

The Lotus Sutra

The teachings, transmission and material culture of a sacred Buddhist text

Conference, 15 – 16 December 2022

Foyle Suite, British Library

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Programme

15 December 2022 – Day 1

- 14.15 Registration
- 14.30 Opening Ceremony, greetings by Roly Keating and the Bei Shan Tang Foundation
- Panel 1 Teachings of the Lotus Sutra**
Chaired by Luisa Elena Mengoni
- 14.45 Welcome by Luisa Elena Mengoni
- 14.50 Keynote: Stephen F Teiser
- 15.50 Venerable Miao Duo 妙多法師 and Roxanna Pang
- 16.15 Tea & Coffee Break
- 16.30 Paul Harrison
- 16.55 Eric Tzu-yin Chung 鍾子寅
- 17.20 Panel 1: Q&A

16 December 2022 – Day 2

- Panel 2 The Lotus Sutra at Dunhuang**
Chaired by Sam van Schaik
- 9.00 Welcome by Sam van Schaik
- 9.15 Neil Schmid
- 9.40 Roderick Whitfield
- 10.05 Tea & Coffee Break
- 10.20 Costantino Moretti
- 10.45 Imre Galambos
- 11.10 Mélodie Doumy
- 11.35 Panel 2: Q&A
- 12.00 Lunch
- Panel 3 Preserving the Lotus Sutra at the British Library:
From Physical to Digital**
Chaired by Mélodie Doumy
- 13.45 Welcome by Mélodie Doumy
- 14.00 Tan Wang-Ward 王潭
- 14.25 Marie Kaladgew, Paulina Kralka, Marya Muzart
- 14.50 Tea & Coffee Break
- 15.05 Tania Estrada, Marie Kaladgew, Paulina Kralka and Marya Muzart
- 15.30 Isabelle Reynolds-Logue
- 15.55 Panel 3: Q&A
- 16.20 Endnote: Luisa Elena Mengoni

Presentations: Titles and Abstracts

Keynote Speaker: Stephen F Teiser

Thursday 15 December, 14.50

The Lotus Sutra: Creating Buddhist Scripture

Who created the *Lotus Sutra*, a text richly represented among the Dunhuang manuscripts? This talk draws on the British Library and other collections to explore how the scripture was both understood as an eternal truth and recreated in countless material forms in medieval China. Questions include: Who was the author or originator of the text? Who translated it into Chinese? Who produced it, and in what media? How was it preached and recited? Which versions were popular? What did believers think about the text, and how did they make it come alive?

Venerable Miao Duo 妙多法師 and Roxanna Pang

Thursday 15 December, 15.50

Lotus Sutra: Applying the Teachings in an Everyday Life

The *Lotus Sutra* is one of the most important and most influential Buddhist sutras. The great scripture encompasses many key teachings which have characterised Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia. The sutra is widely circulated, read and studied by many. The principal teachings are expounded beautifully, through parables, repetitions, verses and passages. As Buddhists, it is the application of these wisdoms that is crucial. How can we use the teachings as a guide for our everyday practice? In what ways can we apply them into our everyday life in order to truly practice the bodhisattva way, in order to benefit both self and others? The talk will be a combined sharing from a monastic and lay Buddhist practitioner on how the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra* can be actualised in modern daily life.

Paul Harrison

Thursday 15 December, 16.30

When Being Original No Longer Matters: Reflections on the Sanskrit Text of the Lotus Sutra and its Uses

The celebration of the completion of the project to digitise Chinese copies of the *Lotus Sutra* provides an opportunity to reflect on the transmission of this important scripture in the Indic languages in which it was composed and first circulated, in India and Central Asia. We assume that the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* began life in Prakrit and was gradually transformed into Sanskrit, and that the translations into Chinese were made while this process was still reaching its conclusion. This talk considers the sutra's migration to East Asia and the reasons why the Chinese versions have come to occupy a position of prime importance, while the Sanskrit text has receded into the background. Among other things, it addresses the extraordinary situation that no modern translation of the complete Sanskrit text into a European language has been made since Eugène Burnouf's *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* of 1852 and Hendrik Kern's *The Lotus of the True Law* in 1884, while multiple renditions of Kumārajīva's Chinese translation have continued to appear in the 21st century.

Eric Tzu-yin Chung 鍾子寅

Thursday 15 December, 16.55

Deciphering the Exhibition of The Arts of the Lotus Sutra at the National Palace Museum

The exhibition of *The Arts of the Lotus Sutra*, held in 2022, brought together masterpieces relating to the *Lotus Sutra*, including manuscripts and printed editions of the scripture, stone rubbings, sculptures, and paintings. In addition, it contained a virtual representation of Mogao Cave 61. Following the traditional three part structure of Buddhist sutras, the first section presented the various Chinese translations and editions of the *Lotus Sutra*, as well as the associated commentaries and practices. The second section then juxtaposed the artistic representations of important themes and genres inspired by the scripture. Finally, the third section explored both the themes around its dissemination and its actual propagation throughout Asia. Through this exhibition, visitors were expected to understand the *Lotus Sutra* as a canonical text that has inspired people in East Asia for over a millennium, and the artistic achievements born out of it.

Neil Schmid

Friday 16 December, 9.15

At the Intersection of Image, Text and Ritual: The Lotus Sutra in Mogao Murals

In medieval China, the *Lotus Sutra* served as an object of devotional rituals through a complex variety of textual, material, and visual forms. Reading, reciting and copying the sutra were core practices, all of which were accompanied by a constellation of rituals sacralising these acts. But what of the contents of the scripture, its narratives and doctrines? How did adherents, the vast majority of whom were illiterate, actively engage in understanding the text itself? What were the visual and ritual expository forms that facilitated comprehension both among individuals and across communities? This paper explores the unparalleled resources from the Mogao Caves and its cache of manuscripts for answers to these questions, in particular 9th and 10th century expositions of the *Lotus Sutra* in the form of 'transformation tableaux' and 'sutra lecture texts', both of which were used in a widespread ritual known as the popular lecture. This analysis details how these two seemingly diverse forms worked in tandem as a singular hermeneutic to further comprehension of and devotion to the *Lotus Sutra*.

Roderick Whitfield

Friday 16 December, 9.40

Universal Gate of Salvation: Guanyin at Dunhuang

Chapter 25 of the *Lotus Sutra* is devoted to the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara whose boundless compassion ensured his popularity both in the mural paintings of the Mogao cave-shrines, and among the votive paintings on silk and hemp from the Library cave. The talk will focus on Avalokitesvara's role as saviour from various perils.

Costantino Moretti

Friday 16 December, 10.20

Dividing and Structuring the Lotus Sutra in Manuscript Form

Medieval catalogues of Buddhist scriptures provide details on the structure and/or internal organisation of sutras and commentaries in an early phase, also setting out interesting codicological details concerning book collections stored in official monastic libraries. By comparing early catalogues to later sources, significant differences in the structure of various texts come to light, indicating that scriptures were, at times, circulating in several formats – possibly with a different layout – and that textual divisions may have evolved over the centuries. In this talk, I will point out a number of considerations regarding scroll divisions of the *Lotus Sutra*, with a focus on manuscript copies found in the Dunhuang corpus.

Imre Galambos

Friday 16 December, 10.45

Pieces of a Puzzle: Fragments of Chinese Manuscript with the Lotus Sutra

Among the group of Dunhuang manuscripts in the codex form is S.5531 from the Stein collection at the British Library. This is a small multiple-text manuscript booklet from the 10th century, most likely produced by several family members in collaboration with each other as part of the series of rituals commemorating the dead. In its current form, the manuscript consists of four quires tied together, although it is also clear that at least one quire is missing from the beginning. By identifying two pieces of this missing first quire in other collections of Dunhuang manuscripts, this paper is able for the first time to reconstruct most of the original manuscript. More importantly, however, the separate pieces allow us to gain insight into the different stages of the manuscript's life between its initial production and its internment in the Dunhuang library cave. This reveals that the manuscript continued to be used for different ends long after the texts were copied by members of a family for the sake of commemorating their deceased kin.

Mélodie Doumy

Friday 16 December, 11.10

The Guanyin Sutra at Dunhuang as Seen Through the British Library Collection

Chapter 25 of the *Lotus Sutra*, *The Universal Gate of Bodhisattva Guanyin*, is entirely devoted to Avalokitesvara or Guanyin. It details, through a series of episodes, how the deity assumes thirty-three different incarnations to succour people facing challenging life situations and to bring them to spiritual salvation. Due to its popularity, this chapter was often singled out for copying and came to be regarded as an independent text known as the *Guanyin Sutra*. This talk will provide an overview of the manuscripts of the *Guanyin Sutra* from Dunhuang in the Stein collection. We will look at their relative representation within the Library's holdings compared to other chapters of the *Lotus Sutra*. We will also explore several of their material characteristics, including formats, as well as some of the colophons that can be found on the scrolls, so as to understand what could have been the potential use and significance of the text for the people who wrote or commissioned it.

Tan Wang-Ward 王潭

Friday 16 December, 14.00

Locating the Lotus Sutra Manuscripts Digitisation Project

Aiming to conserve and digitise nearly 800 Chinese manuscript copies of the *Lotus Sutra* from the Stein Collections at the British Library, the *Lotus Sutra* Manuscripts Digitisation Project is one of the largest project-based digitisation efforts under the International Dunhuang Project. The presentation seeks to reflect on the process of bringing together a multifunctional team to deliver this project. It will consider the project's significance and characteristics with recognition of the pioneering work laid out by the IDP since the 1990s, as well as the current trends in cultural heritage digitisation practices in the UK.

Marie Kaladgew, Paulina Kralka & Marya Muzart

Friday 16 December, 14.25

The Lotus Sutra Project at the British Library 2017–2022: A Conservators' Perspective

Since its inception in 1994, the International Dunhuang Project at the British Library has been a pioneer in conserving and digitising ancient Chinese manuscripts from the Stein collection. The recently concluded five year *Lotus Sutra* Project conserved and digitised nearly 800 copies of the Buddhist *Lotus Sutra*. It represents the largest systematic effort at preservation and providing access to this precious body of material undertaken to date at the British Library. Using the experience gained on this project, the conservators will discuss how they have established a successful working model for the large scale conservation of Stein collection manuscripts within a digitisation context. They will explain the processes of surveying the collection, planning the project workflow, preparing materials for conservation, rehousing, recording treatments, training staff in scroll handling, as well as conducting research. The presentation will also discuss ethical considerations underlying the decision-making process and the ever-evolving approach to treatment aiming to ensure long-term preservation while retaining crucial evidence relating to the items' material history without compromising their fitness for digitisation.

Tania Estrada, Marie Kaladgew, Paulina Kralka & Marya Muzart

Friday 16 December, 15.05

Conservation Case Studies from the Lotus Sutra Project at the British Library 2017–2022

Through these cases studies, this presentation aims to illustrate the practical implications of the conservation treatment approach adopted by the *Lotus Sutra* Project team at the British Library. By looking at shorter treatments of 3–15 hours, which have made up the bulk of conservation on the project, as well as three challenging treatments of 25+ hours, this presentation will demonstrate the practical techniques employed to solve complex issues encountered on the project in the spirit of minimal intervention. These include the treatment of brittle, waxy, heavily water-damaged or crumpled paper; and attached or detached original rollers; the removal and reattachment of historical repairs; the removal of excrements and incrustations from water-sensitive surfaces; the flattening and realigning of severely damaged areas that cannot be pressed; the extensive infilling; and the working around fugitive inks and pigments. The conservation treatments presented build upon established techniques and best storage practices for East Asian rolled material, while incorporating creative and innovative solutions that address the specific needs of the collection; existing storage methods and facilities; accessibility, cost and sustainability in the context of a large-scale digitisation project. Thus, this presentation will also discuss the decision-making process, challenges and outcomes of these treatments.

Isabelle Reynolds-Logue

Friday 16 December, 15.30

Seeing Things Differently: The Imaging of Lotus Sutra Scrolls

This presentation will see one of the project photographers reflect on the last few years spent working on the imaging of *Lotus Sutra* scrolls, detailing the imaging process. There will be a focus on how to get the most out of photographing artefacts to create the most representative digital surrogates and the topics explored will be: using multispectral imaging to reveal hidden text, improving imaging practices to create more accurate digital surrogates, and working with conservators to photograph the most fragile items.