

# Living the LOTUS

*Buddhism in Everyday Life*



VOL. 176

🌸 Founder's Essay 🌸

## A Good Listener Is Always Liked

SOMEONE once said to me, “Rissho Kosei-kai members are really easy to talk to.” This person remarked that when someone was speaking during a group event, all the members looked the speaker straight in the eye, smiling as they nodded in recognition of every point the speaker made. This compliment is something to be really happy about!

Rissho Kosei-kai members have many wonderful qualities, and I think we can say that one of them is this ability to be good listeners. When people are speaking, they are expressing themselves through words. More than anything, speakers worry if listeners are really feeling and accepting what they are saying. If listeners are expressionless, looking away, or fidgeting, those

talking feel like they are being ignored, and their words no longer have heart.

This is the same in Dharma circles. If the facilitator's attention is distracted by this or that and he or she is only listening with half an ear to people's stories, the person speaking will feel ignored. But if the facilitator seriously listens and nods affirmatively to them, this will make the person feel that they have been liberated.

When it comes to Dharma circles, being a good listener comes first. If a good speaker is careless it can sometimes annoy people, but a good listener is rarely, if ever, disliked.

Nikkyo Niwano, *Kaiso zuikan* 9 (Kosei Publishing, 1997), pp. 158–59

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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.

## Calmly and Peacefully

Rev. Nichiko Niwano  
President of Rissho Kosei-kai



### Zentaro of Iwami: A Pious Devotee

There once was a man called Chikashige Zentaro, from present-day Hamada City, Shimane Prefecture. He lived during the later part of the Edo period and was said to be a pious devotee (Jpn., *myokonin*) of the True Pure Land sect of Japanese Buddhism. Such devotees were said to be as pure in character as a white lotus flower.

When Zentaro was young, however, he behaved so badly that the villagers called him Bad Taro the Caterpillar. Eventually, he awakened to faith in Amida Buddha and people respectfully called him Zentaro of Iwami.

One day, a friend of the faith came to see Zentaro. This friend had given Zentaro lodging for the night when he went to pray at the sect's head temple in Kyoto. Zentaro greeted him with a smile, but the friend suddenly called Zentaro a thief and rebuked him. He said that Zentaro had stolen a kimono and taken it away with him.

Although Zentaro had no recollection of doing this, he politely apologized, saying, "Well, that was a bad thing to do." He handed his friend enough money to cover the cost of the kimono, adding, "I don't have much here, but at least I can give you some mugwort dumplings to take to your people at home." He wrapped some mugwort dumplings that had been placed as offerings on the altar and gave them to his friend as a gift.

This friend of the faith returned home and started to eat the mugwort dumplings with everyone there. A young woman working in his house looked downcast, however, and wouldn't touch the dumplings. The man asked her, "Why aren't you eating?"

She confessed her wrongdoing: "I told you that Zentaro stole the kimono, but I took it."

If you were in Zentaro's position, how would you accept this situation and how would you respond?





## Joyfully Following the Buddha Way

If it were possible, we would rather not associate with someone who blindly accuses people and makes selfish assertions without listening to what others have to say, like the man in this story did. Furthermore, it is usually impossible to calmly accept being treated like a thief.

In this sense, I have nothing but admiration for Zentaro's response. However, why, without even trying to explain himself, was Zentaro able to accept the situation?

I think it must have been due to Zentaro's absolute faith that he could "leave everything up to Amida Buddha" because he knew he'd done nothing to be ashamed of and that Amida Buddha watches over everything. In this way, with a calm and peaceful mind, he could accept the situation.

To quote a Buddhist poem, "The person criticizing and the person being criticized / Are sitting together on the same lotus dais." In other words, all people are equal before the Buddha—therefore, Zentaro might have thought it would be petty of him to insist on his innocence (correctness) and get the better of his friend in an argument.

"Encouragement to Hold Firm" in the Lotus Sutra includes these lines of scripture: "Unsparring of our bodies and lives, / We will care only for the unsurpassable Way." These verses express the firm determination of the faithful, but I think that "unsparring of our bodies and lives" does not merely mean "be unsparring of your own life." Instead, if you are aware of the miracle of having been born and being alive right now on this earth, you can no longer be attached to the ego that says "all that matters is that I am okay." You will realize the importance of being grateful for the connections that sustain your life and cause you to live.

"We will care only for the unsurpassable Way" means that when we have opened our eyes to gratitude for those connections, we want to share our feelings of gratitude with as many people as possible. Those of us who have awakened to such feelings of gratitude through the teachings of the Lotus Sutra must step forward to share these teachings with others and together experience the joy and gratitude of being alive.

However, I do not think this means that you should try to change or persuade other people. It is good enough to joyfully practice the Buddha's teachings and interact with people pleasantly, as this may lead someone else to be awakened to the gratitude for being alive right now.

The preceding anecdote about Zentaro is called "Dharma Teaching with Mugwort Dumplings." The pious devotee Zentaro, whose kindness spoke to the young woman's conscience, makes me think about what it truly means to be faithful followers who lead calm and peaceful lives.



From *Kosei*, May 2020



## Sharing Both Suffering and Joy: Following the Way with the Sangha



Ms. Erika Katsumoto  
Rissho Kosei-kai of Koto

*This Dharma Journey talk was presented at the Great Sacred Hall on February 1, 2020, during the ceremony for the first day of the month (Uposatha Day).*

**G**OOD morning, everyone. I was born in 1974 as the only daughter of the Okubo family in Tokyo. I have two brothers, one who is a year older than me and another who's six years younger. As a child, I always tried my hardest to meet my parents' expectations, and I found it hard to ask for the kindness of others or admit weakness.

I don't really remember what my father was like when I was a child, as he was a professional entertainer and was seldom at home. My mother had what I call a "get-tough" personality, but she was also a kindhearted person. She sometimes reflected on her behavior in tears after having an argument with my father. My father was busy with his work and did not care about his family, and my mother often went out to disguise her loneliness, always telling me to look after the home. I grew up feeling dissatisfaction toward my parents and anxiety about the future of my family.

Shortly after I graduated from junior college and began working in a kindergarten, I met the man who would become my husband. He was the only person to whom I could open my heart; I forgot my anxiety when I was with him. A few years later, we got married and started a new life for the two of us.

In 2000, however, my mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. Thinking that my mother would have to be hospitalized repeatedly for treatment, my husband and I decided to live with my parents in their house. While my mother was struggling with the disease, I had two children. Though only for a brief period, my mother watched her grandchildren grow, and she passed away on March 1, 2004, at the age of fifty-five. My daughter was seventeen months old and my son was only three months old.

I had no time to grieve because I was busy taking care of the children, and a month after we held a

memorial service for the first anniversary of her death, my father suffered a stroke. At that point, I felt the heavy burden of raising my children and also caring for my father. I had my hands full every day and I suffered from anxiety for the future. I became mentally worn out and was diagnosed with autonomic imbalance, a disfunction of the nerves that regulate things like heart rate and blood pressure.

The chapter leader and area leader of the Rissho Kosei-kai Dharma center to which my family belonged were worried about me, and they came to visit me. It was then that I became truly engaged in Rissho Kosei-kai's activities. Although I am a third-generation member, I had seldom taken part in the Dharma center's activities. When I first attended a seminar on basic Buddhist teachings, I even told Rev. Anna, the minister at the time, that I couldn't really believe in the Buddha. But one day, when I was visiting the Dharma center half-heartedly, my husband nudged me by saying, "Why don't you see whether the Buddha's teaching is true or not?"

I started to visit the Dharma center frequently, performing activities like running the audio-visual



*Ms. Katsumoto delivers her Dharma Journey talk in the Great Sacred Hall, Tokyo.*

equipment during services and reading books by the Founder and the President to the sangha. I also served as master of ceremonies.

Although I had learned the importance of appreciating one's ancestors and respecting one's parents, I was having difficulty being kind enough to my father because I thought I was sacrificing my children in order to take care of him. I became remorseful of these feelings and blamed myself. Up until that point, I hadn't tried to truly understand how my father felt. I'm sure he missed my mother, and, moreover, he was unable to move his body as he wanted. But sometimes I still couldn't help but think that things would be better if he weren't around. I also hated my brothers, who didn't even seem to consider helping me.

It was around this time that I met Ms. Hotta—we crossed paths because our children went to the same nursery school. I came to know that she'd had an extremely difficult childhood. She had been verbally abused by her mother and hadn't been able to find meaning in life. Now, her eldest child, who was in the first grade, had a developmental difficulty, and she was having trouble getting along with her husband because he couldn't accept his son's disability. All this had caused her to suffer depression.

I felt that my suffering was nothing serious compared to hers—after all, she was enduring the pain alone. Wishing for her happiness, I shared with Ms. Hotta what I'd learned in seminars and *hoza* at the Dharma center. She soon put these teachings into practice at home and, little by little, she began to get along better with her husband. In 2010, five years after we first met and the year in which I received my Dharma Teacher qualification, I guided Ms. Hotta to become a member of Rissho Kosei-kai.

However, in September of the following year, just as things were changing for the better, Ms. Hotta's husband suddenly passed away from a massive stroke. He was forty-two years old. That same month, our family received the statue of the Buddha as the focus of devotion for our home altar. In spite of this, however, I suffered from a sense of powerlessness. I blamed myself for failing to connect Ms. Hotta with the teaching much earlier.

Ms. Hotta couldn't accept the loss of her husband. Her depression worsened and her house became a mess. Since her two children were in elementary school then and Ms. Hotta was unable to cook regular meals for them, I visited her house to bring meals almost every day. After thinking aimlessly about how I could help her, I invited her to the final day of the midwinter sutra recitation practice that was going on at the Dharma center. She said she would join us if she could drive herself to the Dharma center. I was worried that Ms. Hotta might be under the influence of medication, so I accompanied her in the passenger seat, firmly holding my prayer beads. And then, my worry became real. She caused a traffic accident with a motorcycle. Fortunately, the rider escaped with only a minor injury.

The loss of her husband had shocked Ms. Hotta deeply; she had not been able to accept it. But the accident—which could have killed the rider, who had his own family—made her begin to come to her senses.

After the accident, she started to regain her normal life little by little and began visiting the Dharma center regularly again. After attending some seminars, she said to me, "I had always wanted to disappear, and I kept my heart closed. But I realize now that I've been wishing to be happy."

I had been thinking about what I could do to make her happy for a long time, but I realized then that she was able to find true liberation on her own, by practicing the teachings. All I needed to do was stand by her and support her as she faced her sufferings and finally felt happiness. Through this experience, Ms. Hotta enabled me to see the Buddha's deep compassion and his encouragement for us to live.

In 2015, I was appointed as an area leader at the Dharma center. Although I was busy with my Dharma center duties and my job, as well as caring for my father and my children, the members of the sangha always encouraged and supported me. They said things like, "It's great that you're working so hard to take good care of your father," "You're making great efforts," and "The teaching will always support you."

I had decided to look after my father at home until his final moment, but one day I received an unexpected notice that my father was eligible to move into a nursing facility. I couldn't tell him about it, and I thought it over for a long time. Finally, I made up my mind with the help of Rev. Usukura, the minister of the Dharma center at that time, who said, "There are various ways to perform acts of filial piety." She also told me that being able to use some of the time I was currently devoting to my father to benefit other people was a bodhisattva practice that would also help my father. My father accepted the admission to the facility, and only asked me if he could bring some photos of my mother.

With appreciation for my father, whose willingness to move now allowed me to use my time for Dharma activities, I applied for a Buddhist seminar at the Dharma center. The lecturer of the seminar taught us that "all things that are happening before our eyes are

not separated or independent—they are all interconnected, and we can see the Buddha's compassion in everything that happens."

Thanks to that seminar, I gradually became able to see things as they were, instead of just trying to find solutions to the problems. How I communicated with other members also began to change. I sympathized with members who had the same worries about caring for elderly parents, and I praised their efforts. I was pleased to find that my experience helped them deal with their problems, even if only a little.

There was a member who was having trouble coping with her rebellious teenage daughter and felt helpless because she wasn't able to communicate with her. Looking at her, I realized how sad my mother must have been when she was in bed with terminal cancer and couldn't help me with housework or take care of—or even hold—her beloved grandchildren. I also thought about my mother watching over me from the realm of spirit when I was having a hard time caring for my father.

I'm grateful that my father's facility is close to the Dharma center—I can visit him every day on my way home. He always shares old memories with me and says, "Whenever I look at your face, I feel we've had another safe and good day." I never imagined that such a peaceful time would come into my life.

Ms. Hotta has completely recovered from depression. She received a Dharma Teacher qualification and is supporting me as a group leader of my area. Her younger daughter, who had been unable to go to school because of anxiety over her mother's illness, took a step forward on her own and went back to school. She now attends Rissho Kosei-kai activities together with her mother.

I also recently received a new karmic connection with a member who is around the same age as my younger brother. He had isolated himself from society for thirty years and had just lost his mother, whom he really relied on. I listened attentively to him and before I realized it, I was telling him about the importance of holding devotionals for his late mother and that, according to the Japanese Buddhist tradition, the deceased travels for forty-nine days to reach the spiritual realm.

He told me he wanted to hold devotionals for his mother, and he started to perform sutra recitation once a week. He went out to buy flowers for the altar devoted to his mother and tried hard to recite the sutra in a loud voice. He now shares with me how he feels during the sutra recitation and he often visits my house to hold devotionals for my ancestors. I can interact with him pleasantly and with confidence, which is possible because Ms. Hotta—who overcame her own suffering through the teachings—supports me and prays for his happiness.

Every morning during the *hoza* session at the Dharma center, minister Rev. Shimura tells us the importance of always looking at things with a positive eye. His words are embracing and encouraging. They bring to my mind a sense of relief and freedom and enable me to feel the Buddha's all-supportive compassion working within me.

Through this opportunity of sharing my Dharma Journey talk, I have become aware of my deep affection for my husband, who has always supported me and been concerned about me, and who gently pushed me to see if the Buddha's teaching was true. I am now filled with deep gratitude toward him.

Since I was a child, I had always lived with a

feeling of anxiety. But now I see the Buddha's teaching as the guide for my life. I am truly grateful for my husband, my children, and the members of the sangha, who always support me and allow me to follow the Way with a calm and peaceful mind. During this precious opportunity to share my Dharma Journey talk on the monthly memorial day for my mother, I feel that my mother is always supporting me and encouraging me from the realm of spirit.

In the New Year's message for this year, President Nichiko Niwano taught us that "this place is indeed the place of the Way." Looking toward the centennial of Rissho Kosei-kai's founding, wherever I might be, I will value every encounter and exchange with others as an opportunity to be able to bring them relief and joy in the same way so many people did for me. I would like to conclude my talk by renewing my vow to continue to connect with as many people as possible.

Thank you very much for listening.



*Ms. Katsumoto with her father.*

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

## The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wondrous Dharma

### Chapter 15, Springing Up Out of the Earth



With this chapter we begin the second half of the sutra, which deals with the Dharma of Origin (chapters 15 through 28) in which the ultimate substance of the Buddha is made clear. The first portion of this chapter forms an introduction to the Dharma of Origin, while the final section—combined with chapter 16 and the first half of chapter 17—is considered to be the main part of the Dharma of Origin

#### The Vow of Bodhisattvas from Other Buddha Lands

As this chapter opens, the World-Honored One has completed the part of his sermon seen in chapter 14, “Peaceful and Agreeable Practices,” and bodhisattvas “as numerous as the sands of eight Ganges” now step forward and offer to spread the teaching in this saha world after the Buddha’s extinction. The Buddha assures these bodhisattvas from other worlds that there is no need for their help because there are countless bodhisattvas already in this world whose duty it is to expound the Lotus Sutra.

#### Bodhisattvas That Emerge from the Earth

No sooner has the Buddha uttered these words than the surface of the earth breaks apart and countless bodhisattvas, all resembling the Buddha himself, rise up from the crevices. This host of bodhisattvas is led by four outstanding ones—Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and Steadfast Practice—who come forward to salute the Buddha and are in turn addressed in a free and familiar fashion.

#### Question of the Bodhisattva Maitreya

Those who had assembled to hear the Buddha are puzzled by this development, and their questioning is expressed in a long address by the Bodhisattva Maitreya, who asks where these splendid bodhisattvas

have come from and why they have gathered here. The Buddha answers simply that they are those whom he taught and transformed after he attained enlightenment in this saha world. They have dwelled in an empty space beneath the saha world until now. Moreover, it is revealed that he has been instructing these bodhisattvas since long ago.

This seemingly simple answer only puzzles the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the other questioners, for they cannot understand how, in the forty-some years since Shakyamuni’s enlightenment, it was possible to bring such numbers of beings to a state of perfection so near that of the Buddha himself—especially since no one close to the Buddha over these years had ever met any of them. The chapter closes with a poetic repetition of the perplexity in which they all now stand, with the Bodhisattva Maitreya pressing Shakyamuni to explain and sweep away their doubts.







## Bodhisattva of the Origin and Bodhisattva of the Trace

Here, the terms describing the two kinds of bodhisattva—“bodhisattva of the origin” and “bodhisattva of the trace”—need to be explained.

A bodhisattva of the trace was taught and transformed by the historical Shakyamuni Buddha who was born in India and gained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. Therefore, a bodhisattva of the trace is the bodhisattva as a human being who was born into this world.

A bodhisattva of the origin, on the other hand, was taught and transformed by the Original Buddha (the Eternal Original Buddha who appears in chapter 16, “The Life Span of the Eternal Tathagata”). The bodhisattvas who sprang up from the earth are bodhisattvas of the origin, taught and transformed by the Original Buddha. This is why the Bodhisattva Maitreya and the other bodhisattvas who didn’t know the Eternal Original Buddha were so confused by the answer Shakyamuni gave them.

The excellence of the bodhisattvas of the origin who emerged from the ground (including the four great bodhisattvas) is emphasized in this chapter, presumably because the Buddha intends to strongly impress upon us how precious and wonderful these self-aware bodhisattvas of the origin are. This is likely because the Buddha wishes all people to aspire to be like the bodhisattvas who sprang up out of the earth.

Shakyamuni himself is none other than the Eternal Original Buddha, as is made clear in chapter 16. If we recognize this fact, believe from the bottom of our hearts that we are children of the Original Buddha, and practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, we are bodhisattvas of the origin while living as human beings.

Accordingly, those of us who learn and practice the teachings of the Buddha and work for the liberation of people (within the scope of our abilities) are bodhisattvas of the trace. But if some people, from the bottom of their hearts, have the awareness that they were one of the bodhisattvas who sprang up from the earth, and they practice the bodhisattva way with the spirit of the Lotus

Sutra, such persons are bodhisattvas of the origin even though their actions might look like those of bodhisattvas of the trace.

In outward appearance, the forms of faith of the two kinds of bodhisattva look the same, but in terms of the inner substance of their faith, there is a distinct gap between them that becomes apparent in their work of instruction and liberation.

## The Significance of Bodhisattvas Who Spring Up from the Earth

There are different ways of viewing the sudden emergence of the bodhisattvas who spring up from the ground in this chapter, but we may observe three points of particular note.

The first is when Shakyamuni declines the offer made by the bodhisattvas from other worlds and entrusts the work of teaching and transforming in this saha world to those who sprang up out of the earth. The lesson here is that achieving peace and happiness in a place is only possible through the work and effort of the people living there.

The second point to note is when the bodhisattvas, who were enjoying a state of enlightenment and dwelling in the empty space beneath the saha world, broke through the ground at the sound of the Buddha's voice. These bodhisattvas, though certainly people of this world, were content with their enlightenment of emptiness (recognizing that the essence of human beings is buddha-nature, which all people possess equally). They were certainly aware of this truth, but they only took pleasure in this in themselves; they had not yet turned outward to serve for the liberation of all living beings.

There was, then, an absolute necessity for these bodhisattvas to pass through the earth—they needed to experience life in actual society; they had to stand beside the people who were suffering amid the grime and pollution of the world. Only in this way could they really come to lead and liberate people. The lesson here is that it does not do to merely deal



in ideas, for without being in touch with reality, one cannot liberate humankind.

The third point to note is that the four great bodhisattvas in this chapter have the word “practice” in their names: Superior Practice, Boundless Practice, Pure Practice, and Steadfast Practice.

The first half of the Lotus Sutra is largely devoted to the teaching of reason and truth; the teaching of wisdom. But upon completing that half of the sutra, we see the abrupt appearance of countless bodhisattvas who are practitioners. This symbolizes the idea that any teaching is nothing without real-life application. True bodhisattvas are practitioners who manifest in actual life the wisdom of the ultimate reality of all things expounded in the Dharma of Appearance in the first half of the sutra. These bodhisattvas realize the truth of the equality of buddha-nature through the practice of compassion—they are the people who make the teachings of the Buddha meaningful in this world. Since this applies to modern-day believers, it is important to take this message to heart.

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. 148–53.



**Living the**  
 **LOTUS**

## Joyfully Following the Buddha Way

I HOPE everyone is in good health even though we have been in a restless situation due to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.

The title of the President's Message for this month is "Calmly and Peacefully." In it, President Niwano shows us how we can continue our practice of the Way in these trying times. He shares an anecdote about Zentaro, a pious lay Buddhist in Edo-period Japan who was falsely accused of a theft but did not even try to insist on his innocence. The story demonstrates the power of a firm and profound faith in the Buddha and the belief that the Buddha watches over everything. With this faith, we can live a life with a calm and peaceful mind.

Quoting a passage from chapter 13 of the Lotus Sutra, "Encouragement to Hold Firm," which reads, "Unsparring of our bodies and lives, / We will care only for the unsurpassable Way," President Niwano reminds us of the importance of being grateful for all the karmic connections that sustain our lives. He then tells us that leading an everyday life while sharing the teachings with others—in the hope that many more people will be awakened to the preciousness of being alive—is none other than joyfully following the Buddha Way.

This month, I hope we will dedicate ourselves to sharing the teachings with a calm and peaceful mind, as we have learned in the President's Message.

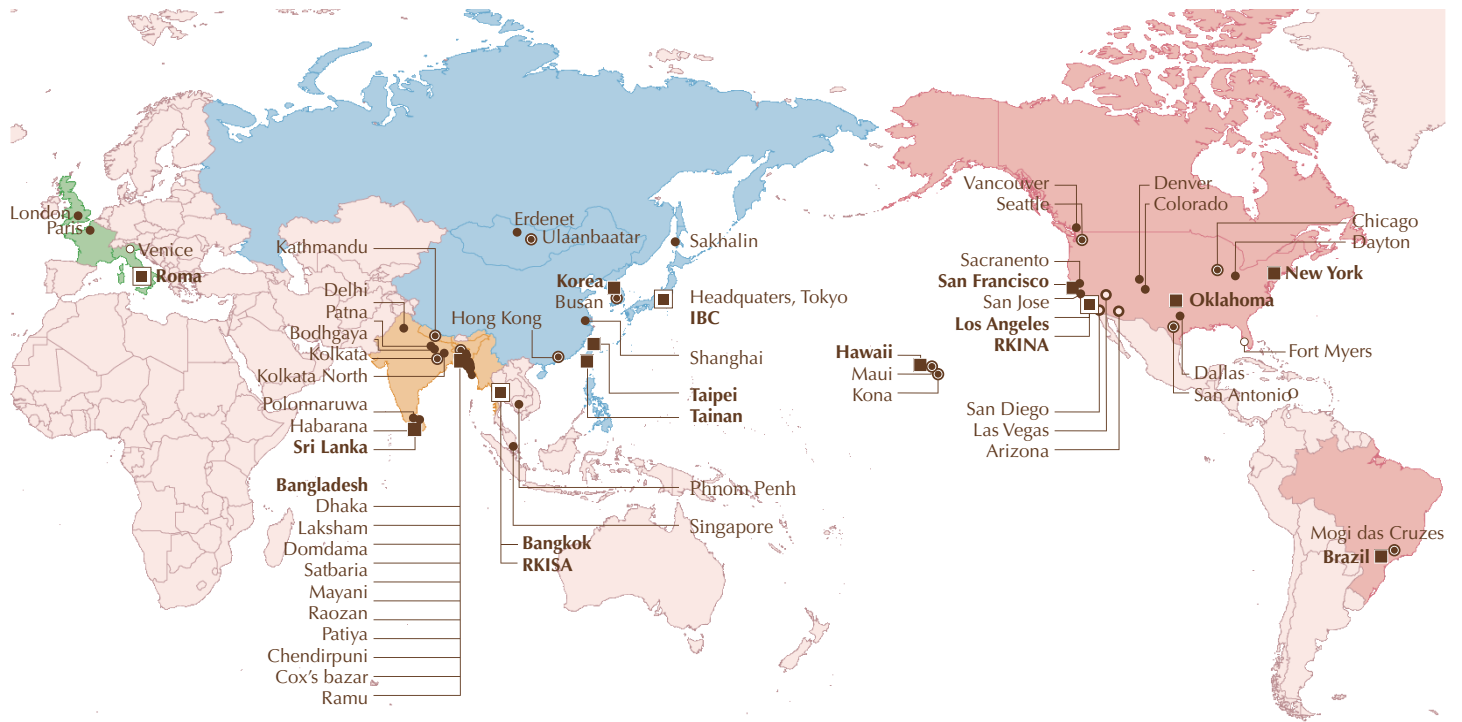
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