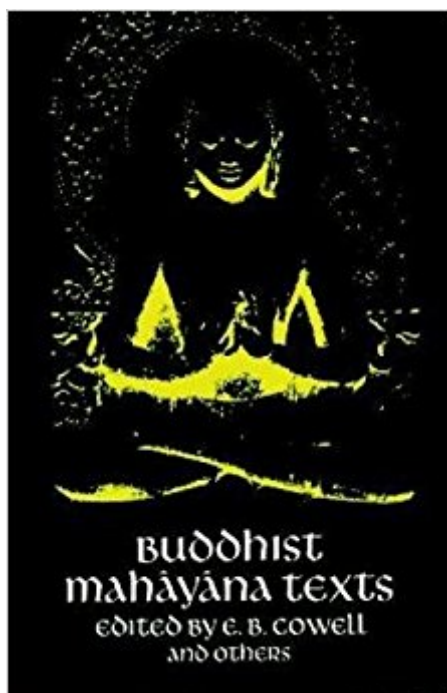


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Buddhist Mahayana Texts (Sacred Books Of The East)



Synopsis

Originally published in the Sacred Books of the East Series, under the general editorship of F. Max Müller, this volume contains translations of basic works in later Buddhism. These documents are extremely important in contemporary Japanese Buddhism, particularly the older sects, such as the Pure Land and Shin Shu, and have also been significant in the development of Chinese Buddhism, and the Buddhism of Tibet and Nepal. All have been translated from Sanskrit texts that preserve the originals as well as can be determined. The first component, the Buddha-Karita of Asvaghosha, has been translated by E. B. Cowell from Nepalese texts. Of Indian origin, around the beginning of the Christian era, it is concerned with the life and teachings of the Buddha — now quite far removed from the Pali documents of the Hinayana. The original text, which was fragmentary, has been completed by the addition of four books by a nineteenth-century Nepalese scholar, Amritananda. Max Müller has translated the Larger and Smaller Sukhavati-vyūha, in which the Buddha describes the Land of Bliss to an assembly of the sangha, gods, spirits, and others. This is followed by Dr. Müller's translation of the Vajracchedikā (The Diamond Cutter), a metaphysical treatise, and the Larger and Smaller Prajñā — paramitāhridaya-sūtras, two brief kernel statements of the Mahayana. The final document for Japanese Buddhism, the highly important Amitayur-dhyana-sūtra, has been translated by Dr. J. Takakusu. Called the Meditation Sutra, it describes meditation and concentration techniques in terms of Amida Buddhism. It is of particular interest today as an experimental document.

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Customer Reviews

Good material, but needs sorting out. Apparently this reprint was originally published by Oxford University Press in 1894. However, the erratic pagination strongly suggests that the various parts were published separately and then combined without renumbering. (In this review all diacritical marks will be ignored, of course.) Part I (pp. xiii, 1-207, including index) consists of "The Buddha-carita of Asvaghosa" (cf., J. _Bussho gyosan_) translated from a SANSKRIT original by E.B. Cowell. It is often important to note whether a Western language translation is made from a Sanskrit/Pali or a Chinese original. For Buddhists in China, Korea and Japan the Chinese version is definitive, however it may or may not vary from its original - "original" does not mean "authentic," just "earlier." Thus, the 28-chapter translation of the Lotus Sutra into Chinese by Kumarajiva in 406 is the scripture known to CJK Buddhists; its antecedents may be investigated out of historical curiosity, but any discrepancies would be of no theoretic importance. Part II (pp. 1-208) begins with 5 texts translated from SANSKRIT by F. Max Muller (1823-1900): the Larger Sukhavati-vyuha [Pure Land], the Smaller Sukhavati-vyuha [Pure Land], the Vajracchedika [i.e., the Diamond Sutra], the Larger Prajna-paramita-hrdaya-sutra [Heart Sutra] , and the Smaller Prajna-paramita-hrdaya-sutra [Heart Sutra]. These are important in the CJK Buddhist tradition - but in their Chinese manifestation. The final item is the Amitayur-dhyana-sutra [Sutra of Meditation on Amida Buddha] translated by J(unjiro) Takakusu (1866-1945) from CHINESE (Nj. 198 = T [Taisho shinshu daizokyo] 365). [Yes, in 1874 the numbering system in use was Nanjo Bunyu (also Nanjio Bunyiu, 1849-1927), A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka, The Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan (Oxford, 1883).] Although all of the Three Pure Land Sutras (Jodo sanbukyo) central to East Asian Pure Land thought are translated here, only the last by Takakusu is from the appropriate "original." The three are as follows: Larger Pure Land Sutra. The Muryojukyo, literally the "Amitayus Sutra," T 360, is the translation into Chinese attributed to Sanghavarman in C.E. 252; but popularly known as the (Larger) Sukhavati-vyuha ("Land of Supreme Bliss") Sutra, it relates the career of the Buddha Amida as the bodhisattva Dharmakara (Hozo), who made 48 vows to save sentient beings. For the Pure Land movement, the 18th vow is central: "Even when I am able to attain Buddhahood, if sentient beings of the ten quarters, with sincerity and faith, desire to be born in my land by practicing [invoking /meditating on] up to ten thoughts on the name of Buddha Amitayus are not born there, I will not accept supreme enlightenment-only excluding those who commit the five atrocities and abuse the True Dharma." Amitabha Sutra. Kumarajiva's translation

(ca. 402) of the (Smaller) Sukhavati-vyuha ("Land of Supreme Bliss") Sutra, the Amidakyo, T 366. In describing Amida's paradise and recommending the invocation of his name, it summarizes the argument of the Larger Pure Land Sutra, or Amitayus Sutra. Sutra of Meditation on Amida Buddha. Amitayur-dhyana-sutra, Kanmuryojukyō, T 365. Sakyamuni's appears to the imprisoned Queen Vaidehi, whom he instructs in various forms of meditation on the Buddha Amitayus with the promise that even the worst sinner can attain birth in Amida's Pure Land if he recites Amida's name ten times at the moment of death. This sole reliance on Amida as savior differs from the visualization of Amida suggested by the sutra's name. The 50 volumes of the Sacred Books of the East Series were - and remain - a great scholarly accomplishment.

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This inexpensive volume contains several important Buddhist scriptures. Included is the Buddha Karita, the story of the Buddha's life. It is a prose translation of the original poem by the great Indian literary master, Asvaghosha. The translation was done a long time ago and so there are many Christo-centric interpretations of words that Buddhists would never use, like "soul" and "penance". Such terms should be more like "consciousness" and "austerity" respectively. These mistakes are forgivable, whether you're Christian or Buddhist, when you realize how beautiful the interpretation is otherwise. Look out for sexist language more indicative of Asvaghosha's milieu than the Buddha's life. Also included are a long and short version of the Shukhavati Vyuha, an important Pure Land text used by the Buddhist sects devoted to Amitabha Buddha. In it is a wonderful, mythical description of one of the Buddhist Heavens, Shukhavati, the Western Realm of Bliss. Buddhists read this scripture for the dead at special ceremonies. The Heart Sutra is also in here. It is sometimes described as the Buddhist Lord's Prayer. Many Buddhists recite it daily and there is even a scene in Bernardo Bertolucci's Little Buddha movie where some monks blissfully break into the Heart Sutra while visiting at a friend's house. Bertolucci also had some opera singer perform it in an aria at the end of the movie...in Sanskrit no less! Wow. It actually worked too.

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