

Living the LOTUS

Buddhism in Everyday Life



Founder's Essay

Training Eliminates Self-Doubt

WHEN facing something like a major competition or important test, we are of two conflicting minds: one that says “I’m ready,” and the other that tells us “But what if...?” Once uneasiness grips us, it pulls us more and more into its grasp.

Nichiren taught that “a group of people who are many in body but one in spirit can accomplish anything.” He added that “if an individual’s heart is divided, that struggle will prevent them from accomplishing anything.”

What can we do to end this conflict within our hearts?

In the world of sumo wrestling it’s said that training is the only way to overcome uneasiness.

Challenging one’s limits during training allows wrestlers to summon the inner strength to perform at their real level of ability, confident that they’re ready because they’ve trained so much.

Waking up early in the morning, getting covered in sand while down on your hands and knees in the ring, and training so hard that it leaves you unable to move will of course instill technique, but it also eliminates any room for self-doubt to take root in your mind.

Constant perseverance can eliminate the uncertainty and self-doubt in life.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 214–15

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Rissho Kosei-kai is a global Buddhist movement of people who strive to apply the teachings of the Threefold Lotus Sutra, one of the foremost Buddhist scriptures, in their daily lives and contribute to world peace. It was founded in 1938 by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano (1906–1999) and Rev. Myoko Naganuma (1889–1957). With the guidance of President Nichiko Niwano, Rissho Kosei-kai members actively share the Dharma widely and engage in peace activities both locally and internationally in cooperation with people from many walks of life.

The title of this newsletter, *Living the Lotus—Buddhism in Everyday Life*, conveys our hope of striving to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in daily life in an imperfect world to enrich and make our lives more worthwhile, like beautiful lotus flowers blooming in a muddy pond. This newsletter aims to help people around the world apply Buddhism more easily in their daily lives.

Making Offerings to “Buddhas”

Rev. Nichiko Niwano
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



Why Are There So Many “Buddhas”?

In chapter 6 of the Lotus Sutra, “Giving Assurance of Buddhahood,” Shakyamuni tells his disciples that they will also become buddhas, and he repeatedly gives them each the assurance of buddhahood. For example, Shakyamuni says, “This disciple of mine, Maha-Kashyapa, in future lifetimes will come to see, pay homage to, revere, honor, and extol three hundred thousand million world-honored buddhas.” He also says, “I now tell you that this Maha-Katyayana, in future lifetimes, will make various offerings to, pay homage to, revere, and honor eight thousand million buddhas.” For each of his disciples, he explains in particular detail the importance of making offerings to and revering buddhas.

For us, hearing that these disciples will make offerings to three hundred thousand million or eight thousand million buddhas—numbers so large we can hardly calculate them—may make us think this is a tale from another world.

The text says this will happen “in future lifetimes,” which must mean after one lives and dies repeatedly, and although we can understand this to be a magnificent figurative expression particular to India, it is impossible to think that we ourselves could do such a thing.

We often call people who have attained buddhahood, like Shakyamuni did, “buddha” or “honorable buddha” (and in Japan, people who are deceased are called *hotoke*, meaning “buddha”). This means that our model of “buddha” is Shakyamuni, which is one reason why we have difficulty understanding such an expression as “eight thousand million buddhas,” which indicates the existence of an enormous number of buddhas.

However, we can see this scripture in a completely different light when we read it from the viewpoint that, as a human being, the historical Shakyamuni accepted as “buddhas” all of the people he encountered prior to his awakening, the people from whom he received the teaching, and the people he came in contact with on his travels to share the Truth.

Therefore, when we emulate Shakyamuni and accept that each and every





person we encounter in our daily lives is a “buddha,” then these lines of scripture almost become a task for our daily practice, don’t they?

The Basis of Making Offerings Is Consideration for Others

Speaking of seeing the people before our eyes as “buddhas,” Linji Yixuan (d. 867), founder of the Linji school of Chan Buddhism (known as the Rinzai school of Zen Buddhism in Japan), said the following to his fellow practitioners: “If you let go of the mind that seeks the Buddha outwardly, you are already a buddha. Therefore, all of you now before my very eyes who are hearing me expound the Dharma are none other than buddhas.”

If you realize that you yourself are intrinsically a buddha with a pure heart, then you *are* a buddha and so is the person before your very eyes. This is no different than believing and accepting that “everyone you encounter, without exception, is a buddha.”

I often hear that although people can readily put their hands together reverently before the dead, they can hardly do so before the living. But because people who have died and people who are living are all “buddhas,” the practice of making offerings to people before our eyes with the feeling of “revering, honoring, and extolling” them is hardly something strange, but rather something quite ordinary.

What then, in concrete terms, should we do? The most important thing in making offerings that express our sincere gratitude to the Buddha is putting the teachings into practice. Through practice, we fully realize that the teaching is the Truth. We go through each day with a mind of compassion like Shakyamuni’s. In simple words, we hope that people’s sufferings and concerns will decrease and their joys will increase, and we show our consideration for them.

Doing so is an offering to the “buddhas” before our very eyes and, by extension, an offering full of reverence and gratitude toward Shakyamuni, the Buddha, who—through his accumulation of practice and diligence—revealed the Truth to us. In this way, we become human beings overflowing with consideration for others, which in turn leads to our coming closer to buddhahood.

Each and every one of us is like a piece of fabric—a wonderful piece of fabric that has the qualities of becoming a buddha. When this fabric is backed with the lining that is our practice of compassion—our consideration for others—it forms the most splendid robe: that of a “buddha.”

From *Kosei*, October 2019





On July 27, Rissho Kosei-kai celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of Dharma dissemination in the United States by holding a commemorative event in Las Vegas. During the convention, four members presented a combined Dharma Journey talk using the title “Satori Story.” We will feature these satori stories in installments in the September and October issues.

How My Daughter’s Illness Taught Me the True Meaning of Happiness

Ms. Joyce Manalo

Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii

ALOHA! My name is Joyce Manalo and I am a member of the Hawaii Dharma Center.

Over forty years ago, my mother joined Rissho Kosei-kai of Hawaii due to my sister’s asthma. My mother became very active in the Dharma center by going to Sunday services, *hoza*, and family visitations, and by helping with various duties there.

I grew up in a close and happy family; I didn’t really have any worries or hardships. But since my mother couldn’t drive, when I became a high school student and got my license, my duties to assist my mother multiplied. I drove her and other members to various Dharma center activities. This was not hard, but I didn’t have any freedom. Being at the Dharma center, I met other Dharma center members and their

families. I remember thinking about how nice everyone was, but also that I was not going to be a “church lady” like my mom.

My first turning point in my faith was when I was asked to join the youth group at the Dharma center. Aileen Ozaki was our youth leader and she was always so nice to me. Slowly I started to come to the Dharma center and make friends with the others. *Hoza* was interesting, and the special sutra studies opened my eyes to other ways of thinking.

Later, I got married and started a family. Our first child, Yoshimi, was born. Life was good—of course we had everyday struggles, but nothing hard. Then, when Yoshimi was around nine months old, she became sick with asthma. I remember one night while Yoshimi was on the breathing machine, I thought to myself, *Why me and our child?*

My grown sister never practiced the Dharma and seldom came to the Dharma center, and her child was fine and healthy. I, in contrast, came to Dharma center, prayed, and practiced the teachings. So why was our child so sick? What happened to all my good luck? I wasn’t supposed to have any sufferings; I’d followed all of the things I was supposed to do, enshrined an altar in my home, went to the Dharma center, and participated in activities and studies. So why was our child so sick?

I received guidance to make my practice my own—now that I was an adult with my own family, I had to practice the teaching for my family and myself. Our family experienced many of life’s chal-



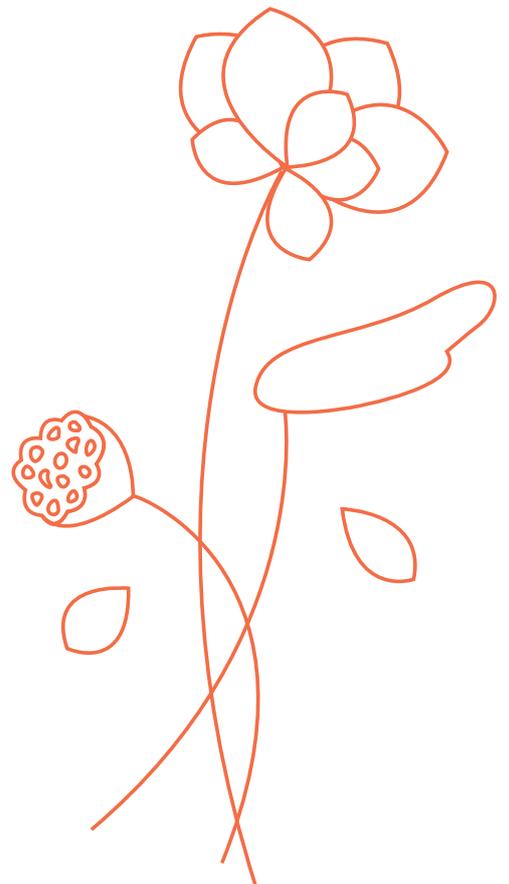
Ms. Joyce Manalo delivers her Dharma Journey talk at the U.S. Sangha 60th Anniversary Convention.

lenges. Some challenges I thought we would not be able to get through. Each time, I sought guidance and it helped me. I had guidance such as doing *toban* (volunteer service at the Dharma center), making donations (both volunteering at the Dharma center and offering monetary donations), performing ancestor veneration services, and connecting people with the Dharma. Through each encounter and by following the guidance given to me, I was able to deepen my faith.

In thinking back over the past thirty-one years, our daughter's asthma was the Buddha's arrangement to turn my life toward the teachings and my faith. It was the true turning point in my life. I learned that the Buddha and the Dharma showed me the real meaning of happiness.

Currently, I am the advisor to the youth director in training. Through my encounters with the youth, I realized the challenges they have. I hope to be able to convey the spirit of the Dharma and support them to deepen their own faith.

Thank you very much!





The Buddha Has Other Plans for Me

Mr. Kevin Roche

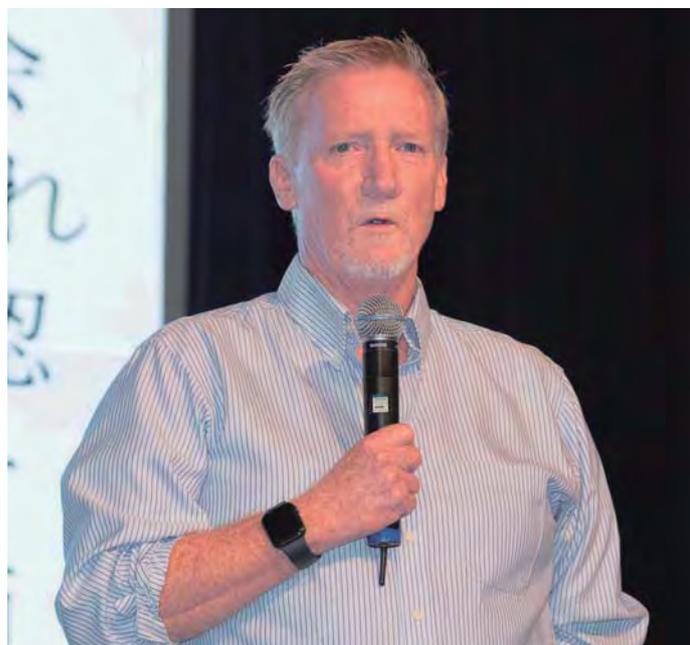
Rissho Kosei-kai of San Antonio

TEN years ago, one week before the Las Vegas convention marking the fiftieth anniversary of Rissho Kosei-kai's dissemination in North America, I was told by my doctor that I had symptoms suspicious of cancer.

Of course I was terrified. But when I told Rev. Naomi Nakamura that I would have to cancel my plans for Las Vegas after undergoing tests to confirm the diagnosis, he smiled and said, "Don't change your plans. Go home and chant the entire chapter sixteen of the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha has other plans for you!"

I didn't understand. Even as a practicing Buddhist, I couldn't imagine who this "Buddha" was who had plans for me. I understood the teachings of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, but I couldn't begin to understand the depths of what that meant.

As it turned out, I didn't have cancer. Nonetheless,



Mr. Kevin Roche delivers his Dharma Journey talk at the U.S. Sangha 60th Anniversary Convention.

I still had no understanding of the Buddha Dharma at the level Rev. Nakamura was trying to teach me. I realize now that some Dharma lessons cannot be taught—they must be lived.

Just after the Las Vegas convention, Rev. Nakamura retired to Seattle and the San Antonio Dharma Center was without a reverend. The sangha was searching for leaders and I failed to answer the call. Even though I'd escaped a cancer diagnosis, my fear of the impermanence of my life restricted my commitment. I couldn't dedicate myself to trying to guide others toward the Dharma. I no longer had the confidence necessary to lead a sangha.

I felt lost because I was looking for someone to show me the way instead of allowing the Dharma to guide me. Without a reverend I feared that the sangha was doomed to collapse, and I didn't want to be responsible for that failure. The English-speaking sangha was breaking down and disappearing—I don't know that I can put into words the despair I felt in watching the sangha disintegrate and knowing that I was in some ways responsible.

Yet within that despair I still heard a voice pushing me forward. I knew I didn't want the sangha to fail, so I started to study the Lotus Sutra intensely. As I studied, I began to see my practice steadily strengthening. A few of us began gathering and studying together. Slowly, the group started to strengthen and grow. We didn't have a leader, but we were learning to lead ourselves.

In 2013, I received my Dharma Teacher appointment and vowed to commit my life to Buddhism and Rissho Kosei-kai's teachings. I was becoming ready

to lead a sangha and manage a Dharma center, even without the guidance of a resident reverend.

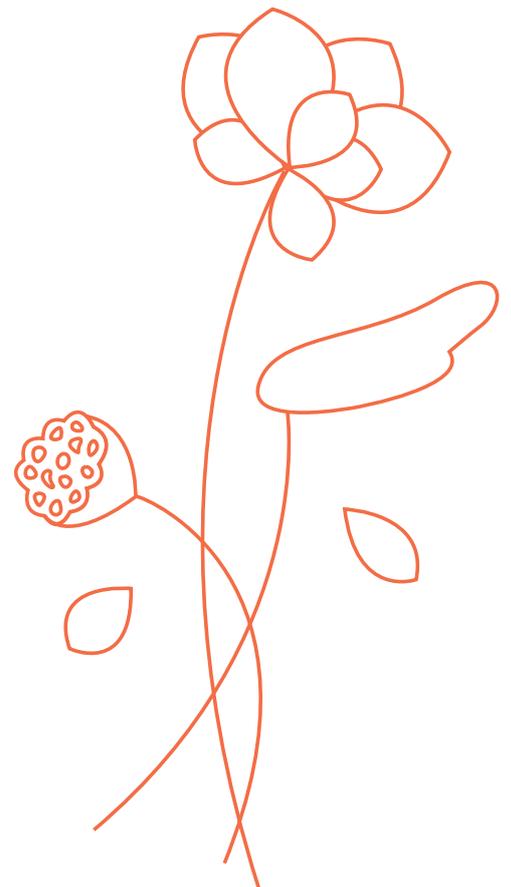
But then, in 2014, I was diagnosed with a form of cancer that is treatable, but not curable. It was during the four months of chemotherapy treatments that my eyes were opened to the Dharma that I've come to understand on a much deeper level. My wonderful wife sat with me through all my chemo treatments, always pushing me forward and not letting me give in to my fears. I learned that impermanence is a much easier concept to read about than to live.

During my final chemo treatment, the meaning of Reverend Nakamura's words, "the Buddha has other plans for you," finally became clear to me. I realized that I can't live forever, and that my self was impermanent but my efforts and energy in spreading the teachings of the Buddha had an eternal life. "The Eternal Buddha" was in me, of me, and would work through me. In a sense, I realized the eternal nature of all things. I felt liberated.

I've dedicated the last six years to working as hard as I can to establish a sangha in San Antonio. I endeavor every day to spread the joy and compassion that has grown in me since being freed from my frightened "self." The recompense of that effort has been realized: it has now been ten years since Reverend Nakamura retired and we haven't had another permanent reverend in residence. But we've evolved into a new model of Dharma center in the United States. We are strong, flexible, vibrant, and reflective of our community. We have a beautiful new building and a growing sangha filled with young and eager bodhisattvas who will carry the Buddha's teaching to another generation long after I am gone.

The best part is that I don't really have to think about it anymore. I just practice. I accept and welcome my cancer as a part of the ever-changing Me.

More importantly, I wholeheartedly understand that "the Buddha has other plans for me."



The Threefold Lotus Sutra: A Summary and Key Points for Each Chapter

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

Chapter 11

The Appearance of the Jeweled Stupa

(1)



The previous chapter closed with the Buddha's explanation of the frame of mind necessary for teaching the Lotus Sutra in the age of decline of the Dharma, and the merit of those who teach the Dharma rightly.

The Testimony of the Tathagata Abundant Treasures

The present chapter opens with a resplendent stupa springing up from the earth and rising into the sky. A great voice of praise issues from within the Jeweled Stupa, saying, "Excellent, excellent, World-Honored Shakyamuni. For the sake of the great assembly, you are able to expound the Wondrous Dharma Flower Sutra of universal great wisdom, a teaching that instructs bodhisattvas and that buddhas protect and keep in mind. So it is, so it is, all that the World-Honored Shakyamuni expounds is the truth."

The listeners are elated to have experienced something so rare and precious, and the Bodhisattva Great Joy in Teaching asks why this stupa has sprung up from the earth and why a voice within it has spoken. Shakyamuni responds that the stupa contains the entire body of a tathagata.

The Jeweled Stupa Is a Symbol of Buddha-Nature

We need to note here the great importance of Shakyamuni's words. Since tathagata means one who has come from truth (or from the world of truth), the tathagata's whole body being in the stupa means that the truth is inside in its entirety.

The truth in this sense is the Dharma itself, which makes all things in the universe exist. In other words, it is the fundamental Dharma, or the ultimate truth. In human terms it is the buddha-nature that is the inherent form of humankind. The stupa, then, is nothing less than a symbol of buddha-nature.



It is important to observe that the stupa did not come down from heaven but sprang up from the earth. Heaven is an ideal world removed from humankind, while earth is the actual world in touch with humankind. Buddha-nature is not something given from heaven or the beyond, but rather something dwelling in ourselves, coming from the earth, and so we are shown here that we need only realize it for ourselves.

The teaching of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma is the Way of the bodhisattva, which, founded upon this truth of buddha-nature, is to rescue the world through the realization and manifestation of the buddha-nature present in all people. The buddhas protect and keep it in mind as the most important teaching, and because Shakyamuni was the first buddha to unveil the Lotus Sutra for the sake of the multitude, this is a holy task beyond the highest appreciation. For humanity it is the greatest matter, bridging the ages. That is why such a loud voice reverberates from within the great stupa of buddha-nature.



To return to the text, the Buddha answers the question of the Bodhisattva Great Joy in Teaching by saying that the voice from the stupa is that of a buddha named Tathagata Abundant Treasures, from far, far away in the east, and that when he was still a bodhisattva this buddha made a vow, saying, “After I become a buddha, if in any country in the universe there be a place where the Lotus Sutra is expounded, my stupa shall arise and appear there, in order that I may hearken to that sutra, bear testimony to it, and extol it.” Moreover, upon attaining buddhahood and leaving the world, his parting word was that those who desired to pay homage to his entire body should erect a single great stupa.

In this passage, “far, far away in the east” means that the Tathagata Abundant Treasures is not a buddha who actually appeared in bodily form in this world. Truth itself—the perfect aspect of the truth—is here named Abundant Treasures. Had the Buddha used such a term as “truth itself,” or “the perfect aspect of the truth,” his hearers at the time, ordinary people, would not have understood his meaning, so he gave it the human-seeming form of a tathagata.

The one thing that does not change with time or location is the ultimate truth, or the complete and unified form of the truth. Since the beginning of the universe, always and everywhere, truth exists. The truth manifests itself in various ways, and the unified form that brings all these manifestations together is symbolized by the Tathagata Abundant Treasures—hence the buddha title “the tathagata in whom numerous treasures are gathered.”

Tathagata Abundant Treasures’s instruction to erect a great stupa means to reveal the buddha-nature of all things. This is the highest form of veneration of the tathagata, or the ultimate truth. For what



the ultimate truth—or the complete and unified form of the truth—desires is that the truth be revealed exactly as it is. Revealing the buddha-nature of all things manifests to the world the complete aspect of the truth.

To be continued

This is an English translation of text that originally appeared in Japanese in *Hokke sanbu kyo: Kaku hon no aramashi to yoten*, by Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai (Kosei Publishing, 1991 [revised edition, 2016], pp. 110–14).

Let Us All Strive for Dharma Dissemination

THIS month, Rissho Kosei-kai holds its annual Oeshiki-Ichijo Festival. This is the time when members are united and we renew our vows to strive to disseminate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra widely in the spirit of the *o-daimoku*, “*Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*” (meaning, “we take refuge in the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma”).

In his message for this month, President Nichiko Niwano quotes from chapter 6 of the Lotus Sutra, “Giving Assurance of Buddhahood,” that calls on us to accept both ourselves and others as buddhas. He also teaches us that the most important offering one can make to the Buddha is to put the teachings into practice.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano wanted as many people as possible to know the way of life that is expounded in the Lotus Sutra and realize their own true happiness.

This month, we would like to strive diligently in Dharma dissemination—the foremost practice of the teachings—by making our Founder’s wish our own.

Let each one of us guide a person to the Dharma!

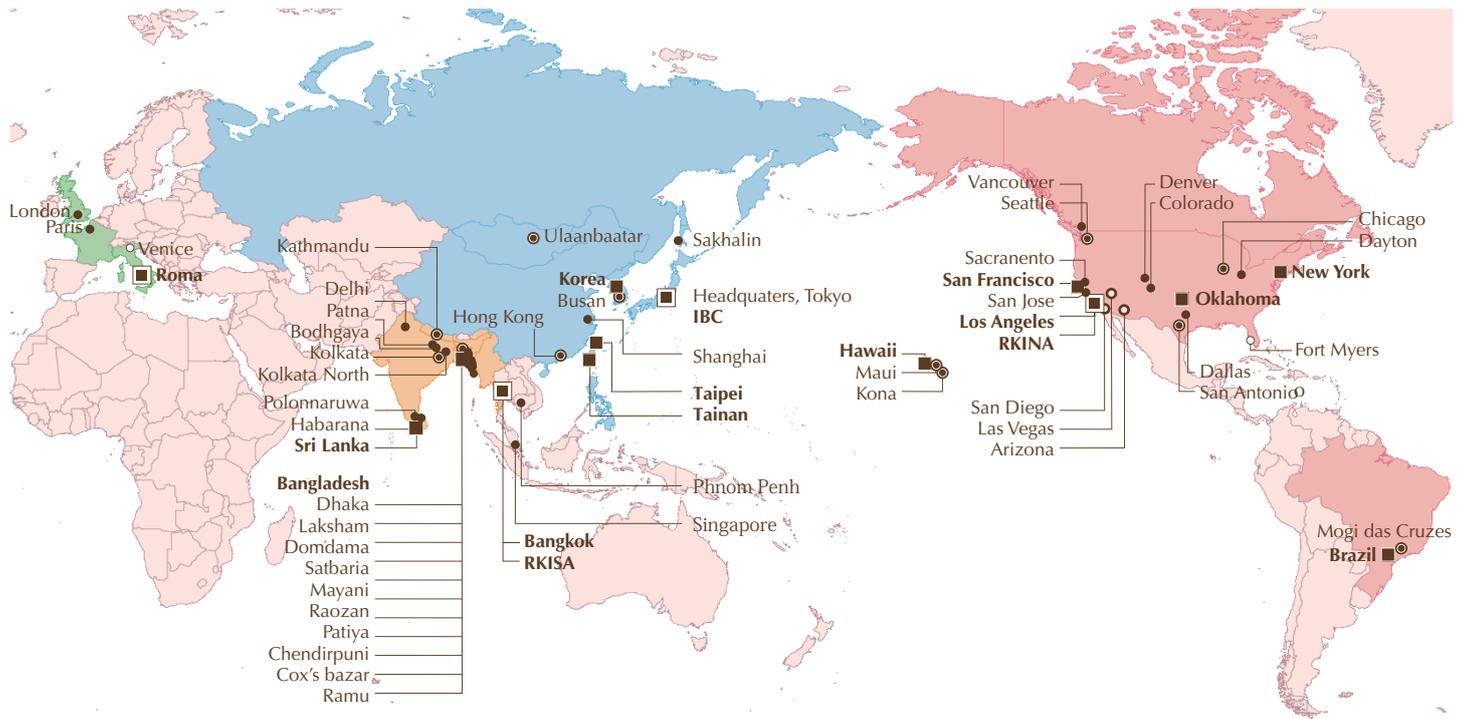
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