

Ford Foundation Symposium



The first symposium held under the project 'Bringing Together Scholars, Scholarship and Scholarly Resources on the Silk Road (China – India – Russia) 2006–2008' sponsored by the Ford Foundation took place on 20th–22nd November, 2006 at the National Library of China (NLC), Beijing. The topic chosen was the versions and transmission in different languages of the *Sutra of Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra*). The Indian research coordinator, Dr Radha Banerjee of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, New Delhi, spent two weeks with IDP at the British Library before the symposium undertaking preliminary research on the Sutra, compiling the home page of the web resource and preparing the bibliography. This web resource was then presented at the symposium to scholars. It was suggested that links to other online resources and papers be included, along with links to images of the texts in all languages in all institutions collaborating with IDP. When finished, the web resource will be translated into Chinese and Russian.

As the research coordinator for China, Dr Saren Gaowa of IDP China at the NLC had organised all the local logistics from invitation letters for the visas of overseas delegates, to accommodation and travel arrangements. She also coordinated a team of colleagues of the Rare Books and Special Collections department at the NLC under Mr Zhang Zhiqing for the hire of the symposium meeting room, refreshments for tea breaks, and specially ordered buffet lunches in the staff canteen to cater for different dietary requirements. The team at IDP China also compiled a web resource on the Sutra in Chinese to complement the English language resource.

The Russian research coordinator, Katia Karmanova, of the Institute of Oriental Studies, St Petersburg arrived in Beijing one week prior to the symposium and spent time at the NLC familiarising herself with the IDP work of conservation, digitisation, cataloguing and research. She also helped out with final preparations for the symposium, met the Russian delegates at the airport and was responsible for their well-being during their stay. Radha Banerjee looked after the group of five scholars from India, and accompanied them to other meetings in Beijing.

Six scholars from India, six from Russia and eleven from China presented papers at the symposium, as well as one specialist scholar from the USA, Dr. Natalie Gummer of Beloit College. From China, the scholars presenting papers were mostly from universities in Beijing. In addition there were two papers by colleagues at the NLC and two papers by scholars of the Dunhuang Academy based in Lanzhou. There were also other Chinese scholars and students in attendance, including a large number of research students working on Central Asian topics from the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing. These students were themselves mostly from non-Han Chinese ethnic backgrounds and raised some interesting points in the discussion about interpreting Chinese history from the viewpoint of non-Han ethnicities.

The NLC had published in a welcome booklet the full texts papers with bilingual abstracts in English and Chinese. Other information such as scholars' names and affiliations as well as the full programme of the symposium was included. This provided a very useful reference tool for all and was an excellent aid in the interpretation between Chinese and English

after papers had been given and during discussions. After the symposium, scholars will revise their papers and re-submit them for formal publication, supported by Dr Shen Weirong of Renmin University, Beijing. The Rare Books Department exhibited some of the manuscripts of the Sutra held at the NLC.

Ms. Zhao Daying of IDP China did a large amount of the translation for the symposium into both Chinese and English, especially in the context of the discussions.

Papers were presented on the different Central Asian language versions of the Sutra, including Chinese, Tibetan, Mongolian, Khotanese, Uighur, Tangut and Sanskrit. Topics analysed included the concept of kingship in the Sutra with particular relation to Khotan. The depiction of the Sutra in Dunhuang wall paintings was also discussed in a paper. Copies of the Sutra held at the NLC, the IOS and the Nakamura Collection in Tokyo were discussed, as well as newly discovered fragments.

The symposium was enthusiastically received by all delegates present, and it was agreed that it provided an excellent opportunity to meet scholars from the other countries face-to-face in a focused and convivial scholarly setting. Scholars learnt more about the work being done on the Sutra in other countries, as well as the operating cultures of the different scholarly communities. Contacts were made, and ideas for new collaborative projects between scholars working in China and Russia on the Tibetan version of the Sutra were circulated.

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