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## Editors' Introduction

### The *Lotus Sutra* in Japan

THE *Lotus Sutra* (Skt. *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*) is arguably the most influential sutra in East Asia. At various points in the *Lotus*, the text extols itself, using such terms as the “king of scriptures” (T 9.32a; HURVITZ 1976, 181), and centuries of practitioners in East Asia seem to have agreed. In a preface to the scripture, the Tang-dynasty historian and bibliographer Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667) stated that it was the most popular sutra in China (T 9.1c). More than a thousand copies of the text are found among the Dunhuang manuscripts, making it perhaps the most copied text after the *Diamond Sutra* (KABUTOGI 1980; WANG 2005, 123; FUJIEDA 1961). However, because the *Lotus Sutra* is many times longer than the *Diamond Sutra* (seven or eight fascicles as opposed to one fascicle), the number of copies of the *Lotus Sutra* is particularly impressive. The *Lotus* was attractive for the literary quality found in its parables and for its optimistic message about the accessibility and universality of Buddhahood. The sutra’s interpretation of several key events in the Buddha’s life enabled exegetes to resolve seemingly contradictory doctrines into a consistent whole with one ultimate goal. The *Lotus* thus played a major role in the classification of doctrines in East Asian Buddhism. The *Lotus* is central to the thought and practice of the influential Tendai (Ch. Tiantai) school. Mention of the Buddha Amitāyus (Jp. Amida) in the text smoothed the way for the harmonious incorporation of Pure Land practices into Tendai tradition, and Pure Land practices were often carried out in the context of Tiantai/Tendai groups. The

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*Lotus Sutra* was also frequently used by Zen (Ch. Chan), Sanron (Ch. Sanlun), and Hossō (Ch. Faxiang) monks (LEIGHTON 2007; LIU 1988; KITSUKAWA 2002). In Japan, it is the basis of the Nichiren sect. The *Lotus Sutra* was also incorporated into the general religious culture, and the various Buddhas and bodhisattvas mentioned in it were the foci of several cults. For example, the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* was devoted to Avalokiteśvara, and was often copied and circulated separately as the *Guanyinjing* 觀音經 (*Avalokiteśvara-sūtra*). Avalokiteśvara saved believers from drowning, burning, and other catastrophes. Moreover, Avalokiteśvara appeared in a number of guises, both male and female. Paintings of Avalokiteśvara rescuing people are found in many temples in East Asia. In addition, copies of the *Lotus Sutra* sometimes contained colophons dedicating the merit gained from copying to deceased relatives.

This collection of articles on the *Lotus Sutra* had its origins in the sixth International Conference on the *Lotus Sutra* held at the University of Toronto in 2004, a conference sponsored by Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai as well as Taishō and Risshō universities—universities associated respectively with the Tendai School and with Nichirenshū. However, many of the articles were added after the conference as the editors thought about what to include in the collection. This is not the first English-language anthology of essays on the *Lotus*. Several papers delivered at the first International Lotus Sutra Conference, held at the University of Hawaii in 1984, were published as *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture*, edited by George J. TANABE Jr. and Willa Jane TANABE (1989). *A Buddhist Kaleidoscope*, edited by Gene REEVES (2002), brought together a number of papers representing a range of disciplinary perspectives that had been delivered at several of the annual international conferences on the *Lotus Sutra* sponsored by Risshō Kōseikai 立正佼成会. A more recent collection, the 2009 *Readings of the Lotus Sūtra*, edited by TEISER and STONE, is intended for college classroom use. We urge readers interested in knowing more to consult these volumes. Like the earlier Tanabe volume, this collection focuses solely on the reception of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japan and represents the work of specialists in Japanese Buddhism; however, it deals with a different set of issues. In this introduction, rather than simply listing and summarizing the articles, we add a few observations concerning the *Lotus Sutra* that may help readers situate them in a larger context.

This introductory article is divided into three parts. First, the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in modern Buddhist studies is discussed, with an emphasis on the role of Japanese scholars and their view of the *Lotus Sutra*. Japanese scholarship may well have overemphasized the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in its view of Indian Buddhism and the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In the second part, doctrinal issues are discussed, particularly the role of the *Lotus* in the classification of doctrines and its definition of Buddhahood and the path. In the third section, practices associated with the *Lotus* are surveyed.

*The Role of the Lotus Sutra in Modern Buddhist Studies*

In contrast to its role in East Asia, the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in the development of Buddhist thought and practice in India is obscure at best. No archeological finds that are clearly related to the text have been made. Many manuscripts of the *Lotus Sutra* in a variety of scripts have been found at sites in Gilgit, Nepal, and Central Asia, but they were copied centuries after the text was composed; in fact, the Chinese translations were based on earlier recensions of the text. In many cases the manuscripts are ornately calligraphed, indicating that they were probably used as objects of worship or copied for the good merit that the copyist and sponsor would receive.

The *Lotus Sutra* has been studied intensively by modern Japanese scholars and has played an important role in their efforts to understand the history of Indian Buddhism. Irō Zuiei (2007) described the efforts of twenty-eight scholars to analyze the formation of the text. However, some modern Japanese scholars have begun to question the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in Indian Buddhism.

The *Lotus Sutra* is sometimes referred to in Indian works, but it does not seem to play a key role in many of them, and the number of citations falls off in later works (SILK 2001). Thus, the *Lotus Sutra* may not have been as central to the development of Mahāyāna thought in India as has been assumed. As Jan Nattier has noted, it differs from most other early Mahāyāna texts in three ways: it argues that the Buddha taught only one vehicle and ultimately rejected three-vehicles; it bestows predictions of enlightenment on those who perform only slight practices (T 9.8c; HURVITZ 1976, 38–39)—thereby making the path to Buddhahood easy; and it claims that Śākyamuni did not actually enter final nirvana, but only appeared to do so (NATTIER 2003, 6–7). All of these elements played a major role in the text's popularity in East Asia. However, its popularity in East Asia did not extend to Korea or Tibet, areas where it was much less important than in China and Japan.

The *Lotus Sutra* was one of the first Mahāyāna texts translated into a western language (French) in 1852 by Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), a rendering that has been highly praised. Burnouf also compiled extensive notes as he translated the text and expressed his wish for additional Sanskrit texts for collation (YUYAMA 2000). Burnouf's choice is significant because he was one of the most influential Buddhologists of the nineteenth century, and an English translation of his study of Indian Buddhism, *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, first published in 1844, was published in 2010, a testament to the quality of his scholarship and its role in the development of Buddhist Studies in the West (BURNOUF 2010). Burnouf noted that he had chosen to translate the *Lotus Sutra* after reading a set of Sanskrit texts that Brian Hodgson (1800–1896), a naturalist working in British India and one of the first Westerners to take an interest in Buddhism, had sent

from Nepal. After reading through these for three years, Burnouf decided to translate the *Lotus Sutra*, believing that it would help him to determine the differences between the Nepalese Sanskrit texts and Buddhist texts written in Pāli (BURNOUF 2010, 77–78). In a letter to Hodgson, he wrote of how enthusiastic he was about the *Lotus Sutra*; his massive study of Indian Buddhism was, in fact, intended as an introduction to the translation (BURNOUF 2010, 11–12).

Many of the Japanese scholars who pioneered modern Buddhology contributed to an emphasis on the *Lotus Sutra*. For example, along with the Dutch linguist and Orientalist Hendrik Kern (1833–1917), Nanjō Bun'yū 南条文雄 (1849–1927, usually written with the old orthography as Bunyiu Nanjio), who helped pioneer modern Buddhist textual studies in Japan, played a major role in the editing of the Sanskrit version of the *Lotus* (1908–1912) and the English translation of the *Lotus* published in 1884 (SILK 2012). The compilation of the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* (see T under the abbreviations in the references) by the Japanese scholars Takakusu Junjirō (1866–1945), Watanabe Kaigyoku (1872–1933), and Ono Genmyō (1883–1939), with a special section on the *Lotus Sutra* and related texts, contributed to this view. Both Takakusu and Watanabe had studied in Europe. Since that time, the *Lotus Sutra* has been considered one of the most important Mahāyāna texts, a position that has only been challenged in recent years by scholars researching the origins of Mahāyāna. The emphasis on the *Lotus* is also found in the work of the Pāli scholar and translator E. J. THOMAS (1951).

For many East Asian Buddhists, the *Lotus Sutra*'s importance in India seemed to be obvious. The *Taishō*, a modern East Asian canon, has a special section set off for “Indian” texts believed to be part of the *Lotus Sutra*'s corpus, the Hokkebu 法華部. Although other catalogs do not have a section with this name, bibliographies of texts brought back from China to Japan by Saichō 最澄 (766/767–822) and Enchin 円珍 (814–891) did have a Hokkebu section that included the *Lotus Sutra* and works on it from the Tiantai tradition (T 55.1055c; 1099a). The *Tōiki dentō mokuroku* 東域傳燈目錄 (Bibliography of the transmission of the flame to the East), compiled in 1094 by the Hossō monk Eichō 永超 (1014–1096), had a Hokkebu that included commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* from a variety of traditions (T 55.1148c). The *Taishō* canon's use of the term Hokkebu, however, is limited to Indian works or apocryphal texts traditionally believed to be Indian, suggesting that the *Lotus Sutra* had a more exalted position in Indian Buddhism than was the case. In addition, the *Lotus Sutra* was mentioned prominently in works attributed to major figures in the two major philosophical traditions of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism: Nāgārjuna from the Madhyamaka and Vasubandhu from the Yogācāra. The *Lotus Sutra* is also mentioned prominently and numerous times in the *Dazhidulun* 大智度論, the one-hundred-fascicle commentary on the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in 25,000 Lines* that has traditionally been attributed to Nāgārjuna.

The translator Paramārtha (499–569) is quoted in the *Fahua zhuanji* 法華傳記 (Biographies of those associated with the *Lotus Sutra*) as claiming that more than fifty commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra* were written in India, although little evidence for the accuracy of this claim survives (T 51.52c–53a; SILK 2001, 89). Only one Indian commentary on the *Lotus* survives, a work attributed to Vasubandhu. The two Chinese translations (or recensions) of this text are by Bodhiruci (?–527; T no. 1519) and by Guṇamati (n.d.; T 1520). Both were in China at the same time, roughly from 508–535, but were unable to cooperate on the translation. The text was particularly important because it introduced the three bodies of the Buddha and the four types of śrāvakas to the discourses on the *Lotus Sutra*. The text was used extensively by the Sanlun exegete Jizang 吉藏 (549–623), who wrote a commentary on it, the *Fahualun shu* 法華論疏 (T no. 1818). In addition, because Vasubandhu was an important figure in Yogācāra thought, the commentary was also valued by Hossō scholars—it is also mentioned in Zhiyi's 智顓 (538–597) *Fahua xuanyi* 法華玄義 (Profound meaning of the *Lotus Sutra*), in sections that were possibly added by Zhiyi's disciple Guanding 灌頂 (561–632) as he polished and edited the text. The commentary was also used by early Japanese Tendai scholars: Saichō brought back several works on the commentary (DZ 5 [*bekkan*]: 152, 154) and wrote an outline (*kamon*) of the text (DZ 3: 741–768), and Enchin composed a ten-fascicle commentary on it, *Hokkeron ki* 法華論記, which quotes extensively from Tang-dynasty texts of the Tiantai, Sanlun, and Faxiang traditions, several of which are no longer extant (FUJII and IKEBE 2001–2003; MAEGAWA 1995).

Finally, the commentary on the *Darijing* 大日經 (*Mahāvairocana-sūtra*), a basic Esoteric Buddhist scripture, written by Yixing 一行 (683–727) on the basis of explanations by Śubhakarasiṃha (Shanwuwei 善無畏; 637–735), included a number of references to the *Lotus Sutra* and to Tiantai teachings. Because of the *Lotus Sutra*'s elevation of Śākyamuni to a position similar to that of the cosmic Buddha Mahāvairocana (Jp. Dainichi), the protagonist of the *Darijing*, Yixing's commentary became a key to Japanese Tendai claims that Śākyamuni and Mahāvairocana were the same and that Esoteric and *Lotus Sutra* teachings had the same purport. This use of the text is examined in Ōkubo Ryōshun's article in this issue.

Clearly our estimation of the importance of the *Lotus Sutra* in the history of Buddhism, not to mention our conception of Mahāyāna, relies on the role that the text played in Chinese and Japanese Buddhist history.

### *Doctrinal Issues*

In his article in this volume, Kitagawa Zenchō considers two important ways that a Mahāyāna scripture might be viewed. First, one might view it as a work pointing at ultimate truth, a truth that cannot be put into words; words thus

serve as expedient pointers, indicating the direction of ultimate truth. Second, the text itself might be considered ultimate truth. The *Lotus* considers the Buddha's teaching of the three-vehicles in the first way; words are simply expedient means indicating an ultimate truth that transcends words. Once the ultimate truth of the one-vehicle is revealed, the words of the *Lotus* are ultimate truth. However, Hossō monks interpreted the one-vehicle of the *Lotus* as an expedient teaching that directed those people who had two types of primordial pure seeds—for example, those enabling them to realize either arhat-hood or Buddhahood—to choose the higher goal. Thus, for the Hossō exegete, statements in the *Lotus* that it revealed ultimate truth were not to be taken literally, but simply as expedient means to guide people. These differences in interpretation were the subject of debates held at court and at imperially sponsored temples, as Minowa Kenryō demonstrates in his article discussed below.

For followers of the *Lotus* in the Tendai and Nichiren traditions, the words of the sutra embodied ultimate truth. This sense of the text can be seen in copies in which each character is placed next to a Buddha, or in cases when the copyist prostrated himself before writing each character. Moreover, copies of the text were sometimes placed in reliquaries in place of physical relics of the Buddha. The three major areas of the Tendai center on Mount Hiei all have copies of the *Lotus* at the center of their monastic complex. When Tendai exegetes claimed lineages that begin with Huisi 慧思 (515–577) and Zhiyi listening to Śākyamuni Buddha eternally preaching the *Lotus* on Vulture's Peak, the text is treated as ultimate truth, continuously preached by a Buddha who is always present. Kitagawa also examines the ultimate value that Nichiren 日蓮 (1222–1282) gave the written characters of the *Lotus Sutra*, identifying each one with the Buddha's mind and the Buddha's body. His article elucidates the origins of this view in the sutras and in works by Zhiyi, Zhanran 湛然 (711–782), and Japanese exegetes. By identifying the written text with Śākyamuni, Nichiren and his followers could claim adherence to both the primordially awakened Śākyamuni and the *Lotus Sutra* by identifying the two. The emphasis on the title of the *Lotus Sutra* for followers of Nichiren is also stressed in the article by Stone.

#### THE *LOTUS SUTRA* AND EMPTINESS

In both the Tendai and Sanron traditions, the connection of the *Lotus Sutra* with emptiness plays a key role in their doctrinal stance. However, emptiness receives little emphasis in the *Lotus Sutra*, with the term *kū* 空 for the concept of emptiness only appearing about five or six times in Kumārajīva's translation (NATTIER 2003, 181; KARASHIMA 2001a, 153–54). The term, however, does appear slightly more often in Dharmarakṣa's translation of the text (KARASHIMA 1998, 254–55). Other terms that refer to the teaching of emptiness, such as *jissō* 実相 (true

aspect), are also found, but not in high numbers. Because East Asian exegetes frequently interpreted the *Lotus Sutra* in terms of the Perfection of Wisdom, that it is mentioned so little is striking. Kajiyama Yūichi has argued that the compilers of the text began by emphasizing the one-vehicle, but then eventually realized that emptiness was needed to explain how the Buddha had used expedient means when he preached the three-vehicles; those expedient teachings were actually empty, an idea that appears in the last half of the “Medicinal Herbs” chapter (KAJIYAMA 2000, 94). Karashima Seishi has suggested that the earliest parts of the *Lotus Sutra* were compiled in a part of India, possibly Gandhāra, where Perfection of Wisdom teachings, which had their origins in South India, were not well known. When the text was propagated in Northwest India where Perfection of Wisdom was known, doctrines concerning emptiness were added (KARASHIMA 2001b, 171).

A positive view of emptiness stresses the causal connections among constantly changing phenomena. This sense is brought out in a famous passage in the “Expedient Means” chapter of Kumārajīva’s translation:

Only a Buddha and a Buddha can exhaust their reality, namely the suchness of the dharmas, the suchness of their marks, the suchness of their nature, the suchness of their substance, the suchness of their powers, the suchness of their functions, the suchness of their causes, the suchness of their conditions, the suchness of their effects, the suchness of their retributions, and the absolute identity of their beginning and end. (T 9.262c; HURVITZ 1976, 22–23)

The term translated by Hurvitz as “reality” can also be translated as the “true aspect of phenomena” (*shohō jissō* 諸法実相), a term that gives a more positive interpretation of emptiness. The term *jissō* is found in a number of places in the *Lotus*, but the phrase *shohō jissō* in the above quotation does not correspond to a set Sanskrit phrase in any extant Sanskrit version of the sutra (KARASHIMA 2001a, 240). In other passages, it sometimes corresponds to *dharmā-svabhāva*, the self-nature of phenomena (TAMURA and FUJII 2001, 112). However, Sanskrit terms taken from other sources have also been suggested as equivalents (NAKAMURA 2001, 701a–b). The term often appears in Chinese translations of the Perfection of Wisdom literature and particularly in the *Dazhidulun*. For the Tendai tradition, the realization of the “true aspect of phenomena” indicated enlightenment or the realization of the connections among various phenomena.

The passage cited above includes a list that is frequently called the “ten suchlikes” (*jū nyoze* 十如是). The Sanskrit versions of the *Lotus* of this passage are sufficiently different from Kumārajīva’s translation that Hurvitz translated them separately (HURVITZ 1976, 349–50). In Dharmarakṣa’s translation, the Sanskrit editions, the Tibetan translation, and Vasubandhu’s commentary, the list of aspects only includes five elements. The expansion of this list to ten is probably

Kumārajīva's invention and may well be presaged in a passage in the *Dazhidulun* that includes nine aspects (T 25.298c; TAMURA and FUJII 2001, 114–15; HURVITZ 1962, 275–82). Recently Jean-Noel Robert has suggested that the list of ten may have been created by Kumārajīva as he strove to reconcile the differences between the Sanskrit version he used and Dharmarakṣa's translation (ROBERT 2011).

The East Asian interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* was decisively influenced by the *Dazhidulun*, which Kumārajīva had translated a year before the *Lotus Sutra*. According to an afterword, Kumārajīva translated only the gist of the *Dazhidulun*; if he had translated the entire work it would have been ten times longer (T 25.756c). The *Lotus Sutra* is cited in the *Dazhidulun* numerous times (TSUKAMOTO 1972), and is referred to as a secret teaching that supercedes the Perfection of Wisdom with its promise of Buddhahood for arhats (T 25.754b). The *Dazhidulun* was crucial to Chinese Buddhism because it gave a positive interpretation to teachings of emptiness, clarified the relationship between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna for the Chinese, and served as a virtual encyclopedia of Buddhist teachings.

The *Lotus Sutra*'s narrative of Śākyamuni's life gave exegetes a template for arranging scriptures in a hierarchical series (ŌCHŌ 1981). If the *Lotus Sutra* served as a model for organizing Buddhist scriptures, the *Dazhidulun* gave East Asian exegetes a sourcebook for doctrines and terminology (ŌNO 2003, 18–21). For the traditional Tendai exegete, the close connection between the *Dazhidulun* and the *Lotus Sutra* allowed him to incorporate Perfection of Wisdom teachings into interpretations of the *Lotus* and the doctrinal basis for explaining expedient means.

#### THE ONE-VEHICLE

For East Asian exegetes, the teaching of how the Buddha used expedient means to lead sentient beings to the one-vehicle, the means by which everyone could reach Buddhahood, lay at the very core of *Lotus Sutra* interpretation. Kanno Hiroshi, a leading scholar of Chinese commentaries on the *Lotus Sutra*, suggests that the one-vehicle teaching was the most important influence of the *Lotus* on Chinese Buddhism (KANNO 2001, 112). The *Lotus* displays considerable literary value and sophistication in presenting this teaching by rewriting one of the key events in the Buddha's biography. Initially the Buddha hesitated to preach because he worried that people would reject his teachings and thereby incur bad karma, but he agreed when the gods begged him to do so. In the *Lotus Sutra*'s retelling of this episode, after considering the gods' request, Śākyamuni decided to do what other Buddhas had done—preach provisional teachings that would enable sentient beings to advance along the path to Buddhahood. These expedient teachings included terms such as “three-vehicles” and “arhat” that did not embody ultimate truth, but enabled the practitioners to advance toward it. His intention was described as “the causes and conditions of the one great matter”

(*ichidaiji innen* 一大事因緣); in other words, the Buddha appeared in the world primarily to lead all sentient beings to the single goal of realizing the Buddha's wisdom (T 9.7a).

Instead of recognizing the validity of several different paths and goals, such as the three-vehicles—arhat, pratyekabuddha, and Buddha—the *Lotus* reinterpreted the Buddha's biography as all pointing to a single goal, Buddhahood, which was to be realized through the one-vehicle. The ultimate reality of two- or three-vehicles was denied; these were no more than expedient teachings that could be abandoned once a person was ready for the Buddha's final teaching. The idea of a final revelation of the Buddha's ultimate teaching, the "secret treasury," was used to explain how the various teachings that the Buddha was said to have taught, although sometimes contradictory, could be reconciled. For Chinese and Japanese exegetes, this narrative was vital if they were to explain how a single person could have preached so many disparate teachings. Viewed from this perspective, the *Lotus Sutra* might be seen as important more for the template it provided that explained how the multifarious doctrines of Buddhism fit together than for the doctrinal teachings of the text itself. In a sense, it was a "meta-course" that explained the connections among other texts (LIU 1988, 65). Or as Carl Bielefeldt states, some have likened it to a "medium without a message—that is, a work that has no message apart from the celebration of its own importance" (BIELEFELDT 2009, 65). The text's exalting of the one-vehicle without offering a detailed and precise definition of that vehicle gave exegetes ample room to define it in various ways. That ambiguity helps account for the sutra's widespread use by representatives of a variety of traditions.

The flexibility of the one-vehicle teaching can be examined by looking at how it was used to interpret "Hīnayāna" teachings. Here we find a crucial split among advocates of the *Lotus* about how the one-vehicle was to be interpreted. For some, it is used to open and reconcile (*kaie* 開會) earlier teachings. For example, as Paul Groner points out in his article, Chinese Tiantai and also the Chinese vinaya master Ganjin 鑑真 (Ch. Jianzhen, 688–763) accepted the "Hīnayāna" vinaya. However, for others, the *Lotus Sutra*'s one-vehicle consisted of rejecting expedient teachings as provisional or incomplete and establishing the one-vehicle (*hairyū* 廢立) as superseding other Buddhist teachings, and this perspective opened the way for Saichō's rejection of the vinaya. The distinction can be seen in Chinese Tiantai, with Zhiyi displaying a more expansive attitude while Zhanran argued that the *Lotus Sutra* should be placed above the eight teachings (*Hokke chōhachi* 法華超八), the four teachings classified according to content and the four methods of conversion traditionally delineated in Tiantai classifications of doctrine (ANDŌ 1968, 305–307). Whereas exegetes like Zhiyi would have seen the potential of all Buddhist teachings to reveal the ultimate Perfect teaching, Zhanran's need to compete with other established schools led him to elevate the *Lotus Sutra* to a position that

transcended any other Buddhist teaching. This move would lay the foundation for developments in Japanese Tendai and Nichiren traditions. The practical difference in attitudes is reflected in the articles by Stephen Covell and Jacqueline Stone. Covell's description of the open-minded attitude of modern Tendai and its ally, Risshō Kōseikai, reflects early Tiantai's acceptance of other strains of Buddhism. In contrast, Jacqueline Stone analyzes the call of Nichiren's followers to martyrdom rather than accept any tradition other than the *Lotus*.

The flexibility of interpretations of the one-vehicle, a term also found in Kegon teachings, is examined in Asai Endō's article, which begins by examining how Saichō was influenced by his early study of Huayan (Jp. Kegon), particularly by the teaching of Suchness according with conditions (*zuien shinnyo* 隨緣真如). Even when Saichō increasingly became devoted to the *Lotus Sutra* and to Tendai doctrinal positions, arguing forcefully for them in his polemical writings against the Hossō monk Tokuitsu 徳一 (n.d.), he was still influenced by his early study of Kegon. However, other Tiantai and Tendai scholars regarded the teaching of the three thousand realms realized in a single thought-instant as the central teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*. Asai discusses how Zhiyi, the de facto founder of the Chinese Tiantai School, used the three thousand realms in one thought-moment, and then goes on to demonstrate how its role was emphasized by Zhanran. He then traces how these two teachings, the three thousand realms in a single thought-instant and Suchness according with conditions, are at issue as the *Lotus Sutra* is interpreted by such figures as Ennin 円仁 (794–864), Kūkai, and Nichiren. As he traces the positions of these men, Asai argues that the *Lotus Sutra* played a central role in much of the history of Japanese Buddhism. He concludes that Nichiren restored the teaching of three thousand realms in one thought-instant to its role as the core teaching of the *Lotus Sutra*. Asai's article indirectly demonstrates the manner in which the *Lotus Sutra* was used to support a variety of teachings, some of them found in other texts or found only in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Lotus*.

The theme of the revelation of the ultimate teaching of the one-vehicle at the supposed end of Śākyamuni's life gave rise to a variety of new interpretations. When Saichō proclaims that the Japanese people as a whole have Perfect religious faculties (*enki* 円機) suitable for the Buddha's final teaching, he is in effect arguing that for the first time in history a whole people is ready to receive a teaching that surpasses all others and that has an import that has remained hidden until then. Nichiren's arguments for the *Lotus Sutra* suggest that a new view of the *Lotus Sutra* and its practice is revealed in Japan in the Last Period of the Dharma. Such interpretations would eventually inspire nationalistic movements based on the *Lotus Sutra*.

The mention in the *Lotus Sutra* of a revelation of "a treasury of the secret essentials" (*hiyō no kura* 秘要之藏) revealed at the end of the Buddha's life sug-

gested to Japanese Tendai monks a resonance with Esoteric Buddhist teachings and practices. As Ōkubo Ryōshun's article demonstrates, Tendai exegetes argued that the Perfect teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* and Esoteric Buddhist teachings had the same doctrinal purport. The difference between the *Lotus Sutra* and Esoteric Buddhism lay in religious practices, an area where Esoteric practices were often considered to be more advanced than anything specified in the *Lotus Sutra*. The inclusion of the *Lotus Sutra* as an authoritative text in Tendai esotericism (Taimitsu 台密) gave it an identity distinct from that of Kūkai's Shingon School. Ōkubo traces the manner in which the identity of the purport of Esoteric Buddhism and the *Lotus Sutra* was interpreted by the major Tendai figures of the early Heian period: Saichō, Ennin, Enchin, and Annen 安然 (b. 841). Their insistence on the role of the *Lotus Sutra* in Esoteric Buddhism would influence other Tendai positions, such as views of the bodies of the Buddha, the equivalence of Śākyamuni and Mahāvairocana, and the realization of Buddhahood with this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛). As they presented their positions, they also had to make sure their views agreed with key passages from Zhiyi's writings.

### *The Lotus Sutra and Religious Practice*

A variety of religious practices in East Asia are associated with the *Lotus Sutra* (we are indebted to Daniel Stevenson for sharing his ideas on this topic). However, the text itself provides only vague descriptions of what is expected; no gradual set of stages on a path to enlightenment or clear definition of salvation is described. Instead, many of the practices found in the *Lotus Sutra* resemble the instructions for spreading the teaching found at the end of many Mahāyāna scriptures, in which copying, reciting, and propagating a scripture yields substantial karmic rewards.

According to the *Lotus Sutra*, the text should be “held, read, and chanted, explained and copied” (T 9.30c). In some of the later sections of the text, making offerings to the scripture is also mentioned, indicating that copies might be placed in reliquaries for worship (T 9.31b; HURVITZ 1976, 174). Eventually these are formulated into five practices: 1. upholding the *Lotus*; 2. reading the sutra; 3. reciting it from memory; 4. explaining (or interpreting) it; and 5. copying it (T 9.47c, 51c; HURVITZ 1976, 264, 286; STEVENSON 2009).

#### UPHOLDING

Upholding the *Lotus* suggested that it was memorized and that it should be spread. Memorization and the other practices could result in the scripture becoming an integral part of one's daily life and interpretation of the world. Exactly what this entailed other than devotion and interpreting one's life experiences against passages from the text is usually not spelled out. At times, passages

or phrases are taken out of context and given a new interpretation, such as the Japanese Tendai use of a variety of passages in interpreting the precepts as shown in Groner's article. In addition, the uses of text in what today we might call "art" include examples of copying the text on private letters or on fans by medieval Japanese devotees. The popularization of reciting the sutra's title, especially by followers of Nichiren, was another way in which a person might integrate the text with his or her daily life.

In the sutra text, when Śākyamuni asked who would spread the sutra after he had entered nirvana, bodhisattvas arose from beneath the earth and promised to do so. Another bodhisattva in the *Lotus Sutra* known as Never-Disparaging underwent persecution to propagate his faith. Both of these images of ideal practitioners influenced Nichiren and his followers.

Kikuchi Hiroki's study focuses on the biographies of adherents of the *Lotus Sutra* (*jikyōsha* 持経者) who were rewarded with miracles during their lifetimes. He compares them with the biographies of Pure Land practitioners who sought rebirth in a posthumous paradise. As he explores these biographies, Kikuchi focuses on such issues as the methods used by the biographer to give his tales credibility. Details such as citing eyewitness accounts, positing an intermediary between the ascetic or reclusive practitioner and lay devotees, and noting specifics such as place names and family ties made these stories believable to medieval readers. The seemingly vague rubric of being an adherent of the *Lotus Sutra* is given definition through descriptions of single-minded recitation and copying of the text. Kikuchi's study concludes by considering the doctrinal significance of these tales, demonstrating how the *Lotus Sutra* was seen by many as transcending the Exoteric-Esoteric system that dominated much of the Heian period.

Jacqueline Stone's study explores a topic similar to Kikuchi's in that it addresses how devotees understood what it meant to embrace or uphold the *Lotus Sutra*. She examines the decision by some *Lotus Sutra* adherents to remain true to the *Lotus* even if it cost them their lives. Beginning with the Atsuhara Affair of 1279, an episode that occurred late in Nichiren's life that involved a deep faith that led some of his followers to become martyrs for the *Lotus Sutra*, Stone traces the social, economic, and religious elements that led to a situation that helped establish the view that a follower of Nichiren had to be ready to defend the tradition even if it cost his or her life. Doctrinal issues abounded in these events. Was any compromise possible? Was a practice based on the *Lotus Sutra*, but belonging to a different tradition, such as Tendai, permissible? Should a follower be martyred rather than submit to demands to perform a Buddhist practice from another tradition, such as the nenbutsu? The apocalyptic events that occurred during Nichiren's life—invasions by the Mongols and natural disasters—were interpreted as karmic punishments for those who rejected the *Lotus Sutra*. Stone traces how these themes develop in the thought of Nichiren and his followers

to produce a narrative that demands that *Lotus Sutra* adherents confront the authorities when necessary and follow correct practices.

#### COPYING AND RECITATION

The *Lotus Sutra* was copied and then recited as a part of liturgy. For example, the nunneries established in various provinces of Japan (*kokubunniji* 国分尼寺) in the seventh century were called “Lotus Temples for the Vanquishing of Wrongdoing” (*hokke metsuzai no tera* 法華滅罪之寺), and the nuns were expected to recite the *Lotus Sutra* as part of services to protect the emperor and nation (KATSUURA 1993). The *Lotus Sutra* was also used as one of three scriptures to protect the nation (*gokoku no sanbukyō* 護国三部經), with the other two being the *Renwang jing* 仁王經 (Sutra of the benevolent king) and the *Jinguangming jing* 金光明經 (Sutra of golden light). Although the connection of the *Lotus* with state-protection rites is particularly noteworthy in Japan, it was also present in China. Note the name of the Tiantai center Guochingsi 国清寺, a monastery for the purification of the state, which was bestowed shortly after Zhiyi’s death. Although the *Lotus Sutra* does not figure directly in the story of its establishment, Guochingsi served as the headquarters of the Tiantai School, which gave the scripture its preeminent place (HURVITZ 1962, 336–37).

During the Heian period, the *Lotus Sutra* was copied and placed in reliquaries that served as the foci of sacred areas. For example, two of the three major Tendai centers on Mount Hiei—Saitō 西塔 (Western Pagoda) and Tōdō 東塔 (Eastern Pagoda)—had reliquaries housing one thousand copies of the *Lotus Sutra*. The third major center, Yokawa 横川, was sanctified by a special copy made by Ennin in which the copying of each character had been accompanied with prostrations or meditation (GRONER 2002, 305, 307). In these cases, through the installation of *Lotus Sutra* copies, the words of the Buddha played a role similar to that of relics of the Buddha, giving an area its sacred character. Similar uses of the scripture to designate sacred areas were found throughout Japan.

Lay believers also copied the *Lotus Sutra*. If they did not do the actual copying, they might commission others to do it for them, with the merit being dedicated to a chosen recipient. The Ōwa 應和 debates of 964 between the Tendai and Nara schools focused on the interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra*, but were preceded by the copying of the *Lotus Sutra* by Emperor Murakami 村上 (926–967; r. 946–967) (GRONER 2002, 96, 332). Fujiwara no Michinaga 藤原道長 (966–1027), the leading courtier of his day, copied the text in gold ink on indigo paper and then buried it and other sutras on Kinpusen 金峯山 in preparation for the decline of the Dharma (KYOTO NATIONAL MUSEUM 2007, 122–27, 267). Such copies were not intended for reading, but as displays of piety and as merit-making devices. The merit of copying the *Lotus Sutra* was directed toward a range of aims, including

prosperity, healing, protection from disaster, rebirth in a pure land, and the salvation of the deceased.

Lay people also recited the *Lotus Sutra*. Sometimes this might be a particular chapter. For example, Princess Sonshi 尊子 (d. 985), the young girl for whom the *Sanbō ekotoba* 三寶繪詞 was written, recited the “Devadatta” chapter. This chapter contains the story of the eight-year-old Nāga girl’s realization of Buddhahood, which must have given some women hope for their own salvation (KAMENS 1988, 12). Recitation could be even briefer, however, as the widespread practice of the *daimoku* 題目, the chanting of the scripture’s title, demonstrates. Although this practice is often associated with Nichiren-based groups, it was also used by some adherents of Tendai and others before Nichiren’s time (STONE 1998, 118–38; DOLCE 2000, 294–315). Veneration of the title could be traced back to Zhiyi’s explanation of how the title, particularly the character *miao* 妙 (Jp. *myō*, subtle, profound), encompassed the sense of the entire scripture in his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* (*Faxhua xuanyi*; KANNO 1997).

Finally, the form of meditation most closely associated with the *Lotus Sutra*, the Lotus samādhi or repentance, was based on the recitation of the scripture and a passage in the “Encouragements of Samantabhadra” chapter that recommended doing so for twenty-one days (T 9.61b; HURVITZ 1976, 333–34; STEVENSON 1986, 67–72).

#### EXPLAINING THE *LOTUS SUTRA*

The practice of explaining the *Lotus Sutra* was carried out in a variety of ritual performances, particularly lectures and debates. Prince Shōtoku 聖徳太子 (574–622), who is said to have been a major supporter of the establishment of Buddhism in Japan, was considered to be the reincarnation of Huisi and to have lectured on the *Lotus Sutra* and composed a commentary on it. Even though Huisi died after Prince Shōtoku was born, and even though the commentary contained positions that differed from those of Zhiyi, the legend persisted and contributed to the position of the *Lotus Sutra* in Japanese Buddhism. The legend was known in both China and Japan by the time of Saichō’s journey to China in the early ninth century.

Minowa Kenryō’s article focuses on how scholar-monks used lectures and debates to explore the doctrinal ramifications of the *Lotus Sutra* in a set of debates held at Hosshōji 法勝寺 in 1131 that concerned the *Lotus Sutra* and other topics. Minowa gives us an account of some of the doctrinal concerns that monks from Tendai, Hossō, and other schools had when they lectured and debated on the *Lotus Sutra*. Hōsshōji was established in 1077 at the order of Emperor Shirakawa 白河 (1053–1129; r. 1073–1087), and was to be the site of Exoteric, Esoteric, Pure Land, and Zen practices and teachings. When Shirakawa went there in 1077, a number of buildings were dedicated, including the Golden Hall, library, lecture

hall, constantly-walking hall, and Amida hall. The variety of halls that were built and the teachings that were to be taught gave Hosshōji a more ecumenical image than many other temples. Minowa demonstrates how this ecumenical perspective worked in the debates held there and compares them with the more sectarian debates of the early Heian period.

A long tradition of debates on the *Lotus* and other scriptures lay behind such performances. A combination of lectures and debates might be used to draw out the meaning of the text. Lectures and debates could vary depending on the audience, with easier content being used to appeal to the masses. Sometimes a format of eight lectures was used, the number determined by the eight fascicles of the *Lotus Sutra*. If the opening and capping sutras were added, the number could be expanded to ten; at times, each chapter and the opening and capping sutras might be the subject of a lecture, bringing the number to thirty (TANABE 1984). Lectures and debates were sometimes academic exercises designed to help educate monks or to provide them with ways to display their intellectual and rhetorical prowess. However, at other times, economic and political patronage might ride on the outcome.

Debate manuals, sometimes called private records (*shiki* 私記), were written to help monks prepare for the debates. These were frequently based on the classic commentaries of a particular school. For example, in Tendai, Zhiyi's *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* and *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* (*Fahua wenju* 法華文句) served as the basis for most of the questions. Students had to be able to recite the key passages from memory along with other texts that were to be used in interpreting them. Frequently the memorized passages seemed to disagree with each other, and the candidate was expected to reconcile the seeming contradictions. The result was a deep and rich corpus of interpretation.

Lay believers traditionally did not debate; however, in recent times, they have been trained to defend and advance their interpretation of the *Lotus Sutra* by some of the new religions, most notably Soka Gakkai. Other groups such as Risshō Kōseikai have also stressed reading and interpreting the *Lotus Sutra* in daily life. An inspiring example of a traditional school using the *Lotus Sutra* to invigorate their teachings is found in Stephen Covell's article, which focuses on Yamada Etai 山田惠諦 (1895–1994), the former head (*zasu* 座主) of the Japanese Tendai School. Covell explores how the *Lotus Sutra* has been used to reinvigorate modern Tendai social actions directed towards peace. Yamada Etai, who was the head of the Tendai School from 1974 to 1994, used the *Lotus Sutra* to formulate an ecumenical movement aimed at religious dialogue. Risshō Kōseikai, a movement that began based on Nichiren's teachings, has moved towards a more ecumenical orientation as well as a close accommodation with Tendai in recent decades, partly because of the friendship of its founder Niwano Nikkyō 庭野日敬 (1906–1999) with Yamada Etai.

In premodern periods, lay believers were frequently an avid audience for lectures and debates. In addition, lay believers with literary talents might compose the dedications that monks read at the beginning of the debate or compile texts that traced sources for a particular commentary (GRONER 2002, 113, 149–50). The stories and parables from the *Lotus Sutra* were familiar enough for lay believers that they served as topics for poems by both lay and monastic practitioners (KAMENS 1990; ROBERT 2008). Elaborate and delicate illustrations of key events in the text were drawn on the frontispieces of some copies. In addition, words from the *Lotus Sutra* were sometimes copied on fans or embroidered (KURATA and TAMURA 1987, plates 35–40, 82), uses that might have been attractive to women. *Setсуwa* 説話, short narratives designed to inculcate belief in Buddhist teachings, frequently alluded to the benefits of chanting and copying the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as tales of karmic penalties for those who defamed or did not believe in Buddhism (CHINGEN 1983).

#### OTHER PRACTICES

The *Lotus Sutra* includes chapters that mention a variety of other practices. Although these were usually not part of any system of practice, both monks and lay believers singled them out as foci of their activities. For example, the vague prescriptions for behavior in the “Comfortable Conduct” chapter became the focus of a short work by Huisi (STEVENSON and KANNO 2006). The term “comfortable practice” indicated that these were relatively easy to follow. Saichō cited the chapter as a key scriptural base for his rejection of the vinaya. This same chapter would later play an important role in medieval Japanese discussions of the role of the precepts.

Paul Groner’s article on the Perfect-Sudden precepts also focuses on how the Tendai School used the *Lotus Sutra* to interpret the precepts and ordinations. Saichō, the founder of the Tendai School, is famous for his rejection of the traditional vinaya in favor of the bodhisattva precepts set forth in the apocryphal Chinese text, the *Fanwang jing*. He died, however, before he explained many of the details of how this new approach would work. Although the *Lotus Sutra* would seem to have little to say about the precepts, later Tendai exegetes focused on several passages and on how the precepts fit into the classification of doctrines as they explored the problems of how to ordain monks and what precepts they should observe. Tendai scholars never arrived at a unified interpretation of the relation between the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Fanwang jing* or resolved the question of whether or not strict observance of the precepts was vital. Thus, the *Lotus Sutra* was used to support a variety of approaches to monastic discipline.

Often a single story or passage of the *Lotus Sutra* was used as a guide for religious practitioners. One of the most striking is the story of the Medicine King bodhisattva who offers his own body through self-immolation to the Buddha

(BENN 2007). This story paralleled the offerings of material goods to the Buddha stressed in other texts, but emphasized the importance of offering everything, even one's own life. It led practitioners to offer their own bodies, or parts of it, such as fingers, to the Buddha. This practice, as far as we know, had no parallel in India. The story was so compelling that figures such as Zhiyi struggled over how to interpret it, leading to an enlightenment experience in Zhiyi's case. The passage on Medicine King did not have to be taken so literally, however. In his line-by-line commentary on the *Lotus Sutra*, Zhiyi argues that Bodhisattva Medicine King's self-sacrifice is a metaphor for the realization of and acquiescence to non-substantiality (KYŌDO 1975, 62–64).

Occasionally, practitioners would emulate Never-Disparaging Bodhisattva, who went around bowing to everyone and stating that he would not dare disparage them because they were potentially all buddhas (KANNO 2002). People responded to his efforts by persecuting and throwing rocks and tiles at him. Although relatively few East Asian practitioners emulated his behavior, his attitude comforted advocates of the *Lotus Sutra* who were persecuted. It also exemplified the belief in universal salvation that came to typify most of East Asian Buddhism. The term “Buddha-nature” does not appear in the *Lotus Sutra*, but this story suggested that it was implicit in the *Lotus Sutra*. This approach began with Vasubandhu's commentary and came to be accepted by most commentators (TAMURA and FUJII 2001, 956).

Along with universal salvation, the speed of realization was a frequent topic among East Asian exegetes of the *Lotus*. The opening lines of Huisi's *Meaning of the Lotus Sutra's Course of Ease and Bliss* clearly state this: “The *Lotus Sutra* is a Dharma-gate of sudden enlightenment proper to the Great Vehicle, whereby one awakens spontaneously, without resorting to a teacher, and speedily attains to Buddhahood” (STEVENSON and KANNO 2006, 225). The text goes on to note that the predictions of Buddhahood, indicating that the realization of Buddhahood is near for many, reinforce this. In the *Lotus*, all those who perform even simple devotional acts—doodling a picture of the Buddha, making a reliquary out of sand, saying the word “Namu”—receive predictions of future Buddhahood. Was there a difference between the prediction of eventual Buddhahood and the quick attainment of it with relatively little effort? At times, the *Lotus Sutra's* predictions seem to posit a long period of practice, as the following indicates: “There are sons of the Buddha whose minds are pure ... who under innumerable Buddhas have practiced the profound and wonderful way... I predict that these persons in a future existence will attain the Buddha way” (T 9.8a). The role of Śāriputra in the *Lotus Sutra*, who undergoes eons of practice with setbacks, suggests a long period of practice. The parable of the prodigal son also indicates that a period of practice may be necessary before one is ready for the ultimate truth. However, other passages, such as the story of the Nāga girl in the “Devadatta” chapter, suggested a

quicker path. In that story, the attainment of an eight-year-old Nāga girl is questioned. She responds by offering a jewel to the Buddha, who accepts it. She then asks whether the Buddha quickly accepted it, and then announces that she will realize Buddhahood even more quickly, going immediately to a southern realm named Spotless, where she becomes a male and realizes Buddhahood.

In Japan, this passage became the basis for debates about realization of Buddhahood with this very body (*sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成佛). Saichō noted that the Nāga girl's attainment, despite her young age, gender, and status as an animal, were all proof of the power of the *Lotus Sutra*. The promise to men, women, laity, and monastics—even Devadatta, the arch-villain in most Buddhist literature—of eventual Buddhahood contributed to the expectation of universal salvation. However, the passage itself was sufficiently vague that a number of fascinating questions were debated by Japanese monks, including the issue of whether a person must have practiced in previous lifetimes in order to realize sudden enlightenment and whether one could attain the various special physical qualities of a Buddha without first dying and acquiring a new body. The passage itself never specified what practices the Nāga girl had performed. Were they primarily the development of faith in the *Lotus Sutra*, perhaps suggesting that Śākyamuni was a savior of sorts? Or, as implied in Ōkubo Ryōshun's article, might Esoteric Buddhist practices have been involved, even though they were not specifically mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra*? Japanese monks sharpened their wits and demonstrated their mastery of doctrines by debating such issues. The mastery of rhetoric probably was as important as the actual content of the material in these performances (GRONER 1989; 1992). The passage about the Nāga girl was important not just for monks. Women could look at the story of the Nāga girl and find hope in their aspiration for Buddhahood. Women's attainment of Buddhahood through the *Lotus Sutra* became a theme in *setsuwa* and *waka* (KIMBROUGH 2008, 102–23).

The practices that accompanied the *Lotus Sutra* thus depended on who was reading and interpreting it. Some monks still saw a long period of hard practice as necessary. Zhiyi seems to have made no extravagant claims for his own spiritual practice, believing he still had far to travel on the path. Others, particularly in Japan, did make such claims. The parables and teachings of the *Lotus* were used to support both positions.

### *Conclusion*

The articles included in this collection indicate the broad range of ways in which the *Lotus Sutra* was interpreted and practiced. In Japan, more than any other country, the scripture was applied in a multitude of ways with considerable enthusiasm by its adherents. Many of these interpretations would not have been apparent to Buddhists in other Buddhist cultural areas. The mix of rigorous

scholarly inquiry into the text by both ancient and modern scholars, as well as the imaginative and innovative uses of it, suggests that, at least in Japan, it lives up to its claim that it is the “king of scriptures.”

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