Feature: Silk Road — Views on the Eastward Transmission of Buddhism

Foreword

Kenzo Kawasaki Translated by Shin'ichi Hashimoto

Introduction

TIFTY years after the field of Oriental Studies was established in Γ Russia in 1818, Nikolay Przhevalsky, who dedicated his life to the study of Central Asia, set out on his first expedition of the Ussuri River. The following year, German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen went to China to do research and published China, Ergebnisse eigner Reisen und darauf gegründeter Studien (China: The Results of My Travels and the Studies Based Thereon) in 1877. In this work, he used the word "Seidenstrassen" to refer to the pathway taken by those who promoted exchange between China and the Western world, and this became the origin of the term 'Silk Road'. Since then, other famous figures such as S.A. Hedin, M.A. Stein, P.E. Pelliot, A. Grünwedel, and S.F. Oldenburg set out from Western Europe, Russia and Japan to take part in the booming exploration of the Eurasian plains and deserts. Descriptions of these explorations appeared in the Japanese Journal of Geography and garnered the attention of researchers, geographers and historians of the Orient.¹ Explorers from either end of the Eurasian continent were drawn to the mysteries of the ancient civilization in the heartland. As fieldwork progressed and the collection of archaeological artefacts grew, it became apparent that there previously existed an East-West route that linked the western regions of Asia and the Mediterranean. The Silk Road tied together the ancient Romans and ancient Chinese. Hedin, who was a student of Richthofen, wrote about the Silk Road in his travelogue and when it was translated into Japanese, it served as one of the sparks that fuelled a Silk Road boom. The term Silk Road represented a multitude of people in the 19th century who were attracted to explorations into Central Asia and the research surrounding the ancient history of exchange between East and West. A range of publications in diverse formats ranging from illustrated volumes to research articles, books for advanced and novice learners and photographic collections emerged on the subject. Even to this day, it is a topic that continues to draw the attention of many readers.

In the 1990s, 100 years after the era of exploration, excavations of Buddhist ruins in Afghanistan, Central Asia and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China revealed new Buddhist and Chinese manuscripts. This spurred research in the fields of linguistics, Buddhology, history, archaeology and art history, with some findings overturning earlier notions that were long considered to be true. However, knowledge of this research was limited to academic journals or highly specialized books in non-Japanese languages and was not accessible to the general public. The feature 'Silk Road — Views on the Eastward Transmission of Buddhism' is an attempt to help introduce the most recent discoveries from researchers in and outside Japan to a broader audience. The aim of this feature is to convey how Buddhism, which is an important spiritual legacy of the Orient, was embraced by the people and cultures it encountered during its eastward transmission. We hope it will stimulate the readers to rethink the way in which Buddhist culture traversed the continent. In addition, this history of transmission is a tale interwoven with those of many other cultures and religions, so naturally, the focus of this feature will not only be limited to Buddhism, but will also encompass other areas of study that have close ties with Buddhism.

This feature contains articles by eight scholars. The titles and authors are listed as follows:

'Journey of the Lotus Sutra: Khotan to Tunhuang' by Dr Lokesh Chandra (Director, International Academy of Indian Culture)

'Transmission of Mahāyāna Buddhism from Gandhāra and Bactria to China' by Late Prof. Seishi Karashima (Former Director, International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University)

'On the History of Buddhist Structures in Tarmita-Termez' by Dr Shakirdjan R. Pidaev (Director, Fine Arts Institute of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan)

'Buddhism in the Chuy Valley (Kyrgystan) in the Middle Ages' by Dr Valery A. Kolchenko (Head Archaeologist, Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnology of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic)

Kalparāja-sūtra and Pagoda Worship' by Dr Duan Qing (Professor, Research Institute of Sanskrit Manuscripts and Buddhist Literature of Peking University)

'The Contribution of Paper in the Transmission of Buddhist Scriptures in the Western Regions' by Dr Rong Xinjiang (Professor, Peking University) 'Sanskrit Folios from an Unknown Commentary on the *Yogācārabhūmi*: A Preliminary Report' by Dr Zhang Hanjing (Research Fellow, Centre for Religious Research of China) and Dr Ye Shaoyong (Associate Professor, Peking University)

The IOP and the Silk Road

Features introducing research related to Silk Road studies and East-West exchanges have appeared in Japanese and English journals of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) previously. The reason for this is because the founder of our institute, third president of the Soka Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda (currently president of Soka Gakkai International), has a strong interest in international cultural exchange, which was his principle purpose in establishing the IOP. Founded in 1962, this institute was originally named the Institute of Oriental Studies. The inaugural issue of our journal was published in November 1962 and therein President Ikeda states, "It is my desire for this institute to contribute to a peaceful future in its efforts to research all the thoughts and philosophies, and all-round cultures of the East and the world from every angle and to make a profound study of the essential aspects."² This vision became the basis for research in our institute. Also, about 50 years ago in 1969, when President Ikeda spoke of the plans for creating Soka University, he stated:

I suggest that Soka University make it part of its future plans to send academic research teams to the Silk Road, which has been a bridge between East and West and along which Buddhism was introduced into East Asia, and to also study Yamataikoku [the most powerful ancient state in Japan during the late second and early third centuries CE].³

In subsequent speeches and publications, President Ikeda stressed the importance of cultural exchanges between East and West and exploring the theme of the eastward transmission of Buddhism. He has expounded on the universality of Buddhist teaching and champions the idea of establishing a contemporary "spiritual Silk Road".⁴

The IOP places the founder's vision as a priority⁵ and has, since its inception, conducted symposia and conferences on the theme of the Silk Road. Works by experts in the field are included in publications such as *Toyo gakujutsu kenkyu* 東洋学術研究 (The Journal of Oriental Studies), *Shiruku Rodo to Bukkyo bunka* シルクロードと仏教文化 (The Silk Road and Buddhist Culture, edited by Takashi Okazaki, 1979) and *Zoku*

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Shiruku Rodo to Bukkyo bunka 続・シルクロードと仏教文化 (The Silk Road and Buddhist Culture, Part 2, edited by Takayasu Higuchi, 1980). Further, together with the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the IOP has produced an exhibition titled, 'The Lotus Sutra and the Silk Road'. It was here that the manuscript of the Lotus Sutra along with others in the Petrovsky collection, which rarely leaves Russia, was exhibited in Japan.⁶

The History of the Eastward Transmission of Buddhism

After establishing the IOP, President Ikeda presented historical overviews of how Buddhism flourished and waned in the three countries of India, China and Japan. Then, from 1972 to 1976, through a series of two-way and three-way dialogues, he dug deeper into the roots of Buddhist history to seek out the reasons behind Buddhism's universality. Several books on this theme came about during this time: *Watashi no Shakuson-kan* 私の釈尊観 (My View of Shakyamuni, *The Living Buddha*); *Watashi no Bukkyo-kan* 私の仏教観 (My View of Buddhism, *Buddhism, the First Millennium*); *Watakushi no Tendai-kan* 私の天台観 (My View of Tien-t'ai Buddhism); *Buppo: Nishi to Higashi* 仏法・西と東 (Buddhism: East and West); and *Zoku Watashi no Bukkyo-kan* 続・私の仏 教観 (My View of Buddhism Part 2, *The Flower of Chinese Buddhism*). In one of the dialogues, President Ikeda states:

My aim, therefore, is not to delve into all the various aspects of the development of Buddhism in India and the lands to which it was transmitted or to try to describe in detail the countless scholarly studies that have been carried out on the subject. Rather, as I survey the history of Buddhism in India, China, and Japan, I will be seeking always to discover what is the real essence of the Buddhist religion, what is the spirit, the vital spark in it that enables it to go on living and growing today.⁷

Although President Ikeda's views were based on current research at the time, his sharp insights into the true nature of Buddhism still hold true, withstanding the flow of time as new primary sources are discovered and the academic field continues to develop.

The fact that Buddhism continues to be actively transmitted from generation to generation for over 2000 years is a testament to Shakyamuni's earnestness in "ensuring the continued existence of the Dharma". The Buddha's earnestness was also shared by his disciples, and because of this, a conclave was convened after his passing to collect and systematize the Buddha's teachings for the sake of posterity and efforts to preserve the teachings continue even now.⁸

Regarding the expansion of Buddhism under the rule of King Ashoka (c. third century BCE), President Ikeda details the painstaking efforts of envoys dispatched to share Buddhism with people of other cultures. He spotlights the struggles of the nameless individuals who endeavoured to spread Buddhism to those unfamiliar with its ideas: "Before a religion imported from abroad can take root in a society and begin to gain general acceptance, a considerable period of trial and tentative acceptance is required."⁹

In addition to the widely accepted tradition about Buddhism's entry into China in the 10th year of Yongping $k \neq (67 \text{ CE})$ during the reign of Emperor Ming of Later Han, there exists another tradition that Prince Ying of Ch'u, a younger half-brother of Emperor Ming, made offerings and paid to honour to *fou-t'u* in the eighth year of Yongping (65 CE). In *The Flower of Chinese Buddhism*, President Ikeda speculates:

Moreover, if, as the biography of Prince Ying indicates, there was already in the first century A.D. [same as original] a member of the imperial family who placed faith in the Buddhist teachings, then it is only natural to suppose that the new religion had by this time won a certain number of converts among the populace as a whole. A knowledge of Buddhism was probably brought to China by merchants and travelers from other lands who journeyed to China over the Silk Road, the trade route linking China with Central Asia and the countries to the west. If this supposition is correct, then a knowledge of Buddhism must have reached the western portions of China first and from there spread to Lo-yang and the regions such as Ch'u to the east.¹⁰

This supposition was backed up by information found on ancient wooden slips recently discovered.

The Mission of the Yüeh-chi

Around the beginning of the first century CE, the Great Yüeh-chi (Da Yuezhi), people of the Kushan Empire, were very active on the Eurasian continent with a unique and vibrant culture. Members of this culture played a key role in the eastward transmission of Buddhism. It is commonly known that amongst the priests who helped translate the

sutras, many were of Kushan origin. In the Japanese journal of IOP from 1983 to 1985, President Ikeda penned a series delving into the life of Kumarajiva. Observing the fact that many early Mahayana teachings were introduced to China by the Yüeh-chi, President Ikeda explains:

The Yüeh-chi, just as their name indicates, were a people of wonder and romance. Furthermore, they played an incredibly crucial role in the history of the transmission of Buddhism. They introduced many of the early Mahayana Buddhist teachings to the Chinese. Their invigorated culture originated in ancient India and Central Asia. However, around the fifth century, they vanished from history. It was surprisingly sudden. It is almost as if the Yüeh-chi's appearance on this Earth was for the sole purpose of conveying Buddhism to Eastern lands. After completing their mission, they quickly disappeared. It is difficult to imagine the prosperity of Buddhism in Dunhuang and Kucha without the contributions of the Yüeh-chi. Further research about their existence is highly warranted.¹¹

Just as it is pointed out above, there are no other ethnic groups as mysterious and perplexing as the Yüeh-chi. According to ancient Chinese historical records, such as the *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Grand Historian), the Yüeh-chi originally resided in the Dunhuang and Qilian Mountain area, but were driven out by the Huns, made their way through Dayuan 大宛 (Ferghana) to Daxia 大夏 (a city in Bactria) which they took over, and later established their capital north of there in the Amu Darya river basin. In the *Hanshu* 漢書 (Book of Han), the Great Yüeh-chi were known to have an alliance with five tribes named Xiumi 体密, Shuangmi 雙靡, Guishuang 貴霜, Xidun, 肸頓 and Gaofu 高 附.¹² Although these histories contain information about the Yüeh-chi, the details of their origin and westward migration have been a topic of constant debate by scholars for over 100 years and continues to be shrouded in mystery.

Then, in 1987, a large number of wooden slips were discovered from Xuanquanzhi of Dunhuang, and as excavation continued, 16 slips that contain the phrase "大月氏" (*Da Yuezhi*, Great Yüeh-chi) have been confirmed thus far. Prof. Nakao Odani of Kyoto Women's University has written a paper in 2015, based on reports from China concerning the wooden slips.¹³ Xuanquanzhi of Dunhuang was "one within a network set up by the empire as a layover station for envoys who travelled between Chang'an in China and the countries of the Western regions".¹⁴ Wooden slips dated from the Former Han era contain records of envoys,

government officials, merchants and refugees from the Great Yüehchi who had exchanges with China. To Odani's surprise, within the 16 slips, there is mention of not only Great Yüeh-chi envoys, but also titles such as "Great Yüeh-chi Allied Prince of Xiumi" and "Great Yüeh-chi Allied Prince of Shuangmi" which were not listed in the aforementioned histories. According to Odani, the record of the Allied Prince of Shuangmi dates back to the first year of Yongguang 永光 (43 BCE) and Allied Prince of Xiumi dates back to the year of Jianzhao 建昭 (37 BCE).¹⁵

One of the oldest known traditions of Buddhism's contact with China is *Weizhi* 魏志 (The History of Wei), wherein it states, "In the past, in the reign of Emperor Ai of the Han, the first year of the Yüan-shou era (2 BCE), the Erudite Disciple Jinglu received the oral transmission of the Buddhist scriptures from Yicun, an envoy of the king of the Great Yüeh-chi." It can be said that the slips from Dunhuang Xuanquanzhi, containing records of the Great Yüeh-chi, lend credibility to the tradition about Erudite Disciple Jinglu receiving the oral transmission of the Buddhist scriptures.

One of the most famous monk-translators of the sutras was Lokakshema 支婁迦讖 of Great Yüeh-chi origin. President Ikeda writes:

The phrase, 'my will is to propagate the Dharma', is essential. It can be said that Lokakshema's noble life in its entirety is contained within this short phrase.... Lokakshema was acutely self-aware of his mission to spread the message of Mahayana Buddhism, which was flourishing in his homeland of Great Yüeh-chi, to the people of Han.¹⁶

Late Prof. Seishi Karashima of the International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University alluded to the importance of the wooden slips discovered in Dunhuang Xuanquanzhi by proposing that the first translations of Mahayana Buddhist texts into Chinese were perhaps the work of a person from Bactria or Great Yüeh-chi, following the evidence that Mahayana sutras were translated from Gandhari to Chinese by Lokakshema, and that his disciple Zhi Qian 支謙 was also of Bactrian origin. Karashima also made the point that the probability of Buddhist monks being despatched along with the envoys from the Kushan Empire was highly likely, as Kushan kings wanted not only to share Buddhist teachings with China, but also open diplomatic channels based on the understanding of Buddhist thought.¹⁷ This is a pivotal point as we rethink how Buddhism made its way eastward, and will be revisited more in detail further. This feature includes article based on the keynote speech delivered by the late Prof. Karashima at Termez State University, Uzbekistan.

A Vision for a Grand Silk Road Exhibition

The 1984 volume by President Ikeda regarding his views on Dunhuang closes with the vision of a grand exhibition focused on the Silk Road, replete with artefacts that highlight the history of the remarkable cultural exchanges that took place.¹⁸

The exhibition would include artefacts gathered from the trade routes that spanned Greece and Rome in the West, through Central Asia and India and finally China, Korea and Japan. In some areas, artefacts may only remain as paintings or drawings, but others have artefacts that are in pristine condition. If these artefacts related to the Silk Road are all gathered together in one location, a grand exhibition of cultural exchange could be presented. I have no doubt that even without words, the people that come to see the exhibition would be awed and moved by the preciousness of peace.... Moreover, if the Silk Road artefacts from the grasslands are displayed together with those that traversed Central Asia in what is now currently the Soviet Union, it will be a great event on a global scale. A peace exhibition of rich cultural exchanges between East and West symbolized by the Silk Road and Dunhuang, is something that this world is in critical need of at this juncture. I propose this exhibition be organized by the year 2001 so that a feeling of oneness can be shared among people and awaken them to the sense that we are one global civilization.

In the autumn of the following year, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum opened the 'Treasures from Dunhuang, China' exhibition featuring cultural treasures such as a reproduction of murals from the Mogao Caves and manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra. This exhibition also travelled to other cities of Japan including Shizuoka, Fukuoka, Nagasaki and Nara, resulting in an outpouring of positive reactions from attendees.

In 1988, the Nara Association for Silk Road Exposition (sponsored by Nara Prefecture, Nara City and NHK) held the Nara Silk Road Exposition with over 6.8 million attendees. It was the pinnacle of the Silk Road boom in Japan and became "a great event on a global scale" as President Ikeda had anticipated. This exposition featured invaluable Buddhist cultural treasures from the Great Yüeh-chi and the Kushan Empire from Soviet Central Asia and captured the imaginations of those

who came to see it. Late Prof. Kyuzo Kato of the National Museum of Ethnology, one of the most famous Silk Road researchers in Japan, had hoped that Japan could do a joint excavation project with Soviet counterparts.¹⁹ That materialized a few years later as he led the first ever joint project between the Soviets and Japan (Soka University's Silk Road Archaeological Team) for an excavation of a Buddhist historical site. From that point, Prof. Kato expanded his archaeological activities, including a dig at one of the most ancient Buddhist ruins, that of Karatepa in Uzbekistan.²⁰ His work has contributed greatly to advancing our understanding of the historical eastward transmission of Buddhism. Just like Przhevalsky, whom he deeply admired, Kato also continued to work until the very end, searching for knowledge in an excavation site. This will be a topic I will expand upon in the very near future. In this feature, Dr Shakirdjan Pidaev, together with whom the late Prof. Kato collaborated on several excavations, discusses the new archaeological viewpoints on the history of Buddhist structures in Termez.

Notes

- ¹ For example, 'Suven Hedin shi Chuo Ajia ryoko dan スヴェン、ヘディン氏中 央亜細亜旅行談'(Sven Hedin's Central Asia Travelogue) was published in 1989 and 'Sutain shi no Chuo Ajia tanken スタイン氏の中央亞細亞探檢' (Stein's Exploration in Central Asia was published in 1916. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi mentions in his *Jinsei chirigaku* 人生地理学 (Geography of Human Life, 1903), "There were five great ancient civilizations and three of those originated in areas located near deserts" (translated from Japanese). He regarded the Amu Darya and Syr Darya river basins to be one of the sites of origin of human civilization.
- ² Translated from Japanese. Ikeda Daisaku 池田大作, 'Sokan o shukusu 創刊を祝す' (Message of Congratulation), *Toyo gakujutsu kenkyu* 東洋学術研究 (The Journal of Oriental Studie's in Oriental Science]) 1, no. 1 (1962): 2.
- ³ Translated from Japanese. Ikeda Daisaku, 'Soka Daigaku setsuritsu koso 創 価大学設立構想' (Thoughts on Establishing Soka University, May 3, 1969), *Soritsusha no katarai* 創立者の語らい (Speeches by the Founder) Part 1 (Tokyo: Soka University Student Union, 2000), 32.
- ⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, 'A New Road for East-West Cultural Exchange. A Speech Delivered at Moscow M.V. Lomonosov State University, May 27, 1975', A New Humanism. *The University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1996), 61–72.
- ⁵ Shinohara Makoto 篠原誠, 'Toyo tetsugaku kenkyu no hoko 東洋哲学研究の方向' (Trend Towards the Study of Oriental Philosophies), *Toyo gakujustu kenkyu* (The Journal of Oriental Studies [The Journal of Oriental Science]) 9, no.1 (1970): 1–3.
- ⁶ The Institute of Oriental Philosophy, ed., 'Showcasing the Lotus Sutra and Its Artefacts Worldwide', *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 28 (2018): 115–21.
- ⁷ Daisaku Ikeda, The Flower of Chinese Buddhism, trans. by Burton Watson (New

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York: Weatherhill, 1986), 5.

Daisaku Ikeda, *Buddhism, the First Millennium*, trans. by Burton Watson (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1977). "There can be no doubt that Shakyamuni, particularly in his late years, gave intense thought to the question of how best to 'insure the continued existence of the Dharma,' as the traditional phrase expresses it. Any religious leader of outstanding ability and foresight can be expected to give serious and constant consideration to the future of the organization after his death. The proof that Shakyamuni did so is to be found in the fact that, immediately after his departure from the world, his followers came together in conclave and put his teachings in order. This act, together with the immense amount of effort expended by members of the Buddhist faith over the following thousand years or more in preserving and enlarging the body of sacred scriptures, are surely reflections of the intense concern that Shakyamuni evinced during his lifetime for the 'continued existence of the Dharma'" (17).

"Needless to say, there were in those days no mechanical means of recording nor any methods of taking shorthand. It is even doubtful that scripts existed for the writing of Indian languages. Shakyamuni's disciples, if they were to retain his teachings, had no recourse but to make those teachings an integral part of their own being.

It is important to note that these teachings are not in any sense a system of intellectual knowledge or a body of facts. Rather they are an expression of wisdom addressed to such questions as how man ought to live or what is the cause of human suffering. As the disciples received the teachings of the Buddha, they proceeded to put them into practice in their own lives and in this way one by one verified the truth and validity of Shakyamuni's words.

The teachings of Buddhism, we must remember, are to be mastered subjectively, through actual practice. One can never understand them by sitting at a desk and reading a book. Only through the exchange that takes place between one person and another, one life force and another life force, can their truths be grasped. This point should also be kept in mind when approaching the Buddhist scriptures, which represent the embodiment of the teachings and wisdom" (18–19).

"However that may be, the fact is that, in the historical growth of Buddhism in this early period, it was the canon fixed by the First Council that served as the core of the faith, being regarded with the utmost reverence and gravity. And, although the canon may have had its imperfections and deficiencies, the determination of the men who compiled it to 'insure the continuance of the Dharma' was the factor that led in time to the birth of the whole great corpus of Buddhist teachings" (24).

- ⁹ Ikeda, *The Flower of Chinese Buddhism*, 20.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 9.
- ¹¹ Translated from Japanese. Ikeda Daisaku, 'Kumaraju o kataru 鳩摩羅什を語る (1)' (My View of Kumārajīva (1)), *Toyo gakujutsu kenkyu* 東洋学術研究 (The Journal of Oriental Studies) 22, no. 1 (1983): 100.
- ¹² Odani Nakao 小谷仲男, 'Tonko Kensen Kankan ni kiroku sareta Daigesshi no shisha 敦煌懸泉漢簡に記録された大月氏の使者' (Da Yuezhi's Envoys Documented in Wooden Slips from Xuanquanzhi at Dunhuang), *Shiso* 史窓 72 (2015): 33–34.

¹³ Ibid., 15–37.

¹⁴ Translated from Japanese. Ibid., 15.

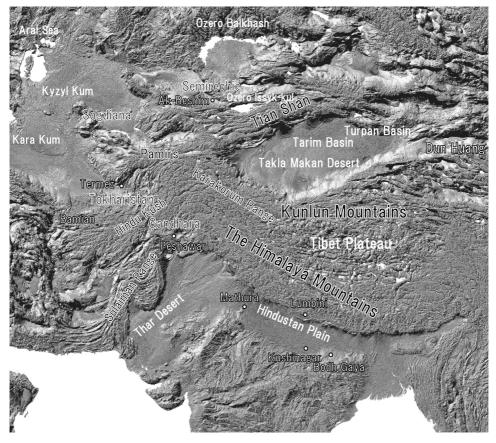
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 35.
- ¹⁶ Translated from Japanese. Ikeda Daisaku, *Tonko o kataru* 敦煌を語る (My Views on Dunhuang) (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 1984), 153–54.
- ¹⁷ Seishi Karashima, 'Mahāyāna Buddhism from Gandhāra and Bactria to China', Keynote Speech delivered (in Russian) on November 24, 2017, at an international conference held at Termez State University.
- ¹⁸ Translated from Japanese. Ikeda, *Tonko o kataru*, 296–97.
- ¹⁹ Kato Kyuzo 加藤九祚, 'Chuo Ajia kodai bunka no kenkyusha tachi 中央アジア古 代文化の研究者たち' (Scholars of Ancient Central Asian Culture in the USSR), *Shiruku Rodo Daibunmei Ten: Shiruku Rodo oashisu to sogen no michi シルク* ロード大文明展: シルクロード・オアシスと草原の道 (The Grand Exhibition of Silk Road Civilizations: The Silk Road: The Oasis and Steppe Routes) (Nara: Nara Prefectural Museum of Art, The Association for Silk Road Exposition, Nara, 1988), 252.
- ²⁰ Kato Kyuzo, *Watashino Shiberia taikenkara Dass Leben ist gut* 私のシベリア 体験から (From My Experiences in Siberia) (Tokyo: Seki Memorial Foundation for Science, 2015), 5.

About the Author and Translator

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Map of the feature 'Silk Road — Views on the Eastward Transmission of Buddhism' (On the basis of map created by the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan)