

Book Reviews and Reflections

Reflections from *HIGAN-COMPASSIONATE VOW*, by Shinobu Matsuura

The following segment is taken from a book entitled Higan-Compassionate Vow, written by the late Mrs. Shinobu Matsuura. In this work published as a private remembrance by her family, Mrs. Matsuura, the wife of pioneer Shin Buddhist minister, the Rev. Issei Matsuura, chronicles her life story as a "bomori" (priest's wife) in serving the Buddha-Dharma in America for some 66 years.

Her recollections are representative of the struggles, sacrifices and determination which the early day Japanese immigrants to America had in their visions for their future generations, but even more so her memoirs record the legacy of planting the seeds of the Buddha-Dharma in the United States of America.

This chapter reveals Mrs. Matsuura's compassion in operating the Guadalupe Children's Home during their assignment at the Guadalupe Buddhist Church. It is a unique event in history and exemplifies the role and responsibility of the Buddhist temple within the Japanese-American community.

THE CHILDREN'S HOME

To regress . . . around the time I came to America in 1918, it was a period of pioneer immigration. Streams of picture brides were arriving, families were getting started and things were gradually settling down. However, there were a number of tragic dramas when, with glamorous hopes, the brides met their respective husbands. There was often disappointment and despair as they saw the course and desolate lives which were now theirs.

Meanwhile, children were born, and when they reached five or six years of age, they were to register in public schools, a difficult commute from the isolated camps.

Parents favored the traditional upbringing and camp life amongst mixed nationalities in primitive conditions made such cultural education essentially impossible. Besides, the parents were too overworked to be looking after their children properly. Most parents relied on their families in Japan to take the children. This was a difficult arrangement, for, by sea (there were no airlines then), it took a good twenty days of rough sailing to reach Japan. And it was completely devastating for some, when parents and children lived separated from one another. Changes in climate, habit and food caused illness, and even death for a number of children. Indeed, it was a critical and tragic situation.

My husband could not bear to see the families broken up. He wanted to care for the children at the temple, teach them the Japanese language while they attended public school, and he wanted to raise them in an atmosphere centered around the Buddha. On holidays, the children would return to the parents for family upbringing.

The parents were in such a dilemma that this arrangement was happily welcomed. So, in the spring of 1919, the Home was opened. We had no previous experience and felt a bit insecure, but began with the *teragoya* (temple classes in Japan) as a model.

The first to come was Mr. Umekichi Tanaka, who lost his wife in the infamous flu epidemic. He brought his two daughters, Toshiko and Akiko. Hastily, the old house was renovated, and even before completion, more children came. Within one month, we were surrounded by many children.

The morning and evening religious services, training in table manners at meals, Japanese language classes, study hours for public school . . . gradually the days molded into a comfortable routine. Mr. Tameji Eto from San Luis Obispo, who was most concerned and helpful about the Home, had already sent his daughters, Kofuji and Toshiko, to be educated in Kumamoto province in Japan. Now he sent for them and brought them to the Home. Suddenly, there were over twenty children. The older children helped selflessly in the church Sunday School and Japanese school.

Everything was going rather smoothly now, and days were filled with delightful sunshine. But suddenly one day, the state inspector came, carefully examined the building and ordered the home closed due to building code violations. What a disaster! The children were sent to nearby relatives and friends. Immediately a campaign for funds was begun. A second floor had to be built. A fire escape, a sturdy metal slide, was placed from the upstairs window. Parents and friends volunteered daily, giving their utmost support to renovate the premises.

Thus, finally, a license to operate was formally granted, giving the Guadalupe Children's Home a fresh start.

Racial prejudice was severe in those days, but everyone persevered in body and mind. When the children returned, and we were all united, it was a supreme joy and all we could do was to smile gratefully. Thirty-six children, aged six to sixteen, our family and a cook inflated into one fat family.

In the spring of 1926, Lord Sonyu Ohtani toured the temples in Hawaii and the United States. All Buddhists sincerely welcomed him with feelings akin to seeing their own parents. In the rural countryside of Guadalupe Buddhist Temple too, the entire Japanese community eagerly awaited his arrival. The children wrote welcome essays in Japanese to present to him. The Lord Ohtani was delighted. He spoke with the children and posed for photographs with them. He visited leisurely, viewing all the bedrooms, classroom and even the kitchen. And he conversed freely with the children. Later, we heard from Bishop Yemyo Imamura of Hawaii Hongwanji that the Lord had described to him, "At a countryside temple on the Southern California coast, I was moved to see many children living in the temple close to the *Dharma* and growing up in a happy family atmosphere."

When the children were healthy, life was comfortable. But frequently, when epidemics struck, we spent many sleepless nights worrying. Measles, mumps, chicken pox, whooping cough and other illnesses were common occurrences. When one became ill, we expected others to soon follow. Caring for the sleeping children, who bravely endured high fever, I realized how they must have yearned for their own

mothers, and I was deeply touched.

Once Akiko came down with scarlet fever. For one whole month, the Children's Home was quarantined. No one was allowed to leave the compound, and no visitors were permitted to enter. There was no time for tears. I had to immediately concentrate on nursing Akiko back to health with the help of her older sister, Toshiko. Her father, Mr. Tanaka, came to the front gate every day, handing fresh vegetables and other food over the fence, pleading, "Please take care of Akiko. I appreciate your care. But if she does not survive, she is in the temple and in good hands." Many parents came to the fence to hand over food and gifts.

Fortunately, after four weeks, recovery at last! The other children were given preventive shots, nutritious meals, exercise, play and study during the quarantine and were spared from catching the disease. When, after a month, the isolation was ended and quarantine lifted, the parents rushed over and a joyous reunion took place. I could only *gasshō*, for surely the *nembutsu* had sustained us.

Thus, through tears and joy, nine years sped by and the children grew up, entering high school and then college, and admirably began to fly away from the nest.

By then, Japanese schools were springing up here and there throughout California. Transportation improved and commuting to schools became easier. During these first ten years, a foundation was built upon which the children grew into adulthood.

As the children returned to their homes, I, too, became homesick for my parents. I was having physical problems. The doctor advised, "Return to see your mother and you will get well again." So our family, now six in number, left our hearts in Guadalupe and traveled to Japan. That was April of 1928.

The other day, Toshiko Tanaka, the first child at the home, called me from Fresno where she now lives. She informed me, "All the children will be holding a 50th year reunion. We want to be together again in Guadalupe for the 25th Memorial for Sensei. Kofuji, Masaji, Paul . . . all are working hard on this happy event!"

The children of fifty years ago must all be grandparents by now. Bursting in joy and anticipation, I am adding this page. *Gasshō*.

Project to Translate Classical Chinese Tripitaka Text

In 1965, Mr. Yehan Numata, Founder of Mitsutoyo Manufacturing Company, Ltd., one of the world's leading producers of precision measuring instruments, established the Buddhist Promoting Foundation (Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai) in Tokyo, Japan. As its first major activity, the Foundation compiled a text entitled *The Teaching of Buddha* and translated it into 24 languages. These texts have been published by the Foundation and placed into hundreds of thousands of hotel rooms and classrooms world-wide.

In 1982, at the request of Mr. Numata, the Foundation initiated a monumental project to translate the entire Classical Chinese *Taishō Tripitaka* Buddhist Canon into English. Forming a scriptural base for all Buddhists, the *Tripitaka* contains the complete system of Śākyamuni Buddha's teachings and has been called a cultural legacy for all humanity.

In order to implement this new translation project, an English *Tripitaka* Editorial Committee was formed in Tokyo. Composed of leading Japanese Buddhist scholars, this committee selected 70 eminent scholar-translators from many parts of the world and made arrangements for the translation of 139 carefully selected texts, which are to be considered the "First Series."

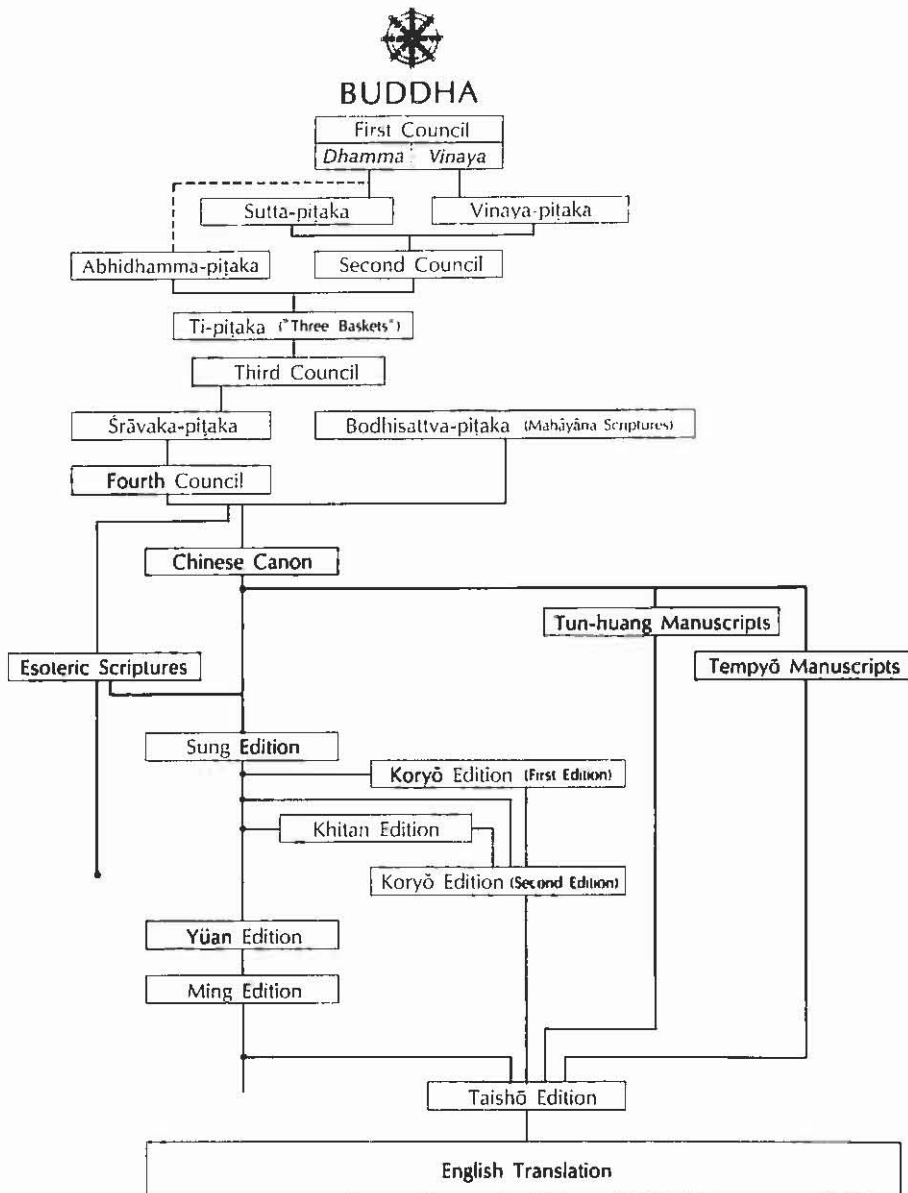
Much progress has been made. By the year 2,000 A.D., it is expected that these "First Series" texts, in 100 volumes, will be published. They represent 11 percent of the complete *Tripitaka* Canon. In order to give a clearer conception of the magnitude of this ambitious and epochal undertaking, one must be aware that it is expected to take an additional 80 years to complete this project, as it consists of thousands of works.

In 1984, to bring this project to fruition, the Numata Center for Translation and Research was established at Berkeley, California. The role of the Numata Center is to monitor the translators' work, to review and edit the translated manuscripts, to make payments to these translators, and to ready the texts for publication. It is anticipated that the initial volume of this "First Series" will be ready for distribution before 1987.

The Numata Center, through the generosity of Mr. Numata, has also established Chairs in Buddhist Studies at three major universities in America and, just recently, at the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley. Additionally, the *Pacific World Journal* is published under the sponsorship of the Numata Center as one of the many ancillary projects of the Buddhist Promoting Foundation.

By utilizing the vehicles of the Buddhist Promoting Foundation in Japan and the Numata Center for Translation and Research in California, Mr. Yehan Numata has been able to bring into focus his singular objective to make available the message of the historical Buddha to all the world's people in the sincere hope that the teachings will lead eventually to universal harmony and World Peace.

A Genealogical Chart of the Original Texts of the English Translation of the Buddhist Canon



(based on Dr.A.Hirakawa's "Daizōkyō no keifu")

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