

The Cult of Kuan-yin in *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and its Dissemination in China

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The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (妙法蓮華經) is commonly accepted as the earliest teaching on Kuan-yin's cult, and was instrumental in disseminating the belief and practice of Kuan-yin to Chinese Buddhist schools in general and Tiantai school (天台宗) in particular. Accordingly, Kuan-yin (觀音) became the most popular and reverend Bodhisattva of Chinese Buddhism, making Kuan-yin a phenomenon in Chinese culture. In light of that, this article presents a brief introduction of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and its significant doctrines in order to illustrate the theory of *ekayāna* (一乘) and skillful-in-means (方便) as the practice way to present Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara who guides all sentient beings to gain the full awakening. Thus, this study demonstrates the role of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* in disseminating the belief and practical theory of Kuan-yin's cult that became the leading spiritual practice to free Chinese Buddhist believers from suffering. Most importantly, it focuses on Kuan-yin's six ways of practising Buddha-Dhamma; namely, merit-making, giving perfection, behaviour transformation, mental development, cognitive transformation, and skillful-in-means in *Lotus Sūtra*,

and its relationship to Chinese Buddhist thoughts. Through inter-textual analyses and interpretations of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and its related texts, this study analyses the cult of Kuan-yin in *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* and its contribution to Chinese Buddhism, while highlighting the need for future research to examine other sutras to better understand the Kuan-yin cult.

Keywords: *Kuan-yin, Avalokiteśvara, Tiantai School, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra.*