

Editor's Preface

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AS is well known, the Xixia state was established in 1032 in China's northwestern region—a region that occupied an important position on the eastern end of the Silk Road—and flourished as a Buddhist state for about 200 years, until 1227. In 1908, a Russian expedition led by Col. P. K. Kozlov (1863–1935) excavated a great volume of cultural relics at the ruins of the ancient Xixia city of Khara-Khoto. Khara-Khoto is situated approximately 350 kilometers east of Dunhuang, which is famous for its ancient Buddhist grottoes and their relics. Studies by various scholars of documents found in 1900 at cave no. 17 of the Mogao Grottoes, Cangjing-dong 藏經洞 (the Library Cave), helped establish the discipline of Dunhuang studies or Dunhuangology (敦煌學). In the 100 years since that time, the discipline has developed from what was essentially treasure hunting to what is now an integrated discipline that encompasses various fields of Dunhuang research. In 2000, a variety of events, including conferences, took place, memorably celebrating the centennial of the discovery of the Dunhuang library cave.

Although studies of Xixia relics began considerably later than Dunhuang studies, at some time or other the discipline came to be termed Xixia-Tangutology (西夏學). In recent years, the number of scholars and students of Xixia studies has increased considerably, so that the discipline is now thriving and yielding conspicuous achievements. Nevertheless, the discipline is still in its infancy and it will require time before the studies are satisfactorily developed into an integrated system.

The relics excavated in Khara-Khoto, including the Stein collection, are of such quantity and quality that they may be said to represent the Xixia culture in themselves. The discovery of the great number of documents in Xixia script made a great impact on the public. From their general shape and the composition of radicals on the left, right and top, etc., these ideograms appeared to be a simple imitation of Chinese characters. The Xixia characters, however, are the product of tremendous ingenuity and creativity and are, in my view, superior to their Chinese counterparts in terms of construction and function.

It should be understood that the promulgation of Xixia characters in 1036 was in actuality an enterprise to create a new written (national) language, one that had been specifically devised for the full expression of the Xixia language. The creation of a national language to replace Chinese and Tibetan was an extraordinary feat, deserving of high praise.

This new written language was formulated from the dialects of groups such as the Mi and Minyak (in the Pingxia region 平夏部, Dongshan region 東山部, etc.), the ethnic groups that composed the Xixia state. I would like to term these dialects, which must have belonged to the Tibeto-Burman languages, the Dangxiang (党項) language. Xixia has the basic linguistic structure common to the Tibeto-Burman languages. The grammatical construction of the recorded language, however, does not seem to be consistent. It has the quality of a hybrid language that integrates various ethnic dialects. Xixia characters were devised to effectively express these various ethnic speech forms.

The translation of Buddhist scriptures and Chinese classics began during the period of Li Yuanhao 李元昊 (1003–1048), the first emperor of the Xixia state, who reigned from 1032–1048. Through this translation process, written Xixia gradually improved and developed into a language of rich expression. The Lotus Sutra was translated at a late stage of this development process and the Xixia Lotus Sutra should be considered a first-rate text for Xixia studies. Through my study of the Xixia Lotus Sutra I have been able to learn a great deal concerning the Xixia grammar and its ideograms. Nevertheless, there is a vast wealth of undiscovered treasure in this material.

The Xixia state was a meeting point of Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism. There is a record of a Xixia sutra being recited together with Tibetan and Chinese versions at Buddhist services. Though Tibetan Buddhism is considered to have been established and organized after the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368), I assume that high-ranking priests who had earlier fled from Tufan 吐蕃 (a medieval Chinese name for Tibet) constructed a firm basis for their faith in the Xixia state, as the extant Xixia canons appear to contain the main sutras representing all of the Tibetan Buddhist schools.

It is quite by chance that this year, 2004, marks the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Contribution préliminaire à l'étude de l'écriture et de la langue Si-hia* by M. G. Morisse, which became the starting point of Xixia studies. The publication of this volume is thus both highly significant and marvelously coincidental. It is my sincere hope that it might appreciably contribute to the promotion of further Xixia studies.

In closing, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the

successive directors of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Dr. Yuri A. Petrosyan, Dr. Evgenij I. Kychanov and Dr. Irina F. Popova; to Mr. Daisaku Ikeda, honorary president of the Soka Gakkai; Mr. Einosuke Akiya, president of the Soka Gakkai; Mr. Yasuo Morita, chairman of the board of trustees of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP); and Dr. Yoichi Kawada, director of the IOP. I am also indebted to Mr. Yoshinori Miyagawa, Mr. Noriyoshi Mizufune, Mr. Haruaki Kotsuki and Mr. Yoichi Ichikura of the IOP for their kind cooperation and assistance over many years. I would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Shoichi Matsuoka, photographer for the Seikyo Press, for his superb photographs of the Xixia sutra. Last but not least, I am grateful to Mr. Anthony George, who was kindly involved in editing and proofreading the English translation.

August 2004

*This article is reprinted from 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* (Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 2005).