

## Foreword

Nepal and Japan share a common historical background. Both nations serve as custodians of culture preserving the quintessence of civilizations that are now lost in many other places. Thanks to their geographical barriers, mountains for Nepal and waters for Japan, they have been able to cherish and safeguard humanity's common heritage for a long time. Standing at the turn of the century with the need to tackle the agenda of the modern age, the peoples of the world need to rediscover the wisdom of the East, to return to spirituality rather than the excessive pursuit of material wealth.

In this regard, the project to publish a facsimile edition and romanized text of the Lotus Sutra (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*) manuscript (no. 4-21) preserved at the National Archives of Nepal, an agency under the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, is very significant. The original text of this manuscript is written in a Brāhmī script and in the Sanskrit language. The Lotus Sutra is regarded as one of the nine holy scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism. It represents Buddhism's message: All beings are potentially capable of perfecting their characters tantamount to that of the Buddha.

In November 1997, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP), Tokyo, dispatched Prof. Hirofumi Toda of the University of Tokushima, Japan, and photographer Shoichi Matsuoka to the National Archives of Nepal, Kathmandu, in order to conduct research on and take high resolution photographs of the Lotus Sutra manuscripts stored at the Archives. I am pleased to know that the facsimile edition and romanized text of the manuscript no. 4-21 are scheduled to be published in November 1998 and the spring of 1999, respectively.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International (SGI), who founded the IOP in 1962 and encouraged its Lotus Sutra projects, as well as President Einosuke Akiya of the Soka Gakkai, which is publishing these volumes as part of its Lotus Sutra manuscript series. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the IOP, led by Yasuo Morita, chairman of the board of trustees, and Dr. Yoichi Kawada, director, who have successfully brought about this publication through the coordination of the many people concerned, not to mention Mr. Matsuoka, who, with his remarkably fine expertise, took photographs of flawless quality for the facsimile. I would also like to congratulate Professor Toda who patiently made the transliteration of the Sanskrit text into Roman script. Thanks to his ardent efforts, the Lotus Sutra manuscript will appear in readable book form. I hope that the publication of these precious volumes will not only preserve and promote this important manuscript but also benefit research in various fields including Buddhology and

philology. I am happy that the publication is an outcome and symbol of warm, friendly relationships between the peoples of Nepal and Japan.

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