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## The Nature of the Buddhist Contribution to Environmental Ethics

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本稿は現在行なわれる環境問題の議論に仏教ができる貢献の性格を分析するものである。環境問題を引き起こしたと考えられている見方や考え方にとって代わりうるものとして仏教の重要な思想のうちのあるものを取り上げられて来て、既に久しい。しかしこれら仏教思想は複雑であるために有効であるよりも問題を生み出す時もある。それ故この思想を簡略にするか適合させるかすべきであるといわれる。本稿では先ずこのような仏教思想の導入の仕方が仏教教義の完全な形を損ない、もはや仏教とは呼べないものになってしまうと論じ、次に現在行なわれる環境問題の議論に仏教ができる貢献が仏教思想そのものの中にはなく、むしろその思想をどのように実際に適用するするかにあると論じるものである。

This article analyzes the nature of the Buddhist contribution to the present ecological debate. For many years, some of the most important doctrines of Buddhism have been suggested as alternatives to the views and ideas believed to be responsible for the current ecological crisis. These doctrines, however, because of their complexity, are sometimes more problematic than useful. Consequently, it is believed that they should be simplified or adapted. The present article first argues that this approach may be compromising the integrity of these doctrines, thus rendering them everything but Buddhist. Secondly, it tries to show that the Buddhist contribution to the present ecological debate should not consist in its ideas per se, but rather in what Buddhist do with them.

For many years now the environmental problems that seem to plague our world have preoccupied not only the scientific community but also people from all fields of study. Following the present trend, and also because they felt a genuine sense of urgency, some scholars of religion have suggested alternative courses of action based on the views and practices of the religious traditions which were generally part of their area of expertise.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, Asian religions, especially Taoism and Buddhism, were highly praised as potential contributors to the present ecological debate. Like many of my colleagues in the field of Buddhist studies, I am also ready to suggest that Buddhism has something valuable to offer in this debate. Such a suggestion is, however, somewhat controversial: in effect, it involves a shift from a descriptive type of discourse to a normative one. A descriptive discourse has to be as objective as possible without sympathy or antipathy towards the object of study. But, in the present context, we, as scholars of Buddhism, can easily go beyond our mandate by suggesting courses of action or even norms of behavior that ought to be followed to improve the present ecological situation. Put differently, in the present context, it is very easy to become directly involved with the subject of our research by assuming the role of a believer who preaches the right way of understanding reality and the proper way to live one's life.

This is a highly subjective enterprise that may result in serious distortions. We may be forcing Buddhism to say things it never intended to say. In fact, especially when we look at ancient scriptures to find guidelines for a responsible ecological behavior, we cannot but put in the mouth of these old Buddhist philosophers and teachers intentions they did not have in the first place. One has to be clear about this fact: ancient Buddhists were not concerned nor confronted, as we are today, with an ecological crisis.<sup>2</sup> We may find here and there certain injunctions that show some degree of ecological awareness. For example, the Indian Buddhist

emperor Aśoka, in one of his edicts, forbids needless or malevolent burning of forests, or, in the Buddhist Book of Discipline (*vināya piṭaka*), we find the prohibition against throwing remnants of food, especially indigestible or dangerous ones, into water containing tiny animals.<sup>3</sup> These types of prohibition are, however, not explicitly meant to protect eco-systems for their own sake. Moreover, there is nothing particularly Buddhist about them.

A second argument that calls for caution is the fact that the primary concern of Buddhism is to liberate oneself from suffering caused by ignorance and attachment to this world. In the final analysis, this world is not worthy of consideration because it is impermanent. This attitude could hardly motivate efforts for the preservation, not to mention the restoration of the environment. Ultimately, it could be argued, Buddhism is incompatible with the goals and aspirations of the ecological movement.

Both these arguments are legitimate and valuable: they should guard us from disfiguring a religion or a philosophy to a point of no recognition. They may even prevent some from taking advantage of the reputation of Buddhism for the sake of promoting their specific interests. The fact that the present ecological crisis requires urgent attention should not be a pretext to hijack this ancient spiritual tradition. To use an analogy, I am not ready to dismantle the great cathedrals to make barricades.

However, these arguments should not discourage us from looking at the Buddhist philosophical and spiritual traditions to find solutions to the present ecological problems. Despite the fact that there may be a difference of objectives between Buddhism and the ecological movement, I believe that they have something to share, not so much in the views they advocate, but rather in the means by which they bring about the acquisition or the integration of their respective views.

It appears that the source of our present ecological crisis resides above all in the way we view ourselves, in the way we perceive the world surrounding us as well as in the way the relationship between us and the perceived world is defined. This is a view shared by most of the scholars working in the field of cross-cultural studies related to ecology, culture, philosophy, and religion. In this respect, very often Christianity and Judaism have received a bad press mainly because of their belief, stemming from the Book of Genesis, that men ought to be fruitful and multiply and that they should fill the earth in order to subdue it. The Judeo-Christian philosophy seems therefore to advocate a relationship of dominance of human beings over nature; this has been interpreted as one of the major sources of our destructive behavior towards the environment.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, religions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Shintoism, which appear to promote a more complementary and harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, are viewed more favorably, although some of the countries like China and even Thailand, where these religions have been predominant for centuries, are not known to be ecologically responsible. Rather than disproving the connection between religion and ecological behavior, this discrepancy has been attributed to the influence of the economic success enjoyed by the Western countries.<sup>5</sup> The allure of the West's higher standard of living has undermined the ecologically responsible conduct that would otherwise have emerged from these eastern religions and philosophies. In other words, the culture of dominance and competition, prevalent in the countries ruled by market

economies, is now taking over the culture of harmony and peacefulness that prevailed in the Buddhist countries.

One may question this link between religious beliefs and social behavior by arguing that religion alone cannot be responsible for our destructive attitude towards nature. A number of studies have analyzed the complexity of this relationship. There are even attempts to correlate men's attitudes towards nature with the ways women are perceived and treated, thus revealing the anthropological and political causes of the ecological crisis. Despite the differences of opinion among scholars, it is generally agreed that our attitudes and behavior, whatever their sources, rest on a "vision" or a kind of tacit perception of reality. This vision is like a core belief around which everything is articulated; our actions reinforce this core belief and the core belief determines our actions. It is like a cybernetic system that maintains its structure by means of controlling its feedback.<sup>6</sup>

The interaction between one's tacit view of reality and one's behavior is well understood by Buddhism. From early on, two main approaches have competed against each other as to how the problem of suffering could be solved. The first approach prescribes the control of one's desires to a point of cessation of all mental functions as the way to spiritual freedom. The second approach advocates the practice of cultivation of insight. Paul Griffiths, a Buddhist scholar, calls these two approaches to spiritual betterment respectively the enstatic and the analytic approach. As Griffiths affirms:

[The analytic approach] is concerned with repeated meditations upon standard items of Buddhist doctrine--the four truths, the 12-fold chain of dependent origination and so forth--until these are completely internalized by practitioners and their cognitive and perceptual systems operate only in terms of them. Such analytical meditations are designed to remove standard cognitive and perceptual habit-patterns and to replace them with new ones. Furthermore, these techniques are designed to teach the practitioner something new about the way things are, to inculcate in his consciousness a whole series of knowledges that such-and-such is the case. In contrast, the enstatic meditations are designed to reduce the contents of consciousness, to focus awareness upon a single point and ultimately to bring all mental activity to a halt.<sup>7</sup>

Eventually, the analytic approach, which focuses on the integration of a specific view, became the dominant means of achieving enlightenment in Buddhism. The reasons why it became the privileged approach are not without interest for our present ecological problems. In fact, understanding why the enstatic approach failed to remain a means of enlightenment in its own right, that is, without recourse to any cognitive element, will serve as the basis of my criticism of how Buddhism has so far been used in the context of the ecological debate. Put differently, to have ideas such as the interconnectedness of all beings is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to bring about an ecologically responsible behavior. The question that remains is what do we do with such ideas? What is their function? This is what I would like to discuss next. Let's first look at one attempt to include Buddhism in the present ecological debate.

One of the most important themes of Buddhism is the idea of nonviolence, or non-injury to living beings (*ahimsā*). Although the idea of *ahimsā* is shared by other Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism and particularly Jainism, its use and application beyond being a simple inhibiting factor is quite characteristic of the

Buddhist traditions. Indeed, *ahimsā* is more than a Buddhist ethical principle to be followed by lay people and monks to avoid, for example, bad *karma* or to accumulate merits for a better rebirth or, even, to cultivate mindfulness. In other words, *ahimsā* is not just a means to attain a specific goal. Rather, it is also to be understood as one of the many descriptions of what it means to be spiritually accomplished. In this regard, the Pali Canon often refers to the Buddha as the one endowed with wisdom and conduct (*vijja-carana-sampanno*),<sup>8</sup> thus implying that realization of the highest truth translates itself into specific conduct. One characteristic of this conduct, as it is known from the example of the Buddha himself, is that all beings are treated with compassion and friendship.

*Ahimsā* must therefore be viewed from two perspectives: firstly, as an inhibiting factor for one's potentially unfruitful behavior; this is the *ahimsā* that corresponds to the first of the Five Buddhist Precepts, and secondly as a description of one's spiritual accomplishment. As such, *ahimsā* is part of the ethical component of the Noble Eightfold Path, that is, Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.<sup>9</sup> This last statement is based on the idea, developed by Gethin in his study of the Buddhist path to awakening, that the Noble Eightfold Path, because of the use of the word "noble" (*ārya* in Sanskrit or *ariya* in Pali), refers to a world-transcending path (*lokuttara*), that is, a "path" that occurs or manifests itself as a result of a spiritual experience.

The distinction between these two aspects of *ahimsā* is relevant for our present discussion because it appears to me that those who look at Buddhism for guidelines for an ecologically responsible behavior tend to focus their attention on the inhibiting aspect of *ahimsā* without examining the implications of its descriptive aspect. On account of using that approach, some difficulties were encountered in setting up a consistent plan of action. Changes had to be made so that the idea of *ahimsā* could work as a moral principle in an environmental ethic.

For instance, one of the justifications for having a precept against committing violence is the doctrine of *karma*, that is, the idea that any action done in the present leads to future consequences for the perpetrator. This means that injuring living beings may lead one to a bad rebirth here on earth as a downtrodden being or in hell where the sufferings are known to be much worse. This idea would therefore serve as a powerful inhibitor if it were not for the other Buddhist idea that states that *karma* accrues to the perpetrator of an action only if the action is done intentionally. In practice, this means that killing by accident does not lead to bad *karma* or that lack of awareness of the results of one's actions is without karmic consequences. When we consider that most of our ecological problems are the result of unintended actions, such as driving cars or eating meat, this emphasis on intentionality dilutes quite seriously the inhibiting effects of the principle of *ahimsā*. In this regard, I have been told that one of the most sought for jobs in Thailand is that of civil servant because, keeping the economical and social considerations aside, the only thing one does is to sign orders without having to carry them out personally. In this way, no bad *karma* is accrued even if the order is to execute a person.<sup>10</sup>

The reason why there is so much emphasis on intentionality is that the real beneficiary of the practice of *ahimsā* as an inhibiting factor is the perpetrator of the action and not its object. From this perspective, one can understand why, in order to accommodate the requirements of everyday life, especially for lay people who made

a living by farming, Buddhists attributed sentience only to animals and people, thus excluding plants. They also elaborated a system of atonement ceremonies to avoid the effects of harmful acts such as fishing or hunting for a living.

To counteract the negative effects of the doctrine of *karma*, one therefore needs to bring about a shift of attention from the perpetrator of an action to the one who suffers its consequences, that is, its object. Put differently, when an act is done, one should no longer be concerned with what will happen to oneself. Instead one should worry about who or what has to suffer the effects of one's act. Practically speaking, this means that one has to get rid of the doctrine of *karma*. This is a big chunk of the Buddhist belief structure. Even if we were to make that sacrifice, would the problem be resolved? In the West, where the belief in *karma* appears to fade away, the root of the problem appears to remain because the practice of Buddhism in general is still motivated by anthropocentric concerns.

It is interesting to note that those who use the doctrine of *ahimsā* in the way I have just described are conscious of the anthropocentric nature of the Buddhist ethical guidelines. Even if, for example, nature is valued as a place of protection from worldly distractions or for its potential to teach truths such as impermanence, they recognize that it is done for the sake of one's spiritual betterment. At times, I have the impression that my colleagues reached a dead end: the solutions they offered, based on their thorough understanding of Buddhism, are nothing more than what the ecological movements themselves have been suggesting since we have become aware of the ecological crisis. The only differences are the justifications for one's change of behavior. In this regard, I wonder if modern science is not more effective in convincing us to change. In this context, why bother to study Buddhism?

What appears to be an impasse, however, may very well be a breaking point opening up new possibilities. The realization that the anthropocentric outlook of the practice of Buddhism makes it difficult, if not impossible, to establish effective principles of environmentally responsible behavior is not without precedents in the context of the ecological debate. The most engaged if not radical advocates of a change of behavior towards nature also recognize that this anthropocentric outlook is a major stumbling block and that, eventually, nature should be given intrinsic value. It is interesting to note that, here again, as with the doctrine of *karma*, if one wants to keep Buddhism as a participant in the ecological debate, something has to be changed. Indeed, Buddhism, as it is, may not be of great help for the ecological cause on account of its mixed attitude towards animals and untamed nature. If animals do suffer pains and for that reason deserve to be treated with compassion, it remains true that they are spiritually inferior and as such they are only a stage of existence (*gati*), like the stage of the Asuras (demons) or that of the hungry ghosts, where one can be reborn until one gets final release.

According to the Deep Ecology movement<sup>11</sup> a cure for the present ecological crisis is possible only with a radical change in our philosophical outlook, as individuals and as a culture. Whether this change is effected by creating something new or by reawakening the old, it remains true that a new ecological consciousness has to be cultivated. This consciousness, based on a kind of metaphysical holism, rests on the idea that, among other things, man is constituted of two selves: the egoistic self which is superficial and the product of social influences, and the true or greater self which sees itself as interconnected with the whole of nature. The

question is now: How can the shift from an egoistic self to a true self be brought about?

This question has always been central to Buddhist spirituality. It has been recognized that by practicing meditation in a certain way, one can easily get stuck and even regress in spiritual terms. The reason one gets stuck is that meditation can become a way of reinforcing a view that is eventually the major obstacle to spiritual transformation. For example, if I say that I practice meditation to be awakened, I end up convincing myself that there is truly someone to awaken. To give a simile, let's imagine a ship that is about to be wrecked. Its captain has to rescue the passengers. He does so by ordering them to leave the ship. Let's also assume that this captain is deluded by the idea that there is a difference between himself and the passengers, that only he is the one who gives orders and that passengers just receive and obey them. In other words, because the captain thinks that he is in charge, he somehow forgets or overlooks the fact that he is also traveling on the ship, thus making him a passenger. Because of that assumption, he never orders himself to leave the ship. So he remains on the ship and ultimately sinks with it. To use another analogy, it would be like someone who is stuck in quicksand: his effort to get out can only make him sink deeper because it gives power to the very thing that is keeping him captive.

It is because of this problem that the enstatic approach, as mentioned earlier, failed to become a means of enlightenment in its own right. It could only temporarily subdue the symptoms of spiritual immaturity such as having desires and fears or even a wandering mind, but never uproot its cause, which is essentially the belief in the existence of a person who has desires, fears, and a wandering mind. In a similar way, the search for guidelines, even from a religious tradition like Buddhism, presupposes that there is someone who is capable of knowing and who is responsible for his or her actions. In this context, it is impossible to get away from an anthropocentric outlook. In fact, it only helps to reinforce it.

One of the ways Buddhism developed to offset the problem of reinforcing what has to be given up was to say that the idea of a goal to be attained is spiritually counterproductive. A good example of this kind of argument is Nāgārjuna's famous statement that Samsara, the world of suffering and illusion, is indeed Nirvana, the state of freedom from suffering. In other words, there is no essential difference between these two states. Another strategy, especially adopted by the Chinese Buddhists, was to say that we are all endowed with the Buddha-nature. What you are looking for is what you already are.

The common denominator of these two strategies is to neutralize one's anthropocentric outlook and so to cultivate an awareness of an idea that ultimately defines or gives meaning to all our perceptions of reality. In other words, it is an idea that puts on equal terms the entire universe including oneself. At first, this idea is presented to us like any other idea, that is, as an object of the mind. Here, a difference between subject and object is still acknowledged. Then, one has to integrate it, through various meditative exercises, so that it becomes a sort of background on which everything is projected. At this point, the difference between subject and object is dissolved. The cultivation of awareness is like watching a movie in a theater and trying to focus one's attention on the screen on which the film is

shown. All elements of the projected films, the sad as well as the happy scenes, are all illusions from the point of view of the screen.

This passage from being an object of the mind to becoming the background that defines all perceptions is often described in Buddhism as a spiritual breakthrough. In the Theravāda tradition it is called "the Opening of the *Dhamma-Eye*" or the "Stream Entry;" in Mahāyāna<sup>12</sup>, it may be referred to as the arising of *bodhicitta* or the entering of the Path of Vision. To understand the full significance of this spiritual breakthrough, I would like to present an explanation of the *Satori* experience of Zen Buddhism as related by Victor Hori, a Rinzai Zen monk and Buddhist scholar. The experience of *Satori* is usually generated by a reflection on a *kōan*. A *kōan* is like a riddle such as "Two hands clap and there is a sound. What is the sound of one hand clapping?" Such a *kōan* has to be resolved by the student. Every now and then, he would go to the Zen master to give what he thinks to be the answer to the *kōan*, but the master will always tell him that his answer is wrong as long as it is formulated in a dualistic way. Thus,

At the extremity of his great doubt, there will come an interesting moment. This moment is hard to describe but on reflection afterward we might say that there comes a point when the monk realizes that he himself and the way he is reacting to his inability to penetrate the *kōan* are themselves the activity of the *kōan* working within him. The *kōan* no longer appears as an inert object in the spotlight of consciousness but has become part of the searching movement of the illuminating spotlight itself. His seeking to penetrate the *kōan*, he realizes, is itself the action of the *kōan* which has invaded his consciousness. It has become part of the very consciousness that seeks to penetrate itself. He himself is the *kōan*. Realization of this is the response to the *kōan*.<sup>13</sup>

This practice is therefore meant to force the student to go beyond duality in order to experience the answer in a non-dualistic way, that is, without making any distinctions between the thinker (the student) and the object of thought (the *kōan*). It should be realized that both are to be understood or viewed from the same perspective. In other words, both find their meaning on account of a common idea.

Thus, given the fact that the root cause of our ecological problems rests on a view that is essentially anthropocentric and that the solution lies in acquiring a biocentric outlook, what Buddhism has to offer is an expertise as to how this crucial passage can be brought about. I would like to show next how this expertise could be applied concretely to achieve standards of ecologically responsible behavior.

The key to this expertise, as mentioned earlier, is the cultivation of awareness of an idea that gives meaning to all our experiences. The example of *Satori* showed that this idea could be anything. The only requirement is that it should be impossible to limit its range of applicability. Metaphysical descriptions of reality such as "Everything is suffering", "Everyone is endowed with the Buddha-nature", or "We are all interconnected" are very good for that purpose. In other words, any idea that somehow falls in a gray zone where it cannot, rationally or scientifically speaking, be proven or refuted, will work just fine. This means that one should not be too worried about finding the true nature of reality; one should take whatever satisfies the criteria of universal applicability and which is realistically plausible to us today. For example, we could say that all that live have a desire to live. The desire to live, as a universal principle, becomes then the starting point of our cultivation of awareness.



This last statement may appear somewhat trivial. For many decades the ecological movement has been seriously searching for ideas and views that describe as accurately as possible what our world truly is. In this search, ideas from the Buddhist traditions have been readily adopted. But were Buddhists really interested in finding out what the world truly is? In their reflections, discussions, and meditations on the reality of this world, the scientific method, as we know it, was never used. On the contrary, their views of reality are rather the product of fantasy and imagination. And yet, their system of spiritual transformation seems to work. Let's see, for example, how one can come to experience a feeling or an attitude of equanimity towards all sentient beings.

It is first affirmed that men are reborn from life to life. This is the doctrine of rebirth. This idea, as far as I know, cannot be proven nor refuted scientifically. As mentioned above, it falls in a kind of gray zone. For many people, however, the idea that one will be reborn after death is quite plausible. Thus, based on this doctrine, it can be further claimed that we have been reborn an indefinite number of times so that the people who are our friends today could have been our enemies in previous lives and vice versa. Moreover, still according to the doctrine of rebirth, it could be said that we have experienced all types of relationships with almost everyone in this world. Given this understanding of what we are and what the others are, let's choose one type of relationship that is likely to be the most conducive to cultivating an attitude of equanimity.

In the East, the type of relationship that is traditionally most engaging is probably that of gratitude and indebtedness. And the person to whom one is likely to be the most grateful is one's mother, a person who has been immensely kind to oneself and who most certainly underwent great sufferings and trouble for one's sake. This is why the image of the mother, to whom one owes life itself, is a very powerful one. Consequently, the process of transformation starts with the decision to view each and every one as one's own mother. What I am now beginning to describe is the "seven-point cause-and-effect method" of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>14</sup> The method further consists in extending the benevolent feelings one usually has for one's mother to all sentient beings starting with one's own friends, then to people one is normally indifferent to and finally to one's enemies. At this point, one may ask how does the cultivation of a view such as the one just described translate into a new behavior?

What is involved here is not an attempt to provide a justification for a change of behavior. If, for example, one visualizes the others as one's own mother, it is not meant to be a way of rationalizing one's actions towards other people by saying, for instance: "Because that person is my mother, I ought to act in a gentle and peaceful way towards him or her." It is also not a means to question our current behavior by constantly asking: "What should I do in this situation?" What the Buddhist approach entails is much more radical than that: one's behavior ought to be always natural and spontaneous. There should be no instant between thinking and acting. In fact, there should be no thinking at all when one performs actions. In the Chinese philosophical, religious, and artistic contexts, this type of behavior is called "*wu-wei*" (non-action). *Wu-wei* does not mean that there is no action but that it is not premeditated. For example, an act of compassion is as natural and ordinary as stretching one's body while waking up. In other terms, one is not even aware of the

nature of one's actions. Although this idea may appear far-fetched, it is not entirely foreign to us.

Indeed, it is very natural to be kind to a person who is kind to us. In fact, one will have to be under a lot of pressure to act in an unfriendly manner towards such a person. The contrary is also true. A person who has harmed us, for example, is not likely to solicit a kind response on our part. In certain situations, it takes a lot of effort not to retaliate. In both cases, our actions or reactions are spontaneous. What determines the course of their "naturalness" is the way we perceive the other.

It is therefore because of this intimate connection between one's view of the world and one's behavior that it is not necessary to search for or even invent guidelines on the one hand to inhibit one's possible destructive behavior and, on the other hand, to promote ecologically responsible actions. This does not mean that there should no longer be any inhibitions or good actions; but, contrary to the approach previously criticized, they are formulated and applied in a spontaneous manner according to the situation that presents itself. This way of behaving resembles that of the *bodhisattva* of the Mahāyāna tradition who uses skillful means (*upāya*)<sup>15</sup> on account of his or her compassion towards all sentient beings. The *Bodhisattva's* actions are not predictable but his ultimate motivation, that is, the desire to save all sentient beings, is.

Let me summarize what I think is the nature of the Buddhist contribution to the environmental debate. Given the assumption that a viable solution to the present ecological crisis can only be brought about by a radical change in conceptualizing our relationship with other living beings and the environment, what Buddhism has to offer is principally an expertise as to how this radical change can be effected. I would therefore suggest, as a way to integrate Buddhism as a serious component of an environmental ethics curriculum, to focus our teaching and research on the field of Buddhist psychology. As just described, Buddhist psychology helps us understand how ideas are handled so that they become the basis of one's spiritual transformation. This assumes that ideas alone are not sufficient to bring about changes. Without proper treatment, they stay at the level of wishful thinking. Or worse, they may even become the source of neurotic behavior.

Beyond just understanding how Buddhists viewed the process of mental transformation, one should also be able to apply their findings to new areas such as that of ecology. For example, by understanding how imagination and fantasy are used in the context of the various Buddhist meditations, one may be able to construct a new culture where every detail of life, no matter how trivial or lofty, will be affected by a ecologically beneficial vision of the world.

Such a culture is possible and I believe that it already exists to some extent. While traveling in Japan, I happened once, in a shop, to put my shoe on a *tatami*, a Japanese mat made of rice straw. The reaction of the shopkeeper was very swift and spontaneous: she uttered a sound of horror as though she had seen a ghost. This was quite a contrast to her previously quiet and dutiful behavior characteristic of Japanese saleswomen. The reason why she reacted in this way is that rice, and everything that is made out of it, is considered as something pure in Japanese culture.<sup>16</sup> This is one of the many legacies of the Shinto religion that still pervade this culture. What is also noteworthy is that the saleswomen might not have been

aware of that fact, so she did not think before acting; the idea of the purity of rice is therefore fully integrated in her way of being.

A last example that may appear more trivial but which is very good to illustrate my point. Like almost everybody I am sure that you brush your teeth before going to bed. If you happen to forget brushing your teeth, as is the case with me sometimes, you may feel a sense of dirtiness. Brushing one's teeth is a rule of hygiene that has now been fully integrated in our behavior. But, as those who have raised children know, this integration does not come naturally: it has to be inculcated. It is therefore to be hoped that one day our ecologically responsible behavior towards the environment will be as natural as brushing one's teeth before going to bed.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Just to name a few: Lambert Schmithausen (Indian Buddhism), Christopher Key Chapple (Hinduism), Roger T. Ames (Chinese religions), William LaFleur (Japanese Buddhism)

<sup>2</sup> Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature* (1991), p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Idem., p. 35

<sup>4</sup> Lynne White's article, *The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, published in 1973 is probably the most significant text with regard to advocating this position.

<sup>5</sup> Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature* (1991), p. 3

<sup>6</sup> This idea was developed by Henri Laborit, a French biologist and philosopher. It is a concept used to explain how biological structures maintain their integrity.

<sup>7</sup> Griffiths (1986), p.13

<sup>8</sup> *Thus Have I heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, I-62, p. 98

<sup>9</sup> The other components deal with Wisdom (Right View and Right Thought) and the practice of meditation (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration).

<sup>10</sup> Private communication with a Thai. It should be noted, however, that religious considerations are probably not the main reasons why these jobs are popular.

<sup>11</sup> The expression "Deep ecology" is to be understood in contrast to the idea of shallow ecology which only seeks to apply remedies instead of going to the root of the problem. The distinction was introduced by the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess.

<sup>12</sup> The Theravāda Buddhist tradition is practiced mainly in Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma). Mahāyāna Buddhism is practiced mainly in China, Korea, Japan, and Tibet.

<sup>13</sup> Hori (1994), p. 30

<sup>14</sup> This meditation is used in Tibetan Buddhism to develop among its practitioners a sense of equanimity towards all sentient beings and a deep desire to work for their salvation.

<sup>15</sup> The concept of skillful means (*upāya*) advocates the idea that all Buddhist doctrines and practices are just provisional means skillfully designed by the Buddha

or the Bodhisattvas to help all unenlightened beings to attain enlightenment in ways that fit their mental dispositions.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that rice is considered pure or at least special in Japanese culture may not have been the only reason why the saleswoman reacted in that way. The point of the anecdote, however, is that stepping on a tatami with one's shoes on in very close to breaking a religious taboo and the reactions it provokes are more than just based on considerations of hygiene. Whatever the origin of this taboo, it remains true that it has been fully internalized in the behavior of most of the Japanese.

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