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A personal view of the Chinese translation by Kumārajīva of the Lotus Sūtra

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While the Chinese translation of the Lotus Sūtra by Kumārajīva is a sūtra rated highly in each of its translations, it is not entirely without a problem or two needing consideration. Here I intend to pick up just one of these points and discuss it.

It concerns the words used to translate the Sanskrit words *ākāśa* and *āntarikṣa*. *ākāśa* is translated as 「虚空」, (space), meaning a stretch enveloping the heavens, the earth and the whole universe, but *āntarikṣa* is translated as 「空中」 (sky), meaning the blue sky or the cloudy sky above us and referring directly to that sky. However, for the most part, Kumārajīva translates both as 「虚空」, space. I would like to discuss why this is so, and why it raises problems.

For example, in the eleventh chapter, when the Stūpa of Treasures rises from the earth to float in the sky, although in the Sanskrit the word *āntarikṣa* is used, Kumārajīva after once translating it as 「空中」 (sky) later translated it as 「虚空」 (space). And although in the fourteenth (or fifteenth) chapter, both the place where the Bodhisattvas from Underground lived and the place where they rose forth from the ground for their meeting with Śākyamuni Buddha are referred to in the Sanskrit using the word *ākāśa*, these are translated as 「虚空」 as well, and no variation is visible between the two words.

This also means that just looking at Kumārajīva's rendering of the Lotus Sūtra superficially, no change can be seen reflecting the development from the eleventh chapter to the fourteenth (or fifteenth) and the fifteenth (or sixteenth). Because of this, it has been taught that the lectures at Mt. Gṛdhrakūṭa begin with the eleventh chapter. However, one cannot fail to notice that in the Sanskrit version of the Lotus Sūtra, the words *āntarikṣa* and *ākāśa* are interchanged, and in the Chinese translation by Dharmarakṣa *āntarikṣa* is translated as 「空中」 (sky) and the *ākāśa* concerned with

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the Bodhisattvas from Underground as 「撰護土界」 (the area protecting the earth), using different translation for the two words.

With the Sanskrit version of the Lotus Sūtra and the Chinese translation by Dharmarakṣa as is, there seems to be a need to reconsider this question, as the appearance of the Bodhisattvas from Underground in the fourteenth (or fifteenth) chapter is a key point in the transition of the Lotus Sūtra to the perfect enlightenment, the connecting point from the present to the future. If the address of the Bodhisattvas from Underground is the same as the address of Prabhūtaratna, development into the future becomes impossible.

The need to indicate these points is the gist of this thesis.