
George J. TANABE Jr., and Willa Jane TANABE, eds., *The Lotus Sūtra in Japanese Culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989. x+239 pp. Hardcover \$25.00. ISBN 0-8248-1198-4.

Although the importance of the *Lotus Sūtra* for the development of Japanese culture has long been recognized, there are few works dealing with this topic. The volume under review is a pioneering work in this long and unjustly neglected area of Japanese cultural studies.

The eleven essays contained in this volume were originally presented at the first "International Conference on the *Lotus Sūtra* and Japanese Culture" held

³ Compare *Icanchu's Drum* with TAUSSIG 1987. Although Taussig shares many of Sullivan's concerns with images, symbols, and myth in South America, he turns at times to an almost novelistic approach to show how such images and symbols are related to the social and political landscape of everyday life.

at the University of Hawaii in 1984. The essays reveal how profound and pervasive was the influence of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Japan's cultural and intellectual life.

The book begins with a provocative and insightful introductory essay by the editors. This is followed by two studies, both by eminent Japanese Buddhologists, that attempt to clarify the position of the *Lotus Sūtra* within the history of Buddhist thought. "The Meaning of the Formation and Structure of the *Lotus Sūtra*," by Shioiri Ryōdō, provides a succinct and useful outline of the complex textual history of this scripture. "The Ideas of the *Lotus Sūtra*," by Tamura Yoshirō, provides a summary sketch of the main ideas of the *Lotus* as well as a brief survey of Chinese and Japanese exegesis on this sūtra.

The rest of the essays are arranged in roughly the chronological order of their subject matter. Paul Groner's "The *Lotus Sūtra* and Saichō's Interpretation of the Realization of Buddhahood with This Very Body" is a clear and businesslike analysis of Saichō's doctrine of *sokushin jōbutsu*, the idea that one can attain Buddhahood within the present lifetime. Groner argues that Saichō developed this doctrine as a means of demonstrating the superiority of his own Tendai sect vis-à-vis the position of the rival Hossō sect. (The Hossō sect held that Buddhahood is attainable only after three incalculable eons of ascetic practices.) Historically, there is also the question of whether Saichō or Kūkai first developed the doctrine of *sokushin jōbutsu*, and Groner, after considering various arguments, concludes that, due to the lack of conclusive evidence, it is impossible to decide who was the originator of this doctrine. The main body of the study is taken up with a detailed account of Saichō's interpretation of *sokushin jōbutsu*. Groner, in particular, stresses that Saichō's formulation of this doctrine was based on the *Lotus Sūtra*'s well-known account of the attainment of Buddhahood by an eight-year-old dragon girl, depicted in the "Devadatta" chapter.

The next two studies, again both by Japanese scholars, take up the influence of the *Lotus Sūtra* on Japanese art and literature. Miya Tsugio's "Pictorial Art of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japan" is a lengthy analysis of two genres of *Lotus Sūtra* paintings from the Heian and Kamakura periods: (1) pictorial representations of the *Lotus Sūtra* used as objects of worship in religious rituals (*raihaizō*), including the *Lotus* mandalas used in such esoteric Buddhist services as the *Hokkekyō-kō*; and (2) works that depict scenes from the *Lotus Sūtra*, generally referred to as *Lotus Sūtra hensō*. Yamada Shōzen's "Poetry and Meaning: Medieval Poets and the *Lotus Sūtra*" deals with Heian and Kamakura period *waka* (31-syllable poetry) composed on themes taken from the *Lotus Sūtra*. After a brief discussion of the origins of Buddhist *waka* (*shakkyōka*) in general and poetry based specifically on the *Lotus*, Yamada compares the *waka* based on the *Lotus Sūtra* written by three representative medieval poets: Saigyō, Jien, and Fujiwara Shunzei. In Yamada's opinion, Saigyō's poems express his own personal and creative restatement of passages from the *Lotus Sūtra*. Also, befitting his status as a monk of the Shingon sect, Saigyō's *Lotus* poems betray the influence of Shingon doctrines. By comparison, the *Lotus* poems by Jien, a Tendai monk who became the chief abbot of his sect four times, were all written from the standpoint of Tendai dogma. Finally, Yamada compares the *Lotus* poems of

Saigyō and Fujiwara Shunzei, and concludes that Shunzei's poems rarely go beyond restating passages from the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japanese poetic language. This (in Yamada's view) shows that Shunzei, as a poet, was "conservative, passive, and not very creative" (p. 117).

The following study, Neil McMullin's "The *Lotus Sūtra* and Politics in the Mid-Heian Period," is perhaps the best piece in this collection. This essay focuses on Ryōgen (912–985), the sixteenth Tendai *zasu* (head abbot of the Tendai sect). Using a wealth of revealing details, McMullin shows how Ryōgen used his forensic and ritual skills to gain the patronage of Fujiwara Morosuke and the Kujō sub-branch of the Fujiwara family. Morosuke needed Ryōgen's ritual skills to effect the birth of a son to his daughter Yasuko, Emperor Murakami's consort. When a son, the future Emperor Reizei, was indeed born to Yasuko, Morosuke's power became absolute. Thus, for Morosuke, Ryōgen was important not as a spiritual mentor but as a capable practitioner of rituals (based on such potent scriptures as the *Lotus*) that could be employed to further his political goals. On the other hand, Ryōgen, too, was interested in power—specifically ecclesiastical power—and he used Morosuke's patronage (and the financial power that accompanied it) to extend his domination over the entire Enryaku-ji monastery complex. In this way, argues McMullin, *sūtras* and ritual were important tools by which monks (and aristocrats) gained and exercised power. In this political economy, the *Lotus Sūtra* "served as the coinage by which Tendai monks purchased power" (p. 119). He concludes that "in terms of Buddhist institutional history, this was the most important role played by the *Lotus Sūtra* and the various rituals based on it. . ." (p. 119).

"Historical Consciousness and *Hon-jaku* Philosophy in the Medieval Period on Mount Hiei," by Kuroda Toshio, deals primarily with the "chroniclers" or *kike*, a little-known group of monks from the Enryaku-ji who specialized in the collection and study of secret oral transmissions (*kuden*) that had proliferated among the monks of that monastery since the late Heian period. Despite their importance in the history of Enryaku-ji and the Japanese Tendai sect, these chroniclers have received scant attention even in Japan, and Kuroda's article is welcome as the first English study on their activities. This essay is followed by Allan G. Grapard's "The Textualized Mountain – Enmountained Text: The *Lotus Sūtra* in Kunisaki," a fascinating study that shows how the *Lotus Sūtra* was superimposed on the Kunisaki peninsula, an important Shugendō center in Kyūshū, to create a sacred geography, i.e., a "transcendental abode of buddhas and bodhisattvas in this world" (p. 171) capable of being perceived by those ascetics who have gained mystical vision through penance.¹

The final two essays deal with modern Japanese adaptations of the *Lotus Sūtra*. George J. Tanabe Jr.'s "Tanaka Chigaku: The *Lotus Sūtra* and the Body Politic" explores the interpretation of the *Lotus Sūtra* presented by the Meiji-period Nichiren nationalist, Tanaka Chigaku, focussing especially on the way

¹ This study should be read in conjunction with Grapard's "Lotus in the Mountain, Mountain in the Lotus: *Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi*" (*Monumenta Nipponica*, 44, 1986: 21–50), a study and translation of the *Rokugō Kaizan Nimmon Daibosatsu Hongi*, upon which the Kunisaki Shugendō practice is based.

Tanaka made use of the *Lotus* to “justify the superiority of Japan’s national essence” or *kokutai* (p. 193). And in the concluding essay, “The *Lotus Sūtra* in Modern Japan,” Helen Hardacre discusses three modern Japanese religious sects based on the *Lotus Sūtra* (Butsurūyūkō, Reiyūkai, and Risshōkōseikai), all of which stress the central place of lay believers in their organizations.

As is inevitable with all conference volumes, the studies contained within this book vary in quality. Tamura’s article, which attempts to present both the main points of the *Lotus Sūtra* and outline the history of its exegesis in China and Japan within the space of fifteen pages, suffers unavoidably from superficiality. Also, the articles by Shioiri and Kuroda could have benefited from more rigorous editing. Both contain lengthy introductory sections (dealing with the influence of the *Lotus* on Japanese literature in Shioiri’s case, and a discussion of *honji-suijaku* theory in Kuroda’s) that, though interesting, fail to mesh with the main bodies of the articles. The editors, I believe, should have found the courage to delete these sections. But these points aside, all the articles (including those by Tamura, Shioiri, and Kuroda) manifest a high level of scholarship and greatly enrich our understanding of the *Lotus Sūtra*. The best among them, such as McMullin’s paper, open up totally new approaches to the study of this sūtra. It is hoped that this volume will serve as a catalyst for more scholars to explore the role of the *Lotus Sūtra* in Japanese culture.

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