



Numata Zentrum für Buddhismuskunde

On the One Vehicle Thought of the Lotus Sutra

A lecture by **Prof. Dr. Shiro Matsumoto** (Komazawa University, Tokyo)
The lecture will be held on **Wednesday, 28 June 2017**, 16:15-17:45 h at Hamburg
University, Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, East Wing (ESA O), Room 120.

It is generally assumed that the central message of the Lotus Sutra, expressed by the term *ekayāna* (One Vehicle), is that all sentient beings can attain Buddhahood. However, the message can be found only in the prose portion of the *Upāyakauśalya* chapter, while in the prose portion of the following chapter, i.e. the *Aupamyā* chapter, this message was replaced with the more specific idea that only *bodhisattvas* can attain Buddhahood.

The oldest layer in the formation of the Lotus Sutra seems to be the prose portion of the *Upāyakauśalya* chapter, where the terms *bodhisattva* and *mahāyāna* (Great Vehicle) were never used. The terms are however found in the prose portion of the *Aupamyā* chapter. The author[s] of the chapter composed the famous parable of the burning house in order to introduce the term *mahāyāna* to the Lotus Sutra, and by means of this introduction, to replace *buddhayāna* (Buddha Vehicle) with *mahāyāna* as the content or the meaning of *ekayāna*.

However, the term *mahāyāna* is meaningful only when it is contrasted with *hīnayāna* (Small Vehicle) in the sense of being superior. Therefore, if *ekayāna* is identified with *mahāyāna* in the prose portion of the *Aupamyā* Chapter, the message expressed by the term *ekayāna* in the chapter is not “universal salvation” but the discriminatory message that only *bodhisattvas* can attain Buddhahood by means of the Great Vehicle, while non-*bodhisattvas* can never attain it.

The people left in the burning house as stated in the burning house parable, it could be assumed, represent non-*bodhisattvas* who can never attain Buddhahood. Such a discriminatory idea that non-*bodhisattvas* can never attain Buddhahood can be found in the theories concerning the so-called *icchantikas* as formulated in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, although some efforts to rescue even *icchantikas* appear in later developments.

Prof. Dr. Shiro Matsumoto obtained his M.A. from the University of Tokyo and his Ph.D. from Komazawa University. His Ph.D. thesis was published in 1994 as *Zen Shisō no Hihanteki Kenkyū* (*Critical Studies of Zen Thought*). Since 1982 he has been a member of the Faculty of Buddhism, Komazawa University, Tokyo, where he teaches as a professor. In 2001 he was visiting professor at the Numata Chair at the University of Chicago.

His research interests include Indian Buddhism, especially Mādhyamika and Buddha-nature thought, and Japanese Buddhism focusing on Hōnen, Shinran and Dōgen. He published eight monographs in Japanese, including *Engi to Kū* (*Dependent-arising and Emptiness*, 1989) and *Hokkekyō Shisōron* (*Essays on the Thought of the Lotus Sutra*, 2010). Some of his papers were translated into English and are included in *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: the Storm over Critical Buddhism*, 1997.

