

Publication of the *Xixia Version of the Lotus Sutra from the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences*

Foreword

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AS the eighth work in the Soka Gakkai's Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series, I am pleased to announce the publication of the *Xixia Version of the Lotus Sutra from the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, edited by Dr. Tatsuo Nishida, professor emeritus of Kyoto University, a member of the Japan Academy, and a leading authority on Xixia studies.

The present volume contains color facsimiles of the manuscripts and xylographs of the rare Xixia version of the Lotus Sutra. These were shown earlier in the exhibition held in November 1998, at the Josei Toda International Center in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The exhibition was entitled "The Lotus Sutra and Its World" and was sponsored jointly by the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP), of which I am the founder, and the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies.

These manuscripts and xylographs were among the various articles in the possession of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies that were removed to the basement of the institute for safekeeping by a man and woman of the institute staff and preserved there during the fierce 900-day assault by the Nazi Germany armies. In doing so, they gave admirable testimony to the fact that culture and humanism will in the end triumph over the forces of violence and narrow nationalism.

Moreover, in the days following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Russian economy was in a state of turmoil, Dr. Yuri A. Petrosyan, the original director of the Institute; Dr. Evgenij I. Kychanov, the former director; Dr. Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, who was in charge of manuscripts; and the other members of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies did their best to ensure the preservation of these most important cultural objects. Seeking nei-

ther renown nor material gain, they surmounted untold obstacles in order to do so.

I recall the words spoken by Dr. Kychanov as we viewed the exhibition “The Lotus Sutra and Its World” together. “Look at the written words,” he said, speaking with great warmth. “Please look at the written words!”

“These are the words of the sutra in Sanskrit and other languages. Through these words, how people must have opened up their hearts to one another! With that thought in mind, look long and carefully at these words and enjoy them!”

Among the words he was speaking of were those of the Xixia version of the Lotus Sutra. These words of the sutra, embodying the prayers of the various peoples whose languages were represented here, were alive. They shone, they sang out, they called to others. They formed a whirlpool around the core of the universe, they mirrored in their form the breaking waves of the great rhythm of the life force. They were words endowed with spirit and vitality.

In order to guard and transmit these words, how many Buddhist believers over the many centuries have undergone hardships and exerted themselves to the fullest? And now, after surviving and enduring for all that time, these words have at last been able to reach Japan, the far eastern end of the Silk Road, and come before all these people. How they must dance with joy!

I first became interested in the Silk Road when I was barely into my teens and longed to know more about it. When my teacher began talking about the Silk Road and I pictured this desert region, a storehouse of cultural treasures but now devoid of inhabitants, I was filled with a sense of strangeness. From that time on, it became for me a land of dreams and exotic imaginings.

The present Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series of publications may be described as an attempt to trace the transmission of the Buddhist teachings and the spread of the Lotus Sutra as they passed along the Silk Road. The earlier publication of the Sanskrit manuscripts of the sutra, followed now by the Xixia version of the sutra, which represents the Xixia state that dominated the region west of the Yellow River in later times, together present a deeply moving panorama.

The examples of the Xixia version of the Lotus Sutra that appear in the present publication were discovered by a Russian, Col. P. K. Kozlov (1863–1935), in his explorations of the Buddhist stupas of Suburgan, an archeological site in Khara-Khoto on the Silk Road. The explorations took place during the period 1907–09. Some of the texts include illustra-

tions depicting the customs and life style of the Tangut people who founded the Xixia state, giving us some idea of their distinctive types of clothing and hair style. At the same time, they reveal the extent to which the Xixia people revered and familiarized themselves with the Lotus Sutra.

At the end of one of the sutra scrolls, I am told, are written these words: “It is our wish that the benefits acquired hereby may be bestowed on all living beings and that we and they together may attain Buddhahood.” The prayer reflects the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, which enjoins us to seek happiness for others as well as for ourselves.

The Xixia people, who for a time governed the area where Dunhuang is situated, followed the Buddhist teachings and lived in harmony with the other peoples of the region. They also showed respect for people of other cultures. Within the region under their control lived Turkish followers of Nestorian Christianity, as well as believers in the Islamic faith. In this sense, we might say, the Xixia people were pioneers in the realm of intercultural dialogue.

I first heard of the Xixia people when I was in my late teens. Through a book entitled *Tōyōgaku no hanashi* or *Talks on East Asian Studies* by Dr. Juntarō Ishihama (1888–1968), I learned how the author joined with a young Russian scholar whom he had met through the Osaka Foreign Languages School (the present day Osaka University of Foreign Studies) in studying the Xixia language. I was much impressed by the author’s vivid description of their undertaking. This same Dr. Ishihama in time guided the editor of the present volume, Dr. Nishida, in his studies of the Xixia language.

The young Russian scholar who participated with Dr. Ishihama in the study of the Xixia language was Nikolai Aleksandrovich Nevsky (1892–1937). He came to Japan first in 1913, returned to Russia, and then came a second time. In order to pursue his studies of early Japanese culture, he traveled from one end of the country to the other, diligently applying himself to research in Japanese folklore. He also attended the regular meetings of the Kyōdokai, an academic group centering around leading intellectuals of modern Japan such as Inazō Nitobe (1862–1933) and Kunio Yanagita (1875–1962) who devoted themselves to the study of Japanese local institutions, customs, and oral traditions.

On the evening of January 12, 1916, a meeting of the Kyōdokai was held at the home of Dr. Nitobe in today’s Bunkyo Ward of Tokyo. There the young man Nevsky met a geographer and elementary school principal who, as a nongovernmental scholar, was engaged in the study of pedagogical methods. This was none other than Tsunesaburō Makiguchi

(1871–1944), the founder and first president of the Soka Gakkai.

Later Mr. Nevsky became a teacher of Russian at the recently founded Osaka Foreign Languages School. There he became acquainted with Dr. Ishihama, who urged him to take up the study of the Xixia language, a suggestion that changed the whole course of his life as a scholar.

In 1929 Mr. Nevsky, hoping to further his efforts to master the Xixia language, returned to Russia, where materials for such study were plentiful. But he fell victim to the purges of the Stalin era and died in 1937.

Mr. V. M. Tityanov, who was imprisoned together with him, recalls how Nevsky used to worry about what would become of the Xixia dictionary that he, Nevsky, was in the process of compiling. He remembers him saying, “I have finally found the key to deciphering the written characters of the Tangut (Xixia) language. ... Up to now I have written quite a few articles on Tangut culture, but I don’t know if there is anyone who can bring my work to completion. I’ve lived an honest life, yet I can’t help deeply regretting that I have not been able to finish my work!” [*Ay Khanum* (the letters of V. M. Tityanov), Tōkai Daigaku shuppankai, 2001.]

Now Mr. Nevsky’s hopes have at last been fulfilled. The work that he began was in time taken over by Dr. Kychanov, the former director of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, and others, and their intellectual efforts have brought to realization Mr. Nevsky’s ambitious dreams. Dr. Kychanov has devoted his whole life to Xixia studies. Over half a century has passed since in his student days he first heard Mr. Nevsky’s name. After ten years of diligent and exacting labor, he published his *Statutes of the Xixia State: The Revised and Newly Endorsed Code for the Designation of the Reign, Celestial Prosperity* (Tian sheng 天盛 (1149–69)). And, following a plan worked out jointly by himself and Dr. Nishida, he and the members of the Department of Linguistics of Kyoto University have pooled their efforts to publish a catalogue of Buddhist texts in the Xixia language. Continuing their research, they are now hard at work on a Xixia-Russian-English-Chinese dictionary.

Viewing the present jointly-sponsored publication of the Xixia version of the Lotus Sutra, I cannot help but feel a deep sense of affinity with those whose cooperation made it possible, the editor, Dr. Nishida, and Dr. Kychanov, the participating party on the Russian side.

I keep calling to mind the impressive words of Dr. Kychanov regarding the Lotus Sutra: “The Lotus Sutra is a scripture on the ideology of peace, one that teaches us to treat all persons with empathy and compassion. My hope is that this compassionate heart of the Lotus Sutra will be

disseminated throughout the world.”

I am of the same mind. And for nearly half a century I have traveled the world over and carried out countless dialogues in order to spread abroad this “heart of the Lotus Sutra.”

The doctrine of the dignity and equality of all human beings taught in the Lotus Sutra is one of universal value, transcending boundaries of time and space. I hope that through the present series of publications of Lotus Sutra manuscripts the message of the sutra, a call to bring happiness to persons everywhere, will continue to spread over an ever wider area.

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