

# The Second Axial Age and Global Dialogue: A Buddhist Perspective\*

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## Abstract

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*Ewert Cousins' theory of a "second axial age" is extrapolated from Jaspers' theory. It proposes that humankind will face a paradigm shift toward a more harmonious dialogue which will unite us after having been dispersed for so long into various religions following the first axial age. The key point lies in predicting the spread of a pan-global value system away from the individual value systems that dominated the first axial age. The present study aims to explore the paradigm shift of religious culture in the Second Axial Age and Buddhism's role and future vision in addressing such changes. First, in the coming second axial age what is the meaning of global dialogue if undertaken with a comprehensive perception of humankind's religious culture? Second, from a Buddhist perspective, how can we understand new civilization that has emerged as a new cultural trend? Third, what is the relationship*

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\*The first draft of this paper was read at the international conference on "Buddhism and the Future World" in Nov. 2012, Geumgang Univ. (Nonsan city, Korea).

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*International Journal of Buddhist Thought & Culture* September 2012, vol. 19, pp. 63-83.

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The day of submission: 2012.6.21 / Completion of review: 2012.7.15 / Final decision for acceptance: 2012.7.26

*between the Second Axial trend and the movement to propagate Buddhism in the West? Through exploration of the aforementioned issues, this paper will delve into the tasks and roles of Buddhism in achieving a horizontal inter-religious fusion and dialogue in the society of the future. As new civilization is growing toward a pluralistic society that transcends boundaries and barriers, the future religious culture should be one of “inter-religious horizontal fusion and dialogue” rather than one of “conflict and judgment.” Buddhism’s open-mindedness should pave the way for a new religious culture, and Buddhists might fulfill their roles toward that end.*

Key words: The Second Axial Age, New Civilization, Global Dialogue, Buddhism, Inter-Religious Fusion.

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## I. Introduction

Scholars present various concepts and theories with regard to the future civilization that began in the latter half of the twentieth century. There are various terms for describing the future society<sup>1</sup>, but the term “post-modern age” is frequently used as a general term to describe civilization’s paradigm shift. The term “post-modern” came about in the context of Western civilization and was initially a criticism of modernism. Recently, it is also used as a global expression to describe the trend of future civilization after the modern age, along with a criticism of Western civilization’s modern and current culture. The post-modern movement has brought about a “value pluralism” that respects diversity while acknowledging differences. The term “post-modernism” evades any certain absolute ideology, but pursues open mindedness instead of uniformity and rigidity.

What is the future direction of human civilization, and how will religious culture change along with it? We can strongly sense that we have already ushered in a rapidly changing age. Futurist Alvin Toffler forecast in

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<sup>1</sup> Terms have emerged such as: space age, information age, electronic era, age of global village, post-industrial society, scientific-technological revolution, super-industrial society, the third wave, the second axial age and post-modern age.

his famous book *The Third Wave* that, “New civilization is emerging in our life” (Tofler 1989, 27). This means that mankind stands at a revolutionary turning point of civilization that will lead to the greatest social change in history and a creative restructuring.

This paper aims to explore the paradigm shift of religious culture in the post-modern age and Buddhism’s role and future vision in addressing such changes. First, in the coming “second axial age” what is the meaning of “global dialogue” if undertaken with a comprehensive perception of humankind’s religious culture? Second, from a Buddhist perspective, how can we understand the postmodernism that has emerged as a new cultural trend? Third, what is the relationship between the post-modern trend and the movement to propagate Buddhism in the West? Through exploration of the aforementioned issues, this paper will delve into the tasks and roles of Buddhism in achieving a horizontal inter-religious fusion and dialogue in the society of the future.

## **II. Theory of the Second Axial Age**

### **A. Jaspers’ Theory of An Axial Age: Mental Awakening and Teaching of Compassion**

The historical legacy of religious conflict and confrontation underlies almost all wars now occurring in many places around the world. They occur chiefly due to complicated religious and racial problems. The doctrinal base of the current religious conflicts lies in ‘The Just War Theory’<sup>2</sup> or in bellicose exclusiveness and fundamentalist religious attitudes. Such religious conflict is likely to continue in the twenty first century.<sup>3</sup> Will we face an unfortunate

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2 The “Just War Theory” was proposed by Augustine (306-37). It claims that wars can be justified under certain conditions. For instance, wars are justified in conditions such as: the punishment of evil, prevention of aggression, protection of innocent people, failed attempts toward peace and wars between states. And it must cause minimal harm to property and non-combatants, and armies must extend compassion to enemies.

3 “Post-Cold War era is composed of seven or eight major civilizations. Cultural similarities and differences define interests, confrontation and cooperation among countries. Surprisingly enough, the world’s most powerful nations originated from distinctively different civilizations. The regional conflicts with a high possibility of expanding to all-out wars are clashes between groups and states belonging to

future due to “the clash of civilizations” and religious wars as alleged by Samuel P. Huntington? Or will there be an age of reconciliation and peace with a harmonization of and dialogue between civilizations? Before discussing this question, we need to broadly examine mankind’s religious civilization history.

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) came up with a religious civilization concept called “axial age” (*Achsenzeit*)<sup>4</sup> (Jaspers 1953, 1-21). The “first axial age” refers to the period between BCE 800 and BCE 200 that witnessed a revolutionary turning point in the history of human consciousness with the rise of great minds like Zoroaster, Buddha, Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Homer, Confucius, Laozi, Muozhi, Jiangzi, Eliya, Jeremiah and Isaiah who all taught a universal love and wisdom to people who had previously been mired in racial ethnocentricity.

It was in this period when philosophy and religion had a far-flung impact on the consciousnesses of human beings, philosophies and religions such as: Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Upanishads, Jainism, Greek philosophy, Zoroaster and monotheistic Judaism. During the pre-axial age, collective, racial and mythological protocols and rituals had been prevalent. But the period after the first axial age saw an enlightenment of universal compassion through mental awakening and self-discovery.

Karen Armstrong, who reinterpreted Jaspers’ axial age concept, concluded that the four areas (China, India, Greece, and Judea) which saw the rise of the first axial age’s spiritual revolution, all suffered from confusion and moral decay due to rapid urbanization, wars, migrations and growth of the population. Against this backdrop, the great minds of the first axial age put first priority on abandoning selfishness while developing compassion and spirituality. This was because “religion itself was compassion.”<sup>5</sup> The wise-men of the axial age commonly taught the so-called Golden Rule or variations of it: “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others,” or in positive terms, “What you wish done to yourself, do to others.”<sup>6</sup> In fact, the

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distinctively different civilizations.” (Huntington 1997, 29).

4 Jaspers (1953, 1-21; 1986, 19-43): Main interpretations for the book are from Armstrong (2011).

5 Refer to Armstrong (2011, 95-154).

golden rule appears in teachings of all the major religions<sup>7</sup> and became a key principle of the world's movement toward morality (Kim 2010a, 298-302). The essential ethical spirit of the golden rule lies in transforming a selfish life into an altruistic one. Teachers in the first axial age taught the "awakening of self," some examples being: Socrates' admonition to "Know thyself," the awakening of the theistic Atman in the Upanishads, the Buddha's enlightenment of Anatta (no-self) and the ethical teachings of the Judaic prophets. All these have become the basic foundation of religions in the East and West.

Owing to the teachings of the great minds of the first axial age, humankind could find and realize real value and meaning as human beings in a real sense (Rigali 1970, 451). After the first axial age, people could ask fundamental questions about self and the world and put ethical courage into practice. By proposing the concept of an "axial age," Jaspers found a unified structure for exploring the history of human thought and the key value of a mental cornerstone of human beings.

Jaspers asserted that mankind reached the first axial age by way of using fire and tools in the prehistoric Proteus age and will reach the second axial age of the future via the first axial age. Karen Armstrong, a proponent of the axial age theory, suggested that modern people should seek out the ethics of the first axial age.

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6 "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others," or in positive terms, "What you wish done to yourself, do to others." (Armstrong 2011, 6). Analects 12:2, The Golden Rule of Christianity is phrased in different ways.

7 Despite different styles of expression, the spirit of the Golden Rule is universally seen in all religions. Zoroaster (BCE 628-551): "What is good for others is also good for me. What is regarded as good for you is also good for others." and "Only the law that can be applied to all people is the true one." (Gathas 43:1). Confucius (BCE 551-479): "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others" (Analects 12:2, 15:23). Gautama Buddha (BCE 624-544): "As you save your life, avoid suffering and want pleasure, so others do the same. So do not kill others or let them be killed" (Sutta Nipata 705, Samyutta Nikaya Verse 353). Hindu lyric Mahabharata (BCE 3): "What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others" (Mahabharata, Anusasana Parva 113.8). Jewish Torah (BCE 5): "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Book of Leviticus 19:18). Jesus (CE 1): "What you wish done to yourself, do to others" (Matthew 7:12). Muhammad (570-632): "The best religion is this. Let others enjoy what you like to do. What is suffering to you is also suffering to others" (Hadith Iman 71:2). Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): "Never regard others as tools. Treat them objectively" (Kritik der praktischen Vernunft 54) etc. See Swidler (1999, 19-21).

We need to rediscover the ethos of the first axial age.  
We are not supposed to and have no room to assert unilateral and non-inclusive perspectives in the age of the global village.  
(Armstrong 2011, 6).

Jaspers' historical view of human thought enables us to explore comprehensively mankind's past and future. Based on Jasper's historical philosophy, Hans Kueng developed the concept of the "Macro-Paradigm-Shift," (Kueng 1987, 153) followed by Ewert Cousins' theory of a "Second Axial Period."

#### B. The Second Axial Age: Shift from Monologue to Global Dialogue

The history of religion has witnessed many paradigm shifts. In this context, the concept of paradigm, according to physician Thomas Kuhn, refers to "the structure of beliefs and values of the members of certain groups" (Cousin 1993, 417-25). A paradigm is a basic model and explanation for our perceptions of the world. Paradigms exist in science and liberal arts, and in sociology. They frame our viewpoint of the world, and religion can be regarded as a paradigm. Paradigms and exemplary models are the overall criteria through which we observe and interpret all the information we acquire. The development of science and culture is possible through a revolutionary paradigm shift.

The history of religion reveals that it changes and develops when triggered by paradigm shifts. In the West, the fusion of Greek civilization and Judaism had a far-reaching impact on Judaism. In Catholicism, there were several paradigm shifts, such as the Protestant Reformation, the Second Vatican Catholic Council and the Ecumenical movement. In the history of Buddhism, there were also major paradigm shifts, some being: the partisan division of original Buddhism into various sects, the Mahayana movement, the foundation of vajra-yana, the spread of Buddhism into China, the rise of Zen Buddhism and the Westernization of Buddhism. Though it is difficult and takes time for a paradigm to evolve into another paradigm, it rapidly develops

once it passes a certain point of inflection.

Oriental religions perceived that a future era would emerge through harmony and reconciliation which would ensure mutual survival, overcoming the previous era's conflict and confrontation. In the West, since the 1960s, the number of people predicting the advent of a new age with the astrological shift from Pisces to Aquarius, the 11th astrological sign of the Western zodiac, has been increasing. This so-called "new age" religious movement began in the early 70s against this backdrop.

Ewert Cousins' theory of a "second axial age" (Cousin 1993, 417-25) is extrapolated from Jaspers' theory. It proposes that humankind will face a paradigm shift toward a more harmonious dialogue which will unite us after having been dispersed for so long into various religions following the first axial age (Cousin 1992). The key point of Cousins' second axial age theory lies in predicting the spread of a pan-global value system away from the individual value systems that dominated the first axial age. Even though, up till now, mankind has diversified and developed separate cultures in communities comprised of tribes and races, various cultures have begun to adopt a more global culture with the rapid development of transportation and communications, coupled with rapid informatization.<sup>8</sup> Experts claim that such a cultural melding into a global community will require a global consciousness, and that future culture will develop in accordance with the theory of evolution. According to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, global consciousness contains the diversity of all people's cultures. But with a creative alliance, the diversification of a complex consciousness and alliance will result in a more varied and creative coalition. In this process, the diversified cultures may "recognize others as self" while maintaining their own identities.<sup>9</sup>

Cousins' new vision of religious culture tries to find a universal principle that connects the past and future based on evolution. In other words, humankind needs to integrate into a universal consciousness prior to the

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8 To develop his theory, Cousins adopted the evolution theory of archeologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. From a viewpoint of planetization, there were migrations of the forces seeking evolution over the past several centuries and they were "migrations from division to integrity." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1965); Refer to Cousins (1981).

9 Refer Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1965, 262).

second axial period while sustaining the self-discovery, rational thinking and compassion which developed in the first axial age. It indicates a need to discover a pan-global common ground that recognizes all mankind as a single race. Such a vision necessitates discovering a common ground for mutual dialogue and exchange between the world's religions and cultures with a pan-global consciousness. In this vein, Cousins' suggestion can be considered organic and ecological toward achieving a global religious pluralism.

Leonard Swidler concurred with Ewert Cousins and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin concerning the theory of global consciousness, through which they claimed we can achieve inter-religious communication and "shift from an age of monologue to global dialogue" (Swidler 1996, 224-25). He alleged that mankind needs to explore new ways of perceiving the truth through a revolutionary shift of consciousness and dialogue.

The religions of the world are the results of divisive forces that took form during the first axial age, and this change in consciousness took place during the first millennium BC in various areas among different cultures. Each religion took a form based on its own uniqueness and progressed by different methods. This also led to the creation of rich religious and cultural entities which could express, conserve and inherit that religion's superior wisdom, mental prowess and relevant legacy. But divisive forces isolated them from each other creating the need for an alliance. Each religion should strive to see the truthfulness of other religions and that religious rituals are required to exercise creative power toward greater development. (Swidler 1996, 224-25)

Global consciousness can develop further through intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. The modern age is a stage for religious change from divisiveness to integration. However, Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations differs sharply from Cousins' theory of the second axial period in that it focuses only on religious differences in the new age. In particular, Huntington strongly emphasizes the possibility of a major clash between Islamic nations and the Confucian-oriented Chinese, both of which have strong antagonism against Western Christianity. He writes:

Of the civilizations, only the West had far-reaching and sometimes destructive impact upon all civilizations. Accordingly, the relationship of power and culture between the West and the other civilizations is still vivid in the history of human civilization. As the power of other civilizations grows, the impact of the Western civilizations diminishes, prompting other civilizations to have stronger pride and confidence in their aboriginal cultures. The key issue in the relationship between the West and non-West is in the disharmony that occurs in the process of making efforts to press ahead with the universality of the Western culture, more specifically, the discrepancy between the efforts by the United States and the inability of the West in reality. (Huntington 1997, 243-44)

Francis Fukuyama, in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, (Fukuyama 1992, 21-23) predicted that future history will enter a stage of perfection rather than incompatibility and that the Christian concept of “doomsday” will be realized with the victory of liberal democracy. The current ongoing trend of cultural and economic globalization should be reviewed from a macro-perspective of human civilization. Now is the time to pay heed to the assertions of Jaspers and Cousins who viewed human civilization from a broad macro-perspective rather than in terms of simple politico-economic theories and competition-oriented elitist fundamentalism. Future society should be able to achieve reconciliation and smooth communication through the interaction of civilizations.

## **II. How to Understand the Post-modern Trend**

Ewert Cousins’ theory of the “second axial age” requires a major shift of perception from a hitherto elitist and narrow-minded view of the world. In this context, postmodernism can be regarded as a cultural movement that already possesses the necessary ideology to bring about the second axial age. Originally, postmodernism appeared along with the student movements in Europe and the avant garde movement of the 1960s. The post-modern trend focuses on a criticism of Christian-influenced<sup>10</sup> Western civilization, or an

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10 Following are books critical of Western civilization: refer to Spengler (1922, 1923) and Sorokin

anti-establishment movement<sup>11</sup> that pursues new values through criticism of the status quo. The trend was ultimately motivated by humankind's inner desire for fundamental freedoms and a spirit of "crossing the border or closing the gap." Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was one outstanding postmodernist thinker.<sup>12</sup> In opposition to Hegel's emphasis on absolute logic, he emphasized the metaphysics of will power and an irrationality based on existentialist philosophy. Schopenhauer greatly influenced existentialism, psychoanalysis and nihilism. He also greatly affected noted anti-metaphysical philosophers like Nietzsche, Freud, Kierkegaard, Wergosong, Wittgenstein and Derrida. Instead of dualism, postmodernism cherishes pluralism and universalism while acknowledging differences and uniqueness rather than similarities and sameness.

Philosophically, postmodernism heaps criticism on substantialist theology and the metaphysical tradition, which had dominated Western thought with its falsehoods and elitism, in an attempt to break down its rationalism, the key thought process of modernism. With the perspective that the absoluteness of reason prohibits free thought, postmodernism tries to be free from all fixed ideologies. Thus, postmodernism naturally respects diversity and embraces a pluralism which acknowledges diversity and individual differences. Since the 1960s, the dissolution of absolutist ideologies resulted in a fresh religious and spiritual movement, leading to the "new age" movement and other social and cultural campaigns. In this sense, postmodernism can be considered a new cultural paradigm which has been developing along with the spirit of the later modern period.

The post-modern movement's criticisms have had a major impact in remolding the Christian-dominated Western civilization. It is also having a big influence on the spread of Buddhism in the West as it is an ideology that opposes the metaphysical and religious culture of the West. The response from Christianity to postmodernism was critical, of course. Christianity regarded

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(1941).

11 Zygmunt Bauman cites the following four books regarding the characteristics of postmodernism, (a) *The Decline of the West*, (b) *The Legitimization Crisis*, (c) *The Intellectual Marketplace*, (d) and *The Process of Deconstruction* (Bauman 1992, 35-52).

12 Schopenhauer led the move to introduce Buddhism into the West. Schopenhauer is thought to have been introduced to Buddhism through such books as: Burnouf (1844), Spence Hardy (1853, 1858).

postmodernism as a sort of atheism as the latter denies the supernatural and absolute being while attempting to break down the philosophy of substantialism. But some reform-minded theologians are exploring a theory of post-modernism which combines postmodernism and theology.<sup>13</sup>

In contrast, Buddhism, given its nature, was not offended by the postmodernist trend. That was because postmodernism and Buddhism had a similar way of thinking. As a matter of fact, Buddhism precedes postmodernism in terms of thesis. So it can be said that both Buddhism and postmodernism pursue a similar objective. As Buddhism is essentially opposed to the philosophy of substantialism, its origin shares some similarities with the origin of Western postmodernism. But we should not overlook the fact that there is a sharp difference between postmodernism in the context of Western civilization and modernism as it is understood by Buddhists.

Nihilism, which was the philosophical origin of postmodernism, created problems for academic attempts to define and categorize it. Postmodernism pursues “universalization of contradiction” as a scholastic method of systemizing a new thesis with rational theories (Murti 1960, 125). As a result, a view or opinion is mapped out, through which one may judge all things. Nietzsche’s stance is similar to Buddhism’s Madhyamika. All philosophical systems attempt to set up such a view (*drsti*), which the Madhyamika sees as the source of all problems (Kim 2010b, 92). Thus, the Madhyamika’s Prajna dialectic tries to break down such philosophical systems rather than create them.

In postmodernism, there was a major shift in the way of perceiving the world from a “substantialist way of thinking” to a “relationalist way of thinking.” In the history of Western philosophy, all substantialist thinking is regarded as metaphysics, while the philosophy of nihilism proposed by Nietzsche, tended to break down such substantialism. In this sense,

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13 Post-modern theology attempts new interpretations regarding the following subjects: the overcoming of Christ-centered theology and afterlife-oriented salvation theory, the formation of a sound pluralism apart from Christian absolutism, the normalization of the social and in-church authority of the clergy, the respect of spiritual identity for the underprivileged, multidimensional approaches in relations between children, women and the Holy Spirit and the formation of a spiritual platform for the preservation of nature and the environment (Hwang 2004, 8).

post-modernist thinking can be understood as a sort of relation-focused thinking that is similar to Buddhism's concept of karma. It is a known fact that the Western way of thinking is closely related to the Buddhist way of thinking. From the Buddhist standpoint, it can be understood that the Buddha's concept of karma, first taught some 2,500 years ago, is closely connected to postmodernism in that they both try to deconstruct an existing tradition. As a result, postmodernism helps facilitate the spread of Buddhism in the West. Buddhism welcomes all post-modern thoughts and trends, and we must recognize that this can be used as a stepping stone for the globalization of Buddhism.

We need to pay heed to the fact that Buddhism does not entirely deny rational thought as postmodernism does. On the contrary, Buddha's initial teachings were mainly based on rationalism. Buddha criticized blindly believing in things that were not confirmed by experience. "Don't be attracted to any dogma due to tradition and authority. Accept and follow things only when they are useful, sound and good" (*Anguttara Nikaya* I.18). This teaching is meant to prevent people from following a unilateral dogma by applying the rational spirit of criticism.

While postmodernism stresses anti-reason, anti-philosophy and anti-science, Buddhism, though it emphasizes rationalism, also stresses a non-discriminating mind which transcends rationalism. In this vein, it can be said that Buddhism has the logical structure of non-dualistic dualism. While recognizing life, death and nirvana, the holy and the secular, and common people and the Buddha, as being one and the same in essence, it also pursues wisdom in the real world. Buddhism's "Sunyata" attempts to simultaneously understand "one and many" and "sameness and difference" rather than asserting non-dualism. People can transcend reason through reason. In particular, the Madhyamika Sunyatavada cautions against the dangers of scriptural language, but on the other hand, it also cites its effectiveness if without through the scriptures and language. So it does not unconditionally deny rationality. All of mankind's problems arise because of bad judgments based on reason, as well as through the innate defects of rationality and

intellectualism. Proper rationality is needed to prevent possible bad judgments. The principle of “criticizing reason with reason” was employed by the Frankfurt faction and is similar to Buddhism's concept of language. Buddhism does not embrace both postmodernism and nihilism, a fact which fundamentally distances it from postmodernism.

The twenty first century's postmodernist trend and the new religious culture are based on pluralism and open mindedness. Postmodernism rejects an absolutization of truth. So, it pursues the destruction of existing religious authority and ideologies. The spread of Buddhism in the West is having a deep impact on the spread of postmodernism. Buddhism has some things in common with ideologies that are critical of modern civilization and romanticism, but which advocate vitalism, the beat generation, the new age movement and the “green campaign” now prevalent in the West. Postmodernism has similarities with Buddhism in that it stresses unlimited open-mindedness. Buddhism can be an alternative to overcoming the limitations of a dubious civilization centered on Western logic. Additionally, Buddhism can help overcome the limitations of post-modernist thought in that it pursues a future harmony between humankind and nature, between unilateralism and pluralism, and between instinct and rationality.

### **III. The Task of Buddhism in Achieving Horizontal Fusion and Inter-religious Dialogue**

Buddhism faces the task of putting an end to the confrontation and conflict among religions and ideologies, thus opening the door to dialogue. I will suggest the following in regard to achieving such inter-religious and ideological horizontal fusion and dialogue.

First, there is an increasing need for a new paradigm shift concerning the flow and direction of the world's religious history. Religion, an important part of the history of human civilization, is a consequence of history and culture. As religious dogma and scripture are also products of a linguistic culture, they are not absolute truth. Rather, we should recognize that they are

linguistic and cultural expressions of human beings and are relative. Historically, all religions are in the process of change. Hermeneutics scholars like Hans-Georg Gadamer reviewed history by emphasizing the subjectivity of all interpretation. All knowledge is subject to interpretation, and the subjects and objects of recognition are in circular relationships. Religious symbols and value systems are also relative and based on history. In this sense, postmodernism plays an important role in breaking down fixed views of truth. In order to shed new light on the world's religious history, Buddhists should explore more deeply "Religious Buddhism" or "Religious Understanding of Buddhism" as well as theology.

Second, we need to take advantage of the West's post-modern trend and use it as a stepping stone toward the globalization of Buddhism. Post-modernistic thinking is relative and very similar to the Buddhist way of thinking. Buddhism also shares some similarities with Western social movements which advocate vitalism, naturalism, the beat generation, the new age movement, and the green campaign. Because postmodernism is based on pluralism and open-mindedness, the spread of Buddhism in the West is having a broad impact on the scope of the postmodern movement. Buddhist thought can be an alternative to overcoming the limitations of a dubious Western civilization and can help overcome the limitations of post-modern thought by creating a harmony between unilateralism and pluralism.

Third, Buddhists need to be more broad-minded compared to followers of other religions in order to promote a deeper understanding among different religions. To this end, they also need to understand in depth the religious character and spiritual values of the major religions. They should bear in mind the maxim which says, "The truth under heaven is not two and neither are the minds of the saints." Concerning their attitude toward other religions, Korean Buddhists tend to be exclusive within its organization but inclusive in its interpretation of doctrine (Kim 2002, 138-39). They also show a pluralist trend in terms of religious experience. There can be many barometers in determining what a seasoned religious person is, but<sup>14</sup> they largely refer to

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14 William James described seasoned religious character as "saintliness." "Saintliness" features (a) Feeling of having a broader and greater existence beyond daily routine and interests, (b) Consciousness of

those living truth-oriented lives instead of egocentric ones. They strive to live a life of compassion without discriminating between self and others. They are true to themselves and their own beliefs. They try to understand the essence of other religions and what they have in common, as well as inter-religious differences.

Fourth, Buddhists need to respect the uniqueness of each religion while acknowledging the differences. It is better to begin inter-religious dialogue by acknowledging and accepting the uniqueness of each religion rather than trying to establish ground rules. For a creative “dialogue between religions and ideologies,” Swidler differentiates real dialogue from a mere debate to attack others’ assertions. He suggested three conditions necessary for real dialogue: (a) In a mutually harmonious atmosphere, those seeking dialogue need to acknowledge each other’s value while avoiding misunderstanding. (b) Participants need to try to put themselves in each other’s position and understand each other’s true value. Through this, both sides will become mutually enriched. This can be a very precious experience because in doing this each participant can view their own religion from the viewpoint of a different religion. What is important here is to respect the autonomy of other traditions. Unity can be accomplished by respecting the differences in order to create a basis for dialogue. (c) Once a creative alliance is achieved, an inter-religious fusion can occur, which, hopefully, will come to characterize the twenty first century. This could be the beginning of a truly global consciousness rather than a divided and abstract consciousness. True global consciousness must come about through a fusion of the world’s various cultures and religions which should pave the way for true and meaningful global dialogue (Swidler 1996, 226). Swidler’s rules of dialogue<sup>15</sup> acknowledge

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intimacy and continuity between ideal power and self. (c) State of mind replete with freedom and boundlessness by transcending selfishness. (d) A harmonious mind full of love and affection (James 1902, 266-67).

15 Leonard Swidler suggested the following ten rules as Ground Rules for Inter-religious and Inter-ideological Dialogue: (1) The first goal of dialogue is to learn. It is to change and grow in understanding and recognition of reality, putting them into practice. (2) The inter-religious and inter-ideological dialogue should be planned reciprocally. It must be an in-house plan within a religious or ideological organization or within an inter-religious or inter-ideological one. The fruits of the dialogue should be shared within the community. In this way, all the communities can consequently learn and engage in dialogue, thus being able to get a real picture of the situation more vividly. (3) Each

religious differences and religious autonomy in order to start “creative dialogue” which differs from that of religious pluralists who focus on inter-religious ground rules. Pluralism is based on open-mindedness and a respect for the uniqueness of each religion, rather than on unilateralism. The universality of a religious truth should be recognizable from various levels of consciousness, and deep religious experience is needed to understand that universality and uniqueness are not necessarily contradictory.

Fifth, we need to seek a model for inter-religious horizontal fusion and dialogue in the Buddha’s attitude toward other religions. From the beginning, Buddhism has maintained a generous and harmonious attitude toward other religions and cultures. Buddha possessed a wise and embracing attitude toward various claims of truth. But he heaped strong criticism on teachings which contradicted the law of karma, and taught that any judgment on truth should be confirmed by individual experience rather than blind belief or obedience to traditional authority. Based on a spirit of compassion, he showed a generous and embracing stance toward other religions and beliefs. Buddha’s compassion toward other religions was based on a “critical tolerance” (Jayatilleke 1975; Coward 1985, 81), and should be emulated in this age.

Sixth, in order to help resolve inter-religious and inter-ideological tension, we need to re-examine Wonhyo’s practice of harmonious hermeneutics. Buddhism’s practice of tolerance began with Buddha’s teaching of “non-violence” and with Mahayana’s Sunyata which taught non-adherence to all concepts and transcending all viewpoints. By inheriting the true tradition of the Buddha, Wonhyo achieved a pluralistic interpretation of the truth that encompassed diverse claims of truth by all scriptures and religions (Kim 2010c, 23-57). Wonhyo’s principle of reconciliation harmonized differing assertions within Buddhism itself and eased inter-religious and inter-ideological

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participant must engage in the dialogue strictly and faithfully. If needed, the participants should clearly explain the difficulties facing their traditions. (4) Participants should not compare ideals and practices in inter-religious and inter-ideological dialogues. (5) Each participant should clarify his or her own stance. (6) Each participant should not engage in the dialogue with a fixed premise regarding differences of opinion. (7) Dialogue can arise between participants on the same degree and at the same level. (8) Dialogue is possible only on condition of mutual trust. (9) Those participating in the inter-religious or inter-ideological dialogue should not be forced to criticize their own religion or ideological tradition. (10) Each participant should be ready to experience the religion and ideology of others “from within” (Swidler 1990, 42-45).

confrontation and conflict. Wonhyo practiced a one-mind-oriented pluralism that recognized the universality of all religions and the teachings of all religious leaders as aspects of Buddhism. Wonhyo's harmonizing hermeneutics acknowledged diversity and difference and was an attempt to reconcile claims of truth, hermeneutics and dialogue. Wonhyo held the belief that all paths are ultimately the same (H. 1, 489a), and his ultimate interest was in living a free and boundless life. Wonhyo attempted to embrace all religions as a single truth. This is illustrated by his attempts to include and understand other doctrines like Samkya and Jainism, as well as the "Three Ways in the One Way" concept (H. 1, 489a). Wonhyo suggested a comprehensive way of recognizing truth to those who have a certain ideology and position. He was open-minded in acknowledging others' assertions and differences without being limited by his own religion or doctrine. Those who really know truth do not make unilateral assertions and do not become the slaves of allegedly absolute truth. Wonhyo's hermeneutics is characterized by fusion while avoiding uniformity. As they are not one, they belong to all, and as they are not different they are one. Such an application of hermeneutics can be used to create dialogue for finding a common ground among the various religions in their efforts toward reconciliation in this era of religious pluralism. It may also be used to resolve conflict within the Buddhist community itself.

Lastly, because Buddhism, more than any other religion, possesses a doctrine and tradition of pursuing understanding and cooperation with other religions, Buddhists need to lead the way in the promotion of world peace and become more mature believers. As religious people in the real sense, we need to take the lead in creating inter-religious dialogue. Buddhism respects the relative nature of truth, utilizes a scriptural language, is not attached to any alleged truth and has a "positionless position" regarding the exploration of truth.

In light of this, Buddhism's religious pluralism can be described as "negativism open to pluralism." Buddhism can suggest an ideal model of inter-religious dialogue in this multi-religious society due to its respect for freedom in the exploration of truth, its generosity toward other religions, and

the dynamism of Sunyata thought that can break down closed doctrines and traditions. Now that civilization is growing toward a pluralistic society that transcends boundaries and barriers, the future religious culture should be one of “inter-religious horizontal fusion and dialogue” rather than one of “conflict and judgment.” Buddhism’s open-mindedness should pave the way for a new religious culture, and Buddhists might fulfill their roles toward that end.

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## Abbreviation

*H* *Hanguk Bulgyo Jeonseo* (韓國佛教全書, Collected works of Korean Buddhism) [followed by volume, page, and horizontal column]. Seoul: Dongguk Univ. Press, 1977–2004.

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