

# Inclusivism and Religious Tolerance in the *Lotus Sūtra*

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## The Problem

**I**N the contemporary world, where a clash of civilizations is seen as an important menace to peace, and religious confrontation is seen as an important cause of that clash, the problem of religious tolerance is a modern problem. Religious tolerance is a kind of attitude which a certain religion or its followers take toward other religions or their followers. Passively, it is an attitude that tries not to eliminate other religions but at least allows their existence. Positively, it is an attitude that admits the value of other religions to some degree. “To some degree” covers a wide range, from admitting that one’s own religion has the same value as other religions to approving partially other religions as a kind of preparatory stage to one’s own religion. The former position, admitting that one’s own religion has the same value as other religions, seems to correspond to the pluralism of John Hick and the latter position, approving other religions as a preparatory stage to one’s own religion, seems to correspond to the category of inclusivism.

In contrast, the position which insists that religious salvation is found only in one’s own religion and denies that other religions have any value is called “exclusivism.” It is different from the pluralism and inclusivism mentioned above. In exclusivism, there are differences in levels, ranging from the position of trying to eliminate other religions by any means, including the use of political power and violence, to the position which expects the selection of a religion to come to an end through verbal discussion. In which position of pluralism or inclusivism a certain religion stands is their choice. And even if a certain religion takes an exclusivist position, the religion is not anti-social if it does not take the position of an extreme exclusivism that tries to eliminate other religions. If their assertions have no persuasive power today, they might be defeated in the free competition between religions.

However, the problem of religious tolerance is often discussed against a background in which some people expect religions to take a more positive role in the world in order to achieve such goals as social justice,

global peace and environmental protection, by transcending differences between religions and sects. If various religions maintain an exclusivism of which the typical example is past Christianity, there will be feelings that such expectations will be frustrated.

This paper will consider how the basic position of the *Lotus Sūtra* should be understood in relation to the problem of religious tolerance, using a theory of relations between religions as being exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist.<sup>1</sup> This will enable followers of the *Lotus Sūtra* to deepen their understanding of the problem of religious tolerance and also make it possible for other people to understand the *Lotus Sūtra*.

In the first section, the attitude of Śākyamuni Buddha, who is the starting point of Buddhism, toward the metaphysical theories of his time is considered and features of his view of truth are clarified. The view of truth in the *Lotus Sūtra* basically follows from that of the Buddha. In the second section, I analyze the significance of the “*saddharma*” of the *Lotus Sūtra* which followed from the Buddha’s view of truth and then consider how the *Lotus Sūtra* understands the Buddhism prior to itself by analyzing some characteristic ideas of the *Lotus Sūtra*, assuming “integration” to be a key term. In the third section, I claim that the *Lotus Sūtra* is basically inclusive, even though it can also be said to be exclusive or pluralistic according to different interpretations. In conclusion, some proposals about inclusivism and dialogue between religions are presented.

## 1. The Basic Standpoint of Śākyamuni Buddha

Various metaphysical theories seemed to have been in serious conflict at the time of the Buddha. He often pointed out the prejudices of teachers who insisted that their own philosophical opinions were absolutely true, criticized others’ opinions for being false, and disputed with each other. And early Buddhist sutras say that the Buddha transcended various disputes, stood aloof from all delusions, and was free from prejudices.<sup>2</sup> In order to clarify the Buddha’s position, I will take up the issue of the “questions that the Buddha refused to answer” (*avyākaraṇa*), the related parable of the poisoned arrow, and then the parable of the blind men and the elephant in order to elucidate the Buddha’s view of truth.

### 1.1 The “Unanswered Questions” and the Parable of the Poisoned Arrow

The “questions that the Buddha refused to answer” indicate that the Buddha kept silent and did not give a definite solution to various metaphysical problems. As mentioned, in the Buddha’s day metaphysical

discussions were very common and were repeated fruitlessly without achieving any solutions. In this situation the Buddha taught the famous parable of the poisoned arrow to a person who asked him, “Is the world eternal, or not eternal? Is the world finite, or infinite? Are body and soul separate, or but one? Does the perfect man exist after death or not?” That person said to the Buddha, “If the Buddha cannot answer these questions, I will not become your disciple.” The Buddha admonished him, “Your attitude looks like that of a stupid man who, hit by a poisoned arrow, says it should not be pulled out and rejects treatment before he receives minute information about the nature of the criminal, the material of the lethal weapon, and so on. The meaning of not answering yes or no, is called “the unanswered.” The Buddha became silent before such metaphysical problems, but in contrast to this explained the Four Noble Truths in detail.<sup>3</sup>

The reason why the Buddha did not answer metaphysical questions is indicated in the saying “It is because it is not connected with the goal, is not fundamental to the Brahma-faring, and does not conduce to turning away from, nor to dispassion, stopping, calming, super-knowledge, awakening nor to nibbāna.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the reason why the Buddha explained the Four Noble Truths is just the opposite of this. In this contrast of metaphysical theories and the Four Noble Truths, the practical target at which Buddhism should aim is made obvious. We will take up this practical characteristic of Buddhism at a later point, in a discussion of the Buddha’s view of truth. According to the Buddha, it seems that it is impossible to answer metaphysical questions correctly because they exceed human ability. Thus if someone answers them and absolutizes his own theory, he violates the limitations of human ability, inevitably making his mind dirty and in that way falling into the state of attachment.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 The Blind Men and the Elephant

The parable of the blind men and the elephant looks at a situation in which lots of philosophers and religionists give declaratory answers to metaphysical questions, absolutize their own opinions, deny others’ opinions, and continue fruitless disputes.

For his amusement a king brought together a lot of men who had been born blind, made them touch a part of an elephant, and asked them how an elephant looked. One who had touched the elephant’s head replied, “An elephant is like a water-pot”; one who had touched the elephant’s ear answered, “An elephant is like a winnowing-basket”; one who had touched the elephant’s body said, “An elephant is like a storeroom”; one

who had touched the elephant's leg said, "An elephant is like a post"; one who had touched the elephant's back declared, "An elephant is like a mortar"; and one who had touched the elephant's tail replied, "An elephant is like a broom." They each absolutized their opinions while denying others' opinions and finally got into a fight and were hitting each other.<sup>6</sup>

In this parable, philosophers and religious teachers other than the Buddha are compared to blind persons who touched a part of an elephant, forming a correct assessment about the part which they had touched. But misunderstanding the whole, they generalized their partial view. In other words, we can say that they did not cognize the entire reality of the elephant, despite the fact that they accurately discerned its parts.

The problem is, which is the Buddha's position? Is he like one of the blind persons or like a king who see the whole of the elephant? In order to properly know a part as a part, it is necessary to have a viewpoint that transcends the part. However, this does not mean that we are unable to recognize a part as a part unless we cognize the whole. The Buddha deeply perceived the fact that philosophers spend their days engaged in endless disputes precisely because their discussions are unable to avoid being trapped in relatively.<sup>7</sup>

Is it possible to have a position on earth where the whole of the truth can be seen? As the Buddha did not answer metaphysical questions, I think it is not possible to see the whole of the truth in the sense which would contrast with the standpoint of the blind who see only a part of the truth.<sup>8</sup> Even though there is the expression "seeing the truth" which is to be discussed at a later point, I think the truth which the Buddha sees is not "the whole" in the contrast between the part and the whole.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.3 The Buddha's View of Truth

The Buddha became a Buddha by awakening to *dhamma* (in Pāli, i.e., *dharma* in Sanskrit). What is the difference between awakening to *dhamma* and recognition of the whole truth? The *dhamma* awakened to by the Buddha is neither a "whole truth" which is relative to a "partial truth," nor is it metaphysical in nature, but something very real which can be experienced. Concerning this, the *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* states, [The disciple] "is possessed of faith in the Truth—believing the Truth to have been proclaimed by the Exalted One, of advantage in this world, passing not away, welcoming all, leading to salvation, and to be attained to by the wise, each one for himself."<sup>10</sup> This shows that the truth of Buddhism is real and can be experienced by anyone. The original

word corresponding to “welcoming all,” “*ehi-passiko*” means literally “come and see.” The idea that everyone can come and can see the truth actually shows the Buddhist view of truth very well.

Moreover, the idea that *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta* refers to both “Be ye a refuge to yourselves” and “Hold fast as a refuge to the Truth”<sup>11</sup> is based on the relationship between *dhamma* and self, the idea that *dhamma* infiltrates the self and is realized in the self. In other words, taking refuge in the self is just taking refuge in the self where *dhamma* is realized. Therefore, taking refuge in the self and in *dhamma* do not conflict, rather it shows the intimate relation of the two. This point seems to be common with the subjective meaning of *dharma* in the later *Lotus Sūtra*.

In short, the Buddha did not participate in metaphysical discussions in his day, and took a stance in which he recognized and realized *dhamma*. This recognition and realization of *dhamma* is not the recognition of the whole of the truth, but brings a realistic benefit to anyone by eradicating earthly desires and bringing them peace of mind.

## 2. The basic standpoint of the *Lotus Sūtra*

As the *Lotus Sūtra* does not focus on the relation to religions other than Buddhism, references to other religions are hardly seen in the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>12</sup> The *Lotus Sūtra* probably was established on the basis of certain critical perspectives and newly formed ideas with respect to a Buddhist world that had developed in various different ways after its initial founding by the Buddha. Then, how did the *Lotus Sūtra* comprehend the Buddhism before itself? I think that in terms of time and space, the *Lotus Sūtra* clearly aimed to integrate various Buddhas into the one Buddha Śākyamuni, and also to consolidate the various teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha into the “one Buddha vehicle.” This was a new view of the Buddha and view of the teachings particular to the *Lotus Sūtra*. And we can seek for grounds supporting the new view in the “*saddharma*” of the *Lotus Sūtra* which directly followed from the Buddha’s view of truth. In this section, first I consider the “*saddharma*” of the *Lotus Sūtra* and second the thought of the *Lotus Sūtra*, assuming “integration” to be a key term.

### 2.1 The “*saddharma*” of the *Lotus Sūtra*

With regard to the fundamental enlightenment of the Buddha, early Buddhist sutras express the idea that the Buddha awakens to “*dharma*” and respects it. The modifying term which is added before “*dharma*” is “*sat*” (correct), to make “*saddharma*.” The *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmaṃpuṇḍarīkasūtra*) adopted the term “*saddharma*” as a part of its title to refer

to a fundamental point of the Buddha's enlightenment. This word "*saddharma*" was respectively translated into "zhengfa 正法" by Dharmarakṣa and into "miaofa 妙法" by Kumārajīva.

What, then, is the understanding of this "*saddharma*" in the *Lotus Sūtra*? The opening of the Skillful Means Chapter reads:

The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it. What is the reason for this? A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of Buddhas and has fully carried out an immeasurable number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known. He has realized the *dharma* that is profound and never known before, and preaches it in accordance with what is appropriate, yet his intention is difficult to understand....Śāriputra, the wisdom of the Thus Come One is expansive and profound. He has [four kinds of] immeasurable [mercy], [four kinds of] unlimited [eloquence], [ten kinds of] power, [four kinds of] fearlessness, [four kinds of] concentration [belonging to world of desire], [eight kinds of] emancipation, and [three kinds of] *samādhis*, and has deeply entered them beyond measure and accomplished *dharmas* never before attained. Śāriputra, the Thus Come One expounds many *dharmas* skillfully making various kinds of distinctions. His words are soft and gentle and delight the hearts of the assembly. Śāriputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully accomplished the *dharma* that is limitless, boundless, never attained before. But stop, Śāriputra, I will say no more. Why? Because what the Buddha has achieved is the rarest and most difficult-to-understand *dharma*, and the true characteristics of lots of *dharmas* can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. (T 9.5b26–5c. Translation by Burton Watson, [with changes], *The Lotus Sutra* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1993], pp. 23–24).

According to this citation, the *Lotus Sūtra* renames characteristics of the Buddha which had been acquired and understood through practices over a long time under innumerable Buddhas, as "*dharmas*," and takes up four kinds of immeasurable mercy, four kinds of unlimited eloquence, ten kinds of power, four kinds of fearlessness, four kinds of concentration, eight kinds of emancipation, and three kinds of *samādhis* as concrete contents of "*dharmas*." Though I omit explanation of these technical terms here, I will say that they are a classification of the abilities, wisdoms, and stages of various meditations of the Buddha. In a word,

“*dharmas*” are not abstract and objective truths. They are realized through practices by Buddhas themselves and are the Buddhas’ wisdom and spiritual stages explained as the concrete moral items listed here.

In other words, two meanings of “*dharma*” are shown in the *Lotus Sūtra*: an objective meaning of “*dharma*” that Buddhas awaken to as the truth and a subjective meaning of “*dharma*” which Buddhas actualize as characteristics making up their spiritual stage, such as wisdom and compassion.<sup>13</sup> The objective “*dharma*” is said to have universality and eternity.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, according to the *Lotus Sūtra*, not only the present Buddha Śākyamuni but also the past Buddhas, such as Sun Moon Bright Buddha, Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha and Awesome Sound King Buddha, preached the *Lotus Sūtra*. The length of time when the *Lotus Sūtra* was preached and the number of verses of the *Lotus Sūtra* are described in figures that go beyond our imagination. This seems to show that Buddhas can amplify the contents of the *Lotus Sūtra* freely. Then, what on earth is the *Lotus Sūtra* which Buddhas preach in common? Living beings can become Buddhas only after they awaken to “*saddharma*” and the sūtra which expounds that “*saddharma*” in detail, I think, is none other than the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>15</sup> Because the compilers of the *Lotus Sūtra* had thought at least like this, they incorporated “*saddharma*” in the title of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Therefore, all Buddhas in the three-fold world commonly preach “*saddharma*” which they awakened to by themselves as the ultimate teaching, and its content is expressed as none other than the *Lotus Sūtra*.<sup>16</sup> We can say that the universality and the eternity of the *Lotus Sūtra* are symbolically shown here.

Next, there is also the universality that it is possible for anyone to realize the *dharma* in one’s own body as well as the universality of objective *dharma*. This is taught in the *Lotus Sūtra* as the concept of the “one Buddha vehicle,” the idea that all living beings have equal access to becoming a Buddha. From the viewpoint of the “one Buddha vehicle,” the *Lotus Sūtra* is said to teach only bodhisattvas.<sup>17</sup> In a word, all living beings are defined as “bodhisattvas” or, in other words beings who can be enlightened. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who practiced the idea of the one Buddha vehicle, carried out the practice of paying respect to all people as beings who can become enlightened through the bodhisattva way. The actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging express an attitude that attributes the utmost dignity to all people.<sup>18</sup> In summary, from the standpoint of humankind, the universality of “*saddharma*” is connected to the “self-dignity” that one can be enlightened.

## 2.2 The Integration of the *Lotus Sūtra*

First, I will consider the integration of Buddhas in terms of space. This idea is based on the story concerning “the three purifying transformation of the *sahā* world” in the Emergence of the Treasure Tower Chapter.<sup>19</sup> Concisely speaking, as Bodhisattva Great Joy of Preaching said that he wished to see the body of Many Treasures Buddha in the Treasure Tower which had emerged from the earth. Śākyamuni Buddha answered that for that purpose, he should meet the requirement given by Many Treasures Buddha. The requirement is that Śākyamuni Buddha has to gather all Buddhas who are his embodiments from the worlds of the ten directions. “Embodiment Buddhas” means Buddhas who a Buddha produces by his supernatural powers. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, embodiment Buddhas are produced and sent to the worlds of the ten directions by Śākyamuni Buddha where they are currently preaching and teaching. Then, Śākyamuni Buddha purified the *sahā* world three times in order to gather the embodiment Buddhas.

What did the *Lotus Sūtra* intend by this drama? Mahāyāna Buddhism admits that many Buddhas exist simultaneously. For example, in addition to Śākyamuni Buddha in the *sahā* world, there are Amitābha (or Amitāyus) Buddha in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the west and Medicine Master Buddha in the Pure Lapis Lazuli World in the east. New Buddhas developed one after another and faith in them was described in Mahāyāna sūtras composed prior to the *Lotus Sūtra*.

Though the *Lotus Sūtra* also admits that there are many Buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions and accepts that idea as a Buddhist view of the world, it has another idea as well. This was for the purpose of establishing a strong Buddha who integrates the innumerable Buddhas who are all over the universe and can be said to be loose without center. The *Lotus Sūtra* tried to have Śākyamuni Buddha play this role of integrating innumerable Buddhas. As mentioned above, the fact that embodiment Buddhas of Śākyamuni Buddha were gathered from the worlds of the ten directions can be interpreted as meaning that the innumerable Buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions are nothing more than Buddhas embodying Śākyamuni Buddha. This can be called a dramatic expression of the integration of Buddhas in terms of space, which means the integration of Buddhas in the worlds of the ten directions under Śākyamuni Buddha.

Second, I will consider the integration of Buddhas in terms of time. The Life Span of the Thus Come One Chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* teaches that Śākyamuni Buddha became enlightened in the remote past and will have an extremely long life span in the future. Here, Śākyamuni

Buddha, who has a long life span in terms of both past and future and can be said to be eternal, plays the role of integrating the past and future Buddhas who had been mentioned from the time of early Buddhism into himself. According to the Life Span Chapter, Śākyamuni Buddha developed and will continue to do various things as a Buddha to save all living beings. This means nothing less than the fact that Śākyamuni Buddha plays the role of past and future Buddhas. If we think like this, the idea of the “long existence of Śākyamuni Buddha” can be interpreted as the integration of Buddhas in terms of time.

When we notice that the *Lotus Sūtra* attempts to integrate Buddhas in terms of space and time, we also discover that the idea of the one Buddha vehicle in the Skillful Means Chapter tries to integrate the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha throughout his life into the one Buddha vehicle. This is the third integration of teachings.

In conclusion, we can say the *Lotus Sūtra* is the sūtra that has the prominent characteristic of integrating Buddhas and teachings.

### 3. Inclusivism in the *Lotus Sūtra*

The *Lotus Sūtra* aims to integrate Buddhas and teachings throughout the Buddhist world into Śākyamuni Buddha, as the lord of teachings of the *Lotus Sūtra*, and the one Buddha vehicle, respectively. The integration of Buddhism, accomplished through various developments centered on the *Lotus Sūtra*, can be called a Buddhist inclusivism. I will consider the relation between the idea of the one Buddha vehicle which aims to integrate teachings and inclusivism.

At the most basic level, the concept of the “one Buddha vehicle” implies not only that we should abandon all the teachings which the Buddha expounded before the *Lotus Sūtra*—since they are merely provisional expedients—but also that those very same teachings become revitalized once again if we recognize their limitations as skillful teachings. “Skillful means” has two aspects. One is to severely reject teachings other than the *Lotus Sūtra* and another is to revitalize them once again. As evidence of how this works, the *Lotus Sūtra* also explains the achievement of perfect enlightenment by voice-hearers. Destined to remain arhats in Nikāya Buddhism, when they understand the ultimate import of the *Lotus Sūtra* they become reborn as “true voice-hearers” destined for Buddhahood.<sup>20</sup> This feature of the *Lotus Sūtra* is referred to in Chinese Buddhism by the technical term “*kaihui* 開會,” i.e., “exposing limitations of skillful teachings and integrating them into the ultimate truth,” which highlights the fact that the *Lotus Sūtra* revives all the teachings, even those superseded in the *Lotus Sūtra* itself. Also, all reli-

gious merits, even the most trivial of good actions such as little children collecting sand to make a Buddha tower at play, drawing an image of the Buddha, or just once exclaiming “Hail to the Buddha,” do not only lead to worldly benefits but contribute directly to the attainment of Buddhahood.<sup>21</sup> This is the idea that even “trivial good actions lead to the attainment of Buddhahood,” or “all goodness leads to the attainment of Buddhahood.” As long as someone does the most trivial of good actions in the name of Buddhism, they are destined for Buddhahood, which is the ultimate purpose of Buddhism. We can regard this idea as inclusivist.

The Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples Chapter teaches that the Arhat Pūrṇa is a bodhisattva inwardly while appearing outwardly as a voice-hearer.<sup>22</sup> I think this idea can be interpreted as saying that the Buddha is warning against criticizing voice-hearers thoughtlessly. As this indicates the possibility of subsuming voice-hearers as bodhisattvas, we can say it is a kind of inclusivism.

The *Lotus Sūtra* aims to integrate Buddhism by making the *Lotus Sūtra* itself central. However, integration is not the only thing it emphasizes. Diversity actually receives similar attention. This is shown in the technical term “exposing limitations of skillful teachings and integrating them into the ultimate truth.” Though the center of the integration is Śākyamuni Buddha and the “*saddharma*,” the latter is more fundamental, as even Śākyamuni Buddha becomes a Buddha only after awakening to the “*saddharma*.” As discussed in the former section, the universality of the “*saddharma*” means that anyone can relate to it and we realize it as a spiritual stage of becoming a Buddha. If we locate the center of the integration in rigid sectarian dogmatism, then the esteem of diversity will be like pie in the sky.

Though the inclusivism of the *Lotus Sūtra* originally limits concern to what is inside Buddhism, the universality of the “*saddharma*” aims to exceed the scope of Buddhism, insofar as the universality and the eternity of dharma was taught in early Buddhist sutras.<sup>23</sup> The “*saddharma*” does not discriminate against followers of other religions at all. In a word, the “*saddharma*” can be realized by anyone. Such a standpoint will contribute to an attitude that recognizes the dignity of all people, even if they believe in other religions. The practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging seems to show this very well.

However, if we think that the specific belief and practices of Buddhism are indispensable for realizing the “*saddharma*,” we should say that the *Lotus Sūtra* is not pluralist but inclusive.<sup>24</sup> Or, is there a possibility that the method of realizing the “*saddharma*” is opened widely also

to the methods of other religions and to non-religion?<sup>25</sup> This might be a big problem for followers of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the future.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the background of modern religious tolerance, there seems to be an abandonment of insistence on a specific religion's absoluteness. Since insistence on the absoluteness of a specific religion's truth is thought to be difficult in view of cultural relativism, and insistence on the absoluteness of a specific religion's experience is thought to be difficult in view of mystical religious experience, it is hoped that the possibility of a joint struggle to achieve social justice can be opened, with religions transcending or suppressing insistence on their absoluteness.<sup>26</sup>

John Hick exalts pluralism to avoid useless fighting among religions in the real world, where many religions cannot help coexisting. Furthermore, he criticizes inclusivism for being a soft form of exclusivism.<sup>27</sup> I can understand very well that he cannot help diminishing inclusivism to exalt pluralism. As pluralism is a hypothesis that tries to end the fighting among religions, I think the evaluation of pluralism should be verified by whether the fighting among religions can be ended. The hypothesis of pluralism offers to persons of no belief and irreligion a convenient diagram for understanding relations among religions, but it seems to be difficult for persons who actually strongly believe in some religion to accept. If persisting in pluralism, which is difficult for those people to accept, is not effective in preventing harmful, useless fighting among religions, rather than just criticizing inclusivism, groping for the possibility of an inclusivism that can control the fighting among religions might be the more realistic method.

Even if we take the standpoint of inclusivism, conversation between religions must be possible. I think it is possible for inclusivists to agree that removing misunderstanding of others' religions and promoting mutual understanding are necessary for preventing harmful, useless fighting among religions. And once they join in religious dialogue, they might be able to substantially extend a potential possibility of their own religion through dialogues in the light of other religions. In this case, even a certain kind of transformation of one's own religion will be possible.

If someone today insists on the absoluteness of a specific religion, it is necessary to ask what that is based on. If one insists on absoluteness without showing any basis for doing so, he will not be persuasive for a lot of people. On the other hand, even if he abandons insistence on absoluteness, or avoids it, criticism of other religions does not quite

become taboo in actual religious dialogue. Even if it is difficult to determine how important it is to have no contradictions in a doctrinal system, many modern people will think that one with fewer contradictions is more desirable. Moreover, as for the relation of religions to social problems, many people will expect their positive participation to achieve social justice and deter anti-social criminality. As for the doctrines of the religion and the content of the religious leader's remarks, a lot of people will agree with the idea that they have to be verified in the actual activities of a religious group and the behavior of its followers. Anyway, it is not necessary to regard criticism of other religions as taboo, and it is necessary to develop more sophisticated methods of religious criticism that are applicable to today's world of active religious dialogue.

In this paper, I have pointed out that the “*saddharma*” of the *Lotus Sūtra* followed from the Buddha's view of truth. I have also explained the universality of the “*saddharma*” and showed inclusivism to be the basic standpoint of the *Lotus Sūtra*, which aims to integrate Buddhism, even though it can also be said to be exclusive or pluralistic according to other interpretations. Even though this inclusivism is criticized for being a soft form of exclusivism by John Hick, I have pointed out that it is more realistic to admit a certain effect to prevent harmful, useless fighting among religions. Also I have suggested that it is necessary to search for a mature method for criticizing religions in the context of religious dialogue.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> On the religious tolerance of the *Lotus Sūtra*, See Gene Reeves, “The Lotus Sutra and Religious Tolerance,” in *Shūkyō to kanyō: ishūkyō-ibunka kan no taiwa ni mukete*, edited by Takeuchi Sei'ichi and Tsukimoto Akio (Tokyo: Taimeidō, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Some early Buddhist sutras which claim that the Buddha transcended various disputes, stood aloof from all delusions, and was free from prejudices are cited in Hajime Nakamura, *Genshi Bukkyō no shisō*, vol. I, (Tokyo: *Shunjūsha*, 1993), pp. 196–200. However, I will not provide quotations here. I will refer to material from Nakamura's book when I consider the Buddha's view of truth. I also consulted Hajime Nakamura, “Fundamental Attitudes”, in *A Comparative History of Ideas* (Kegan Paul International, England, second edition, 1986), pp. 217–236, when translating my original Japanese paper into this English version.

<sup>3</sup> This story is included in the *Majjhima-Nikāya*, I, pp. 426–432. The Chinese version is *Jian yu jing* (*Taisho Tripitaka*, vol. 1, No. 94).

<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima-Nikāya*, I, p. 431; *The Middle Length Sayings*, vol. II, p. 101 (Translated by I.B. Horner, P.T.S., 1994).

<sup>5</sup> I think it is impossible to interpret the texts as meaning that the Buddha did not answer these metaphysical problems because it was not useful to give an answer to a beginner, even though the Buddha himself knew the answer. The Buddha declared that

he disclosed the truth to which he awakened to his disciples. For example, there is the saying, “I have preached the truth without making any distinction between exoteric and esoteric doctrine; for in respect of the truths, Ānanda, the Tathāgata has no such thing as the closed fist of a teacher, who keeps some things back.” (*Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, Dīgha-Nikāya*, II, p. 100; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, forth edition, vol. II, p. 107 (Translated by T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, P.T.S.)). However, during his entire life he did not answer the above-mentioned metaphysical questions.

<sup>6</sup> This story is included in *Udāna*, VI, 4, pp. 66–69. The Chinese version is *Jing mian wang jing* of *Yi zu jing* (the *Arthavargīya-sūtra*), vol. I (*Taisho Tripitaka*, vol. IV, No. 198).

<sup>7</sup> See *Sutta-nipāta* 880, “If, not accepting an opponent’s doctrine, one becomes a fool, an animal of inferior intelligence, then all indeed are fools with very inferior intelligence, (for) all these (people) are indeed abiding by their (own) view.” (*The Group of Discourses*, vol. II, p. 101, translated by K.R. Norman, P.T.S., 1995).

<sup>8</sup> I think it is appropriate that Keiji Hoshikawa made “Consciousness of the limit of human ability to recognize truth” the base of religious tolerance. See Noriyoshi Tamura, Keiji Hoshikawa, and Yukiko Yamanashi, *Kamigami no wakai—Nijūsseiki no shūkyō kan taiwa* (Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 2000), p. 86.

<sup>9</sup> The remark that philosophers other than the Buddha only see a part of the truth is indicated in the saying, “Some Brahmin recluses, would you believe, are attached to these. They contend divisively, (as did) folk who were seers of a single limb.” (*Udāna*, VI, 4, p. 69; *The Udāna*, p. 133, translated by Peter Masefield, P.T.S., 1994).

Concerning the emphasis on one single truth and the notion that the person who knows this truth transcends controversy, see *Sutta-nipāta* 884, “There is only one truth; there is no second, about which an intelligent man might dispute with an (other) intelligent man. Ascetics themselves proclaim various truths, therefore they do not say one (and the same) thing.” (*The Group of Discourses*, vol. II, p. 101, translated by K.R. Norman, P.T.S., 1995). Although it is not impossible to interpret this verse showing that the Buddha recognizes the whole truth, I think the Buddha teaches a truth which has different dimensions and characteristics from that of philosophers and which is connected directly with the achievement of the practical target of Buddhism, the elimination of suffering.

Moreover, an expression seemingly supporting the comparison between the whole truth and part of the truth, which I am against, is shown in *Theragāthā* 106, “When the goal has 100 marks and bears 100 signs, the person who sees but one part is a fool, but he who sees 100 is clever.” (*The Elders’ Verses*, vol. I, p. 14, translated by K.R. Norman, P.T.S., 1995). However, this does not express a comparison between the Buddha and other philosophers. It is no more than a metaphor which shows the Buddha’s superiority, and does not have an additional meaning that compared to fools the wise Buddha literally recognizes the whole of the truth.

<sup>10</sup> *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, Dīgha-Nikāya*, II, p. 93; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, forth edition, vol. II, p. 99, translated by T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, P.T.S.

<sup>11</sup> *Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, Dīgha-Nikāya*, II, p. 100; *Dialogues of the Buddha*, forth edition, vol. II, p. 108, translated by T.W. and C.A.F. Rhys Davids, P.T.S.

<sup>12</sup> However, there is a teaching in the Simile and Parable Chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra* that we should preach the *Lotus Sūtra* to a person who shows no intention of seeking other sūtras than the *Lotus Sūtra* and the writings of the non-Buddhist doctrines (cf. T 9.16b2–4). And the Peaceful Practices Chapter takes up non-Buddhists and Brahmins as

people whom we should shun (cf. T 9.37b22). Moreover, Prof. Gene Reeves suggested that it is also good to refer to the story of King Wonderfully Adorned, who was originally a non-Buddhist and was converted by his two sons (cf. T 9.59c18).

<sup>13</sup> Concerning my interpretation of “*dharmā*” in the Skillful Means Chapter, see Hiroshi Kanno, *Ichinen sanzen to wa nani ka* [What is the idea of three-thousand worlds in one moment?], Tokyo, Daisanbunmei-sha, 1992, pp. 46–60.

<sup>14</sup> Just after Śākyamuni Buddha became fully enlightened, he thought, “It is bad to live paying no one the honour and obedience due to a superior.” But he did not see anyone more accomplished in contemplation or the knowledge of emancipation than himself. Therefore he concluded that he would live under, pay honor to, and respect this Norm to which he had awakened. “And Brahmā also declared his support for this conclusion of the Buddha and pointed out that all the Buddhas in three existences respect *saddhamma*. (Excerpted from *Samyutta-Nikāya*, I, pp. 139–140; *The Book of the Kindred Sayings*, part I, p. 175–176, translated by Mrs. Rhys Davids, P.T.S., 1996). In early Buddhist sutras, the eternity of the *dharmā* is often referred to.

<sup>15</sup> This “*saddharma*” is the truth which can be actualized as merits such as wisdom and compassion, and should be explained in a practical sense as the concept of the one vehicle whereby everyone can become enlightened.

<sup>16</sup> The truth which enables all living beings to become enlightened is *saddharma*, and in the case of actualizing that *saddharma* it is thought that it becomes virtues such as wisdom and compassion.

<sup>17</sup> See the Skillful Means Chapter of the *Lotus Sūtra*, “The Buddhas, the Thus Come Ones, simply teach and convert the bodhisattvas.” (T 9.7a29. Translated by B. Watson, *ibid.*, p. 31).

<sup>18</sup> See Hiroshi Kanno, “The Practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in the *Lotus Sūtra* and its Reception in China and Japan,” *The Journal of Oriental Studies* 12, 2002, pp. 104–122.

<sup>19</sup> See *Fahua xuanyi* vol.6A (T 33.751c10).

<sup>20</sup> See the Belief and Understanding Chapter, “Now we have become voice-hearers in truth, for we will take the voice of the Buddha way and cause it to be heard by all.” (T 9.18c20–21. Translated by B. Watson, *ibid.*, p. 94).

<sup>21</sup> See the Skillful Means Chapter (T 9.8c11–9a27).

<sup>22</sup> See the Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples Chapter (T 9.28a17).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. note 14.

<sup>24</sup> The Simile and Parable Chapter enumerates severe and frightening retributions from slandering the *Lotus Sūtra*. (T 9.15b22–16a7). Similar expressions also appear in the Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy Chapter. (T 9.62a16–23). I have pointed out that the “*saddharma*” is related to “self-dignity.” If we locate the *Lotus Sūtra* in strong sectarian dogmatism, these enumerations of severe retributions might imply radical exclusiveness. However, if we regard the *Lotus Sūtra* as the universal “*saddharma*” which teaches “self-dignity,” the slandering of the *Lotus Sūtra* might trample down that “self-dignity.” Therefore, there might be an interpretation in which enumerations of retributions do not necessarily imply exclusiveness but have the function of strongly motivating people to recognize their own “self-dignity.” This might be a big problem for followers of the *Lotus Sūtra* in the future.

<sup>25</sup> This standpoint seems to be quite close to pluralism.

<sup>26</sup> See John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a*

*Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, New York: Orbis Books, 1987.

<sup>27</sup> See John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, London: Macmillan, 1985.

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Inclusivism and religious tolerance in the lotus sūtra 95. global peace and environmental protection, by transcending differences between religions and sects. If various religions maintain an exclusivism of which the typical example is past Christianity, there will be feelings that such expectations will be frustrated. This paper will consider how the basic position of the Lotus Sūtra should be understood in relation to the problem of religious tolerance, using a theory of relations between religions as being exclusive, inclusive, and pluralist.<sup>1</sup> This will enable followers of the Lotus Sūtra

The lotus flower symbolizes beauty and spirituality in several cultures and religions of the world. The lotus is the national flower of India and Vietnam because of its cultural significance, symbolism, and popularity. The lotus (*Nelumbo nucifera*) is an aquatic perennial plant that belongs to the family Nelumbonaceae. It is also called Sacred Lotus and Indian Lotus. In Sanskrit (the ancient language of India), the lotus is known by various names like, Pundarika, Padma, Kamala, Utpala, etc. Would you like to write for us? Well, we're looking for good writers who want to spread the word. Get in The Lotus Sutra was originally translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa, aka Zhu Fahu, in 286 CE in Chang'an during the Western Jin Period (265-317 CE) (E. Zürcher *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 57-69). The various religious institutions and their doctrinal proponents notwithstanding, all paths are then, officially speaking, part of the skillful means and plan of Buddhism, thus the sutra's former disavowal of all competitive doctrinal disputes. Lotus Sutra – noun Short name for Sūtra on the White Lotus of the Sublime Dharma Saddharma Puṣkara Sūtra, a popular Sanskrit treatise which forms the basis of many forms of Buddhist religion worldwide – Wiktionary. LOTUS SUTRA – probably the most important text of MAHYANA BUDDHISM. Thus the Lotus Sūtra presents grand stories referring to a vast scale of space and time using stupendous figures that stretch our powers of [p98] imagination to the limit. Such a religious discourse is clearly expounded in the Lotus Sūtra, in the famous episode of the withdrawal of the five thousand persons. In the Expedient Means Chapter of the Lotus Sūtra, Āśvīputra asks the Buddha three times to preach the teaching. Recognizing Āśvīputra's serious desire for the truth, the Buddha begins to preach in response. Three important schools within this field are pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Each of them will be briefly examined here. 1. Pluralism Pluralism is basically the belief – While pluralists assert the validity of all religions, they also deny the finality of all religions. According to Hick, in the evolutionary scheme of things in which at isolated ages and places the early religions are succeeded by higher religions, it is the same message of God that comes distinctly to a particular group but as different from the others. Hick challenges the older view that Christ or Christianity must be seen at the center of religions. Rather, he says, God must be seen at the center of religions. The pluralistic contention is that all religions are fundamentally the same though