


首届世界佛教论坛文集·征文获奖卷

和谐世界 从开始

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多元世界中的佛教

——佛教作为 21 世纪世界宗教的挑战与机遇

麦文彪

提要:本文探讨佛教作为一个主张和平、慈悲和智慧的世界宗教在 21 世纪该如何定位。笔者将 21 世纪最令人困扰的社会问题归纳为“三毒”,然后从佛教的角度对“三毒”进行阐释,并探讨其化解途径。

首毒为瞋,当今世界一个突出的问题是种族、宗教矛盾所引发的冲突、歧视以至恐怖活动。大多数国家一般通过法制与外交途径来解决,而佛教认为根本方法是消除人类内心的仇恨。因此,佛教提倡以如实观来消除偏见,更主张以慈悲心去积极感化他人。佛教超越信仰和种族界限的济世精神,无疑会对当今教条主义大行其道的社会起到一个平衡作用。

二毒为贪,指全球化所引发的贫富悬殊进一步加剧。发达国家为了维护既有利益通过各种途径欺压发展中国家,加剧了贫民阶层整体上的赤贫化和边缘化。佛教主张节约和环保,摒除贪欲,鼓励互助,倡导无私布施和舍己为人的精神。

三毒为痴,指高科技社会所带来的资讯混乱。在大众缺乏明确价值观的情况下,良莠不齐的资讯对个人以及社会造成的伤害不可胜数。尽管政府实行资讯监管,但资讯获取和认同仍取决于个人的判断与分析能力。2500 多年来佛教通过教育和禅修启发人类智慧和加深自我认识,与当今重工具、重技巧的倾向形成明显对比,这种

人本教育的社会效用仍有待更深入的探讨。

综上所述,笔者认为面对当今社会问题,不能仅靠设立更多规则、制造更多工具等离开本体的方法意图解决,毕竟三毒皆出自人心,找出烦恼根源才是治本之法。最后,笔者指出尽管佛教对各种社会问题有其精辟见解,然而要达到济世的目标,就须有效地向世界各阶层传达其信息。现存佛教汉、藏、巴利三大语系经典浩瀚繁多,传承有异,艰涩难懂。当今佛教最为迫切的问题是让不同传承的佛教宗派联合起来,为21世纪佛教树立一个鲜明的形象,并令佛法广为流传。

主题词:多元性 佛教 世界宗教

Ehi Passiko in the Pluralistic World

——Challenges and Opportunities of Buddhism as a
World Religion in the 21st century

B Mill Mak

Abstract: This paper attempts to examine a number of major issues currently confronting our world and what the Buddhist position is with regard to each of them. The issues discussed are ethnic/religious violence resulted from intolerance, globalization and poverty, and the confusion resulted from information overload in this technological age. The author suggests that Buddhism in many ways provides us unique insight into the situations by turning our attention to our own mind, rather than looking for mechanical

societies, cultures, as well as individuals are closely meshed with each other. The questions we ought to ask are: What does Buddhism mean in this age? What roles does it or can it play in our society for the betterment of our world? In other words, what are the challenges that confront Buddhism of our time and what are the opportunities that lie ahead of us?

In this paper, my focus will be on a number of the critical issues which our world is currently facing, namely, violence, impacts of globalization and the rapid development of technology in the fields of communication and information, and what Buddhism has to say in each of them. In the course of the examination, I hope to illustrate thereby some of the key characteristics of Buddhism as a world religion and how Buddhism may contribute in its own unique way to peace and prosperity of our world.

Age of Violence and Insecurity and the Buddhist Paradigm of Pluralism

In a speech addressed to the audience at Harvard University, U. N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan pointed out a number of crises now challenging the United Nation, or to put it more generally, the world at large. Amongst them what concerns us the most is the crisis of “collective security” as international terrorism becomes rampant.^① The position of the U. N. is clear: measures should be taken only when the international community reaches some form of “collective agreement”.

The spirit of “multilateralism”, described as Annan as the founding principle of the United Nation, is easier to say than to implement. The

① Annan, Kofi (2004). “Three crises, and the need for American leadership”. U. N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan Commencement address at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. June 10, 2004. <http://www.commement.harvard.edu/annan.html>

it is based on the acknowledgement of the equality of all sides participating in it and on their mutual respect. Neither should anybody claim superiority of his/her belief and on that premise to judge what is right and what is wrong in somebody's actions."^①

As an effort to construct a proper model for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, the pluralist model as described by Stepanyants was criticized by many on various grounds: doctrinal, philosophical, ritual, historical and so the list goes on. As Ruokanen puts it: "trying to achieve agreement or unity in the essence of religion or religion proper is an unrealistic and even an unnecessary goal of religious dialogue…… An increase mutual understanding and tolerance are goals high enough."^② Critics of the pluralist models have rightly observed that trying to understand the point of view from another culture and religion is challenging enough in itself, and it seems to be the case that the premise for each religion is to assert its own superiority over others. Ruokanen argues therefore that "real progress" of such dialogue could take place only in more pragmatic fields such as morality and social ethics. How well indeed would Buddhism—a religion which places the importance of ethics and morality above faith, beliefs and everything else, answer to this call!

In overcoming differences, Buddhists take the "realist" approach. Buddhists recognize that no matter how models of dialogue and mediation might be set up, they remain after all a human construct. What truly underlies the success of any peace mission is the intent of those who participate in the dialogue. While peace and harmony are the common

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^① Stepanyants, Marietta. "Is the Dialogue between Western and Islamic Civilizations possible?" Collection of Papers and Abstracts on Philosophy-Beijing Forum (2005).

^② Ruokanen, Miikka. "A Response to a paper by Dr. Marietta Stepanyants on 'Is the Dialogue between Western and Islamic Civilizations possible?'" Collection of Papers and Abstracts on Philosophy-Beijing Forum (2005).

our own selves and to have a profound and realistic understanding of how things are as they truly are. Buddhists see that people are simply the way they are as each goes through his own spiritual development. What remains in effect is one's volition and action which inevitably leads to different consequences. In this regard, everyone has the same right and opportunity for further development.

The 20th century has witnessed some of the cruellest atrocities ever known to humankind: the Holocaust and the Japanese invasion alone resulted in millions losing their lives and sufferings of the most unimaginable sort. Now that we are in the 21st century, have we learned the lessons from the past? Unfortunately, religious and ethnic violence continue to escalate, resulting in past decades disastrous wars in Africa, "ethnic cleansing" in the Balkans, in the Middle East and more recently the tragedy of 9/11 and the American wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. We have moved into a new era of violence when conflicts arise no longer simply due to imperialist motives and vested interests of all kinds, but rather, out of intolerance and prejudice against those who are different from us-or to put it simply, out of hate.^① Hate is known one of the three poisons in Buddhism and is considered the worst and most difficult to cure.^② Hate, according to Buddhist teachings, is something impossible to rationalize in its own terms and is the direct cause of violence. Killing as a result of violence is considered the greatest crime by Buddhists.

The teachings of Buddha stop not here by telling the world that peace

① Alan Phillips, director of the Minority Rights Group, commented in a report that since UN was set up at the end of the Second World War, there seemed to be little progress in eliminating racial hatred. A survey of the situation around the world indicated that violence due to racial hatred only appeared on the rise. For details see Banton, Michael. (2000) Combating Racial Discrimination: The UN And its Member States. Minority Right Group.

② Commentary by Nagarjuna in Mahāprajñāpāramitāśāstra 《大智度论》“瞋恚其咎最深，三毒之中，无重此者；九十八使中，此为最坚；诸心病中，第一难治。”

conglomerates continue to monopolize the market through various means, livelihoods of many in the developing countries are greatly threatened, while the richer countries continue to enjoy their luxurious lifestyle at their expense. The violence erupted during the WTO meetings in Seattle, Cancun, and most recently Hong Kong, illustrates the frustration and anger of many who feel utterly helpless as poor nations were bullied by the trade laws imposed by the rich countries. When put under pressure, all WTO could do is amend the rule more in favor to the poors, overlooking completely the human factors involved.

There is obviously element of aversion and prejudice from all parties involved in the conflict. But more fundamentally, what all parties are vying for is material wealth. So, what is the Buddhist view on material wealth? Contrary to possibly some popular misconception, Buddha does not in fact discourage possession of wealth, but rather, encourage wise use of one's material resources. Wealth is in fact considered a form of reward for human beings to enjoy.^①In the Sigolasutta of the Pāli Nikāya, Buddha gave very detailed advice to lay Buddhists on how to manage wealth properly.^②Material wealth, along with a healthy mind and body, are considered prerequisites for making further progress in one's spiritual life here in this world. Confronting a world of injustice and poverty 2500 years ago, Buddha never advocated equal distribution of wealth as a solution. Instead, the Buddha asked everyone to give generously as giving generates merits both in this life and hereafter. Buddhists believe that one's material status is linked

① Again see Cakkavathin-sihanāda Suttanta as quoted above. Material wealth is considered a karmic reward for those who lived an ethical life as well as those who cultivate virtues such as honesty and diligence. Indeed, during Buddha's lifetime, many patrons and devotees are those of great wealth and power.

② It should be noted however that for the monastic communities, regulation against handling of money was imposed for special purposes, cf. vinaya. The monastic setup was intended to be a training ground for those who want to devote themselves to the religious life.

University students, described the 21st century as the “Age of Choice.”^① Globalization and the rapid development of communication technology resulted in an unprecedentedly huge amount of information available to us. Whether it is e-mail at workplaces or simply browsing through the internet, we are bombarded with information and are required to make numerous rapid decisions in order to perform our duties and to obtain the information we need. While in no doubt, the internet search engine, as with many of the technological innovations have lived up to their promises in making our lives more convenient and enjoyable, the confusion as a result of the overload of information in our age is an undeniable reality.

Here, let us remind ourselves of the gentle words of the Buddha: ehi passiko-come and see. Buddha's teachings, with its inherent liberalism, may appear to some a rather feeble voice in a world drowned with loud propaganda and advertisements. How should Buddhism make itself heard in the 21st century?

As we have seen in the case of violence and social injustice, Buddhism has its unique way to contribute to the world. What makes Buddhism unique is its humanistic approach. We are living in an age where regulatory bodies and faceless corporates dominate. In solving conflicts and problems, the modern mind is always tempted to look for solutions outside, through amending or possibly setting up more rules for others, while undermining completely the human factors. The result is clear: dehumanization results only in mistrust and more suffering for all. Buddhism, in this respect, with its profound understanding and investigation of the human mind and its afflictions, helps to create a coherent system of positive human values which is seriously lacking in our world.

In dealing with confusion, or better known as moha(痴), the last of

^① Speech delivered at the Yingjie Exchange Centre, Peking University. 18th October, 2005.
<http://ennews.pku.edu.cn/news.php?s=129857976>

main factors why Buddhism appeals to people in the modern age.

Opportunities for Buddhism in the 21st Century

In the foregoing discussion, I have taken a number of critical issues which our time is facing and to examine the Buddhist position on each of them. These crises, despite efforts by many, have met with little success and seem to be of little avail. In a most unobtrusive manner, Buddhism offers possible solutions to the world by advocating a moderate and peaceful lifestyle, a way of living filled with generosity and compassion, and inviting all to have a more profound understanding of themselves before demanding anything from others. The liberalism and tolerance advocated in Buddhist teachings are values which are greatly appreciated in today's world where ideological dogmas and intolerance have caused much strife and conflicts amongst nations and individuals.

So what are the opportunities for Buddhism in our age? Globalization, together with the liberal spirit of our age has made Buddha's teachings attractive and practical. Buddhism has crossed national and cultural borders and is already considered a common heritage of humankind. Many are ready to respond to Buddha's invitation of ehi passiko. However, if Buddhism is to make any impact to our world, it must make itself heard properly. At the moment, the teachings of the Buddha are scattered amongst the three scriptural traditions of the Buddhism: Chinese, Pāli and Tibetan. The vast body of scripture confounds any novice seekers. A proper compilation of all extent Buddhist teachings is something of utmost urgency. Different sects of Buddhism should overcome their differences and come together to make Buddhist teachings readily available to the world, taking advantage of the advancement of technology.

Furthermore, Buddhism in our age should continue to practice what it

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