Tokyo, 1962, 1964, 1967). Probably no Chinese Buddhist text has been studied so carefully as Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra. It has often been praised for its stylistic qualities. Moreover, the Lotus Sūtra is not a text which makes use of a highly technical and complicated terminology in order to express its main ideas. One would therefore be justified in expecting that a translation into English would not be a difficult enterprise. However, a comparison of these two translations is sufficient to show that, in quite a few places, the text has been interpreted in different ways by the translators. After having compared the two translations of chapters II to 16 with the Chinese text, I have come to the following general conclusion as to the relative merits of the two translations. Katō's translation adheres more closely to the Chinese text. Murano's translation is often slightly too free. In translating the stanzas, Murano does not hesitate to transpose the order of the verses. However, Katō's translation is not without errors and, generally speaking, Murano's translation is more correct. From a stylistic point of view preference has to be given to Katō's translation which is written in very lucid and clear English.

It is perhaps not superfluous to examine some of the difficulties encountered by the translators. This will be useful not only in illustrating the relative merits of the two translations but also in drawing attention to the tasks which face the translators of Chinese Buddhist texts. For the sake of brevity the translations by Katō, Murano and Sakamoto are referred to with the letters K, M and S.

K. translates on p. 7 得未曾有 (Skt. *adbhuta-prāpta*) as "obtaining that which had never been before." This translation does not make it clear to English readers that *adbhuta-* is traditionally interpreted as *a-bhūta*. Japanese readers have no difficulty in understanding this and, in his Japanese translation, S. keeps the same characters and translates: "*mizōu-naru koto o ete*" (vol. jō, p. 18). M. translates correctly by "were surprised" (p. 3). This example shows that it is not always possible to translate the Chinese text literally without taking into account the Sanskrit original. On p. 264 K. renders the same expression by "having obtained (such) unprecedented (felicity)." This rendering is halfway between a misleading literal rendering and a correct translation of the meaning of this phrase.

In chapter XI the Buddha Prabhūtaratna appears sitting on his throne in the Mahāratnastūpa. According to the Sanskrit text he addresses the Bhagavat with the following words: "Excellent, excellent, Lord Śākyamuni; thou hast well expounded this Dharmaparyāya of the Lotus of the True Law" (cf. Kern's translation p. 236). The Chinese text has: 快說是法華經. K. translates: "Speedily

preach this Law-Flower Sutra" (p. 242). This translation is grammatically possible but is excluded by the context because the Buddha Prabhūtaratna praises the Bhagavat for having preached the Lotus Sūtra. Kumārajiva's text has been translated correctly by M.: "Excellent, excellent! You, Śākyamuni Buddha, have expounded the Sūtra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law with joy" (p. 170), and by S.: "Toi kana, yoi kana. Shakamunibutsu wa, kokoroyoku kono Hokekyō o tokita mo" (vol. chū, p. 188).

It would be possible to quote further examples of wrong translations by Katō which are due to the fact that he has not paid sufficient attention to the Sanskrit original. In other cases, Katō has misunderstood a technical term. For instance 無生忍 is rendered by him as "the assurance of no (re)birth" (p. 255). M. translates "the truth of birthlessness" (p. 179) but refrains from giving any further explanation in a note. S. keeps the same characters: *musbōnin o e* (vol. chū, p. 210). A note on p. 349 gives an adequate explanation but without mentioning the Sanskrit term *anutpattikadharmaśānti*.

As has been mentioned before, Murano's translation is more correct. The short bibliography lists Sakamoto's translation of which he seems to have made good use. However, Murano's translation is not completely free from mistakes. For example, Murano translates 神通道力 with "the power of giving discourses" (p. 179). Katō has "transcendent powers of the way" (p. 254), whereas Sakamoto splits this expression in two: *jinzū to dōriki to* (vol. chū, p. 208). The Sanskrit text has *mahārddhibalata* "miraculous powers" and it is obvious that the expression 神通道力 is equivalent to 神通力.

Both translations take into account interpretations given by the commentators. Especially Chih-i's 法華文句 (Taishō no. 1718) has often determined the renderings given by both translators. This has sometimes given rise to forced interpretations which cannot be justified from a philological point of view. For instance, in the beginning of chapter XI, a voice from the stūpa praises the Bhagavat with the following words: 能以平等大慧教菩薩法. Chih-i explains that 平等大慧 is a designation for the Lotus Sūtra. Consequently the translators render it as the object of 教 "to teach," cf. K. "the Wonderful Law-Flower Sutra of universal and great wisdom" (p. 236); M. "the Sūtra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law, the Teaching of Equality, the Great Wisdom" (p. 165); S. "byōdō no daie, bosatsu o osbiereu bō ni sbite . . . Myōbokekkyō" (Vol. chū, p. 170). I am afraid that the grammatical construction of the Chinese sentence does not allow this interpretation. 以平等大慧 cannot be translated otherwise than "by means of the great Wisdom of Sameness."

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In chapter XIV M. translates the stanza 菩薩常樂安穩說法 as follows: "The Bodhisattva should wish to make all living beings peaceful, and then expound the Law to them" (p. 195). He follows Sakamoto's interpretation (cf. vol. chū, p. 258) which is based on Chih-i's exegesis (cf. Taishō no. 1718, p. 122b). In this case, Katō has not followed Chih-i and his rendering is without doubt the correct one: "The bodhisattva ever delights and is at ease in preaching the Law" (p. 277), cf. the Sanskrit text (ed. Kern-Nanjio, p. 283,6): *sukhasthito bhoṭi sadā vicakṣaṇaḥ sukham niṣaṇṇas tatha dharmu bhāṣate*.

In the beginning of chapter XIV Kumārajīva's text has 不行不分別. This corresponds to *dharmesv avicāraṇā avikalpanā* in Sanskrit (ed. Kern-Nanjio, p. 275, 10-11). The rendering of *vicāraṇā* by 行 is quite understandable because the verb *vi-car-* means both "to act, make, do" and "to reflect, consider." Kumārajīva's text can therefore be rendered in the following way: "they do not make considerations nor do they construct ideas" (i.e. with regard to dharmas). There seems to be here no difficulty but, influenced by the commentators, both Katō and Murano give very forced translations: K. "nor proceeds along the undivided way"; M. "He should not be attached to his non-attachment to anything. Nor should he be attached to his seeing things as they are." In order to understand Murano's translation one has to consult Sakamoto's note on this passage (vol. chū, p. 354).

It would be easy to multiply the examples, given above, but I believe that they are sufficient to allow us to draw the following conclusions. In translating Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra it is dangerous to be guided by the commentators who were inspired by dogmatic considerations. Chih-i's interpretation of the Lotus Sūtra is important for the knowledge of Chih-i's ideas which exercised such a great influence in China and Japan. However, he is not an authoritative source for the interpretation of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra. This has to be studied in the first place as a Chinese text from the beginning of the fifth century. It is, however, not possible to study it independently from the original Sanskrit version. Often several interpretations are possible and it is necessary to consult the Sanskrit text in order to be able to choose between them. Although we do not have at our disposal the Sanskrit text which was used by Kumārajīva and his Chinese assistants, there are enough places where one can establish with a fair degree of reliability the text which is at the basis of Kumārajīva's translation. Publication of the Gilgit fragments and of the Petrovsky manuscript will be helpful but it is not likely that, at least in the poetical parts, the text will be very different from the one which has been transmitted by the Nepalese manuscripts.

There is no doubt that Kumārajīva did not hesitate to make stylistic improvements as we are told in Seng-jui's biography (Taishō no. 2059, p. 364b 2-6, cf. J. W. de Jong, *Buddha's Word in China*, Canberra, 1968, pp. 13-14). There are, however, places where the changes go far beyond stylistic improvements. For instance in the Devadatta chapter Kumārajīva's translation states that the Buddha revealed the 一乘法 "The doctrine of the One Vehicle" (K. p. 257; M. p. 181; S. vol. chū, p. 216). There is nothing similar in the Sanskrit texts, neither in the Nepalese version (cf. Kern-Nanjio, p. 262) nor in the fragments from Central Asia, recently published by Heinz Bechert (*Über die "Marburger Fragmente" des Saddharmapundarika*, Göttingen, 1972, p. 55). In the absence of a critical edition of Kumārajīva's translation it is not possible to know whether the oldest manuscripts mention the doctrine of the One Vehicle. However, the Devadatta chapter is considered to have been inserted later into Kumārajīva's translation and it remains to be seen whether differences of this nature are limited to this chapter or not. In other places, divergences from the Sanskrit text can be explained without too many difficulties. In chapter XIV the dharmas are said to be 無有常住, K. "without permanence"; M. "They are not permanent" (p. 194). Later on the text says of the dharmas: 常住一相 which Murano renders as: "They are permanent, of the same form." In a note, he remarks that this is inconsistent with the statement above that they are not permanent. Katō translates: "ever remaining a unity" (p. 275). A more precise translation would be: "they remain always of the same aspect." In the Sanskrit text in both places the same expression occurs, cf. Kern-Nanjio p. 281, 9-10: *dharmā ime . . . stbita nityakālam*; p. 282, 2: *stbitā hi dharmā imi nityakālam*. Kern has mistranslated both places: "all laws (i.e. the laws, the things) have been declared to be . . . everlasting"; "These, indeed, are the laws, all and for ever." In both cases the meaning is the same. The dharmas are said to remain (*stbita*) always (*nityakālam*) as they are, i.e. unsubstantial, not-produced, etc. Kumārajīva has avoided a repetition of the same formula but without committing the inconsistency which is imputed to him by Murano.

The translations by Katō and Murano both have their merits and it would not be just to be too critical with regard to translations which aim in the first place at making the English reader acquainted with the Lotus Sūtra as it has been traditionally understood in China and Japan. From a strictly scholarly point of view, however, neither translation can be considered adequate. As pointed out above, Katō has not sufficiently taken into account the fact that Kumārajīva's translation is not an original text but a translation based upon a

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Sanskrit original. Whenever the meaning of the text is not unequivocally clear it is necessary to consult the Sanskrit texts in order to see whether this can help us to understand Kumārajīva's translation. However, one must be careful not to force its meaning into strict correspondence with the Sanskrit text when the construction of the Chinese text does not allow such interpretation. It would be highly desirable to study the text with the help of a Sinologist who has a good knowledge of Chinese literature of the period between the Han and Sui dynasties.

A careful study of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra and of other texts is required for a better knowledge of his translation methods. Only through a much more exact knowledge of Kumārajīva's vocabulary and style is it possible to arrive at a correct appreciation of the value of his translations in those cases in which no Sanskrit original has survived. Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra has been studied mainly from the religious and philosophical points of view. However, just as any other text, it has to be studied in the first place as a *text* with the help of sound philological methods. This does not mean that the traditional exegesis has to be completely discarded. The history of the Lotus Sūtra in China and Japan cannot be understood without knowledge of the commentaries. The primary meaning of Kumārajīva's translation of the Lotus Sūtra and the traditional exegesis are two different things which have to be clearly distinguished. The translations by Katō and Murano contain only very few notes and give in this respect much less than, for instance, Sakamoto in the annotation to his translation. It is to be hoped that a future translator will point out in notes the interpretations given by Chih-i and other Buddhist scholars. This would be of great benefit, especially for the English reader who is unfamiliar with the traditional exegesis of the Lotus Sūtra in China and Japan.

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ZEN AND THE COMIC SPIRIT. By Conrad Hyers. Rider & Co. Ltd.: London and The Westminster Press, 192 pp.

To the Western mind, religion is anything but a laughing matter and therefore Conrad Hyers's "Zen and the Comic Spirit" will, I hope, provide many people with a much needed and enjoyable initiation into a mode of spirituality which dispenses with solemnity and churchy frown.

"Humor means freedom," says Dr. Hyers, as he sets out to corroborate Bergson's and Freud's views of laughter as an expression of liberation, or perhaps