

# Book Review

## *THE SURANGAMA SUTRA*

Translated by Charles Luk (*LuK'uan Yu*) (Rider, 45s.)

Review by J. C. Cooper

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To quote Charles Luk's own words, his only ambition is "to present as many Chinese Buddhist texts as possible, so that Buddhism can be preserved at least in the West, should it be fated to disappear in the East as it seems to be." How wise is this decision and how valuable such a work is only too evident today, with China not only "bitten by the mad dog" herself, but, like a sufferer from rabies, ready to infect others as well. It is apparently not sufficient to stamp out the ancient traditions of Chinese religion and scholarship, but the disease must be carried to the defenceless and innocent Tibet in an attempt to destroy a nation and, with it, its Buddhist tradition. Thus the West must be doubly grateful to Charles Luk, now writing in Hongkong, for placing in its hands the possibility of helping to preserve some of the wisdom of the East.

Of the *Sūrangama Sūtra* he writes: "This important sermon contains the essence of the Buddha's teaching and, as foretold by Him, will be the first sutra to disappear in the Dharma ending age." It is presented in the characteristic style of question-and-answer which evokes the sermons of the Buddha, the Tathagata. The obtuseness of the questioning disciple induces a step-by-step instruction from the World Honoured One, who tells Ananda that "in truth wise people should be awakened by examples and analogies," and assures him that "there is a samādhi called the all-embracing Supreme *Sūrangama*, a gateway through which all Buddhas had reached the profound Majestic Path."

It is in this *Sūtra* that we find the well-known but significant simile that, while still clinging to the mind to listen to the Dharma, which is also causal, man fails to realise the Dharma-nature and is "like a man pointing a finger at the moon to show it to others who should follow the direction of the finger to look at the moon. If they look at the finger and mistake it for the moon, they lose sight of both the moon and the finger."

Of this *Sūtra* it is said that "The *Sūrangama Samādhi* is pure and cannot be sullied, like the lotus flower. It is indestructible like the royal diamond and can destroy the darkness of ignorance. It looks into all phenomena and realises their illusory and transient nature." The *Sutra* ends with the "Warning to Practisers" and enumerates the ten states of mind affected by the five aggregates of form (*rūpa*), receptiveness (*vedana*), conception (*sañña*), discrimination (*samskāra*), and consciousness (*viññāna*) which originate in the mind consciousness and should be eliminated, beginning with form (matter). In principle they vanish the moment one is awakened, in practice they are wiped out gradually, due to the force of habit. "You should awaken to the source of false thinking and open your mind, and then teach practisers in the Dharma ending age so that they know its falsehood and reject it, become aware of the existence of Nirvana, and so stop hankering after the three worlds."