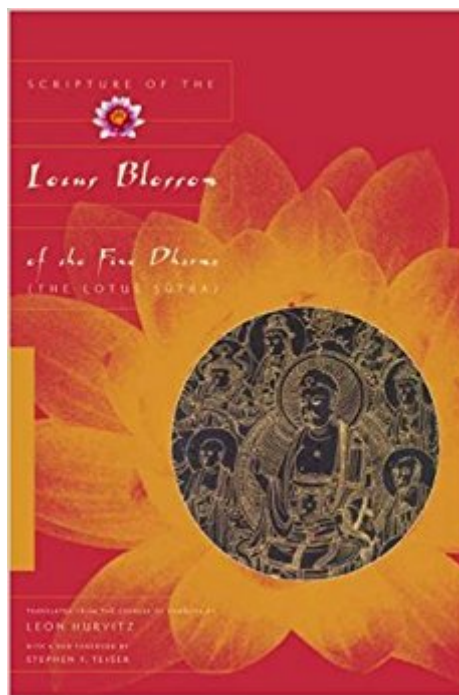


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Scripture Of The Lotus Blossom Of The Fine Dharma: The Lotus Sutra (Records Of Civilization: Sources And Studies)



Synopsis

This is a translation of a Buddhist scripture which was originally written in Sanskrit but is best known to Buddhists through Chinese versions. It is one of the most influential and popular texts of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The work is famous and beloved throughout the Far East for its parables; presentation of abstract religious concepts in concrete images; the innumerable fascinating beings which people the work; and the charm, warmth, and directness of its style.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Text: English, Chinese (translation)

Leon Hurvitz is a professor in the Department of Asian Studies, University of British Columbia. He spent time during the occupation of Japan as a translator and interpreter and later studied in Japan, specializing in early Chinese Buddhism.

A look outside Zen.

Many English versions of the Lotus Sutra are translated from a Chinese translation of the original Sanskrit version. Regardless of how well they were translated into English, the quality of these versions depends heavily on the quality of the Chinese translation. As many such translations were either done by merchants who didn't know that much about religion or by monks who didn't know

much about the other language, there are quite a few bad versions of the Lotus Sutra. This is not one of them. Not only was it translated from the best known of the Chinese versions (that of Kumarajiva), but Hurvitz also consulted the original Sanskrit to see where the versions differed. While the main text comes entirely from the Chinese, there are nearly 70 pages of endnotes on the Sanskrit, in which Hurvitz either comments on differences between that and the Chinese, or gives a translation of Sanskrit passages that don't appear in Kumarajiva's translation. What this means for the text is that it is one of the most readable versions of the Lotus Sutra and, at the same time, one of the most informative.

The Lotus Sutra, or Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (J., Myohorengekyo, Hokkekyo), the preeminent scripture in the Mahayana Buddhism of East Asia -- China, Tibet, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam -- is known primarily through the translation into Chinese of the Sanskrit Saddharma-pundarika-sutra by Kumarajiva in CE 406. (This 28-chapter version differs in organization and presentation from the 27-chapter Sanskrit text translated into English by H. Kern in 1884, and still available for sale; the two versions should not be confused.) Although Kumarajiva's Lotus Sutra has influenced all of Japanese Buddhism in one way or another, it is the basic scripture for the great medieval Tendai (C., T'ien T'ai) sect, as well as the later Nichiren sect and its offshoots, especially Soka Gakkai and Rissho Koseikai, all three of which emphasize recitation of the "Nam' myohorengekyo" formula." The Lotus is NOT included in the scriptural canon of Southern Buddhism (Theravada) in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and other areas of SE Asia. The Lotus Sutra is basically a statement of philosophical principles and should not be approached as literary entertainment. Its message has serious implications - today probably more so than any time in past history. But the reading takes patience and serious, quiet rumination. Its message is that all sentient beings have the potential for attaining Buddhahood, but conceptual illusion prevents them from realizing that this is their essential nature. Out of compassion, the Buddha(s) employs many devices (Skillful Means/Expedients; hoben) accommodated to their specific needs, to assist them in seeing through this illusion. (The notion is expressed through most of the sutra's Seven Parables.) Although provisional teachings are not only possible but necessary, there is, in fact, only One Vehicle, one ultimate, ineffable spiritual goal; and for this reason the Lotus is sometimes called the Sutra of the One Vehicle. It is important to note, however, that the term does not describe an EXCLUSIVE DOGMATIC FORMULATION that is taken to be correct while others are false. The ultimate religious experience is beyond the reach of rational understanding, which is, at best, "a finger pointing at the moon". Although the Lotus Sutra might be viewed as the BEST possible

expression of the Buddha's teaching, it is NOT THE ONE AND ONLY way to spiritual realization: other scriptures (and other words, rituals, myths, metaphors, etc.) can be embraced as expressing a more or less adequate means for attaining spiritual understanding - the specific words or symbols do no matter. The One Vehicle refers to a single experiential GOAL to be reached through a variety of conceptual formulations and exercises, but ultimately transcending the word-games of rationality. Note, however, that although the Lotus Sutra freely admits many routes to enlightenment (because of the varying needs of individuals), it does NOT claim that "one view is just as good as any another," i.e., relativism. Although today the most popular translation of the (Chinese) Lotus Sutra may be Burton Watson's elegant rendition (1993) into English, some serious scholars still prefer this older version by Leon Hurvitz (1976); and even, occasionally, the Bunno Kato collection of three sutras (1975). Depending on the size of your wallet, you might consider buying all 3.

While the Burton Watson translation of the Lotus Sutra is "elegant" as one reviewer commented, to be sure, it was also totally commissioned by the Soka Gakkai International to be written. Don't get me wrong, it is a great translation in it's own right as Burton Watson has done some excellent translations in the past, it's just that that one had an agenda from the beginning. Now this older Leon Hurvitz translation, on the other hand, had no political influence. It just remained pure to the Sanskrit and Chinese translation from the Kumarajiva. This remains the most accurate and readable translation to date - period and exclamation point! Buy both copies and read them side by side. Do all the research online into the original Sanskrit of the Bodhisattvas and then make your own judgement. Better yet buy as many translations of The Lotus Sutra as you can and refer to all of them from time to time - it will broaden your understanding deeply. Namaste, Donna

good

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