

The lotus sutra, translated from the Chinese by Senchu Murano.
Tokyo: Kyodo Obun Center Co., Ltd., 1974. xiii + 371 pages.
Glossary. Index. Bibliography. ¥5,000.

The threefold lotus sutra: The sutra of innumerable meanings, the sutra of the lotus flower of the wonderful law, the sutra of meditation on the bodhisattva universal virtue, translated by Bunnō Katō, Yoshirō Tamura, and Kōjirō Miyasaka with revisions by W.F. Soothill, Wilhelm Schiffer, and Pier P. Del Campana. New York and Tokyo: Weatherhill and Kosei, 1975. xviii+383 pages. Glossary. \$7.95 (softcover).

The *Lotus Sutra* is one of the most important sutras of Mahayana Buddhism and today is revered by millions of people throughout the world. It was probably composed by a large group of lay writers in northwestern India during the first two centuries of the Christian era and was circulated widely in China following Kumarajiva's famous translation from Sanskrit in A.D. 406. It reached Japan by the end of the sixth century and eventually became the chief text of the Tendai and Nichiren sects, and today forms the basis for much of the philosophy of such lay Buddhist organizations as the Risshō Kōsei Kai and the Sōka Gakkai.

The *Lotus Sutra* supposedly relates the final and highest teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni on Vulture Peak before his entry into Nirvana. The purpose of the sutra is the revelation of Shakyamuni's vow to save mankind, and its key element is the Buddha's teaching of the doctrine of Universal Salvation. He announces that the achievement of Buddhahood is open to everybody and that the greatest king as well as the humblest beggar can achieve enlightenment and entry into Nirvana. Shakyamuni also discloses the absolute eternity of his life, thus rejecting the previous notion that he had obtained enlightenment during his life on earth, and he suggests that the noblest form of Buddhist practice is the Way of the Bodhisattva, one who unselfishly seeks to lead others to enlightenment and salvation.

The *Lotus sutra* has been translated into Western languages on several occasions many decades ago, but there has been a need in recent years for more up-to-date and readable translations of this work. It is fortunate that two new versions have been published in the last two years.

The Katō-Soothill version was begun over thirty years ago from Kumarajiva's famous Chinese translation and has been revised by many scholars since then. This text has been republished here together with two other brief sutras translated into English for the first time: "The sutra of innumerable meanings" and "The sutra

of meditation.”

“The sutra of innumerable meanings” supposedly records the sermon preached by the Buddha to a host of bodhisattvas immediately before giving the *Lotus sutra*; there is no mention of the *Lotus* in this document, however, and there is no doubt that it could easily stand on its own. “The sutra of meditation” is said to be a sermon delivered after the *Lotus* by Shakyamuni and is meant to encourage the way of repentance as the method to follow the teachings of the Buddha.

Senchu Murano, the chief priest of a Nichiren temple in Kamakura and professor of Buddhism at Risshō University, devoted twenty years to this translation of the *Lotus sutra*.

Both translations are excellent, and I heartily recommend them. Here one finds the culmination of the life work of several distinguished scholars who have combined the highest levels of academic scholarship with an elegant and lucid prose understandable to all. The wording of each version often differs sharply, but in the end their interpretations of the meaning of the text are usually the same.

Murano’s writing style, however, is generally superior to that of the Katō-Soothill version. His text is remarkably clear and extremely well written while the writing in the Katō-Soothill work on occasion can be very choppy and confusing, perhaps because so many people have worked on it over the years. In my research I always refer to Murano’s volume first. The notes and glossary in Murano’s work are a little more comprehensive, but the Katō-Soothill version is greatly enhanced by the presence of the two other sutras, which are beautifully translated and are absent from Murano’s text.

These works could be further improved, however, by the inclusion of a comprehensive introduction with a detailed discussion of the main teachings of the *Lotus sutra*. The introductions for both these works give only a brief history and summary of the text without explaining the crucial importance of the sutra. This fault should be remedied in later editions.

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