

# The Potential of Buddhism as a Background Philosophy for Animal Ethics and Environmental Ethics

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## INTRODUCTION

The fundamental question, “Why should others, including not only humans but also animals and other living things, be valued?” This fundamental question has been discussed by various philosophies and religions since ancient times. Since the latter half of the 20th century in particular, “animal ethics” and “environmental ethics”—ideas and activities for the protection of animals and plants—have been spreading worldwide.

In Buddhism, the answer to this question is to be found in "indiscriminate wisdom," which is said to be a prerequisite for becoming a Buddha. The reason for this is that to have “indiscriminate wisdom” is to have of a state of mind that transcends the distinction between “self” and “others.” Bodhisattvas—those whose goal is to become a Buddha—endeavor to embody this state of mind through “bodhisattva practice.” In the case of bodhisattvas, the suffering and joy of “others” is their own suffering and joy, and “others” means not only human beings but all living beings.

Because it reflects the perspective of a Buddha's indiscriminate wisdom that there is no distinction between self and others, or between human beings and other living beings, and that all living beings are objects to be cherished equally, Buddhism places the precept of non-killing as the first of all its precepts.

The idea that all living things are to be cherished equally, which lies behind the precept of non-killing, is the forerunner of the "animal ethics" concept that has recently come to be recognized mainly in Australia, Europe, and the United States. In addition, this viewpoint of equality stemming from indiscriminate wisdom can be the ideological basis for "animal welfare," and even "environmental ethics," which require the utmost consideration for all living things. Therefore, further research on the concept of compassion in Buddhist thought, which is based on this indiscriminate wisdom, should contribute in no small way to the current global trend of "animal welfare," "animal ethics," and "environmental ethics.

In the West, it was not until the latter half of the 20th century that the theme of "animal ethics" came to be considered in earnest as a field of research that questions the ideal relationship between humans and animals. In the East, however, the concept of absolute non-killing has existed for more than 2,000 years in Buddhism and Jainism, and there have been examples of legislation based on Buddhist thought, such as the edicts of King Ashoka in ancient times in India, and the “Order for the Pity of Living Creatures” by Tsunayoshi Tokugawa 300 years ago in Japan. Yet, with a few exceptions such as the Jains and other traditions in India, in the wave of modern Westernization of Asia all of these laws seem to have become a thing of the past. And now, Japan finds itself to be one of the countries that are lagging behind with regard to issues like animal welfare. It is only in the last few years that the theme of "animal ethics" has begun to be recognized in Japan.

Buddhism must have established the precept of non-killing as its most important precept considering that it was a manifestation of the state of indiscriminate wisdom requisite to Buddhahood. However, research on the significance of the precept of non-killing and its relationship with indiscriminate wisdom, as well as research on the relationship between these concepts and recent animal ethics thought in western countries, has not yet been sufficiently conducted.

In Japan, pioneering research on animal ethics has been conducted by Dr. Masaki Ichinose and Dr. Tetsuji Iseda, and over the past few years, several books have been published on the subject. Yet, it would not be an exaggeration to say that there is still little recognition of this issue by the general public.

Furthermore, while this issue of animal ethics has had a major impact on the development of laws and the reform of the livestock industry in western countries, Japan has lagged far behind in both the development of that kind of legislation and the reform of the livestock industry. In fact, the Japanese egg and poultry industry, alarmed by the above trend in the west, gave bribes to the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in an attempt to prevent the establishment of such laws.

In western countries, many people are becoming vegetarian or vegan to stop a meat-eating habit. Also in recent years, it has become clear that the greenhouse gas effect of the methane gas contained in the farts and burps emitted by livestock around the world is greater than that of carbon dioxide from human industrial activities. Therefore, in order to stop global warming, it is said that we should do away with such a habit of meat-eating.

Incidentally, it was in the early 1970s that the issue of environmental ethics began to be discussed in western countries, at about the same time as the above-mentioned issue of animal ethics was proposed. In Japan, however, the issue of environmental ethics came to be discussed relatively early, but the issue of animal ethics seems to have been discussed very little. In most of the developed countries, both animal and environmental ethics have been discussed at about the same time since the 1970s.

However, while animal ethics tends to neglect the issue of forest protection for plants and other insensitive animals, in environmental ethics, and even in deep ecology and biocentrism—which are the spearhead of cherishing all living things—meat-eating is allowed for human survival, and thus animal ethicists criticize

environmental ethicists and environment ethicists criticize animal ethicists for each other's inadequacies. It can be said that there has yet to be an idea that is consistent with both.

As mentioned above, when we look at the current state of animal and environmental ethics, we can see that Japan is now in a state of global backwardness in terms of animal ethics. Yet, Japan is regarded as a Buddhist country by the rest of the world. If this is the case, then Japan should rather be an ideologically advanced country in animal ethics, animal welfare, and environmental ethics. And in actuality, given the fact that both academic research on Buddhism and the activities of Buddhist religious organizations are flourishing, I believe that Japan should be able to develop innovative proposals on animal ethics, animal welfare, and environmental ethics through its many academic research initiatives and activities based on Buddhist thought.

In light of this situation, this paper will examine the current state of background thought on animal ethics and animal welfare in the west, clarify the problems and issues involved, and outline the current state of environmental ethics and its related issues—which began to emerge at the same time, and which call for the protection of the environment, including plants.

In order to do this, I will first reconfirm the importance of the precept of non-killing, the meaning of compassion as the basis for this precept, and its position in Buddhist doctrine as a whole. Then, I will confirm (1) that it is based on the requisite condition for attaining the state of Buddhahood, (2) that it is also based on the view of equality which sees no distinction between self and others or between human beings and other living beings and sees all living beings as objects to be cherished equally, and (3) that, therefore, the practice of the precept of non-killing originally must have been the most important theme of Buddhism.

However, as Buddhism developed and spread in the world, it was not always practiced as a central theme—which has resulted in the current backward state of animal and environmental ethics in Japan where Buddhism is supposed to be flourishing. In order to overcome such a situation, in addition to looking at the meaning of the precept of non-killing based on the indiscriminate wisdom of the Buddha and its significance as the essential factor in Buddhism, we must reexamine the importance of compassion as well. Finally, I will look at the fundamental problem of the deep-seated selfishness that is part of human existence which prevents us from implementing such ideals and principles as they should be.

From this, I will verify that the keys to realizing compassionate animal welfare and solving environmental problems in the future will be to become aware of our own selfishness and arrogance as human beings, to make efforts to overcome such traits, and to learn ultimate humility toward all other living beings as exemplified by the Buddha.

## CHAPTER 1

### The Global Spread of "Animal Ethics" and "Animal Welfare" Policies Born in the West

In 1975, the Australian philosopher Peter Singer published *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals*. Singer explains “*why the ethical principles on which human equality rests requires us to extend equal consideration to animals too*”<sup>①</sup>: “*The basic principle of equality does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration.*”<sup>②</sup> “*It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others and our readiness to consider their interests ought not depend on what they are like or what abilities they may possess.*”<sup>③</sup>

In conclusion, “*– the taking into account of the interests of the being, whatever those interests may be – must, according to the principle of equality, be extended to all beings, black or white, masculine or feminine, human or nonhuman.*”<sup>④</sup> “*If a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – insofar as a rough comparison of suffering can be made—of any other being.*”<sup>⑤</sup> “*So the limit of sentience (using the term as a convenient if not strictly accurate shorthand for the capacity to suffer and/or experience enjoyment) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others.*”<sup>⑥</sup>

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① “Animal Liberation” by Peter Singer, HarperCollins Publishers (2009) – P.1.L2~L4

② Ibid – P.2.L29~L30

③ Ibid – P.5.L21~L24

④ Ibid – P.5.L30~L34

⑤ Ibid – P.8.L32~L36

⑥ Ibid – P.8.L38~P9.L2

In other words, Singer came to the conclusion that according to the ethical principles that underlie human equality, the infliction of suffering on all sentient beings must necessarily violate those principles, and he began to denounce the human infliction of suffering on all animals. The majority of people who do not apply the ethical principles of humanity to other animals do not care for the suffering of non-human animals simply because they are of a different species.

In particular, animal experimentation and the breeding of livestock for food are the most serious acts that cause suffering to animals and are typical of speciesism. In Chapter 2, Singer describes in detail various examples of animal experiments and their fearless cruelty.

In the following chapter 3, he introduces the current situation and the cruelty of raising livestock for food. In the chapter 4, he describes in detail the benefits of becoming a vegetarian in order not to be complicit in the greatest human deception, speciesism, and the outrageous cruelty it perpetrates on hundreds of millions of animals.

In Chapter 5, he points out that the background to today's speciesism and the justification of humanity's use of animals is in no small part due to the influence of Judaism and ancient Greek thought, and the Christianity that succeeded it.

In other words, traditional Western philosophy has developed as an extension or antithesis of the Greek or Christian view of the world and human beings. He believes that there should be no difference between human beings and all living things that can feel suffering as well as human beings, and that equal consideration should be given to them. In this respect, there seems to be a similarity with the basic stance of Buddhism, which does not recognize any difference between humans and non-human sentient beings as objects to be considered. However, the approximations and fundamental differences will be examined again in another section.

In any case, the assertion by Western thinkers such as Singer that humans should give the same consideration to all non-human creatures that can feel suffering as they do to humans, from a perspective that is completely different from the monotheistic worldview and value system that had been in place up to that time, and the painful accusation of the cruelty of raising laboratory animals and livestock for food as a result of species discrimination without such consideration, shocked many people.

In his final chapter, Singer states. *“We have seen how, in violation of the fundamental moral principle of equality of consideration of interests that ought to govern our relations with all beings, human inflict suffering on non-humans for trivial purposes; and we have seen how generation after generation of Western thinkers has sought to defend the right of human beings to do this. In this final chapter I shall look at some of the ways in which speciesist practices are maintained and promoted today, and at various arguments and excuses that are still used in defense of animal slavery.”*<sup>⑦</sup> Singer goes on to say: *“It is important to expose and criticize this ideology, because although contemporary attitudes to animals are sufficiently benevolent – on a very selective basis – to allow some improvements in the condition of animals to be made without changing his basic attitude to animals, these improvements will always be in danger of erosion unless we alter the underlying position that sanctions the ruthless exploitation of non-human beings for human ends. Only by making a radical break with more than two thousand years of Western thought about animals can we build a solid foundation for the abolition of this exploitation.”*<sup>⑧</sup>

The main reason why people today continue to eat meat is the misconception that it is essential for human beings, and that this misconception is instilled in children from an early age. However, in reality, plant proteins alone are sufficient to nourish the body, and in fact, there are many famous active athletes who are vegetarians, and it has been shown that they are even better than meat-eaters in terms of athletic performance and health.

He also points out that if humans eat the same grains and legumes that are fed to meat animals (cattle), the energy efficiency is less than 1/17th, in other words, only 1/17th of the grains and legumes harvested in the same area are converted to meat, which is a major cause of global food shortages and hunger.

It also points out that the methane gas in the burps and farts of hundreds of millions of farm animals around the world has a greenhouse effect greater than the greenhouse effect of carbon dioxide in all industries.

In short, Singer shows that stopping the meat-eating habit is essential not only to ending cruel animal cruelty, but also to averting a human food crisis and halting global warming.

First published in 1975, Singer's "Animal Liberation" was a huge sensation, and a movement to denounce cruelty to laboratory and farm animals began to spread around the world. Until then, most people were not informed about the realities of laboratory and livestock animals. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that they had been daring to turn a blind eye.

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⑦ Ibid – P.213.L5~L13

⑧ Ibid – P.213.L19~L29

In response to this situation, this book presents a number of hair-raising and cruel acts that are actually being committed against animals, with examples so concrete and relentless that the reader wants to cover his eyes. The impact of this book was so great that it seems that there are few people who can remain unmoved after reading it.

The book has gone through several editions over the past 40 years, and in the meantime, the “animal welfare” policies that were inspired by the book and began to be institutionalized in countries around the world are now being enforced as a matter of course in developed countries, and as a result, Japan has fallen into a situation where institutionalization is the slowest among developed countries.

In his foreword to the 2009 edition, Singer notes that since the first edition was published in 1975, the book has had a much greater response than he had anticipated, and lists the following examples of that response. *“In the 1980s, under pressure from the animal movement, cosmetics corporations began putting money into finding alternatives to testing on animals. The development of product testing methods not involving animals now has a momentum of its own in the scientific community and is partly responsible for holding down the number of animals used. Despite ‘fur is back’ claims by the industry, fur sales have still not recovered to the level they were at in the 1980s, when the animal movement began target it.”*<sup>⑨</sup> *“The first breakthrough for farm animals came in Europe. In Switzerland, the battery cage system of producing eggs described in Chapter 3 became illegal at the end of 1991. Instead of cramming their hens into small wire cages too small for the birds to spread their wings, Swiss egg producers moved the birds to sheds where they could scratch on a floor covered with straw or other organic material and lay their eggs in a sheltered, soft-floored nesting box. Once the Swiss had shown that change is possible, opposition to battery cages mounted throughout Europe, and the European Union (EU), covering 27 member states and almost 500 million people, has now agreed to phase out the standard bare wire cage by 2012, giving hens more room, access to a perch, and nesting box to lay their eggs in.”*<sup>⑩</sup>

Furthermore, the practice of confining veal calves and sows in crates where they cannot move for long periods of time was already banned in the UK in 1990, and is now completely banned in the European Union, as well as in the US. In the United States, it was banned in 2007 and will be banned by 2017. In addition, many chefs, grocery stores, and caterers have declared that they will not use pigs, chickens, or eggs that have been raised in cruel conditions. In 2008, it was decided that batterie cages would be completely banned in California by 2015.

Thus, since Singer’s shocking book “Animal Liberation” was published in 1975, public opinion in Western countries has erupted to demand a review of the way humans treat animals. While this became a tidal wave of public opinion that culminated in today’s legislation for “animal welfare,” Japan remained outside the scope of such international trends and most people had never even heard of the term “animal welfare. The typical Japanese response to the anti-whaling and anti-dolphin fishing campaigns by Western activists was that it was contradictory to give special treatment to whales and dolphins when Westerners kill and eat cows and pigs without hesitation. However, the anti-whaling movement in the West is part of a movement to rethink the cruel treatment of animals by humans as described above, and anti-whaling activists are naturally anti-livestock and anti-laboratory animalists, vegetarians or vegans.

The biggest problem with the current situation in Japan is that most Japanese people do not even understand the background of that bribery scandal.

Although Japan is internationally regarded as a Buddhist country, it has been rapidly westernized by the importation of Western lifestyles and industrial structures since the opening up of Japan to Western civilization in the Meiji era (1868-1912), and the practice of eating meat has become commonplace. It seems that this is the reason why Japan has become such a backward country in terms of animal welfare, and it is undeniable that the current backwardness of Japan’s animal welfare to the extent that it is frowned upon by developed countries in the West is partly due to the indifference of the Buddhist community and the Buddhist Studies Association in Japan to this issue.

Singer’s decision to limit his concern to “animals that have the ability to feel pain” was concrete and made it possible to respond in a realistic manner. However, it is also true that the fact that animals, plants, and even humans, who cannot feel pain, were excluded from consideration was the subject of criticism from various quarters.

In particular, in his “Practical Ethics,” he said, if a fetus is confirmed to have a serious disability and is known to suffer only pain at birth, it should be aborted when it is not yet aware of the pain. He goes as follows.

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⑨ Ibid – P.X.L9~L17

⑩ Ibid – P.X.L30~L42

*“My suggestion, then, is that we accord the fetus no higher moral status than we give to a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-consciousness, awareness, capacity to feel and so on. Because no fetus is a person, no fetus has the same claim to life as a person. Until a fetus has some capacity for conscious experience, an abortion terminates an existence that is – considered as it is and not in terms of its potential – more like that of a plant than that of a sentient animal like a dog or a cow. (The issue of the difference the potential of the fetus should make is still to be discussed.) Once the fetus is sufficiently developed to be conscious, though not self-conscious, abortion should not be taken lightly (if a woman ever does take abortion lightly).”*<sup>①</sup>

*“I have argued that the life of a fetus (and even more plainly, of an embryo) is of no greater value than the life of a nonhuman animal at a similar level of rationality, self-awareness, capacity to feel and so on, and that because no fetus is a person, no fetus has the same claim to life as a person. Now we have to face the fact that these arguments apply to the newborn baby as much as to the fetus. A week-old baby is not a rational and self-aware being, and there are many nonhuman animals whose rationality, self-awareness, capacity to feel and so on, exceed that of a human baby a week or a month old.”*<sup>②</sup>

Such cold attitude of Singer toward human embryo was severely criticized by anti-abortionists. Besides, Singer assumed animals and plants with less evolved senses of pain, such as shellfish and plants in general, as the beings that are not subject to consideration. Such discriminative attitude toward less evolved animals and plants has been criticized by environmental ethicists as it cannot be a background philosophy for environmental ethics.

Singer's insistence on the need to care for "animals that feel a great deal of pain" has won the sympathy of many Westerners, and the enrichment of "animal ethics" and "animal welfare" and laws based on them has brought about significant social change. On the other hand, his cold-hearted attitude toward "animals, plants, and humans that do not feel pain" have to be regarded as "speciesism," which Singer himself has repeatedly condemned.

After all, the target of concern should be "all living things," and among them, the target of urgent action should be "animals that feel pain to a great extent," and in turn, consideration should be given to "all living things."

If this had been the case, Singer's philosophy could have been an environmental ethics philosophy that takes into consideration all living things on earth, including plants.

However, Singer made a clear distinction between "objects that need to be taken care of" and "objects that do not need to be taken care of. This is the limit of Singer's thought and the biggest difference from Buddhist thought, which will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

### **“Environmental ethics” and its issues that emerged around the same time as animal ethics**

Like "animal ethics" above, the term "environmental ethics" has been in use since the 1970s.

Originally, the term "ethics" meant a normative path to be followed in the order of human life, in other words, human ethics, and thus the term was used only for humans or human society.

The reason why the term "ethics," which was originally intended for humans, came to be used for non-human animals and the environment is because people began to argue that animals and the environment should be given the same consideration as for humans.

The concept of "animal ethics" has been recognized since Singer's "Animal Liberation," and the term has become established.

As for "environmental ethics," with the publication of "Man and Nature" by George Perkins Marsh in 1864, peoples' attention was drawn to the environment and the Forest Reserve Act was enacted in the United States in 1891. In 1944, Aldo Leobold proposed the concept of a "land ethic," which advocated a shift in human position from that of a dominator of the land to that of a member of an interdependent ecosystem. In 1967, American historian Lynn White wrote in *“The Historical Root of Our Ecological Crisis”* that the root of the current environmental crisis lies in the “Judeo-Christian tradition” and that *“God had created ... the earth and all its plants, animals, birds and fishes. Finally, God had created Adam...Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.”*<sup>③</sup>

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① “Practical Ethics” (Third Edition) by Peter Singer, Cambridge University Press (2011) – P.136.L3~L16

② Ibid – P.156.L10~L18

③ “The Historical Root of Our Ecological Crisis” by Lynn White (1967) – P.5.L37~P6.L1

In the early 1970s, people began to question the anthropocentric view of nature as all non-human beings are existing for human use. At the Third World Congress on Future Studies held in Bucharest in September 1972, Aarne Næss, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oslo, Norway, gave a lecture entitled "*The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Movement.*" He denounced that the environmental movement, whose main objective is to "*Fight against pollution and resource depletion. Central objective: the health and affluence of people in the developed countries.*"<sup>⑭</sup> is an anthropocentric, superficial, and shallow ecology. In contrast, he described the Deep ecology as "*Rejection of the man-in-environment image in favor of the relational, total-field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. ....To the ecological field-worker, the equal right to live and blossom is an intuitively clear and obvious value axiom. Its restriction to humans is an anthropocentrism with detrimental effects upon the life quality of humans themselves. This quality depends in part upon the deep pleasure and satisfaction we receive from close partnership with other forms of life. The attempt to ignore our dependence and to establish a master-slave role has contributed to the alienation of man from himself.*"<sup>⑮</sup>

In other words, Ness said that for humans, the totality of relationships with all living things is the true self, and treating other living things as objects for use is nothing but self-alienation. True environmental protection for human beings is to protect the totality of the relationships among all living things, which is also an act of self-realization for each and every human being. And then he named such environmental protection activities Deep Ecology, as opposed to the anthropocentric Shallow Ecology mentioned above.

The emergence of Deep Ecology, which called for consideration of the totality of relationships among all life forms, including humans, led to the spread of the recognition that the environment is also an object of ethics, and the term Environmental Ethics came into use.

In 1973, the Australian philosopher Richard Routley presented a paper at the 15th World Congress of Philosophy entitled "Is There a Need for a New, an environmental Ethics?" in which he argued that in order to deal with environmental problems, traditional Western ethics is limited to humans, and that even if humans destroy natural things, as long as they do not harm others, such actions are not morally reprehensible, but may even be permissible. In order to cope with this situation, a "new ethics" is needed to replace the old one.

Routley saw Aldo Leopold's land ethic, or "the ethical rules governing the relationship between humans and the land and the plants and animals that depend on it," as the prototype, and called for a new environmental ethic based on Leopold's "land ethic."

However, in 1974, another Australian philosopher, John Passmore, published "Man's Responsibility for Nature," in which he argued against Routley. He disagreed with Routley and argued that there was no need for a new ethic.

Passmore argued that "there is an urgent need to change our attitude towards the environment, and that man cannot continue the unconstrained exploitation of the biosphere. He did not agree with attempts to clarify environmental issues through a radical revision of our ethical framework, such as that advocated by deep ecology, which he considered to be false mysticism and irrationalism. Passmore was highly skeptical of attempts to attribute intrinsic value to nature, and his favored position was to value nature in terms of what it contributes to the flourishing of sentient beings (including humans). He refuted Lynn White's claim above that Judeo-Christianity was the source of anthropocentrism and environmental destruction, saying that Christianity gave humans the role of managing the natural environment and animals, not allowing them to use or destroy them as they please. He argued that since it is our role to protect and manage the natural environment and animals, the existing ethics for humans are sufficient and there is no need for a new ethics.

Thereafter, the major debates in environmental ethics thought continued to be over whether to be anthropocentric or non-anthropocentric, life-centric or ecocentric, ideological or pragmatic.

Yet, apart from such controversies in environmental ethics, the actual philosophy that drives the environmental protection policies of governments in various countries is that if the environment continues to be destroyed, the survival of human beings themselves will be at stake, which is based on the shallow and anthropocentric ideas of so-called shallow ecology. After all, what motivates most people is their own survival, and they may inevitably become anthropocentric.

However, as we have seen in the previous chapter on animal ethics, the number of people who have given up eating meat and become vegetarians or vegans for the pure reason of caring for animals in pain is increasing all over the world, and it is also true that legislation to improve the treatment of farmed animals is being developed all over the world.

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the result of a chain reaction of people sympathizing with Peter Singer's arguments that appeal to people's conscience and sensibilities.

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⑭ "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Movement." By Aarne Næss (1972) – P.1.L10~L12

⑮ Ibid – P.1.L13~L16 / P.2.L2~L9

Yet, as I have already mentioned, Singer limits the objects of human concern to animals that feel a considerable amount of pain and above, and does not consider animals and plants that do not feel much pain as objects of concern.

In the non-anthropocentric and ecosystem-centric movement of J. Baird Callicott and others, which is becoming the mainstream of environmental ethics today, the protection of ecosystems is the main objective. If the original ecosystem of the area has been altered due to the propagation of alien species, a thorough extermination of the alien species is openly carried out to restore the original state. It is as if alien species are evil, and the extermination of alien species is a natural justice in order to preserve the native species.

In this sense, the current mainstream environmental ethics of ecosystem-centeredness or ecosystem conservationism does not consider the dignity of the lives of individual organisms for the cause of maintaining the indigenous ecosystem. Such an attitude is unacceptable in terms of the ideas of people such as Singer and Tom Reagan, who claimed that animals have the right to live without human interference or exploitation.

Thus, the fact that the background ideas that are the main driving force behind current animal ethics and the background ideas that are the main driving force behind environmental ethics are incompatible with each other and contain fundamental contradictions is a truly serious problem, and there is an urgent need to come up with a coherent idea that is consistent with both animal and environmental ethics.

In this sense, the deep ecology of Arne Ness, Albert Schweitzer, who advocated reverence for life based on the value that “all life is equally sacred,” and Paul Taylor, who reorganized Schweitzer's values in the context of contemporary environmental ethics and advocated life-centeredness. Their philosophy, which advocate life-centeredness, are likely to be the background ideas that underlie both of animal ethics and environmental ethics, in that they consider all life, including animals and plants, as the object of consideration. However, they are also incompatible with animal ethicists such as Singer and Reagan in that they accept the deprivation of other life on the condition that there is a justifiable moral reason. On the other hand, environmental ethics thinkers of ecological conservationism have criticized life-centered environmental ethics such as deep ecology as being too ideological and unrealistic to be implemented.

It is an unavoidable fact that human beings have to take other lives in order to survive. This fact, which cannot be excused, is the greatest cause of heartache for those who truly wish for the well-being of others. It can be said that Buddhism focused on the fundamental contradiction and conflict between wishing for the happiness of others and maintaining one's own survival. Therefore, in Buddhism, life with such a fundamental contradiction is “suffering,” and as long as we are greedy for self-preservation, trying to survive by ourselves even if we push others away, we cannot escape from the “suffering” that is the result of such a fundamental contradiction. That is why the ultimate goal is to completely overcome such greed for self-preservation and to continue striving to transcend the form of existence of “life” that can only exist at the expense of others and to sublimate into the form of existence as a Buddha.

In other words, from the Buddhist point of view, all living beings should be cherished and their lives should not be taken for any reason. It is an unavoidable act. This recognition of the fact that it is an unacceptable but unavoidable act is an extremely important point in considering the issues of animal and environmental ethics.

This is because the act of taking another living being's life can never be justified, nor should it be done, for any reason, and it should never be accepted or even recognized as a right.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the root of the problem is the “excusable self-justification” those human beings have decided upon, such as that eating animals and cutting down forests are God-given human “rights,” that the killing of alien species is “necessary” for the preservation of ecosystems, that meat eating is “acceptable” for human survival, and that it is “okay” to kill creatures that do not feel pain, although sentient animals should not be killed.

Human beings, once their acts have been accepted or recognized, almost forget their guilt, remorse, guilt, and reservation, and as if they have the “right” to do so, they unreservedly commit acts against their “original ideals.”

For this reason, “the awareness that we are doing something that cannot be tolerated or justified, but that we cannot help but do” can be the greatest deterrent to minimize the damage to others caused by our actions.

To use a very simple example, in Japan, the Road Traffic Law stipulates that bicycle should be ridden on the road and not on the sidewalk. In other words, riding a bicycle on the sidewalk is clearly illegal. Yet, in reality, riding a bicycle on a narrow road is extremely dangerous and can hinder the passage of cars, and in some cases, it is necessary to ride on the sidewalk to avoid danger. However, because bicyclists ride on sidewalks is illegal, the riders immediately return to the road if there are people walking on the sidewalk and give top priority to the safety of pedestrians. Yet, what if bicycles were allowed to ride on sidewalks and legalized as it is unrealistic and idealistic to force bicycles to ride on the road? Because it is a “right” granted by the government, a “necessity,” and “accepted” by everyone, almost all bicycle riders will use sidewalks. As a result, accidents between bicycles and pedestrians will increase dramatically, resulting in many deaths and injuries.

In this way, the key to putting a stop to human behavior is to be aware of the fact that we are doing things that cannot be condoned or justified, but that we have no choice but to do so.

### CHAPTER 3

#### The Meaning and Position of the Precepts of Non-killing and Compassion in Buddhism

Buddhism, which was preached by (Shakyamuni) Buddha, who is said to have attained enlightenment at Buddha Gaya in India around 450 B.C. has spread not only in India but also in neighboring countries, Southeast Asia, Tibet, China, Korea, Japan, and now all over the world.

In Buddhism, the first precept to be observed by both monks and lay followers is the precept of non-killing. The teachings and interpretations of the Buddha's teachings vary greatly, and there is still much debate as to what the Buddha's true teachings were. Yet, it can be said with certainty that the Buddha set the precept of non-killing first and foremost in his code of conduct as a Buddhist, and it may be the point that all the Buddhists can agree on. In other words, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Buddha considered breaking the precept of non-killing to be a violation of the fundamental principles of the Buddha's teachings.

Yet, it seems that the meaning and ideological basis of this important precept of "non killing" has not been explored deeply enough in history.

In the early days of Buddhism, the precept of "non killing" was accepted as a basic premise to be observed, and there may have been no need to explain its meaning or reason in depth, nor was there any necessity to delve into it. However, considering the detailed and meticulous analysis of the Buddha's teachings by the later schools of Buddhism, it is unlikely that the issue of "non killing" and compassion as its basis was considered to be of paramount importance, given the fact that so little attention was paid to this important topic, and rather too much attention was devoted to even trivial issues.

Furthermore, from the teachings of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and impermanence and anātman (no permanent self or essence) which are said to have been first taught by the Buddha, it would seem that the significance of compassion, which is the basic premise of the precept of non-killing, cannot be easily derived.

In other words, if you go through the theory of anātman (no permanent self or essence), the self, which is the object to be attached to in the first place, has no essence nor substance, and the purpose of practice is to realize that all objects to be attached to, including the self, have no substance, and to be liberated from all attachments, never to be reborn in this world again, and thus to attain the so-called Arhat-ship.

In this way, the fact that all objects to be attached to, including the self, are insubstantial means that all living beings, the objects of compassion, are also insubstantial in nature and cannot be objects to be attached to nor cared for.

This is clearly a contradiction. If the theory of anātman (no permanent self or essence) and the practice of becoming an arhat based on this theory do not lead to the necessity of compassion, then it becomes unclear why the Buddha had set non-killing as the first item in his code of conduct as a Buddhist and strictly ordered compassionate practice.

The fact that the Buddha strictly ordered non-killing precepts and compassionate acts, and the fact that he taught the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, impermanence, and anātman (no permanent self or essence), and the way to practice to become an Arhat, are both almost certain historical facts.

If one of these two important facts is not derived from the other, or contradicts its philosophy, it may be an indication that one of the facts does not present a complete picture that encompasses both facts.

In other words, if the inevitability of the precepts of non-killing and compassion cannot be derived from the particular interpretation of teachings as taught in the Theravada Buddhism to attain Arhat-ship, it may be clear that they do not represent the whole picture of Buddhism as originally taught by the Buddha.

The issue of compassion was finally discussed in depth in Mahayana Buddhism, and it was made clear that it was a prerequisite for attaining Buddhahood, which is beyond Arhat-ship. Yet, compared to the so-called early system of the teachings found in Theravada Buddhism, the concept of bodhisattva conduct based on compassion in Mahayana Buddhism was so extensive in its logical development that it was once advocated that Mahayana Buddhism is not the teachings of the Buddha.

However, the issue of compassion is the basis for the fundamental premise of the Buddhist precept of non-killing, and in a sense, it should have been the most important issue for Buddhists. Yet, the disciples after the Buddha did not deeply delve into this most important theme, and the focus of their attention was fixed on the mastery of the Arhat path, which is not necessarily connected to the significance of compassion. As a result, the precepts of non-killing and the practice of compassion have been treated as mere precepts and desirable virtues.

Obviously, this did not reflect and explain the significance and meaning of the fact that the Buddha, set the precept of non-killing as the first code of conduct for Buddhists and strictly ordered the compassionate acts. In this sense, it can be said that the interpretation of Buddhism before the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism was not complete enough in the sense that it failed to show the whole picture of the original Buddha's teachings which placed the precept of non-killing and the compassionate conducts for all living beings as the most important prerequisite.

Therefore, we will first go back to the early Buddhist scriptures and examine how the importance of compassion was taught there. First, the Buddha's teachings only explain the importance of practicing compassion and do not give any reason or necessity for doing so. Secondly, in later Mahayana Buddhism, the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and impermanence and anātman (no permanent self or essence) were delved into in depth, and as a result, compassion for all sentient beings arose from the state of equanimity that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas attain through their indiscriminate wisdom. As a result, the motivation for the precept of non-killings, the first code of conduct for Buddhists, was naturally derived.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Importance of Compassion strictly ordered in the Early Buddhist Scriptures

<Sutta Nipata>  
Chapter 1: The Serpent  
8: Compassion

- “143 The following is what a person who has attained the ultimate ideal should do to attain this state of peace. He should be capable, upright, righteous, gentle in speech, meek, and without conceit.  
144 He should know what is sufficient, live frugally, do little in the way of chores, have a simple life, be quiet in all senses, be intelligent, not overbearing, and not covetous in all (other) houses.  
145 And never do anything that is vile, so that you may be reproached by other person of good sense. Be happy, be at ease, be at peace, all living beings.  
146 Let not any living creature, whether frightened or strong, long, great, medium, or short, minute or coarse, or anything of the kind, be it visible or invisible.  
147 Happy are all living things, visible and invisible, dwelling far and near, born and to be born.  
148 Let no man deceive another, neither let him despise another, wherever he may be; neither let him wish to afflict another with anger.  
149 Just as a mother would protect her only child at all costs, so too should you be immeasurably compassionate toward all living beings.  
150 And raise up a heart of immeasurable compassion for the whole world. Upward, downward, and sideways, without hindrance, without resentment, without enmity (do charity).  
151 As long as you stand, walk, sit, lie down, and do not sleep, be sure to keep this mindfulness (of compassion). In this world, this state is called the sublime state.  
152 He who is free from all evil thoughts, who keeps the commandments, who has knowledge, and who is free from the greed of all desires, will never again be conceived in a mother's womb.” ⑩

This is a verse from the Sutta Nipata, which is considered to be one of the oldest Buddhist scriptures in existence, especially in verse 149: “Just as a mother would protect her only child at all costs, so too should you be immeasurably compassionate toward all living beings.”

In this way, we should have a heart of compassion for all living beings. The compassion for all living beings expressed here is not merely “do not harm living beings,” but is so great that we are told to protect them even at the cost of our own lives, “just as a mother protects her only child even at the cost of her own life.”

In other words, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the lives of all living beings are clearly stated to be of equal value to one's own life.

However, no reason is explained here why the lives of all living things are so important, nor is there any reason why we should protect them even at the cost of our own lives.

As for the question of whether plants are included in the list of all living things mentioned here, some studies have suggested that the original Pali word translated in 146 as “whether frightened or strong” can be translated

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⑩ “Sutta Nipata” (translated from Pali into Japanese) by Hajime Nakamura (1984, Iwanami)  
(translated from Japanese into English by author)

as “whether movable (tasa) or immovable (thāvara) and the word “tasa” can be interpreted as “animal” and “thāvara” can be interpreted as “plant.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, it seems possible to assume that at least at the time this sutra was compiled, plants were included among the living beings.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, as a result of the doctrinal analysis of the Buddha's teachings by his later disciples, the object of compassion was determined to be the so-called sentient beings, meaning living beings with senses. The fact that only “sentient beings” are considered as objects of mercy seems to be akin to Peter Singer's definition of protection as only “animals with some degree of sentience or more.” However, Singer's biggest problem seems to lie in the fact that he differentiated the animals with a certain degree of sentience and above and other less sentient animals and plants. (I will examine this point again in Chapter 7), and this attitude is fundamentally different from Buddhism.

As mentioned above, according to the doctrine that was later systematized by the disciples of the Buddha, the object of compassion is beings that are sentient. But this does not mean that only sentient animals can be the object of compassion, and other living beings such as plants are excluded. Because, as quoted above, in the Sutta Nipata which is considered to contain the oldest teaching of Buddha, it is said “*should you be immeasurably compassionate toward all living beings*. And as term “all living beings” is used here, there seems to be no reason to exclude plants from “all living beings.”

The reason why animals and plants are separated is probably because in the process of analyzing the teaching of Buddha, it was thought that only sentient animals, which accumulate actions with a certain degree of sensation and emotion, accumulate Karma, and according to that karma they go through reincarnation. And only the beings that go through reincarnation are regarded as sentient beings.

Yet, in a sense, these are the metaphysics conceived by the disciples, and it is questionable how much of the Buddha's original intentions and worldview were reflected in them.

In any case, the Buddha's command to “protect all living beings even at the cost of one's own life” may have been a supreme command to all Buddhists, but the reasons for it, its importance, and its place in the overall Buddhist doctrine were not discussed until the rise of Mahayana Buddhism.

## CHAPTER 5 Compassion as emphasized in Mahayana Buddhism and its premise of indiscriminate wisdom

In the early Buddhist scriptures, Sutta Nipata, it is ordered to protect the lives of all living beings even at the cost of your own life, but later in Theravada Buddhism, the main aim became to realize that there is no substance to be attached to in oneself, or any other things, and to pursue the path of liberation from all attachments.

This meant that all living beings, the objects of compassion, were also essentially insubstantial and somethings not to be attached to. This was probably the main reason why the issue of compassion was not deeply delved into in Theravada Buddhism, but how then did Mahayana Buddhism derive the necessity of compassion from the theory of anātman (no permanent self or essence) ?

One of the distinctive Mahayana Buddhist scriptures, known as Ten Stages Sutra (Sanskrit: Daśabhūmika Sūtra), later incorporated into Avatamsaka Sutra as the Chapter of Ten Stages. The following is a quotation from its 6th stage.

*<Verse 14>In this way, without the slightest doubt, the Bodhisattva perceives the truth of the origination of deluded beings caused and conditioned by various correlations. It is like a phantom, appearing untruthfully as if it were something that really exist. It is like a dream, in which the ego-subject is tormented, even though there is no ego-subject to be tormented. It is like all the images that appear in the mirror of truth. It has a nature similar to that of a shimmer, and it misleads the unenlightened beings. (24)*

*The bodhisattva, through the wisdom of enlightenment, sees through the truth, from ten kinds of true perspectives, that deluded beings are caused and conditioned by various correlations, and in that there is no self, no sentient being, no life, no human being, nothing substantial, and śūnya (devoid of its own essential nature). With the wisdom of enlightenment, the Bodhisattva clearly recognize the truth that there is neither an individual ego that acts nor an individual ego that suffers.*

*In that process, the various paths to attain the enlightenment of free liberation (the entrance gate to the liberation by the recognition of śūnya) appear through the suchness of śūnya as it is.*

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<sup>17</sup> “Do Plants Have Life? -Theravada Buddhism's Two Types of Life Root,” by Akira Fujimoto (Annual Report of the The Nippon Buddhist Research Association, No. 68, 024) – P.102

<sup>18</sup> The problem of the sentience of plants in earliest Buddhism by Lambert Schmithausen – P58-P65

*The Bodhisattva achieves the ultimate free liberation as these components of deluded beings are essentially extinct, without substance. There is no individual substance of any being. Thus, for the Bodhisattva, the various paths to free liberation (the gate of formless liberation) emerge before him through the suchness of being without individual substance. When the Bodhisattva has thus mastered the suchness of śūnyā and the suchness of no individual substance, no desire can arise anymore. Aside from great compassion and the desire to bring all sentient beings to maturity on the Bodhisattva Path. In this way, for the bodhisattva, the various paths to free liberation (the gate of liberation without desire) will appear through the suchness of not seeking desire.<sup>19</sup>*

Here, the Bodhisattva who has mastered the state of egolessness is aware that there is no ego, no sentient being, no living being, no human being, and all of them are not substantial but śūnyā (devoid of its own essential nature). Once one has mastered the suchness of śūnyā and no individual substance, no desire arises. However, the desire to bring all sentient beings to maturity on the Bodhisattva Path through the “Great Compassion” that exists from the beginning is different and will never disappear.

In other words, from the perspective of being aware of the true reality of things, there is nothing substantive about the self, sentient beings, or anything else, they are śūnyā and cannot be the object of one's attachment or desire, yet for those sentient beings who are not aware of the true reality of things, all kinds of suffering that arise from their ignorance is very real, and unless the bodhisattva leads them to the bodhisattva path so that they too can be free from suffering, their suffering will continue forever.

Such suffering of sentient beings is ultimately delusional and insubstantial, but an attitude of leaving it as someone else's problem without doing anything to them is the proof of "separating" enlightened oneself from unenlightened others, and have not yet transcended “the state of self-separation.”

In this sense, those who remain on the arhat path, neglecting the implementation of compassion and seeking only their own enlightenment, can be said to have not yet surpassed the above-mentioned state of self-separation.

The following passage is a continuation of the previous quote.

*<Verse15> In this way, when one recognizes the truth of the origination of deluded beings caused and conditioned by various correlations, then there only emerges the suchness of śūnyā as it is. For those who have wisdom, when the various conditions cease to exist, then there only emerges the suchness of being without individual substance. If one recognizes that individual substance is not really there, one will not seek it anymore, except for taking rebirth, only because of deep compassion to sentient beings. (25)*

*If one practices the various paths to free liberation through these three kinds of suchness, the bodhisattva will no longer have the notion that there is a distinction between self and other. He will not have the notion of an individual ego-subject who acts nor an individual ego-subject who suffers. The notion of existence and nothingness will disappear. Then, one will be more and more inspired by the Great Compassion and will strive harder and harder, in order to perfect the various practices that lead to bodhi without leaving any part that has not been perfected yet.*

*The bodhisattva thinks, “It is only when various conditions are correlated that deluded beings (conditionally caused phenomenon) arise. If the correlations are broken somewhere, it will never arise. It is only when the various conditions are brought together in unison that deluded beings arise. If that unison is broken somewhere, it will never arise. Yes, I know that every deluded being is contaminated with many erroneousness. Let me try to break the correlations and unison of these various conditions. Nevertheless, I must not become fully aware of the ultimate extinction of arising process (conditional causation of phenomenon)-egocentric operation- of all deluded beings. Because I must help all sentient beings mature into the Bodhisattva path.”*

*Thus, all of you, disciples of the Buddha, by the wisdom of enlightenment as you are clearly recognizing that arising process of deluded beings are contaminated with many erroneousness and devoid of its own substantiality and essentially non-phenomenal, then at that time, with emergence of great compassion, the bodhisattva never cease to work for the sentient beings. Because of it, it is said “the wisdom with complete freedom emerges.” The Bodhisattva practice with Prajñā (the finest perfect wisdom) appear before one's eyes. It manifests vividly.*

*In this way, the Bodhisattva fully attains the wisdom and exemplifies the Bodhisattva actions with most excellent Prajñā (the finest perfect wisdom). There, one achieves one's goal by accumulating various efforts to complete the various practices that lead to bodhi. However, making the effort does not mean that one remains complacent among the deluded beings. Rather, by the wisdom of enlightenment, one clearly recognizes essential extinction of arising process of deluded beings. Yet,*

<sup>19</sup> “Ten Stages Sutra” translated by Noritoshi Aramaki (from Sanskrit to Japanese)(Chuko Bunko) P191.L4~L15  
(translated from Japanese to English by author)

*one does not remain complacent in the state of extinction. This is because if one does so, the various practices that lead to bodhi will not be fulfilled.* ⑩

Here, as mentioned above, it is said that for the bodhisattva, who practices the various paths to attain the enlightenment of free liberation (the entrance gate to the liberation by the recognition of śūnya) through the suchness of śūnya, the various paths to free liberation (the gate of formless liberation) through the suchness of being without individual substance and the various paths to free liberation (the gate of liberation without desire) through the suchness of not seeking desire, will have “no more notions of separating self and other.” This means that the Bodhisattva has reached a state of “indiscriminate wisdom” that transcends the “separation of self and others.”

Furthermore, in (Verse15), it is said, “if one recognizes that individual substance is not really there, one will not seek it anymore, except for taking rebirth, only because of deep compassion to sentient beings.” It means that the bodhisattva's rebirth in the world of reincarnation is not due to obstinance to one's ego, but due to compassion for sentient beings.

Then, “the bodhisattva fully attains the wisdom and exemplifies the bodhisattva actions with most excellent Prajñā (the finest perfect wisdom). There, one achieves one's goal by accumulating various efforts to complete the various practices that lead to bodhi. However, making the effort does not mean that one remains complacent among the deluded beings. Rather, by the wisdom of enlightenment, one clearly recognizes essential extinction of arising process of deluded beings. Yet, one does not remain complacent in the state of extinction. This is because if one does so, the various practices that lead to bodhi will not be fulfilled.” In other words, bodhisattvas do not remain in the world of delusion, yet although they are aware of the essential extinction of arising process of deluded beings, they do not remain in the world of nirvana, but rather strive to perform the various practices that lead sentient beings to bodhi.

Furthermore, it goes “Let me try to break the correlations and unison of these various conditions. Nevertheless, I must not become fully aware of the ultimate extinction of arising process (conditional causation of phenomenon)-egocentric operation- of all deluded beings. Because I must help all sentient beings mature into the Bodhisattva path.” This means that although it is quite possible to become fully aware of the ultimate extinction of activities of self, one does not dare to go that far because if one does so, the agency that bring the bodhisattva to world of delusion to lead sentient beings to enlightenment would also be extinguished and it would let the bodhisattva enter into so-called parinirvāṇa (complete nirvana), making it impossible to continue the practice of bodhisattva.

In this way, Mahayana bodhisattvas also recognize that both their own selves and sentient beings are essentially insubstantial, simply arising by various correlations as described by the theory of anātman (no permanent self or essence). This view is same as Theravada practitioners who aim to attain arhat-ship. However, in fact many sentient beings are actually suffering and their suffering will never be eased until unless some enlightened ones guide them to the liberation. Seeing the sufferings of so many sentient beings, without trying to guide them toward enlightenment, (thinking that they are not the objects to be clung as they have no intrinsic substance), just trying to free oneself from all attachments and quickly enter the state of nirvana alone can be regarded as a self-centered attitude.

Also, it may be a disregard of the Buddha's stern command (in Sutta Nipata) to “protect all beings, even at the cost of your own life.” In this sense, it must had been a matter of historical necessity that Mahayana Buddhism later questioned such a way of Buddhist practice that neglected the first code of conduct for Buddhists, and established a new doctrinal interpretation and system of practice that included the issue of compassion that had been left unresolved in the Theravada Buddhism.

In the Sthiramati's commentary on the Mahayana-sutra-alamkara-karika, which is said to have been expounded by Maitreya, the founder of the Yogachara School, there is a description as follows. ⑪

*When one attains the First Stage, one acquires the view of the equality of self and others, hence it is termed “The View of All-inclusive Great Self.” Thus, by viewing “self and others are equal” it benefits infinite sentient beings, hence it termed “The View of All-inclusive Great Self.” In other words, “at the time of attaining the First Stage” then as one settles in the view of “the equality of self and others,” so one “takes refuge in The View of All-inclusive Great Self,” which is extremely rare, it means.*

*When it is said “No view of self is here but still there is view of self,” (K.38, a) it means when one attains the First Stage, it can be said that one will have “view of self” but at the same time*

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⑩ Ibid – P192.L10~P194.L8

⑪ A Study on the Theory of No-Self and Ethics: Focusing on Altruism in the Early Yogachara School by Koji Chiba (Komazawa Women's Univ.)

one will have “no view of self.” The reason why one will have “no view of self” is when one attains the First Stage, one breaks off the physical view of oneself, so it is said that one will have “no view of self.” Then why is it said that one will have “view of self?” It is because one regards oneself and sentient beings equally like as all sentient beings are oneself. That is why it is said that one will have “view of self.”<sup>22</sup>

(Omission)

“But it is not so [with the bodhisattva], because for the bodhisattva, sentient beings and oneself are equal.” (K.41, d) thus when it is said so it means that [the above bodhisattva's actions] are not rare. In other words, if the above occurs in those who have not attained sama-citta (empathetic equality mind) with regard to self and others, [it is] rare. But if [even such people] have compassion for themselves and strive to be happy, it is not rare for them [to do the above for themselves.] Likewise, in this case, if the bodhisattva has attained empathetic equality mind toward oneself and others, and assimilate that all sentient beings are nothing but oneself, then how can it be rare to benefit all sentient beings and wish for their happiness? That is why it is said it is not a rare thing.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, a bodhisattva who has attained the indiscriminate wisdom that transcends the distinction between self and others has attained sama-chitta (empathetic equality mind) with regard to self and others, and understands that all sentient beings are nothing but oneself, and that it is quite natural and not rare to benefit all sentient beings and wish for their happiness.

In this way, through the ideological development of Mahayana Buddhism, the importance of compassion emphasized by the Buddha was incorporated into the system of thought, while taking into account the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the theory of impermanence and anātman (no permanent self or essence). In the past, the purpose of Buddhist practice was to free oneself from all attachments and to be free from the world of samsara, but now, compassion is the basic premise, and the purpose of Buddhist practice is to walk the path of enlightenment together with sentient beings as the practice of compassion. In the end, the ultimate goal was to attain the indiscriminate wisdom that transcends the distinction between self and others, and to reach the state where all sentient beings are the self, and that is the state of the Buddha. Here, at last, the consistency of the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the theory of impermanence, and the theory of anātman (no permanent self or essence), as well as the precept of non-killings as the most important precept and the practice of compassion as the basis for this precept, have been clarified and integrated ideologically.

## CHAPTER 6

### History and Current State of the Ideological and Practical Impact of the Idea of Compassion in Buddhist Countries

As we have seen above, the Buddha's stern command in the original Buddhist scriptures to "have compassion for all living beings at the risk of one's own life, just as a mother protects her only child at the risk of her own life," became the basis for the precept of non-killings. However, the significance of this Buddha's command was not sufficiently conveyed by his later disciples, especially in terms of doctrine, and it was treated as just one of the precepts and as a result its ideological influence was limited.

Later on, people who felt the contradiction of the actual practice of monks who were isolated from society, despite the importance of compassion emphasized by the Buddha, pursued the meaning of the importance of compassion in both doctrine and practice. It is thought that the system of thought that later came to be known as Mahayana Buddhism, which is rooted in the Mahayana philosophy, came to appear as the Mahayana sutras.

However, although the system of thought appeared as the Mahayana sutras and treatises, it is unclear how much the practical groups that actually put the thought into practice developed. And Mahayana Buddhism went through esotericization in India and later declined.

In the meantime, Mahayana Buddhism, while esotericized, spread to East Asia and Tibet, and developed in each place. However, bodhisattvas who have attained the indiscriminate wisdom that transcends the distinction between self and others, such as those described above in the Ten Stages Sutra and the Mahayana Sutra Alamkara Karika, have attained the sama-chitta (empathetic equality mind) with regard to self and others,

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<sup>22</sup>“Sthiramati’s commentary on Chapter 14 of Mahayana-sutra-alamkara-karika”(translated from Sanskrit to Japanese by Nobuchiyo Kotani) (Bunrido), 1984. P179.L16-L27 (translated from Japanese to English by author)

<sup>23</sup> Ibid – P182.L16~L25

and understand that all sentient beings are the self, and wish to benefit all sentient beings and wish for their happiness. Aside from a few legendary examples, such as those of famous monks and the followers of the Sanjiejiao (Three Levels Movement) of the Tang Dynasty, there have not been many instances of the ideal of bodhisattva practice being put into practice.

The reason for this is that the Mahayana Buddhism that was introduced to East Asia and Tibet was mainly focused on individual meditation or seeking salvation by praying to a deified Buddha, and a religious movement like the one described above, where many people would practice the philosophy of bodhisattva conduct, such as “understanding that all sentient beings are the self, benefiting all sentient beings, and wishing for their happiness,” could not become a major social movement.

It was because, as we can learn from the history of the above-mentioned Sanjiejiao (Three Levels Movement) of the Tang dynasty in China, which was thoroughly suppressed by the regime of the time, for most of follower really came to live for the benefit of others rather than themselves, and a mutually supportive community was really created, and as the result the ruler virtually became unnecessary, the most inconvenient situation for those in power.

This is probably the reason why Sanjiejiao (Three Levels Movement) was suppressed so thoroughly that no trace of it remains. Yet, it was truly “one of the religions with the most thoroughgoing spirit of altruism, which can be said to be the essence of Mahayana Buddhism,”<sup>②④</sup> and its followers were practicing the ideal of bodhisattva conduct.

Since Buddhism spread under the supervision of the regime of the time, it was tolerated by the regime to the extent that it did not interfere with the governance of the people. Therefore, the content of Buddhism had to focus on the spiritual fulfillment and salvation of the individual, and social movements that would drastically change the nature of society as a whole were not tolerated.

However, this fact means that if all people would actually live a life of "understanding that all sentient beings are nothing but oneself, doing good to all sentient beings, and wishing for their happiness," it could bring about drastic changes in the way society works, the way animals are treated, and the state of environmental problems.

Although Mahayana Buddhism has blossomed into an ideology that can bring about such wonderful results, it is unfortunate that we have not had the opportunity to utilize its real results in the real world so far. However, for the future, there is a good chance that Buddhism could become a basic philosophy that could revolutionize the current state of human society.

## CHAPTER 7

### Can Buddhism be a Background Philosophy for "Animal Ethics" and "Environmental Ethics"?

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 2, the two main schools of thought in the West today, animal ethics and environmental ethics, are mutually critical of each other because of their conflicting philosophies. On the other hand, the Judeo-Christian orthodox view that domestic animals and the natural environment were created by the Creator for human beings, and therefore humans are empowered to use them or obligated to manage them, which had long been the basis for the ethical view of people in the West, was rejected as anthropocentric.

In other words, for the past 2,000 years, Judeo-Christians have believed that eating domestic animals and clearing forests for human use were approved by the Creator and that there were no ethical problems. But now, due to the accumulation of human actions that must have been allowed by the Creator, the environment of the earth is being destroyed, and the survival of human beings themselves is being endangered. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the greenhouse gas effect of the total amount of methane gas contained in the burps and farts of domestic animals, which are supposed to be fed to humans, is said to exceed the greenhouse gas effect of the total amount of carbon dioxide emitted by human industrial activities, and this is one of the main reasons why global warming is becoming more serious.

Since the latter half of the twentieth century, attention has been drawn to environmental problems by the anthropocentric idea that the natural environment, which is essential for the comfortable survival of human beings, must be protected for the perpetuation of the human race. The other is the non-anthropocentric view of environmental ethics, which says that the anthropocentric view has been destroying everything around us and disrupting harmony for many years, and that we need to change the anthropocentric view itself. At present, non-anthropocentric ecocentrism seems to be becoming the theoretical guideline.

In 1975, Peter Singer's “Animal Liberation,” which I mentioned in Chapter 1, was published, and it made a

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<sup>②④</sup>“Zhiyan, Fazang and Sanjiejiao” Kiyotaka Kimura (Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 107)

huge impact on many readers in Western developed countries by listing many specific examples of how cruelly farmed and laboratory animals were being treated today. As a result, cruel treatment of animals was banned, and animal husbandry and animal experiments were forced to undergo a major overhaul and animal welfare was legislated in developed countries.

However, Singer argued that the protected species should be animals with a significant sense of pain and above, and that animals with a substandard sense of pain, plants in general, and even human fetuses before they can feel pain need not be protected. This extreme argument has been criticized by environmental ethicists as lacking an environmental ethical perspective, and human rights groups have also criticized it as inhumane.

As already mentioned, it is an undeniable fact that Singer's writings and activities have led to the development of animal welfare legislation in the West today. Singer's writings and activities have caused many people to reconsider the way they used to do things, and even the way they eat, live, and fashion in the West has changed drastically. The fact that this has happened is astonishing. In recent Western history, there have been few instances where the influence of a single thinker has changed the very nature of Western culture, so the magnitude of this influence is truly epoch-making.

However, even though Peter Singer has had such a tremendous impact, his influence is now limited due to criticism from various quarters. The biggest problem with his ideas is that he presents his criteria as if humans have the right to decide whether or not living creatures should be protected.

Of course, it is natural for human beings to decide what to do, but the attitude that human beings should decide whether non-human creatures should be protected or not, and even decide their fate, shows the conceit of human beings. The same attitude can be seen in the environmental ethics thinkers and activists who are ecocentric.

They claim that their ideas and activities are non-anthropocentric and ecosystem-centered, but they openly carry out genocidal acts, such as the elimination of alien species, under the guise of the idea of preserving the ecosystem. Humans are deciding the right of survival of non-native species. If their first priority is to preserve the ecosystem, the first thing to be eliminated should be human beings themselves. Humans should be the worst invasive species among all species, destroying and changing ecosystems and causing the extinction of many organisms. The fact that humans, the main culprit in the destruction of ecosystems, are openly killing off non-native species as a hindrance is like the mafia taking out thieves under the guise of maintaining security in a town.

However, the fact that even Peter Singer, who so drastically altered the cruel treatment of animals, is still criticized for being inhumane, and the ecological conservationists, who advocate non-anthropocentrism, are slaughtering individual unwanted organisms from a totalitarian perspective, makes me wonder if they were not exempted from the influence of the mythical premise that human beings were granted special powers by the Creator from the very beginning and their cultural traditions.

Both Singer and the ecosystem conservationists questioned the very premise and used their own judgment to object to the mistreatment of animals and ecosystems at the expense of humans, which in itself should have been revolutionary. However, since the Creator had originally given them special authority, even if humans later limited that authority at their own discretion, they only changed the content and extent of the authority, and they could not completely eliminate the premise that humans had the authority to decide the fate of all living things from their own way of thinking.

Originally, the premise that the Creator created livestock and the natural environment for the sake of human beings was nothing more than a convenient myth invented by human beings and had no basis in fact. However, over the past 2,000 years, some human beings have been exercising this unfounded authority as a matter of course, almost without question, and their cultural influence has allowed their values and lifestyles to permeate almost the entire world, including Japan.

In any case, the only objective fact is that human beings and other creatures coexist on the earth. As I mentioned earlier, some humans have interpreted this situation as the Creator creating livestock and the natural environment for the sake of humanity, and this way of life has greatly influenced the way of life of all humans.

On the other hand, another part of the human race was extremely pained by the fact that their survival was at the expense of other creatures. They came to the conclusion that the root cause of the problem was self-centered greed and obsession with oneself, trying to survive at the expense of other creatures. And they decided to dedicate their entire lives to the practice of overcoming such self-centered greed and attachment to themselves. All the while, they tried as much as possible to avoid sacrificing other living beings for their own survival. And they adhered to the most important code of conduct, "Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, so too should you have a heart of compassion for all living things."

As mentioned above, there were those who believed that man was empowered to decide the fate of all other creatures as a basic premise, while these ultimately humble people felt that man, rather than deciding the fate

of other creatures, could only live with the utmost restraint so as not to interfere with the lives of other creatures. And ultimately, they must have felt that they had no choice but to overcome their self-centered greed and obsession with themselves and eventually reach a way of existence that would not require them to sacrifice any other living beings.

This ultimate state of existence, in which all living beings do not have to be sacrificed at all, is considered to be the state of nirvana. This may be the reason why the Buddha set the precept of non-killing as the most important precept, strictly emphasized the importance of compassion, and set nirvana as the goal of his practice.

If this is the case, then Buddhism can be considered not only as a background for animal ethics, but also as a background for true environmental ethics that values all living things, including plants.

However, it is clear that living while eating living things while claiming to value all living things is a contradiction and a deception, and that it is unrealistic and inconsistent in terms of ethics, and that it is incomplete as an ethical thought. That is why both Deep Ecology and "life-centeredness" ultimately accept killing for survival, and Singer's exclusion of lower animals and plants from consideration seems to have been due to the need to provide food for his own survival.

In this way, they tried to maintain the reality and consistency of ethics, and to maintain the integrity of a complete ethic, but in doing so, they forcibly positioned the killing of others, which should have been unacceptable, as a legitimate or acceptable act. However, it cannot be denied that by accepting such exceptional killings, the original premise of valuing all living things becomes only words but no substance and, in the end, it becomes a hollow ethical thought.

It is a contradiction and a deception to say that we should care for all living things, yet live by eating them, because human beings, as actors, are inherently imperfect and incapable of doing completely right things. However, this does not mean that there is any deception or hypocrisy in the idea of taking care of all living things.

In short, human beings are inherently unholy beings who have no choice but to sacrifice many other living beings just to stay alive. And awareness of this could be the greatest deterrent to minimize the destructive actions of human beings to other living beings.

If "cherishing all living things" is the ultimate justice and ethics, then it is the human beings who are unable to carry it out literally because of their inherently selfish nature. So, we cannot dismiss such ideal ethics itself as an unrealistic and impracticable idealism simply because it is difficult to implement. For, if we degrade the ethics according to the human viability, then that ethics inevitably have to reflect the unholy and selfish nature of human beings. Yet, we tend to forget the fact that the ethics that can be carried out by unholy human beings are essentially unholy and they can never represent the perfect justice. And human being always make mistake by believing in such incomplete ethics or belief as if they represent perfect justice, and proudly try to mete out their own imperfect justice.

Unfortunately, such mistakes have been repeated many times in the past, and it is clear from the history of mankind how much misery has been caused by the ethics, justice or belief of people who are not aware of their own inherent selfishness and unholiness.

Buddhism teaches that all living beings, including ourselves and others, are the sum total whole of infinite interconnections of various causations and conditions, and that no distinction nor separation is possible. And it teaches us to live for the well-being of all living beings as our own selves or just go into nirvana not to sacrifice anyone of them anymore.

In any case, as a third path that can stop the current bipolar opposition between anthropocentrism and non-anthropocentrism, ecocentrism and life-centrism in animal ethics and environmental ethics, it is a path in which the self, others, animals, plants, and the whole of nature are an unbroken whole with infinite connections, and all of them must be cherished. I believe that this spirit of indiscriminate compassion can be a background thought that integrates both animal ethics and environmental ethics for humanity in the future.

The idea that animals, plants, and nature as a whole are an unbroken whole with infinite connections is itself something that has been said in environmental ethics such as ecosystem-centeredness, life-centeredness, and deep ecology. However, Buddhism would never say that the connected and unbroken whole is more important than individual life forms, or the sacrifice of others is acceptable for the sake of our own survival.

From a Buddhist perspective, the value of each individual life is something that humans should never be allowed to judge or decide on their own, and even if they are forced to take a life, it is never justified or condoned. It is solely the actor's own responsibility that respect for life cannot be literally implemented, and the consequences must be taken seriously by the actor himself/herself. In the Buddhist view, no human being or anyone has the authority to justify or condone what cannot be done according to the principles by saying that it is practically unworkable. Such ultimate humility seems to be the basic premise of the precept of non-killing and the spirit of compassion as taught by the Buddha.

However, the precept of non-killing and the practice of compassion, which Buddha established as the primary code of conduct for all Buddhists, should have been the central theme of Buddhism, and as we have seen earlier, the Bodhisattva philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism, which ideologically grounded the necessity of Buddha's compassionate acts, should have had a greater impact on the way of life and lifestyle of many more human beings, just as the Christian doctrine has had a great influence on the way of life of all mankind, but unfortunately, the current situation is not so.

If this is the case, then, in rethinking our way of life and lifestyle for the future, we must change the great misconception that “human beings are empowered to decide the fate of all other living creatures,” which has been the source of the environmental destruction and cruel treatment of animals up to now, and change our attitude toward the world as the Buddha strictly commanded, “*Just as a mother would protect her only child at all costs, so too should you be immeasurably compassionate toward all living beings.*” This is the philosophy that can be the guiding principle for all humankind from now on. This ultimately humble attitude, which makes no exceptions, no excuses, and no justifications, is the essential attitude for the future of animal ethics and animal welfare, and environmental ethics and environmental protection.

## Final Chapter

This essay began with the fundamental question, “Why should others, including not only humans but also animals and other living things, be valued?” Peter Singer, who can be said to have triggered the development of animal ethics and animal welfare legislation in Western developed countries, proposed the reason that beings beyond animals that have the ability to feel pain and suffering need to be protected from such suffering.

However, on the other hand, this meant that creatures including plants that do not feel such pain need not be protected, and because that, it cannot be a background thought for protecting plants and environment.

Environmental ethics, on the other hand, can be divided into three types: those who believe that the environment must be protected for human survival, those who believe that the preservation of the ecosystem is of paramount importance and that anything that interferes with this is to be eliminated, and those who value individual life but tolerate sacrifices for their own survival. However, all three approaches are unacceptable from the standpoint of animal ethics, in that they all condone the killing of animals that are capable of feeling pain.

This leads us to the conclusion that in order to completely eliminate all unjust treatment of all living creatures, not only humans and animals but also plants, we must completely eliminate any kind of “speciesism,” value all living creatures equally, allow no exceptions, and provide no excuses or justifications for failure to do so.

However, rather than rejecting such ideals out of hand because they are unrealistic and unworkable, I believe that what is most needed today is the humility to reexamine our own ways of being, which are not capable of literally implementing such ideals and try to change it.

In this sense, as Buddha strongly encouraged all his followers 2,500 years ago, saying “*Just as a mother would protect her only child at all costs, so too should you be immeasurably compassionate toward all living beings,*” and later Mahayana Buddhism delved deeper into the significance of this and concluded that the ultimate goal of Buddha's teaching is to attain the indiscriminate wisdom that transcends the distinction between self and others, and to reach the state where all sentient beings are the self (that is the state of Buddha), attaining such state of mind is truly a state beyond any kind of “speciesism” in a real sense. And this idea that humanity should act with the “feeling that all humans, animals, and plants are nothing but their own selves” can be the background philosophy for animal and environmental ethics in the world in the future. Furthermore, it is required of humankind in the future that we look at the self-centeredness of human existence, which contradict with above mentioned ideals, realize the depth of its roots, and humbly walk the path of overcoming it. This is what Buddhism has been teaching us from ancient time.

This paper concludes that the path to the true realization of animal welfare and the solution of environmental problems is for humankind to learn the ultimate humility taught by Buddhism and to share the common understanding that minimizing the sacrifice of all living beings should be the most important goal shared by all humankind.

As a subject for further research, it is believed that humans have empathy to feel the suffering of others as their own, and that this empathy gives rise to compassion and caring for others, but at the same time, humans are aware that they are forced to sacrifice others for their own survival.

Looking back through history, we can see that this feeling of compassion and caring for others is increasing and becoming more and more universal. The fact that many people have become vegetarians as a result of Singer and others' animal ethics and that animal welfare policies are spreading around the world is evidence of

this.

In this way, it is expected that the feelings of compassion and caring for others will increase even more in the human race in the future, and the feelings of conflict between such strong feelings and the contradiction of having to sacrifice others in order to survive will also become more universal. It seems to me that the Only then will the meaning of what Buddhism has been teaching for 2,500 years be understood with empathy by more and more people.

If such an understanding is spread, Buddhism will not be merely a religion of the East, but will be reaffirmed as a universal system of thought for overcoming the conflict that arises between the altruistic state that higher beings such as human beings inevitably reach in the process of biological evolution and their own selfish nature, which is in contradiction to the altruistic state.

I believe that in the future there should be research on Buddhism from such a perspective.