

Joint Exhibition Activities of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences

Irina F. Popova

THE long and fruitful collaboration between the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IOM RAS; then still the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies) and the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) in Japan began in November 1996. At that time, the director of the Saint Petersburg Branch was Prof. Yury Ashotovich Petrosian (1930–2010); the deputy director was Prof. Yevgeny Ivanovich Kychanov (1932–2013); and the head of the Manuscript and Document Department was Prof. Margarita Iosifovna Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya (1933–2021). Those three guided a section of the staff that began the implementation of an agreement on scholarly collaboration with the IOP that included exchanges of researchers, the holding of conferences, and also the provision of materials with Buddhist content, first and foremost the Lotus Sutra, in the form of academic publications, exhibitions, and exhibition catalogues.

The first major joint project was the organization of ‘The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road’ exhibition that opened at the Soka Gakkai Josei Toda International Center in Shinjuku, Tokyo, in November 1998. It featured 47 manuscripts and woodcut books with Buddhist content in 14 languages from the Saint Petersburg collection. The exhibition was a great success, attracting many visitors with an appreciation of Buddhist culture, ancient writings, and the history of Central Asia. One of the primary reasons for such interest from the public was the inclusion in the display of remarkable manuscript copies of the Lotus Sutra in the Tangut language and the Petrovsky Manuscript in Sanskrit.

The unique Tangut manuscripts of the Lotus Sutra were brought to Saint Petersburg by the Russian traveler Pyotr Kuzmich Kozlov (1863–1935), who in the course of the Mongolia-Sichuan Expedition of 1907–09 discovered the remains of the ancient city of Khara-Khoto. Conducting excavations in that ‘Asiatic Pompeii’, as Kozlov called the site, he came upon a whole library of manuscripts and block-printed books, most of them with Buddhist content. This unique collection from

Khara-Khoto is now lodged in the IOM RAS and is one of the ‘gems’ of the manuscript collection not only of our Institute, but the entire world.

The decision to include works in the Tangut language in the ‘Lotus Sutra and Its World’ exhibition was taken not only for their uniqueness, but also for the special significance that their study had to the history of Russo-Japanese scholarly and cultural ties. In Japan, the language and writing system of the Tangut people was studied by the eminent scholar, linguist, and ethnographer Juntaro Ishihama (1888–1968), who collaborated for many years with the outstanding Russian researcher Nikolai Alexandrovich Nevsky (1892–1937). Nevsky, who was posthumously awarded a Lenin Prize in 1962, is renowned in Russia chiefly as a Tangut scholar. In Japan, he is better known as an ethnographer, linguist, and folklorist. Nevsky made substantial contribution to the study of the southern Japanese Miyako dialect. The port of Hirara on Miyako Island has a street named after him and a commemorative pillar erected in his honour.

After arriving in Japan in 1915 for a two-year study placement, Nevsky ended up remaining much longer due to the revolutions and civil war in Russia. He taught in Japan for many years and became part of the Japanese intellectual community, publishing papers in Japanese scholarly journals and participating in the Local Historians’ Society (Kyodo-kai) headed by the eminent Japanese scholars Shinobu Orikuchi (1887–1953) and Kunio Yanagita (1875–1962). At one of the society’s meetings, Nevsky made the acquaintance of the well-known educational reformer Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944). In 1929, eager to engage in the deciphering of the Tangut texts, he returned to his homeland, where he devoted eight years to the study of the Tangut fund, making an inventory, identifying the most significant items, and setting about compiling a dictionary. His life was, however, cut tragically short in 1937, when he was arrested based on a false denunciation, accused of spying, and summarily executed.

Nevsky’s endeavors were continued at the Leningrad Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies by the Tangut Studies Group, which was headed from 1963 by another talented Sinologist, Tangut scholar, jurisperit, and historian of Central Asia — Yevgeny Ivanovich Kychanov. His work *Izmenennyyi i zanovo utverzhdennyyi kodeks deviza tsarstvovaniya Nebesnoe protsvetanie 1149–1169* [The Revised and Newly Endorsed Code for the Designation of Reign ‘Celestial Prosperity’ (1149–69)] (Moscow, 1987–89)¹ is unsurpassed for the precision of its translation from Tangut to Russian. In addition, his *Tangut-Russian-English-Chinese Dictionary* (Kyoto, 2006) is used by

Tangut scholars around the world. For many years Yevgeny Kychanov collaborated with the leading Japanese Tangut scholar Prof. Tatsuo Nishida (1928–2012), a pupil of Juntaro Ishihama. One product of their consultations and interaction with each other was the fundamental *Catalogue of Tangut Buddhist Texts in the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Oriental Studies* (Kyoto University publication, 1999). Yevgeny Kychanov spent many years compiling the catalogue. The foreword was written by Prof. Nishida, while the indices were created and the editing work performed by Dr Shintaro Arakawa (born 1971), a pupil of Yevgeny Kychanov and Prof. Masahiro Shogaito (1942–2014).

The ‘Lotus Sutra and Its World’ exhibition in 1998 was accompanied by the publication of a catalogue with parallel Japanese and English texts (*The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road. Manuscripts and Block Prints from the Collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies*) with leading scholars from Russia and Japan participating in its creation.

In 2005, the IOP published (as number 6 in the *Series of Lotus Sutra Manuscripts*) a colour facsimile of the Tangut-language Lotus Sutra from the collection of the IOM: *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* (Tang 218), edited by Prof. Nishida.

In 2013, the Petrovsky Manuscript was published as number 13 in the same series: *Sanskrit Lotus Sutra Manuscripts from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Facsimile Edition* (SI P/11), edited by Mr Noriyoshi Mizufune. In Russia, this text has been studied by Sergei Fedorovich Oldenburg (1863–1934), Vladimir Svyatoslavovich Vorobyev-Desyatovskiy (1927–1956), and Margarita Iosifovna Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya. Due to its unique character, this manuscript quite quickly became an object of study by the international scholarly community. In the 1950s, the Indian scholar Raghu Vira and his German colleague Heinz Bechert managed to establish that the wording of this manuscript differs from that of the Nepalese version known to the scholarly world. Later, Prof. Hirofumi Toda and Prof. Ronald Eric Emmerick ascertained from the partially preserved colophons that the manuscript should be considered to have come from Khotan rather than Kashgar.

In the 2013 IOP edition, the Petrovsky Manuscript (belonging to the collection from IOM RAS) is supplemented with fragments from other collections around the world, making the volume an invaluable complete source for the study of the history of Buddhism across an

extensive region of Central Asia and the Far East.

In the 1950s, Vladimir Vorobyev-Desyatovsky engaged in the study of works in the Serindia fund, where the Petrovsky Manuscript is kept. He compiled a preliminary card index containing a full palaeographic description of all the fragments. He also initiated the multidisciplinary study (on the basis of materials in the Leningrad/ Saint Petersburg collection) of questions in Central Asian philology, but only managed to accomplish a fraction of what he was working on before his untimely demise.

His wife, Margarita Vorobyeva-Desyatovskaya, continued his work on the Indian-languages fragments in the collection. It was primarily through her efforts, as well as the contribution of Grigory Bongard-Levin (1931–2009) and Eduard Temkin (1928–2019), that in 1985, pages from the Petrovsky Manuscript of the Lotus Sutra from the Leningrad/ Saint Petersburg collection were published in one of the issues of *Pamyatniki indiiskoi pis'mennosti iz Tsentral'noi Azii* [Indian Written Monuments from Central Asia] in facsimile, with transliteration, a study and commentary (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1985) (*Pamyatniki pis'mennosti Vostoka*, LXXIII,1; *Bibliotheca Buddhica*, XXXIII).²

This Sanskrit manuscript of the Lotus Sutra dates from the eighth century. The Sanskrit version of the text was long believed to be lost. It was acquired in Kashgar (now the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of the PRC) by the Russian consul Nikolai Fedorovich Petrovsky (1837–1908), who played an outstanding role in the study of the antiquities of Central and Middle Asia. Petrovsky facilitated not only an expansion of Russia's activities in East Turkestan, but also the advance of scholarly archaeological exploration in the region. He bought manuscripts from the local populace, carried out digs, and paid close attention to the activities of foreign explorers in East Turkestan. Petrovsky worked closely with the Oriental Section of the Imperial Russian Archaeological Society in Saint Petersburg, and in 1905, he donated the entire collection of manuscripts he had gathered in East Turkestan to the Russian Committee for the Study of Central and Eastern Asia, which in turn passed it on to the Asiatic Museum (the forerunner of the IOM RAS).

Another significant event that the IOM RAS held in conjunction with the IOP, this time with the participation of the Association Culturelle Soka de France, was the 'Buddhist Sutras: A Universal Spiritual Heritage — Manuscripts and Iconography of the Lotus Sutra' exhibition in the exhibition halls of the UNESCO headquarters in Paris from April 2 to 10, 2016. For this exhibition, the IOM RAS provided



No Image

Dr Irina F. Popova (to the left), alongside Dr Lokesh Chandra (center), cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremony of the exhibition ‘Buddhist Sutras: A Universal Spiritual Heritage — Manuscripts and Iconography of the Lotus Sutra’ held at the UNESCO headquarters, Paris (April 2016).

27 original manuscripts from Central Asia, some of them absolutely unique. The display included pages from some very ancient texts: *The Tale of Bhadra*, a 19th-century Khotan-Saka textbook of Buddhism containing quotations from sutras and popular legends; fragments from one of the oldest Indian manuscripts (dated the second century CE) of the *Dharmapada*, a collection of sayings and aphorisms attributed to the Buddha; a Kāśyapaparivarta-sūtra, a seventh–eighth-century Sanskrit manuscript in the *pothi* format; a jataka Śukasūtra from Dunhuang; and several more extremely rare items in the Sanskrit, Tocharian, Sogdian, Tangut, Oirat, Manchurian, Tibetan, and Chinese languages. A catalogue was published for the opening of the exhibition — *Sūtras bouddhiques un héritage spirituel universel. Manuscrits et iconographie du Sūtra du Lotus* (Paris: les Indes savantes, 2016) — containing reproductions of the exhibits from Saint Petersburg and other world collections.

In 2022, the IOP marks the 60th anniversary of its foundation. Over that period, its productive activities have positively impacted dozens of highly diverse institutions and thousands of people around the world. Those who have worked with Russia, with Saint Petersburg, with the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts include President Daisaku Ikeda, the founder of the IOP, Dr Yoichi Kawada and Mr Akira Kirigaya, their longstanding interpreter Dr Mitsuru Eguchi (‘Masha-san’), and many other members of its staff. I wish these remarkable people, and indeed

everyone at the IOP, health, prosperity, and productive work for many years to come.

Notes

- ¹ Russian reference. *«Измененный и заново утвержденный кодекс девиза царствования Небесное процветание (1149–1169)»* (Москва, 1987–1989), [The Revised and Newly Endorsed Code for the Designation of Reign ‘Celestial Prosperity’ (1149–69), (Moscow, 1987–89)].
- ² Russian reference. *«Памятники индийской письменности из Центральной Азии»* Вып.1. Издание текстов, исследование и комментарий. М: «Восточная литература», 1985 (Памятники письменности Востока, LXXIII,1; Bibliotheca Buddhica, XXXIII), [Indian Written Monuments from Central Asia, (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1985), (Pamyatniki pis'mennosti Vostoka, LXXIII,1; Bibliotheca Buddhica, XXXIII)].

About the Author

Irina Fedorovna Popova is the director of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences, professor at Saint Petersburg State University, corresponding member of the RAS. Having completed her postgraduate studies at the Saint Petersburg (Leningrad) Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies (now Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences), she served as a researcher and Academic Secretary there and received her Doctor of Sciences in history. Her current research focus is the political thought and administrative system of medieval China. At present, she is also in charge of cataloging the Chinese collections of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, RAS.