

Message

from Founder of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy

Daisaku Ikeda

I wish to extend my warmest greetings to Dr. Wang Xudong, Director of the Dunhuang Academy, whom I hold in the highest esteem, as well as to the Academy's distinguished scholars and researchers and to all of you who are in attendance today.

Please accept my heartfelt felicitations to you on the holding of the Dunhuang and the Lotus Sutra Symposium, which was co-organized by your illustrious Academy and our Institute of Oriental Philosophy in honor of two major milestones: the 75th anniversary of the Academy's founding as well as the 40th anniversary of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the People's Republic of China and Japan.

I had the privilege of publishing a dialogue with the Academy Honorary Director Chang Shuhong, the towering "guardian of Dunhuang." Among the numerous insights Dr. Chang shared in our work that I will cherish for all time were his beliefs that Dunhuang art was created by the hands of ordinary people for the sake of ordinary people, and that the purpose of artistic creativity lies in its service to and for all.

Led by Dr. Chang, all of you who have followed in his footsteps at the Academy have embraced his worthy beliefs with as profound a passion as he had. And just as he had, you have overcome indescribable hardship after hardship to protect Dunhuang, this Jewel of the Silk Road, striving day upon day to restore and preserve its manifold treasures.

While the names of the master artists that created them have been lost in sands of time, their lives were surely spent as devout adherents of Buddhist thought, which seeks to emancipate human beings from the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. Living out of caves, their days were unquestionably harsh, yet they must have drawn from the depths of their lives a paragon creative force to give birth to the Buddhist art of Dunhuang, works so magnificent and transcendent of both time and space that they, once revived, radiate an undying brilliance that humanity will forever cherish.

Why then is Dunhuang culture so widely admired by the people of the world? I recall what the Academy's first director, the venerable Duan



Dr. Chang, President Ikeda and Mrs. Ikeda meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse (Beijing, June 1990) © Seikyo Shimbun

Wenjie, firmly believed—that Dunhuang’s attraction lies in its human-centric spirit, its dedicated concern for the happiness of all and its commitment to inspiring ordinary people to achieve ever greater degrees of wellbeing. This is why I remain profoundly moved by, applaud and appreciate the sublime work that all of you here are engaged in at the Academy.

You may be aware of the extensive discussions that I have had with Drs. Chang and Duan on the Lotus Sutra, which is a keynote theme of this Symposium.

Among all the scrolls unearthed at Dunhuang, none are more numerous than those of the Lotus Sutra; many murals depicting scenes from the sutra have also been discovered in the Mogao Caves. As a teaching that reveals that all people are equally capable of attaining Buddhahood, the Lotus Sutra represents a priceless spiritual treasure for our global civilization.

In a passage from the sutra, Shakyamuni declares, “Hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us.” The purpose of the Buddha’s advent is to thus guide us to a life of enduring happiness. It lies in elevating humanity’s spiritual essence and life-state to ever higher heights and, in doing so, enables us to build a world truly in peace. This is why the Lotus Sutra is held among the foremost of all Buddhist teachings.

Beginning with Buddhism, my country has incurred an inestimably immense debt of culture from yours over the ages. Nevertheless, as indebted as the Japanese have been to the Chinese, it was not long ago that Japan—under the pseudo-rationale of State Shinto to validate the rise of militarism—perpetrated repeated transgressions against humanity in China.

During this historical maelstrom, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai, spoke out against the militarist regime and the two were consequently incarcerated for their beliefs, leading to Mr. Makiguchi's death in prison. He died in 1944, the very same year that your Academy was founded. With the passing of his dear mentor, Mr. Toda stood up alone with the war's end to realize the Lotus Sutra's stated goal of empowering everyone to gain the same enlightenment as the Buddha, a process that he repurposed with the modern term "human revolution." His efforts laid the groundwork from which innumerable Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whose appearance the sutra predicts, would emerge from the fertile lands of the people. Today, the Soka Gakkai has become a truly global movement of humanistic Buddhism actively promoting the causes of peace, culture and education in 192 countries and territories.

The Lotus Sutra is a teaching holding the inherent dignity and worth of life over every other truth; it serves as the original beacon illuminating the harmonious coexistence of all living things, a compass that leads global citizens to unite and act in the building of peace. The murals at Dunhuang that depict the parable of the three kinds of medicinal herbs and two kinds of trees are indeed resounding proclamations of the rich diversity of our biosphere and the indiscriminate nature of human compassion. It is in the Lotus Sutra, passed on to us over the ages, that we may find the light of wisdom to cast hope for our civilization in the 21st century. I am convinced that Dunhuang, as an agglomeration of the Silk Road culture in which diverse peoples and ethnicities interacted, will shine even brighter than before, its artistry and aesthetics touching the hearts of all our contemporaries. Dunhuang, as a lush oasis of human spirituality, will continue to animate us from deep within through its universal call for peace, coexistence and humanitarianism.

This Symposium, held here at Dunhuang, where the air is so rich and alluring with the timelessness of history, is indeed a gathering of hope marking a fresh departure toward the golden anniversary of bilateral peace and friendship between China and Japan as well as the centennial of your Academy. My heartfelt wish is that splendid new threads of amity, of trust and of creative expression be spun and woven

from Dunhuang, and I conclude my felicitations with prayers that the Dunhuang Academy may advance and flourish even further for all time.

September 5, 2018