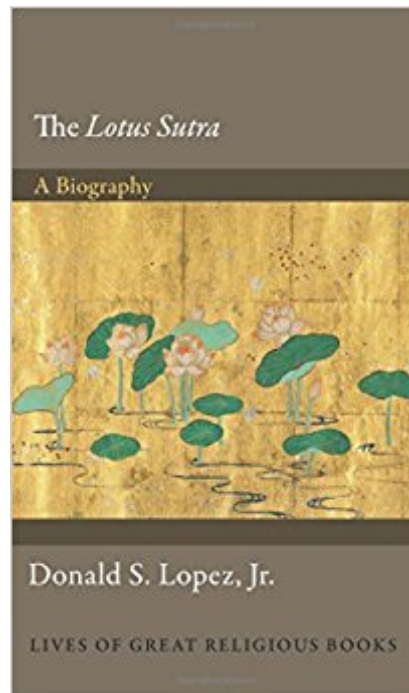




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The "Lotus SÅ«tra": A Biography (Lives Of Great Religious Books)



Synopsis

The Lotus Sutra is arguably the most famous of all Buddhist scriptures. Composed in India in the first centuries of the Common Era, it is renowned for its inspiring message that all beings are destined for supreme enlightenment. Here, Donald Lopez provides an engaging and accessible biography of this enduring classic. Lopez traces the many roles the Lotus Sutra has played in its travels through Asia, Europe, and across the seas to America. The story begins in India, where it was one of the early Mahayana sutras, which sought to redefine the Buddhist path. In the centuries that followed, the text would have a profound influence in China and Japan, and would go on to play a central role in the European discovery of Buddhism. It was the first Buddhist sutra to be translated from Sanskrit into a Western language—into French in 1844 by the eminent scholar Eugène Burnouf. That same year, portions of the Lotus Sutra appeared in English in *The Dial*, the journal of New England's Transcendentalists. Lopez provides a balanced account of the many controversies surrounding the text and its teachings, and describes how the book has helped to shape the popular image of the Buddha today. He explores how it was read by major literary figures such as Henry David Thoreau and Gustave Flaubert, and how it was used to justify self-immolation in China and political extremism in Japan. Concise and authoritative, this is the essential introduction to the life and afterlife of a timeless masterpiece.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"In the raft of entertaining characters found in the [Lotus Sutra] itself . . . Lopez's book adds a cast of historical figures across two millennia united only by their passion for the book. . . . Lopez's book shows us that translators are the unsung heroes of religious, as much as literary, history."--Chandrabhas Choudhury, Wall Street Journal

"With scholarly acumen, contextual nuance, and adaptive storytelling, he deftly traces the historical trajectory of the Lotus Sutra by examining various people, places, and political contexts that influenced the transmission of the text. . . . A great pedagogical tool, Lopez's book is also an enjoyable read for anyone interested in Buddhism and Eastern religion, or the global reach of a single sacred text."--Publishers Weekly

"In *The Lotus Sutra: A Biography*, Donald Lopez promises to trace the various roles of the Lotus Sutra as it has traversed the globe - and he delivers."--Paul Swanson, *Buddhadharma*

"This engaging yet sobering study tells the picaresque tale of a most curious text that continues to fire the devotional imagination of millions of Buddhists worldwide. Recounted with scholarly rigor and postmodern irony, this biography reveals how the story of a book can be just as intriguing, quirky, and unpredictable as that of any living, breathing person."--Stephen Batchelor, author of *After Buddhism*

"The Lotus Sutra is both a key scripture of Indian Mahayana Buddhism as well as a mainstay of the forms of Buddhism that emerged in China, Korea, and Japan. But despite numerous translations into English, this text remains poorly appreciated and understood in the West. With his usual literary aplomb and vast erudition, Lopez has written an invaluable and eminently readable introduction to this demanding work. His lucid exposition of the history, transmission, reception, and significance of this justly famous scripture will be appreciated by anyone interested in Buddhism's sophisticated literary legacy."--Robert Sharf, University of California, Berkeley

"Highly recommended. In Lopez's easy-to-read biography of the Lotus Sutra, readers will find an informative and provocative account of the many lives of this influential scripture. It not only introduces the key themes in the history of Buddhism, but also provides an invaluable overview of the development of Buddhist studies in the West."--William M. Bodiford, University of California, Los Angeles

"In this lively and engaging book, Lopez presents a concise account of the Lotus Sutra and the high points in its history of reception in China, Japan, and the modern West. Even for seasoned Lotus specialists, there are some wonderful surprises here."--Jacqueline I. Stone, Princeton University

"Such a well-written, smart, and engaging treatment of the Lotus Sutra could have only been written by a scholar with the type of expansive vision of the Buddhist tradition that Lopez commands. Lopez provides insight into the sutra's challenging doctrines, describes the controversies it sparked, and tells a compelling story about its role in the early days of Western

engagement with Buddhism. This book will be enjoyed by general readers, although specialists will also come away from it with fresh new perspectives on this Buddhist classic."--James Robson, Harvard University

I have been a fan of the scholarship of Donald S. Lopez Jr. for a long time: His "Prisoner's of Shangri-la" and "Tibetan Religion in Context" shattered a lot of myths I had held on the topic and that permeated popular culture both within and outside convert Buddhist circles. Although he has two books on myths about Buddhism and the Buddha that go into little known elements of Theravada history, Lopez tends to focus on myths of Mahayana buddhism and the critical studies around it, and particularly on Vajrayana variants. This was different in that he was dealing with a text, although he did a treatment on the "Tibetan Book of the Dead," and a text, while important to Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism, is foundational for Tendai, Shin, Shingon, and most dramatically Nichiren Buddhism. Lopez starts with the texts seem origins in the Sanskrit literature of the Indo-Greek world of Bactria. There is some speculations on the exact nature of the shift here. The secret doctrine elements of the text set it apart from the other two famous Mahayana sutras readily found in English, the Heart Sutra (which isn't really even a Sutra) and the Diamond Sutra (foundational for Chan/Seon/Zen). Lopez then talks us through the reception in China, the development of Chinese esoteric Buddhism, the shift to Japan, Japanese devotional and esoteric Buddhism(s), the develop of Nichiren Buddhism in particular, the reception of the Lotus Sutra in French and American scholarship, the Development of the modern Nichiren sects, their consolidation in the Meiji restoration at the same time as French-English scholarship on the Lotus sutra begins, and then the post-war development of Nichiren outside of Japan. Fascinating and brings up many of the problems of the history of Buddhism and the Mahayana developments outside of India and outside of their original Sanskrit context. Easily readable despite the obscurity of a lot of the topic, and offers a good history of Mahayana developments in both Japan and America in particular through the lens of the Lotus Sutra's reception.

Before I start to study the Lotus Sutra, I wanted a background, a primer, so to speak, before I began. Very easy reading and now, am even more excited to jump into the actual Sutra. Highly recommend!

Half of a book...where is the rest? A good read...I liked it...but I felt that the book missed so much. How bout a chapter concerning metaphysical aspects? The notion that we can attain Buddhahood

in our present form, just as we are, is at the heart of contemporary Buddhism. Only the Lotus Sutra...and only the Lotus Sutra taught this idea. The 16th Chapter teaches the eternity of life...the idea of rebirth is implicit. Two huge concepts that were not even mentioned. Buddhism evolves and adapts to suit the environment in which it flourishes...and that my friend, is why we practice Buddhism and not Shakyamunism.

This was a gift for my son, and he tells me he's enjoying it.

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