

Samdhābhāṣya Depicted in the Lotus Sutra

Tsugunari Kubo

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha argues that buddhas always use words “appropriate for his listeners,” and the sutra shows this attitude with the use of the word *saṃdhābhāṣya*.

In this sutra, *saṃdhābhāṣya* must be understood as “purposeful wording,” although different understandings of the word became common. Nevertheless, traditional Chinese translations show us the same comprehension, and some scholars also reached the same conclusion.

Dictionaries do not guide us to an appropriate comprehension of the word. Monier Williams, for example, says in his dictionary that the word denotes “allusive speech,” including *bhāṣita* and *vacana*, showing “*SaddhP.*” at the end of his discussion in the sections of *saṃ-dhā*. Under the heading of *saṃdhā* in his BHS dictionary, Franklin Edgerton writes: “(special, cryptic,) esoteric meaning, the ‘real’ meaning of a Buddhist text or doctrine opp. to its prima facie or superficial meaning; perh. always in comp. with a word for speech, words, or the like.” The influence of the reading of *saṃdhābhāṣya* (or of *saṃdhyā-bhāṣita*) in the *Vajrayāna*, also has been discussed.

In the field of Japanese research, Wogihara’s dictionary (漢訳対照梵和大辞典) shows the Chinese translation, 隨宜[所]説 (“the appropriate teaching according to the situation”) in ‘*Saddh-p*’ under the headings of *saṃdhā-bhāṣya*, although in the case of °-*bhāṣita* the dictionary says, “a word spoken vaguely, so as to have two meanings; a word spoken with a sense of mystery.” Thus, the pilots of the dictionaries fly us in indistinct directions.

Nevertheless, *saṃdhābhāṣya* (*saṃdhābhāṣita*, *saṃdhāvacana*) is one of the key words in the Lotus Sutra. It shows the sutra’s recognition or attitude regarding the fundamental nature of what the Buddha says, including the nature of his comments that appear in the sutra. Kumārajīva successfully created a translation by meaning, as 隨宜所説 (隨宜説法) (“the comment which is appropriately [隨宜] spoken”). However, Chinese and Japanese Buddhists had little familiarity with the word, as compared to *upāya-kauśalya* (方便; “skillful means”), which is fundamentally related to its concept. Moreover, in more modern academic surveys, some accomplished scholars misread its meaning within linguistic examinations of the Sanskrit word and its Tibetan translation. In Japan there are also discussions about the use of *saṃdhā* (“intention”) with regard to the concepts of the three *yānas* and the single Buddha *yāna*. In the end, even through dictionaries, translations, and scholarly discussions, readers do not grasp the importance of the word in the Lotus Sutra relative to the Buddha’s (i.e., the sutra’s) attitude toward communication.

The use of the word *saṃdhābhāṣya* in the Lotus Sutra will be re-examined in this paper.