

been inspired by the great thoughts that he has included in this volume.

The book consists of twenty chapters each with an introduction. Quotations deal with twenty subjects, such as "Nature of the Mind", "Life is Valuable", "Speech must be Guided", "How to act Wisely" "How to lead a Married and Family Life." One can start reading the book with whatever subject one is interested in. Each quotation is given a sub-heading and is indexed for easy reference. The introduction at the beginning of each chapter consists of a general discussion highlighting the compiler's own views on the subject. In a way, the compiler plays the role of an experienced steward, serving dishes cooked by different chefs. He has his own dishes. Wherever source of a quotation is not given, the author is the compiler himself.

As stated in the foreword, the purpose of compiling the book is to provide an insight into human life and thereby make one's life more meaningful: "*The insights to understand life's imponderables cannot be obtained at one attempt. One has to constantly strive to reach that understanding by returning to the problem over and over again until wisdom arises. Like food we need it constantly to sustain ourselves.*". It is in that sense that this volume becomes 'food for the thinking mind'. It caters to the spiritual hunger of the reader.

The book is not aimed at a particular group of readers or religious followers. A single saying can be so meaningful and enlightening that it may change the whole process of thinking of an individual. As an entry from of the Buddha emphasizes,

"Though a thousand be the verses,
With words of no avail,
Better is a single line of verse,
Having heard which, one is pacified".
Dhammapada; VIII. 2.

Here is a sample of the sayings included in this volume:

"The journey of a thousand miles starts with one step"—Confucius, (p.212)

"Marriage is a give and take affair. The husband gives his wife everything he makes and she takes it" —Henry Morgan, (p.312)

"An ounce of practice is worth more than a ton of theory"—E.F. Schumacher, (p.197)

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you.
Weep and you weep alone"—
Shakespeare (p.207)

Aparekke Punyasiri

The Biographical Scripture of King Asoka

BDK English Tripitaka 76-11

Translated by Li Rongxi

Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, Berkeley, California, USA 1993

It was in 1982 that Yehan Numata the founder of the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism) decided to begin the monumental task of translating completely the Taisho Edition of the Chinese Buddhist Canon into English. As it would be impossible to achieve such a project within the foreseeable future, a phased program has been adopted. Accordingly a hundred volumes composing one hundred and thirty nine scriptures have been taken up as the First Series and scheduled to be published within the twentieth century. The importance of this project cannot be over-emphasized. The absence of readily available translations of the Chinese Buddhist Canon has remained an obstacle not only for an academic study of the major schools of Buddhism but also for the full utilization of the East Asian sources for a better understanding of the inspiring message of Buddhism. The Translation Committee emphasizes that the final object of this project is not academic fulfillment but the transmission of the teaching of the Buddha to the whole world in order to create harmony and peace among mankind. Yet it is abundantly clear that these translations in standard lucid English in neatly and handsomely produced volumes are bound to serve both purposes.

The volume under review is called the biographical *scripture* of king Asoka.

Taisho edition has two separate versions of Asoka's biography: A-yu-wang-zhuan (Asokāvadāna –Taisho No. 2042) and A-yu-wang-jing (Asokarājasutra –Taisho No. 2043). It is the latter that is translated in this volume and its title –jing =sutra is apparently the reason for it to be called a scripture. But as most *sūtras* do, it does not begin with the traditional statement "Thus was it heard." The translator establishes its date on internal evidence as "no earlier than 184BCE."

One may examine a few statements in the "Translator's Introduction" by Li Ronxi. He says that little is known of the original Sanskrit text of this Sūtra. That would be true only with regard to the detailed account of Upagupta's life and career which begins in Chapter VI and ends in Chapter VIII (pp. 91-184). As regards the pages 1 to 90, the text is derived from four chapters of *Divyāvadāna* which, though not included in sequence, are popularly taken together as a single work under the title "Asokāvadāna." (e. g. *The Asokavadāna Sanskrit Text compared with Chinese versions* by Sujitkumar Mukhopadhyaya, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 1963, and its translation into English by John S. Strong as *The Legend of King Asoka: A Study and Translation of the Asokavadāna*, Princeton University Press, Princeton NJ, 1983)

He also states that "in spite of the legendary style of presentation, this biographical work gives accounts of the major events in the life of King Asoka that are verifiable through comparative studies of reliable written records and archaeological findings." I have done this comparative study for my *Asoka the Righteous: A Definitive Biography* (Central Cultural Fund, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Colombo, Sri Lanka, 1993) and come to an altogether different conclusion with regard to the Avadāna literature in Sanskrit, Chinese and Tibetan. The association of Upagupta with Asoka is a moot question for Upagupta, who succeeded Sanakavasin as patriarch, was at least a hundred years before Asoka the Maurya emperor. It is becoming increasingly clear that there were two Asoka's connected with the history of Buddhism: (i) Kalasoka who was a contemporary of Sanakavasin and Yasas; Both these monks are associated with

the Second Buddhist Council whose patron was Kalasoka. All of them were around a hundred years after the Buddha. (ii) Asoka the Maurya emperor who ascended the throne 218 years after the Buddha and was, therefore, removed from Upagupta by at least a hundred years. That is why neither Asokan inscriptions nor other archaeological evidence associates Upagupta with Asoka the Maurya emperor. The monk, who played a corresponding role in this emperor's spiritual activities is, according to Pali sources, is Moggaligutta-tissa. In his case, the stupa at Sonari has yielded a relic casket clearly marked with his name.

Li Ronxi further states that Dhitika is unknown to Southern Buddhism. In reality both Upagupta and Dhitika are unknown to Southern Buddhism. But Li Ronxi's conclusion that the book under review is a book with a Mahayanist tendency is indeed correct.

In spite of my comments on Li Ronxi's introductory comments, the present work has to be rated as a significant contribution to our knowledge of the literary treasures of the Taisho Edition of the Chinese Tripitaka. Much needed comparative studies between the scriptures of Northern and Southern Buddhism has been long delayed due to lack of translations of the bulk of the former. BDK English Tripitaka is a timely remedial measure. The translation is in lucid readable English and the presentation is excellent.

The Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research deserves to be congratulated on a significant achievement. Further publications, as planned by it, are eagerly awaited.

Ananda W. P. Guruge

Wisdom of Buddha

A translation of the Samdhinirmocana Sutra by John Powers

One of the few things that makes me sad about the Dharma is the difficulty of making it accessible to large numbers of people. The