

Translation Strategies in Dharmarakṣa's Version of the *Lotus Sutra*,
with Special Reference to Chapter 3 ("Parable")

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Thanks to Professor Karashima's 辛嶋靜志 groundbreaking research in Dharmarakṣa's 竺法護 translation of the *Lotus Sutra*, especially his *A Glossary of Dharmarakṣa's Translation of the Lotus Sutra* (1998), it has become much easier to study this text focusing on its inner coherency and style.

This early translation has had a bad reputation ever since it was superseded by Kumārajīva's 鳩摩羅什 masterpiece in the early 5th century. In particular, within the religious circles centred on the *Lotus Sutra*, Dharmarakṣa's version has been repeatedly charged with being obscure and almost unintelligible. It is indeed significant that it left very few traces in the exegetical tradition, although even a very superficial comparison shows how abundantly, and discerningly, Kumārajīva borrowed from Dharmarakṣa's vocabulary.

Lately, I have endeavoured to make a systematic French translation of chapter 3 ("Parable"; this, of course, being the received title, while Dharmarakṣa's rendering could be more accurately translated as "Convenience"), concentrating precisely on the readability of the text from the point of view of the Chinese language. I will present here some of my provisional conclusions.

It seems that, apart from problems of manuscript or oral transmission of the Sanskrit text, Dharmarakṣa's final redaction resulted from a tension between a rather intuitive knowledge of the original language, a concern for a continuously readable Chinese text, and the need to follow his *a priori*, perhaps oral, knowledge of the content of the original against his immediate, and often erroneous, understanding of it. More often than not, a surprising outcome is that Dharmarakṣa's version, apart from its unreliability as a translation, can make for interesting reading and would deserve a fuller translation.

I will try to assess these points with concrete examples taken from the text.