

# The History and Role of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy

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**I**N discussing the history and role of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, I should like to refer to the following three points: the significance and purpose of establishing the Institute, the history of the Institute, and the current situation of the Institute and its role in the future.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSE OF ESTABLISHING THE INSTITUTE

On the occasion of his first visit to India in February of 1961, inspired by Buddhagayā, where Shakyamuni attained Enlightenment, SGI President Ikeda declared a plan to establish the Institute of Oriental Philosophy. I would like to quote from a passage of the SGI President's novel, *The New Human Revolution*, where he indicates the details of how he laid down the plan to establish the Institute.

Theravāda Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam are the leading religions in many Asian countries, and they have been instrumental in shaping diverse ethnic cultures and traditions. President Makiguchi said, "Don't judge things you don't properly understand." But hardly anyone in Japan today correctly apprehends these religions or cultures. To better understand our Asian neighbors and form an accurate picture of their religions, cultures and national characters, it will be important, I feel, to conduct in-depth study and research. Also, to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism, we will need to foster individuals who can conduct academic research specifically on the Lotus Sutra and introduce the humanism and pacifism of Buddhism to the people of the world. For those reasons, I propose that we establish an institute for the research of Eastern philosophy, culture and ethnology.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose and significance of establishing the Institute is crystal clear in the above remarks. I should now like to review the following points at issue: to achieve an accurate understanding of Asian religions, culture and tradition (including their national characteristics); to conduct research based on the Lotus Sutra; and to spread to the

world the humanism and pacifism of Buddhism.

The Asian religions, culture and traditions referred to above include not only Buddhism, in the forms transmitted to the North and South and also in Tibet, but also Chinese Confucianism and Taoism, Japanese Shintoism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.

With regard to research based on the Lotus Sutra, we intend to analyze the sutra's contents and development based on documentary and academic research. The purpose of including the study of the development of the Lotus Sutra is due to its relation to the aforementioned third point, research on the humanism and pacifism of Buddhism. Therefore, the aim of undertaking the third point is to direct our studies toward structuring, formulating and developing the theory of Buddhist humanism and pacifism as taught in the Lotus Sutra.

Thus, if we are to develop our studies on Buddhism, a fount of wisdom, it is a requisite that we cover the issues of peace, human rights, global environment, economy, society, modern science, education and logic.

In summary, our studies will deal with the issues facing humanity and aim to provide a theory that may serve as a solution to them. This endeavor is consistent with the mission of Buddhism, which is to contribute to the survival and prosperity of humanity, and also with the purpose for which the Institute of Oriental Philosophy was established. In the 40 years since SGI President Ikeda's decision to establish the Institute, we have endeavored to realize his expectations as clearly specified in the novel *The New Human Revolution*.

#### THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE

I should like to classify the 40 years history of the Institute into two periods. The first period is from February 1961 to May 1986 and the second period is from June 1986 to the present. I would say that the first period was "a period of preparation" and the second "a period of laying the foundation."

Based on the plan projected in Buddhagayā, the first period saw the establishment of the Institute of Oriental Studies in January 1962, a year after President Ikeda's visit to India. Following this, in December 1965, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy was officially approved as an incorporated foundation. Including the Institute's move to Shibuya-ku, Tokyo, this period was literally a continuous process of trial and error in the systemizing of the Institute and on working on the quality of our research after we gradually began to determine our direction. During

the first period, the first edition of *The Journal of Oriental Studies* was published in 1962. In addition, the research workers system was put into action, which was followed by the holding of the first Academic General Meeting in 1985.

As for our academic research undertakings, a team of inspectors visited Buddhist sites along the Silk Road on two occasions in 1978 and 1979. In August 1979, a group of researchers attended the conference of the Société de Sociologie des Religions (SISR) held in Italy.

However, our main undertaking during this period was the publishing of a character index to the Lotus Sutra, the Vimalakīrti Sutra and the Śrīmālā Sutra, as well as the publication of SGI President Ikeda's books *Bukkyo: Nishi To Higashi (Buddhism: East and West)* and *Bukkyo Shiso No Genryu (The Origin of Buddhist Thought)*.

The publication of the character index to the Lotus Sutra eventually served as a catalyst to our in-depth research of the sutra. Furthermore, as the SGI President's above-mentioned writings are analyses of Buddhist philosophy beginning with its birth and including the history of its transmission along the Silk Road, they formed the foundation of the Institute's future studies on Buddhism.

The second period began with the shifting of the Institute to its present location, Hachioji-shi, Tokyo. During this period we were able to, at long last, embark on the realization of the SGI President's vision for the Institute. That is, the second period saw the furtherance of our studies, especially our research into Asian religions including Christianity and Islam. In addition, centered on the study of the Lotus Sutra, we endeavored to establish the validity of humanism and pacifism as taught in Buddhism, as we worked in joint efforts with institutions around the world.

I should now like to discuss our undertakings during this past decade beginning with the "foundation laying period" up to the present. During this period, we have (1) established overseas centers; (2) signed academic exchange agreements with research institutions around the world; (3) held international symposia and dispatched research workers overseas; (4) conducted academic exchanges domestically and internationally; (5) held exchanges of Chinese and Japanese scholars; and (6) undertaken publishing projects. I would like to report in detail on these undertakings.

#### (1) Establishment of Overseas Centers

- a. The European Centre in Taplow Court, U.K., May 1989
- b. The Indian Centre in the Bharat Soka Gakkai Culture Centre,

New Delhi, February 1992

- c. The Hong Kong Centre in the Hong Kong Grand Culture Centre, Hong Kong, May 1996
  - d. The Russian Center in the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg, Russia, May 1997
- (2) Signing of Academic Agreements
- a. International Academy of Indian Culture, February 1992
  - b. The Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, October 1992
  - c. The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, August 1996
  - d. St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, November 1996
  - e. Centre for East Asian Studies, University of Montreal, March 1998
- (3) International Symposia and Dispatch of Research Workers Overseas
- a. Japan-India Joint Symposium Commemorating the 30th Anniversary of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, held in the Nehru Memorial Museum, August 1991, under the theme “The Role of Eastern Philosophy in the 21st Century”
  - b. Japan-Russia Joint Symposium Commemorating the Opening of the Russian Center, held in the Russian Center, May 1997, under the theme “The 21st Century and the Role of Religion”
- (4) Domestic Academic Exchange Programs
- a. Academic exchange with the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture at Nanzan University from May 1993 to 1995; joint symposia held on 12 occasions under the theme “Christianity and Buddhism”; Publication of *Catholicism and Soka Gakkai*
- (5) Exchange of Japanese and Chinese Research Workers
- a. Lectures held at the Institute of Oriental Philosophy
    - \* “On the Fusion of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in Chinese Tradition and Culture,” by Lou Yulie, professor of Peking University, May 1987
    - \* “On Making Distinctions between the Periods in the Development of Taoism,” by Qing Xitai, professor of Sichuan University, January 1988

- \* "The Reorganization of the Moral Philosophy of Wang Yangming by Early Qing Dynasty thinkers," by Chen Deshu, director of the Institute of Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences and Cultures, January 1988
- \* "A Report on the Present State of Buddhism in the Sichuan Area," by Li Yuanguo, assistant researcher of the Institute of Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences and Philosophy, July 1989
- \* "A Report on the Present Condition of Buddhist Studies in China," by Yan Zengwen, professor of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, October 1992
- \* "On Chinese Buddhism and Japanese Buddhism," by Yan Zengwen, professor of the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, December 1997
- b. Visit to the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
  - \* Visit to the Lüshun Museum to photograph the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments, June 1996
  - \* Symposium held to commemorate the establishing of the Faculty of Religions at Peking University, September 1996 (Yoichi Kawada and others)
  - \* Visit to Peking University, August 1985, April 1995 and October 1998 by researcher of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (Hiroshi Kanno)

#### (6) Publications

- a. The English version of *The Journal of Oriental Studies* from July 1987 onwards
- b. *Humanity at the Crossroads*, dialogue between Karan Singh and Daisaku Ikeda, 1988
- c. *Buddhism: A Quest for Unity and Peace* by Johan Galtung, 1990
- d. *Thoughts on the Problem of Brain Death* (English version) by Daisaku Ikeda, 1990
- e. *The Environmental Problem and Buddhism* (English version) by Daisaku Ikeda, 1990

Finally a vitally important project to carry out the Lotus Sutra manuscript studies was commenced in January 1994. Conferences were held and a project team was formed to publish the work. The results and future plans of this project will be discussed in the next item.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION AND FUTURE ROLE OF THE INSTITUTE

I should like to discuss this item along the following three points: the research system and its contents; the publication of the Lotus Sutra manuscript series; and the holding of exhibitions and symposia.

*The Research System and Its Contents*

At present, we are undertaking research into eight projects. Each project is conducted by a team lead by a chief and comprised of researchers of the Institute. They are working to structurize and formulate doctrines based on Buddhism.

The themes of the eight projects are:

- 1) "Nichiren Buddhism." The aim is to conduct documentary research on the *Nichiren Daishonin Goshu Zenshu (Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin)* and academic research on Nichiren's studies based on the above work.
- 2) "The Lotus Sutra." Documentary research on the Lotus Sutra and the three major works of T'ien-t'ai (Chih-i, 538–597) will be conducted along with the development of its philosophy.
- 3) "Human Rights: Religion and the State." We will conduct research on Buddhist philosophy and human rights, freedom of religion, and religion and the state.
- 4) "Religion and Humanism." The aim of this project is to structurize humanism as taught in Buddhism and from this viewpoint conduct studies on comparative philosophy. This will include a study of Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, on which respective civilizations are based.
- 5) "Bioethics and Religion." Detailed studies will be conducted on issues such as euthanasia, suicide, brain death, artificial insemination, external fertilization and abortion.
- 6) "Global Environment and Religion." Comparative studies of respective religions' views of nature and the environment and their relation to global environment will be conducted.
- 7) "The Role of the SGI Movement in the International Community." Based on reports and data from countries around the world, an analysis of the issues facing the SGI movement will be studied.
- 8) "Religion and Women." Research will be conducted on respective religions' views of the role of women and their historical development. The research will also include the issue of "women's liberation" from the viewpoint of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism.

The above-mentioned projects cover numerous issues where Buddhism's views may contribute to humanity. However, we feel that this alone is not enough. Thus, we plan to gradually include in our research other vital issues such as ethics, economy, education, peace and non-violence. In general, the Institute's aim is to establish and formulate the theory of "humanism" and "pacifism" of Buddhism.

### *Publication of the Lotus Sutra Manuscript Series*

This undertaking coincides with the second project. Our project to publish the Lotus Sutra manuscript series was prompted by the facsimile edition of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscript kept at the Cultural Palace of the Nationalities, Beijing, presented to us by Wang Zhen, then honorary president of the China-Japan Friendship Association, in 1984.

In the first of these series, which is the publication of the *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collections*, Ji Xianlin, professor of Peking University expounds the sameness of "the meeting of God and man" and "the oneness of Brahman and Ātman" which assesses the Soka Gakkai's second president Josei Toda's Enlightenment to the Lotus Sutra while in prison.

Following the analysis of the significance of the study of the Lotus Sutra manuscripts, SGI President Ikeda says, "Extracting lessons from the history of the transmission of the Lotus can also make possible the discovery of how to nurture, 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 cultural areas."<sup>2</sup>

The series include the publication of *The Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscript from the National Archives of Nepal (No. 4-21)*, *Facsimile Edition* in 1998 and *Fragments of a Manuscript of the Saddharmapundarikasūtra from Khādaliq* in May 2000. Apart from the above, the publishing plan also includes the Tangut version of the Lotus Sutra from the collection of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences and the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra manuscripts from the collection of the Cambridge University Library.

### *Holding of Exhibitions and Symposia*

In collaboration with the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of Russian Academy of Sciences, an exhibition entitled "The Lotus Sutra and Its World—Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road" was held in November 1998. Exhibited here were 47 items including the Petrovsky manuscript of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra, Chinese versions of the Lotus and other sutras as

well as important Buddhist scriptures in such languages as Xixia (Tangut) and Sogdian. Each of these were the originals and were being exhibited abroad for the first time.

In addition, on the occasion of this exhibition, lectures were delivered by Margarita I. Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya from Russia on “Bodhisattvas in the Lotus and Other Sutras,” Evgenij I. Kychanov from Russia on “The State and the Buddhist Sangha: Xixia State (982–1227),” and Lokesh Chandra from India on “The Rising Sun, the Blooming Lotus and the Enlightening Sensei.”

The holding of today’s symposium under the theme “The Lotus Sutra,” in collaboration with the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, will add a new page in the history of the achievements of our Institute. Through this China-Japan Joint Symposium on “The Lotus Sutra” we wish to acquire valuable wisdom from your esteemed institute.

In the summer of the year 2000, we are scheduled to be in charge of a session on the Lotus Sutra at the International Congress of Asian and North African Studies (ICANAS), sponsored by the University of Montreal. At this session, we intend to indicate ways to contribute to the solution of the global issues facing humanity such as human rights, peace, non-violence and the environment based on the history of the Lotus Sutra.

At the end of Kumārajīva’s version of the Lotus Sutra, Bodhisattva Universal Worthy and his numerous followers make their advent into the *sahā* world from the Land of Mystic Purity. Referring to Bodhisattva Universal Worthy, Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282) says that in the name *Fugen* (Universal Worthy), the element *fu* or “universal” refers to the true aspect of all phenomena, the essential and unchanging truth as embodied in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The element *gen* or “worthy” expresses the idea of wisdom, the wisdom that functions in accordance with changing circumstances, as embodied in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

In other words, he indicates that in *Fugen* (Universal Worthy) lies the truth as embodied in the theoretical teachings and wisdom that functions in accordance with changing circumstances as embodied in the essential teaching. Thus, Nichiren Daishonin emphasizes that the widespread propagation of this sutra must be under the care and protection of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

As we approach a new stage in the development of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy at the start of a new century, we would like to welcome the scholars of the esteemed Institute of World Religions with



deepest respect as though we are welcoming the advent of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 3, Santa Monica: SGI-U.S.A., 1996, pp. 264–265

<sup>2</sup> Ed. by Jiang Zhongxin, *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra, Fragments from the Lüshun Museum Collection*, Tokyo: Lüshun Museum and Soka Gakkai, 1997, p. xviii