

PREFACE

The Lotus Sutra, which from early times has been called “the king of the sutras,” has long inspired in the hearts of the Asian peoples a respect for life, a way of living in peace and compassion with the universe and nature, an attitude of consideration for the well-being of all humankind. And it has brought about the flowering of a varied and brilliant culture.

The late Professor Jiang Zhongxin, a research fellow of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has reported on the special characteristics of the presently extant manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit. First, he notes that they are the most numerous of all sutras. Second, sites where existing Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts have been found are likewise the most numerous and cover the widest geographical area. Third, the differences in language, structure, length, and other aspects amongst the existing Sanskrit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra are most complex. Fourth, existing Sanskrit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra were recorded over the longest continuous period of time.

Professor Jiang concludes that, “In the light of these particular overall characteristics, we are able to arrive at the following general conclusions. Namely, that the Lotus Sutra was the most widely circulated among the sutras of Indian Buddhism, and that, among the works of Indian Buddhism, it has exercised the widest and longest influence. (See volume 8 of *The Journal of Oriental Studies* [English version].)

In order to study the origin of the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra and ascertain its course of development over time, the investigation into its process of development, namely, the study of its various written manuscripts, is of essential importance. However, the manuscripts themselves, which are of so great significance, are held in the research collections of various different countries, kept under careful surveillance and closely watched, so that to study them in person, to compare them and determine their respective characteristics are very difficult.

Daisaku Ikeda, Honorary President of the Soka Gakkai, has called the underlying spirit of the Lotus Sutra one of “cosmic humanism,” and, with that spirit as the basis, has worked for the development of peace, culture, and education throughout the world, while being engaged in dialogues among the leaders of world opinion to discuss the various global problems that face humankind.

The eternal and universal message of the Lotus Sutra is one that underlies the dialogues Mr. Ikeda has been conducting. Meanwhile, in the course of these efforts, he has been presented with quite a number of facsimiles of the Lotus Sutra and microfilms

by scholarly individuals and academic institutions all over the world.

In 1994, the Soka Gakkai, in accordance with a plan proposed by Mr. Ikeda, set about on a campaign to further the study of worldwide Buddhism. It included the study of manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra in Sanskrit and other languages, materials of high scholarly value, and involved a plan for setting up a committee entrusted with the job of publishing the facsimile editions and romanized texts of the manuscripts. The task of studying and producing the results was entrusted to the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. The results, produced through the cooperation of academic institutions and specialists in Japan and other countries, have been carried out successfully through the first and second phases of the work, and have been published in 13 works that have already appeared. These constitute the following items listed below.

(The first phase)

1. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection, Facsimile Edition and Romanized Text* (1997)
- 2-1. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Facsimile Edition* (1998)
- 2-2. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Romanized Text 1* (2001)
- 2-3. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21), Romanized Text 2* (2004)
3. *Fragments of a Manuscript of the Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra from Khādaliq* (2000)
4. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1682 and Add. 1683), Facsimile Edition* (2002)
5. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from University of Tokyo General Library (No. 414), Romanized Text* (2003)
6. *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* (2005)

(The second phase)

7. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland (No. 6), Romanized Text* (2007)
8. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the Société Asiatique (No. 2), Romanized Text* (2008)

9. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the British Library (Or. 2204), Facsimile Edition* (2009)
10. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from Cambridge University Library (Add. 1684), Romanized Text* (2010)
11. *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the British Library (Or.2204), Romanized Text* (2011)

Among the major three types of Lotus Sutra manuscripts, in the first phase are found the two types, namely, the Central Asian manuscripts, which appear to be close to the Chinese text translated by Kumarajiva, and the Nepalese manuscripts, which represent the most important original texts of the Lotus Sutra. The manuscripts that were published in the first phase, along with the precious Xixia texts, make up a total of eight examples.

In the second phase are published four texts, or five examples, which represent excellent and indispensable Nepalese texts. These are texts that may be used in a long-term undertaking to prepare a critical edition of the Nepalese Lotus Sutra that can stand in lieu of the Kern-Nanjio edition.

The above listed researches and publications have been made available to the community of scholars who are studying the question of the Lotus Sutra manuscripts and have been highly acclaimed by Buddhologists, those who are concerned with philological studies of original texts, and other experts in the field.

As the start of the third phase of our work on the publications of Lotus Sutra manuscripts, we, including members of the National Archives of India, the Soka Gakkai, and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy working in cooperation, are extremely happy to be engaged in the production of a new facsimile edition of Gilgit manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra that will be in elaborate color.

When the facsimile edition of Gilgit manuscripts is completed, it will mean that Soka Gakkai's Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series will include representative texts from all three lineages of the Lotus Sutra manuscripts, namely, the Gilgit manuscripts, the Central Asian manuscripts, and the Nepalese manuscripts.

Mr. Ikeda, commenting on the process of study of the Lotus Sutra manuscripts and the results that have been published regarding them, has made the following remarks:

(1) Through comparative studies of the various versions of the Lotus Sutra, we can trace the process by which it came into being and was transmitted.

(2) Analysis of differences in the versions of the sutra excavated or preserved in various areas can provide clues to perceiving how the Lotus Sutra changed and was

altered in response to the diversity of the peoples and cultures of Asia.

(3) On the basis of the results of this study, we can analyze the relations between the histories of peoples, each with their own culture, and the Lotus Sutra, thus allowing us to also examine how the all-embracing doctrines of the sutra contributed to the formation of the cultures of these peoples.

(4) Extracting lessons from the history of the transmission of the Lotus Sutra can also make possible the discovery of how to maintain, in an all-inclusive way, a common consciousness of belonging to humankind, while making the best of the distinctive features of the earth's varied and diverse areas. (*Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection, Facsimile Edition and Romanized Text*, Preface, p. xx, English text p. xviii)

We hope that the philosophy of peace, symbiosis, and compatibility of the Lotus Sutra, which has attracted so many followers and adherents, transcending the boundaries of nations, peoples, and cultures, will spread further over the world in the present and the ages to come through these publications of the manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra.

Finally, we wish to express our deep thanks to Professor Mushirul Hasan, Director General of the National Archives of India, to Dr. Lokesh Chandra, Director of the International Academy of Indian Culture, to Dr. Oskar von Hinüber, Professor Emeritus of Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg of Germany, and to all scholars and specialists in Indology and Buddhology as well as in other fields from Japan and abroad who have taken part in the projects of the Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series.

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