

Enlightenment of the Fusion Theory of Huayan Buddhism to Religious Dialogue

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In the context of today's coexistence of multi-religious traditions, how different religious traditions get along is not only an academic issue, but also a practical one. Huayan Buddhism is one of the eight major schools of Buddhism in China. The characteristic theory of Chinese Huayan Buddhism—fusion thought, providing a way of thinking and practical guidance for friendly dialogue between religions, has not only solved the problem of religious dialogue, but also promoted the development of harmonious relations among different religions. In addition, it has positive implications for exchanges between civilizations and cultural diversity.

Keywords: Huayan Buddhism, Fusion Theory, religious dialogue

The Raising of Questions

Conflicts between different nationalities have run through thousands of years of civilization, confirm untold blood and tears of suffering. It has always been one of the greatest scourges in human life. In the 20th century, many people lost their lives in two world wars, as well as hundreds of wars, many of which are directly or indirectly related to conflicts between nations. The conflicts between the nations under the Austro-Hungarian Empire led directly to the First World War; the conflict between Serbs and Albanians led directly to the Kosovo war. In less than a century, there are countless examples of the great dangers of national conflicts. Mullah Mohammad Omar, the Taliban's supreme leader, believes that "these idols are infidel gods". Countless treasures of Afghanistan were destroyed, including the Bamiyan Buddhas. This is a great pain not only for religious circles but also for human civilization. However, a similar incident happened again in Afghanistan in 2021.

Common challenges faced by different religions, and common problems faced by different religions, create conditions for inter-religious dialogue. Under the influence of various traditional religions, traditional societies are undergoing the process of modernization. At the same time, the society is also suffering from ills, for example, environmental pollution, resource exhaustion, urban congestion, rampant crime, and so on. To alleviate or eliminate these maladies requires the strength of various traditional religions and cultures; this provides a basis for cooperation between religions. At the same time, secularization, along with modernization, also poses challenges to various religions; different religions need to work together to solve these problems. This allowed for dialogue between religions.

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Academia Tries to Solve Problems

Many religious scholars have tried to solve this problem, and this paper lists three representative examples. John Hick formally proposed the hypothesis of religious pluralism in the early 1980s (1985, Chapter 3). John Hick seeks to find commonalities between religious phenomena. He examined the four major religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, and found that they all share a common redemptionistic structure and space. That is the transformation of human existence from egocentric to reality-centric.

Panica proposes two kinds of religious dialogue: in-religion dialogue and interreligion dialogue. The premise of inter-religious dialogue is intra-religious dialogue. If I do not have room in my heart for another who is different from me, if I as a Christian do not have room in my heart for Buddhists, Hindus, Mohammedans, etc., dialogue cannot proceed (Panikkar, 1999).

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a historian of religion, points out in his classic book *The Meaning and Purpose of Religion* that the world's great religions are not themselves isolated. Together with other elements in their respective cultures, they constitute the major religious traditions. So, there is no isolated Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, etc.; they are all huge social religious entities. Throughout history, religious traditions have largely developed in their own cultural regions. There is also mutual communication and exchange between them, but it is not very common, and their relationship is basically based on mutual exclusion and struggle.

Huayan Buddhism Provides a New Way to Solve the Problem

The first, the heart. "Heart" is the ultimate ontology of Huayan Buddhism. Huayan Buddhism believes that everything in the world is born from Heart and Heart is the common root of things. As it is said in Huayan Buddhism "The mind governs all worldly laws, which is the noumenon of the universe. And there's no difference" (Fa Tsang, 1932a, p. 45). In other words, the heart produces everything, and everything eventually dies out and returns to the heart. According to this way of thinking, the heart of noumenon is the basis of the common existence of all religions, as well as the common goal of all religions. A comparison of different religions shows that, although different religions have different fundamental principles, values, and ways of practice, they share a common starting point and goal, which is to guide people to pursue kindness and maintain kindness, and guide all living beings to pursue a happy life. Therefore, different countries have different social status and face different social problems, but the ultimate purpose of solving social problems is the same. This is what binds religions together. The common starting and ending points between religions lay the foundation for religious dialogue.

The second, Lin and Shi do not interfere. There is an important proposition in Huayan Buddhism "Lin and Shi do not interfere" (Fa Tsang, 1932b, p. 45). It refers to the fact that truth and things depend on each other and that there is no barrier between theory and things. This theory of Huayan is a concrete criterion for practicing religious dialogue. "Li" refers to the values, ways of thinking, principles of belief, and other theories of different religions. "Shi" refers to religious behavior under the guidance of theory. Different religions have different ways of cultivation and practice. There is no contradiction between theory and practice in the same religion. Different religions have different theories and practices, but it is not right to reject or deny other religions just because they have difference. It is also because religions share a common goal that different religious practices can be integrated with one another. This theory of Huayan Buddhism emphasizes that there

is no contradiction between the theory and practice of different religions, and religions can have friendly dialogue and communication. It is an important way of religious dialogue to integrate religious differences with a positive attitude.

The third, Shi and Shi do not interfere. According to Huayan Buddhism, nothing interferes with the truth; everything is the manifestation of the truth. On the other hand, things do not interfere with one another, because they are manifestations of truth. Among all things, there is no difference between the one and the many, and the big and the small are mutually tolerant. The Huayan School of Chinese Buddhism calls it “Shi and Shi do not interfere”. There are various religious acts in the world today, and religious acts should be affirmed on the premise that they conform to this religious theory. Different religions should actively learn and keep an open mind to understand the specific behaviors of other religions, instead of rejecting or denying other religions. The differences in religious behaviors are not the real differences in nature. No matter from the perspective of ontology or practice, integration of other religions with a positive attitude can also promote the progress of one’s own religion. This is the enlightenment that Huayan Buddhism gives us on the question of religious dialogue.

To sum up, the characteristic of Huayan Buddhism is “integration”, from which we can find the answer to the problem of religious dialogue. It is commendable that many religious scholars have made efforts on the problem of religious dialogue. However, the theory of Huayan Buddhism provides a new way of thinking and practice for this problem. In other words, it affirms and respects the differences of religions, and treats different religions from different perspectives in an integrated manner. This method of integration is not only conducive to the friendly coexistence between religions, but also conducive to the communication between different civilizations, which has a positive reference significance for the progress of human civilization.

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