การใช้วิถีพุทธในการจัดการกับความยากในการเสวนาทางศาสนา: กรณีศึกษาของ ทีฆนิกาย และ มัชฌิมนิกาย

Buddhist Way of Dealing with Difficult Interreligious Dialogue: A Study of the Dighanikaya and Majjhimanikaya

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บทคัดย่อ

การเสวนาระหว่างศาสนาหรือการเผชิญหน้ากันระหว่างคนที่มีหรือแนวคิดด้านศาสนาที่แตกต่างกันนั้นมีประวัติศาสตร์มายาวนาน อย่างไรก็ตามการเสวนาระหว่างศาสนาสมัยใหม่ได้เริ่มต้นในฝั่งตะวันตก โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งในการประชุมของรัฐสภาโลกในเมืองชิคาโก ปี ค.ศ.1893 และการขับเคลื่อนด้านเอกสัมพันธ์อย่างรวดเร็วของคริสเตียนในศตวรรษที่ 20 การเสวนาระหว่างศาสนาได้รับการยอมรับว่าเป็นเครื่องมือที่สำคัญเพื่อแก้ปัญหาความขัดแย้งและสร้างสันติภาพในสังคมพหุนิยม อย่างไรก็ตาม ในการเสวนามีอุปสรรคและข้อจำกัดหลายประการ ซึ่งนักวิชาการหลายท่านพยายามนำเสนอหลักการที่จะควรทำและไม่ควรทำเพื่อหลีกเลี่ยงปัญหาในการเสวนา อย่างไรก็ตาม ผู้เขียนเห็นว่า การหลีกเลี่ยงปัญหาไม่ใช่คำตอบที่ยั่งยืน ดังนั้นจึงเสนอว่าผู้เสวนาจำเป็นต้องมีการอบรมทักษะการสนทนาเพื่อจัดการกับปัญหาในการเสวนา น่าจะเป็นสิ่งที่ทำให้ลดความจำกัดในการเสวนาได้ ซึ่งก็ยังขาดวรรณกรรมด้านทักษะการสนทนาอยู่ ฉะนั้นงานวิจัยฉบับนี้จะมีส่วนช่วยสำหรับช่องว่างนี้ การมองเข้าไปในปัญญาของพระพุทธเจ้าตามแบบดั้งเดิม โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการพิจารณาทีฆนิกายและมัชฌิมนิกายของหลักธรรมบาลีของชาวพุทธผ่านการวิเคราะห์เชิงเนื้อหา เพื่อดึงเอาวิธีการที่พระพุทธเจ้าได้จัดการกับความยากของการเสวนาทางศาสนาอย่างมีประสิทธิภาพ วัตถุประสงค์ของการศึกษาครั้งนี้คือเพื่อระบุประเดินของบทสนทนาที่ยากที่พระพุทธเจ้าเผชิญ และวิธีการสื่อสารที่พระพุทธเจ้าใช้ในการจัดการบทสนทนาเหล่านั้น เพื่อลดปัญหาและเพิ่มประโยชน์สูงสุดให้กับทุกคน ผลของการศึกษานี้จะช่วยทำให้การปฏิบัติด้านการเสวนาทางศาสนาดีขึ้นและขับเคลื่อนต่อไปในอนาคต

คำสำคัญ : การเสวนาทางศาสนา**;** ทักษะการสนทนา**;** พระพุทธเจ้า**;** พระสุตตันตปิฎก

Abstract

Interreligious dialogue, or the encounter between people of different religions or worldviews, has a long history. However, modern interreligious dialogue movement started in the West, specifically the 1**893** World's Parliament of Religion in Chicago, and accelerated with Christian ecumenical movements in the twentieth century. Interreligious dialogue has been viewed as an important tool for conflict resolution and building a peaceful pluralistic society. However,

its practice has faced several obstacles and limitations. Scholars have tried to propose principles on dos and don'ts to avoid problems in dialogue. The author argues that avoiding problems might not be a sustainable solution and proposes that dialogue participants need dialogue skills training to deal with problems in dialogue. There is a lack of literature on dialogue skills. This paper contributes to this gap by looking into the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition. It particularly examines the *Dighanikaya* and *Majjhimanikaya* of the Buddhist Pali Canon through a qualitative content analysis method to draw out methods of how the Buddha deals with difficult interreligious dialogues effectively. The objectives of this study are to identify types of difficult dialogue encountered by the Buddha and what communication methods the Buddha uses to handle those dialogues in order to minimize problems and maximize benefits for all. This study hopes to enhance modern interreligious dialogue practice and move it forward into the future.

Keywords: Interreligious Dialogue; Dialogue Skills; Buddha; Suttapitaka

1. Introduction

Modern interreligious dialogue has over a century-long development. Scholars trace its origin to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. It accelerated with Christian ecumenical movements in the twentieth century (Swidler, 2014b, pp. 379-380). Interreligious dialogue has been recognized as an important tool for building a peaceful pluralistic society (Swidler, 2000; Merdjanova and Brodeur, 2009). However, its practice has not been easy but full

of problems and challenges. For example, studies of Buddhist-Christian dialogue around the world show that this dialogue has faced various problems such as misunderstanding, weariness, skepticism, rejection for fear of losing one's religious identity, incompatibility of the belief system, one-sided motivation for dialogue (Fleming, 2002; Humbertclaude, 1970; Ingram & Streng, 1986; Lai & Bruck, 2001; Pieris, 1988). Similarly Muslim-Christian dialogue such as that in the United States experiences problems such as high tensions in confrontational dialogues or doctrinal debates; participants' being tired of the superficiality of a safe kind of dialogue that stops at the exchange of religious information; suspicion of being proselytized, avoidance for fear of conflict, and being tired of talks, and so on (Smith, 2007, pp. 64–65). Consequently, interreligious dialogue in most places is maintained as an activity of a small circle of the religious elite mostly male elite.

Some scholars and practitioners of interreligious dialogue have tried to minimize problems by proposing principles on dos and don'ts that dialogue participants should observe such as no confrontation, no debate, no superior truth claim, no negative criticism, and no proselytization (King, 2014, p.18; Suwanbubbha, 2004, pp. 157–158; Swidler, 2014a, pp. 39–67). These principles aim to avoid or prevent problems in dialogue. However, avoiding problems is not a sustainable solution. This paper proposes that dialogue skills are needed to overcome obstacles in dialogue. There is a lack of literature on dialogue skills. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore some insights into how to deal with difficult dialogues by learning from the Buddha's dialogue skills in the Buddhist Pali Canon, particularly the two collections of the *Suttapitaka: Dighanikaya* (Collection of Long Discourses) (D) and *Majjhimanikaya* (Collection of Middle Length Discourses) (M).

The *Suttapitaka* is a rich source of interreligious dialogue. The Buddha is described as a dialogue expert. He skillfully communicates and transforms many of his dialogue partners including those who view him as rival and enemy into positive attitudes. For forty-five years of dialogue, he accumulated and passed

down many of his dialogue insights to his disciples. Therefore, his wisdom and experience are valuable for learning and enhancing the work of interreligious dialogue for peacebuilding in our time. Particularly this study addresses two questions:

1) What kinds of difficult dialogue does the Buddha encounter?
2) How does the Buddha deal with problems arising in those dialogues?

The objectives of this study are to identify types of difficult dialogue encountered by the Buddha and what communication methods the Buddha uses to handle those dialogues in order to minimize problems and maximize benefits for all.

2. Defining Interreligious Dialogue

Over a long period of theorization and practice, scholars have tried to clarify the meaning of interreligious dialogue. As a result, the concept has received various definitions from broad to narrow ones. For example, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue has a broad definition of dialogue. Dialogue is defined as "a way of living" that includes all aspects of life where people from different religions live and work together and go through all events of human life (Borrmans, 1990, pp. 28–30). The *Dialogue Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia* lists four forms of dialogue: (1) dialogue of life as the above, (2) dialogue of works or cooperation between different religions for solving social problem and advancing human welfare, (3) dialogue of experts or dialogue of theological exchange, and (4) dialogue of religious experience where religious people experience rituals, values, and practices of another religious tradition (Chia, 2001, p.36). In contrast to those broad ways of understanding dialogue, Lynn A. de Silva (1919-82), a Methodist pastor who was key in dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, has a narrow definition of interreligious dialogue as follows:

> Dialogue is not a pleasant conversation, nor a controversy nor a negotiation nor an argument. Dialogue is a discussion, verbal or written, in a sincere effort to reach mutual understanding. It is an earnest effort to

appreciate the truth in the other's convictions together with an unequivocal articulation of one's own convictions (L. A. de Silva, 1966, p.i).

In this study, based on the nature of the Buddha's dialogues with people of other faiths, interreligious dialogue is defined as "'verbal communication' between the Buddha and people of other religious views and worldviews for various purposes in which the Buddha uses his religious view to address the issues raised" (Le, 2023, pp. 7-8). Based on the Pali Canon, people come to him for various purposes such as political consultation, settling doctrinal disputes, clarifying rumors or accusations, seeking truth, and so on. In this sense, this study has a broad understanding of dialogue purpose as compared to the popular scholarly understanding which restricts dialogue purpose to "a mutual exchange" between "equals" (Swidler, 2000, p.9; Merdjanova & Brodeur, 2009, p. 15).

3. The Buddha's Attitudes toward the Religious Others in the Pali Canon

Studies of the Buddha's attitudes toward other religions in the Pali Canon have been few and can be grouped into three groups. The first group includes studies that frame the Buddha's attitudes towards other religions according to the Western Christian paradigm or the three truth models: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. They place the Buddha's attitudes from exclusivism to somewhere between inclusivism and pluralism. For instance, Richard P. Hayes argues for the Buddha's exclusivist attitude toward other religions because the Buddha views Nibbana (the Buddhist highest stage of liberation) and the Noble Eightfold Path as the only one ultimate goal and method of attaining it (Hayes, 1991). In contrast, J. Abraham Velez de Cea asserts that the Buddha has a pluralistic inclusivism perspective rather than an exclusive one. The Buddha recognizes different teachings of other religions as long as they are compatible with the Dhamma and the Noble Eightfold Path. The Buddha only excludes specific teachings rather than the whole tradition (de Cea, 2013). The

limitation of this first approach is that it is restricted to doctrinal aspect and ignores practical issues such as dialogue skills.

The second group includes those writings that explore the positive values of Buddhism that promote interreligious dialogue such as “deep listening”, respect for different views, non-argumentative attitude, non-dogmatism, rationality, tolerance, openness, and loving kindness (P. de Silva, 2009; Jayatilleke, 1987; Sek, 2017). Though some of the values can be considered as dialogue skills such as “deep listening”, “rationality”, this area of dialogue skills has not been well studied.

The third group of literature has a pragmatic view of the Buddha’s attitude toward other religions. For example, Elizabeth J. Harris argues that the Buddha of the Pali Canon has five different faces in response to the religious others: respectful debate, teaching ideas that opposed those taught by others, ridicule of the ‘other’, subordination of the ‘other, and appropriation of the ‘other’ (Harris, 2013). In Harris’ description, Buddha of the Pali Canon appears as superior to his dialogue partner. Toshiichi Endo explains that the Buddha of the early Buddhist source is not an ordinary person in eye of the Buddhists who compiled the scripture. They viewed him as an ideal human being and attributed more excellent qualities to him in the process of developing the scripture because they considered this way as the most sincere and affective to pay homage to the Buddha (Endo, 2002, pp. 6–10). However, it does not mean that the Buddha’s excellent qualities has no validity. According to Stephen J. Laumakis, though basic facts of the historical Buddha’s life are “really quite few”, the number of his followers after his death and the durability of his teachings reveal that he was among few human beings who could leave such impact and legacy (Laumakis, 2008, pp.5–8). Historically, the Buddha lived in a challenging and demanding intellectual environment where different religious leaders and philosophers tried to assert their own truth claim and compete with each other through philosophical debates (Laumakis, 2008, pp.7–9). It is not difficult to imagine how

sharp the Buddha's intellect and communication skills were when he was able to encounter all those people and successfully established his teaching and community. The Pali Canon is the oldest and most complete record of those powerful and difficult dialogues.

In the eye of some modern dialogue scholars, the Buddha might not be seen as a role model for interreligious dialogue because he appears superior to his dialogue partner in virtue, wisdom, and communication skills. There is a view that dialogue should be between "equals" in knowledge of their traditions and so on because such equality facilitates two-way communication (Swidler, 2014a, pp.23–24, 49). However, in reality, interreligious dialogue can take place in any form and any context. People enter into dialogue for various purposes rather than only one purpose (for exchanging religious ideas and mutual understanding as proposed by many scholars), and people are not always equal in knowledge, virtue, and skills. In my opinion, the gaps in virtue, wisdom, and communication skills between dialogue participants are good space for learning and transformation in dialogue. According to Buddhism, it is advisable to meet a noble person who is equal or superior in virtue and wisdom because it helps a person learn and improve oneself (*Dhammapada* 61). Two-way communication can take place in this asymmetrical situation as long as both are respectful to each other and respect the equal opportunity and space for expressing ideas respectfully and being understood. The Buddhist dialogue narratives display this principle of communication.

Moreover, it is helpful to think of interreligious dialogue effectiveness in terms of dialogue skill. Dialogue skill is something that can be learned and mastered to tackle problems in dialogue. Therefore, it is relevant and worth to learn from the Buddha's dialogue skill to enrich our dialogue competency in modern time. Modern dialogue literature has been predominated with regulating people's truth position and attitudes in dialogue to avoid problems while missing out what skills to develop to deal with those problems. This is the gap that this

study fills in by exploring the Buddha's communication methods in dealing with difficult interreligious dialogues.

4. The Buddha, His Dialogue Context, and Dialogue Partners

According to the Theravada tradition, The Buddha was born in 623 B.C.E. and passed away in 543 B.C.E. at the age of eighty. His name is Siddhartha Gautama. He was son of the ruling prince named Suddhodana in a small state called Sakka at the foot of the Himalayas which covered part of southern Nepal and part of Uttarapradesh of India. The word "Buddha" is an appellative title meaning "the Enlightened One." The Mahayanists call him Sakyamuni Buddha. Western scholars refer to him as the Buddha or Gautama the Buddha. Queen Maya gave birth to Prince Siddhartha under a tree in Lumbini Park while she was travelling to the city of her parents, Devadaha. She passed away seven days after his birth. Prince Siddharta belonged to the warrior caste (Pali: *kattiyas*; Sanskrit: *kshatriya*). At the age of 29, he saw the four sights: an old person, a sick person, a corpse, and a recluse. He was awakened with the reality of suffering and the way for liberation. He left his royal life and went to practice several religious ways including self-mortification for six years, but none satisfied him. He decided to find his own way. Under the Bodhi tree after 49 days and nights, he got supreme enlightenment. He became a Buddha. For the next forty-five years, he preached this excellent way of liberation from suffering or the Dhamma to all people without discrimination. He established a community of practice including *bhikkhu* (ordained male monks), *bhikkhuni* (ordained female monks), laymen and laywomen. Many got enlightened as the Buddha did (Chandra-ngarm, 1999, pp. 35–41).

During the Buddha's time in ancient India, religious teachers of different religions could freely move around, investigate and challenge each other's religious view through reasons and persuasion without any bloodshed, riots, or rebellion between adherents of different religious groups. The public benefited

much from those religious disputants and theorists because they sharpened the intellect and deepened the people's thought. It was a golden time of religious tolerance and intellectual freedom. It was called "culture of the mind" (de Zoysa, 1955, pp. 3–4). At the Buddha's time, there existed various and opposite schools of thoughts who debated with one another on various topics ranging from moral to metaphysical, and religious issues (Akira, 1990, p. 17; Jayatilleke, 1963, pp. 115–116). The *Brahmajala Sutta* (D I 1) lists 62 wrong views about the nature of the self and the world.

One of the Buddha's major dialogue partners is the *brahmin* group who believed in a caste system and the *Vedas*. For them, the society was divided into four castes: the *brahmins* or priestly class; the *kattiyas* or the ruling class; the *vessas* or the merchants and agriculturalists; and the *suddas* or the menials and serfs. There were also others outside of those four castes and seen as lower than the suddas (Bodhi, 2005, pp. 112–113). The *brahmins* believed they were superior to the rest. The Buddha belonged to the second caste, the *kattiyas*. Though, according to this system, the *brahmin*'s prescribed role was to be priests or religious profession, they had various professions ranging from religious priests to government officials, and householders who lived on different trades.

The second major dialogue partner of the Buddha was the ascetics called *ajivakas* or *parivajakas* [homeless ones or ones who have gone forth]. John Snelling identified five main sects: (1) the *Ajivakas* founded by Makkhali Gosala who taught that all people would eventually move toward perfection; (2) the *Lokayatas* (the Materialists) founded by Ajita Keshakambalin, a contemporary of the Buddha, who taught that both the fool and the wise will perish when they die so people should seek maximum pleasures when living; (3) the Sceptics who did not believe that truth was utterly attainable. These people wriggled like eels to every question raised to them; (4) the Jains who practiced extreme austerity for believing that it would lead them to liberation. (5) The fifth group was the Buddha and his practice community (Snelling, 1991, pp. 15–16).

The next group that the Buddha often encountered was the political and army leaders (M II 85, 86, 90). This group admired the Buddha for his virtue and wisdom. They sought the Buddha's advice and knowledge on both political and religious issues. Next were clan people (*Anguttaranikaya* 3.65; 4.193), householders (D III 31; MN II 54, 55), and robber (MN II 86). All these groups of people were the dialogue counterparts of the Buddha as recorded in the *Suttapikta*.

5. Research Methodology

This study used a qualitative content analysis (QCA) approach to study the Buddhist narratives of dialogue between the Buddha and people of other faiths in the two collections - *Dighanikaya* and *Majjhimanikaya*. QCA is "a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material" that requires some degree of interpretation. It is best suited for describing the selected aspects of the material guided by the research questions (Schreier, 2012, pp. 1–9). This method was suitable for this study because the study only focused on some aspects of the dialogue narratives, namely the difficult types of dialogue, and the communication methods that the Buddha applied in the dialogues. The study did not aim to give a comprehensive understanding of the Buddha's dialogues that might include other aspects such as the context, the audience, the content, and so on. The expected outcome of the study is a systematic understanding of (1) various types of difficult interreligious dialogue, (2) the Buddha's communication methods in dealing with problems in dialogue. This study does not cover source criticism of the Pali Canon because this is beyond the scope of this paper. In this paper, the Buddha is analyzed as he is described in the text.

6. Types of Difficult Interreligious Dialogue Encountered by the Buddha

From the two collections, *Dighanikaya* and *Majjhimanikaya*, this study found five types of difficult interreligious dialogue. These types are considered as difficult

because they involve sensitive issues such as politics, violent conflict, doctrinal debate and criticism, and negative emotions. If these things are not well handled, they can lead to violent conflicts and other negative consequences.

6.1 Giving political advice and resolving violent conflicts

The first difficult type of interreligious dialogue is dialogue that involves politics and violent conflicts. There are three dialogues found for this type (D I 5; D II 16 (Chapter 1); M II 86). In *Kutadanta Sutta* (D I 5), the Brahmin Kutadanta wants to make a big sacrifice with hundreds of animals ready to be killed. He wants to consult with the Buddha on how to make a successful sacrifice. This dialogue is challenging for the Buddha because he has to negotiate between his principle of no-harm to all living beings and the brahmin's bloody sacrificial system. In *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (D II 16), Chapter 1, King Ajatasattu of Magadha wants to invade and destroy the *Vajjians*, a neighboring clan. He sends his prime minister to seek advice from the Buddha to know whether or not he should do it. The king trusts that the Buddha would never speak untruth. This dialogue involves potential harm towards other human beings, the *Vajjian* clan and a challenge to the Buddha's principle of no harm and honesty. How to resolve the potential violent conflict and give the king a true and satisfactory answer without violating the Buddha's moral principles. In the dialogue in *Angulimala Sutta* (M II 86), the Buddha intentionally passes by the place of the cruel robber, Angulimala who then runs after the Buddha to kill him. The Buddha has a dialogue with the robber while both are running. Finally, the robber is awakened, throws his weapons away, and gets ordained as a monk. Because of Angulimala's numerous committed murders, he is sought by the king and people for punishment. The Buddha has to resolve the next violence through a dialogue with the king. As a result, Angulimala escapes the punishment. However, due to his past evil deeds, Angulimala is attacked by people with stick and stone on his way to collect alms food. The Buddha comforts him with a teaching which liberates him from

suffering. All the dialogues above involve different types of power, cultural power (brahmin sacrificial system), political power (the king), and evil power of violence and suffering (Angulimala's violent behavior and suffering). Many violent conflicts of our time have a religious dimension and involve the above powers. According to modern peace theories, religious leaders play a significant role in conflict resolution. Providing moral guidance and support for political powers is one of the tasks (Appleby, 2000, p.211). How a religious leader can dialogue with various groups to resolve conflict in a good way is a difficult question. The Buddha could provide some insight into this question.

6.2 Defending one's own religious truth and position against rumor, misunderstanding, and criticism

The second type of difficult dialogue is the one in which the Buddha has to defend his own religious teachings and position against rumor, misunderstanding, and criticism. There are six dialogues of this type found by the study. The Buddhist path was born amidst several competing truth claims of other religious groups during the Buddha's time. The Buddha had to present his new religious path and teachings in dialogue with those groups of people. The Buddhist path had its unique training and experiences which were not easy to be comprehended by the outsiders. Therefore, there are narratives about misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings by the outsiders (D I 8; M II 55; M II 71, 90) and even the insiders as in the case of his disciple Sunakkhatta (D III 24). For example, there is rumor that Buddha discredits all forms of asceticism which was popularly practiced at that time (D I 8) and that he consumes animal meat which has been intentionally killed for him (M II 55). His practice of seclusion and avoiding metaphysical questions and debates is also attacked as cowardice and incapability of public speaking (D III 25). There are also conflicting rumors that the Buddha declares to be all-knowing (M II 71) and that he declares that no recluse or brahmin is all-knowing (M II 90). Occasionally there are people who approach

the Buddha to ask for clarification. Such rumors are dangerous because they might harm the Buddha's reputation, his teachings, and community. They could potentially provoke religious conflicts and violence. Discrediting rumors with the truth is not an easy task if a person does not know well one's own tradition, and how to explain truth that the other can be satisfied.

6.3 Settling doctrinal disputes, and doubts

Beside the above difficult dialogue types, the Buddha also encounters another type of difficult dialogue in which he is sought by the religious others to settle doctrinal disputes and doubts about other religious teachers and teachings. The study found 5 dialogues of this type which can be classified into two sub-types. The first sub-type is the dialogue in which the religious others have disputes among themselves on competing teachings within their own tradition, and they are unable to convince each other about their own doctrinal stance. As a result, they go to the Buddha as an external authority to settle the dispute (D I 13; M II 98). The challenge of this type of dialogue is that the person who plays the role of the external source of knowledge must not only understand well the tradition in dispute but also know beyond this tradition in order to give a well-grounded and reasonable answer. Additionally, giving judgment of another religious teaching is also a sensitive issue because it might provoke offence and negative reactions. Therefore, in this case, the Buddha has to overcome two challenges: knowledge competency and communication skills in order to minimize negative consequences.

The other sub-type of this dialogue includes conversations in which the religious others doubt various truth claims and the claimed spiritual achievements of different religious figures of the time. As a result, they seek the Buddha's answer on the issue whether or not these religious teachers have spoken the truth (D II 16 (Chapter 5), M I 30; M II 79). This type of dialogue is more challenging than the previous one. There are at least two potential dangers to judge truth claims and

achievement of religious leaders of other religious traditions: (1) A negative judgment of truth claims and of the claimed spiritual achievement of other religious leaders might provoke negative reactions, hatred, and even violent conflicts from those religious leaders and their own communities; and (2) if the Buddha gives a quick answer that other religions are wrong and his own religion is right and superior, he would be suspected and viewed as self-exalted and biased toward other religions. Therefore, this type of dialogue is deadly dangerous and difficult to handle.

6.4 Criticizing the beliefs and practices of other religions that the Buddha views as baseless and unprofitable for the wellbeing and happiness of the believers

The fourth type of difficult interreligious dialogue is the one in which the Buddha criticizes the understanding or beliefs of other religions that he views as wrong or unprofitable for the wellbeing and happiness of the believers. This study found 13 dialogues of this type. These dialogues can be divided into two groups. In the first group (D I 9; D II 16 (Chapter 4); M I 7; M II 74, 80, 96; M III 152), the religious others such as *brahmins*, ascetic wanderers, and disciples of other religious sects come to see the Buddha, present their religious belief, and invite the Buddha's opinion on it.

In the second group of dialogue (D I 9, 12; D III 24, 31; M I 14; M II 79; M III 101), the Buddha actively approaches other religious groups or individuals to question and criticize their beliefs and practices which he views as baseless and unprofitable for them. This type of dialogue is difficult because it is sensitive and provocative. By criticizing the teachings and practices of other religious groups, the Buddha could be accused as arrogant and interfering into another religion's internal issues. This could provoke anger, hatred, and violence toward the Buddha. However, if the Buddha knows clearly from his enlightened knowledge that their teachings are wrong and unprofitable for their wellbeing but keeps silent

or compromised for avoiding trouble, he could be seen as lack of compassion and a coward. Therefore, how to criticize the unsound teachings of others in a way that can minimize problems and maximize benefits for all is a challenging task. In today's time, it is even more challenging to do this because dialogue of truth criticism and persuasion is viewed as obsolete, unappealing, and even violator of dialogue code of conduct (Smith, 2007, pp. 64–66, 86). I argue that forbidding and avoidance of truth persuasion and truth criticism in dialogue is not the solution. The better way is how to present truth and criticize truth is a way that enlightens and benefits people.

6.5 Facing aggression, hostility, insults, and challenge to debate

The final type of difficult interreligious dialogue that the Buddha encounters is the one that involves disrespect, aggressive attitudes, insults, hostility, and the challenge to debate from his dialogue partners. This study found 14 dialogues of this type from the two collections. The Buddha's dialogue partners can be divided into three groups. The first group includes the *Brahmins* who claim their superior caste status and ultimate religious truth (D I 3, 4; M II 93, 95, 99, 100). They believed they were superior to the rest (the ruling class, the working class, and the serving class). In the dialogue narratives, some young Brahmins show disrespect and have insulting words toward the Buddha in the dialogue because the Buddha is from a lower class.

The second group includes the ascetic wanderers who are described as lovers of noises and debates (D I 9; M I 18). According to the narratives, due to the Buddha's principles of seclusion and avoidance of debate, he is sometimes ridiculed as cowardice and lack of public speaking skill (D III 25). Some others have hostile attitude toward the Buddha due to their misunderstanding the Buddha's teaching (M II 75).

The third group of people that the Buddha encounters are the *Niganthas* or the Jains who view the Buddha as a rival and occasionally plan to trap the

Buddha in a debate to insult and defeat him (D III 24; M I 35, 36; M II 56, 58). Indeed, these situations are extremely challenging to deal with. In modern interreligious dialogue, these negative emotions are seen as tough problems to be avoided.

Whether or not and to which extent these dialogue narratives are real events is beyond the scope of this paper. My interest is to know how the Buddha handles all these dialogue problems as narrated in the scripture. What communication methods can be drawn from these dialogue narratives? The following section will present some insights I have found from these narratives.

7 The Buddha's Communication Methods in Handling Difficult Interreligious Dialogues

In this section, I will present four communication methods that the Buddha uses in the above dialogues. These findings are preliminary rather than final because there are other methods that are not included.

7.1 Speaking truth in a concrete wholesome framework

For the Buddha, truth must be understood in its wholesome framework with concrete criteria to be verified and experienced by the listener. 'Wholesome' means that this truth is conducive to the moral well-being, happiness, and peace for the many. According to the dialogue narratives, the Buddha often constructs truth framework and criteria based on his own excellent experience of enlightenment before he gives any conclusion to a question of truth. In this study, the Buddha uses this principle when he responds to political issues, settles religious disputes, and debates with others. For example, in *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (D II 16), Chapter 1, when the king's minister asks the Buddha whether or not the king should invade the *Vajjians*, the Buddha does not answer it immediately but provides concrete wholesome criteria to evaluate the issue in

question through his conversation with his disciple, the Venerable Ananda, in front of the minister. The Buddha lists seven principles for a thriving people:

1) Have frequent public assemblies
2) Have harmony in their public affairs
3) Respect ancient traditions and their authority
4) Respect, honor the elders, and listen to their words
5) Not take wives and daughters of others illegally and forcibly.
6) Preserve native traditions and spiritual practices in the country and abroad
7) Rightly protect, defend and support *Arahants* (enlightened persons) to live peacefully in the land. (*the author's summary of the* (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Digha Nikaya*, 1987, pp. 231–232)).

The Buddha askes Venerable Ananda to confirm if the *Vajjians* have kept these seven principles. After Venerable Ananda has confirmed it, the Buddha says to the minister that as long as the *Vajjians* keep these seven principles, they will not decline but prosper. The Buddha limits his answer to this point and lets the king's minister make his own decision. As a result, the violence war is prevented. The Buddha's answer is based on the cause-and-effect principle rather than on his own personal influence. It means whether the *Vajjians* thrive or decline depending on their own moral deeds rather than on any external will or power. This method of giving advice to politicians is wise because it provides a good moral framework for reflection and freedom for the other to make a decision. In our today world, there are cases of violent conflicts involving religion as a causing factor. Some religious leaders contribute to making conflict rather than peace by speaking prejudice and hatred towards other religious groups because they are driven by fear of losing their religious and cultural power. Therefore, being able to speak truth in its concrete wholesome framework and lead politicians to moral reasoning is a good lesson learned from the Buddha.

7.2 Being sincere and brave to speak truth both pleasant and unpleasant out of compassion, with good purpose, in due season, and appropriate for the level of the listener

Another method used by the Buddha is being sincere and brave to speak both pleasant and unpleasant truth out of compassion, with good purpose, in due time, and appropriate for the level of the listener. The Buddha's sincerity and bravery are seen clearly in his being alone speaking out reasonable criticisms against the caste system, the baseless absolute truth claims and unprofitable practices of the religious others. However, being sincere and brave is not sufficient for speaking truth. If truth is spoken at the wrong time or in the wrong place, it may lead to more negative consequences than positive ones. Speaking truth must go with conditions.

In *Abhaya-Raja-Kumara Sutta* (M II 58), the Buddha gives four principles of his speaking truth both pleasant and unpleasant: (1) Is it true and fact? (2) Is it relevant to the purpose; (3) Is it spoken in due season; and (4) Is it spoken out of compassion. The Buddha only speaks truth when it satisfies the above conditions. In *Bhayabherava Sutta* (M I 4), verse 21, the Buddha declares his purpose of existence in the world is "for the welfare and happiness of many", "for the good, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans." Concretely the Buddha's purpose is to help people live a happy moral life when they are in the world and to achieve absolute liberation from suffering by practicing the Noble Eightfold Path. In *Samyuttanikaya* 42.7, *Desana (aka Khettupama) Sutta*, the Buddha states that though he has one message of liberation, he discerns what to teach according to each individual's capacity and need. Those principles help the Buddha focus on his purpose and skillfully lead the conversation away from discussing things which finally does not go anywhere nor bring any benefit. This can help explain why he rejects answering metaphysical questions (D I 9; M I 18) because they are irrelevant and unprofitable for liberation from suffering. Out of compassion for the others' welfare and happiness, he is not afraid of trouble to criticize their teachings and

practices which he perceives as groundless and unprofitable (D I 9, 12; D III 24, 31; M I 14; M II 79; M III101).

Today, some dialogue scholars recognize the importance of having a clear and good purpose for dialogue in order to be productive and sustainable (Cilliers, 2002; Smith, 2007; Smock, 2002). However, whether or not unpleasant truth such as religious differences and criticizing the other's belief should be discussed in dialogue is still a debate among scholars. Several scholars argue that both similarities and differences need to be examined in dialogue (Abu-Nimer, 2002, p. 22–23; Ochs, 2015, p.509). Buddhism contributes to this conversation that both pleasant and unpleasant truth should be spoken for the welfare, happiness, and peace of the many when it satisfies certain conditions including being true, fact, originated from compassionate heart, with good purpose, appropriate for the listener, and communicated in due season.

7.3 Tranquility of mind in the face of praises and criticisms

According to the Buddha's teaching in the *Brahmajala Sutta* (D I 1), verses 1.5 and 1.6, the Buddha advises his disciples to remain tranquil when other people praise or insult their teacher, the teaching, and the order of monks. Because if they run after either one by feeling excited or angry, they will not be able to see whether what people have said is true or not. The right attitude is to clearly discern the truth as it is, whether it is true or untrue, correct or incorrect. Based on this pure understanding, the disciples would confirm or reject it. With this tranquility, the Buddha is able to avoid the trap of being arrogant and biased when being trusted and praised by others. In heated debates, he is able to see the problem in his opponent's argument and eventually turn the situation upside down. This is the principle that the Buddha embodies when he is challenged to debate and when he faces attitudes of hostility, disrespect, insult, and aggression from his dialogue partners.

In today's interreligious dialogue, there has not been any guideline on how to deal with pleasant and unpleasant truth in dialogue. The Buddhist way of training the attitude of tranquility toward both types of truth can open a new way for future dialogue to move forward. If this attitude is well cultivated, dialogue participants will be well-equipped to encounter any challenges in dialogue.

7.4 Being attentive in listening to acquire a clear understanding before responding to the other, and being patient in explaining the truth

The fourth method that the Buddha uses in his dialogue is attentive listening and careful understanding before responding and being patient in explaining the truth. According to the dialogue narratives, the Buddha always listens to the other's view carefully and clarifies it when necessary. Sometimes he asks for confirmation from the other if his understanding is correct to the third time. For example, in *Ambattha Sutta* (D I 3), in the face of the rude behavior and insulting words from the young *brahmin* Ambattha in front of a group of *brahmins*, the Buddha calmly askes the young *brahmin* to explain the reason why he has acted that way. In *Tevijja Sutta* (D I 13), two *brahmins* debate with each other about whose view is correct and they go to the Buddha to settle the dispute. The Buddha carefully listens to their story, then he confirms with them if his understanding of their view is correct three times before he responds to it. Being attentive in listening in order to get the right understanding of the other's view does not only show respect to the other but also helps oneself know well how to respond correctly to the problem.

Besides being attentive in listening, the Buddha is very patient to clarify and explain his view step by step and in various ways until the other is satisfied. For example, in *Upali Sutta* (M II 56), the *Niganthas* made several attempts to trap and defeat the Buddha in a debate. One time, they send their most intelligent and influential layman leader named Upali to debate with the Buddha

on the doctrine of action and its consequences (*kamma* in Buddhism). Before proceeding the dialogue, the Buddha has a condition that the discussion must be based on reality. Upali agrees. The Buddha starts to use a daily life story and logical questions for Upali to answer. Upali contradicts his view. But he intentionally plays the stubborn person to learn more wisdom from the Buddha. the Buddha is patient to use different examples to expose the wrong view. Finally, Upali praises the Buddha and converts.

Today more interreligious dialogue scholars are aware and promoting deep listening and understanding in dialogue (Clapsis, 2016; P. de Silva, 2009; Gross, 2005; King, 2014). Padmasiri de Silva and Emmanuel Clapsis believe that listening alone has transformative power (Clapsis, 2016, p.11; Padmasiri de Silva, 2009, pp. 40–41). For the Buddhist case, attentive listening is important for getting the correct understanding of the other's view before responding to it. Being patient, knowledgeable, and skillful in explaining truth to satisfy the other's intellectual quest is also a key to transforming the other's attitudes from negative to positive.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, with the purpose of searching for good ways to deal with difficult interreligious dialogue from the ancient Buddhist wisdom, particularly the Buddha's dialogue experience in the *Dighanikaya* and the *Majjhimanikaya*, this study has found five groups of difficult dialogue ranging from dialogues that involve politics and conflict resolution to those that involve defending one's religious doctrine, settling doctrinal disputes, criticizing other's religious beliefs and practices and dealing with aggression, hostility, insults and challenge to debate. These five types show that interreligious dialogue at the Buddha's time was an open space for people to freely express their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors as they develop naturally during the dialogue. It was a golden time of religious tolerance and intellectual freedom (de Zoysa, 1955, pp. 3–4). In contrast,

in modern time, such a culture is missing when religions have been colored with layers of sensitive issues such as politics, colonialism, cultural and religious imperialism, etc. Consequently, each religious person carries with himself or herself a big burden of the past and multiple barriers to overcome in order to have a genuine dialogue. Additionally, most people are not well-trained to deal with and transform problems in dialogue. Therefore, this study proposes that for a peaceful future and more effective interaction between people of different religions, dialogue skill training must be made available for people wherever the life condition allows. Religions can provide rich resources for dialogue skills education. The Buddha's four communication methods for dealing with difficult dialogue is an example of this type of resource. Future research can focus on exploring dialogue skills and best practices in other religious traditions to enrich the resources of dialogue skill development.

Abbreviations

D Dighanikaya

M Majjhimanikaya

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