

Special Series:

Dialogues on Eastern Wisdom (2)

Ji Xianlin  
Jiang Zhongxin  
Daisaku Ikeda

THE LANGUAGE OF SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

### **Sanskrit and the Early Sutras**

**Ikeda:** On this occasion, I would like for us to focus our discussion on the topic of Buddhism, and particularly on Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra.

Professor Ji, you have spent a great deal of time in Germany studying at the University of Göttingen, the world's foremost center for linguistics and Buddhist studies. You studied under the late Professor Ernst Waldschmidt (1897–1985), the leading authority on Sanskrit and Buddhist studies.

**Ji:** Yes, I did. My studies overlapped with World War II, and during part of that period, Dr. Waldschmidt was drafted and spent time in the German army. As a result, the retired scholar, Professor Emil Sieg (1866–1951), the world's preeminent scholar on the Tocharian language, taught me Tocharian and Sanskrit.

**Ikeda:** Generations of German scholars have created a profound depth of knowledge in the fields of Indian and Asian studies. I sense the same exacting and robust intellectual inquiry of this great German scholarly tradition in your work as well. As the world's leading authority on the "language of Buddhism," would you kindly share with us your insights into the language used by Shakyamuni Buddha? My associates and I share a great interest in the language used by Shakyamuni and his disciples as they sought to spread the truth of Buddhism.

**Ji:** By all means. I will gladly share with you the extent of my knowledge on the subject.

**Ikeda:** Our discussion will no doubt be somewhat challenging for the average reader, given that you are a distinguished scholar and we will

be engaging in a rigorous intellectual discussion, so please try to make your comments as accessible as possible.

In preparation for our three-way discussion, I have read about your many noteworthy accomplishments. You have devoted a great deal of study to the language used in the early Buddhist scriptures. One of your areas of expertise, for example, is the well-known Mahāvastu or “Great Story.” We know that this legendary record includes extremely ancient linguistic elements, but newer ones as well from the fourth and fifth centuries, CE. This text provides us with valuable materials for the study of linguistic change in Buddhist sacred texts over a lengthy period of time.

**Ji:** Yes, that is quite right. In my studies of the Mahāvastu, I focused my attention on the aorist form (a form of past tense) and, through this device, was able to distinguish a more recent as well as an archaic strata in the text.

**Ikeda:** I am well aware of your noteworthy research. The aorist form was not commonly used in standard classical Sanskrit texts; therefore, we can surmise that the early portions of the Mahāvastu, in which it appears frequently, were composed in a period which was not deeply influenced by classical Sanskrit. And therefore, the more recent portions of the texts demonstrate the formative influence that classical Sanskrit had on the Buddhist story’s development.

**Ji:** Yes, that is correct.

**Jiang:** From 1960 to 1965, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to study classical Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (a language which includes both classical Sanskrit and more vernacular linguistic elements), and the Pali language under Professor Ji. After five years of intensive study and many years of research, I have nothing but profound admiration and respect for Professor Ji and his research on Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit. When Professor Ji refers to the aorist form in the Buddhist sutras, he makes the following point:

“Generally speaking, in archaic text, the aorist form is quantitatively overwhelming; whereas in more recent text, other forms of the past tense are used instead. For example, the perfect tense appears most often, and also not infrequently, the past participle.”

Based on research of the various Sanskrit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra, I can state with complete confidence that Professor Ji’s conclu-

sions on this language form extend beyond the Mahāvastu and are entirely applicable to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, I believe that Professor Ji's findings are correct and that they will withstand the test of time as subsequent research findings on newly discovered texts corroborate his conclusions.

### **The Vinaya (Rules of Monastic Discipline): On the meaning of “one's own language”**

**Ikeda:** Previously, you made a very interesting point about the Lotus Sutra, and I would like to again touch on this topic in this discussion. Classical Sanskrit was certainly an influence in the formation of many of the world's great literary works. Panini, the highly esteemed grammarian who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, and other scholars analyzed the language which possesses intricate grammatical rules, and it is clear that it can rightly be called a “treasure of humanity.”

Historically speaking, however, classical Sanskrit in the times of Shakyamuni was legitimized by kings and the nobility and therefore occupied a place close to the center of political power. Professor Ji emphasized this issue in his work “The Language Problems of Primeval Buddhism,” and I am reminded of his description of an account in the Buddhist literature dealing with Yamelu and Tekula, two brothers of Brahman origins who were disciples of the Buddha.

**Ji:** This is an important tale from the Vinaya texts.

**Ikeda:** If I may, the story goes something like this. Two brothers of the Brahman class, Yamelu and Tekula, were disciples of the Buddha. They were well-spoken and had beautiful voices. On one occasion, they came to Shakyamuni and said, “O Lord, these days the monks are quite diverse in name, lineage, birth, and clan. They defile the teachings of the Buddha by speaking of them in one's own languages. We would like to translate the Buddha's teachings into the Vedic language” (Vinayapitāka, Cullavagga, volume 5). In response to their proposal, it is written that Shakyamuni said, “My teachings must not be put into Vedic. He who does so commits an egregious sin. I hereby permit those who wish to study my teachings to learn of them in their own language.”

Opinions may differ regarding the strict interpretation of the “Vedic language” referred to here, but for our purposes, I believe that it is accurate to consider it the orthodox Sanskrit in use at that time.

**Ji:** Yes, I believe so, too. Sanskrit was considered the legitimate language and was used in the Brahman religion. Various interpretations exist of Shakyamuni's reference to "one's own language." For example, the British Buddhist scholar, T. W. Rhys Davids (1843–1922), and the German Asian Studies specialist, Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920), interpreted this to mean the dialect of the monks themselves. The accomplished German scholar, Wilhelm Geiger (1856–1943), took it to mean "the language of Shakyamuni himself."

### **To Communicate the Buddha's Teachings in "One's Own Language"**

**Ikeda:** Therefore, the phrase "one's own language" means either the language of Shakyamuni himself or that used by the monks in their daily lives.

**Ji:** Yes. Actually, few scholars supported Geiger's theory that the Buddha meant to have his teachings conveyed only in his own dialect. However, Geiger had a very powerful supporter for his theory.

**Ikeda:** And who was that?

**Ji:** Support came from the work of Buddhaghosa. As with Geiger's theory, Buddhaghosa's interpretation was that Shakyamuni referred to his own dialect.

**Ikeda:** Buddhaghosa was a prolific and highly esteemed fifth century South Asian Buddhist scholar who wrote commentaries on the three Pali divisions of the Buddhist canon. His work is a significant source supporting the interpretation of the phrase to mean "in the Buddha's own words." However, since he had previously rejected theories differing from his own, it is possible that he let his own bias affect his conclusions.

**Ji:** Yes, it is just as you say. Buddhaghosa was a renowned authority on the Pali scriptures. Therefore, one can readily imagine that the scholar leaned toward preserving the legitimacy of these sacred texts. We cannot help but doubt somewhat the objectivity of Buddhaghosa's interpretations.

**Ikeda:** Taking this into consideration then, it is Professor Ji's view that

the Buddha meant to say that his teachings should be preached “in the monks’ own dialects,” isn’t it?

**Jiang:** This passage has been interpreted in various ways by scholars in the past, each stubbornly insisting on his own view and unsuccessfully attempting to persuade his colleagues. However, Professor Ji was the first to use evidence, such as rules within several Chinese Buddhist scriptures on monastic discipline, to prove that the only possible interpretation of the Buddha’s words is that the monks should use their own dialects in their study and teaching of the scriptures. His analysis provided a decisively airtight case, thus resolving this important historical issue in the interpretation of the Buddhist texts.

**Ji:** Yes. And an abundance of similar examples can be seen in the Chinese scriptures. I dealt with these in my paper and will give a few examples here. The fourth volume of the *Pinimuĵing* or *Binimokyō*, the Chinese version of the *Vinaya-māṭṛkā-śāstra*, includes the following account:

Once there were two Brahman monks named *Wujuehe* or *Usaka* and *Sanmotuo* or *Sanmada*. They came to see the Buddha and said to the World-Honored One, “Among the Buddha’s disciples are those of various families who come from diverse countries, regions, and states—each speaking his own language. Since language is an imperfect medium, the monks violate the truth of the Buddha’s teachings.” The two monks implored *Sakyamuni* saying, “Please, World-Honored One, let us arrange and render the sutras according to the *Chandas*, *Veda*’s metric rules. If speech and sound are revised, meaning will be clarified.” To this, *Shakyamuni* replied, “In Buddhism, beautiful language does not determine accuracy of meaning. My only wish is that the essential meaning of my teachings be conveyed correctly. My teachings should be taught according to the dialect and pronunciation of the language understood by the people.”

**Ikeda:** Yes, this is as it should be. Though truth may be one, if we insist that it can only be expressed in one particular way, we fall into an attitude of self-righteousness. The concerns of people are diverse, and the most appropriate path to salvation is one that addresses the specific needs of the individual. Religion exists for the sake of human happiness.

### Chinese Versions Reveal the Buddha's True Intent

**Ji:** As you say, the purpose of religion is to address the concerns of the people. I am in complete agreement. As further illustration of the Buddha's position on language, the Fourfold Vinaya, volume 52, includes the following story.

There was once a disciple of Brahman origins named Yongmeng or Yūmyō. He sought out the Buddha with this same language concern. When he approached the Buddha, he bowed his head to the ground, then withdrew to the side where he sat down. Then he spoke:

“O Lord! Your disciples are of various ranks and come from diverse origins—every one with a different family name. They violate the teachings of the Buddha. Please, O World-Honored One, grant me my desire to convey the Buddhist teachings correctly through the language favored by society, (that is, Sanskrit).” To this the Buddha replied, “You fool! Doing so would inflict grave injury. That would be to obscure the Buddhist sutras by rendering them in the language of the non-Buddhists.” Continuing, the Buddha admonished, “Recite and study the sutras in the language of the masses, so that they may understand.”

Similarly, the Fivefold Vinaya, volume 26, also includes a story of two Brahman brothers. The brothers were learning to recite the Chandas-veda (a scholarly work dealing with metric rules ancillary to the four main Vedas, one of which is the Rig Veda). Subsequently, they became monks following the correct Law. When they heard the recitation of the monks, they were critical and disapproving. “Though these eminent monks have been in the order for some time, they are unable to distinguish the various grammatical elements of the texts, such as masculine and feminine words, singular and plural words, present, past, and future words, long and short syllables, and stressed and unstressed syllables. It is unthinkable that they would dare to recite the sutras.”

Hearing this, the monks felt shame, and two of them came to the Buddha and related this matter in detail. The Buddha responded, “Even though the sutras may be recited in the dialect of the land, the essence of the message will not be lost or corrupted. You must not convey the Buddha's teachings in the language of the non-Buddhists. Those who violate this will be committers of an offense.”

**Ikeda:** This is an extremely interesting tale. These two Brahman brothers show that they are fixated on the formal aspects of grammatical rules. In response, the Buddha emphasizes that it is the meaning itself,

as it conveys the compassion of the Buddha, that is ultimately important.

**Jiang:** This story exhibits several Sanskrit grammatical terms. Among them are three kinds of “words,” the respective meanings of which are different though expressed as “words.”

**Ikeda:** I believe you are referring to the grammatical forms of “masculine and feminine words, singular and plural words, and present, past, and future words,” which appear in the Fivefold Vinaya from which Professor Ji quoted a passage previously.

**Jiang:** Yes, that is correct. In modern Chinese, the first “words” refer to gender or terms appropriate for men and for women. The second “words” refer to numbers, indicating singular or plural. The third “words” describe tense corresponding to past, present, and future.

Sanskrit grammar is so intricate that it requires long-term disciplinary learning to master. It was said in ancient India that one must devote 12 years to become fully proficient in the language. Even in the India of those times, a mere handful of people from the upper classes were fluent in the language. The fact that Shakyamuni Buddha adopted a language policy which forbade the use of Sanskrit and permitted each monk to teach in his own language enabled the religion he had founded to reach the masses, and empowered the monks to address the people’s needs more effectively. The result was that Buddhism was propagated widely among great numbers of people.

### **Speaking in the Language of the People**

**Ikeda:** Buddhism is a religion of the people. It is the means for people to overcome the suffering of the cycle of birth and death. As Professor Jiang mentioned, Shakyamuni always sought to shower the people with his compassion. In this sense, Professor Ji’s interpretation of the text as meaning “the language the monks use in their daily lives” makes perfect sense.

**Ji:** The anecdotes about the monks are undoubtedly different permutations of the same story. A side-by-side comparison shows that the Buddha’s reference to “in one’s own language” definitely did not mean “in the Buddha’s own language.”

**Ikedā:** It is clear that Shakyamuni was sensitive to the language and means of expression of the people. Monks of Brahman origins criticized the idea of allowing people to teach Buddhism in their own languages, based on their strict adherence to a grammatical and phonological purism. But we see that the Buddha scolds monks with this attitude.

**Ji:** In addition, stories such as these hint at a serious problem that faced early Buddhism. And as the texts suggest, Shakyamuni Buddha was resolutely opposed to the use of Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmins.

**Ikedā:** Yes, he even declares that rendering the sutras into Vedic would constitute *ezuo* or *akusa*, meaning a minor offense.

**Ji:** The word *ezuo* or *akusa* is *dukkata* in the original language of the text. The offense referred to is relatively minor, unlike those that would result in expulsion from the Buddhist order. It is an act that is forgiven after the offender engages in reflection upon his deeds and assumes an attitude of penitence. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that indeed, this was an offense, albeit a lesser one. To make the use of Sanskrit a minor offense clearly illustrates an attitude of resistance against the Brahman religion which occupied a dominant position in the society of those times.

**Jiang:** I believe that both of your comments are quite right, and I am in complete agreement. Shakyamuni Buddha opposed the monks' use of Sanskrit and permitted them instead to use their own dialects to convey the Buddha's teachings. For this reason, the Buddhist scriptures which have come down to us are numerous and not limited to one definitive manuscript which is recognized as legitimate. Among religions, Buddhism is the only faith that lacks one authoritative sacred text. Indeed, it is precisely this characteristic of the Buddhist scriptures which enables such fruitful exploration of major issues in Buddhist history through the language of the Buddhist texts. For example, based on the linguistic aspects of a Buddhist sacred text, we are able to surmise the geographical and chronological details of the text's origins.

Professor Ji was the first scholar to link philological research in Buddhist texts to Buddhist history, leading the way to a significant methodological breakthrough. He deserves wide recognition for his pioneering accomplishments.

**Ikedā:** This brings to mind the famous passage from the Dhamma-

pada, (393) which goes, “Not by matted locks, not by clan, not by birth, does one become a brahman. In whom is truth and righteousness, he is pure and he is a brahman.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Suttanipāta (136) states, “Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a brahman. By (one’s) action one becomes an outcaste, by (one’s) action one becomes a brahman.”<sup>2</sup> Considering social conditions at the time, these words were an unprecedented declaration of freedom and human rights.

### **The Position of Shakyamuni Buddha in a Rigid Class Society**

**Ji:** Those are my thoughts exactly. The Buddhism brought forth by Shakyamuni Buddha must have been revolutionary for those times. Frankly, there would have been clear benefits to using the officially recognized language of the elite.

**Ikeda:** Using the language of the rulers and aristocracy would surely, from the very start, bestow an aura of respectability and authority with which to command a dominant position in the minds of the people. Shakyamuni Buddha, however, did not adopt this approach.

**Ji:** Yes, despite the great advantages that using Sanskrit might have brought, the Buddha refused to succumb to the temptation. Furthermore, in the scriptural accounts, he scolded the two monks, telling them that they were fools for insisting on the use of Sanskrit. They were probably of Brahman upbringing and undoubtedly still held very conservative views supporting the status quo.

**Jiang:** To put this topic in context, the Brahman and Hindu religions advocated a hereditary caste system which categorized people into different ranks in a hierarchical system of social statuses. The Brahman caste was the highest in this social ranking system.

In Brahmanism and Hinduism, according to the rules dictated by the Laws of Manu, Brahman status conferred three special privileges. The first was the privilege of teaching the Vedas. The second was the privilege of holding and presiding in religious ceremonies for others. The third was the right to receive offerings. The first two privileges relate to the occupation of the Brahmans, and the third was a special Brahman right. In other words, the right to receive offerings was a manner of compensation for engaging in the first two occupational roles of the Brahmans.

In regards to the language issues, the acts of teaching the Vedas and officiating in religious ceremonies both required the use of Sanskrit. Therefore, in actual fact, the Brahmans held a monopoly on the right to use Sanskrit, and revered the language as the most holy and supreme of all languages. For these reasons, those of Brahman upbringing who therefore had studied Sanskrit, naturally looked down upon the ordinary persons who spoke in one or another dialect or used common speech.

**Ikeda:** An air of contempt is clear in the two monks' statement, "O Lord, these days the monks are quite diverse in name, lineage, birth, and clan. They defile the teachings of the Buddha by speaking of them in one's own languages." By viewing the use of indigenous languages and dialects as tainting and polluting the teachings of the Buddha, and by desiring to recast the teachings in the Vedic language, the brothers revealed their elitist attitudes, which supported the conventional ideas of Brahmanism.

The statement indicating their view that the Buddha's teachings would be defiled, is a clear expression of this prejudice. Shakyamuni Buddha, who professed his desire to befriend all those in need, deemed that the philosophy of Buddhism should be taught in the dialects of the people. This is compelling evidence of the diversity and compassion embodied within Buddhist philosophy and its aim to point the way to freedom and liberation for all people, without distinction.

**Ji:** I wholeheartedly agree.

**Ikeda:** And, upon further examination, the statement which refers to "differences in name, lineage, birth, and clan" reveals the great social and racial diversity which must have existed among Shakyamuni's disciples. Considering the many attributes such as race, culture, social class, and economic status that produce conflict and confusion in modern society, it is truly significant that Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings were able to overcome the boundaries of clan and lineage and spread among the people.

In tandem with the development of trade and commerce, the Indian society of those times was beginning to allow its people to experience a small degree of freedom. However, there can be no doubt that differences in lineage, social status, and clan were difficult barriers to overcome. Nevertheless, these seemingly insurmountable obstacles were rendered insignificant as people gathered to learn at the feet of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Ji:** Yes, this is so. The distressed and downtrodden shed concerns over their various circumstantial and regional disparities and were drawn by the bright hope they discovered in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

### The Raison d'Être of the Buddhist Order

**Ikeda:** In the time of Shakyamuni Buddha, there existed a caste of people called the *chandāla* (*caṇḍāla*) who were the target of merciless discrimination. They were forced, as a group, to live their lives isolated from the mainstream society. In the Buddhist scriptures, however, are examples of members of this caste entering the Buddhist order and completing their studies after several years (Mahāvamsa 5, 61). In the context of the society of that period, the Buddhist order must have seemed like an oasis for the troubled and oppressed.

**Jiang:** Not only did the Brahman religion strictly forbid those of humble origins from becoming followers, it also firmly admonished that such people were to be barred from participating in religious ceremonies. Shakyamuni, however, took a completely different approach by opposing the caste system and advocating the equality of all sentient beings. He also permitted anyone, no matter what their caste or gender, to become a follower or enter the priesthood.

According to the dictates of the Brahman religion, the *chandāla* were classified as a separate lower class, designated as untouchable. In Indian society, which followed Brahmanism, when the *chandāla* walked down the street, they were required to announce their presence by clapping two sticks together. The intent was to warn those of higher castes of their approach. This allowed those of higher castes to avoid the shadow of the lowly *chandāla*. Coming into contact, with even the shadow of the *chandāla*, was seen as defiling for those of higher castes.

Despite the prevailing social attitudes toward the “lowly castes,” Buddhism welcomed those shunned by society and permitted them to become followers and, as with other followers, to also attain the way. This is a clear indication that the Buddhism founded by Shakyamuni Buddha was undeniably a revolutionary movement that provided the masses with something to believe in and posed a challenge to the legitimacy and status of Brahmanism in Indian society.

**Ji:** The story of Yamelu and Tekula hints at the diversity among the people taking part in Shakyamuni Buddha’s activities. Of course, these

men viewed this social and linguistic diversity with distaste and felt that it defiled the Buddha's teachings.

**Ikeda:** We can surmise that this Brahman view, based on disapproval of the use of native dialects to convey the Buddha's teachings to the masses, was an indication of the reality that Buddhist teachings were spreading more widely among the masses than among the elite classes.

**Ji:** Yes, that is exactly right.

### **The Language of Communication in Eastern India**

**Ikeda:** Now then, please let me ask another question. It is certain that Shakyamuni opposed using Sanskrit as the common language to convey the faith. However, he realized that communication would be very difficult if everyone used his or her own language or dialect exclusively. But then, again, the people did not understand Shakyamuni's language. So, then, what language came to be used as the medium of communication between different groups?

Shakyamuni Buddha conducted his activities in the regions of Kapilavastu, Rājagriha (Rājagṛha), and Shrāvastī (Śrāvastī), which were located in the very influential kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha. In that period, Kosala and Magadha were flourishing commercial centers and we can assume that Magadhi or a similar dialect was the language of common usage. It is said that the inscriptions of King Ashoka includes elements of several different languages. Among them is one that exhibits the linguistic characteristics of ancient Magadhi and is said to have been used in the area around the Ganges River where Shakyamuni Buddha was most active.

These clues lead to the conclusion that perhaps the language of the Buddha was Magadhi or a tongue closely akin to it. Though perhaps people used the language of their respective clans among themselves, they may have used Magadhi, the language with the widest currency, to conduct their economic transactions. As a result, in time, Magadhi naturally spread throughout the area.

What are your thoughts on this matter, Professor Ji?

**Ji:** I believe that it is just as you say. Ashokan inscriptions in many areas are rendered in Magadhi, meaning the language of Magadha, and a variant called Ardhamagadhi (semi-Magadhi). Shakyamuni most probably spoke Magadhi in regions in which it was the native dialect

and used Ardhamagadhi in other regions. These were the languages in common use in the regions of eastern India where Shakyamuni was active, so they were naturally the languages of choice. This in no way contradicts Shakyamuni's admonition that a single standard language not be forced on the people, but rather, that multiple languages be recognized.

In any case, Shakyamuni benevolently accepted the use of native languages for conveying his teachings. He also permitted dialects and colloquial speech. This enabled the teachings of the Buddha to be easily understood and accepted by the masses. However, with the passage of time, the Sanskritization of the language occurred. The aorist form appearing in the previously mentioned Mahāvastu text is an example representing this transformation. Subsequently, many sutras came to be recast in Sanskrit.

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

### The Language of the Lotus Sutra

**Ikeda:** Next, I would like to inquire about the origins of the Lotus Sutra.

**Ji:** Many treatises have dealt with the development of the Sanskrit texts of the Lotus Sutra.

**Ikeda:** Yes, I know. And in your work, you have pointed out that manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra contain many vernacular Prakrit elements that were in use prior to the process of Sanskritization. You also mention major differences among these Prakrit elements.

**Ji:** Yes. Let me touch briefly on the major issues. Many manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra are extant. The older the manuscript, the more plentiful the Prakrit elements it contains. This is true not simply of certain portions, but of entire texts.

**Ikeda:** You make a very key point.

**Ji:** The manuscripts that have survived to the present consist of two major types. One is the Nepalese manuscripts and the other is the Central Asian manuscripts, which are also referred to as the Western Region manuscripts represented by the Kashgar manuscript.

**Ikedā:** Another group, the Gilgit manuscripts are also cited. They are said to be from the fifth and sixth centuries. In November 1998, as part of our efforts to publish manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra, we published the *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Facsimile Edition*. Regarding the Central Asian texts, the Petrovsky manuscript, which shares the major portion of the Kashgar manuscript, was displayed in “The Lotus Sutra and Its World” exhibition held in Tokyo in the same month.

**Ji:** Of the two types of texts, the Nepalese manuscripts are more recent and the Sanskritization of the texts is more advanced compared to that in the Central Asian manuscripts.

**Ikedā:** Please tell us specifically why you think that is the case.

**Ji:** To be brief, I will limit my discussion to my conclusion and the reasons behind it, rather than give examples which would require much more time.

**Ikedā:** Since our readers may be hard-pressed to fully grasp the more academic points of your argument, that will be fine.

**Ji:** Let me start with my conclusion. The Lotus Sutra is the most significant and oldest of the Mahayana sutras. It originated in the Magadhan region of eastern India.

**Ikedā:** Magadha, as was mentioned previously, was the region in which Shakyamuni Buddha conducted the majority of his activities. Because Magadha was an economic center, Ardhamagadhi was the language of commerce that was used widely throughout the region.

**Ji:** That is correct. Shakyamuni Buddha and most of his disciples originated from eastern India. The Ardhamagadhi language is one of a variety of dialects in eastern India. It has many distinguishing characteristics, the most notable of which is the suffix *-āni* appearing in *-a*-stem words (words having the stem ending with *-a*) in the masculine, nominative, plural. In Sanskrit, the suffix *-āḥ* is used in the same case. Regarding the Lotus Sutra texts, in the Kashgar manuscript, a representative of the Central Asian manuscripts, appears the suffix *-āni* while the Nepalese manuscripts use the suffix *-āḥ*. Observation of these characteristics led to the supposition that the birthplace of early Mahayana

scriptures was eastern India (then known as “central India” in Chinese documents). And it is inferred that the texts of the classic Mahayana period emerged in southern India.

**Ikeda:** I see. Then, according to the various typologies, the primeval Mahayana scriptures were compiled during the most ancient period. So, this included, for example, the various early Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) sutras. Professor Ji, as you just pointed out, due to its ancient characteristics, the Lotus Sutra was also included among the primeval Mahayana sutras. Next, the classical Mahayana sutras appeared following the development of Mahayana thoughts. Among these Mahayana scriptures is the Nirvana Sutra which clearly articulates the philosophy of the matrix of the Thus Come One (*Tathāgata-garbha*). And it has come to be the view that the primeval Mahayana sutras, represented by the Lotus Sutra, were created in and around the Kingdom of Magadha, the region where Shakyamuni Buddha conducted most of his activities.

**Ji:** Yes, and the language of the Lotus Sutra reflects the language used by Shakyamuni himself.

### **The Theory of “Mahayana Buddhism as Apocryphal Teachings”**

**Ikeda:** Professor Ji, as you have indicated, from a philological perspective, the Lotus Sutra reflects the language spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha. In my view, as a philosopher and believer, the Lotus Sutra embodies the teachings of the Buddha and clearly presents the essence of his teachings.

**Ji:** Speaking for myself, I must say that I have the greatest respect for Buddhism. I identify with the Buddhist concept of compassion because it is so similar to the Chinese idea of “heaven and humankind as one.” I believe that this philosophical concept is critical to saving humankind from the dangers that confront it. Though I hold the Buddhist philosophy and religion in the highest regard, I am not a follower, but merely a researcher. The opinions I express are based entirely on my own academic perspectives.

**Ikeda:** Professor Ji, the humility of your statement is a testament to your stature as a sincere seeker of truth.

Currently, many scholars espouse the view that the central core of the Lotus Sutra was established in the first century, several hundred years after the death of Shakyamuni. That said, there was a time when the theory of “Mahayana Buddhism as apocryphal teachings” was actively debated. This “apocryphal teachings” theory contends that the Mahayana sutras such as the Lotus Sutra are not based on the teachings of the Buddha.

At this point, I would like to briefly recall the history of this debate.

**Ji:** Please go ahead.

**Ikeda:** The assertion was that the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism constitute a philosophy that was fabricated, in the name of the Buddha, after his death. This theory has an extremely long history. For example, when the Lotus Sutra was compiled, the various schools within the Buddhist establishment condemned the Mahayana sutras as arbitrary fabrications. This theory, then, existed from the very inception of Mahayana Buddhism.

**Ji:** Yes, that is true. It was a theory embraced by the various Buddhist schools that were critical of Mahayana Buddhism.

**Ikeda:** In China also, where the various sutras of the Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhist canon were introduced and translated in rapid succession, the debate continued. It is said that around the fifth century in China, a monk named Zhu Fadu propagated the Hinayana doctrine and asserted that Mahayana Buddhism did not represent the Buddha’s teachings.

However, in China, the sutras, whose dates of compilation were chronologically diverse, were introduced all at once, and so they all were accepted as the direct teachings of the Buddha. Numerous attempts were made to organize these many Buddhist scriptures into coherent systems of comparative classification. During that period, Zhiyi (538–597) or the Great Teacher Tiantai, appeared. He created his own five period classification system revealing the development of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings. He claimed that the Mahayana teachings were superior to those of the Hinayana schools, and he held up the Lotus Sutra as by far the most genuine and supreme teaching of all.

In Japan, Saichō (767–822) or the Great Teacher Dengyō, expounded on the Tiantai doctrine, and it came to be accepted widely. During the Tokugawa period, however, researchers from various scholarly disci-

plines began to conduct empirical research in various fields of studies. This trend included, for the first time, critical research on Mahayana Buddhism.

**Jiang:** By whom was this research conducted?

**Ikeda:** Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746), a philosopher who lived during the mid-Tokugawa period, expounded on the theory of “Mahayana Buddhism as apocryphal teachings” in his book, *Shutsujōgogo* ([Buddha’s] Comments after [His] Meditation). He based his argument on the theory of “accumulation.” In other words, he asserted that various extraneous elements were added to the original teachings of the Buddha, and this is how many of the Mahayana sutras came into being and evolved over time.

That said, Nakamoto’s discussion of the “apocryphal teachings” theory was based on a primarily scholarly interest, unlike the arguments of critics who were intent on merely criticizing Buddhism. However, once the theory became known, philosophers critical of Buddhism focused on it and began to use it as a weapon in their denunciations of Buddhism. A major critic was Hirata Atsutane (1776–1843).

**Jiang:** How did the Buddhist establishment respond?

**Ikeda:** The Buddhists offered up a counter argument. This, however, merely consisted of a rehash of the conventional arguments. And during the Tokugawa period, no one of equal stature stepped forward with an objective argument to take on Tominaga’s theory.

**Jiang:** Very interesting.

### **Empirical Research on the Early Sutras**

**Ikeda:** With the beginning of the Meiji period, the theory of “Mahayana as apocryphal teachings” was debated extensively. This was the result of the introduction into Japan of western empirical research methods which were applied to the study of Buddhism and the Buddhist scriptures. It was through this influence that gradually the historical development of Buddhism became clearer, and scholars came to the view that in the formative period of Buddhism, the early sutras (e.g., the Pali canon and the Chinese translations of the Agama sutras) were really the actual, or quite close to the actual, teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

**Jiang:** Who first began discussing this theory from a scholarly perspective?

**Ikeda:** The first scholar to raise this issue was Senshō Murakami (1851–1929). His argument was based on the empirical methodology of modern Buddhist studies, and since he was a Buddhist priest, he created a major stir in the entire Buddhist world. However, on the subject of historical development, Murakami’s argument only went as far as saying that, judging by their current form, the Mahayana texts are not a direct transcription of the Buddha’s teachings. On the topic of Mahayana doctrine, Murakami not only asserted that the Mahayana texts were the Buddha’s sermons, but he also claimed that they were superior to those of the Hinayana Buddhist canon.

**Jiang:** That is fascinating. What is the situation with regard to this issue today?

**Ikeda:** Subsequently, the theory of “Mahayana Buddhism as apocryphal teachings” was left behind as the focus of interest in Japanese Buddhist studies shifted to other areas of concern. Specifically, the questions of scholarship centered on identifying those elements in the Hinayana sutras which accurately convey the teachings and aspects of the life of Shakyamuni Buddha; and those portions of the Mahayana sutras that must be studied to gain an accurate perspective on the development of the Buddha’s teachings.

In the light of this historical context, modern scholarship does not totally dismiss Mahayana Buddhism. Rather, based on a recognition of the significance of Mahayana Buddhism, mainstream scholarship in the field is attempting to discover the portions that might provide the most valuable insights. These efforts can be categorized into three main viewpoints.

**Jiang:** And what might those be?

**Ikeda:** The first position contends that, based on an examination of commonalities between the doctrines expounded in the sutras of the Mahayana tradition, the primeval Buddhist sutras, and the sutras of the various early Buddhist schools, it is clear that the primeval Buddhist sutras already contained in them elements of Mahayana Buddhism.

Based on this assertion, one can say that Mahayana Buddhism is a legitimate development of the original teachings of Shakyamuni Bud-

dha. The second position claims that the Mahayana teachings are united directly with the Buddha in terms of ultimate enlightenment. According to this view, enlightenment as an ultimate goal is a consistent thread linking the primeval Buddhist sutras to the Mahayana Buddhist canon, the differences being only the way in which the Buddha expressed his enlightenment. The third position asserts that the value of the sutras must be judged on the content, rather than on whether or not they are the actual teachings of Shakyamuni.

Academically speaking, even in the primeval Buddhist sutras which are said to be the direct teachings of Shakyamuni, we see countless traces of the historical development of the Buddha's teachings. Accordingly, it is questionable whether it is possible to discover the actual direct teachings of Shakyamuni solely in the early Buddhist sutras. Of these three positions, currently the one that dominates the field is the first one.

**Jiang:** Thank you for that excellent overview of the Mahayana debate in Japan.

**Ikeda:** In the final analysis, even if several hundred years had passed since the Buddha's death, it would be impossible to claim that the Mahayana sutras were arbitrary fabrications, totally unrelated to Shakyamuni. And even if the teachings of Shakyamuni were committed to writing years after his death, it is entirely reasonable to assume that an oral tradition of the Buddha's discourses had evolved and was transmitted from generation to generation. This can be said not only of the Lotus Sutra, but also of other Mahayana sutras that appeared during the same period.

The various canons on which the Buddhist schools based their faith were also compiled repeatedly by disciples after the Buddha's death. Among these were texts that were heavily influenced by the doctrine of the particular early schools of Buddhism that produced them.

Also, as I mentioned previously, the predominant view currently is that the Mahayana sutras accurately depict the development of Shakyamuni's philosophy. Accordingly, the simplistic view which holds that only the Hinayana sutras represent the Buddha's teachings, and categorically condemns the Mahayana sutras as false and illegitimate, is not acceptable. Rather, it would be more accurate to say that the Mahayana as well as the Hinayana sutras evolved from the teachings of Shakyamuni.

Professor Jiang, as a researcher and specialist on the Lotus Sutra, what is your view of the Buddha's teachings and the various sutras? What do you think about the early Buddhist schools' criticisms of the Mahayana sutras as false teachings?

**Jiang:** Although I am interested in topics of Buddhist history, I am not well-versed in the field, and so I am rather reluctant to express a casual opinion on the subject. However, Mr. Ikeda, since you have been kind enough to ask, I will briefly share my opinion.

As you both have mentioned, it appears that the theory of the "Mahayana sutras as apocryphal teachings" is basically a criticism of Mahayana Buddhism by the proponents of Hinayana Buddhism. I am in agreement, Mr. Ikeda, with your perspective based both on intuitive as well as logical grounds, and I think that yours is a very effective rebuttal to the Hinayana criticism.

### **The Origins of the Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhist Canon**

**Ikeda:** Please allow me to ask you one more question. What is your view of the formation of the Hinayana and Mahayana sutras?

**Jiang:** Mr. Ikeda, of the numerous issues you have mentioned previously, I believe that the common origin of the Hinayana and Mahayana sutras is of central importance. In other words, at issue is whether or not texts that may be called a "primeval Buddhist canon" actually existed.

**Ikeda:** The presumption is that the Hinayana and Mahayana sutras evolved from the primeval Buddhist canon, isn't it? These sutras are thought to be a compilation of Shakyamuni's many teachings. This is a very important issue.

**Jiang:** Academics hold a variety of opinions on this topic. Briefly, Heinrich Lüders (1869–1943), the German scholar, early on, proposed the concept of a "primeval Buddhist canon" (*buddhistischer Urkanon*). Lüders contended that there existed a certain primeval Buddhist canon, and he systematically described the characteristics of its language. The diametrically opposed views among scholars about the existence of a certain primeval Buddhist canon were based on differing interpretations of Lüders' contentions of its underlying significance. Those in favor of Lüders' argument are represented by Professor Ji. And those opposed by Franklin Edgerton (1885–1963) and Heinz Bechert.

It would be impossible and unnecessary to present excerpts of these two viewpoints. In order to describe the debate, the following passage from Professor Ji's prolific work on the subject will suffice.

**Ikeda:** This is an extremely important issue. Please continue.

**Jiang:** Professor Ji states, "Based on our current suppositions, the developmental process of the Buddhist sutras must have proceeded in the following way. In short, the Buddha himself did not simply write down his teachings. This point can be confirmed. On the other hand, it is impossible to imagine that the Buddha did not regularly expound on certain topics. The passage in the sutras dealing with the twelve-linked chain of causation may fall into this category.

"In the period in which the Buddha lived, written literature did not exist, so oral instruction was the means by which teachers conveyed their knowledge of the teachings to their disciples. The disciples in turn learned by heart by repeating what the teachers spoke. The first subjects conveyed in this oral tradition must have been teachings which the Buddha frequently espoused. This is undoubtedly because these teachings were so compelling that they could be told over and over again. After many recitations, the teachings became firmly fixed in the memories of the disciples, and over time, they gradually came to form the foundation of the Buddhist sutras. This initial foundation was influenced by historical transitions and the introduction of new elements by each successive generation of masters and disciples, and so the end result, after much editing, was a relatively massive set of volumes when the tradition was recorded as written scriptures.

"Since the Buddha himself and the great teachers of early Buddhism were all from eastern India, they spoke the dialect of that region, and the first sutras, which we commonly call "the primeval Buddhist canon," must have been written in that dialect. If that were not the case, there would have been no way for the people to understand them."<sup>3</sup>

Professor Ji's statement is based on the foundation of his research of the language of early Buddhism, and I think that it effectively substantiates your own view, Mr. Ikeda.

## **Linguistic Transformation of the Oral Tradition**

**Ikeda:** I believe that in the compilation of the Lotus Sutra, the concepts that were the essence of Shakyamuni's original teachings took form

under the influence of the historical conditions and philosophical trends of that period. Professor Jiang, what is your understanding of the historical and philosophical influences on the compilation of the Lotus Sutra?

It seems to me that upon examination of the Lotus Sutra, the following inferences can be made. First of all, in the history of Buddhism select portions of the enormous volume of the Buddha's ideas were seized upon in a piecemeal fashion, and numerous splinter groups evolved. In the process, the essential message of the Buddha's teachings was obscured. Also, as memories of Shakyamuni faded into the distant past, the people conceived of and pursued the teachings of various other Buddhas.

It is reasonable to suggest that the fundamental aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha's teaching in the Lotus Sutra is the concept of equality that the Buddha discovered through his enlightenment. This was a radical concept for that period, and as a result, the compilers of the Lotus Sutra were considered heretics and were persecuted. I think this is a reasonable assumption, but what do you think?

**Jiang:** The historical literature on early India is scanty, so it is impossible to describe in detail, based on historical materials, the social and philosophical context of the era in which the Lotus Sutra was created. Even so, scholars are examining and drawing suppositions from the philosophical content and linguistic characteristics of the Lotus Sutra itself, as they attempt to discern the multi-faceted social and philosophical issues of the period in which the Lotus Sutra was compiled.

For example, as Professor Ji clearly states: "The birthplace of the Lotus Sutra is thought to be in Magadha in approximately the second century BCE. . . . From a linguistic perspective, the Lotus Sutra belongs in the same category as the primeval Buddhist sutras."<sup>4</sup>

**Ikeda:** This is a very clear statement. Are there other perspectives that have been advanced?

**Jiang:** Yes. Yūichi Kajiyama, former director of Soka University's International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, which you founded, Mr. Ikeda, and the current director, Kanno Hiroshi, and Professors Yuyama Akira and Karashima Seishi have all conducted studies on the philosophy and philology of the Lotus Sutra, and all deserve our highest regard. I believe that it is possible to discern, from the content of the Lotus Sutra itself, the nature of the philosophical trends of the period in which the Lotus Sutra was compiled. For example, the egali-

tarian perspective expressed in the Lotus Sutra reveals a spiritual or perhaps a religious desire of the people of that time to be able to attain Buddhahood. Similarly, the assertion of *huisan guiyi* (turning to the one vehicle by unifying the three vehicles) manifested in the Lotus Sutra can be thought of as perhaps expressing the desire and need of the people for the unification of the Three Vehicles.

**Ikeda:** I believe you are referring to the concept known in Japanese as *kaisan ken'ichi* (the replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle). Yes, I understand it well. Incidentally, what are your thoughts on the practice in India of preserving precious teachings through memorization, committing them to heart, rather than through the written word?

**Ji:** Well, first of all, a writing system did not exist in ancient India. The Vedas, the sacred scriptures of the Brahman religion, survived thanks to an oral tradition of transmission from one generation of masters and disciples to the next.

**Ikeda:** Was this the case during the period when the Lotus Sutra was compiled? In the *Dazhidu lun* or *Daichido ron* (Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom) attributed to Nāgārjuna, it is written that “Words from the Buddha’s lips were recited by his disciples and written down, thus creating the sutra scrolls.”<sup>5</sup> I believe that these “sutra scrolls” refer to the Mahayana sutras. It appears that the sutras were compiled as the teachings were committed to writing.

**Ji:** In the era in which the Lotus Sutra evolved, India had its own writing system. At that point in time, the inscriptions of King Ashoka had already been engraved. Obviously, this provides the evidence that a writing system existed during that period.

**Ikeda:** Professor Jiang, please share your thoughts on the factors leading from the oral tradition to the transcription and compilation of the Buddha’s teachings as scriptures. Also, what do you think about the process by which the oral tradition was transformed into the written word. In addition, what was especially different about the approach of the Lotus Sutra compilers as opposed to the approach used in compiling other sutras?

**Jiang:** The compilers felt that the practice of transcribing the Lotus

Sutra was itself a form of religious practice and a meritorious effort to ensure the continuity of the Lotus Sutra for all time. Indeed, transcription of the Lotus Sutra was seen as a genuine expression of faith and a means to accumulate merit in this world.

Two kinds of transcriptions existed: In the first case, the person desiring to accumulate merit transcribes the text. In the second case, the person seeking merit pays an offering to have another person transcribe the text. In Mahayana Buddhism it is believed that merit acquired by transcribing a sutra may pass through the hand of the transcriber to the worshipper or person making the offering. In short, both kinds of transcription were a kind of religious practice for the purpose of accumulating merit.

**Ikeda:** When I read the Lotus Sutra, I am deeply moved by the vibrancy of the text. This is a result of the compilers' excellent choice of central concepts in the Buddha's teachings which were handed down in the writings and oral tradition. I cannot help but be impressed by the ability of talented individuals among the compilers to profoundly comprehend the Buddha's enlightenment and to present these concepts so splendidly in the text.

### **Addressing the Needs of the Times**

**Ikeda:** Perhaps we can say that the times were crying out for meaning, and Shakyamuni's philosophy manifested itself in a message that directly answered that cry. The Buddha had discovered the universal philosophy at the heart of human existence and the nature of the universe and, in the Lotus Sutra, it was offered it up in a new vessel, explained in new language. A true philosophy radiates an eternal life force which is restored in a manner aptly suited to the exigencies of the times.

Does Chinese thought also express the idea that Buddhism experienced a restoration of universal truth which corresponded to the needs of that era?

**Jiang:** The idea of a universal truth, restored in a form addressing the needs of the times, must also exist in Chinese thought. I believe that this idea must also exist, for example, in the works of the Tiantai school canon. But since I am not well-versed in that literature, please forgive me for failing to offer actual examples as proof.

**Ikeda:** This restoration is surely the result of the sincere efforts of

Shakyamuni's successors, those steeped in his concepts who, responding to the call, grappled with his philosophical ideas in the context of the realities presented by the times in which they lived. As they engaged wholeheartedly in their religious practice, these devotees must have become awakened, as was Shakyamuni, to the penetrating truth of the law pervading the entire universe. And consequently, they, too, realized the law inherent in their own life force and sought to weave it into the sutras together with the teachings from Shakyamuni's sermons of the infinite and timeless law. These practitioners, awakened to the True Law, undoubtedly felt just as if they were present, listening to the true Buddha who had attained Buddhahood in the remote past expound on his teachings.

Professor Jiang, how do you think that the average sutra compiler comprehended the law realized by Shakyamuni? Also, what can you say specifically about the understandings of the compilers of the Lotus Sutra?

**Jiang:** In my opinion, the compilers of the sutras most certainly were awakened to the Buddha's teachings through the oral instruction of their teachers.

**Ikeda:** Society and the times are in a state of constant change. Seen through the lens of ultimate truth, reality is a picture of undulating ocean swells, wave after wave cresting in succession. For this reason, when society leans to one extreme, one who is attempting to live a life of moderation is not viewed as moderate. Rather, in the context of that social milieu, he is seen as an extremist.

In other words, though the truth of the Buddha's philosophy was articulated in a new form, or perhaps precisely because of this, it appeared, in the context of those times, even more striking and fresh. In this sense, my point is that I think the Lotus Sutra represents Shakyamuni Buddha's true message, ancient in origin, yet astonishingly relevant for each new generation. Of course, it reflects the currents of its time, and historical research will undoubtedly bring to light many aspects of that period. I believe that the fruits of this kind of sincere scholarly research must be welcomed. Notwithstanding this, I firmly believe that the philosophical worth of the Lotus Sutra will not be tarnished, but rather, its radiance will grow even more brilliant.

**Jiang:** Mr. Ikeda, your opinion reveals your great confidence and unwavering principles. You display considerable courage in welcoming the

results of rigorous scholarship. For that you have my heartfelt admiration.

**Ikeda:** This view of “the Lotus Sutra’s message as universal truth” has also been seen in the Lotus Sutra itself. In the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha Sun Moon Bright is said to have, in the past, expounded the Lotus Sutra as the correct teaching. Likewise, in the chapter, “The Parable of the Phantom City,” the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, and his princely sons, all preached the Lotus Sutra.

In the chapter, “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging,” the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging nearly dies, but revives and teaches the Lotus Sutra. These examples clearly show that the Lotus Sutras taught by past Buddhas were quite voluminous works. The Lotus Sutra taught by the Buddha Sun Moon Bright took a truly lengthy period of sixty small kalpas to complete. The Lotus Sutra expounded by the Buddha Awesome Sound King is composed of trillions of verses. The Lotus Sutra of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence is said to have taken over eight thousand kalpas to convey and is composed of verses as numerous as grains of sand on the banks of the Ganges River. This recounting reveals that the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni that we read today is only one of many that have been expounded over time.

Professor Jiang, what is your view of the multiple versions of the Lotus Sutra that are mentioned in the Lotus Sutra itself?

**Jiang:** As you say, Mr. Ikeda, the Lotus Sutra we have today introduces a number of other versions. However, I have not undertaken a study of the problem of whether the Lotus Sutra as we know it today is or is not the only one, nor to my knowledge have any of my colleagues before me. Now that you have brought the issue to my attention, however, I will make an effort to include it in my future studies. I appreciate your encouragement to look into this issue.

### **Wisdom and Compassion for the Happiness of All People**

**Ikeda:** My great teacher, Mr. Josei Toda (1900–1958), the second president of Soka Gakkai, understood the essence of the Lotus Sutra and his view of its most important elements is illuminating. He wrote, “The Lotus Sutra is manifested in diverse ways according to the Buddha who expounds it, the historical context, and the capacity of humankind to comprehend and accept it. Even if there is only one ultimate truth, it is

expressed in various ways based on the depth of the relationship between the people of an era and the spiritual world. The average person who has studied a little about Buddhism thinks that no one other than Shakyamuni Buddha has expounded on the Lotus Sutra. However, the Lotus Sutra states that the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence, have all expounded the Lotus Sutra, as has Tiantai.”<sup>6</sup>

This one great truth can be embodied in various manifestations. However, ultimately, this means that they are all manifestations of the Lotus Sutra. When a serious, conscientious person who desires the happiness of others encounters the Lotus Sutra, he experiences an awakening which enables him to comprehend the times in which he lives and then interpret the Lotus Sutra anew for his generation. The Law of attainment of Buddhahood, the Law to which the Buddha himself was awakened, teaches that enlightenment is possible for all sentient beings so that they may experience happiness and peace—indeed, this is the universal essence of the Lotus Sutra.

I am firmly convinced that the heart of wisdom and compassion, expressed in the desire “to work tirelessly for the happiness of all people” is an expression of the eternal truth at the heart of the Lotus Sutra.

What do you identify as the universality of the Lotus Sutra, i.e., the “heart of the Lotus Sutra”?

**Ji:** I rather think that you, Mr. Ikeda, have the more perceptive view on this question.

**Jiang:** Your statement that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra is expressed in the wise and compassionate desire “to work tirelessly for the happiness of all people,” is, I think, an extremely lucid observation. According to a traditional Chinese expression, the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, and more specifically the Lotus Sutra, is called “the spirit of the bodhisattvas.” In other words, it is an altruistic spirit of great compassion which seeks to relieve the suffering and distress of the masses. Actually, this is the reason why I have such great respect for Mahayana Buddhism. Indeed, this Mahayana spirit of compassion encourages the development of wisdom, courage, and passion, and helps human society confront and conquer its difficulties, enabling all humankind to experience true happiness.

My profound respect for Soka Gakkai is also based on this “spirit of the Lotus Sutra,” inherent in the organization, which leads it to respond to the hopes of the people and elucidate the nature of the times in which

we live. Also, its members implement their beliefs with unwavering conviction and admirable effort as they make outstanding contributions to promote worldwide peace and enhance the cultural and educational lives of people throughout the entire world.

THE DIFFUSION OF THE LOTUS SUTRA IN INDIA, CHINA, AND JAPAN

**A Century of Life, a Century of Peace**

**Ikeda:** I would like to now pose this question for our discussion: What must we learn from the Lotus Sutra to illuminate the twenty-first century and create a “Century of Life,” and a “Century of Peace”?

**Ji:** I welcome the opportunity to discuss such an extremely important matter.

**Ikeda:** To explore this topic, let us learn from your country, that is, by exploring China’s past, its rich traditions, then discerning the realities of the present, and finally, envision the possibilities for the future. Let us proceed with the scientific approach expressed in the principle you raise, Professor Ji, of the importance of “seeking truth from facts.” As our point of departure, let us focus on the actual object of our interest, explore the principles of its development, and ascertain its essential nature.

**Jiang:** Yes, to reflect on the past and contemplate the present is an effective means of accurately viewing the future.

**Ikeda:** In the Buddhist scriptures is the passage, “A sage is one who fully understands the three existences of life—past, present, and future.”<sup>7</sup> Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to explore the truths of the three existences with such wise scholars as yourselves.

**Jiang:** A broad historical perspective reveals that among the numerous Buddhist sacred scriptures, the Lotus Sutra has been propagated for the longest period over the widest geographical area and has inspired the most believers and interested researchers. This tells us that the Lotus Sutra is indeed the king of the Buddhist scriptures.

A general overview of the present also shows that the Lotus Sutra has had a major impact on the modern world, and moreover, has continued to expand its range of dissemination. Therefore, when we contemplate

the future, we are able to confidently predict that the Lotus Sutra will spread throughout the entire world in the twenty-first century.

**Ikeda:** That is quite a bold assertion. On what factors do you base your prediction?

**Jiang:** My statement is based on only one factor—the objective observation of existing facts. Speaking for myself, I do not profess allegiance to any religion, nor am I affiliated with any political party. I am simply an ordinary researcher who conducts his work based on the principle of “seeking truth from facts.” Let me briefly present the facts that support my contention.

**Ikeda:** Yes, by all means, please continue.

### **Dissemination in India**

**Jiang:** The Lotus Sutra originated in India. Yet, extant writings from the historical record of ancient Indian culture are sparse. This is why it is difficult to discuss specific details of the impact of the Lotus Sutra on Buddhist history in India. Nevertheless, the Lotus Sutra manuscripts possess quite distinct and unmatched characteristics when compared with extant manuscripts of other Buddhist texts.

**Ikeda:** Certainly, compared to the depth of China’s historical record, ancient India produced little in the way of historical texts. Perhaps this is because the Indians were more attracted to texts whose significance transcends considerations of time.

Well then, specifically to what unparalleled characteristics of the Lotus Sutra do you refer?

**Jiang:** First of all, there exist a large number of Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts. Second, the manuscripts have been discovered over a vast geographic area and in a great number of locations. Third, dissimilarities among the manuscripts of language, composition, and length offer intriguing complexities. Fourth, the span of time during which manuscripts were transcribed is remarkably long.

I believe that a comprehensive analysis of these characteristics will lead to definitive conclusions. In other words, because we have found that the Lotus Sutra is a Buddhist scripture which was extremely widespread and had the most enduring impact throughout ancient Indian

Buddhist history, the opportunities to engage in research, and the possibility of that research bearing fruit, are abundant.

**Ikeda:** Yes. That is clearly the case. The great Buddhist scholars Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu both used the Lotus Sutra. Nāgārjuna, the illustrious Mahayana theorist who lived in the second and third centuries and whose sphere of influence extended throughout southern India, quotes from the Lotus Sutra in his discourse, *Dazhidu lun* or *Daichido ron* (Treatise on the Sutra of the Perfection of Wisdom). Vasubandhu, who lived in the fourth and fifth centuries and was active in northern India, is known for his interpretive work, “Treatise on the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law.” (This work is extant only in Chinese translations, one by Bodhiruchi entitled, *Miaofa lianhua jing lun youbotishe*, the other by Ratnamati entitled *Miaofa lianhua jing lun youbotishe*.) If we merely consider the writings produced by these two scholars, it is clear that the Lotus Sutra was the focus of great interest for several centuries in both northern and southern India.

### **Diffusion to the Western Region, or Central Asia**

**Ikeda:** Well then, we see that the Lotus Sutra spread from the vast country of India to Central Asia, known in Chinese as the “Western Region.” The so-called “Silk Road” which facilitated the spread of the Lotus Sutra could very well be called the “Lotus Road.”

**Ji:** Yes. The Silk Road was simultaneously an avenue for the spread of commerce as well as for propagation of religions. During those times, priests and merchants not only turned to each other for help, they also relied on and coexisted with one another in the course of their travels. The Silk Road was a major thoroughfare used by many of the leading priests of China, India and other countries as they traversed the continents on their various missionary journeys.

**Ikeda:** The Lotus Sutra traversed time and great geographical distances to become a widely revered scripture. Its universal message was embraced by many cultures and peoples and was interpreted differently in the context of each unique cultural milieu.

**Jiang:** The Lotus Sutra was relayed to the Western Region, or Central Asia, where it became the most widespread and had the most prevailing influence of any Buddhist scripture in the history of the region. As I

mentioned previously, based on the discovery to date of the remarkable number of Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts, we see the vast range of regions in which they appeared, the complexity of the texts, and the immense expanse of time over which transcriptions were produced. No other Buddhist scripture can match this record. In contrast, for example, there are extremely few ancient Sanskrit manuscripts of the Golden Light Sutra (*Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*) from the Western Region.

**Ikeda:** Perhaps this is an indication of the deep belief that the various peoples of the Western Region had in the Lotus Sutra. During the past several years, we at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy organized an exhibition entitled, “The Lotus Sutra and Its World,” which includes manuscripts and block print books from the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. The exhibition has been held in Tokyo (1998), Vienna (2000), and Wolfenbüttel, Germany (2000).

In the exhibition held in Tokyo, the manuscripts and block printed texts of the Lotus Sutra and other major Buddhist scriptures represent thirteen writing systems and fourteen languages from regions along the entire route of the Silk Road. On display were texts written vertically as well as horizontally, and on surfaces not only of paper and palm leaf, but also of birch bark and leather hide. The exhibition showed a truly magnificent representation of texts.

**Jiang:** Marvelous! Indeed, the exhibition vividly traces the route of the Lotus Sutra, which, having been transmitted from India to Central Asia, embarked from there to China on the Silk Road.

**Ikeda:** Yes, and in addition to the Chinese translations, there are Tibetan, Mongolian, ancient Turkish, Manchurian, and Annamese (a Vietnamese dialect) translations. In modern times, we also have a French translation by Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), an English one by Hendrik Kern (1833–1917), and a Japanese translation by Bunyiu Nanjio (1849–1927) and Hōkei Izumi (1884–1947). Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra (*Miaofa lianhua jing* or *Myōhō-rensō-kyō*) is considered an unrivaled masterpiece that is recited even today. Translations into other languages such as Xixia or Tangut were done from the Chinese translation.

**Jiang:** History shows us that the Lotus Sutra was translated into Tibetan, Uighur (belonging to the Turkic group of Altaic languages),

Xixia, and Mongolian. It greatly influenced these cultures and their peoples as well.

### **The Convergence of Cultures on the Silk Road**

**Ji:** The Silk Road provided the context for fostering harmonious cultural interaction and blending cultural influences of different peoples in ancient times. The world's great ancient civilizations—China, India, and Greece—brought with them the major world religions, i.e., Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Travelers spoke many of the world's languages including the Indo-European languages and others. In addition to this convergence of religions and languages, the Silk Road also facilitated the interaction of many of the world's literary, artistic, and musical traditions.

**Ikeda:** The Silk Road was truly the scene for cultural encounter. Evidence of these encounters can be seen in the wall paintings and other artifacts discovered in the cave temples of Dunhuang. These are vivid remnants of the variety of peoples who occupied and traversed this area. Needless to say, Dunhuang was a critical point of contact between China and the Western Region. I believe that today the example of these peoples serves as an evocative symbol of the absolute necessity for dialogue between the civilizations.

In 1985, the exhibition, “Treasures of Dunhuang, China,” was held at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum. The exhibition fascinated Japanese viewers with its display of the hidden treasures of this great desert gallery. Included were Chinese and Xixia translations of the Lotus Sutra as well as other discovered texts and reproductions of the brilliantly colored Mogao Grotto paintings from the cave temples of Dunhuang. In 1990, we published *Tonkō no Kōsai: Bi to jinsei o kataru* (The Radiance of Dunhuang: On Beauty and Life), dialogues between myself and the late Professor Chang Shuhong (1904–1994) (honorary director of the Dunhuang Academy), who was truly the guardian angel of Dunhuang.

**Ji:** I also have had the opportunity to visit the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, also known as the Caves of One Thousand Buddhas. In an environment such as Dunhuang which is surrounded by such a vast and boundless desert, it is easy to imagine how the ancient peoples of the Silk Road came to understand the importance of coexistence and providing mutual aid to one another. Groups of people are depicted in many of the wall paintings. The faces and appearance of the people

illustrate the many different racial and ethnic groups they represented. They appear to be working together in various kinds of projects.

My impression is that those people—for instance, those who carved out and lived in the caves and those the artists who created the paintings—were not a single people but came from different races or tribes. Of course, those portrayed in the paintings no longer exist—indeed, life is but a fleeting moment. However, the goodwill between their peoples is eternal. This simple truth is clearly illustrated in this facet of Chinese history.

A visit to Dunhuang imparts an uncanny feeling, almost as if being transported to an ancient and remote time and place, far removed from modern life. The intercultural goodwill and friendship, etched for all time on the cave walls of Dunhuang, portrays a perennial aspiration of all peoples. Upon gazing at the wall paintings, a profound and heart-warming feeling of joy swept over me.

**Ikeda:** I felt exactly the same way. In every corner of today's modern world, ethnic strife abounds. Encounters with peoples different from oneself have not always resulted in conflict. Rather, when peoples were able to transcend the constraints of their own culture, they have caught a glimpse of a global vision of a more peaceful world. This is history's lesson from the Silk Road.

The Lotus Sutra was embraced by peoples representing the heterogeneous cultures of the Silk Road. It served to encourage this great array of diversity, while simultaneously pointing the way to a life of peaceful coexistence. The paintings inspired this insight, revealing the universality of the Lotus Sutra.

### **Transmission to China—Six Translations/Three Extant Texts**

**Ikeda:** By way of background, please tell us how and when the Lotus Sutra was transmitted to China.

**Jiang:** The first translation of the Lotus Sutra appeared in the state of Wu in the Three Kingdoms period (222–280). It was called the *Fo yi sanche huan jing* or “The Buddha Summons the Three Vehicles” and was translated by an *upasaka* or lay believer, Zhi Qian, from the country of Yuezhi.

**Ikeda:** The word Yuezhi refers, in the narrow sense, to the northwestern part of India. More broadly interpreted, it refers to the whole of India.

Therefore, Zhi Qian must have been a translator from India who settled in China. The sutra name, i.e., “The Buddha Summons the Three Vehicles,” suggests that the focus of this translation is on the “Simile and Parable” chapter, chapter three of the Lotus Sutra, which depicts the story about the three carts and the burning house.

**Jiang:** Yes. That is exactly right. This text consists of only one volume, so it is undoubtedly an excerpt translation of the Lotus Sutra. Furthermore, just as you say, the name of the sutra itself indicates without a doubt that the subject of the abridged volume is the parable of the three carts and the burning house.

At present, we know of a total of Chinese translations of the Lotus Sutra. Of these, three complete versions and one excerpt are extant.

**Ikeda:** In the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (Kaiyuan Era Catalog of the Buddhist Canon), we are told of “six translations of which three are extant.” The three complete extant Lotus Sutra versions in Chinese are the *Zheng fahua jing*, the *Miaofa lianhua jing*, and the *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing*.

Of these, the *Zheng fahua jing*, translated in 286 CE during the Western Jin dynasty by Dharmaraksha, is claimed to be based on a Sanskrit palm leaf manuscript with some 6,500 verses, which was preserved in the palace archives of the king of Yutian, a small state in Central Asia.

The *Miaofa lianhua jing* was translated in 406 during the Later Qin dynasty by Kumarajiva based on the 6,000 verse “white silk” Sanskrit manuscript in the palace archives of the king of Jibin, another small state in Central Asia.

The *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing*, translated in 601 during the Sui dynasty by Jnanagupta and Dharmagupta, is said to be based on a 6,200 verse palm leaf manuscript. Of these three translations, it is believed that the oldest text form of the Lotus Sutra had been preserved in the original Sanskrit manuscript on which Kumarajiva’s translation is based.

The three lost translations, which we know only by their names, are the *Fahua sanmei jing*, which consisted of six volumes, translated by Zhengwuwei in 255 in the state of Wei in the Three Kingdoms period; the *Sayun fentuoli jing*, composed of six volumes translated by Dharmaraksha in 265 during the Western Jin dynasty, and the *Fangdeng fahua jing*, in five volumes, translated by Zhi Daogen in 335 during the Eastern Jin dynasty.

What is the difference, then, between the eight Chinese versions

mentioned by Professor Jiang and these six translations mentioned in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*?

**Jiang:** Each of the six translations, of which three are extant, that you referred to, Mr. Ikeda, are translations of the entire Lotus Sutra. The eight translations I mentioned include those six translations plus an additional two translated excerpts from the Lotus Sutra. According to the preface to the *Bonkan taishō shin'yaku hokekyō* (A New [Japanese] Translation of the Lotus Sutra in Collation of Sanskrit and Chinese Texts), translated by Bunyiu Nanjio and Hōkei Izumi, the two translated excerpts are as follows:

1. *Fo yi sanche huan jing*, now lost, one volume, translated by the *upasaka* Zhi Qian of Yuezhi during the Wu dynasty.
2. *Satan fentuoli jing*, extant, one volume, translator unknown, listed in the records of the Western Jin.

Therefore, the difference between the six sutra translations, which you mentioned, and the eight I discussed, is simply the two translated excerpts I have just described.

### **The Translation of Kumarajiva's *Miaofa lianhua jing***

**Jiang:** The *Miaofa lianhua jing* translation by Kumarajiva is the seventh Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra. Once this translation was made public, it supplanted all previous Chinese translations. Moreover, the subsequent Chinese translation, i.e., the *Tianpin miaofa lianhua jing*, which was the eighth, in effect, served no useful purpose. In other words, Kumarajiva's *Miaofa lianhua jing* translation played a decisive role in the propagation of the Lotus Sutra to China and Japan and throughout all of East Asia.

**Ikeda:** With Buddhism's transmission to Japan during the time of Prince Shōtoku (574–622), the *Miaofa lianhua jing* or *Myōhō-rensōkyō* came to be used exclusively. Nichiren Daishonin also used it extensively.

Professor Jiang, in your view, what are the aspects of Kumarajiva's translation that make it so superior to other translations?

**Jiang:** Kumarajiva spread the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine throughout Asia, and the magnitude of his contribution in that period is unrivaled by any other Buddhist devotee. First of all, Kumarajiva conducted thorough and systematic studies of the Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist

scriptures available in India during his time. Second, even before he began translating Buddhist scriptures, he was well-versed in all the various doctrines of Buddhism and other religions. Third, Kumarajiva deliberately and systematically set out to use the most appropriate and accurate language in his Chinese translations and, not surprisingly, the resulting translations of Buddhist scripture were transmitted quickly and widely throughout the region and were the most enduring. Needless to say, the scriptural translation that drew by far the most readers was the *Miaofa lianhua jing*.

The greatest characteristic of the Lotus Sutra is its declaration of equality for all. No matter what the circumstances, each person possesses the essential nature of the Buddha. This is what “equality” means. This is what “equality” means. This is the appeal of the Lotus Sutra that transcends time and space. Mr. Ikeda, I sense that your philosophy is also founded on a boundless faith in human beings.

Kumarajiva translated the Lotus Sutra into Chinese by capturing the essence of its meaning rather than slavishly translating word for word into Chinese. It is such a masterful translation, no doubt, because at heart all his efforts were for the sake of the Buddhist Law and all humankind. I receive this same feeling, Mr. Ikeda, from your forthright and contemporary perspective of the Lotus Sutra.

**Ikeda:** Thank you for your generous comment. My wish is to testify, for the sake of humankind, to the powerful and indestructible force of the Lotus Sutra which is relevant for today’s world as well as for the future.

Nichiren Daishonin especially praised Kumarajiva’s translation of the Lotus Sutra as an accurate transmission of Shakyamuni’s spiritual message. He said: “As many as 176 individuals have translated sutras and treatises which have made their way from India to China. But Kumarajiva is the only translator who has faithfully conveyed Shakyamuni’s scriptures without arbitrarily adding his own ideas.”<sup>8</sup>

Kumarajiva was fluent in Sanskrit as well as Chinese. As Professor Jiang so accurately pointed out, Kumarajiva’s exceptional talent was his ability to grasp the essential meaning of the text and not simply translate the words themselves into Chinese. As a result of Kumarajiva’s intense and painstaking translation efforts, Buddhism spread throughout the vast Chinese cultural sphere and was accepted warmly by the people. From there, it was disseminated throughout the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago, becoming a major influence in all of East Asia.

## The Impact of the Lotus Sutra on China

**Jiang:** The monumental impact of the Lotus Sutra on Chinese culture as well as on Chinese Buddhist history is profoundly broad and long-lasting. Therefore, it is impossible to identify a specific period or place to explain this phenomenon, nor is it necessary. For the purposes of our discussion, I would like to be relatively conservative in choosing a number of issues that I believe are worthy of consideration for future research.

**Ikeda:** By all means, please continue.

**Jiang:** First of all, broadly speaking, the Buddhist sacred text that had the greatest impact on China was the Lotus Sutra. This was due to Kumarajiva's excellent translation, the *Miaofa lianhua jing*.

We are still not completely sure about the exact number of extant ancient manuscripts of Buddhist sacred texts translated into Chinese. However, among the ancient Chinese translations of the Lotus Sutra, manuscript copies of Kumarajiva's translation are by far the most numerous.

Some time ago, I discovered that the oldest extant block print Chinese Buddhist text was indeed, as we might have expected, the *Miaofa lianhua jing*.

**Ikeda:** Please tell us more about this oldest block print text.

**Jiang:** I am told that it was published during the middle years of the Zhou dynasty in the reign of Empress Wu (c. 624–705, reigned 690–705), which means that it must have been produced before the period 695–699 CE. This is approximately 170 years before the previously recognized oldest manuscript of this kind was published. So, it predates the block print book of the *Jingang bore jing* (Diamond Wisdom Sutra), published in the ninth year of the Xiantong era during the Tang dynasty (868 CE).

**Ikeda:** Fascinating. Can you tell us why so many transcribed manuscripts and printed books of the Lotus Sutra were produced? One theory, apparently, is that believers were taught that reproducing the Lotus Sutra would garner merit for the transcriber. So, certainly, the hope of accumulating merit was a factor. I believe that another major impetus was that followers felt greatly impelled to spread the message of the

Lotus Sutra. Professor Jiang, what do you think about this issue?

**Jiang:** I think it is just as you say. It is quite conceivable that one of the major motivations for the creation of numerous manuscripts and printings of the Lotus Sutra was the desire on the part of all believers to propagate the Lotus Sutra far and wide.

**Ikeda:** Are there any other reasons?

**Jiang:** We can infer from ancient texts on Chinese Buddhist history, such as the *Liang gaoseng zhuan* (The Liang Dynasty Biographies of Eminent Priests), that the Lotus Sutra had an enormous impact on China. We must also consider the numerous works by ancient Chinese writers devoted to describing and interpreting the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Accordingly, the large body of literature devoted to the Lotus Sutra was a stimulus to the production as well as an indicator of demand for Lotus Sutra transcriptions and printed books.

### **Tiantai Zhiyi and the One-Vehicle Philosophy**

**Ikeda:** The volume of works written on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra by ancient Chinese writers indicates considerable philosophical interest that the Lotus Sutra attracted. It appears that, early on, prominent Buddhist scholars began writing interpretive works on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The earliest extant work of this kind was the *Miaofa lianhua jing shu* (A Commentary on the Lotus Sutra) by Daosheng (355–434), a disciple of Kumarajiva.

Other interpretive texts followed, such as those written by Fayun (467–529) of Guangzhesi temple; by Jizang (549–623); and by Kuiji (632–682), also known as the Great Teacher Cien. And of course, the finest examples were written by Zhiyi, the Great Teacher Tiantai.

**Jiang:** Generally speaking, before the Sui and Tang dynasties, the mode by which the Lotus Sutra was conveyed was limited to translations and lectures. At this stage, distinct lineages and doctrines did exist, but the various Buddhist schools had not yet appeared. The one individual who made the greatest contribution to the initial spread of Lotus Sutra doctrine in China was undeniably Kumarajiva.

Beginning in the Sui and Tang dynasties, Chinese Buddhism entered into a period of school creation. In this next phase of Buddhism's development, Zhiyi, the founder of the Tiantai school, made the greatest con-

tribution to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. The Tiantai school, which is also known as the Fahua or Hokke school, venerated the Lotus Sutra as a precious scripture.

**Ikeda:** Zhiyi presented the world with three major writings based on the Lotus Sutra. These are the *Fahua xuanyi* or *Hokke gengi* (The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra); the *Fahua wenju* or *Hokke mongu* (The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra); and the *Mohe zhiguan* or *Maka shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight). How was it possible for Zhiyi to make such a significant contribution?

**Jiang:** I think there were probably many factors. The fundamental reason is, in my humble opinion, that Zhiyi did not take a stubbornly dogmatic approach to Lotus Sutra doctrine, but rather was able to clearly and accurately interpret the essence of the Lotus Sutra, at a time when Chinese society was in turmoil and the country was yearning for unity. The concept of unity in the Lotus Sutra provided support for the traditional Chinese cultural concept of “Great Unity.” The profound significance of this influence is difficult to appreciate today; however, it is a concept worthy of special attention.

**Ikeda:** So, you are suggesting that a major factor enabling Zhiyi to make such a great contribution was his clear elucidation of the “one-vehicle” philosophy of the Lotus Sutra. This one-vehicle philosophy, based on universal and egalitarian principles, teaches that all beings are capable of enlightenment. As a result, after a long and divisive period of competing mini-states, this message struck a sympathetic chord during the Sui and Tang dynasties which had witnessed the unification of China under one nation state. This is a truly important philosophical concept that also resonates with people in contemporary times.

What was the nature of popular belief in the Lotus Sutra in everyday people’s lives?

**Jiang:** The degree of influence the Lotus Sutra had on ancient as well as on contemporary Chinese people is most notable in the devout belief in the compassion and saving grace of the Bodhisattva Guanyin or Kannon (Perceiver of the World’s Sounds). In many places throughout China, one finds Buddhist temples which are called Fahua or Hokke temples and which are dedicated exclusively to the veneration of the Bodhisattva Guanyin.

So, the worship of the Bodhisattva Guanyin had already become an

important element in the religious life of the Chinese people.

### **The World of Buddhism as Seen in the Wall Paintings of Dunhuang**

**Ikeda:** In the caves of Dunhuang is a masterpiece that depicts the subject matter of the Guanyin or Kannon chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the full title of which is “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.”

The parable of the three carts and burning house, found in the “Simile and Parable” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, is also portrayed. This parable tells the story of some children (representing human beings) who are playing, unaware that they are being enveloped in a burning house (representing the flames of worldly passions). The children are thrilled to be promised three carts, which is a metaphor for the path of the voice-hearer (Learning), that of the pratyekabuddha (Realization), and that of the bodhisattva, and thus lured from the house, are saved from the flames. The Buddha’s ultimate purpose, however, beyond providing these three vehicles, is to lead people to the one supreme vehicle, in other words, to Buddhahood through the power of the one Buddha vehicle.

One can clearly recognize this parable in the cave paintings of Dunhuang. It is almost as if the scenes are a series of images unfolding on videotape. The essential message of the Lotus Sutra is clear to anyone, and this universality itself, reveals the brilliance of the Lotus Sutra.

**Ji:** I have visited many caves to view artistic depictions of the sutras on their walls. Among these works of art are scenes from the Lotus Sutra, the Lankāvatāra Sutra, and the Golden Light Sutra. The artists chose to represent many of the chapters of the sutras in visual form, and it appears that the Guanyin chapter of the Lotus Sutra was the most well-liked, based on the frequency of its occurrence.

The Guanyin chapter teaches that any person who fervently recites the name of the Bodhisattva Guanyin will be spared from the flames of raging fires and will not be swept away by turbulent floods. Those who, embarking on ocean voyages in search of treasure, encounter violent storms, will escape hardship even though they are cast adrift and washed ashore on strange lands. Those who suffer persecution and are threatened with punishment will escape the executioner’s blade as it shatters into pieces.

The Guanyin chapter elaborates on many other blessings afforded

believers. For example, if a woman wishes for a son, she will give birth to a son blessed with virtue and wisdom. If she wishes for a girl, she will be granted a beautiful daughter. In short, the power of these blessings is evident, and through prayer, blessings of miraculous efficacy will surely be received. The most frequent image of all is that of an imminent execution scene in which the victim is literally about to be hacked to pieces. This subject matter most vibrantly illustrates the power of Buddhist Law possessed by the Bodhisattva Guanyin.

**Ikeda:** “The Lotus Sutra and Its World” exhibition also displayed a copy of a Xixia or Tangut translation, including illustrations, of the Guanyin chapter.

The Lotus Sutra was well received on all levels of Chinese society. On the national level, political leaders took a serious interest, and faith in the Lotus Sutra also took root as it spread widely among the people.

**Jiang:** In other words, we can not ignore the major role the Lotus Sutra played in the development of Chinese culture. Indeed, if we do not study the Lotus Sutra and its impact on Chinese culture, we will be unable to fully understand the breadth and depth of Chinese culture itself.

In as early as the seventh century, the Lotus Sutra was transmitted to Japan through the Korean peninsula.

### Acceptance of Buddhism in Japan

**Jiang:** Now, I would like to ask you a question, Mr. Ikeda, about how the Lotus Sutra was received in Japan. How was Buddhism, and particularly the Lotus Sutra, received in Japan in the early period after their introduction? And what role did Prince Shōtoku (574–622) play at that time?

**Ikeda:** Buddhism was officially introduced into Japan during the middle of the sixth century. And it seems that the Lotus Sutra also was transmitted rather early on during that same period.

A variety of obstacles had to be overcome, however, so it took some time before the imperial court truly accepted the new religion. The Buddha, the deity of the new religion, was considered a foreign god of a foreign religion, and the court was reluctant to revere this new god just as they did the time-honored gods of old Japan. According to the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicle of Japan), in the year 606 CE, Prince Shōtoku

expounded the Lotus Sutra in lectures to Empress Suiko (554–628). These lectures are currently the subject of debate.

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that in the face of major opposition to the adoption of Buddhism, Prince Shōtoku played a pioneering role in facilitating the acceptance of this foreign religion, and particularly the profound philosophical belief system presented in the Lotus Sutra. Legend has it that the great Chinese priest Jianzhen (688–763), known in Japan as Ganjin Wajō (venerable priest), commented on the depth of Prince Shōtoku's understanding of the Lotus Sutra.

Jianzhen is a figure in Buddhist history dear to the Japanese people. He endured great hardship in his efforts to come to Japan, and even now, the Japanese have not forgotten the great sacrifice he made for them. It was in the year 742 that Jianzhen made the decision to travel to Japan at the fervent request of enthusiastic student priests who accompanied a Japanese embassy to Tang China. He embarked on five ill-fated voyages to Japan, each ending in failure. These arduous travels left Jianzhen blinded. In 754, twelve years after his initial decision, Jianzhen was finally able to realize his long-cherished wish to come to the capital of Japan. At that time, he brought with him the three major writings of the Tiantai school.

**Ji:** I have had the opportunity to visit Tōshōdaiji temple where the image of the seated Jianzhen is enshrined. While there, I felt as if I had, in one instant, retraced one thousand years of history to Jianzhen's time. I have only had this experience once before. That was in India where I was able to view the ruins that had earlier been visited by the Chinese Buddhist priest Xuanzang (602–664). There, I sensed the presence of Xuanzang everywhere I looked. In my recent experience, the location had changed from India to Japan, and the personage from Xuanzang to Jianzhen. In that venerable old temple, my eyes came to rest on the compassionate and solemn face of Jianzhen. I felt as if I could see him sitting cross-legged on a lotus flower dais, preaching the sutras, teaching about the Buddhist Law and conferring the precepts. Those gathered around him included the emperor, crown prince, aristocrats, and common folk. Not only could I see his image, I could even hear his voice.

Jianzhen loved Japan and its people with all his heart. He developed a deep appreciation, shared by the Chinese people as well, for friendly relations between the people of China and Japan. With the desire to spread the message of Buddhism in Japan, Jianzhen determined to leave his own country behind and give his all for the salvation and happiness of the Japanese people.

**Ikeda:** The Japanese people must never forget Jianzhen's generous spirit of compassion. In 1998, President Jiang Zemin, your country's head of state, came to Japan. This was the first time in the several thousand-year history of China-Japan relations for a Chinese head of state to visit Japan. I met with President Jiang and convey the Japanese people's enthusiastic welcome. As we were talking, I discovered that he originated from Yangzhou, the same area as Jianzhen. I told President Jiang, "You were committed to fostering friendly relations and so were able to overcome great difficulties to come to Japan. Jianzhen, who shares your place of birth and who, similarly, was a pioneer devoted to promoting friendly relations between China and Japan, is undoubtedly overjoyed by your visit to Japan."

### **Saichō and the Development of Tiantai Buddhism in Japan**

**Jiang:** Jianzhen Heshang (venerable priest) was persuaded to come to Japan by student priests who accompanied a Japanese embassy to China. By contrast, during the Heian period (794–1192), Saichō, also known as the Great Teacher Dengyō, traveled on board an envoy's ship to Tang China to study the Tiantai school of Buddhism.

**Ikeda:** Yes, that is true.

**Jiang:** We know that Saichō introduced the Tiantai school of Buddhism to Japan, where it is known as the Tendai school. But what significance did he give to the Lotus Sutra, and how did he propagate it in Japan?

**Ikeda:** Saichō's achievements include not only facilitating the Japanese people's acceptance of the Lotus Sutra, but also the founding of the Tendai school in Japan in the ninth century. I must point out that this was an extraordinary epoch-making accomplishment.

Saichō taught that all sentient beings were capable of attaining enlightenment through the "one-vehicle philosophy" of the Lotus Sutra. While other sutras dictated that only through long, arduous training could one become enlightened, Saichō emphasized that the Lotus Sutra taught that one could attain enlightenment in one's present form.

Saichō entreated the court for permission to build a platform on Mt. Hiei from which to administer the precepts of Mahayana Buddhism. His wish was granted by the emperor one week after his death. Following Saichō's passing, the Tendai school became the leading Buddhist order in Japan, and as a result, the Lotus Sutra spread throughout the country.

In Heian period literary masterpieces such as the Tale of Genji and Sei Shōnagon's Pillow Book, we can see the influence of the Lotus Sutra and Tendai "original enlightenment thought." The Lotus Sutra teaches that women, too, are capable of attaining enlightenment or Buddhahood, and so female adherents increased, and the idea provided the inspiration for the creation of numerous cultural contributions by women during the Heian period.

Speaking of attainment of enlightenment by women, during the Nara period (710–794), which preceded the Heian period, provincial nunneries were established in each region, based on the Lotus Sutra, their fundamental sacred text. Needless to say, it is clear that the Lotus Sutra had an immeasurable influence on all aspects of Japanese culture, whether it be on Japanese literature, the performance arts, or the everyday life of the people.

### **The Fundamental Philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin**

**Jiang:** Next, please explain to us the nature of the relationship between the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren (1222–1282), who founded the Buddhist tradition based on the sutra in the thirteenth century and whose teachings are fundamental to the beliefs of your organization, Soka Gakkai.

**Ikeda:** I will briefly summarize my answer into two main points. First, Nichiren Daishonin established a method of religious practice, based on the essence of the Lotus Sutra, which would enable every person to attain Buddhahood. Leading up to this development, the Daishonin had carefully considered the sutras of Shakyamuni's teachings and concluded that the core of his teachings is the Lotus Sutra. He determined that Shakyamuni of India, Zhiyi (the Great Teacher Tiantai) of China, Saichō (the Great Teacher Dengyō) from Japan, as well as himself were the "four teachers of the three countries" who all carried on the legitimate teachings of Buddhism. Moreover, Nichiren introduced this new form of religious practice he had developed, based on the essence of the Lotus Sutra, as being timely and relevant to the era of the Latter Day of the Law.

Centuries earlier, Zhiyi had set forth the principle, based on the Lotus Sutra, of *shijie huju* or *jikkai-gogu*, "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds," which states that each of the Ten Worlds or states of existence possesses the potential for all ten. This concept asserts that every individual is endowed with the innate capacity to achieve the state of Buddhahood, and therefore is able to attain enlightenment.

Zhiyi had also taught practices to achieve Buddhahood such as meditations on *yinian sanqian* or *ichinen-sanzen*, the principle that a single life moment possesses three thousand realms, a concept he set forth in his work *Mohe zhiguan* or Great Concentration and Insight. However, this kind of religious discipline was difficult even for those who had become monks, so, of course, it was especially unsuited for the average person.

To provide a solution to this problem, Nichiren Daishonin presented to believers a mandala as the object of devotion for attaining Buddhahood, based on the principles of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds (*jikkai-gogu*) and the integration of all phenomena in each single moment of life (*ichinen-sanzen*). He declared that every person can manifest his or her inherent pure Buddhahood and become enlightened by chanting the words “*Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō*” or “Homage to the Lotus Sutra” to the Gohonzon (object of devotion).

The Daishonin taught that the Lotus Sutra’s spirit of compassion should be embodied in every field of society in order to realize social justice and an ideal society. The Daishonin maintained that we must realize the ideal, as indicated in the Lotus Sutra, of what is known as *shaba-soku-jakkō*, which means that the present world of suffering is none other than the ideal world of Eternally Tranquil Light, and of *shido-soku-bukkokudo* or “this very land is the Buddha land,” in order to transform this world of suffering into a Land of Eternally Tranquil Light or a Buddha land.

By example, Nichiren attempted to provide relief to people suffering from natural disasters, famine, and disease by writing a work entitled *Risshō ankoku ron* or “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.” The title of this work consists of two factors. “Establishing the Correct Teaching” means that the leaders as well as general members of society must achieve inner transformation in order to embody the principles of the Lotus Sutra. “The Peace of the Land” means peace and tranquility for all the peoples of the world. Nichiren’s reference to “land” or “country” in this context does not carry any hint of nationalism. In many parts of this work, he chose the Chinese character 國 to indicate “country,” which places the element that represents the people within the element that represents the national borders. This indicates that people were central in the Daishonin’s understanding of the word “country.”

THE DEVELOPMENT AND UNFOLDING OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
THE LOTUS SUTRA

### **The Founding of Soka Gakkai**

**Ikeda:** Next, let us proceed with a discussion of the Lotus Sutra in the present.

**Jiang:** That would be excellent. In today's world, if we were to search for the center of Lotus Sutra belief, practice and research, we would find it in your country, Japan. And of all the Japanese Buddhist schools that regard the Lotus Sutra their principal sacred text, Soka Gakkai is the largest. In other words, if we want to consider the present status of the Lotus Sutra in the world, we must think in terms of the Lotus Sutra as it exists in Japan. Furthermore, I believe that if we want to understand the status of the Lotus Sutra in Japan, we must consider, first of all, the present state of Soka Gakkai.

**Ji:** The truths and principles contained within the Lotus Sutra are of such enormous breadth and depth that an outsider like myself is incapable of readily discussing the intricacies of its content. I can say, however, that the understanding of the Lotus Sutra on the part of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), the first president, and Josei Toda, the second president of Soka Gakkai, is completely consistent with the essence of eastern philosophy as it is understood in India and China. Mr. Makiguchi was originally an educator, wasn't he?

**Ikeda:** Yes. Our first as well as second presidents were educators. "Kyoiku," or education, was originally a part of our organization's name: Soka Kyoiku Gakkai or Value Creation Education Society.

### **Makiguchi, Soka Gakkai's First President, and Value Theory**

**Ji:** President Makiguchi expressed his Philosophy of Value in this way: "Respect for life is the single most important value in this world. All other values derive their significance from their association to this respect for life."<sup>9</sup>

**Ikeda:** Yes, indeed. It is just as you say. President Makiguchi considered "value" in terms of its relationship to all living creatures and their survival. Makiguchi's Philosophy of Value was a theme he pursued for

life. This is reflected in the name of the organization itself, i.e., Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society).

The most outstanding Japanese Buddhist scholar, the late Professor Hajime Nakamura (1912–1999), lectured on this very topic.

**Ji:** Yes, I am quite familiar with Professor Nakamura’s work.

**Ikeda:** Indeed, Professor Nakamura wrote the forward for the Japanese edition of your selected essays.<sup>10</sup> Professor Nakamura lamented the fact that Japanese scholarship in the fields of philosophy and thought tended to simply interpret rather than advance philosophical ideas. Whether it be eastern or western thought, he questioned the “slavish scholasticism” of simply carrying on the ideas of well-established philosophers and theorists.

President Makiguchi, however, followed a different path. He was said to believe in his own powers of thought and to insist on thinking independently as his own master. As a specific case in point, we can consider President Makiguchi’s alteration of the values in the conventional value system of “truth, good, and beauty” or “truth, good, beauty, and spirituality.” He substituted “benefit” for the values of “truth” and “spirituality.”

Professor Nakamura discusses these concepts in this way: “One may associate ‘benefit’ with ‘profit,’ but surprisingly, benefit is a concept that is integral to eastern philosophy. That which is held as most important in Buddhism is ‘the effort to benefit others’ or ‘that which is for the sake of others.’ The Sanskrit word meaning ‘for the sake of’ is ‘artha.’ The concept of the word is often rendered as ‘benefit’ or as ‘justice.’ One might argue that ‘benefit’ and ‘justice’ are different, but both express the meaning of the concept. This seeming mismatch of meanings focuses on a pivotal aspect of the concept, i.e., that actions undertaken for the sake of others also benefit oneself.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, Professor Nakamura shed light on Buddhist traditional concepts, and in so doing, recognized the importance of President Makiguchi’s philosophy of Value Creation.

### **President Toda’s “Experience of Enlightenment”**

**Ji:** President Makiguchi and President Toda both were vehemently opposed to the Japanese militarists’ aggression and, as a result, they were arrested and imprisoned. While in prison, President Toda experienced a profound enlightenment which was inspired by the Lotus Sutra.

Mr. Ikeda, I believe you described his experience in your book, *The Human Revolution*.<sup>12</sup>

**Ikeda:** Yes. That is right.

**Ji:** According to your account, President Toda pondered the thirty-four negations in the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra (*Wuliangyi jing* or *Muryōgi-kyō*), which is regarded as an introduction to the Lotus Sutra, and contemplated long and hard the nature of Buddha's body or entity. He explained in clear detail that an extraordinarily wonderful state of mind had come over him, and all of a sudden, he distinctly understood that the "Buddha" represented life itself.

**Ikeda:** President Toda explained that he had come to recognize that "The Buddha is life itself. It is the cosmic life force that dwells within me as well as throughout the universe." Through this experience, President Toda's mind had been opened to the truth of the Lotus Sutra and the life force of the universe. He was then able to interpret the essence of the Lotus Sutra in readily understood language and make it come alive for modern times.

**Ji:** President Toda writes about his experience in his essay entitled, "The Philosophy of Life." He tells how, in an instant of religious awakening, he realized that the microcosm of his own life was one with the macrocosm of the entire universe, that is, the identity of the self and the universe.<sup>13</sup>

**Ikeda:** Through his experience of oneness with the life of the universe—eternal life—President Toda came to the realization that he is a Bodhisattva of the Earth. He was struck with the profound awareness that he himself was one of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth appearing in the Lotus Sutra. At the same time he realized that the time had come for a multitude of Bodhisattvas of the Earth to appear and save humankind by awakening it to the truth of the Lotus Sutra. This realization of his religious mission was a direct result of the great adversity he had experienced. Ignited by a resolute determination, President Toda set about the postwar reconstruction and development of Soka Gakkai which had been practically destroyed by the oppressive Japanese military authorities.

**Jiang:** That is a fascinating story. I previously stated that "I believe that

if we want to understand the status of the Lotus Sutra in Japan, we must consider, first of all, the present state of Soka Gakkai.” In relation to this statement, I must solemnly say that I am aware that conflicts exist among the many Japanese Buddhist schools that regard the Lotus Sutra as their main sacred scripture.

However, I maintain a strictly impartial position and do not intend to become involved in any of these debates. My impartiality is based on an understanding of Soka Gakkai that is founded entirely on fact and experience.

**Ikeda:** I think your approach is quite natural for a scholar who pursues the truth.

### **Soka Gakkai’s Contribution to Peace**

**Jiang:** As you well know, the Lotus Sutra is the core of the Philosophy of Value authored by President Makiguchi as well as the basis of the realization President Toda gained while in prison.

Currently, as the president of Soka Gakkai International, Mr. Ikeda, you have applied the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, based on the *Ongikuden* or “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”—Nichiren’s lectures on the Lotus Sutra—and have devoted yourself to developing activities to ensure the happiness of humankind.

It is also my understanding that Soka Gakkai has made an outstanding contribution to efforts toward world peace. I base my statement on the following grounds. First, President Makiguchi carried on the spirit of Nichiren who spread the Law at the risk of his life. He fought against Japan’s fascist government for the sake of peace and was thrown into prison and died a martyr for his beliefs. Second, on September 8, 1957, President Toda sought to safeguard peace by resisting international as well as domestic pressures and issuing the historically significant Declaration against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs.

**Ikeda:** Our first two presidents shared a profound desire for the happiness of all people. This was their long-cherished hope. They knew that without peace on the national level, the happiness and well-being of the people would be elusive.

**Jiang:** Third, following in the footsteps of your predecessors, and as the third president of Soka Gakkai, Mr. Ikeda, on September 8, 1968, you advocated friendly relations with China. During the period from 1974 to

1997, you made ten formal goodwill visits to China, thereby contributing greatly to amicable relations between Japan and China.

**Ikeda:** Thank you for your kind remarks. This year (2002) we commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan. My hope is that the peoples of China and Japan will move forward together by joining their hearts and minds to work for the sake of peace and development in Asia.

**Jiang:** Fourth, Mr. Ikeda, you have shown by your efforts as the president of Soka Gakkai International that you are deeply committed to overcoming the various differences of religion, culture, and ethnicity by continuing to engage in dialogue with a wide range of prominent national leaders and cultural representatives. Beginning in 1972 with a dialogue with Dr. Arnold Toynbee, the well-known English historian, you have continued these dialogues for the past thirty years. You have also engaged in many highly significant efforts to build a firm foundation for an enduring world peace.

Fifth, in August of 1983, Mr. Ikeda, you were awarded the United Nations Peace Award. The historical account of your many accolades demonstrates that the world's peoples hold you in high esteem for your contributions toward peace for humankind.

This is the basis of my statement that my understanding of Soka Gakkai is founded entirely on facts and my own experience.

### **The Achievements of Daisaku Ikeda, the Third President of Soka Gakkai**

**Ikeda:** You are too kind. I believe that dialogue is the key to achieving peace, and this is the belief on which all my work has been based. I believe that if people open their hearts and communicate with each other, the resolution to any problem is attainable. Mutual understanding and trust form the foundation for peace.

**Jiang:** I may have a superficial understanding of Soka Gakkai; however, the insights I have gained thus far have broadened my perspective. Based on my observations, it seems that Soka Gakkai, the Buddhist order which regards the Lotus Sutra as its primary scripture, is now endeavoring to discern ways to research the depth and breadth of the Lotus Sutra's message and present it clearly in the context of modern society. Also, Soka Gakkai strives to understand how to implement the

wisdom of the Lotus Sutra and lead modern society toward the answers it seeks to the problems confronting it.

Furthermore, Soka Gakkai seeks to discover how to spread Buddhist philosophy, centered on the Lotus Sutra, far and wide among all the world's peoples. Understanding this has most definitely expanded my horizons.

**Ikeda:** Professor Jiang, I have great respect for your insights as well as your humility. I can only say that we have single-mindedly pursued efforts to bring about world peace and happiness for humankind. We set about our work with a sense of urgency and passionate commitment, vowing to do whatever it takes to achieve this goal. We are indeed grateful for the high esteem with which we are regarded by truly wise scholars such as yourselves.

**Jiang:** Mr. Ikeda, I would also like to mention that, thanks to your broad vision and keen insight, you have made extraordinary efforts to promote the steady advance of friendly exchanges between China and Japan. In recognition of your contributions, you have been awarded numerous honorary degrees from prestigious institutions such as Peking University, Fudan University, Wuhan University, Shenzhen University, Xiamen (Amoy) University, and the Museum of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. In addition, the Chinese Academy of social Sciences awarded you the title of honorary research professor, and the Lüshun Museum conferred on you the title of honorary member.

Among the other awards and recognitions you have received are the Peace and Friendship Cup from the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and the China-Japan Friendship Association, the China Art Contribution Award from the Chinese Ministry of Culture, the title of Peace Messenger from the China-Japan Friendship Association, and the title of Friendship Ambassador from the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

Also, an exhibition of your photographs assembled under the title "Dialogue with Nature and Peace" has been displayed in Beijing, Shanghai, and the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. To add to this impressive list of awards and achievements, over twenty of your written works have been published in China. And, several years ago, a quote of yours received widespread attention when it appeared on a signboard in the Shanghai subway. I must also make special mention of your historically significant meeting, as president of Soka Gakkai, with the late Premier Zhou Enlai in December of 1974. This event clearly reveals that

your endeavors represent the hopes of humankind in its quest for world peace, the fundamental birthright of all humankind.

In the course of your efforts toward peace, you have had to overcome all manner of obstacles and will surely enjoy the appreciation of people from every corner of society.

**Ikeda:** Your country, China, has been Japan's benefactor since ancient times. Japan has received many cherished cultural gifts from China, including Buddhism.

Though perhaps insignificant, over the years I have hoped to repay this great debt by doing as much as I can, little by little. So, I am very pleased by your generous appraisal of my efforts. I firmly pledge to continue do my utmost, together with you, my esteemed colleagues, to contribute to friendly relations between China and Japan as we work toward peace throughout the entire world.

### **Wisdom to Create the Future**

**Ikeda:** Now that we have reflected on the past and contemplated the present, next, on this foundation, I would like to visualize the future as it may unfold.

**Jiang:** The history of human societal development points toward a progressively greater unity throughout the entire world. Despite the trend, however, it will not be smooth sailing on the voyage to realize this global unity. Rather, it is certain to be an extremely unpredictable and complex journey. In truth, when human beings today consider the prospects for the future, they are not as optimistic and confident as their predecessors. The reason is that people now are apprehensive about the many global crises that seriously challenge the world today.

**Ikeda:** Though a wave of global unity has spread over the earth, at the same time, a grim darkness has engulfed humankind. This is why we earnestly seek a glimmer of hope to penetrate the gloom and rend the darkness.

**Jiang:** A common thread links every global crisis. We must realize that each crisis is global in nature and has a broad impact on all aspects of life as we know it. Now that people are aware that they face a common threat, they have gradually come to realize the mutual benefit to humankind of transcending ethnic, national, and regional differences.

Objectively speaking, the impact of human activities has brought modern man to a crossroads. As a point of departure for discovering a resolution to our problems, we must, first and foremost, protect the common interests fundamental to all human life.

**Ikeda:** I agree. Above all, human beings are fundamentally importance. It is inexcusable to build one's happiness on the misfortune of others. We must, first of all, guarantee those aspects of life that benefit the broadest number of people. Most importantly, we must go beyond the minute differences that separate us from one another and join forces to accomplish this goal.

**Jiang:** Only through efforts in which we collaboratively pursue our hopes, discover the right course and clearly identify our way will we be able to confidently and smoothly advance in the twenty-first century.

**Ikeda:** I am in complete agreement.

**Ji:** A Chinese proverb states, "The year begins with spring, and a day begins with the morning." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, I believe that we must ask ourselves, as leaders and as world citizens, how do we want humankind to live during the next hundred years of this century, or the next thousand years? When we think about the world's problems, it will not do to divorce ourselves from reality.

As we enter another one thousand-year chapter of human history, I feel that what we, the world's people, need is peace, understanding, and goodwill. To manifest these conditions, I am hopeful that we can increasingly foster acceptance of eastern philosophy, including the philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism.

**Jiang:** As we give thought to the future, I firmly believe that the Lotus Sutra overflows with a profound wisdom expressed in the concept of equality, a spirit of compassion, and a philosophy of unity. These elements have enabled the Lotus Sutra to exert enormous influence over vast geographical regions for a span of over two thousand years. Even more so in the present, the Lotus Sutra has attracted large numbers of followers as well as researchers.

Soka Gakkai International (SGI), especially, has been responsible for clearly revealing the spirit of the Lotus Sutra in harmony with the times and in response to the wishes of the people. With unflagging determination and admirable endeavors, SGI has made outstanding contributions

to the pursuit of peace and to cultural and educational programs for the enrichment of all the world's peoples. Accordingly, through these efforts the Lotus Sutra will inevitably spread widely during the twenty-first century to all the peoples of the world. I am very certain of this. And I am very sure that we will see a resurgence of research on the Lotus Sutra in the twenty-first century.

### **Research on Lotus Sutra Manuscripts**

**Ikeda:** We are continuing our publication program to encourage scholarly contributions to Lotus Sutra research by commissioning the Institute of Oriental Philosophy to manage and prepare the publication of Lotus Sutra manuscript texts and facsimiles. We are also deeply appreciative of Professor Ji's and Professor Jiang's considerable assistance with our efforts. Professor Ji was kind enough to write the foreword to the volume of the Lüshun manuscripts. (*Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection, Facsimile Edition and Romanized Text*)

**Ji:** The Lüshun manuscripts are fragmentary but extremely significant. This is because, of the numerous Lotus Sutra manuscripts, these are among the earliest. That is why Soka Gakkai's publication of these manuscripts is of such great importance.

**Ikeda:** Thank you. We believe so, too. Professor Jiang, who helped with the romanization of the text and provided detailed commentary, also made a crucial contribution to the publication.

**Jiang:** I believe that by announcing its publication plans for the Lotus Sutra manuscripts, Soka Gakkai has already sparked a renascent interest in Lotus Sutra research. Exactly one and a half centuries have passed since the mid-nineteenth century when scholars around the world began conducting research on the Lotus Sutra manuscripts.

The Lüshun manuscripts publication will assuredly be considered a valuable contribution to scholarship by scholars everywhere who are interested in the Lotus Sutra. This is because there had been no opportunity (with a few exceptions) to view the oldest extant Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts among the Lüshun manuscripts. Possible evidence shows that fragments of the Lüshun manuscripts are from the same period as the Sanskrit original texts used by Kumarajiva to translate the Lotus Sutra into Chinese.

**Ikeda:** We have thus far published the following texts in our Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series:

1. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection, Facsimile Edition and Romanized Texts*
  - 2.1 *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Facsimile Edition*
  - 2.2 *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Romanized Text 1*
3. *Fragments of a Manuscript of the Saddharmapundarikasūtra from Khādaliq (Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in China)*
4. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1682 and Add. 1683), Facsimile Edition*

The following titles are scheduled for publication:

5. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the University of Tokyo General Library (No. 414), Romanized Text*
6. *Xixia Lotus Sutra Texts from the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Facsimile Edition*
7. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the Tibetan Autonomous Region, China, Romanized Text*

**Jiang:** Making the precious Lotus Sutra manuscripts available to the world is extremely significant. This is an important contribution to international studies of the Lotus Sutra, a development that surely will be welcomed enthusiastically by many scholars.

## From Division to Unity

**Ikeda:** The spirit of unity embodied in the Lotus Sutra is the wellspring from which flows the power to heal the misery of division and conflict, ease people's anguish, and foster a dynamic and harmonious tranquility. This conviction is the basis for all of my activities.

Today, at the root of the problems plaguing modern society is an undertow of division and animosity. A unifying philosophical foundation is needed to overcome this negative force. The spirit of unity espoused in the Lotus Sutra truly is the bright light of truth that illuminates the depths of darkness.

**Ji:** To be sure, since the industrial revolution in the West, people have in no small way benefited from the conquest of nature. This is a truism of modern life. However, at the same time, this conquest has been fraught

with numerous tangible and intangible catastrophes. Among these are, for example, environmental pollution, destruction of the delicate balance of the ecosystem, species extinction, the population explosion, the occurrence of new diseases, a shortage of freshwater resources, and an increase in interpersonal animosity and intercultural conflict.

If an appropriate solution for even one of these problems is not found, the future survival of humankind will be endangered. I do not believe in predictions that the demise of human life on earth is imminent. However, we can not just sit back and pretend that the problems I have just mentioned do not exist.

**Ikeda:** That is exactly right. I firmly believe that we must learn from the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra if we wish to pave the way for a bright future. If we are able to do so, humankind will benefit from the cultural knowledge of the many diverse cultures of the earth and discover a way to cultivate a consciousness of holism and humanity.

**Ji:** That is my conviction as well. To reverse the effects of the various afflictions brought about by the central tenet of western science, i.e., the domination of man over nature, we must seek answers in the Lotus Sutra and eastern philosophy. I believe that if we adopt this philosophy as a guide for the twenty-first century and beyond, only then may we be able to save humankind.

### **Peace and the Development of Autonomy**

**Jiang:** I think that the key to solving all the world's problems lies in resolving two major issues. The first is the problem of the relationships between people. The other is the issue of the relationship between people and the environment. In other words, the two major problems are those of peace and development. Of the two, the most important is the problem of bringing about peace. The reason is that peace is necessary for development. Without peaceful conditions, it is impossible to foster development.

Therefore, we have to say that the problem of establishing peace is the most urgent and critical among all the problems facing humankind. The kind of development that we must promote must further contribute to world peace and be linked to the common prosperity and welfare of humankind.

**Ikeda:** Very well said. The key to achieving these goals is people. It is

critically important to have organizations of people who have awakened to the current realities.

**Jiang:** Without a doubt, if we are to effectively deal with the problems of peace and development, we must rely on the long-term and committed cooperation of people in every country of the world. The United Nations is already tackling the issues of the environment, population, food problems, world peace, and social development by holding international conferences devoted to each topic. Countries entering into regional organizations of various kinds frequently meet to discuss issues of primary concern to their region, for example, the formation of a nuclear-free zone. These kinds of efforts are definitely extremely important and totally indispensable.

However, the activities of the United Nations and individual countries are by themselves inadequate to address the challenges we face. That which is necessary and imperative to supplement these efforts is the energy of the people of every nation in the world. This energy can be tapped with the cooperation of the leaders of civic organizations and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). People are the primary creators of human civilization. Therefore, ultimately, the hope of human civilization lies in people, the creators of civilization.

**Ikeda:** Yes, that is so true. Each one of us is an agent of change. We hold the responsibility for creating a bright and hopeful future.

**Jiang:** The greatest desire within the heart of every person, no matter what nationality, is for the realization of world peace and a spirit of unity among humankind. There can be no doubt that every individual shares the same feelings, ideals, and beliefs for achieving world peace and global harmony. Movements that are able to express these sentiments and stir people's hopes for a peaceful world will surely be welcomed universally by all the world's peoples.

**Ikeda:** Yes, the people are wise. They have a keen ability to distinguish what is truly superior. And only those ideas and movements that attract widespread popular support will survive.

I believe that further in-depth inquiry and extensive examination of the Lotus Sutra are important to furthering human happiness and creating a bright future for humankind. My hope and anticipation is for twenty-first century research on the Lotus Sutra to become a comprehensive inquiry drawing upon the accumulated wisdom of humankind.

**Ji:** Yes, it will be eastern philosophy that saves the human race!

**Ikeda:** Thank you, gentlemen. My best wishes to both of you for continued success in your research efforts—efforts through which I hope that we may together actively seek to create a more hopeful future for humankind.

**Postscript/Obituary:** With great sorrow, we must announce that Prof. Jiang Zhongxin passed away in a Beijing hospital on October 7, 2002. He was 60. It was a great loss for the world's studies in Buddhism. We express our deepest condolences to his bereaved family members and colleagues. At the same time, we dedicate the last installment of his dialogue with Prof. Ji Xianlin and Mr. Daisaku Ikeda carried in this issue as a paean to the precious contributions he has made in philological Buddhist studies.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> K. R. Norman, tr., *The Word of the Doctrine* (Dhammapada) (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 2000), p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> K. R. Norman, tr., *The Group of Discourses* (Sutta-nipāta), volume II (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), p.16.

<sup>3</sup> “Zai lun yuanshi Fojiao yuyan wenti” (A Second Discussion on the Language Problems of Primeval Buddhism), *Ji Xianlin wenji, di san juan: Yindu gudai yuyan* (The Writings of Ji Xianlin, Volume 3: The Language of Ancient India) (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), p. 418.

<sup>4</sup> “Lun Fanben ‘Sheng shenghui daobi’an gongde baoji ji’” (On the Sanskrit “Ārya-prajñāpāramitā-ratnagaṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā”), *Ji Xianlin wenji, di qi juan: Fojiao* (The Writings of Ji Xianlin, Volume 7: Buddhism) (Nanchang: Jiangxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), p. 259.

<sup>5</sup> *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō*, volume 25 (Tokyo: Taishō shinshū daizōkyō kankō kai, 1924–29), p. 506, a.

<sup>6</sup> *Toda Jōsei zenshū, dai san kan: Ronbun kōen hen* (Collected Works of Josei Toda, Volume Three: Articles and Speeches) (Tokyo: Seikyō shimbun sha, 1983), p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1999), p. 641.

<sup>8</sup> *Nichiren Daishōnin goshō zenshū* (Collected Works of Nichiren Daishonin) (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1952), p. 1007.

<sup>9</sup> *Makiguchi Tsunesaburō zenshū, dai go kan: Sōka kyōikugaku taikai, jō* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Volume Five: Education for Creative Living, no. 1) (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei sha, 1982), p. 232.

<sup>10</sup> Ji Xianlin, tr. Yoshiie Yoda, *Chūgoku chishikijin no seishinshi: Ki Senrin sanbunshū, jō ge* (The Spiritual History of a Chinese Intellectual: Selected Essays of Ji Xianlin, vols. 1 and 2) (Tokyo: Hokuju shuppan, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Hajime Nakamura, "Beyond Servile Scholarship: Frustration and Working Out of Comparative Philosophy," *Studies in Comparative Philosophy* (no. 5, March 1989), pp. 1–9. (Address in commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Japanese Association for Comparative Philosophy, delivered at its 15th conference held in Tokyo in June 4, 1988.)

<sup>12</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, vol. 2 (New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill, Inc., 1974), pp. 130–139.

<sup>13</sup> *Toda Jōsei zenshū, dai san kan: Ronbun kōen hen* (Collected Works of Josei Toda, Volume Three: Articles and Speeches) (Tokyo: Seikyō shimbun sha, 1983), pp. 5–22.

**Ji Xianlin**

Born 1911 in Qingping (now Linqing), China. Graduated from Tsinghua University in 1934. Traveled to Germany in 1935 and spent the years 1936–1945 at the University of Göttingen studying the ancient languages of India and Tocharian, receiving a PhD from the university in 1941. Returned to China in 1946 to post of professor at the Department of Oriental Languages of Peking University. Subsequently held a variety of posts including head (dean) of the Department of Oriental Languages; Vice-President of Peking University; member of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Division of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; member of the Standing Committee of the People's Republic of China National People's Congress; President of the Linguistics Society of China, and President of the China Comparative Literature Society. Current posts include President of the Chinese Dunhuang-Turpan Society. Major works include a collection of essays on ancient Indian languages; *The Language Problems of Primeval Buddhism*; *Papers on the History of Sino-Indian Cultural Relations*; *Papers of Ji Xianlin on Buddhist Studies*; *China and Eastern Cultures*; *Tocharian Studies*; *Translation from the Tokharian Maitreyasamitinātaka*; *A History of Sugar*, and *Collation and Annotation on "Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty"* (editor-in-chief). Translated works include *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Śakuntalā* and prose: *Ji Xianlin: Essays and Studying in Germany for Ten Years*.

**Jiang Zhongxin**

Born 1942 in Shanghai. Graduated 1965 from the Department of Oriental Languages of Peking University, becoming a research assistant at the Institute of History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. 1979 appointed Assistant Research Fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences/Peking University Institute of South Asian Studies; 1986 an Associate Research Fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies, and 1991 a Professorial Research Fellow of the same Institute. Major works include *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra: a Sanskrit Palm-leaf Manuscript Kept in the Library of the Cultural*

*Palace of the Nationalities* (facsimile edition), *A Sanskrit Manuscript of Saddharmapuṇḍarika Kept in the Library of the Cultural Palace of the Nationalities, Beijing* (romanized text), *The Laws of Manu: Translation and Annotation, Collation and Annotation on "Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty"* (coeditor), *A Modern Chinese Translation of "Records of the Western Regions of the Great Tang Dynasty"* (co-translator), *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collections*. In 1990 awarded the "Commendation for young and middle-aged experts of most illustrious contributions" by the Ministry of Personnel of the People's Republic of China.

### **Daisaku Ikeda**

Born 1928 in Tokyo. Honorary president of Soka Gakkai. President of Soka Gakkai International (SGI). As a Buddhist leader, author, poet and educator has launched numerous initiatives in areas such as peace, the environment and education, lectured at universities on these topics, always with an underlying theme of the "humanism" of Buddhism, and engaged in dialogue with many national and cultural leaders and academics worldwide. Founder of numerous educational institutions including the Soka Kindergarten, Soka Elementary School, Soka Junior and Senior High Schools and Soka University, plus academic research institutions and peace organizations including the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research, Institute of Oriental Philosophy and Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, and cultural institutions such as the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum and Min-On Concert Association. Ikeda is also author of over 100 publications including a novel, *The Human Revolution* (in 12 volumes), and collected dialogues including *Choose Life: A Dialogue* (with Arnold Toynbee), *Spiritual Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (with Mikhail Gorbachev), and *Quest for a Bright New Century* (with Jin Yong). The majority of these works have been translated and published in English, Chinese and numerous other languages. Awarded the United Nations Peace Medal in 1983. Recipient of honorary professorships and doctorates from many universities around the world, including Peking University.