



## Synopsis

This is the Elucidation of the Intention Sutra, or the Sutra Unravelling the Thought (of the Buddha).

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Buddhist scholars everywhere should rejoice. This is the first full translation of the Samdhinirmocana Sutra, an important exposition on the nature of existence attributed to the Buddha. This sutra is one of the primary texts of Yogacara, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Powers has wisely reproduced the Tibetan text from which he translates on the facing page to aid scholars. Sutras, like all religious tracts, are difficult to read, especially for those unfamiliar with the theological foundation of this form of Buddhism. Luckily for the scholar, the translator has heavily footnoted the more arcane passages and includes a useful bibliography. After reading the text, one wishes that a more comprehensive introduction of Yogacara was included with the translation, but this is a minor criticism of an important addition to the study of Buddhism. Recommended for theological and academic libraries. Glenn Masuchika, Chaminade Univ. Lib., Honolulu Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc.

John Powers is professor of Asian Studies at Australian National University. He is the author of 16 books and more than 50 academic articles.

If you are a Mahayana Buddhist who is practicing yoga in the form of body postures, breath control, or sitting in meditation to deepen your tranquility of mind and clarify your insight into Wisdom - you are on a path that leads to this foundational Yogacara (Master of Yoga) text, which has been translated three times - once by Thomas Cleary as [a course in] Buddhist Yoga and John Powers as The Wisdom of the Buddha, and finally by Keenan in The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning. The Cleary text is aimed at being very simple and straightforward, an effort to make it easy to assimilate text. The Power's book is lovely having facing pages of Tibetan and English text and a full set of notes. In a review of John Powers book that you can find on the Internet by Tom Graham you can get the background picture of just how frustrating it is that a text this important as a background to both the Yogacara School and the view of the Tantras is almost completely overlooked by American Buddhists. Both the Powers and the newest, excellent, translation by Keenan offer a both a crystal clarity of translation and insightful footnotes that make for a compact commentary on the text all by themselves. Key to Coordinating the available english translations:

I. The Samdhinirmochana Sutra as translated from The Tibetan of the sDe-dge bKa'-`gur:1.) Powers, John. Wisdom of Buddha: The Samdhinirmochana Sutra. Dharma Publishing, 1995 II. The Samdhinirmochana Sutra as translated from The Chinese of Hsuan-tsang (Taisho Vol. 16, Number 676):2a.) Cleary, Thomas. Buddhist Yoga: A Comprehensive Course. 1st ed. Shambhala, 1995. the same text republished in 2b.) Cleary, Classics of Buddhism and Zen, Shambhalla, 20023.) Keenan, John P.. The Scripture on the Explication of Underlying Meaning. Numata Center for Buddhist Translation & Research, 2000.-----A Student's Guide to Using their version to Study the Samdhinirmochana Sutra Keenan Chapter One Page 7 Cleary Chapter One Page 1 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 753]"Introduction"[Powers Chapter One] Gambhirarrhasamdhinirmocana p.5 Keenan Chapter One Page 11 Cleary Chapter Two Page 5 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 755]"Characteristics of Ultimate Truth"[Powers Chapter Two] Dahrmodgata p. 25 [Powers Chapter Three] Suvisuddhamati p.35 [Powers Chapter Four] Subhuti p. 53 The first four chapters in Powers version focus on a discussion of the ultimate truth (paramartha).-----Keenan Chapter Three Page 27 Cleary Chapter Three Page 19 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 766]"Characteristics of Mind, Intellect, and Consciousness"[Powers Chapter Five] Visalamati p.69 Keenan Chapter Four Page 31 Cleary Chapter Four p. 23 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 769]"Characteristics of All Phenomena"[Powers Chapter Six] Gunakara p.82 The fifth and sixth chapters discuss the concept of alayavijÃfÃ ana or "storehouse consciousness" and the three characteristics of phenomena (trilak'a'a), which refer to the incomplete and absolute truth of various phenomena.-----Keenan Chapter Five Page 35 Cleary Chapter Five Page 27 [ Classics Vol. 5 -

p. 772]"Essencelessness"[Powers Chapter Seven] Paramarthasamudgata p.95The seventh chapter is mainly concerned with outlining principles of Buddhist HERMENEUTICS-----Keenan Chapter Six Page 51Cleary Chapter Six Page 43 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 784]"Analyzing Yoga"[Powers Chapter Eight] Maitreya p. 151The eighth chapter focuses on MEDITATION theory, (Yoga) and practice.-----Keenan Chapter Seven Page 51Cleary Chapter Seven Page 69 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 805][Chapter Nine] Avalokite'vara p. 221"The Transcendent Way of the Sages"The ninth chapter describes the Bodhisattva PATH (Marga).-----Keenan Chapter Eight Page 99Cleary Chapter Eight - Page 91 [ Classics Vol. 5 - p. 822]"Deeds of the Enlightened "Powers [Chapter Ten] Mañju'ra page 275The final chapter is concerned with the characteristics of Buddhahood, the culmination of the practices the text describes.-----

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beautiful book

product as specified. a difficult read. some interesting points.

Did not know what to expect and when I received it I was extremely impressed. I would recommend it to all seekers of knowledge.

The Samdhinirmocana is surely one of the most important Mahayana Buddhist texts. Being possibly the first and most influential of the "third turning" texts of the Yogacara school, it ushers in new concepts like the three natures and the alayavijñāna which became key concepts of later thinkers like Asanga and Vasubandhu. For a modern English speaking Buddhist who wants to get an understanding of the Mahayana, no other sutra save the Prajāparāmitā is as important as the Samdhinirmocana. Sadly, it is not as widely read or known. There are currently 3 English translations of this work, Powers (1995), Keenan (2000) and Cleary (1995). The Cleary is out of print as far as I know, as well as possibly not complete. The main choices are really between the Powers and Keenan. The Powers is translated from the Tibetan, Keenan from the Chinese. Besides the source difference, my reading of the texts noticed that the Powers seems a less detailed translation than the Keenan. Tom Tillemans in his review of Powers - "On a Recent Translation of the Samdhinirmocanasutra" notes this as well. Tillemans does not mince words: "the translation is often quite

unreliable, having errors which seriously obscure the basic sense of the sutra. Tillemans examines various passages which are useful in giving a sense of the difference in translations. Chapter I (Powers p. 12-13f.) "Son of good lineage, 'uncompounded' is also included within the conventional. Even if something were expressed that is not included within the compounded or uncompounded it would be just the same as this. It would be just like this. An expression is also not without thingness. What is a thing? It is that to which the Aryas completely and perfectly awakened without explanation, through their exalted wisdom and exalted vision. Because they have completely and perfectly realized that very reality which is inexpressible, they designate the name 'compounded'...." It is that to which the Aryas completely and perfectly awakened without explanation, through their exalted wisdom and exalted vision. Because they have completely and perfectly realized that very reality which is inexpressible, they designate the name 'compounded'. Tillemans notes that Powers missed the fact that there is an actual objection here that can best be rendered as "But words must have objects, so what is the object here?" Powers misses this. Tillemans also notes: Powers, in effect, should have read a dative for the Tibetan . . . de nyid mngon par rdzogs par rtogs par bya bdi phyir, i. e., "in order that [others] might perfectly understand reality," rather than an ablative "because they [i. e. the Aryas] understand...." Now let us see how Keenan (Keenan, p. 12) renders this same passage, translating from the Chinese: "Good son, the term 'unconditioned' is also a word provisionally invented by the First Teacher. Now, if the First Teacher provisionally invented this word, then it is a verbal expression apprehended by imagination. And, if it is a verbal expression apprehended by imagination, then, in the final analysis, such an imagined description does not validate a real thing. Therefore, the unconditioned does not exist. Good son, the term 'conditioned' is also invented from language [and it validates nothing real]. "Besides 'the unconditioned' and 'the conditioned,' any other expression that exists in language is the same. But [some may object], is it not true that there are no expressions without some [corresponding] reality? What then is that reality here? I would reply that it is that reality apart from language and realized in the perfect awakening of the saints through their wisdom and insight apart from all names and words. It is because they desire to lead others to realize perfect awakening that they establish [such expressions] as 'the unconditioned' as verbal descriptions." Here is the Cleary (p.5) as well: "That does not mean, however, that there is nothing being discussed. What is that thing? Sages, with their knowledge and vision, detach from names and words, and therefore actualize enlightenment. Then, because they wish to make others aware of this nature that is beyond words, they temporarily set up names and characteristics and call something created. As we can see Keenan is

able to get the two points that Tillemans objects to in Powers's translation correct here. Cleary is a bit closer, but Keenan is still the clearest and most precise here. The next passage Tillemans discusses in his review of Powers is in Chapter 5, page 71 of Powers: "Viśāmatī, consciousness is also called the 'appropriating consciousness' because it holds and appropriates the body in that way. It is called the 'basis-consciousness' because there is the same establishment and abiding within those bodies. Thus they are wholly connected and thoroughly connected. It is called 'mind' because it collects and accumulates forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects. Tillemans writes: this passage has been discussed by Lambert Schmithausen in his *Alayavijñāna: On the Origin and Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogacara Philosophy* (Tokyo, 1987), who on his p. 22 translates as follows: "[The mind-containing all-seeds] is also called 'alayavijñāna' because it sticks to and dissolves into or hides in the body, in the sense of sharing its destiny (i. e. becoming closely united with it)." Powers regrettably missed all this. If we look at Powers's understanding of the syntax of the passage, it should be clear that breaking the sentence at grub pa dang bde ba gcig pdi don gyis, not translating the don gyis = arthena and then starting a new sentence with 'Thus . . .' is quite unacceptable: making two arguments here, where there is only one etymological explanation, deforms the passage badly. In fact, SNS passage asserts that the consciousness in question can be called alayavijñāna because it clings to and hides in the body in the sense of sharing the body's same yogakṣema ("fate," "welfare," "destiny"). Schmithausen devotes a considerable part of his monograph to the question of just what was this early or even initial conception of the alayavijñāna "sticking to" and "being concealed in" the body. Now let's look at Keenan's rendering of the passage (Keenan, p. 28): "Viśāmatī, this consciousness is also termed the appropriating consciousness, because it is taken up together with the body. It is also termed the receptacle consciousness, because this consciousness joins itself to and lies hidden [in that body] in a common security and risk. It is also termed mind, because this consciousness mines and accumulates material forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and touches. And Cleary (p. 19-20) for completeness: "This consciousness is also called clinging consciousness, because this consciousness follows and clings in the body. It is also called repository consciousness, because this consciousness receives and stores in the body, indifferent to good or bad." Clearly, Keenan is once again closer to the meaning as outlined by Tillemans and Schmithausen here. It also makes much more sense on the face as a cold reading than the Powers, for it is not easy to see what "there is the same establishment and abiding

within those bodies. It could mean without further commentary but this consciousness joins itself to and lies hidden [in that body]. It is much easier to understand what is meant. So Keenan is clearly the better choice here as I hope I have shown. Cleary is not as off as Powers in these key passages, but he is not as correct as Keenan either. Now as Tillemans notes "We should stress that much of the text of the SNS is more or less correctly rendered into readable English by Powers and that the Anglophone reader will thus have access to the SNS (although he should exercise caution and healthy skepticism)." So this is not to be taken as an absolute trashing of all of Powers translation, however, it is quite obvious that it is not without its problems, and that a preference for the Keenan seems the best option here, at least until a better translation comes along.

This book provides the "definitive meaning of the Teachings". This means that it is really for advanced scholars. It would be better avoided in the case of people with strong dogmatic tendencies (even Buddhists) because wrong interpreting is easy with this difficult text...The richness and beauty of the meaning of the text requires some habit with Buddhist teachings. In intent, it is rather for scholars than poets...so don't expect verses...beauty is in the meaning, not the writing style...The content is structured as each chapter being the question of a particular Bodhisattva and the answer from the Bhagavan. Each question being asked for allowing the Bhagavan to explain its "doctrine" and by the same way to allow Bodhisattvas to attain perfect enlightenment. This first English translation of the Samdhinirmocana Sutra is invaluable, thanks John ! I hope there will be more...

Not only is the text of this volume inspiring, it is beautifully designed, with Tibetan text on the left side and the English translation facing. Wisdom of Buddha is a pleasure to hold and to read.

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