

Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra in Chinese History and Its Significance in the 21st Century

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AS one of Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures translated in Chinese in the early stage of Chinese Buddhism, *Fahua jing* (Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra/Good-Law Lotus Scripture) once gave its comprehensive impact to peoples in China, Korea and Japan in the process of development and transmission of the Northern Buddhism. Until present day, the scripture has enjoyed the worship in the society of the above-mentioned regions. At the turn of a new millennium, the scripture is still believed to possess the strong viability in an epoch of high technology and science. Through re-interpretation in the modern society, the essence of the *Fahua jing* can be carried forward in the establishment of reverence for life, spiritual exchange of broad mass of worshipers and peoples, formation of conception of environmental protection and safeguard of international peace.

CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF THE FAHUA JING

As a text produced in the early time of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism, the most prevalent versions of the *Fahua jing* were the *Zheng fahua jing* (*Lotus Sutra of the Correct Law*) and the *Miaofa lianhua jing* (*Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law*). The former was interpreted by the monk Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu) in the period of Western Jin (265–316), and the latter by the eminent scholastic monk Kumārajīva in the period of Later Qin (384–416).

In the seventh year of Taikang in the Dynasty Western Jin (286) Dharmarakṣa translated the *Fahua jing* in Chang'an with the help of laybuddhists Nie Chengyuan, Zhang Shiming, and Zhang Zhongzheng. This version was welcome and preached in North of China as soon as coming to the light. More than 100 years later, the most popular translation by Kumārajīva was also completed in Chang'an. That was in the eighth year of Hongshi period in Later Qin Dynasty. When the scripture was first interpreted, it was comprised of 27 chapters in seven volumes. The present-day 28 chapters in eight volumes took form in the later time

when the chapters of Devadatta and Pumen (the Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds) were added to it. According to the *Chu sanzangji ji (Records of Translating Tripitaka)*, the chapter of Devadatta in Sanskrit was gained in Turfan by the monk Faxian from the Qi period (479–502) of Southern Dynasties and carried to the city of Jiankang where another Indian monk named Dharmamati (Fayi) rendered it into Chinese. Whereas the reciting gāthā for the chapter of Pumen was translated by the monk Jñānagupta in the period of Northern Zhou (557–581), which is told us by a comment appended to the Good-Law Lotus recorded in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu (Records of Chinese Buddhist Scripture Edited in the Kai-yuan Period of Tang Dynasty)*. In addition, there is a *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing (The Chapter-Added Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra)* rendered by Jñānagupta in collaboration with Dharmagupta, which is consisted of seven volumes with some differences in the chapter titles and contents, yet its main body of text is very similar to the version by Kumārajīva. The latter eventually became the orthodox version in the Northern Buddhism.

IDEOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKASŪTRA

The Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra was one of the early Mahāyāna scriptures that were characteristic of imaginary plots, far-reaching moral, and vivid metaphors. Thus it has brought about comprehensive influence throughout the East Asia. The scripture possesses the following features in Buddhist ideology:

It Proclaims That All Living-Beings Become Buddhas.

In the primitive Buddhism, it was only recognized that the Saint Shakyamuni was entitled to become a Buddha, whereas all other cultivators can enjoy the possibilities to come to the summit as *arahants*, insulated from the Buddhahood. When the early Buddhist forked into Mahāsimgha and Theravāda sects, there arose an idea of Past Buddha meaning Gotama Shakyamuni attained to his liberation. After the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the delivered monks were told to have three results such as *śrāvaka*, *pratyeka* and *bodhisattva*, and the ways they have to go through were called *srāvakayāna*, *pratyekayāna* and *bodhisattvayāna*. To become Bodhisattva was only next to the Buddha and he would eventually reach the Buddhahood with special cultivation, among which he should first set up the greatest will to seek for Enlightenment upwardly and to save all the sentient beings downwardly. Only in this stage, Mahāyāna Buddhism had promised that a pious seeker

could become a Buddha. And taking the ideal of entering into Buddhahood as central thesis, a group of Mahāyāna texts come into being. They were the Prajñāpāramitāsūtra, Avatamsakasūtra, Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra, and Sukhāvāṭīvyūhasūtra and so on.

The Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra expounds a theory that the three vehicles like *śrāvakayāna*, *pratyekayāna* and *bodhisattvayāna* are only expedient delivering resorts according to the Buddha's original intention, and the three vehicles will converge into a lofty end—to let all the sentient beings gain the final Enlightenment. In the second chapter of Expedient Means, a very famous metaphor is given to show the teaching. In order to save his three children from the house on fire who are indulging in play and do not sense their own peril on the moment, the merci-filled father use the three different carts that are drawn respectively by a bull, a deer and a goat to induce his sons to get out of the house; in the chapter of Simile and Parable, another metaphor describes that a poor son is looking for his father and finally succeeds in inheriting family property, which means all Hīnayāna followers are also sons of the Buddha, and the father's teaching will lead them to the Buddhahood. The scripture also accounts about the Buddha's prediction that quite a few Hīnayāna disciples like Śāriputra, Mahākāśyapa and Subhūti will surely be guaranteed to become Buddhas.¹ Buddhism generally allots a low position to women in its world where a woman cannot become a king or Heaven King, nor Buddha. Yet in the *Fahua jing*, a story of Longnü (Dragon's Daughter) who transforms into male body before entering into Buddhahood, which set up a model promising reward as woman being a Buddha;² Also in the scripture, the Buddha gives his prediction that nuns like Mahāprajāpatī and Yāshodhara will mount upon the throne of Buddha in the future. The conception that all people are equally to become Buddhas are reshaped in the expressions of *kaiquan xianshi* (opening the expedient gate-ways and demonstrating the true and only one truth) and *huisan guiyi* (unifying three ways into one real way).

Mahāyāna Doctrine of Buddhakāya (Buddha's Body) Exemplified by Means of Jiuyuan Chenshi (Everlasting and Ultimately Real) Shakya-muni Buddha.

Mahāyāna Buddhism affirms that there was not only existing the Past Buddha, but also Present and Future Buddha. In addition, it puts forward an enunciation of *Buddhakāyas*. Among various bodies, the typical one is the *dharmakāya* (dharma body) which is said to represent the Buddha's teaching and the essence of Buddhism as well as the universe.

Besides there are *saṃbhogakāya* (bliss body) and *nirmāṇa-kāya* (manifested body). The former is realized only through timeless cultivation by a bodhisattva until he finally experienced what the ultimate reality is like, and the latter can be many figures by that the Buddha tirelessly preaching his teachings on the earth and help his worshipers in response to their invoking. As we understand, the founder of Buddhism should be the Buddha in his *nirmāṇakāya*. At the time when the *Fahua jing* was formulated, there were not the doctrine of Buddha's *trikāya*. Nonetheless, we are able to feeble the trace of the conceptions in a few chapters like the chapter of Emerging from the Earth in vol. 5 and the chapter of the Emergence of the Treasure Tower in vol. 4. The Buddha Shakyamuni demonstrates an evident double character of *nirmāṇakāya* and *dharmakāya* in the former, and in the latter we are told that a magnificent pagoda emerges from under the ground with a Buddha of Multi-jewels living in a long-long-ago past, who comes to preach the *Fahua-jing* to Shakyamuni Buddha and witness the great event. We are impressed deeply by the numberless Buddhas who have come from all Buddha-kingdoms in the 10 directions in order to attend to the grand dharma-preaching ceremony. The chapter of Emerging from the Earth also describes that under this earth, there are many bodhisattvas as the Buddha Shakyamuni's disciples who have set up great wills to propagate and protect the *Fahua jing* in the future. The chapter of the Life Span of the Thus Come One mentions that the Buddha Shakyamuni has survived endless number of *kalpas* (aeons) and he will live on without extinction. According to Chinese Buddhist tradition, the Master Zhiyi of the Tiantai School and the Master Jizang of the Three-Treatise School say in their commentaries to the *Fahua jing* that Shakyamuni Buddha is a triad of *dharmakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*. Although he has attained to his *dharmakāya*, he is still persisting in teaching all beings in forms of *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya*.³

People in the later time re-express the conception of Shakyamuni becoming Buddha by *kaijin xianyuan* (to demonstrate the distant longevity of the Buddha's *dharmakāya* in comparison to the nearness of his *nirmāṇakāya*) and *kaijing xianben* (to demonstrate the dharma as being equivalent to the Buddha's *dharmakāya* through phenomena explained by the Buddha's *nirmāṇakāya*).

For the First Time the Fahua Jing Brings forward Important Conceptions such as Zhufa Shixiang (True Entity of All Phenomena) and Shi Rushi (Ten Factors).

The chapter of Expedient Means says: "The Buddha has established the

first ontological principle that is hardly understandable. It is only through the Buddha and Buddha that the *zhufa shixiang* can be exhaustively pondered and expounded. What is mentioned here as *zhufa* (all phenomena) is ten factors manifested through phenomena: form, nature, substance, power, action, cause, condition, effect, compensation, and ultimacy.” The *zhufa shixiang* here refers to *yifo cheng* (one vehicle), *fozhi zhijian* (Buddha wisdom), *zhufa jimie xiang* (extinction face of any dharmas), and *dacheng kongyi* (meaning of Mahāyāna’s voidness), which is representative of the fundamental truth of Mahāyāna Buddhism against the background of the Prajñāparāmitta scriptures. The chapter of Peaceful Practices says like this: “By the super insight one know all beings is empty, which is the suchness’ appearance and not upside-down, immovable, uninvertible and unchangeable; like the nothingness of voidness, it is beyond any speech, any words and names, and beyond possession; it is numberless, boundless and untouchable.”⁴ To this sense, the *shixiang* in the *Fahua jing* is something like the ideas like *shixiang* (true entity), *zhenru* (essential truth of things), *bijing kong* (ultimate void), *faxing* (dharma nature), *foxing* (Buddha nature) and *nirvāṇa*, etc. used in the Prajñāparāmittasūtra and the Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra. As all these terms are very flexible and can be explained in many way, ancient Buddhist scholars tended to adopt them to create their Buddhist philosophic systems.

The Faith in Guanyin Bodhisattva is Praised in the Scripture.

Nearly everywhere the *Fahua jing* talks about the merits of the Bodhisattva of Sympathy who tirelessly goes everywhere to rescue his followers in answering their invoking. The chapter of the Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound announces that Guanyin is able to transform into any figures to teach the *Fahua jing* and save the suffering in their deeds.⁵ The chapter of Pumen stresses Guanyin’s great power to deliver anyone when his name is called by any worshipers. Guanyin has 32 incarnations and it is said Guanyin can observe the miserable’s crying. Guanyin is the most popular goddess of in the eyes of Chinese followers.

SADDHARMAPUNḌARĪKASŪTRA AND CHINESE BUDDHISM

As soon as the *Fahua jing* was translated into Chinese, it immediately diffused broadly and brought about far-reaching multi-influences as following:

The Fahua Jing’s Commentaries and Their Explanation to Zong and Ti

Among the disciples of Kumārajīva, quite a few like Sengrui made their commentaries. Sengrui once studied the *Zheng fahua jing* translated by Dharmarakṣa and took part in the interpreting work of the *Miaofa lianhua jing*. He was called Jiuche Fashi, since he was a dharma-master who was able to expound the scripture in a way called *jiuche* (nine tracks). Another disciple named Tanying also knew the *Zheng fahua jing* very well. And he composed a commentary in four volumes soon after the Lotus Scripture was interpreted by his master Kumārajīva; The eminent monk Daosheng wrote a commentary in two volumes entitled *Fahua yisu* (*Commentary on the Lotus Sutra*) which is extant today. Later in the different periods, many scholastic monks have to show their talents by enunciating the text with their writings. Such as the monk Huilong at Mt. Lushan, Fayao, and Sengyin in the Song-Qi period (420–502) of Southern Dynasties; Fayun and Huisi in the Qi-Liang period (479–557); Zhiyi in Sui Dynasty (589–618) and Jizang in Tang Dynasty (618–907). Among their works, whatever is still extant as follows: the *Fahua jing yiji* (*Annotations on the Lotus Sutra*, eight vols.) by Fayun, the *Fahua jing anlexing yiji* (*Essential Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*) by Huisi, both the *Fahua wenju* (*Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*, 20 vols.) and the *Fahua xianyi* (*Profound Meaning of The Lotus Sutra*, 20 vols.) by Zhiyi, the *Fahua xianlun* (*Treatise on the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra*, 10 vols.), the *Fahua yisu* (12 vols.) and the *Fafua youyi* (*Meaning of the Peaceful Practices of the Lotus Sutra*) by Jizang, and the *Miaofa lianhua jing xuanzan* (*Praising the Profundity of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law*) by Kuiji. Monk Jizang was the founder of the Three-Treatise School, and Master Zhiyi the first patriarch of the Tiantai School. Kuiji was the actual founder of the Faxiang School.

Owing to the tendency of traditional way of thinking, all these works adopted methods of comprehensiveness and synthesis, and firmly grasped the fundamental aim and central idea that was called *ti* or *zong* (principle), which reflected people's concerns and knowledge about the text at their contemporary time. In his commentary of the *Fahua xianlun*, the Master Jizang listed some representative views at that period as follows:

Huiyuan at Mt. Lushan of Eastern Jin (317–420) who took *yicheng* (one vehicle) as *zong*; Huilong at Mt. Lushan of Song-Qi (420–502) who took *guozhi* (fruit wisdom) as *zong*; Huiguan of Song period (420–472) who took *zhenhui* (real wisdom) as *ti*; Sengyin at Zhongxing Temple of Qi period *yicheng shihui* (one vehicle real wisdom); Fayun at

Guangzai Temple of Liang period (502–557) *yicheng yinguo* (one vehicle causation) as *zong*.

There were some others claiming that *zong* and *ti* was *ersheng* (double-goodness), *miaofa lianhua* (good law lotus), *changzhu* (everlasting being) and others. Master Jizang criticized all of those claimings and views. In his opinion, the only right one was that Enlightenment should be the highest principle. Yet, as the *Fahua jing* concerned, he insisted that “*shixian zhengfa* (suchness) is the principle.”⁶

Zhiyi took *ti* and *zong* as separate category when he expounded the *Fahua jing*. There were chapters titled as “Dier xian ti” (Section two as Indicating Ti) in vol. 8 and “Disan ming zong” (Section Three as Indicating Zong) in vol. 9 of his *Fahua xuanyi*. Zhiyi thought that *zong* and *ti* had the relation of means and aim. He disagreed with all previous views and formulated a scheme of *benmen* (essential teaching) and *jimen* (theoretical teaching) which was to demonstrate the causation as the final principle in the *Fahua jing*.⁷

There was a chapter of Peaceful Practices which made a demarcation. All chapters before it were put into *jimen*, and the chapters after it fell into *benmen*. In his opinion, the former part of the text were only an expedient means to show the relativity of the *sancheng* (three vehicles) and usher the real teaching as the ultimate way to emancipation. Whereas the latter part of the text served for further laying out Sakyamuni Buddha’s preaching as phenomenon, and the Buddha’s fundamental goal to show the real fruit that meant the essential purpose of Buddhism.

According to the foregoing facts, Chinese scholars think that there are two fundamental statements: one is that every sentient being is a potential Buddha, that is the only vehicle taught by the Buddha; the other is the idea that the Shakyamuni Buddha whose being is *jiuyuan chenshi* (everlasting and ultimately real) possesses the double body as *dharmakāya* and *sambhogakāya*, and the Shakamuni Buddha in history is only one of the numberless incarnations of the Buddha. All their exegeses to the Saddhamapūṇḍarīkasūtra focuses on the two points.

Various Forms of the Fahua (Dharma Lotus) Worship

Concerning with the *Fahua* worship, there are many Buddhists’ works that record various miracles about the text’s worshiping from the Liang to Tang and Song Dynasties, such as the *Gaoseng zhuang* (*Biographies of Eminent Monks*), the *Ji shengzhou sangbao gan tong lu* (*Collected Records of Miracles Resulting from Worshiping Three-Jewels in China*) by Daoxuan, the *Fayan zhulin* (*Pearl Trees in the Buddhist Garden*) by

Daoshi, the *Hongzang fahua* (*Records of Stories Praising the Dharma Lotus Scripture*) by Huixiang, *Fahua zhuanji* (*Records of Stories about the Dharma Lotus Scripture*) by Sengxiang in the Tang Dynasty as well as the *Taiping guangji* (*Universally Recordings Collected in the Taiping Years*) by Lifang in the Song Dynasty. Chinese people in the medieval ages deeply believed that any of these activities like explaining, reciting, copying and practicing the *fahua sangmei* (meditation techniques of the *Fahua jing*) would brought about indescribable merits so it was very popular for worshipers to devoted themselves to erect pagodas and images of figures in the *Fahua jing*, worship the Guanyin Bodhisattva, even to burn part of their bodies and commit suicide by burning themselves as sacrifice to the Buddha. The worshipers of Dharma Lotus Scripture covered all layers of the ancient society from the emperors and his counsels around in the court to common monks and nuns and the working people. They cherished the different motives and wishes in their practice. Some wanted to attain the final Enlightenment and *moksha* (liberation), others wanted to transmigrate into a well-being status next life, and most of them expected to live in the pure land (Buddhist paradise) after life.

The *Fahua jing* has had an impact upon Chinese Buddhist schools to different extent respectively. Among them, the Tiantai School put it before any other Buddhist scripture, and some basic concepts like *yifo cheng* (one vehicle of the Buddha), *shi fajie* (ten dharmadātu) and *shi rushi* (ten factors) has become the organic part of the school's ideological frame.

CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATION OF THE DHARMA LOTUS SUTRA AND ITS ROLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In present days scientific technology has developed to an unbelievable degree and the economic and cultural exchanges between all countries are going to a deeper and wider directions. As people have experienced more and more new things, they become deeply concerned with their inner world and their spiritual needs. If Buddhism wants to keep its energetic viability, it must come along with the speed of the times, and provides consistently the society it depends on with lofty values in the need of its followers. In this case, the essential thing is how to re-interpret the Buddhist teachings to meet the requirements of modernity as a world trend. In the past of more than 2,000 years, Buddhism survived the vicissitudes by adopting itself to Chinese circumstances of culture and politics, and eventually accomplished its sinicization. That process

gives us some insight in our reinterpreting activity in modern times.

As for the adaptation of the *Fahua jing* to today's world, I think that there are, at least, two principles which we should follow: One is the loyalty to the original meanings of the text, which we might call as "heart of the Buddha"; The other is to popularize the reinterpretation in order to make it understandable and acceptable to people in common. Thus, we should make a serious consideration of the followings:

Bringing New Sense to the Conception of Equality the Scripture

In the chapter of Expedient Means of the *Fahua jing*, the stress upon the universal Buddhahood for all beings is repeated here and there. It upholds that *śrāvaka*, *pratyeka* and *bodhisattva*, and even the eight-parts consisting of *devas* and *nagas* have all equal chance to become Buddhas. The chapter says: "No matter *śrāvakas* or *bodhisattvas*, they are sure to actualize their Buddhahood if only they hear my preaching, even a *shloka* (verse). In the Buddha's land of 10 directions, only one vehicle is real, not two, not three." Although there is no definite idea of Buddhahood, in the scripture there is a "Buddha's knowledge" which means the later developed conception of Buddha nature (Buddhahood). The original meaning of *fo* (Buddha) was Enlightenment, and the *chengfo* (becoming Buddha) referred to the final knowledge of the truth of life and society. In this sense, to become a Buddha never means that an Enlightened one can ignore the common people. Conversely, the transition in spirit assigns a new task to him to be ready to help any suffering beings until they gain the eventual Enlightening. In today's situation, to make people acquire Buddha's knowledge should mean that let them have equal chance and right to take education, to develop themselves, and to be respected in their life. Becoming-a-Buddha only means self-actualization of personality.

In the 21st century, the whole mankind faces universally the task of seeking peace and development. In the view of the *Fahua jing*, it is very natural that all peoples and races are equal when they realize their economic and cultural ideals in this world. By flexible interpretation, the *Fahua jing* should offer its own active contribution to building of new reasonable economic frame and political order in the world.

The Zhufa Shixiang and Man-and-Nature Merging into Whole

The chapter of Expedient Means in the *Fahua jing*, the *zhufa shixiang* (true entity of all phenomena) is explained as ten factors manifested through the phenomena: form, nature, substance, power, action, cause, condition, effect, compensation, and ultimacy. In a word, the conception

is a comprehensive one that covering all facets and characters any beings that is named as *shijie* (Ten Worlds) including destinies as hell, preta (hungry ghost), beast, asura, man, heaven, śrāvaka, pratyeka, bodhisattva and Buddha. All phenomena in existence are representative of the *zhufa shixiang*. In its essence, world can be reduced into voidness and nothingness, and on this fundament the real appearance is equal to suchness, *dharmatā* (dharma nature), and eventual emptiness. Logically speaking, by that universal character of emptiness and voidness, all things and beings are inter-penetrative and interchangeable. It is only on the conception that logically based the *ynian sanqian* (three thousand realms in a single moment of mind) and *shijie hujie* (mutual possession of the Ten Worlds) that the Tiantai School claims.

At the last analysis, the idea that all existences converge into a whole is very similar to the traditional Chinese *tianren heyi* (identification between nature and mankind). From this knowledge, people will draw a conclusion that nature and human society are inter-dependent and mutually compensatory. Today when the environments which people live in are rapidly deteriorated as the development of industrialization, mankind is repeatedly warned: it will terribly punished if the plundering exploitation of the nature can not be stopped.

*Renovation of Concepts of Liudu (Six-Parāmita)
and Cibei (Mercy and Compassion) to Enrich Social Values*

As a Mahāyāna text, the *Fahua jing* insists *liudu* as the fundamental actions a would-be bodhisattva should conduct. The text says that if one can follow its teachings “as well as practice gift-giving, persisting precepts, fostering humility and keeping efforts, meditation and wisdom, then he will gain the endless and unaccountable merits.” In modern society, we should say that gift-giving means not only material donation, but also help develop cultural and educational institutions as well as popularize the scientific and technical knowledge.

Mercy and compassion is the highest morals that is carried forward exhaustedly in the *Fahua jing*. Its chapters of the Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound and Pumen play up the all-saving spirit of Guanyin Bodhisattva. Mercy means providing joyfulness and pleasure to others, and compassion relieving others from the sufferings. In present society the conception of mercy and compassion can be substituted by humanism. Therefore it should be given the priority to and not only limited within humanistic activities in making donations when some natural disasters take place but also support to the struggles for human rights and denouncing any abuse of human rights.

In the 21st century, the Northern Buddhism, especially the Tiantai School and other sects that hold the Dharma Lotus as superior one will continue to exploit its sublime teachings and push forward their own doctrines. It is expectable that in the future Buddhism imbued with essence of the Dharma Lotus Sutra will surely go forward with a new unprecedented age.

Notes

¹ cf. *Fahua jing*, vols. 3 and 4

² cf. *Fahua jing*, vol. 4

³ cf. *Fahua wenju*, vol. 9 and the *Fahua yisu*, vol. 10

⁴ cf. *Fahua jing*, vol. 5

⁵ cf. *Fahua jing*, vol. 7

⁶ cf. *Taisho shinshu daizokyo*, vol. 34., Tokyo: Society for the Publication of the Taisho Tripitaka, 1926, pp 374–381

⁷ cf. *Taisho shinshu daizokyo*, vol. 33., Tokyo: Society for the Publication of the Taisho Tripitaka, 1926, p 795