Saving Animals and Winning a War: Buddhist way of dealing with conflict

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Abstract [Keywords: religious conflict, saving animals, Jātakas, Bhagavad-Gītā, Universal Morality, in-group morality]

Johannes Bronkhorst in his recent publication, Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism, has argued that Buddhism offered 'very little' in terms of practical and sensible advice to royal court on issues related to statecraft. One of the examples given in the book is the letter sent to young King Kaniska of Kushana dynasty from a Buddhist monk Mātṛceṭa known to be the intellectual grandchild of Nāgārjuna. In this letter he, as a Buddhist counselor to the King, talks only about saving the life of animals and not even mentioning of the killing of humans.

It looks as if this advice cannot help the King busy at intense statecraft and at bloody warfare. Although it can be regarded neither as practical nor as sensible, it in fact conveys the core Buddhist ethical value of universal morality. If one should value high on the life of animals, there is no need to mention the life of human beings including enemy troops. Indeed, there is one charming Jātaka story in which the future Buddha, born as Śakra Indra, the Lord of devas, wins over asuras by saving the life of animals in a war. It is preserved both in Pali Jātaka and in ĀryaŚūra's Jātakamāla in slightly different setting.

Nowadays religion has been condemned as a divisive force powered by in-group/out-group enmity and vendetta. Buddhism seems to be a step aside from those religious conflict and violence. Indeed Buddhists, based on non-violence as well as loving kindness and compassion, wish for the happiness and well being of all living creatures. In this there is no such distinction as oneself and others, our side and other side and in-group and out-group. The spirit of Buddhist universal morality seems to be embedded in diverse Buddhist stories, such as the Kulāvakajātaka, and they could offer the key for Buddhists to deal with multi-religious and multi-cultural society we live in.

* This work is improved English version of my presentation, Religious Conflict and Buddhism, in a conference entitled 'Buddhism and the Future World' to commemorate the 100th birth Anniversary of the Great Patriarch Sangwol Wongak (Hwang 2011).
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I. Introduction

Richard Dawkins starts his book “The God Delusion”\(^1\) with John Lennon’s famous song, “Imagine.” In this song, John Lennon has represented the sentiment of the young generation in the early 1970s who protested against the Vietnamese War by dreaming of a peaceful world where all the people could live together without having any conflicting ideas of paradise, hell, nation, religion, violence and possession. In particular, the line that imagines a world even without religion comes off as an argument that could not be so detached from the reality.\(^2\) Indeed countless conflicts and violence have been occurred under the name of religion across the world even today. Dawkins puts out his atheistic idea based on evolutionist theory that the world would be a lot better if there is no religion in the world in the following way:

“Imagine, with John Lennon, a world with no religion. Imagine no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as ‘Christ-killers’, no Northern Ireland ‘troubles’, no ‘honor killings’…”\(^3\)

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2) In some cases in America, the line saying and ‘no religion too’ in Imagine has been substituted to ‘and one religion too’ (Dawkins 2006 p. 24).
Is religion the 'Root of All Evil,' a title of TV program Dawkins hosted for Channel Four television in UK around 2006? Under severe criticism due to the endless conflicts and extreme confrontation between Monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, could Buddhism be a step aside from such criticism? This paper deals with this problem through the Buddhist open hearted attitude towards all living creatures based on Universal morality.

II. Religion and Conflict

Samuel Huntington, who wrote “The Clash of Civilization” in the mid-1990s, conceptualized the conflicts between civilizations as the most serious geopolitical risk in the aftermath of the collapse of the former Soviet Union that represented the ideological strife for many decades. Huntington viewed those cultural and racial identities, rather than the class and ideologies, would become more important in the near future. The confrontation between different civilizations, therefore, would take the central stage in the world politics, he predicted.

According to this perspective, any civilization that adopts the modernization militarily and economically, yet rejects Western cultural tradition, could become a potential threat to the Western civilization. He went on to warn that conflicts between Islamic Middle East and Christian West would intensify. His ideas gained more traction following the September the 11th attacks, shaping the public opinion that what’s ahead is a
gloomy future filled with conflicts and confrontation among societies with different cultural and religious backgrounds.

In an interview on Orientalism, the Western prejudice against the Middle East in particular, Edward Said noted that people living together in the same society should find a way to live with their differences in religion, tradition, language and culture. According to him, accepting differences without hostility and violence could be a big challenge yet a sad reality we have to live with. In these multi-religious and multi-cultural societies we live in what we should embrace is nothing but co-existence.

In fact, Christianity and Islamism are structured in a way that makes it almost impossible to find a middle ground when it comes to the co-existence. Monotheism underlies both religious traditions for ages; accepting other gods or belief systems is almost impossible. Regarding both religions born in the desert areas, the idea of peaceful co-existence could be a kind of luxury idea. A sterile and hostile environment of the desert rarely offers an oasis, which make almost impossible to share its water with people from other culture and religion. On the contrary, it could be very important for people living nearby oasis to join forces under the unifying banner of one religion to pursue their prosperity and to secure their survival.

Perhaps, Buddhism is a religion that has evolved to embrace multi-cultural and multi-religious period. From the very beginning, Buddhism interacted with multi-cultural traditions and diverse belief system. In India, Buddhism was established in line with other religious movements called “six heretical sects” including Jainism. Buddhism also exchanged influences with Brahmanism for a long period.
Many people believe that the king Aśoka in Maurya Empire and the king Kaniṣika in Kushan Empire could be an ideal Buddhist king giving their support only to Buddhism. For long time both kings become a model Buddhist king known as Universal Monarch or Wheel Turning King (cakravartin). According to Aśokan inscriptions, however, the word dharma appears in countless inscriptions cannot refer exclusively to Buddhist teachings. His inscriptions repeatedly insist the importance of tolerance among all religious sects. In fact, Chandragupta and Bindusara, the first and second king of Maurya Empire, were known to have preferred Jainism and Ajivikism to Buddhism respectively. Buddhism in this circumstance could not enjoy an exclusive dominance as a state religion during this reign.

The king Kaniṣika of Kushana Empire seems to know how to deal with multi-religious and multi-cultural society. King Kaniṣika governed huge Empire on the famous trade route known as Silk Road in between Han China and Roman Empire. His Empire was building up a fortune through trading with various people evolved in this ancient international trade. In order to keep the trade route moving he and his subjects had to accept different culture and religion brought by diverse merchants and tradesmen. One of the good examples to show multi-religious and multi-cultural background of his Kingdom could be his gold coin. Gold coins minted during the king’s rule have diverse images of gods in different religions including Buddhism, Persian religion and Greek religion.

4) Thapar(1994) p. 29.
III. Saving Animals and Winning a War

What aspect of Buddhism has bolstered its growth in an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious society? In his recent book, Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism, Johannes Bronkhorst has argued that Buddhism offered ‘very little’ in terms of practical and sensible advice on statecraft to the royal
court.5) One of the examples given by Bronkhorst is the letter sent to young King Kaniṣka of the Kushana dynasty from a Buddhist monk Mātṛceṭa, considered to be the intellectual grandchild of Nāgārjuna.

In ancient India, Brahmans allowed warrior class (kshatria) to use violence as part of their social obligation and prestige. They also offered effective political counsels to numerous kings through the books, such as the Arthaśāstra. As far as Buddhism was concerned, there was no difference in the act of killing regardless of whether one belongs to warrior class (kshatria), Brahmans or Buddhist monks and nuns.6) Any violence or murder is exactly the same human act that should be condemned and avoided, according to the Buddhist teachings.

Mātṛceṭa sent a letter to young king Kaniṣka of Kushana Empire who staged a number of warfare for territorial expansion from Gandhara to central India. In this letter he, as a Buddhist counselor to the King, discusses mostly about saving the life of animals.7) He hardly mentions the killing of humans in warfare.

It does not seem that this advice can offer much to the King who is busy with the intense demands of statecraft and bloody warfare. Although it can be regarded neither as practical nor as sensible, it in fact conveys the core Buddhist ethical value of universal morality. If one places a high value on the life of animals, there is no need to mention how important the life of human beings is, including even the life of enemy troops in a battle field.

Indeed, there is one charming Jātaka story in which the future Buddha, born as Śakra/Indra, Lord of the devas, defeats the asuras by saving the life of animals in the middle of a war. It is preserved both in the Pali Jātaka\(^8\) and in Ārya Śūra’s Jātakamāla\(^9\), in slightly different settings. In the Pali version, the Buddha in the previous life was born as Indra, the king of devas, as a reward of fulfilling seven injunctions: to cherish one’s mother, to cherish one’s father, to honour one’s elders, to speak truth, to avoid harsh speech, to avoid slander and to shun niggardliness.

Asuras, however, were envious of Indra’s wonderful bliss, and a war broke out as a result. Indra on a heavenly chariot driven by a thousand excellent horses was at front line and somehow isolated in the middle of the war. When asuras began to surround Indra, Mātali, a charioteer, was about to turn around the chariot for the fear of being trapped in danger. At this point, Indra happened to notice young birds, garudas, which cannot fly yet on the top of silk-cotton tree on the way his chariot is moving. He ordered the young birds to be saved to the charioteer, even though it could mean his life is in danger.

“Let them [young garudas] not be troubled because of me, friend Mātali. Let us not, for Empire’s sake, so act as to destroy life. Rather will I, for their sake, give my life as a sacrifice to the asuras.”\(^{10}\)

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10) Chalmers(1973) pp. 80-81. Similar passage can be found in Jātakamāla as well(Khoroche 2006 pp. 82-83).
Mātali, a charioteer, reluctantly obliged the order, turning the chariot back to the direction where they would confront the asuras again. However, this sudden turning around confused the asuras, who falsely believed that Indra had got reinforcements and that Indra’s troops were marching for help. Falling into a big disorder, the asuras started to retreat. Encouraged by this sudden development, Indra joined forces with other devas and eventually defeated asuras and won the war.

A sense of reality is certainly missing in this story set considering the life-or-death situation in the battlefield, which preaches the virtue of appreciating the life of an animal and the necessity of trying one’s best to rescue living creatures in danger even in the extreme war situation. Paradoxically, however, Buddhists stress in this story that life of living creatures deserves all the attention it gets even in a most horrifying context of the battlefield. Given that a mere animal’s life is so important from Buddhist perspective, the story indirectly delivers a point that the same principle should be applied to human life as well.

I think there is a sharp contrast when we look at this Buddhist story compared with famous Hindu Epic Dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna in the middle of a battle field, known as Kuruksetra, in the Bhagavad-gitā, the song of the load.

When Arjuna was facing with enemy troops consisting of his teachers and relatives, he hesitated to fight and to become very sad and to falling into sorrow.
His charioteer Krishna, god form of the Load Vishnu, persuaded Arjuna to fight. When Arjuna said “I will not fight!”, Krishna replied “You sorrow for men who do not need your sorrow. You speak words that in part are wise. However wise men do not sorrow for the living and the dead.”

Krishna reminds him of his cast-duty as a warrior. He did his best to show that an individual, like Arjuna, is merely a pawn moved by the hand of an all-powerful god whose will no man or god can resist or thwart.

In contrast that these Hindu attitude, the Jātaka story indeed showcases Buddhist ‘universal morality,’ in which all the sentient beings should be protected and people should have loving kindness and compassion toward the all sentient beings. This is in sharp contrast to an in-group morality that divides friends and foes and strictly favors the former over the latter.

The main principles that support Buddhism could be that human beings should overcome their passion, hatred and delusion to achieve the equanimity of the mind. As for the world filled with conflicts and violence, Buddhism continues to stress the importance of not killing living beings, loving kindness and compassion and right livelihood (samma-ājīva).

As Buddhism urges its follows to save living creatures, to treat other sentient beings in danger with unlimited loving kindness and compassion, to lead a life in a way that does not put any negative pressure on other living beings, it is almost unthinkable for Buddhists to endorse conflicts and violence.

Buddhist respect for life seems to have played a major role in helping multi-cultural and multi-religious societies to achieve stability and harmony. Buddhists seem to be a step aside from other religious group which accelerated social conflict and division. This could be the reason why Buddhism has enjoyed dramatic growth and advance in the societies of diverse cultural backgrounds with different religious groups.

IV. Buddhist Way of Dealing with Conflict

Richard Dawkins talks about a kind role of religion in such divided society as Northern Ireland in which society is polarized by Catholics and Protestants:

"Religion is a label of in-group/out-group enmity and vendetta, not necessarily worse than other labels such as skin colour, language or preferred football team, but often available when other labels are not."14)

Of course, the troubles in Northern Ireland have deeper political elements, but the case here illustrates that religion often plays as a factor that accelerates a break-up of society. ‘Neighbor’ in Christianity and ‘brotherhood’ in Islam could be interpreted as a more of universal concept in which there is no distinction between in-group and out-group. Historically however, both religions tend to favor their own members and re-

main hostile to other religion, thereby repeating a vicious cycle of confrontation and hatred for centuries and that is still going on.

Although Buddhists aim at embracing universal morality based on the non-killing, loving kindness and compassion, historical records suggest that Buddhists are not without fighting spirit. Peter Harvey underlines that Buddhism had been suppressed by Hindu kings in the history of India, but Buddhist kings never persecuted other religions. However, Buddhist kings never hesitated to use violence against invading troops.15)

Sinhalese king Duṭṭhagāmaṇi defeated general Elāra and his troops, mostly non-Buddhist. Just as Aśoka was agonized in the wake of the Kalinga war, King Duṭṭhagāmaṇi was deeply distressed and tormented as he personally felt responsible for the countless innocent people killed in the war. At this point, according to the Mahāvaṃsa, eight Arhants appeared and delivered a relieving message: “You have just killed one and a half man.”16) They argued that the king is responsible for the death of only one Buddhist and for a half of a person who was not yet fully to become Buddhist. The other enemy soldiers were non-Buddhists, they claimed, and they died like wild animals, and the king doesn’t have to take any responsibility for

16) Gombrich(2006) p. 141; Geiger(1980) p. 178: From this deed arises no hindrance in thy way to heaven. Only one and a half human beings have been slain here by thee, O lord of men. The one had come unto the (three) refuges, the other had taken on himself the five precepts. Unbelievers and men of evil life were the rest, not more to be esteemed than beasts. But as for thee, thou wilt bring glory to the doctrine of the Buddha in manifold ways; therefore cast away care from thy heart, O ruler of men!
Wars continued to break out even in Southeast Asia, a region that absorbed Buddhism as the dominant world view. Sometimes a war was waged to grab important Buddhist scriptures.\(^{17}\) A battle broke out over the white elephant, one of the seven treasures of the Universal Monarch\(^{18}\), or wheel turning king. Countries even started a war to “purify” Buddhism in their neighboring kingdom\(^{19}\) and a battle was fought over famous Buddha statues\(^{20}\). Of course, many of the wars were sparked mainly by political motives, yet what’s notable is that Buddhism did not play an active role to block or to prevent such conflicts and to minimize bloody strife.

Buddhist monks stayed in the barracks in countless wars as they were believed to be auspicious symbols. Some monks disrobed and jumped into wars as regular soldiers. In Southeast Asia, Buddhist monks were not allowed to watch or to stay in the army barracks, at least officially,\(^{21}\) but this rule was not observed strictly. This situation has been more or less the same in East Asian countries, like Japan and Korea. Indeed Buddhist universal morality of non-killing, loving kindness and compassion seems not to function properly when it was faced with the collective ideas, such as the nation-state and racial identity, and with the outbursts of conflicts and violence among different groups. When the value of a nation-state or a partic-


ular racial identity becomes more important than individuals, what Buddhism could do is fairly limited since Buddhist karma asks for individuals to take full responsibility for their own behaviors.

According to Peter Harvey\textsuperscript{22}, one Jātaka talks of a king who opened up the gate of his city because he did not want a kingdom that had to harm the invaders to maintain his rule. In that episode, the invading ruler learned a lesson and returned the country to the king, but this type of development is highly unlikely to happen in the real world. Let's assume that a certain king hands over his country to an enemy to observe his Buddhist vow of non-killing; all the people who believed and followed him will certainly suffer from atrocities of the invaders. In other words, a strictly Buddhist act of an individual could inflict countless pains on the people living in his kingdom.

In the Ratnāvalī, believed to be written by Nagārjuna, a suggested solution for such confusing and conflicting situation is to leave the society behind and to join the member of Buddhist sangha.

However, if from the unrighteousness of the world it is difficult to rule religiously,

Then it is right for you to become a monastic for the sake of practice and grandeur.\textsuperscript{23}

Johannes Bronkhorst says that Buddhism did not have a clear social vision that was seen in Brahmanism.\textsuperscript{24}

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\item \textsuperscript{22} Harvey (2000) p. 242.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bronkhorst (2010) pp. 104–105.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Buddhism
was not interested in running a state, either. Therefore, Buddhists handed over the management of a state to Brahmans in almost all areas, while preaching the way to overcome our endless passion hatred and delusion to become free from the never-ending cycle of rebirth.

Buddhists stress the individual responsibility in the form of Karma and preaches the virtue of non-killing, loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings based on open and universal morality. Therefore, it seems inevitable that Buddhist did not have any extra room to adapt itself to the conflict-laden relations between countries, peoples and groups. Buddhism, from its core, does not easy to accept the idea that Buddhist believers should be generous to their own religion and yet remain hostile to other religion.

Photo 5: Buddhist Declaration for realizing religious peace movement

In 2011, South Korea’s Jogye Order has announced that Buddhists no longer criticize other religions any more, declaring that mutual respect and harmony among different religions are

the call of the times. The Korean society, where Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism have long gained a firm footing, is also entering into a multi-cultural and multi-religious phase as a result of the rapid influx of foreign workers and immigrants with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. In this era of diverse cultural and religious traditions, people should learn to reconcile differences in culture and religion to accept other people to ensure co-existence in a single society or nation. Although this move was gaining support from ordinary people in South Korea, it was eventually withdrawn by Jogye Order headquarter due to the internal criticism saying: "It could be seen as a self defeating move surrounded by one of the most hostile and aggressive protestants!", "Where is the Buddhist spirit of protecting the true and right teachings!". Despite this sad decision, I think, all Buddhists know the answer in this case which is beautifully illustrated in the verse five in the Dhammapada:

Enmities never cease by enmity in this world;
Only by non-enmity do they cease. This is an ancient law.\textsuperscript{25)

V. Closing Remarks

Human beings tend to feel a sense of intimacy and fellowship when they belong to a certain group. The opposite side of

\textsuperscript{25) Harvey(2000) p. 239.
the coin is that they also feel, however vaguely, hostility and rivalry against those in other groups. The same phenomenon is applied to the feeling people get regarding a football team they support. Without any specific reason, they hate the people who support their rival football teams. Perhaps, in-group morality or 'closed ethics' could be deeply embedded into the human nature through promoting the stronger bond among "our" members and the hostility toward "other" groups or strangers.

Today people are likely to live under the banner of the global village, an all-encompassing community of different religions and diverse cultures. In this multi-religious and multi-cultural era, people should learn to live with others, regardless of different value systems and lifestyles.

A true Buddhist should refrain from identifying friends and foes and then confronting enemies under no circumstance, whether it's about nation state, ethnic group, or religion. Within Buddhism there should be no distinction that generates conflicts and clashes. The universal morality of Buddhism calling on people to show loving kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings without any distinction could be the very guiding light that Buddhists should adopt to navigate through religious and cultural conflicts in the future.

In conclusion, we may go back to John Lennan's Imagine again with a little Buddhist touch: Imagine, with Buddhism, a world filled with people full of loving kindness and compassion toward all sentient beings. Imagine no confronting ideas, no religious conflict, no territorial dispute, no war, neither rich nor poor, neither the living nor the dead... You may say I am a dreamer. But I am not the only one. I hope someday you will join us. And the world will live as one.
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요약문

동물을 구하고 전쟁에 이기는 법
_분쟁을 대하는 불교적 태도_

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요하네스 브롱코스트는 '브라만 사상의 그늘에서 본 불교'란 최근 저서에서 국가를 경영한다는 측면에서 불교인들이 왕가에 해 줄 수 있는 일들이 아주 적었다는 점을 지적하고 있다.

아마도 이러한 태도는 생사를 건 전쟁에 임하는 쿠샨의 카니시카왕에서 동물을 구할 것을 집중적으로 강조한 마뜨리째따(Mātrcêta)의 편지에서 잘 나타나고 있다. 비록 이러한 불교적 태도가 왕에게 전혀 도움이 되지 않았을 것 같지만, 불교인들이 분쟁을 맞이했을 때 어떻게 해야 하는지를 잘 보여주고 있다.

사실상 빨리 자마까와 아리아슈라의 자마까말라는 신들의 왕으로 태어난 전쟁의 봉다가 악신들과의 전쟁에서 어린 독수리들을 보호하고 전쟁에서도 승리한 이야기를 전하고 있다. 불교인들의 열린 윤리관은 단한 윤리관 속에서 자라를 구분하고 자기편에 대해서는 사랑하고 의지하며 다른편에 대해서는 중요하고 폭력을 행사하는 현실에 갈年之久 경종을 울리고 있다.

이 논문에서는 불교의 열린 윤리관이 현실적으로 어떻게 적용될 수 있는가를 검토하면서 다종교 다문화 사회에서 상호간의 이해와 평화를 검증하는 불교인의 태도를 다양한 측면에서 검토해 본다.
주요어: 종교갈등, 동물보호, 본생담, 바가바드기따, 열린윤리, 닫힌윤리, 종교평화선언.

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