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Paper II

The Concept of
an Asian Community and
the Unity of Religions Seen
from Buddhist Scripture

Saeng Chandr-Ngarm

Associate Professor of Buddhism,
Chiang Mai University, Thailand

Buddhism believes in the unity of the humankind. According to Aggannasutta,¹ sometimes called 'the Buddhist Genesis,' ancestors of humankind lived in outer space as Radiant Beings who were mind-made. When the earth was forming on the surface of the water, these radiant beings descended, tasted the savour of the primordial earth, became solid and lost their radiance and the ability to fly. They had to live on earth, ate grosser food became more solid and distinguished by sex and other physical features. All races of mankind are descendants of these common ancestors.

Buddhism believes in the equality of all human beings. It does not recognize the caste system of the Hindus. While the Brahmins claim their divine origin from the very mouth of Brahma, the Creator God, the Buddha reminds them of the plain fact thus "But, Assalayana, Brahman wives of Brahmans are known to have their menstrual periods, to give birth and to give suck. Yet these Brahmans, born of woman like everyone else, speak thus, "Only Brahmans form the best caste . . . heirs to Brahma."²

The Buddha dismisses all caste and class differentiation as artificial, biased and unjustifiable. The only difference he recognizes

is the moral quality of life as the result of individuals' karma or volitional acts. The Buddha says,

No outcaste is by birth,
 No Brahman is by birth,
 By deeds an outcaste be,
 By deeds a Brahman be!"³

Once a Brahmin named Bharadvaja was performing a fire-sacrifice at the bank of river Sundarika in the kingdom of Kosala. Having done that, he collected the remainder of the offering to give to someone who would per chance come by. He saw the Lord Buddha sitting at the foot of a tree, approached him, and asked him of his birth. The Buddha replies thus,

"Ask not of birth, ask of the course of conduct.
 From any sticks verily fire doth take birth,
 The steadfast seer, though his descent be lowly,
 To intellect's aristocrats is lifted,
 By noble shame all that is evil curbing,
 Tamed by the truth, graduate in that taming,
 Of saving lore master, the good life living.
 Th' oblation's brought! Do thou invoke him duely.
 Timely the rite, worthy is he thus worshipped."⁴

The Idea of a Political State

According to the Aggannasutta again, the primordial state began to take shape when the number of people increased and the land areas for rice-growing remained the same. The people got together and said "... Come now, let us divide off the rice fields and set boundaries thereto! And so they divided of the rice field and set up boundarise round it."⁵

Even with the rice fields divided off among them there were some greedy people who stole another plot and made use of it. These culprits were arrested and punished several times; yet they still

committed the crime. "Now those beings, Vasettha, gather themselves together and bewailed these things, saying, "From our evil deeds, sirs, becoming manifest, in as much as stealing, censure lying, punishment have become known, what if we were to select a certain being, who should be wrathful when indignation is right, who should censure that which rightly be censured and should banish him who deserves to be banished? But we will give him in return a proportion of the rice."⁶ They then elected the handsomest, the best-favoured, the most attractive, the most capable to the post of the chief called "Maha Sammata (The Great Elect). Thus comes the idea of an organized society which is the prototype of a political state.

Since the political state is only an artificial one created out of necessity, the Buddha pays little attention to it. Instead he places great emphasis on the moral quality and capability of the ruler.

The Buddha himself was a Sakyan of the State of Sakya. But he did not confine himself to his homeland or to any particular state. He attained his Supreme Enlightenment in Magadha, preached his first sermon in Kasi, established the Sangha in Rajagriha, the capital of Magadha, spent a good part of his life in Kosala and passed away in the state of the Mallas. He was indeed an internationally-minded teacher of all mankind regardless of races and political boundaries. From his exemplary conduct, a conclusion can be drawn that Buddhism promotes the concept of an international community.

The Concept of an Ideal State

All major religions of the world have what is called the messianic cult, i.e., the belief in the coming of a savior and a golden age of peace and prosperity. The Hindus look forward to the coming of Kalki

Vishnu who is believed to appear at the end of our age as a cosmic judge; the Jews are waiting for the Messiah; the second coming of Christ for the Christians; the coming of Mehdi for some Muslims; and the coming of the Fifth Buddha by the name Maitreya for the Buddhists.

The Buddhist golden Age to come in the future is described thus,

"Among humans living 80,000 years, Brethren, maidens are marriageable at 500 years of age.

Among such humans there will be only three kinds of disease—appetite, nonassimilation and old age. Among such humans, this India will be mighty and prosperous, the villages, towns and royal cities will be so close that a cook could fly from each one to the next

At the period, brethren, there will arise in the world an Exalted One named Metteyya, Arahant, Fully Awakened, abounding in wisdom and goodness, happy, with knowledge of the worlds, unsurpassed as a guide to mortals willing to be led, a teacher for gods and men, an Exalted One, a Buddha, even as I am now.⁷

In Malayasutra,⁸ some more detail about the Buddhist Millennium is given. It is said that the surface of the earth will be as even as the surface of a drum. That means there will be complete equality among the people. There will be a tree of all wishes at the center of each community where people can obtain whatever they need. This means that society will be prosperous and self-sufficient.

The Six Attributes of the Ideal Society

In the Buddhist Canon the list of six excellences appear in five places.⁹ They are given in bare names without any context. We have a glimpse of their implication in Mangalatthadipani by Ven. Sirimangalacarya.¹⁰ Mangalatthadipani is an exposition of Mangalasutta¹¹ in which the 38 blessings are given by the Buddha.

The fourth blessing deals with living in befitting country (patirupadesa). A befitting country, according to the author of Mangalatthadipani, is characterized by the six excellences as follows:

1. Excellent sights (dassananuttariya)
2. Excellent hearings (savananuttariya)
3. Excellent gains (Labhanuttariya)
4. Excellent education (Sikkhanuttariya)
5. Excellent services (pacariyanuttariya)
6. Excellent ideals (Anussatanuttariya)

The text has interpreted all the six excellences in terms of religious, of course Buddhist, objects. Excellent sight, for example, is the sight of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the sangha. If the excellent sight was confined only to the sight of Buddha, not one society now could have a chance to be befitting country since the Lord Buddha has passed away. I am, therefore, sure that the six excellences can also be interpreted in a secular sense.

The six excellences, seen from a secular point of view, can be as follows.

1. Excellent sights are all things to be seen with eyes. It means that everything in the society should be pleasant to look at and inspiring morality and creativeness.

2. Excellent hearings are all sounds to be heard with ears. They should be pleasant, informative and conducive to morality and creativeness.

3. Excellent gains here mean that all citizens should be given appropriate jobs and sufficient income for them and their families.

4. Excellent education should be provided for all citizens of the country.

5. Excellent services such as transportation, communication, health service, entertainment, etc., should be made available for all citizens.

6. Excellent ideals here mean a common philosophy of life regarding politics, economy, culture and religion. Such a philosophy of life should be discussed, agreed upon and inculcated to all citizens from childhood.

The Concept of an Asian Community

The idea of common ancestry and equality of man by birth is not unique only to Buddhism. All major religions have the same idea and so, it can be regarded as a universal, fundamental concept of all cultures. Using this universal concept as the foundation, the idea of an Asian community can be conceived and realized.

In my opinion, Asia can be divided into four zones in accordance with the four dominant cultural influences.

Those countries in Western Asia, from Pakistan to Turkey can be

grouped as the Islamic zone on the ground of predominant Islamic culture. The state of Israel may pose a problem but details about the name and the organization can be negotiated and agreed upon later. Those countries in 'Central Asia,' including India, Bangladesh, the Himalayan nation, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Kampuchea can be grouped as Hindu-Buddhist zone. Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei and New Guinea can be grouped and classified as a separate zone. The majority of people in this zone belong to the same stock. Even though most of them are Muslim, they cannot be grouped with the Islamic zone because of the great distance between them. The name for this zone can be discussed and given later. The People's Republic of China, both Koreas, Japan and Vietnam can be grouped as Buddhist-Confucian zone or, geographically speaking, East-Asian Zone.

Each zone should be united into some kind of a union or a republic or a federation first. Member states should cooperate in the economic field first. This is recommendable because the economically oriented groups like EEC and ASEAN are functioning quite effectively. The next field of cooperation and unification should be the military, defense and foreign affairs. Member nations should pool their military resources and have a common defense system. This will relieve member nations of the tremendous military expenses and of their own intrastate conflict. With the common defense well-established, common parliament and foreign policy can be easily worked out.

If the unification process works well in one zone for some time, two adjacent zones should try to merge into a larger union or federation. In this way the whole Asia will become a single community.

The Sensitive Areas

As far as I can anticipate, there are at least four sensitive areas that stand on the way to unification. They are local languages, local religions, local social institutions and local culture.

For local languages, they can be left alone. Each member state can conduct her own internal affairs in her vernacular as usual.

Yet a common language is needed as a medium for interstate communication and joint activities. What language should be adopted for this purpose? Since the pride of one's own language is deep-rooted, it will not be easy to adopt the language of any one particular state as a lingua franca. And since English seems to be steadily rising to the top of popularity now, it should be wise to use it as an interstate medium at least temporarily. Local institutions such as the monarchy and the like should also be left alone. Local culture, the general pattern of life of community tends to resist the change and the assimilation process stubbornly, especially the strong culture of an ancient and large nation like the Indians and the Chinese. Cultural traits of a state can also be left alone. Culture also changes even though its rate of change is very slow. As the result of worldwide communication and the wide spread of modern way of life based on science and technology, there seems to be a trend towards a unified culture of the world. That should be a good sign.

Religion, the Most Sensitive Area

Religion is usually looked up to as the heart of a community, the core of a culture and the foundation of a civilization. A religion is most difficult to be assimilated into another religion or abolished from a society by any means, either peaceful or violent. Hinduism, for instance, has survived the spectacular spread and popularity of Buddhism, the forceful flood of the Islamic invasions, the efficient proselytizing effort of the Christians backed by the mighty Western powers, and lastly the advent of communism so attractive to the poor mass of India. It is, therefore, not possible to unify local religions into one and have it as the common religion of a union or a state.

It is, however, still desirable to have a single religion as the spiritual guidance of life in a community in order to minimize or abolish religious prejudice, conflict and all-out war which have caused uncountable destruction and suffering to mankind. The problem is how such a single religion can be had.

Dr. Kedar Nath Tiwari of the University of Delhi has pointed out

three ways of establishing a universal religion :

1. By elevating one of the existing religions to the status of a universal religion ;
2. By selecting the good doctrinal items from all existing religions and combining them into one single religion, or
3. By creating a completely new religion.¹²

The author, however, sounds very pessimistic about the success of any of the three ways. Having surveyed the history of world religions, I agree with him in all points but one.

I think a world religion can be scientifically and systematically formulated and created. To make way for such a scientific religion to emerge, it is necessary to study the nature of religion scientifically. If we do that seriously and objectively enough, we'll find that religion is purely a human affair. It is based on certain needs of human beings. It has been created to satisfy human needs. I agree with N. Micklem when he writes.

But as there is, we may hope, something of the hero as well as something of the criminal in each of us, something of love as well as much of egotism, so there is something of the mystic in all, something of the rationalist, something of the devotee, something of the God-fearer. All men share a common human nature ; sympathy, imagination and self-knowledge can make us intelligible to one another. Religions differ in proportion and emphasis. They are rooted in a common nature.¹³

It is generally accepted that human beings have the following basic needs :

1. Physical needs : the needs of a number of necessities to maintain life.
2. Social need : the need to be among and to be recognized by other people of one's own kind and culture.
3. Emotional need : the need of emotional satisfaction like love, care, attention, enjoyment from sex, music, poetry, arts, etc.
4. Need for a supernatural refuge in time of emergency and crisis.
5. Need for goodness in persons, things and environment.

6. Intellectual need : need for truth, knowledge and information.
7. Need for survival of life which is so dear to living beings.
8. Need for higher happiness
9. Need for the perfect which is the antithesis of life as it is.
10. Need for a sound philosophy of life to serve as a guide of life.

A universal religion should be equipped with doctrinal principles, organization, activities and resources to satisfy all of the ten needs of its followers. Major religions of the world now cater for some needs only. Most religions, for example, care little for the physical needs of man. Buddhism places emphasis on higher happiness at the expense of emotional satisfaction. Most theistic religions uphold supernatural refuge above intellectual need. Confucianism stresses the good and ignores other higher needs.

A religion that can satisfy all the ten needs should be a perfect religion. It can be put in a community as the religion of a minority first, just as the early stages of all world religions, and then spread around by its own force of completeness and attractiveness. Existing religions in the same area can be left alone to gradually and peacefully wither away or to adapt themselves radically in order to survive.

Conclusion

The concept of an Asian Community is not only feasible but can also be realized in a not-too-far future. It is quite possible for peoples of different races, languages, religions and cultures to live harmoniously in a community if they are given equal status, equal rights and, of course, a better chance of advancement.

It is much more difficult to unify different religions but the chance is not zero, even though it may take a longer time and greater effort. At least it is challenging and worth trying.

Notes and References

- (1) Aggannasutta, No. 27, of Dighanikaya II

- (2) Assalayana Sutta, No. 93 of M.II.341
- (3) Suttanipata : Sutta, No. 7 verse 142
- (4) Sundarika sutta : Samyuttanikaya II.210
- (5) Aggannasutta (18) p. 87
- (6) Ibid. p.88
- (7) Cakkavatti-Sihanada Suttanta No. 26 of D.III. 74-75
- (8) A later work very popular in Southeast Asia till recently. In Thailand once a year every temple used to perform an all-day ceremony in which the Mahavessantarajataka was preached to the people from sunrise to sunset in the vernacular verse. Those who wanted to be reborn in the period of Metteyya were obliged to listen to the Jataka story without interruption.
- (9) D.III.250,281 : A.III.284,325,452
- (10) A Northern Thai scholar monk who has composed a number of Buddhist treatises in Pali. He lived in the 21st Buddhist Century
- (11) Khuddakapatha (Minor Readings) No.5 pp.2-6
- (12) Kedar Nath Tiwari, *Comparative Religion* (Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), p.217.
- (13) Nathariel Micklem, *Religion* (London : Oxford University Press, 1948), p.194.

Paper III

The Concept of an Asian Community and the Unity of Religions Seen from Confucian Scripture

Ki-Kun Chang

Professor of Chinese Literature,
Sung-Hwa Theological Seminary, Korea

Introduction

All things existing physically are different in appearance, but all are the same in essence, that is, having been created by the intangible God, and being developing incessantly in accordance with Divine Principle. All things are different in outside but the same in essence.

It is nothing but a matter of process to plan a community based on the phenomenal social sciences. The ultimate purpose should be achieved based on metaphysical Religion which teaches men to realize the Absolute and practice the highest good. On the standpoint of actual politics, we can hardly expect to overcome national egoism and racial differences.

Since every one, the man created by God, has the nature of goodness, if we could cultivate it through religious education, we could expect the overcoming of national egoism and coming to the unity of all nations in future.

Many of atheists have a great misunderstanding that human history has been developed by men alone, but in reality, God had in the past and has presently the decisive influence upon it, that