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DIVINITY IN PROCESS THOUGHT AND THE LOTUS SUTRA

In an earlier article, I outlined in broad brush strokes some resemblances between the Lotus Sutra and process thought.¹ Here, while repeating some of what appeared in that article, I want to focus more narrowly on the idea of divinity, making, I suppose, an attempt at explicating Buddhist theology.

It is very important to realize at the outset that the Lotus Sutra² is not a philosophical work. It is clearly and explicitly soteriological, designed not so much for edification as to change the reader's way of life.³ Like much of Buddhism, this Sutra sometimes disdains seeking answers to difficult metaphysical questions that make little or no apparent difference in our lives. At other times, on matters where philosophers and nonphilosophers alike could yearn for greater clarity, it is marvelously vague, a tendency that is often facilitated by the Chinese language.

In this sense, making comparisons or showing relationships between the Sutra and process philosophy sometimes simply misses the mark of what the Sutra is about. We run the risk of grossly distorting the teaching of the Sutra by turning it into a philosophical or theological tract when in fact it is an extended homily. Nevertheless, embedded in its parables and stories and poetry, behind its teachings and self-interpretations, even in its organization, there is, I believe, a remarkably coherent understanding of the world, even a relatively sophisticated metaphysics.⁴

For both the Lotus Sutra and for process thought it is impossible to consider God or Buddha apart from the world, or at least apart from some world. That is, God and Buddha are the way they are in part because the world is the way it is. For Whitehead, for example, creativity is ultimate just because it is ubiquitous, something God does not create and cannot destroy. God suffers the world willy-nilly. Similarly, in the Lotus Sutra, Buddha nature is ubiquitous, something the Buddha finds or discovers and embodies but does not create. This means that understanding God or Buddha requires some parallel understanding of the nature of the world.

In this article, the three closely related ideas in the Lotus Sutra, Buddha, buddha-nature, and Dharma, are considered in relation to the Whiteheadian notions of God, creativity, and process.

PHILOSOPHIES OF INTEGRATION

Whitehead called his a “philosophy of organism.” Hartshorne often uses the term “synthesis”⁵ to describe process thought. Undoubtedly, for very different reasons, the Lotus Sutra too embodies a philosophy of integration⁶ in which there is a harmony of truly diverse elements—both a genuine one and a genuine many. In this, the Lotus Sutra expresses a middle way between ultimate monism, in which the many disappear like drops of water in an ocean, and ultimate pluralism, in which there is no real unity or harmony of the many. For it, as much as for Whitehead, both “creativity”—or at least something much like creativity—and “one” and “many” are “ultimate notions.”⁷ This philosophy of integration finds statement in many ways within the Sutra, but all of them are expressions of the fundamental underlying, perhaps metaphysical, view that all of reality is one integrated whole.⁸

One of the ways human beings and nature are integrated in the Lotus Sutra is through the doctrine, to be discussed later, according to which all things, or at least all actual things, can be analyzed into dharmas, the ultimate actualities, which in many ways are like Whiteheadian actual entities.⁹ Accordingly, all natural things, including human beings, are equally dharmas or analyzable into dharmas. The dharmas embody the Dharma, with which they share a kind of ultimacy.

This integration of all reality through the notion of Dharma has been important in subsequent interpretation of the Lotus Sutra. But the more immediate notion through which the Sutra itself integrates human beings and other beings is the idea of buddha-nature. Although the term “buddha-nature”¹⁰ is not used in the Sutra, numerous stories and exhortations are used to teach that idea, the idea that all living beings have within them the potential or capacity to become a buddha.¹¹

The philosophical basis within the Sutra for holding strictly to the idea of universal buddha-nature is the idea that there is a basic process of causal relations (*pratītya samutpāda*¹²) that enables all things to be born, to live, to decline, and to die. It is, thus, a process of both creating and sustaining life, both in the micro sense of creating and sustaining individual existences and in the macro sense of being collectively the life of the whole. This relational process can also be understood to be the Truth about the universe, or the Dharma. And this Dharma is the *Dharmakāya*, the Dharma body of the Buddha. To be alive is to partici-

pate in that great life process and thus to be endowed with a buddha-nature. Thus, what is primarily a soteriological doctrine—that no one is beyond saving because they have a buddha-nature—is firmly rooted in the basically metaphysical doctrine that all living beings necessarily have a buddha-nature.

Thus, while any particular truth or any particular thing is contingent, that there are truths and that there are things is not contingent. That there are truths and that there are things is one of the truths that constitute the Dharma. Although the Sutra certainly does not use the term “metaphysical,” we might say that they are metaphysical truths.

PHILOSOPHY OF BECOMING

All Buddhists, I think, wanted to deny that anything has substantial or independent reality. But, in East Asian Buddhism at least, this basic conviction sometimes took courses that were finally world-denying in the sense of denying the reality and importance of the mundane world. Sometimes this was done by giving prominence to pure lands, sometimes by emphasizing emptiness, or by interpreting emptiness as nothingness, sometimes through a two-truth doctrine in which the mundane world is mere illusion or at least something very inferior to a higher reality.

The Lotus Sutra, in contrast, emphasizes the reality and value of the mundane world of suffering—the *sāha* world—which is the Buddha land of Śākyamuni Buddha. It could even be said that the whole Sutra is an affirmation or even celebration of the empirical world of becoming in all of its diversity. I mention this because it is important to recognize that the philosophy of becoming embedded in the Sutra is not mere speculation about the nature of reality; it primarily serves the purpose of affirming the value of the empirical world and the reader’s ethical engagement in it.

But a metaphysical theory is quite clearly present. In the brief *Innumerable Meanings Sutra*, which often accompanies the Lotus Sutra as a kind of preface or “opening sutra” and forms the first part of the so-called Threefold Lotus Sutra, there is a passage which, without details of course, marvelously anticipates Whitehead’s theory of concrescence. All things, or dharmas, enjoy only a brief moment of existence in which there are four phases:

According to the nature of things (the Dharma), all things (dharmas) emerge. According to the nature of things, all things live. According to the nature of things, all things change. According to the nature of things, all things perish. According to the nature of things, bad and good things emerge, live, change and perish. . . . None of these things continues to

live even for a moment, but they emerge and perish every moment, and each emerges, lives, changes, and perishes in an instant.¹³

This process, *pratītya samutpāda*, is the Dharma, both the truth that the Buddha discovered and his teaching about that truth. This Dharma is both immanent in all things and a kind of ground of the reality of all actual things. It is thus an ultimate in one sense. Yet, apart from actual things, apart from the dharmas, which are the basic actualities, there is and could not be a Dharma, the process by which things become. Thus, the Sutra suggests that there is an interdependence and even a kind of identity of Dharma, the truth about the way things are, and the actual things themselves, understood to be that in which the process is always embodied. As one of the great interpreters of the Lotus Sutra, Chih-i, says, “The mundane dharmas are themselves the ultimate Dharma. There is no need to forsake the mundane and adhere to the sacred.”¹⁴

One can say that there are at least two ultimates in the Sutra-dharmas, which are transient actualities, and the Dharma, which is the everlasting ground or process in and through which the Dharmas come to be and pass away. But, while both the many dharmas and the one Dharma are ultimately real, they are also both without independent existence. Both the things within the process, the actual beings, and the process by which they become are interdependent. Apart from being in actual things, there could be no Dharma, and apart from Dharma, there could be no actual things. Thus, again, their integration is not a matter of claiming that one is ultimate and the other phenomenal, or that one is more real than the other. Rather, they require each other and have no reality apart from each other.

Thus the world is one within which there is enormous diversity and variety, but it is an integrated whole because it is based in a single process, a single ultimate reality and shares, in a sense, one Buddha. But, there is, and can be, no separate or independent ultimate reality. Ultimacy is a matter of generality, not of independence.

Looked at in another way, the Dharma is the *Dharmakāya*,¹⁵ one of the three (or more) bodies of the Buddha. This is so because a buddha embodies—that is, lives—the truth. Although the Buddha has had, and will in the future have, an infinite number of embodiments, it is the *Dharmakāya* that is eternal, or eternally embodied—eternal in the sense that it has no beginning and no end, not in the sense that it is somehow out of or beyond time. We could say that the Dharma is temporal but not temporary, eternally embodied in the temporary.

The idea of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) does not play a big role in the Lotus Sutra. But in one sense it can be said to be an underlying reality of all existence. From the point of view of the Lotus Sutra, emptiness is nothing more or less than the process of interdependent causality expressed

negatively. Most simply, “emptiness” means the absence of substantial being (*svabhāva*). All things are without, or empty of, independent existence. Emptiness, in other words, is a necessary characteristic, albeit a very important one, of all existing beings. Emptiness is also expressed in the negative notions of *annica* and *anatman*, the doctrines that all beings are impermanent and that all selves are impermanent. Accordingly, everything and every person comes to be, changes, and perishes. There are no permanent substances, beings, things, persons, or souls of any kind.

Because it advocates a positive attitude toward the world and positive activities within the world, there is a preference within the Lotus Sutra for expressing the truth of emptiness positively—as universal causation and universal interdependence. All actual things exist or live only within a vast causal network apart from which there is nothing. Causal relationships extend ever more widely into the indefinitely extended past and into the indefinitely extended future that is yet to be. In this sense at least, the Lotus Sutra takes time very seriously. The whole meaning of receiving from the past and contributing to the future depends on the notion that temporal process is the ground or underlying reality of all existence, that is, an ever-present reality behind and within existing things.

Causality works in both temporal directions, that is, from the past and toward the future. Therefore, what people do, what one makes of one’s life, can have enormous impact on those who will come after. Sometimes it is said that what distinguishes Lotus Sutra faith from other Buddhist ways in Japan is that while all Japanese sects venerate ancestors, those who follow the Lotus Sutra must also venerate their descendants and work for their well-being and happiness.

Here, again, it is the case that time or historical process is taken very seriously in the Lotus Sutra. Nowhere does it suggest that one should seek to escape temporal existence, or that eternity is somehow more real than temporal existence, or that time can be reversed in some way. Even the notion of the eternal Buddha very clearly means that the Buddha is in all time. It does not in any sense suggest that time is unimportant. To the contrary, as temporal process, it is ultimately real.

BUDDHA-NATURE AND CREATIVITY

Despite the fact that the Lotus Sutra does not employ any term corresponding precisely to “creativity,” as indicated earlier, the Sutra does have ultimates that correspond to Whitehead’s “one,” “many,” and “creativity.” What the Sutra insists on as ultimate is the “buddha-nature” of all beings. Indeed, one could say that the teaching of the buddha-nature of all beings is its central teaching, at least in the sense that “creativity”

is central to process thought. On the one hand, the buddha-nature teaching is explicitly a doctrine of universal salvation. That is, the Sutra insists that absolutely no one is finally exempt from the possibility of complete redemption. No matter whether one is poor, deranged by drugs, guilty of great crimes, a woman, a child, a nonhuman creature—with absolutely no exceptions—all beings have within them the potentiality to become a supremely enlightened Buddha, a potentiality which, given infinite time, will ultimately be realized.

The philosophical ground for the teaching of universal salvation is the doctrine of universal buddha-nature. This suggests, of course, a metaphysical doctrine, or something very close to it, in the sense that it is absolutely general, applying to everything that is actual without exception. As in the case of Whitehead's creativity, the potential may be, and usually is, very small, but can never be zero. No effort is made in this Sutra to settle disputes about the way in which the buddha-nature exists in all beings—whether, for example, it is more like a womb or more like a fruit within a womb. It is simply a capacity, or a small bud, which can be nourished and developed. But the reason why the buddha-nature is absolutely general is quite clear. It is because everything actual comes to be and is part of a single process, and in that sense is alive. To be is to participate in that process and it is what gives everything a buddha-nature or potential to become a Buddha. Because nothing exists apart from the process, which is the Dharma, everything has a buddha-nature.

Thus, while the Lotus Sutra does not have anything exactly corresponding to the metaphysical doctrine of creativity in process thought, in some respects the idea of buddha-nature functions in a very similar way, being both absolutely general and a practical encouragement toward openness and creative activity.

THE UNIVERSAL BUDDHA

There has been much discussion about whether Buddhism conceptualizes anything like the Western idea of God. Certainly if "God" means an all-powerful being who is the only Creator of the universe, then the Lotus Sutra has no God. But if "God" means something more like what is taught by Whitehead and Hartshorne, there can be little question that the Sutra's "Eternal Buddha" is indeed God, or vice versa.

The Lotus Sutra goes to great lengths to teach the reality of the one, universal Buddha, the Buddha of all worlds—past, present, and future. Śākyamuni is the Buddha of this (*sahā*) world, but he has previously lived in countless other worlds and he will live in still other worlds after departing from this one. Also, the buddhas of other present worlds are

in some sense representatives or even duplicates of Śākyamuni Buddha. Thus the term “Eternal Śākyamuni Buddha” is used.¹⁶

The cosmic vision in the Lotus Sutra is one in which there are infinite (or at least innumerable) expanses of space and time occupied by an infinite number of Buddha lands, in each of which there is at least one Buddha. The word¹⁷ used in the Sutra for the relationship of these many buddhas to the universal Buddha is difficult to interpret or translate. It suggests that the many buddhas are somehow fragments or replicas, or representatives or manifestations of the universal Buddha. Although the exact nature of the relationship is murky, the basic point is very clear—all of these countless buddhas are subordinate in some sense to the one universal Buddha. They are simply a way in which the universal Buddha is present everywhere. Thus, the clearly made philosophical point is that the universal Buddha is omnipresent, that is, present in all places. Whether the number of worlds is actually infinite or simply incredibly large is not very important. In either case, there is no place that is, or can be, separated from the universal Buddha.

While the universal Buddha is thus omnipresent spatially, the same Buddha has also been teaching bodhisattvas through countless ages. Everyone is astonished when an enormous host of bodhisattvas emerge from under the earth and the Buddha explains that it is he himself who has been teaching and leading them from the most remote past. How can this be, Maitreya asks, when the Buddha has only been around for forty years? The Buddha’s response is that his own death and entry into nirvana is only a teaching device to get others to take responsibility for their own lives. In reality his life has not been extinguished. The Buddha is the Buddha, not only of all places, but also of all times, past and future. There is no suggestion, however, that the Buddha is in any sense above or outside of temporal process. Thus the term “eternal Buddha” or “eternal Śākyamuni” should not be taken to mean an atemporal or nontemporal reality. Such an idea simply is not to be found in the Lotus Sutra. What we do have is the idea that all of the Sutra’s teachings are brought together in the teaching that Śākyamuni Buddha is the one universal Buddha, the Buddha of all times and places, one who is infinite both spatially and temporally, in all parts of an infinite universe through the countless ages of the past into the countless ages of the future.

ABSOLUTE EXISTENCE

Nikkyo Niwano’s discussion of the Buddha as “an absolute existence” and use of the term “absolute” is very interesting in this regard.¹⁸ The idea of an “absolute power” (*zettaitekina chikara*) is rejected, as such a

god, being totally external to ourselves, would be unreliable as a source of assurance or peace of mind. The more such a god is conceived to have absolute power, the more dependent and fearful we would feel, not knowing when we might be abandoned or punished by him.

In contrast, the Buddha is said to be an “absolute existence” (*zettai no sonzai*). He is an absolute existence, we are told, because he exists “from the infinite past into the infinite future”; he exists “in every place, both inside and outside of ourselves”; he is “inseparable from us, even if we want to escape from him.” Our existence depends on him without our knowing it, as we depend on oxygen without being aware of it—he “is always enabling us to live” (*wareware o tsune ni ikashiteite kudasaru mono ga*).

Clearly this “absolute existence” is much more like what process thinkers have called “necessary” than it is like anything known as “absolute” in Western thought. While I prefer to use the term “universal Buddha,” underpinning this use of “universal” is a divinity that is, in this respect, logically close to Whitehead’s and Hartshorne’s views of God as necessary.

But they are not exactly the same, even with respect to their necessity. In Lotus Sutra Buddhism, both the Buddha/Dharma and the world (some world or other) are necessary in the sense that there has not been and will not be any time or place where there is no world or no Buddha. This, it seems to me, is not quite true for Whiteheadian process thought, in the sense that while God’s existence is necessary and it is necessary that there have been some world or other at some time or other, it is not necessary that there always be a world. Conceivably, Whitehead’s God could enjoy the past, which being infinite is infinitely rich, without an actual world continuing as actual. God does not need a contemporary world, only a past one. The Buddha, on the other hand, cannot exist apart from being embodied in a world. Buddha and world strictly require each other.

In itself this may not be a very significant point. But it is one more of the many ways in which the Lotus Sutra is radically world-affirming, and perhaps more thoroughly so than process thought. It also provides a powerful incentive for living responsibly, for it is in such living that the Buddha himself lives.

FATHER OF THE WORLD

The Lotus Sutra very unambiguously uses personal language for talking about this universal Buddha. In many of its stories or parables, the Buddha is likened to a human father. And the Buddha tells us in several

places that he is the father of us all.¹⁹ Such a conception of the Buddha also involves conceiving of him as having human or humanlike feelings, such as suffering and joy. We are told that the Buddha is like a father whose life is incomplete and suffers so long as a son is lost.

Clearly, this Buddha has struggles. I take it to be not merely a matter of curiosity that when other buddhas come to visit the universal Buddha they inquire about his health and about how his work of saving others is going, and about whether people in this world are giving him a difficult time. This Buddha is not one who enjoys all power. This Buddha, we are told, is continually creative, through aeon after aeon, constantly and tirelessly struggling to find new ways to fulfill his original vow or purpose, which is always and only to save others. This Buddha is not only one who has longings and sufferings, but one who tries things and sometimes fails, making it necessary for him to come up with other creative solutions to problems.

It is largely, I think, through the use of anthropomorphic language that the Sutra avoids pantheism. So far as I know, the term “pantheism,” or its Chinese equivalent, was not known in ancient China. But I see no reason why it could not apply in this case. If, however, we suppose pantheism to be a range of middle ways between pantheism and traditional theism, perhaps it should be said that the Lotus Sutra, by identifying dharmas and Dharma, is somewhat closer to pantheism than is orthodox process thought. And one can understand why some interpreters, with a conception of pantheism not available to them, drew pantheistic conclusions about the Lotus Sutra. Still, since the universal Buddha of the Lotus Sutra, as compassionate father, clearly transcends any state of the world, and in this sense transcends all worlds, this Buddha cannot be simply identified with the world in a pantheistic way.

In addition to personalistic or anthropomorphic language about the Buddha, there is also, however, nonanthropomorphic language. In the Lotus Sutra, as in Mahāyāna Buddhism generally, the Buddha is the Dharma. This is so because a buddha is fully enlightened, which means that he embodies the Dharma in some full or complete way. It does not mean that he knows everything. Throughout the stories of the Lotus Sutra, buddha figures try things that do not work until they find something that does. But a buddha embodies the truth—accepts it, lives it, and teaches it.

In the Lotus Sutra much concern is expressed over what is to happen to the Dharma, especially the teaching of the Dharma, after the Buddha has died and gone to another world. The response to this, grossly simplified, is that everyone who has received the Dharma from the Buddha accepts responsibility for carrying on the Buddha’s work in this world, in order that the Buddha’s foundational vow to save all the living may be realized. In so doing, one embodies the Dharma oneself, that is, the Buddha’s enlightened practice. To the extent that one does this, one

becomes, like the Buddha himself, a bodhisattva—one who strives in an enlightened way to help others. Embodying the Dharma is, of course, realizing or developing one's buddha-nature. This is one of the ways in which the Buddha is in the world still, working to save all the living; he is embodied in the wise and compassionate acts of all who have received the Dharma.

Thus the universal Buddha, like everything else, is related to others, both by being dependent on others and by having effects on others. Bodhisattvas are relied upon—depended upon—to do the work of the Buddha. And since everyone is to some extent a bodhisattva, the Buddha is dependent on everyone. Just as there can be no Dharma apart from there being dharmas of some kind or other, there can be no Buddha without there being worlds of some kind or other, with beings of some kind or other following the Buddha-way to some degree. Thus, the Buddha is not and cannot be said to be totally other or absolute. But the Buddha, unlike any other being, is universal—related to all others throughout infinite space and time, luring them into the Buddha-way whereby they are transformed into bodhisattvas to help others and realize their own highest potentiality—their Buddha-nature—by becoming more and more Buddha-like.

INTEGRATION OF GOD, CREATIVITY, AND PROCESS

In process thought, God, creativity, and process are distinct from each other, each having its own role within the system and within the world. In the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, there is a sense in which creativity, and not only creativity but the whole causal process by which actualities come to be and pass away, is the Buddha, the Buddha alive and at work in the world. Put differently, in process thought, while God's subjective experience of the world is complete, as active in the world, God is for the most part limited to providing initial aims for new occasions, initial aims that can serve as lures for the becoming of actual occasions. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, sees the universal Buddha as always active in the world, in the sense that the Buddha is the buddha-nature in all creatures and in the Dharma, the process of *praītya samutpāda*, which makes it possible for anything at all to exist. In a sense, compared with the process conception of God, the universal Buddha is more dynamic and more actively engaged with the world—without resorting to supernatural intervention and without diminishing in the slightest the importance of creaturely freedom, creativity, and responsibility.

Could it be that in process thought, precisely because God is primarily a subject, experiencing—and in that way saving—the world, that

need for the redemption of the actual world as such is somewhat diminished? In Lotus Sutra Buddhism, in contrast, the way in which the world can be redeemed is through the effort and action of bodhisattvas—people—doing the work of the Buddha in the empirical world.

At the end of chapter 11 of *Science and the Modern World*, Whitehead notes that God has sometimes “been conceived as the foundation of the metaphysical situation with its ultimate activity.” But if this is so, he says, “there can be no alternative except to discern in [God] the origin of all evil as well as of all good.” The Lotus Sutra view is that while there is a sense in which the Dharma as the ground of all that is, necessarily contributes to any evil situation, there is no reason to accept Whitehead’s apparently much stronger claim that the Buddha so conceived is the only origin of evil, unless one has previously accepted the idea that some sort of divinity external to the world is the only factor in creation. In the Lotus Sutra, the universal Buddha is conceived not as the sole creator, but as one who is constantly struggling, along with others, through countless ages, to make the world healthy and beautiful for all. Is it possible that a Buddhist process theology would benefit from something like an integration of God/Buddha, creativity/buddha-nature, and process/Dharma?

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ENDNOTES

1. Gene Reeves, “The Lotus Sutra and Process Thought,” *Process Studies* 23, no. 2 (summer 1994): 98–118.
2. The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma (Chinese: *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*, Japanese: *Myōhōrenge-kyō*, Sanskrit: *Saddharmapundarīka-sūtra*). Throughout this article, it is the translation into Chinese by Kumarajiva that is being discussed. Although there are extant Sanskrit manuscripts, all are considerably more recent than the Chinese translation.
3. I take this to be a religious way of reading the text, or a way of reading the text as a religious document. Some Buddhist scholars have their own theories about purposes for which the text was originally written or compiled, but there is no evidence at all outside of the text itself. In fact, apart from what is written in the text itself, virtually nothing is known about when, where, or why the Lotus Sutra came to be.
4. Although the Lotus Sutra tradition has generally rejected the possibility of Buddhist “ontology,” as ontology is understood to be about substantive realities, of which there are none according to Buddhism, there is no reason in the Sutra to reject the possibility of metaphysics as that term is used by Whitehead, and possibly not even in the way it is used by Hartshorne.
5. For example,

[P]hilosophy is achieving a new synthesis. Two or three decades ago philosophers seemed to have reached a stalemate. “Idealism” had been discredited, but the “realisms” which were taking its place were bizarre and differed fantastically among themselves. “Monism” was shattered,

but the extreme pluralisms which succeeded it made the world an unintelligible shower of entities which had nothing to do with one another.

Today there is a philosophical movement which is not idealism or monism or materialism or sheer pluralism or positivism or supernaturalism or atheism, or any of the older isms, but a genuine integration. . . . (Hartshorne, *Beyond Humanism* [Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1937], pp. vii–viii).

6. Some might prefer a term other than “integration” here. By “integration” I mean any view that asserts the ultimate reality and value of both unity and diversity. “Harmony” seems too weak with respect to unity for this. “Synthesis” suggests the destruction of the diversity. “Unification” might fit, but it has already been taken for other purposes.
7. Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, corrected edition by Griffin and Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 21.
8. This is the central theme—often expressed as the “Middle Way”—of the interpretation of the world based on the Lotus Sutra by China’s greatest Buddhist philosopher, Chih-i (538–597), whose understanding has had great influence on virtually all subsequent interpretations of the Lotus Sutra. See, for example, Paul L. Swanson, *T’ien T’ai Philosophy: The Flowering of the Two Truths Theory in Chinese Buddhism* (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1989).
9. “Phenomena” is sometimes used to translate dharma, but there is no evidence that composers of the Lotus Sutra conceptualized dharma in an analogous way to notions of “phenomena” as conceived by, for example, Kant or Nāgājuna. Translating dharma as “phenomena” creates a misleading impression of the relation between dharmas and Dharma, which is contrary to the Lotus Sutra.
10. It is likely that this term, *busshō*—*fo xing* in Chinese—was a relatively late development used to translate several Sanskrit terms, especially *buddhadhāu*.
11. Although the terms “all living beings” and “all beings,” which for the most part are used interchangeably in the Sutra, are clearly meant to be inclusive in some sense, their exact scope is not clear. Because it is directed toward human beings and their enlightenment, the Lotus Sutra is primarily concerned with making the point that all human beings, without exception, have a buddha-nature. At other times the reference is clearly to living beings but without any obvious assumption that there are nonliving beings. Behind this is the more basic idea that human beings are part of a great system of life that includes heavenly beings of various kinds and many kinds of subhuman beings, all of which have a buddha-nature. Hence, there is no major division between human beings and the rest of nature. All beings are equally part of this one great integrated, that is, organic, system of life. Thus, the Chinese T’ian-t’ai school, based largely on the Lotus Sutra, held that all things have buddha-nature.
12. *Praṭītya samutpāda* is most often translated as “dependent origination,” but “interdependent becoming” would be more accurate.
13. The translation is my own; see Bunnō Katō, Yoshirō Tamura, and Kōjirō Miyasaka, trans., with revisions by W. E. Soothill, Wilhelm Schiffer, and Pier P. del Campana, *The Threefold Lotus Sutra* (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing Company, 1975), p. 12. As in English, in Chinese there is an interesting ambiguity in the phrase that I have translated “according to the nature of things.” If I understand it correctly, it means both that it is the nature of actual entities to become, perish, and so forth, and that it is the nature of process that actual entities become, perish, and so forth. This closely parallels Whitehead’s claim that “creativity” is ultimate in the sense that it cannot be explained in terms either of higher universals or components (*Process and Reality*, p. 21).
14. *Mo-ho-chih-kuan*, chapter 1; quoted in Yu-Kwan Ng, *T’ien-t’ai Buddhism and Early Mādhyamika* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993), p. 166.
15. Neither this term nor the theory that the Buddha has three (or more) bodies occurs in the Lotus Sutra itself.
16. Although the term “eternal” is reasonable for one who is in all times and without beginning or end, I prefer the term “universal Buddha” to avoid any suggestion of a devaluation of this temporal world, which could be implied by use of the term “eternal.”
17. Translated into Japanese as *bunshin*.
18. *Hoke-kyō no atarashii kaishaku* (Tokyo: Kōsei Shuppansha, 1989), p. 337.
19. It is relevant to note here that there is frequent use in the Sutra of a term meaning “to be like” or “similar to,” but that in this case it is not used.

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE/JAPANESE CHARACTERS

bunshin 分身

busshō 佛性

Chigi 智ぎ also, 天台大師

Hoke-kyō no atarashii kaishaku 法華經の新しい解釈

Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching (Ch.), *Myōhōrenge-kyō* (Jp.), *Saddharmapundarika-sūtra* (Sk.) 妙法蓮華經

Mo-ho-chih-kuan 摩訶止観

pratītya samutpāda 縁起

sahā 娑婆

śūnyatā 空

wareware o tsune ni ikashiteite kudasaru mono ga われわれつねに生かしていただくものが仏なのです

zettatekina chikara 絶対的な力

zettai no sonzai 絶対の存在