How could we get over the monotheistic paradigm for the interreligious dialogue?
By Seung Chul Kim

1. Deconstruction of the typology of interreligious dialogue

In this paper I will argue that the Christian theology of religions in an Asian context requires a deconstruction of the theology of interreligious dialogue that has been conducted so far under the conventional typology of "exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism." I think such a typology comes from the monotheistic Christian paradigm. Once that is done, we can begin to explore new theological possibilities emerging from the actual reality of the Asian Christians who have lived in and with the various religious traditions of Asia. I want to find out such a theological possibility in the Hua-yen Buddhist thought.

Looking back the history of effect of the interreligious dialogue so far which was initiated by the Christian awareness of religious plurality in modern society, we should admit that we have rarely tried to understand how and what other religions understand about the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue, and how they evaluate the Christian contribution to the interreligious dialogue. If we consider these matters seriously, the absence of the voices of other religions in contemporary discussions of the interreligious dialogue is enough to raise skeptical questions about their legitimacy and propriety. Reviewing the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, James W. Heisig, who has been personally involved in this dialogue for decades, offers harsh criticism of the dialogue itself: "Christian theology came to be so overwhelmed by derivative debates over the nature of doctrinal truth claims in a religiously plural world that the immediacy of *contact* had been displaced by *talk about contact*. In time, it became clear to Buddhist participants that the Christians preferred to talk to themselves." [1] As Heisig aptly points out, there is a "misplaced immediacy" in the theology of interreligious dialogue. In other words, the Christian dialogue with other religions was suspected to be a dialogue with something that was already constructed by the Christian understanding of that religion. It could not be a genuine dialogue, but at most a monologue in the form of ventriloquism.

Viewed from an Asian perspective, the conventional modes of thought prevalent in the western theological tradition do not seem the right place to begin constructing an Asian theology of religions. We can point out at least two reasons for that.

First, almost without exception, Christian theologians have tended to the simplistic view of other faiths "existing *alongside* the Christian faith" that Christians need to "encounter."[2] Other religious traditions are assumed to be distinct traditions running *parallel* to the Christianity and then they were made objects of theological reflection without further ado. It is this assumption that lies behind the distinction between three modes of approach: exclusivism,

inclusivism, and pluralism. But there is one more assumption rarely attended to which I think is more important and more crucial than the first one: The idea that there is "one and only one" truth, and that truth is revealed, full or partially as the case may be, through the Christian faith. Accordingly, the question of interreligious dialogue is thought to concern the ways in which other religions deal with that "one and only one" truth.

This way of dealing with other religions reflects the Christian understanding of the ultimate truth and constitutes what I want to call a "theological semantics of other religions." I have adapted the notion from Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist, who addresses the forms of thought and behavior in a given worldview in terms of a "cultural semantics" described as "a semantic paradigm expressed in grand stories and differentiating motifs." [3] In the case of monotheistic religions, Assmann identifies its paradigm with the belief that "there is no God but one" and that "idols are nothing." If there can be one and only one God, it is logical to conclude that anything else called "God" should be either replaced by or absorbed into the one true God. In this way, monotheistic religions transform existential questions about God into a logical choice: true or false, friend or foe. This in turn is intrinsically "political" in the sense that it differentiates allies from enemies. [4] We remember here that Carl Schmitt defined his concept of "the political" (*das Politische*) as a way to discern friend from enemy, or enemy from friend. And it is interesting enough that his concept came from his traumatic experience in his youth when he lived with his family as a member of the Catholic minority in the Protestant state of Preussen.[5] The fundamental character of monotheistic semantics is thus deductive and, as a result, exclusive. It demands with "violence" that its followers divide the world into for and against, into a way of life and a way of death.[6]

The same thing could be said about interreligious dialogue. That is to say, the theologies of religions, or the theologies of interreligious dialogue, or the theologies of religious pluralism, whatever they may be, have focused on the question of the monotheistic oneness of truth. Turned upside down, such theological endeavors arose from an awareness of the need to resolve the problem of oneness in Christian faith. Sometimes oneness means the exclusive absoluteness of Christian faith that should be defended against the truths claims of other religions. At other times, oneness means something very boundlessly open that could include a variety of religious truths. In this point, the core problem of religious pluralism is to be found in the question about the oneness and manyness of the truth, which was typically manifested in the theological statement of Ernst Troeltsch who took the initiative in the theological reflection on the history of religion. He said: "In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not one, but many. But to apprehend *the one in the many* constitutes the special character of love." [7] Troeltsch's theological thinking established the resources of the stereotypical paradigm of the Christian theological concern for other religions, as Paul Knitter observes: "[M]uch of what we feel concerning

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3 Jan Assmann, "Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt" In: *Das Gewaltpotential des Monotheismus und der dreieinige Gott* hrsg. Peter Walter, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2005, S.19.
4 Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Texte von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1963.
5 Horst Althaus, *„Heiden" „Juden" „Christen" Positionen und Kontroversen von Hobbes bis Carl Schmitt*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007, S.481
6 Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung: Oder der Preis des Monothiesmus* München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003.
7 Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in: John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite ed., *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings* Glasgow: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 31. (Italics added.)

religious pluralism is mirrored in Ernst Troeltsch." [8] The theologies today that try to have relationships with other religions, whatever they may be, have derived their fundamental forms and contents from the theological thinking of Ernst Troeltsch and from the monotheistic paradigm.

Second, the current theological controversies over interreligious dialogue recall the conditions in which the science of religion was born as an academic discipline in earlier centuries. As recent critical reexaminations of the science of religion indicate, the study of phenomena called "religion" was undertaken exclusively through theological perspectives. Such concepts as "religion," "history of religions," (*Religionsgeschichte*) and "world religions" (*Weltreligionen*) have been coined or applied exclusively by Christianity-centered and Europe-centered awareness. [9] From the beginning, the science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) was subordinate to Christian theology. Friedrich Heiler identifies the inseparable relation of the science of religion to theology as follows: "... we can't understand the religion if we regard it as superstition, illusion, and bugbear. Religion has something to do with the ultimate reality that is revealed to the human being and bless him. God, revelation, eternal life are the realities for the religious human being. All the science of religion is in the end theology, as long as the science of religion deals not only with the psychological and historical phenomena, but also the experience of the otherworldly realities." [10] To support his argument, Heiler refers to a phrase of Nathan Söderblom, one of the founders of the science of religion as a modern discipline: "God is living, I can prove it through the history of religion."[11]

In other words, the concept of "the science of religion" and "the history of religions" are suspected to be Christian inventions to prove the existence of God and thereby assert the universal validity of Christian theology. Since the Enlightenment, Christian theology has had to face fatal criticism from humanism and modern science that such Christian concepts as revelation, salvation, creation, etc. are merely relics of an ancient worldview that is no longer viable. Christian theologians staged a counterattack. By inventing the concept of "the history of religions" to form a joint front with the Christian faith, and by bestowing a special character on "religion," such theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ernst Troeltsch, and Rudolf Otto believed that they had found academic ways to withstand criticism of the Christian faith. That is, the concept of "the history of religions" carries with it an assumption that faith itself is a universal human phenomenon and that faith is something totally different ("*das Andere*") from rational ways of thinking and being human. In this sense the science of religion was, from beginning to end, *ancilla theologiae*.

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8 Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 23.

9 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" Mark C. Taylor ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 269ff.; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How the European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.309ff.

10 Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsforschung und Wesen der Religionen* Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961, S.17. (Italics added) For critical reexaminations of the origins and history of the science of religions, see Axel Michaels, „Einleitung" *idem* hrsg., *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: Vom Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade* 2.Aufl., München: C.H.Beck, 2994, S.7ff ; Sigurd Hjelde, „Religionswissenschaft und Theologie: Die Frage nach ihrer gegenseitigen Abgrenzung in historischer Perspektive" *Studia Theologica* 52(1998) S. 85ff.

11 "Gott lebt, ich kann es beweisen aus der Religionsgeschichte." Nathan Söderblom, *Der lebendige Gott im Zeugnis der Religionsgeschichte*. German ed. by Friedrich Heiler, München: C. Kaiser, 1932, I, S.356.

2. Religious understanding as "intimacy knowledge"

But the Asian way of theologizing takes a different approach. Asian Christians experience the relationship between the Christian faith and other religions not as the objective juxtaposition of variant traditions lying *outside* their own faith, but as part of a historical and cultural accumulation and configuration *within* their own faith. From the outset, the Christian faith in Asia is a composite phenomenon that includes other religious traditions. In other words, the religious traditions with which the Asian Christian seeks dialogue are already "somatically associated" [12] in their Christian faith. Let me enter into a detailed discussion of this topic.

The objective religious history in Asia shows that multiple religious traditions have existed simultaneously. We may call such a condition "explicate" religious reality, expressed in the religious history of, for example, Korea [Figure O]. But the genuine "religious" meaning of the co-existence of multiple religions is to be found for the first time when we turn this figure vertically, as in Figure I. That is, the genuine awareness of interreligious dialogue for Asian Christian does not emerge until the "explicate" objective religious reality is internalized and incarnated into the "implicate" subjective religious reality of one's Christian faith. [13] For the Asian Christian, the plurality of religions as an outer fact [Figure O] is encoded and incarnated in her/his faith as an inner religious reality [Figure I]. The objective religious history of Asia is accumulated in the subjective faith of Asian Christians. At this moment the objective knowledge of the history of religion gets its corporeality. In this sense we can cite what Thomas Kasulis explains as an "intimate" type of knowledge in his book *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*: "Perhaps we need to coin a new term capturing the theory of truth involved in an intimacy orientation. In this work we will call it the "assimilation theory of truth." […] The term "assimilation" is used in physiology to indicate the process by which the body takes in nutrients from the food that has been ingested and digested. From the standpoint of intimacy, knowledge is absorbed into the body somatically through praxis. Knowledge is literally incorporated rather than received from outside or generated from inside. […] In an important sense, intimate knowledge is not something the person has. Instead it is what that person, at least in part, is. (In Sanskrit, *satya* means both "being" and "truth.") Knowledge is assimilated, not acquired. It resides in the overlap between the knower and the known." [14]

Kasulis distinguishes the "intimacy knowledge" from "integrity's knowledge." The latter assumes, in contrast to the former, quoted above, "a publicly verifiable objectivity," and in order to get that, the knower as an observer should take a distance from the known. In principle, the knower could be separated from the known at any time when the integrity relation between the two is of no use. But in the case of "intimacy knowledge," the known could not be separated from the knower because the former became "somatically" an indispensable part of the knower. When the knower is by force removed from the known, it leaves for both of them an incurable injury. The separation of the knower from the known means in this case a loss of a part of the

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12 Thomas Kasulis, *Intimacy and Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, p.79.
13 I borrow the terms "explicate" and "implicate" from Stephen Kaplan's Book *Different Paths, Different Summits: A Model for Religious Pluralism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.
14 Thomas P. Kasulis, *ibid.*, p.79.

knower. In this sense, the religious understanding as "intimacy knowledge" is intrinsically sacramental and Eucharistic.

Through Kasulis's term of "intimacy knowledge" which, as he maintains properly, is "somatically assimilated" into the body of the knower, the relation between the history of religions in Korea and the Christians who live in it can be understood in this way: The historical knowledge about the other religions "out there" is "somatically assimilated" into their Christian faith; this "somatic" knowledge in turn recalls the position of other religions "in" their own Christian faith; other religions "out there" and their Christian faith exist, if expressed by the Hua-yen terminologies, in the relation of simultaneity, interdependence, and interpenetration.

In this sense Asian Christians belong, consciously or unconsciously, to multiple religions that affect the living traditions of their Christian faith. Their Christian faith was and is constructed through encounters with "other" religions that are already found in their faith itself. Here *faith is dialogue, and dialogue is faith*. To understand this intimate relationship we thus need to develop "the hermeneutics of the depth" for unearthing the religious traditions layered in the unconsciousness depths of the Christian faith, modeled after C. G. Jung's ideal of achieving "individuation" by incorporating the voice of the unconsciousness. [15] In this sense, Christian dialogue with other religions would begin from a self-reflective dialogue of faith with its own "inner" reality rather than from an encounter with "other" and "outer" religious ways. Dialogue would then not be an elective activity for those who wish to engage in it but an integral dimension of faith itself.

3. The Hua-yen Buddhist *dhatu* of Asian Christian faith

As mentioned above, the reason to investigate the possibility of the theology of interreligious dialogue which is grounded on the Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the ultimate reality comes, first of all, from a critical reevaluation of the theological concentration on the oneness of religious truth. Here I want to refer to the Hua-yen Buddhist contribution to the formation of Asian theology of interreligious dialogue, or Asian theologies of religious pluralism.

In a short paper entitled "Buddhism and pluralism," Kiyotaka Kimura, a well-known Japanese Buddhist scholar, inquires into "the relationship between Buddhism and monism or pluralism." [16] He divides the transition of Buddhist teaching about the nature of reality into three phases: From a naïve pluralistic standpoint over nihilistic monism to a standpoint that transcends both naïve pluralistic and monistic ways of thought.

The fundamental Buddhist awakening is expressed through two sorts of teachings on *pratiitya-samutpada* (=dependent origination). The first, the teaching of the Twelve-fold Chain (*nidānas*) (*nidvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*), holds that all suffering (*dukkha*) in the world is

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15 Cf. Seung Chul Kim, "Der Glaube als interkulturelles und interreligiöses Ereigns in Bezug auf die Kulturalität des Selbstverständnisses des ostasiatischen christlichen Glaubens." In: Michael Fischer hrsg., *Die Kulturabhängigkeit von Begriffen* Frankfurt am Main/ Berlin/ Bern/ Bruxelles/ New York/ Oxford/ Wien: Peter Lang, 2010, S.123ff.
16 Kiyotaka Kimura, „Bukkyo to Tagenshugi" (Buddhism and Pluralism) *Bukkyō to Ningen Shakai no Genkyu: Asaeda Zenshō Hakase Kanreki Kinen Ronbunshū* (*A Study of Buddhism and Human Society. Essays in Honor of Dr. Zenshō Asaeda on his Sixtieth Birthday*) Kyōtō: Nagata Bunshōdō, 2004, p.525. (Author's translation)

caused by "ignorance" (*avidya*). The second, the teaching of "five aggregates" (five *skandha*), says that a human being is constituted with five functions of "form," "sensation," "perception," "mental formations," and "consciousness." And in this case, the five aggregates were thought to be substances (*asti*) that exist eternally. This standpoint, Kimura asserts, "is evidently a sort of pluralism." That is, according to the essential teaching of Buddhism, everything in the world exists out of more than two causes. There is no One thing out of which everything comes from. The teaching of Twelve-fold Chain shows us how the former cause yields organically the later cause. There is a Twelve-fold 'Chain of being' from ignorance to birth. "Buddhism does not give importance to the idea of the Root-Principle or the First Cause as other systems of philosophy often do. […] According to Buddhism, human beings and all living things are self-created or self-creating. The universe is not homocentric; it is a co-creation of all beings. Buddhism does not believe that all things came from one cause, but holds that everything is inevitably created out of more than two causes." [17]

But "the theory of all that exists" (*sarvāstivāda*) was severely criticized by Mahayana Buddhism. According to the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of the *Mādhyamaka* School founded by Nāgārjuna, neither self nor *dharma* has in itself any eternal substance. The naïve pluralism of Buddhism is totally denied here. But the standpoint of emptiness is not to be called even as a monism, because *śūnyatā* as a concept has in itself no substance, either. *Śūnyatā* itself is nothing more than a transient name which is dedicated to something that exists only in mutual relationships, which are as Nāgārjuna puts it:"Whatever is dependently co-arisen / That is explained to be emptiness./ That, being a dependent designation / Is itself the middle way. (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18)

But the *Mādhyamaka* School, Kimura maintains, represents a position that somehow has an intrinsic possibility to fall into a sort of nihilism. As a critical alternative to such a tendency the *Yogācāra* School appears as a monism of consciousness. According to this school, all phenomena come from and converge to consciousness only. The *Yogācāra* School was succeeded by the *Tathāgatagarbha* School that maintains the inherent identity between the Buddha and sentient beings. They subsume each other in the way that sentient beings have in themselves the Buddha-*dhatu* or *tathāgatagarbha*. Kimura maintains that these ways of thinking take on monism.

Furthermore, Buddhist philosophy reached its ultimate state of development in the view that there could be, besides and behind all things, no special ground for anything. That is, all things that exist, whether as an individual or a whole, are affirmed immediately as the very appearance of ultimate truth. As examples of this position, Kimura lists the theories of the Tien-tai School, the Zen School, and the Hua-yen School. According to Tien-tai, all things and phenomena reflect the truth [諸法実相]. The Zen School maintains that the heart of sentient beings is not different from the Buddha himself [即心是仏] .

The extreme form of the affirmation of all things as the very appearance of ultimate truth is realized by the Hua-yen School. The Hua-yen School sees the world as a place where we find ourselves as *loka-dhatu* existing in an interdependent relation with *dharma-dhatu*, the

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[17] Junjiro Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* ed., by Wing-Tsit Chan and Charles A. Moore, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973, p. 29.

world of *dharma* [18] The world is, as it is, the Lotus Treasury World (*Padma-garbha-loka-dhatu*) (華蔵世界). This phenomenal world is at once the world of faith, the realm in which "simultaneous interpenetrative harmonization" [19] between the phenomenal world and the transcendental world, if we still are allowed to use such dichotomous concepts. It is precisely in this Hua-yen worldview, as Heinrich Dumoulin wrote, that the "the cosmotheistic (*kosmotheistisch*) world view of the East Asian people" is intensively realized and enthusiastically practiced.[20] In this sense Hua-yen Buddhist thought, which is, according to Kimura, to be evaluated as the most sophisticated system of thought in Mahayana Buddhism, can be expected to give Asian Christians the most comprehensive possibility to understand and express their Christian faith.

As is well known, the Ha-yen School teaches about the Four *dharma-dhatu*: the *dharma-dhatu* of "Shih"; the *dharma-dhatu* of "Li"; the *dharma-dhatu* of Non-obstruction of "Li" against "Shih"; The *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of "Shih" and "Shih." And the ultimate meaning of all this is to be found in "the *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of 'Shih' and 'Shih,'" which could be translated as "the realm of non-obstruction between phenomena." All things and phenomena are intrinsically interdependent. As *Avatamsaka* Sutra asserts, the basic idea of the Hua-yen School is the interdependence and unity between the absolute and the relative, and also between all the relatives: "All in One, One in All. The All melts into a single whole. There are no divisions in the totality of reality. It views the cosmos as holy, as 'one bright pearl,' the universal reality of the Buddha. The universal Buddhahood of all reality is the religious message of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra." Or,

> In each dust-mote of these worlds
> Are countless worlds and Buddhas.
> From the tip of each hair of Buddha's body
> Are revealed the indescribable Pure Lands.
> The indescribable infinite Lands
> All ensemble in a hair's tip [of Buddha]. [21]

In keeping with his understanding of the historical transition of the Buddhist teachings, as summarized above, Kimura suggests that "we have to recognize the complexity and diversity not only of the Buddhism but also of the religions, and that we should abandon some principle which we tend to set up as a ground for the religious complexity and diversity. Because, as Nāgārjuna and Zhuangzi maintained, as long as such a principle is established, another principle should be set up, and there would be a rivalry and prejudice. […] We should find the way that we could transcend monism, dualism, and even pluralism at the same time." [22] Although Kimura maintains that pluralism is also something to be transcended, it is evident

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[18] Eikaku Yosihara, "The world *loka-dhatu* and the *dharma-dhatu*" *Review of Kobe University of Mercantile Marine Part I Studies in Humanities and Social Science* 21(1973) p. 5ff.

[19] Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982, p. 3.

[20] Heinrich Dumoulin, "Dozai no Taiwa wo unagasu Kegonkyō"(*Avatamsaka sutra* that stimulate the East-West Dialogue) *Sophia* 34(2) (1985), p. 95.

[21] Cited from Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Volume 1: India and China* World Wisdom Books, 2005, pp. 46-47.

[22] Kiyotaka Kimura, *ibid.*, p. 526.

from his argument that he advocates the pluralistic understanding of Hua-yen Buddhism, which goes far beyond both the naïve pluralism of early Buddhism and the somewhat nihilistic monism of the *Mādhyamaka* School. The pluralistic view of the Hua-yen School went through a negation of the substantial understanding of pluralism that juxtaposes all things and phenomena. It is a pluralism after naïve pluralism (eternalism 常住論) and after the monism of emptiness (annihilationism 断滅論). [23]

What, then, could a Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of ultimate reality tell about the self-understanding of Asian Christians with reference to the various religious traditions? The complicated metaphysical system of Hua-yen thought could be aggregated into the teaching of "the *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of 'Shih' and 'Shih.'" *Dharma-dhatu* could be translated as *topos*, where "each individual is at once the cause for the whole and is caused by the whole, and what is called existence is a vast body made up of an infinity of individuals all sustaining each other and defining each other." [24] "The Hua-yen universe is essentially a universe of identity and total intercausality" in "which there is no center, or perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere." [25] Hua-yen destroys "the fiction of a sole causal agent." [26] Rather, with the insight of Hua-yen Buddhism, we can maintain, "the religious truths are spread out in the organic co-relational network." [27]The point to the doctrine of interdependence is that things exist *only* in interdependence, for things do not exist in their own right. In Buddhism, this manner of existence is called 'emptiness' (Sanskrit *śūnyatā*). Buddhism says that things are empty in the sense that they are absolutely lacking in a self-essence (*svabhāva*) by virtue of which things would have an independent existence. In reality, their existence derives strictly from interdependence. [28]

Things exist interdependently because they have no self-nature, and vice versa. In this sense Hua-yen synthesizes, as Kimura maintains, both the naïve pluralism and the nihilistic monism of Buddhism. Cook describes the same insight by citing the phrase of Japanese Buddhist Gyōnen (1240-1321) that "both Fa-tsang and Nāgārjuna accomplished the same end: both demonstrate that things do not exist independently of each other." [29]

If all things exist in interdependence, then there could be no substantial distinction between sentient beings and the Buddha, between the relative and the absolute. As Cook

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23 In this connection we still have to remember, however, that there have been in Buddhism itself many efforts to classify the sutras and their teachings [教相判釈]. It was an endeavor to propose the superiority of one's own school on the grounds of specific sutras and their teachings, and the Hua-yen School was not an exception. It is therefore impossible and even anachronistic to try to find an impulse for religious pluralism in the ancient religious traditions as such, because the awareness of religious pluralism is a modern one. Cf. Richard P. Hayes, "Gotama Buddha and Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 1(1991), p. 94-95.

24 Francis Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977, p. 3.

25 *ibid.*,p.4. Cf. Kamata Shigeo, "Hokkai Engi to Sonzairon" (The *pratiitya-samutpaada* of *dharmadhatu* and Ontology) in: *Kōza Bukkyō Shiōo: Sonzanton/Jikanron* vol.1 ed by Mitsuyoshi Saigusa, Tōkyō: Risōsha, 1974, p. 102.

26 Francis Cook, *ibid.*, p. 12.

27 Ryūsei Takeda, „Shinrann Jōdōkyō Saikaishaku no ichi Shiza: Shūkyō Tagenjidai ni okeru Jōdōkyō no Tatzukōuchiku" (One perspective for the Reinterprtation of the Jodo teaching of Shinran: The Deconstruction of Jōdō Buddhism in the age of religious pluralism) *Shūkyō Genkyu* (Study of Religions) 82(2)(2008) p. 297.

28 Francis Cook, *ibid.*,p. 15.

29 *ibid.*, p. 48.

admits, the perfect nature of the Buddha "is treated in the most unusual manner" by Fa-tsang: "Fa-tsang's position is that this [*nirvāṇa*, emptiness, Buddha nature] comes to exist in both a pure and impure form as conditional phenomena." [30]

The interdependence of the Absolute and the Relative could be developed by the theory that one thing is the whole and at the same time nothing. Francis Cook explains this fact with the analogue of Fa-tsang's ten coins, which is an analogy for the totality of existence. "According to the reasoning of the Hua-yen masters, coin two is not a self-existent entity in its context of the ten (whole). It is coin two as a result of coin one, and looked at from the standpoint of coin one, coin one is the cause and coin two is the result, i.e., it is a conditioned coin two. […] Consequently, coin one exists- i.e., is a phenomenal object – and coin two is empty – i.e., exists only in a conditioned manner. […] The coins are identical in their simultaneous possession of the natures of emptiness and existence.[…] The emptiness and existence which serve as the source for the identity of thins function primarily as a means of indicating the flow of causal efficacy between a dharma considered to be cause and the totality of remaining dharma which are in this context considered to be result." [31]

Cook interprets this metaphysical analogue of Fa-tsang in an existential and ethical way for the Bodhisattva: "Not only is the reality of identity and interdependence the basis for Bodhisattva activity, but it also acts as a moral imperative, leaving the truly moral being with no option but to act in accordance with this reality." [32]

If this Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the reality is "somatically" assimilated into self-understanding of Asian Christian faith, as I believe it is, then the identity of Asian Christians is born within the awareness that their faith is intrinsically formed through the encounter with other religions. At the same time this awareness tells them that their identity as Christians is always "in the making," so that it could not be fixed to one form. Rather, their faith frees them from every attachment to any object of the faith, because the self as the subject of their faith is already constituted by the encounters with other religious worlds of faith.

Thomas Kasulis seems to draw near to this Hua-yen understanding of the interdependent self when he sees the Buddhist understanding of the self as "intimacy's view of the self." According to Kasulis, in Buddhism intimacy's understanding of the self reaches the furthest logical point, because the naïve attachment to the 'I' or ego (*ātman*) as an independent entity is totally denied in Buddhism. Kasulis says further of the Buddhist self:

> In the Buddhist self's diagrammatic representation, there is no unshaded or independent part of *a* left. This lack of the independent ego –the lack of an unshaded part of *a* – is what Buddhism calls *anātman*, 'non ego' or 'non-I.' This does not mean that I am without identity; there is still the unique overlap of interdependent process defining who I am (as represented by the full circle of *a*). The major point for Buddhism, however, is that the overlaps defining *a* are

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30 *ibid.*, p.60.
31 *ibid.*, p.64-65.
32 *ibid.*, p.118.

completely interdependent (completely shaded) and without any trace of independent substantiality – without any untouched nucleus. [33]
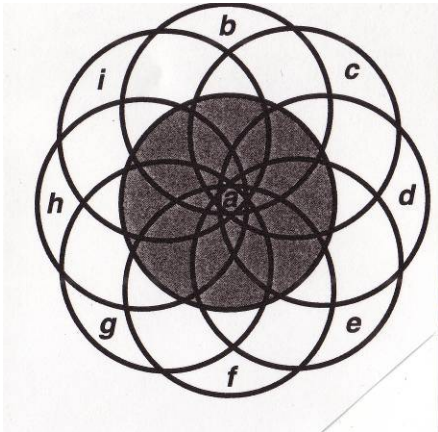
The Buddhist Self [34]

In the Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of reality, "the lack of the independent ego" of a person is both a starting point for and as the ultimate stage of living in the realm of dharma. At the same time, the "lack" is experienced as a freedom from the attachment to a self-closing exclusive self of the faith that denies, as cited above from Steve Odin, any "simultaneous interpenetrative harmonization" in front of the different religious tradition than one's own.

4. Three steps toward "the theology of pluralistic pluralism"

The essential problem of theological understanding of religion could be not stated as a question of whether there is only one ultimate religious truth or not. [35] From the point of view of Asian Christians, this is merely an abstract question that neither is to be answered ultimately, nor has any ultimate meaning for their faith. Although the concept of pluralism is to be defined as "the metaphysical doctrine that all existence is ultimately reducible to a multiplicity of distinct and independent beings or elements," [36] the "multiplicity of distinct and independent beings or elements" is assimilated in one and the same faith of Asian Christians. In this sense, the question of whether there is one ultimate truth must transcend its epistemological character, which could not be asked and answered without objectifying Asian

[33] Thomas P. Kasulis, *ibid.*, p.63.
[34] *ibid.*
[35] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Gott ohne Grenzen. Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005, S.177.
[36] Frederick J.E. Woodbridge, "Pluralism," James Hastings ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* vol. X Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1981, p.66.

Christian faith. The dichotomy between the One and the Many, no matter how it is assumed, is no longer valid for the reality of Asian Christian faith. Or, to state the same thing better, the one faith consists of many religions, and many religions are assimilated in one faith.

In order to be honest toward the experience of Asian Christian faith, I think we must pass through three steps of theological thought.

First of all, we must overcome the exclusive attitude toward other religious traditions. Hick's "Pluralistic Hypothesis" could contribute to a deconstruction of the egocentric self into the Reality-centered view of the religions. Hick says: "The great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human. ... One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions that have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances. [...] Within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological "spaces" within which, or "ways" along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfillment." [37] Hick's idea of a "Pluralist Hypothesis" that concentrates the transcendent One over all historical and cultural religious phenomena could provide us, although temporarily, a method (*upāya*) to overcome the exclusivist attitude toward other religions.

Second, we should further cut the thread of the oneness that is assumed to tie all the various religious traditions of the world together to the transcendent One. That would mean getting over even the "Pluralistic Hypothesis" of John Hick. The following Zen *mondo* could be cited as an indicator to cut the One; "A monk asked Jōshū, 'All the dharmas are reduced to oneness, but what is oneness reduced to?' Jōshū said, 'When I was in Seishū I made a hempen shirt. It weighed seven pounds.'" [38] By concentrating on this *mondo*, we could delete the shadow of the One that remained in the "Pluralistic Hypothesis" of John Hick.

In order to understand the religious experience of Asian Christians, the contemporary discussion of the phenomenon called "multiple religious belonging" [39] could provide us with a possibility to be free from the coercive One. Let's hear what Monica Coleman, an African American Christian, notes about the intrinsic problem of the theological endeavors for the religious pluralism by some Western theologians:

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37 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* Yale University Press, 1989, p. 240.

38 *Two Zen Classics. Mumonkan & Hekiganroku* Translated with commentaries by Katsuki Sekida; edited and introduced by A.V. Grimstone, New York: Weatherhill, 1977, p.271. (case 45) *Mondo* means literally "question and answer" and is used in Zen Buddhism to provoke a great question and to test the awakening status of the practicing monk.

39 The theme of "multiple religious belonging" becomes actively discussed rather among the European and American scholars. Cf. Christoph Bochinger, "Multiple religiöse Identitäten im Westen zwischen Traditionsbezug und Individualisierung" Reinhold Bernhardt/Perry Schmidt-Leukel hrsg., *Multiple religiöse Identität. Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen* Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008, S.137ff.; Jan Van Bragt, "Multiple Religious Belonging of the Japanese People" in: Catherin Cornille ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, pp.7-19; Cf. Xavier Gravend-Tirole, "Double Commitment: or The Case for Religious *Mestizaje* (Creolization)" in: David Cheetham et.al. ed., *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People* Editions Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi B.V., 2011, p. 415ff.

The assumption is that each of us identifies him or her self in one discrete religious tradition and then interacts with those other people who also identify themselves as members or adherents of a different and yet also single and discrete religious tradition. The Womb Circle exists as part of a larger African American religious tradition that illustrates that this assumption is, in many contexts, fallacious. That is, there are individuals—indeed entire communities—that do not function as members of a single unitary religious tradition. There are individuals—indeed entire communities—that live and function as members of multiple religious traditions *simultaneously*. In these contexts, conversations about religious plurality are not just between discrete faith traditions and communities—about being interreligious—but rather about being multi-religious. And while examples may be found outside of African American religions, I believe that African American religions are distinctively qualified to discuss this multi-religious existence because this it is not a new phenomenon or realization for African American religions. Rather, multi-religious living is woven into the history and reality of African American religions.[40]

Third, by cutting the thread of the transcendent One, we enter into the realm (*dhatu*) of faith, which I have described with the help of Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the reality. In this realm, the religious pluralism "out" is "somatically" assimilated into the religious pluralism "in'" as a reference to the existence of Asian Christians. In this realm of faith, the "individuals" or "entire communities," as Colman mentioned above, "live and function as members of multiple religious traditions simultaneously."

What would be the proper name for the theological paradigm that effectively expresses the Asian Christian faith? I want to call it "a theology of pluralistic pluralism." Needless to say, this phrase was coined from the "the theology of unitive pluralism" by Paul Knitter, in which Troeltsch's insight into the relation between the One and the Many are seems to be repeated: "The many are called to be one. But it is a one that does not devour the many. The many become one precisely by remaining the many, and the one is brought about by each of the many making its distinct contribution to the others and thus to the whole. ... So there is a movement not toward absolute or monistic oneness but toward what may be called 'unitive pluralism': plurality constituting unity." [41] Seen from the Asian perspective, Knitter's recent autobiographical book *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* (2009) suggests a possible realization of what was potentially entailed in his concept of "the theology of unitive pluralism." In other words, the intrinsic meaning of "the theology of unitive pluralism" is realized in the theology of "double-religious belonging": To be faithful both to the Christian faith and Buddhist

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40 Monica A. Coleman, "The Womb Circle: A Womanist Practice of Multi-Religious Belonging" *Practical Matters* 4(2011) pp. 6-7. (Italics not in original.)
41 Paul Knitter, *ibid.*, p.7.

tradition simultaneously. With Knitter we could maintain that the Asian way of being Christian is realized as a "multi-religious belonging" to the various religious traditions at the same time. [42]

"The theology of pluralistic pluralism" is a theological way of thinking to express the reality in which we experience the free-floating and mutual penetration of the religious traditions not only in the world "out there," but also in the inner world of one's faith. This reality, as experienced by Asian Christian, is not to be totally and adequately expressed by the "Pluralistic Hypothesis," although it helps us to overcome the unnecessary conditions of being a Christian in Asia: The exclusivist self-righteous attitude of the faith. In the theology of pluralistic pluralism, the Many appears as much the Many as it is liberated from the coercive One. One's own faith occurs here, to put it better, by the mutual penetration of the many faiths, unconsciously and even consciously.
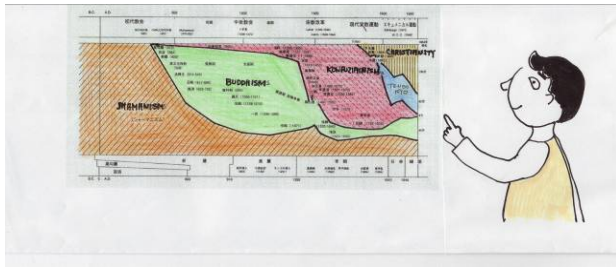
[Figure O] [43]

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42 In Korea and also in Asia, where multiple religious traditions have long co-existed, however, comprehensive reports or studies of the phenomenon of "multi-religious belonging" remain to be done. This is probably partly due to the historical fact that the Christianity from the West has taken the initiative in Korean society since the modernization of the country, and it is partly due to the fact that the traditional religions of Korea have rarely played a leading social role. Moreover, the Christian faith which was introduced into Korea by Western missionaries was usually conservative and fundamentalist, with extremely exclusive attitudes toward non-Christian religions. But along with the diversification of Korean society and the influx of laborers from Southeast Asia, came the phenomenon of "multiple religious belonging." Therefore, what Colman says about African American religious tradition corresponds to the Asian Christian faith, so the object fact of religious plurality is reflected in and coincides with the awareness of interreligious dialogue "in" one's own faith.

43 The figure (a religious history of Korea) itself comes from Dong Sik Ryu, *Hanguk Jongyo wa Kidokkyo* (*Religions of Korea and the Christianity*) Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1965. I modified it by adding an illustrating figure for my own use in this paper.
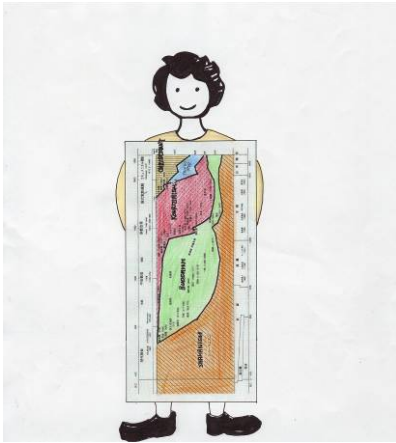
[Figure I]

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