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History of Buddhism

A brief strategic survey

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The Sutta Discovery (SD) series started with the NUS Buddhist Society weekly Sutta Study Group (SSG) classes in February 2002, and the Buddhist Fellowship SD series started in February 2003. These classes are still running today. This is a small record for an ongoing activity, especially Sutta study.

Piya Tan, who works on these Suttas and notes, and teaches them, was a former Theravada monk of 20 years. Today he is a full time lay Dharma teacher specializing in early Buddhism. He was consultant and regular lecturer to the Buddhist Studies Team (BUDS) that successfully introduced Buddhist Studies in Singapore Secondary Schools in the 1980s. After that, he was invited as a visiting scholar to the University of California at Berkeley, USA. He has written many ground-breaking and educational books on Buddhism (such as *Total Buddhist Work*) and social surveys (such as *Buddhist Currents* and *Charisma in Buddhism*). He is a full-time Dharma teacher who runs regular Buddhist, Sutta and Pali classes like the basic Pali course series, the Sutta Study Group (NUSBS), Dharma courses (the Singapore Buddhist Federation), Sutta Discovery classes (Buddhist Fellowship and elsewhere), and Sutta-based (including meditation) courses (Brahm Education Centre), besides running his own full-time Pali translation and research project, the Pali House, and doing a comparative study of the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. As a Theravāda monk, he learned the insight method from Mahasi Sayadaw himself in the 1980s. As a lay teacher, he learned the forest method from the Ajahn Brahmapamso himself. He has run numerous meditation courses and retreats for students and adults (incl non-Buddhists) since 1980s. In 1992, he taught meditation at the University of California at Berkeley, USA. He has taught at BP, JP Morgan, the Defence Science Organization, GMO, HP and SIA. He is doing all this for the love of Dharma and of Ratna and their two children.

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As people today become more aware of Buddhism, many seek the simple original teachings of the Buddha. For over two decades now, Piya Tan has been inspired by this ideal of “mere Buddhism.” In this connection, he has set up the Minding Centre (Bukit Batok) and Pali House (Jurong East).

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BUDDHISM IN INDIA

A brief strategic survey

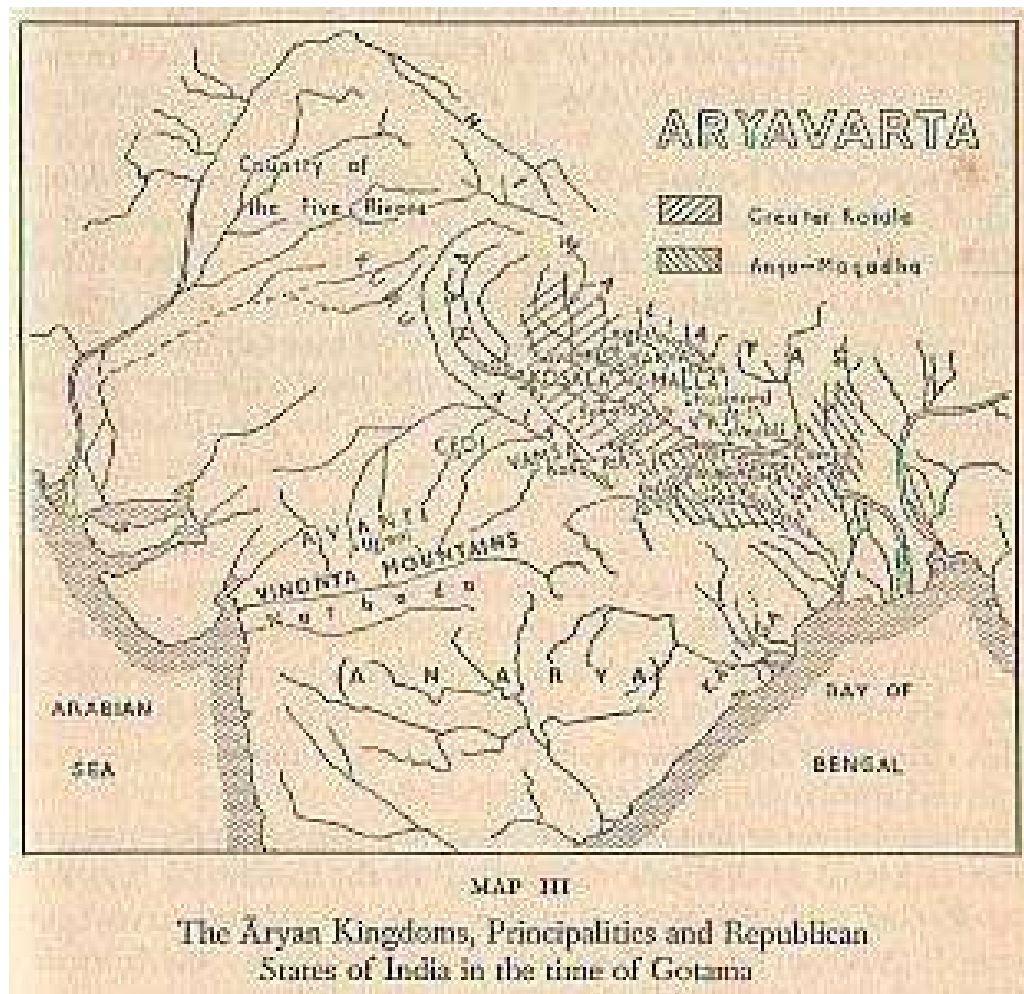
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SYLLABUS

- (1) Buddhism and history; “strategic study”; historical periods of Buddhism.
- (2) Mahayana: origins and nature.
- (3) The Buddhist Canons.
- (4) Buddhism under the empires: Aśoka; the Guptas; Harsha.
- (5) Foreign influences in India: Buddhist art; religion.
- (6) Stupa worship & lay specialists.
- (6) Tantra in India.
- (7) Hindu reactions to Buddhism.
- (8) Decline of Buddhism in India.

1. WHY STUDY HISTORY OF BUDDHISM?

- (a) Buddhism is a missionary religion: “Go forth, O monks, for the good of the many!” (V 1:20)
- (b) Buddhism is a living religion. We have to know how it grows and adapts itself.
- (c) Buddhism is a social phenomenon. Often enough, when a religion becomes successful, it begins to face its own problems.
- (d) Buddhism is growing very fast today. Some of the reasons can be found in a study of its history.



Academic conventions. For details on the academic conventions (Pali/Sanskrit, abbreviations, and referencing), see **The Sutta Discovery** series, 2003- .

2. INTRODUCTION: BUDDHISM & HISTORY <slide>

The **phoenix** is a mythical bird that probably originated in India, but became better known in ancient Egyptian mythology. It is a bird of great beauty and sweet voice, of which only one exists at a time. It dies every 500 years, burning itself up, and from its ashes arises a new phoenix who lives for another 500 years, and so on. This is a beautiful imagery found in religion and literature, which I shall use as a central theme in my lectures on Buddhism in India and its global spread.

Strategic study of Buddhist history

In his book, *The Vision of Buddhism*, Roger Corless thinks that **history** (as understood in western academia) is “a western, post-Christian, academic discipline, is non-Buddhist, even anti-Buddhist” (NY: Paragon House, 1989: xx). However, he concedes that one could still write on a history of Buddhism, but that would be “**more history than Buddhism**,” and that in order to make sense of such a history, one should first have an understanding of Buddhism.

This series of lectures on the history of Buddhism is based on what I’ve called “a strategic study.” By **strategic study** I mean:

- (1) What are the strong points of Buddhism?
- (2) How were these strengths used by Buddhists, and how were these strengths exploited by others?
- (3) What are the weaknesses of Buddhism?
- (4) What do we learn from the patterns in Buddhist history?

As such, this is an interdisciplinary study of sorts: **history, sociology, ethics, missiology**. Above, all can sense can we make out of Buddhism specifically, and religion in general.

Linear conception of time

Scholarly works on Buddhism often assume the notion that for Buddhists **history simply does not matter**. This notion is generally based on the understanding that the Buddhist conception of time (like the Indian one) is cyclic, not linear as in the case of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam and their developments). For Buddhists, “history” definitely repeats itself over and again.

In a **linear conception of history**, events occur only once, and if history does repeat itself here, only the actions appear similar, but the actors are always new and unique. There is only one Moses, one Exodus, one Christ, one Crucifixion, one Mohammed, one Hejirah. And the unbeliever has only one chance to choose between an eternity of heaven if he believes or an eternity of hell if he does not. We almost do not such rhetoric in our better-informed societies today, but the linear conception of time still deeply influences us.

Cyclic conception of time

The Indian conception of time is **cyclic**, and Buddhism accepts such a conception of history. There are many Buddhas, many have come and gone, and more will come in the future. We have lived many lives before, and will continue to be reborn here or elsewhere in this vast cosmos (if we remain unenlightened). History repeats itself.

For Buddhists, at least the informed and practising Buddhists, this repetitiveness of history has a higher purpose. In simple terms, this higher purpose of history is for us to learn from our mistakes—the pronoun “our” here refers to a sort of common consciousness if you like, whether as different persons or in different situations. History can be cyclic, imprisoning one in its repetitive cycle, or it can be a spiral path of higher evolution leading one out of the cycle into spiritual liberation.

Buddhism in world history

When we talk of a “history” of Buddhism, we are referring to the human experience of *saṃsāra*, the ups and downs of religious fervour, spiritual growth and moral decay, repeating and interacting among themselves in endless colourful cycles. There are some clear patterns in all this, and we shall try to discover them for ourselves. Since history tends to repeat itself, we might thereby gain some wisdom in our positive responses to events that directly concern us as Buddhists today.

The Axial Age

The history of human civilization is characterized by recurrent waves of **fascination with power and wealth**, and then with the disillusion of these very same power and wealth when they seem not to fulfill the hopes associated with them. Around 600 BCE or the first 700-800 years BCE, a major series of such waves swept across all civilized Asia with major “breakthroughs,” in what the German existentialist philosopher, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) has called the “axis age” or “**axial age**.”

In **Greece**, we see the rise of pre-Socratic and classical philosophy; in **Persia**, the coming of Zoroastrianism; in **the Middle East**, the advent of classical Judaism through the prophets and the beginnings of rabbinical Judaism; in **China**, we have Daoism, Confucianism and the “hundred schools”; and in **India**, we see the birth of the Upanishads, Jainism, various heterodox sects—and Buddhism.

According to **Karl Jaspers** (1883-1969), the renowned German existentialist philosopher, the axial age was a turning point in human history—in the 6th century BCE, when Confucius, the Buddha, Zoroaster, Deutero-Isaiah, and Pythagoras were alive contemporaneously. If the axial age is extended backward in time to the original Isaiah’s generation [fl 8th cent BCE] and forward to Mohammed’s time [c570-632], it may perhaps be recognized as the age in which humans first sought to make direct contact with the ultimate spiritual reality behind phenomena instead of making such communication only indirectly through the non-human and social environments.

Serpents and dragons

Conze makes an interesting observation that for the last 2000 years Buddhism had mainly flourished in **rice-growing areas** and little elsewhere. Furthermore, he says, it is hard to explain why it had spread only into those countries which had previously **a cult of Serpents or Dragons**, and never made headway in those parts of the world which view the killing of dragons as a meritorious deed or blame serpents for mankind’s ills. (1980:12)

3. PRE-BUDDHIST INDIA <Slide>

A central teaching of the Buddha is that of **non-self** (*anattā*), which offers the cure for individualism and eternalism. The Buddha addressed a society of individualistic city dwellers who generally believed in a creator god or an eternal soul, or who were utterly materialistic.

Furthermore, it was a society of **the Iron Age**, whose metal forged better weapons to wage more devastating wars by ambitious warrior kings who established large kingdoms, with big cities, widespread trade, a well-developed money economy and a rationally organized state. These cities replaced small tribal societies with large conurbia, with all the evils of alienation, specialization and social disorientation that all this entailed.

The Buddha’s public ministry was mostly in the urban areas, which helps to account for the intellectual character of his teaching, the “urbanity” of his words and the rational quality of his ideas. As if reflecting the widespread republican spirit of his times, the Buddha often declared that he was merely a “guide” (Dh 276), not an authority (D 2:100, 154), and that all propositions, including his own should be tested (A 1:188 f).

Having the advantage of **a liberal spiritual education**, the Buddhists respond to the unknown and the unproven with benevolent skepticism and a spirit of inquiry. In this manner, they have been able to accommodate themselves to every kind of popular (and unpopular) belief, not only in India, but wherever they find themselves.

4. HISTORICAL PERIODS OF BUDDHISM <Slide>

Edward Conze, in his short but excellent *History of Buddhism*, which first appeared in 1958, gives a useful framework where he divides Buddhist history into 4 periods of roughly 500 years each. This rather neat and systematic division does not always agree with the facts, but as Conze puts it,

[I]t is mentioned in many Buddhist writings dating from the beginning of the Christian era. These five periods of 500 years are enumerated as marking the continued degeneration of the doctrine... Whether or not observation bears out this diagnosis of continuous decay, it has a

Ch 1 Buddhism in India

profound influence on the mentality of the Buddhists in later ages, and we will hear of it again and again. The story of Buddhism is indeed not only a splendid, but also a melancholy one.

(*A Short History of Buddhism*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1980: 14 f.)

Buddhism has lived for 2500 years and during that period has undergone profound and radical changes. If we follow the traditional 500-year system, as Conze has done, then we have 4 successive 500-year periods of Buddhist history (except for the last) neatly divided as:

The 1 st period: 500-0 BCE.	Early Buddhism	(Ascetic & Monastic Buddhism).
The 2 nd period: 0 CE-500.	Mahayana	(Popular Buddhism).
The 3 rd period: 500-1000	Tantra and Chan	(Magical & Contemplative Buddhism).
The 4 th period: 1000-2000.	Modern Buddhism	(Pragmatic Buddhism).

It is important to understand that this **500-year system** is at best an approximate guide for discussing Buddhist history.¹ There are overlappings of sectarian developments and other events. Certain trends, like traditions rooted in early Buddhism (especially the Theravada), run throughout Buddhist history to the present day like a silent undercurrent in the now stormy now sunny Buddhist ocean. The headings (such as “Early Buddhism” etc.) here only refer to the predominating trend or trends.

In this lecture, I shall cover all these four periods as far as they cover the development of Buddhism in India. As for the spread of Buddhism outside India, I shall discuss in the second lecture (Spread of Buddhism).

5. RELIGIOUS FOCUS <Slide>

Let us first have an overview of the 4 periods so that we would have a better grasp of certain recurrent developments in the 2500 years of Buddhist history as they are discussed here.

The 1st period of Buddhist history, or early Buddhism, remained almost totally Indian. This opening period concentrated on **psychological questions**, that is, concerning individuals gaining control of their own minds and the analysis of the method of self-control.

During the 2nd period (the Mahayana), Buddhism spread outside India, especially in south and southeast Asia and throughout Central Asia, and was in turn significantly influenced by non-Indian thought. This second period focussed on **ontological questions** (regarding being, that is, existence and reality), discussing the nature of true reality and the realization of the true nature of things essential for enlightenment.

The 3rd period (Tantra and Chan) was a creative period when Buddhism spread to north and east Asia. This period was one of adaptation and **indigenization**, whereby Buddhism harmonized with ambient society and the cosmos in the quest for spiritual liberation. Secular powers tapped the religiosity of Buddhism in the quest for legitimation and worldly power.

The 4th period (modern Buddhism), that is, the last 1000 years, we see at first the decline of Buddhism in India and elsewhere, its lowest ebb during the colonial period, followed by Buddhist revival in Asia and the **globalization** of Buddhism in our own day.

6. RELIGIOUS VIRTUOSI <Slide>

In my later years as a Buddhist monk, my interest in sociology has helped me to have a deeper understanding of the dynamics of religion in society. I shall here employ the notion of “**religious virtuosi**,” an idea introduced by Max Weber and developed by other scholars like Guenther Roth. [See G Roth & W Schluchter, *Max Weber’s Vision of History, Ethics and Methods*. Berkeley, CA, 1979.]

For our mutual convenience, I shall not be too pedantic here, but apply the term “religious virtuosi” as it helps us understand how Buddhist religious leaders function in our study of Buddhist history. Here,

¹ The period of 500 years is associated with the Buddha’s declaration in the Vinaya and elsewhere that the True Teaching would endure for only that long (V 2:255; A 4:278; Miln 4.1.55-61). See “The Dharma-ending Age,” SD 1.10.

I shall use “**religious virtuoso**” to refer to a person who is perceived as having a vital grasp of Buddhist doctrine and spirit by sheer personality and social status.

Soteriologically (in terms of spiritual liberation), each of the four periods differ in the conception of the religious virtuoso. In the 1st period the religious ideal is the liberated saint or **Arhat**, in whom all cravings are extinguished and who will no more be reborn.

In the 2nd period, it is the ideal of the **Bodhisattva**, not the historical Buddha-to-be, but the hypostasis (or embodiment) of compassion, that is, a being (human or otherwise) who wishes to save other beings, even at the cost of postponing his own final enlightenment.

In the 3rd period, it is the **Siddha**, a holy man or religious adept who is totally in harmony with his environment that he is under no constraint whatsoever and as a free agent is able to manipulate the cosmic forces both inside and outside himself.

In the 4th period, it is the **Śreṣṭhī**, a secular professional or executive, a person of means, whose charisma and social success are regarded as blessings of past good karma—as such, worthy of emulation and respect as a teacher. [I will deal more with the Śreṣṭhī in my next lecture, on “The Spread of Buddhism.”]

Let me also add here that I shall not be discussing the life of the Buddha or his personal ministry as they are already well known and often dealt with elsewhere. Also given the time we have, I shall only select certain events and themes that I think are vital and useful for us in our own small way to positively influence the present course of Buddhism and the history of its future.

7. THE SANGHA AFTER THE BUDDHA’S DEATH <Slide>

All the Buddhist traditions accept that soon after the Buddha’s Final Nirvana, a Buddhist Council was held. However, there are various versions of what actually took place in that council. As such, some scholars have doubted that there was ever such a Council. My analysis is that, after the Buddha’s passing, various groups of monks in different parts of India each had their own Council. In due course, such groups developed into various systematic schools of their own.

The First Council (543 BCE)

Chapter 11 of the Cullavagga of the Theravada Vinaya Piṭaka records an important incident in connection with the 1st Council or **the Council of Rājagṛha**, sponsored by king Ajātaśatru. Some elder monks invited the monk Purāṇa (of Dakkhināgiri, south of Rājagaha) to join in the Council that was in progress, but he turned down the invitation, saying:

Well-recited are the Dhamma and Vinaya by the elders, but I will remember the
Buddha’s teaching from what I have heard directly in his presence, what I have directly
received from him. (V 2:290)

This event clearly shows that even though the 1st Council (as recorded in the Pali Canon) was held at Rājagṛha (in modern Bihar) and attended by 500 Arhats, there were other communities of monks who did not attend it.

Whether or not there was any assembly as large or as authoritative as this Council, remarks Noble Ross Reat, “is not as important historically as the point that soon after the death of the Buddha, if not already within his lifetime, a corpus of his teachings regarded as authentic began to take shape” (1994:17; emphasis mine).

The Second Council (c. 350 BCE)

The Theravada Vinaya records the events of the 2nd Council or **the Council of Vaiśālī** in Chapter 12 of the Cullavagga (V 2:294 ff.). This event was said to have been sponsored by king Kālāśoka of Magadha (90-118 AB = 396-368 BCE). Most other sources also mention this event, especially since it resulted in a schism between the **Sthaviravāda** (Pali, *Theravāda*, “Teaching of the Elders”) and the **Mahāsaṅghika** (“the Great Sangha party”).

8. THE MAHĀSAṄGHAIKA <Slide>

The Mahāsaṅghika [28] was the more liberal of the two schools, winning more support from the laity, since they placed **less emphasis on the Vinaya and more stress on meditation**. In fact, this was the early beginnings of a major new movement that would be called **Mahāyāna**, the Greater Vehicle, which as we shall see, would give rise to many philosophical schools and would increasingly accommodate the local cults through its catholic tendencies. [24]

Traditional accounts attribute the first schism after the Buddha to a dispute over monastic rules. Later texts however emphasize differences between the Mahāsaṅghikas and the Sthaviravādins regarding **the nature of the Buddha and of arhathood**. The Mahāsaṅghikas believed in a plurality of Buddhas who are supramundane (*lokōttara*), omniscient and abide in eternal samadhi, and held that what passed for Gautama Buddha in his earthly existence was only an apparition. In holding such doctrines, the Mahāsaṅghika was a precursor of the Mahayana.

Bodhisattva ideal

Another important Mahāsaṅghika development was their **application of the term *bodhisattva* to an enlightened being**. Traditionally, the term *bodhisattva* applies to the Buddha-to-be in the process of cultivating and accumulating “perfections” (*pāramī*), such as generosity, moral conduct, and wisdom. While the Sthaviravāda ideal is the Arhat, the Mahāsaṅghika, and the Mahayana that followed, look up to the Bodhisattva, defined as **an enlightened being who postpones his final enlightenment** for the sake of giving succour to living beings and helping them on to enlightenment itself.

The notion of an enlightened being prolonging his lifespan was not new. Its basis is an enigmatic remark made by the Buddha before he passed away (recorded in the **Mahā,parinibbāna Sutta**):

Ānanda, whoever has developed the four paths of accomplishment (*iddhi,pāda*)² practised them frequently, established them...could undoubtedly live for a *kalpa* or the remainder of a *kalpa*. The Tathāgata has developed these four paths of power...established them. And he could, Ānanda, undoubtedly live for a *kalpa* or the remainder of a *kalpa*.
(D 2:104)

The same statement (regarding the *kalpa*) is made in the **Cakkavatti,sihanāda Sutta** in relation to a monk, but including other blessings of spiritual beauty, spiritual happiness, spiritual wealth and spiritual power (through the cultivation of the setting up of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) (D 3:77). The Theravada traditionally translate “**kalpa**” (*kappa*) as a normal human lifespan (as envisioned in the Buddha’s time), that is, a century. The Mahayanists however take “kalpa” in its literal dictionary sense to mean **a world-period**, that is, one cycle of the universe (from its arising to its collapse) (cf. D 1:17).

The Mahāsaṅghika school was first located in the area of Vaiśālī and spread also to south India, with centres at Amarāvati and Nāgārjunakoṇḍa. Its texts were written in Prākṛit. It further divided into several subjects, of which the best known was the Lokottaravāda (so called because of its views on *lokottara*, or the supramundane).

9. EARLY BUDDHIST CANONS <Slide>

The teachings the early Buddhist monks had learned, whether directly from the Buddha or from his immediate enlightened disciples, were handed down through **an oral tradition**. This was partly because all religious teachings of the time were orally transmitted, and partly because the languages used by the early Indian Buddhists themselves were lyrical and regulated by a well-developed **prosody** (system of versification). As such, the system is as accurate as a scribal (written) tradition, if not more so, like a living lineage of folk music and songs, whose tune and lyrics can be proof-checked from internal rules of sounds and spirit for accuracy by way of **communal chanting** (*saṅgīti*).

Understandably, human errors are likely to be found even in an oral tradition. The most viable solution to such uncertainties is the comparison of surviving scriptures of the various early schools of

² *Iddhi,pāda*: the will to attain mental absorption, the effort to attain it, the mind to enjoy it, the investigation of that mental absorption, D 2:213, 3:78.

Buddhism. Whatever materials that agree amongst the disparate traditions could be reasonably taken to predate their separation.

10. ORIGINAL TEACHINGS <Slide>

Unfortunately, the only totally complete extant Buddhist canon is that of the Pali canon of the Theravada. Fortunately, however, the surviving portions of the other early pre-Mahayana schools, sometimes called **Nikāya Buddhism**, exist in translation in the canons of the Chinese and the Tibetans.

Other than the Theravada canon, the only extensive literature of a Nikāya school to survive is the **Sarvāstivāda canon**, preserved almost in its entirety in Chinese translation. In general, Chinese translations of the Sarvāstivāda texts are in reasonably good agreement with their Theravada counterparts. From this sort of scriptural detective work, scholars can reasonably deduce an outline of the early Nikāya texts, going back to about 250 BCE, when the Sarvāstivāda broke away from the Sthaviravāda.

Vinaya

The canons of the early Buddhist schools all go by the same name of **Tripiṭaka**, “the three baskets,” that is, the Vinaya (monastic discipline), Sūtra (doctrines), and Abhidharma (higher doctrines). **The Vinaya** of the Theravadins is subdivided into three sections: the Sutta Vibhaṅga, the Khandhaka and the Parivāra.

The **Sutta Vibhaṅga** contains the Pātimokkha, the code of rules governing the lives of monastics. The **Khandhaka** contains procedural rules for the conduct of monastic affairs and contains valuable records of early Buddhist history. The **Parivāra** is a supplement to the Theravada canon, a book of summaries and classifications of rules.

The Vinayas of the Theravada, the Sarvāstivāda, and four other early schools are preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations. They vary in arrangement and details, particularly in the Skandhaka (Pali, *Khandhaka*) (the procedural sections) and in their supplements. **The actual rules governing monastics, however, are remarkably consistent.**

11. SŪTRA <Slide>

In terms of doctrine, the most important section of the Buddhist canon is the **Sūtra Piṭaka**, the collection of teachings of the Buddha and his immediate foremost disciples. It should be noted that only the texts of the Theravada are in **Pāli**, while those of the other early schools are in what has been variously called “Buddhist Sanskrit” or “Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit.”

Most important of this collection are the first four groups of texts called *nikāya* in Theravada and *āgama* in the other early pre-Mahayana schools:

Dīgha Nikāya	Dīrgha Āgama	(Long Sayings)
Majjhima Nikāya	Madhyama Āgama	(Middle-length Sayings)
Samyutta Nikāya	Samyukta Āgama	(Connected Sayings)
Anguttara Nikāya	Ekōttara Āgama	(Numerical Sayings)
[Khuddaka Nikāya]	[Avadāna]	

The actual contents of the Long Sayings and Middle-Length Sayings of all the Nikāya schools agree closely with one another, even in translation. This agreement is particularly important in the case of the Majjhima Nikāya and the Madhyama Āgama (of the Sarvāstivāda). As such, these texts (as we have mentioned) predate the first schism in about 250 BCE.³

The fifth Nikāya of the Theravada, the **Khuddaka Nikāya** or “Minor Collection,” is a miscellany, containing some very old texts, but others culled from the four Nikāyas or added later. The Chinese canon also contains a fifth section of miscellaneous texts, but it is not called an Āgama. Instead it is

³ See Anesaki, “Some Problems of the Textual History of Buddhist Scriptures” and “The Four Buddhist Āgamas in Chinese,” *Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, vol. 35, nos. 2-3, 1908. see also Thich Minh Chau, *The Chinese Madhyama Āgama and the Pāli Majjhima Nikāya*, The Saigon Institute of Higher Buddhist Studies, n.d., probably 1964.

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known as **Avadāna** (edifying stories) and as might be expected does not correspond well to material in the Pali Khuddaka Nikāya.

12. DEVELOPMENT OF ABHIDHARMA <Slide>

Both the Theravada and the Sarvāstivāda have their respective Abhidharma collection, but aside from a general similarity of ideas expressed, the actual content of the two collections is dissimilar. Both contain seven books, but the Theravadins ascribe their composition to the Buddha himself, whereas the Sarvāstivāda ascribe them to seven different disciples of the Buddha. In either case, it is clear that the Abhidharma represents a **scholastic development** within Buddhism quite some time after the Final Nirvana of the Buddha.

<u>Theravāda</u>	<u>Sarvāstivāda</u>
1. Dhamma.saṅgaṇī	1. Jñāna,prasthāna (T 1543-1544) by Katyāyanīputra
2. Vibhaṅga	2. Prakaraṇa,pāda (T 1541-1542 by Vasumitra
3. Puggala Paññatti	3. Vijñāna,kāya (T 1539) by Devaśarman/Devakṣema
4. Dhātu,kathā	4. Dharma,skandha (T 1537) by Śāriputra
5. Yamaka	5. Prajñapti,śāstra (T 1538) by Maudgalyāyana
6. Paṭṭhāna	6. Dhātu,kāya (T 1540) by Pūrṇa
7. Kathā,vatthu	7. Saṅgīti,paryāya (T 1536) by Mahākauṣṭhila

Abhidharma systems

The **Saṅgīti,paryāya** or more fully Abhidharma,saṅgīti,paryāya,pāda Śāstra is closely connected to the Dhammasaṅgaṇī. The original Sanskrit of the **Dharma,skandha** or Abhidharma,dharma,skandha,-pāda Śāstra is lost, only fragments remain. This work is closely connected to the Vibhaṅga. The **Vijñāna,kāya** or Abhidharma,jñāna,kāya,pāda Śāstra is closely connected to the Dhātukathā.

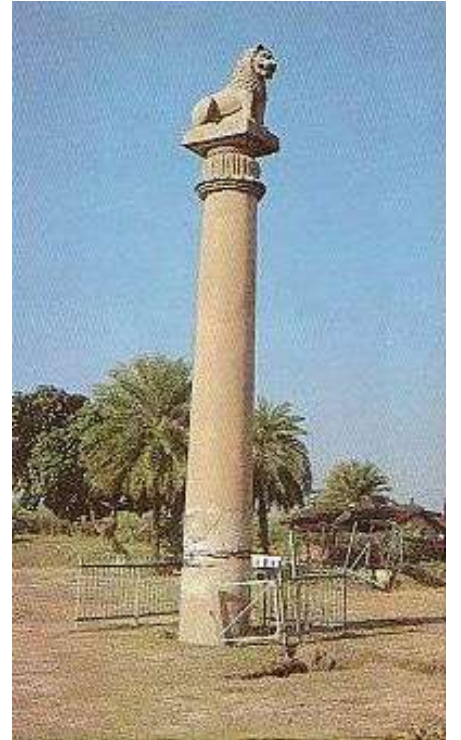
It is important to note that the 1st Council recited only the “Dhamma and Vinaya” (V 2:285). There is no mention of any “Abhidhamma” at all. In fact, the term (as used in reference to a collection of texts) is first mentioned only in the Commentaries. As such, scholars generally think that the third Piṭaka probably was not composed until around 300 BCE, after the split between the Vibhajyavāda and the Sarvāstivāda, the former being the early Theravada.

13. ASOKA & BUDDHISM <Slide>

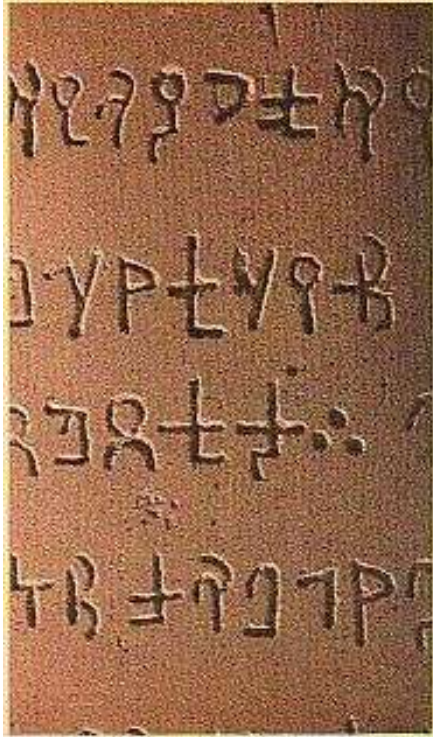
Aśoka (r. c. 268-239 BCE) of the Maurya dynasty was the first monarch to rule over **a unified India**, and as such can be said to be the founder of India, since before him, India did not exist as a political entity. He converted to Buddhism in 260 BCE after a traumatic experience of seeing the bloodshed he had caused in the Kalinga campaigns.

Within ten years of his conversion, in an effort to educate and unite his empire, Aśoka covered his realm with numerous **edicts** carved into stones, cave walls and free-standing granite pillars. These edicts are **the first examples of writing in India** after the demise of the Indus Valley civilization in about 1500 BCE.

For the remaining 80 years of the Maurya dynasty, Buddhism was the



Asoka's pillar, Lumbini.



Brahmī inscriptions on Asoka's pillar.

predominant religion though Aśoka also freely patronized other Indian religions. In effect, Buddhism was **the first state religion of India**, since India as such never existed before Aśoka.

Moggaliputta Tissa

Aśoka was said to have called the 3rd **Buddhist Council**, the Council of Pāṭaliputra, to standardize the canon and to purify the Sangha which was rife with heresy and disunity. According to the Sri Lanka tradition, **Moggali,putta Tissa** was summoned by Aśoka to Pāṭaliputra, where Tissa defrocked heretics and purified the Sangha so that those remaining adhered to the **Vibhajjavāda** (the School of Analysis), that is, the Theravada.

The Sri Lanka sources also record that Moggaliputta Tissa composed the **Kathāvatthu** (Points of Controversy), a work of apologetics, to counter the various doctrinal points brought up by other schools against the Vibhajjavāda. This book is included in the Abhidhamma Piṭaka of the Theravada just before the Pali Canon was closed during the 3rd Council, presided over by him. This Council was held around the 18th year of Aśoka's reign.

The Council of Pāṭaliputra is mentioned only in the Sinhalese sources (Dīpv 7:343-43, 44-50; Mahv 5:267-82; VA 60 f.) and its Chinese recensions (T 1462 ch 2:684a-b). As such, not all scholars agree that the 3rd Council was held during Aśoka's reign. However, since Moggaliputta compiled the **Kathāvatthu** within the Thera-

vada order, some sort of council must have been convened. However, this council could not have been held during Aśoka's reign, but approximately a century after Aśoka.

Schism

Hirakawa Akira argues that since the doctrines of the various schools of Nikāya Buddhism are examined and criticized in the Kathāvatthu, this text must have been written after these schools arose, probably during the last half of the 2nd century BCE. Thus, if the 3rd Council is to be considered as a historical event, it was a council only within the Theravada during the latter part of the 2nd century BCE. (*A History of Indian Buddhism*, 1990: 91).

In his effort to unify the Sangha, Aśoka erected edicts strongly warning monastics against creating schism in the Order. These edicts were found in **Kauśambī, Sāñcī and Sārnāth**, the strongholds of the western monks of the Gangetic plain [see map], who were historically connected with the reason for the convening of the 2nd Council in 100 AB. Anyway, it is said that these schisms eventually led to the rise of **the 18 schools of Nikāya Buddhism**.⁴

I. Mahāsaṅghika:

1. Mūla, mahāsaṅghika, 2. Vyavahārika, 3. Lokottaravāda, 4. Bahuśrutiya, 5. Prajñaptivāda, 6. Caitika, 7. Pūrvaśaila, 8. Aparāśaila.

II. Sthavira:

1. Mūla, sthavira, 2. Sarvāstivāda, 3. Vātsīputrīya, 4. Dharmottarīya, 5. Bhadrāyanīya, 6. Saṃmatīya, 7. Mahīśāsaka, 8. Dharmaguptaka, 9. Suvarṣaka, 10. Uttarīya.

⁴ In his *History of Indian Buddhism* (1608: 270 f.), the Tibetan compiler, Tāranātha, reproduces this list of 18 schools with 2 subdivisions which he attributes to the Sthaviras. He does not cite his source, but several early lists adopted the same subdivision. [See Kōgen Mizuno, *Essentials of Buddhism*, Tokyo: Kosei, 1996: 36-39 for diagrams with dates.]

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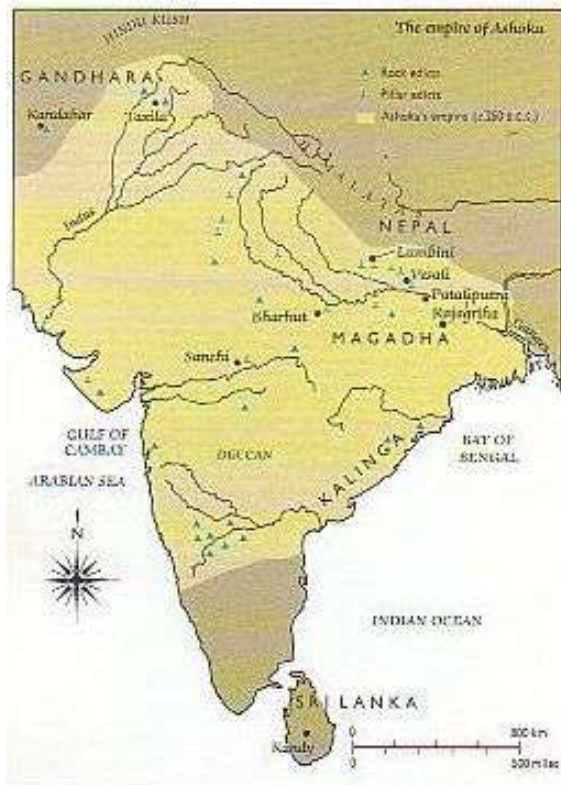
14. SPREAD OF BUDDHISM OUTSIDE INDIA⁵ <Slide>

The Sri Lankan chronicles say that Aśoka sent various monks to spread Buddhism throughout India and abroad. Buddhism spread into southern India and lasted there longer than in the north. We hear of a Theravadin monk being invited from Kāñcī (Conjeeveram) in Tamilnadu to Sri Lanka as late as the 14th century, about a century after the Muslims gave the deathblow to Buddhism by destroying the monastic universities of north India.

By land, Buddhism spread first into eastern Iran and Central Asia, and then along the caravan route into China. Striking evidence showing that Buddhism early moved through the Northwest Passage out of India is found in the Aśokan inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic found at Kandahar (now in Afghanistan).

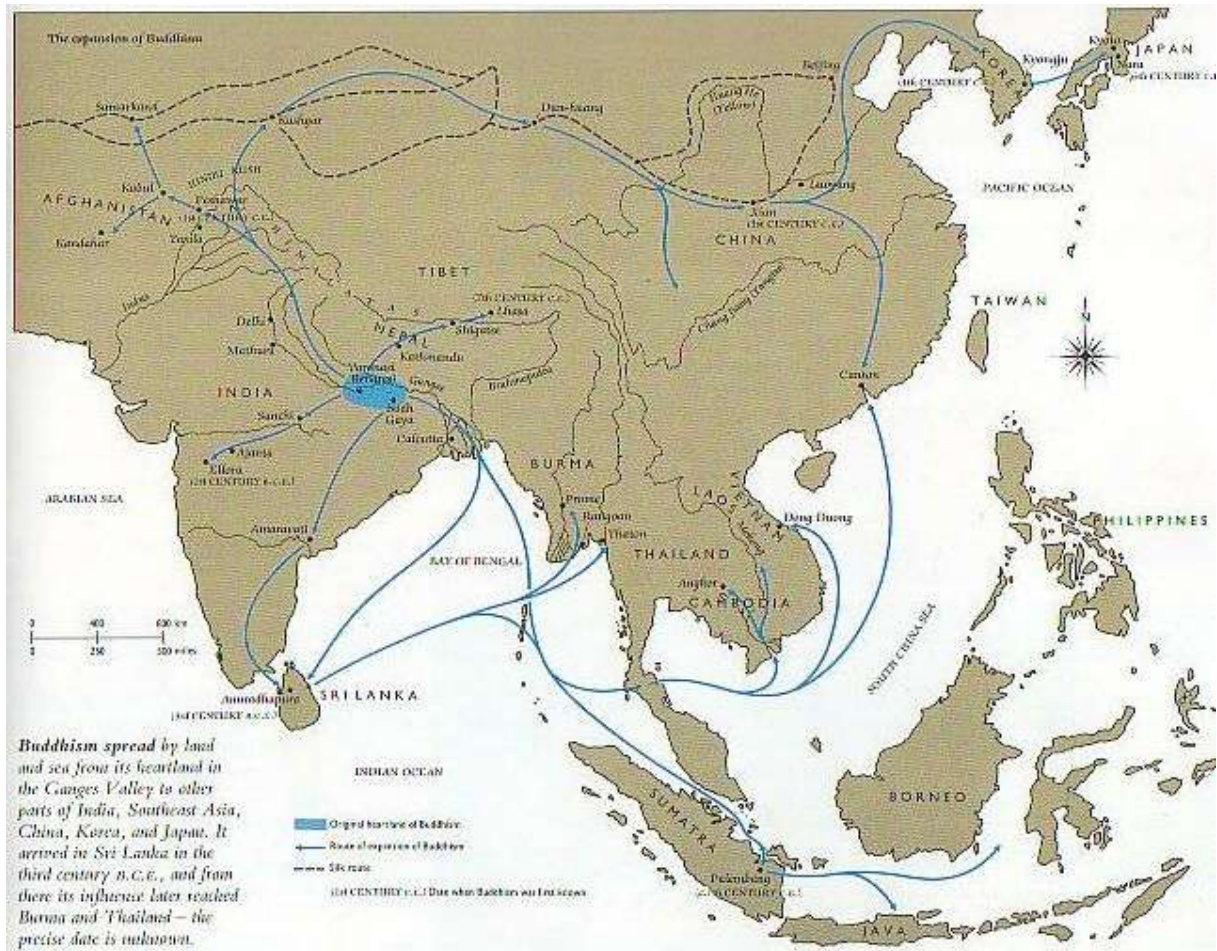
By sea, Buddhism spread from the east coast, in the middle of the first millennium CE, to continental southeast Asia and Indonesia. Some of the greatest Buddhist monuments, notably the Borobudur in Java and the temples of Angkor in Kampuchea are due to this seaborne expansion.

The Buddhist missionaries introduced important aspects of Indian culture—notably **writing** using the Indian script in one form or another—to parts of Central Asia and most of southeast Asia.



Slide 14. Spread of Buddhism outside India

⁵ This topic will be covered in greater detail in “The Spread of Buddhism” lecture series.



15. GREEK BUDDHISTS <Slide>

Although the reign of Alexander the Great (336-323 BCE), one of the world's greatest generals, was very short, it had a most significant impact on the history of Europe and Asia. He invaded India in 327 BCE spreading Greek culture there. He was repulsed by Candragupta (r. c. 321-297 BCE), the founder of the Mauryan empire.

During Aśoka's reign, the monk **Majjhantika** was sent to northwestern India (a Greek area) as an emissary to establish a Buddhist order there. Inscriptions have been found to show that a number of Greeks had converted to Buddhism by the 1st century BCE. According to an inscription on a reliquary urn found in the Swat Valley, the urn contained a relic of Śākyamuni Buddha and had been installed there by a Greek governor (*meridarkh*) named **Theodoros**. He and his wife had also built a stupa.

Greek Buddhists were found even in Aśoka's time. Among the Buddhist missionaries sent by Aśoka was a Greek monk named **Dhammarakkhita**, who went to Aparāntaka to spread Buddhism. It is possible that Buddhism was known in this area even in the Buddha's time (M 3:268, S 4:61 f.).

Beginning around 180 BCE, when the Maurya empire began to weaken, a series of foreign peoples began invading northwestern India and occupying the land. The first of these were the Greeks, called **yavana** in Sanskrit and **yona** in Pali, both terms probably reflecting the Indianized forms of the place name "Ionia."

Menander

After Alexander's death, his generals continued to rule in western India. Of the Macedonian kings recorded in Indian history, **Menandros** (known in Pali as Milinda) is particularly important (Miln:H 1:

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xxi-xxviii). Menandros invaded India and ruled an area extending from central India to Afghanistan from around 160 to 140 BCE. The capital of the empire was at Śākala.⁶

Menander is thought to have held a series of debates with a Buddhist monk, **Nāgasena**, and to have converted to Buddhism. The contents of their discussions were compiled into the **Milinda,pañha** or Questions of King Milinda. The Pali text of this work includes some additions by later authors. However, the earliest parts can be determined by comparing the Pali text with the Chinese translation, the *Nahsien pi-ch'iu ching* (T 1670a).

Those parts found in both versions constitute the oldest elements of the work and offer a fascinating view of certain aspects of Indian Buddhism during the first and second centuries BCE. No elements of Mahayana is found in the work, which reflects Buddhist doctrine in the transitional period between the Āgamas and the development of Abhidharma literature. (Hirakawa Akira, 1990: 229)

Buddhism, being a rational and moral religion, easily appealed to foreign peoples. The Greeks readily responded to Buddhist teachings and worship at Buddhist stupas. In contrast, Brahmanism and Hinduism were based on the caste system and regarded foreigners as *mleccha* (impure barbarians). Moreover, Hinduism contains much folk religion. Not only the Greeks, but the foreign invaders of India who followed, including the Śakas, Parthians, and Kushans, often became supporters of Buddhism.

16. FOREIGN POWERS IN INDIA <Slide>

Śaka (Scythian)

Around 180 CE, the **Śaka people**, a tribe of the Scythians, living near the Ili River in Central Asia were forced by the Uighurs to move west. The Śakas eventually destroyed the Macedonian state in Bactria and made it their base.

However, the Xiongnu later pushed the Uighurs further west, and the Uighurs in turn conquered Bactria. The Śaka, forced to move south, invaded India. Around 100 CE Maues became the first Śaka king. He conquered northern India and was on a campaign to conquer Mathura when he died. The Śaka rulers patronized Buddhism. They built stupas and monasteries, and gave land for the construction of cave temples.



Gandhara Buddha image

Pahlava (Parthia)

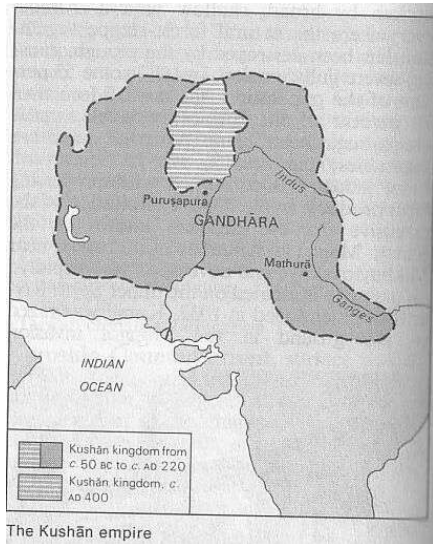
Like the Śakas, **the Pahlavas** of Parthia, too, were of Scythian origin. Parthia was originally located southeast of the Caspian Sea (southwestern Asia bordering Europe). In the 3rd century BCE Arsakes rebelled against the king of Syria and established the Parthian kingdom. The Parthians (Pahlavas) overran the domains of the Greeks, and during the reign of king Azes invaded India. The next king, Gondoparnes, lived around the beginning of the Common Era and ruled northwestern India. By the end of the 1st century, the Parthians had replaced the Śakas as rulers of northwestern India. Shortly afterwards, the Kushan dynasty replaced the Parthians.

The Parthians were Buddhists. The Chinese called the Parthians *anxi* (*an-hsi*), a transliteration of Arsaces or Arsakes. A number of Parthian monks were instrumental in bringing Buddhism to China. For example, **An Shigao** (the character *an* was taken from the term *anxi* or Parthia and was used as an ethnonym indicating the monk's Parthian descent) was a prince who became a monk, studied Abhidharma and meditation. A few decades later, another Parthian, the layman **Anxuan** (An Hsüan), traveled to China.

⁶ Hisatsugu Ishiguro (*Iwai Commemorative Volume*, Tokyo, 1963: 34-42) presents the opinion that the Śākala or Sāgala of the *Milinda,pañha* is not Sialkot as is often supposed, but probably Bari Doab, and the description of the city was based upon Taxila.

17. THE KUSHANS <Slide>

The Kushans (or Kuśāṇa), often thought to be an Indian dynasty, were originally refugees from the borders of far western China. In the 3rd century BCE, the Chinese had begun to build the Great Wall to keep out the marauding hordes known as the Xiongnu (Hsiung Nu). The Kushans, known as Dayuezhi (Ta yüeh chih) amongst the Chinese, found themselves outside the Great Wall and as such vulnerable to the random attacks of the Xiongnu.



The Kushan empire, 50 BCE-220 CE



As a result, the Kushans migrated south, encountering and conquering the Greek kingdoms to the northwest of India. Establishing themselves there, the Kushans in effect became a buffer zone between the Persian empire to the west and the relatively weak states of northern India to the east. Understandably, the Kushans pushed their way into India after subduing the weaker enemies.

Eventually, under the first great Kushan emperor **Kanishka** (r. c. 78-123), they dominated a broad area including present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan and northern India. Kanishka was also influential, if not dominant, among the Central Asian states on the Silk Road, the gateway to China and East Asia. The Kushans, who ruled northern India until about 225, thus maintained contacts with the Chinese, Persians, Greeks and Central Asians.

The Mahayana Buddhists remember Kanishka as the Mahayana equivalent of Aśoka. It is clear, however, that he not only patronized Mahayana, but also encouraged Nikāya Buddhism, particularly Sarvāstivāda (as evident from the inscription found at the great stupa of Kanishka).

As a **patron of Buddhism**, Kanishka is chiefly remembered for having convened **the 4th Council**, the Council of Kaśmīr, that traditionally marked the beginning of Mahayana Buddhism. During the Council, according to Chinese sources, authorized commentaries—**the Mahāvibhāṣā**—on the Buddhist canon were compiled and engraved on copper plates.

Kanishka, however, was a tolerant king, and his coins show that he honoured not only the Buddha but also the Zoroastrian, Greek and Brahmanic deities. During his reign, too, contacts with the Roman empire led to an increase in trade and the exchange of ideas. Perhaps the most remarkable example of the fusion of eastern and western influences in his reign was the **Gandharan school of art**, in which Græco-Roman classical lines are seen in images of the Buddha [19].

18. THE THREE SHRINES <Slide>

While the Buddha lived, devotees would bring offerings and place them before his Fragrant Chamber (*gandha, kuṭi*) when he was away. The Introduction to the Kālīṅga, bodhi Jātaka (J 4:228) records that Ānanda questioned the Buddha regarding what, like the Fragrant Cell, could constitute a “basis worthy of worship” (*pūjāniyaṭṭhāna*) during his absence. In his reply, the Buddha spoke of **three kinds of shrines (*cetiya*)**:

- (1) **the bodily or analogous forms (*sarīrika cetiya*)**—here we might include relics, hair, and footprint;
- (2) **shrine by use or chrematomorphic forms (*paribhogika cetiya*)**, e.g. a robe, an almsbowl, a Dharma-seat and the Bodhi tree; and
- (3) **memorial forms: shrine by dedication or association (*uddesika cetiya*)**, e.g. the *dharma, cakra*, the trident (*triśula* or *nandī, pada*), the stupa, and the Buddha image. (J 4:228)



Aniconic (ie symbolic) representation of the Buddha (empty seat)

The Buddha rejected the use of relics (*sarīrika cetiya*) in his own lifetime and dismissed the memorial forms (*uddesika cetiya*) as “groundless and fanciful,” in the sense of being arbitrary. He allowed only the use of **the Bodhi tree** to represent him while he lived. A similar prohibition is alluded to in chapter 48 of the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (see A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1935:63 n4).

The three kinds of shrines are similarly mentioned in **the Commentary to the Nidhi, kaṇḍa Sutta** as follows:

- (1) the shrine by use (*paribhogika cetiya*), namely, the Bodhi tree;
- (2) the memorial shrine (*uddesika cetiya*), namely, the Buddha image (*Buddha paṭimā*); and
- (3) the relic shrine (*sa, dhātuka cetiya*), namely, the stupa with a relic chamber (*dhātu, gabbha thūpa*). (KhpA 222)

The Vinaya Subcommentary (*ṭīkā*), **Sārattha, dīpanī**, speaks of a slightly different set of Shrines: the shrine by use, the relic shrine, and the Dharma shrine (*dharmma cetiya*). By the lastnamed is meant “that which is made into a book written with such doctrines as the Law of Interdependent Arising and so on, and then set aside [or installed in a shrine]” (*paṭicca, samuppada’ādi-likhita-potthakaṃ nidahitvā kataṃ pana dhamma, cetiyaṃ nāma*) (VT 1:264, Siamese ed).

The Commentator probably drew his inspiration here from the Dhamma, cetiya Sutta (M 89) that speaks of the Dharma as a “shrine” (*cetiya*). But its Commentary explains the term as meaning “words of respect for the Dharma” where in showing respect to one of the Three Jewels, one does so to all three (MA 3:355). The Dharma shrine or *dharma, cetiya*, therefore, constitutes a fourth type of shrine.

Another reason for the Buddha’s rejection of the use of memorial shrines (*uddesika cetiya*)—including anthropomorphic images—to represent him is simply because when the Buddha finally passed away, he entered into “Nirvana without remainder,” thus abandoning his physical body. As such, before the Common Era, Buddhist art always represented the Buddha only **aniconically**, that is, in symbolic form (by way of a pair of footprints, a Dharma wheel, royal parasol, a Bodhi tree, etc.) carved in reliefs that adorned Buddhist stupas and architecture at places like Bharhut (2nd cent. BCE) and Sāñcī (1st cent. BCE) in central India.

19. THE FIRST BUDDHA IMAGES <Slide>

The first images of the Buddha were **sculptures in human form** that appeared in **Gandhāra** (north-east Pakistan) and in **Mathurā** (northern India, on the Yamuna River, NW of Agra) during the last half of

the 1st century CE. Understandably, these were areas ruled by foreign powers: the Greeks in Gandhāra and the Scythians (Śakas) in Mathurā.

In Gandhāra art, the Buddha was at first depicted in approximately human size, equal in size as the other figures in the **reliefs** though he was the central figure. Later, however, the Buddha figure was made larger than the surrounding ones. Finally, they appeared independently of the biographical contexts, and the first Buddha images as we commonly know them appeared.

The first Buddha images



- Gandhari Buddha images: Greek.
- Mathura Buddha images: Asian & Mixed?

20

Mathurā and Gandhāra were important centres of Buddhist art. Many Buddhist inscriptions dating from the reign of the Greeks, the Śakas, the Parthians (Pahlavas) and the Kushans have been found there, testifying to its importance in the history of Buddhism.

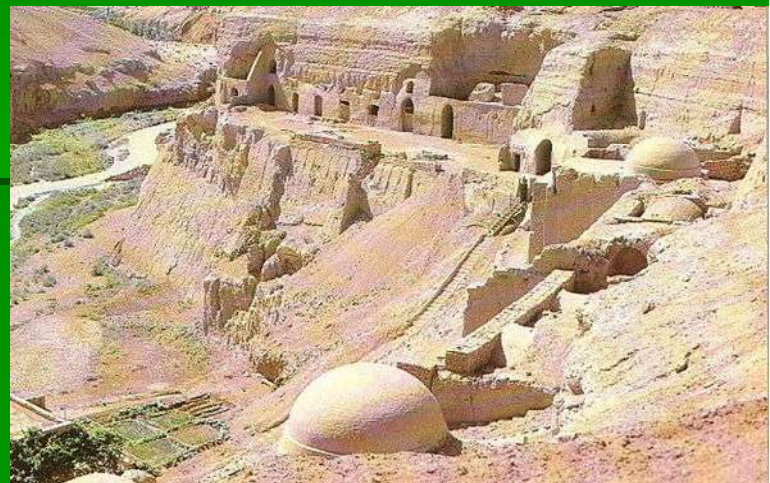
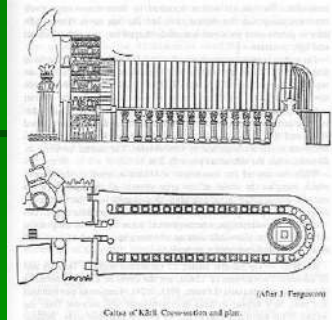
20. CAVE-TEMPLES

Chinese pilgrims like Faxian and Xuanzang visited a number of cave temples in India. In fact, some 1200 cave temples have been found in India, 75% of which are Buddhist, with the oldest dating from the 2nd or 1st century BCE. The excavation of cave temples peaked during the next few centuries.

Cave temples are a major distinguishing feature of Buddhism in the Deccan Plateau, especially in the Ghats, the mountain range along the west coast. The Deccan is an area of rocky but treeless mountains. Without enough wood for construction, the Buddhists there carved large caves turning them into monasteries and stupas.

20. Cave temples

- India: about 1200 cave temples
- —75% Buddhist.
- —oldest: 2nd/1st centuries BCE.
- **Ajantā (1817)**, Bhāja, Nāsik, Kārli, Ellora.
- *Cetiya,ghara; vihāra.*



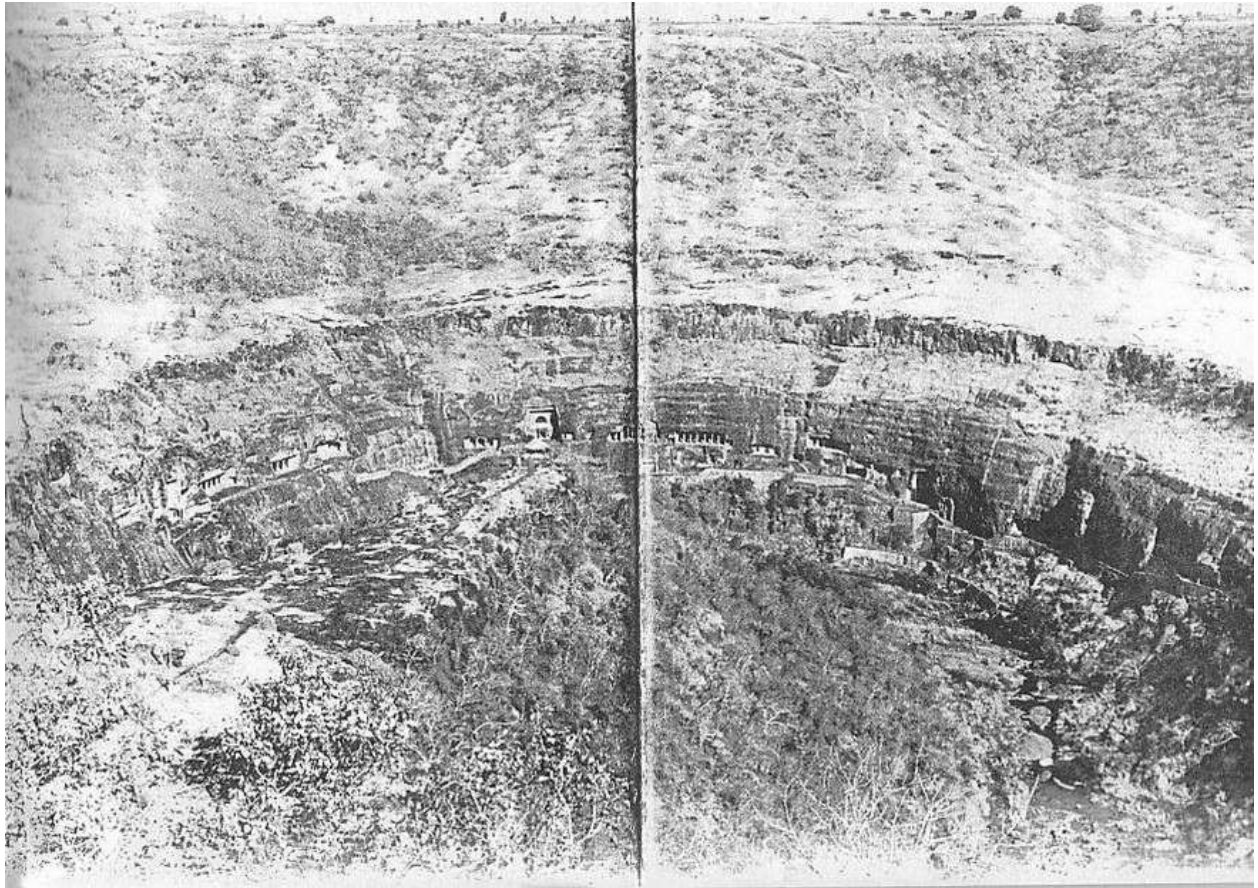
Bezeklik, n. Turkestan

Since caves and rocks are long-lasting, these monuments provide significant information about monastic life in ancient India. The most famous cave-temples are found at Ajañtā, Bhāja, Nāsik, Kārli and Ellora. Two types of caves are found at these sites: caves used for worship (*cetiya,ghara*) which contain a stupa, and caves used as quarters for monastics (*vihāra*).

One particular large cave *vihāra* at **Ellora** consists of three stories with a total of over a hundred cells for monks. The cell entrances and the stupas of such cave temples were often elaborately carved, while the *vihāras* were usually plain.

Ajañtā is famous for its rock-hewn caves in the horseshoe of cliffs forming north bank of the Wagora river. A total of 28 cave-temples were dug between 2nd century BCE and 7th century CE. Most of the caves are monastic residential quarters (*vihāra*) with **elaborate facades of paintings and sculptures** that are world-famous. Their preservation is due to the fact that by the time Buddhism disappeared in India they had been abandoned and forgotten, until they were re-discovered in 1817.

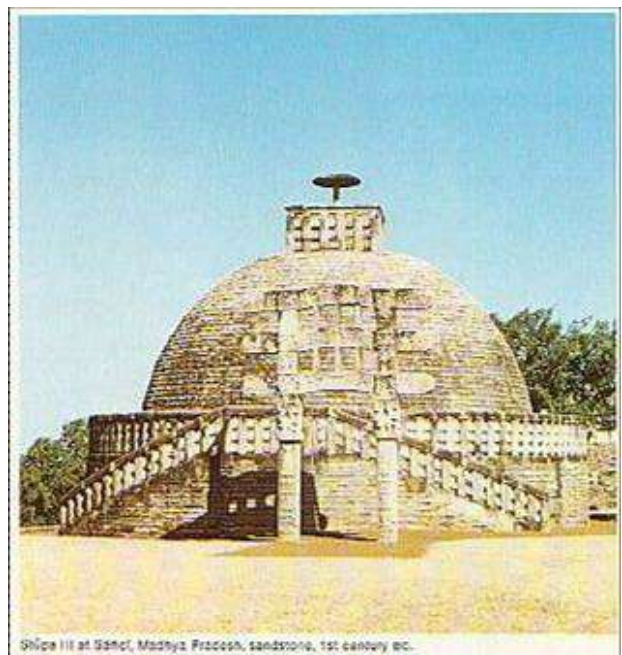
There are also cave temples in Central Asia, such as those at **Bezeklik** in northern Turkestan.

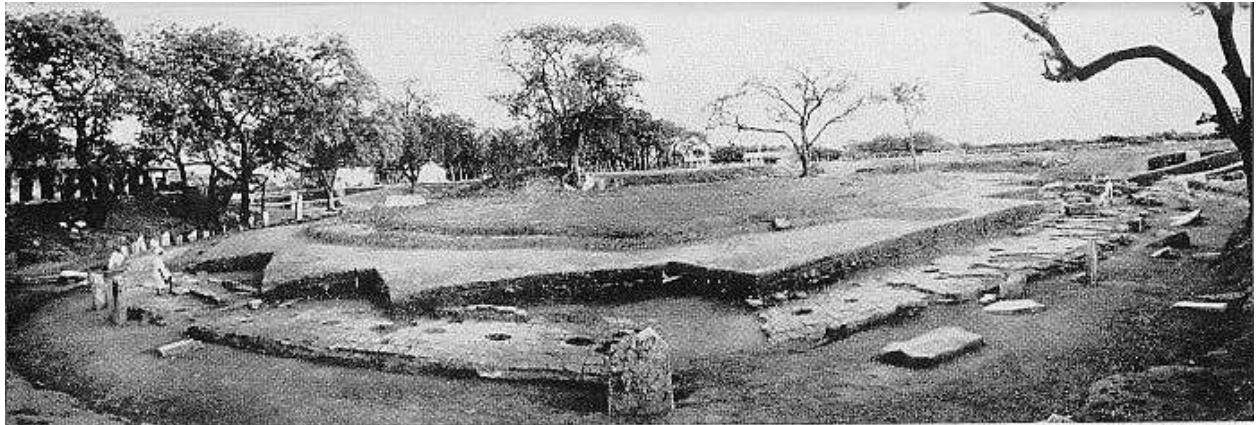


21. STUPAS <Slide>

A **stupa** [see right] is a memorial shrine that, as a rule, were constructed to enshrine the relics of the Buddha or his enlightened disciples. Stupas grew in popularity especially amongst the lay Buddhists after the Buddha's passing. One of the most famous stupas is located in **Nāgārjunakoṇḍa** or Nāgārjunikoṇḍa, the capital of the Ikṣvāku state on a plateau, located on the south bank of the middle reaches of the Kistna River. Although the name of the place suggests a connection with the Mahayana thinker, Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250), the inscriptions found there do not mention his name. One of the inscriptions state that a certain stupa belonged to the Aparasāila school (a Mahāsaṅghika subsect).

Nāgārjuna is believed to have written his *Suḥṛllekha* (Friendly Letter) to a Śātavāhana king, possibly Yajñaśrī (c. 173-202). He is said to have lived on a mountain in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa called **Śrīparvata**, the site of the Culadhammagiri monastery. An inscription from its shrine-hall records the gift of the hall by elder monks from "Tambap[a]ṇṇaka" (Sri Lanka). Another inscription records the presence of a Sri Lankan monastery ("Sihala, vihāra") in the area and the gift of a water tank to the Pūrvasāila school (a Mahāsaṅghika subsect).





7. The great Amarāvati Stupa (of which only the foundations remain). (Photo: Department of Archaeology, N.E. Project, Guntur)

**The foundations of the Amarāvati stupa (top).
How the Amarāvati stupa originally looked like (right).**

One of the largest stupas built in India was the **Amarāvati stupa**, begun about 200 BCE, but underwent several renovations and additions. It was about 160 ft (50 m) in diameter and 90-100 ft (30 m) high. The Amarāvati stupa contains many old inscriptions, one of which date from the reign of king Pulumāyi (2nd century) of the Śātavāhana dynasty, which states that the children of the merchant Puri commissioned a sculpture of the Dharma-wheel to present to the large stupa of the Buddha, which was the property of the “Cetiya” (Caitaka) school (a Mahāsaṅghika subsect).

The Amarāvati stupa was discovered mostly intact in 1797. However, in the following year, the local ruler had established his capital at Amarāvati. The great stupa was subsequently demolished and used as building materials for the new city. The carved marble panels and fence around the stupa were removed, and the ruins were eventually converted into a pond. Some of its marble carvings, however, were saved. Today they are in the collections of the British Museum in London and museums in Madras and Calcutta.



Ajaṇṭā caves on the Wagora river.

22. STUPA WORSHIP <slide>

Laicization of monasticism

Stupa worship played an important role in the rise of the Mahayana. Stupa and stupa worship are mentioned in many Mahayana sutras such as the Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Sūtra (T 262) and the Smaller Sukhāvati,vyūha Sūtra (Amituo jing, T 366). Furthermore, the Mahayana concern with **saviour Buddhas** can be traced to stupa worship. (Hirakawa Akira, 1990:270-274.)

Nikāya Buddhism generally focusses on the Dharma, rather than the Buddha. Consequently, it emphasizes **monasticism** and the proper keeping of the Precepts and monastic procedures. An important development in post-Buddha history is the greater involvement of monastic Buddhists in making the Buddha as the focus of cult worship, rituals (especially the “transference of merit”), and financial affairs.⁷

⁷ On the “transference of merit,” see esp **Jāṇussoṇī S** (A 10.177/5:269-273) = SD 2.6. On monastic finance, see G Schopen, 1994:527-554.

Such developments are clearly documented in the pioneering works of Gregory Schopen, especially *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks*.⁸ From his field studies of archaeological monuments and epigraphs all over India, Schopen discovered that monks often owned considerable amounts of property, had money at their disposal.⁹ Their lives often centred around the cult of relics, and the building and worship of stupas, and funeral ceremonies.¹⁰ Furthermore, Schopen found evidence from a number of sites showing that many of the donations from monastics and laity were intended to “**transfer merits**” to others.¹¹



Stupa worship, 2nd cent (Gandhara). Note the Greek style of monastic robes.

Gregory Schopen's theses

Schopen's field studies and works significantly revised scholarly thought regarding the development of Mahayana and the role of monastics in Buddhist cultic life.¹² He radically argues that “there appears to be...no actual evidence that the textual ideal was ever fully or even partially implemented in actual practice” (1997:4) and holds that to discern the actual practices of early Indian Buddhist communities that rely exclusively on textual sources to be fundamentally flawed. Schopen also claims that although most western scholars regard the Pali Vinaya as the standard source of Indian monastic rules, there is no evidence that it was actually used by any early Indian Buddhist communities. In fact, he claims, **the Mūla-sarvāsti,vāda Vinaya** was widely used and as such a more reliable guide to the actual religious practices of Indian monks.¹³

Drawing parallels from archaeological studies of mortuary practices in Christian communities,¹⁴ Schopen states that in excavated Buddhist sites in India the most common pattern is a large central stupa built on a site believed to have been in physical contact with the Buddha and housing one of his relics, with smaller stupas clustered around it, mostly containing mortuary remains of the local monastic dead. He argues that all such evidence show that these remains were believed to actually be the Buddha or the deceased monk, and that the structures that housed them were regarded as legal persons, and that they owned property. The Buddha was believed to be actually resident in the monasteries where his remains were housed, or in which a special residence chamber had been built for him, although he had been dead for centuries.

⁸ Studies in Buddhist Tradition series. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997. xvii+299 pp. Reviews: John Powers, *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 25,3-4 1998:396-399; JC Holt, *The Journal of Religion* 78,3 July 1998:486 f; S Collins, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67,3 1999:706-706; Arnold Dan, *Philosophy East and West* 50,4 Oct 2000: 620-623.

⁹ See ed Schopen 1994 & 1997a:3-5.

¹⁰ See Schopen 1997a:23-36.

¹¹ See Schopen 1997a:36-43.

¹² For an evaluation of Schopen's ideas, see esp Arnold Dan, rev of *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks* (Gregory Schopen, 1997a), *Philosophy East and West* 50,4 Oct 2000: 620-623. See prev n.

¹³ See for example “Doing business for the Lord: Lending on interest and written loan contracts in the Mula-sarvastivada-Vinaya,” *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114,4, Oct-Dec, 1994:527-554.

¹⁴ G Schopen, “Burial ‘ad sanctos’ and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism: A study in the archeology of religions.” *Religion* 17 1987:193-225.

Ch 1 Buddhism in India

Roots of stupa worship

Mahayana Buddhism, although monastic-dominated, is from the beginning very accommodating of the laity, especially in religious practices. Doctrines for **lay bodhisattvas** play a prominent role even in the oldest Mahayana sutras. **Lay Buddhism** emphasizes the role of the Buddha in salvation. Since lay followers are unable to strictly follow the precepts or devote much time to meditation or put the Dharma into practice in a traditional manner, they turn to **the Buddha's compassion** for their salvation. This is evident in beliefs in the Buddhas Amitābha and Akṣobhya, showing the laity's need to rely on someone greater than themselves.

The hero of the **Vimala, kīrti Nirdeśa**, for example, is the layman Bodhisattva Vimala, kīrti himself. Moreover, lay or household language is clearly reflected, for example, in the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra:

The three realms are completely insecure. They are like a burning house, full of suffering.
Yet the three realms are all mine and the sentient beings within them are my children.

(Saddharma, puṇḍarīka Sūtra T 9:14c)

According to Hirakawa Akira, for such a state of affairs to develop, the lay Buddhists must have had their own teaching centres or organizations where one generation of lay teachers transmitted the teachings to the next, independent of the monastic system. The best place for such a development would be **the stupas**, since stupas were predominantly for lay Buddhists (1990:270 f).

Stupa worship has its roots in **the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta**, where the Buddha, in response to Ānanda's question regarding the disposal of the Buddha's remains, replied that after his cremation, the remains should be interred in a stupa:

And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes [sandalwood] and colours [ochre paste] there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time. (D 2:141 f)

After the Buddha's passing, **the Mallas of Kuśi, nagara** performed the last rites. His relics were then divided amongst eight contending kings, each of whom erected a stupa over their portion.

In the same Mahāparinibbāna Sutta passage, the Buddha mentions **“the four persons worthy of a stupa,”** namely, a Self-enlightened Buddha, a Pratyeka Buddha [fully enlightened one who does not establish a teaching], a Buddha's disciple and a wheel-turning monarch [righteous universal ruler]:

And why is each of these worthy of a stupa? Because, Ānanda, at the thought: “This is the stupa of the Tathāgata, of a Pratyeka Buddha, of a Tathāgata's disciple, of a wheel-turning monarch,” people's hearts are made peaceful, and then, at the breaking up of the body after death, they go to a good destiny and are reborn in a heavenly world. That is the reason, and those are the four who are worthy of a stupa. (D 1:143)

Shrine halls and memorial mounds (*cetiya*) were erected at all such sacred places: the Buddha's birth-place at Lumbinī, the site of his enlightenment at Buddhagayā, the site of the first discourse at the Deer Park, Sārnāth, and the site of his passing away at Kuśinagara. Many such stupas were commissioned by emperor Aśoka himself. In due course, pilgrims visit these holy places, even today.

23. LAY RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS <Slide>

Thus from the very beginning, although monastics were commonly involved in stupa worship, and in the building of **stupas and their related sacred structures**, these structures were often maintained and protected by **the laity**, who also indulged in stupa worship. (Even today, pagodas in Burma are administered by committees of exclusively lay devotees.) The religious **donations** recorded by the inscriptions came not only from individuals, but also from clans (*kula*), groups (*gana*) and associations (*sahaya*). In the case of the “associations,” they could have been the Buddhist sects (like the Saphineyakas from Ujjayinī, and the Aparājitās and Apaguriyas from Junnar).

By the beginning of the Common Era, **stupas were built within the confines of the temples**, located centrally around which monastic quarters and other structures were built. This occurred understandably

in response to the growing popularity of stupa worship. Stupa worship attracted the laity, which in turn promised greater potential donations (Liu 1988: 90 f, 95 ff., *passim*).

We have evidence of this new development of constructing stupas within the temple compound. **The Pali Vinaya does not mention stupas** even though we know that stupas have graced temple compounds for centuries. Apparently, Theravada monks began making offerings at stupas only after the Vinaya Piṭaka had been compiled.

In contrast, the Sarvāstivādin and Mahāsaṅghika Vinayas (T 1435 and 1425) mention Buddha images, indicating that the compilation of these two Vinayas was probably later than the Pali Vinaya. The Sarvāstivādin and Mahāsaṅghika Vinayas state that a strict distinction must be maintained between properties belonging to the monastic order and those belonging to the stupa, transgressing of which entails stealing, that is, an offence of defeat (*pārājika*) (T 22:498a, 23:352b).¹⁵

Neither lay nor monastic

Carvings on the stupa fences (*vedika*) and on its gates (*torāṇa*) illustrated incidents from the Buddha's last life and previous ones (from the Jātakas). Religious specialists who explained the Jātaka tales and life of the Buddha to the worshippers probably resided at the stupa, as did people who managed the lodgings for the pilgrims.

Since stupas had **property**, people must be present to manage it. Gold, silver, flowers, incense and food must have been offered at the stupa by the faithful. Although such alms were presented to the Buddha, they were undoubtedly accepted and used by those who cared for the stupa. These religious specialists were very different from ordinary lay devotees, but were probably not monastic members—they were **neither lay nor monastic**.

As these religious specialists repeatedly explained the illustrations of the Jātakas and the Buddha's life, they extolled the Buddha's religious practices in his past lives as the practice of the Bodhisattva and praised his greatness and deep compassion. Gradually they must have advanced doctrines to explain **the Buddha's power to save others**. In this way, they attracted more devotees to the stupas.

Visualization

Worship at the stupas probably led to meditations in which the Buddha was visualized. Even today, Tibetan pilgrims at Buddhagayā can be seen prostrating themselves hundreds, even thousands, of times in front of stupas. As people repeatedly performed such practices while intently thinking of the Buddha, or reciting Buddhist passages, they might have attained some level of concentration (*samādhi*) in which the Buddha appeared in their minds.

Such practices are supported in the Pali Canon, for example, **the Vimutti Sutta**, where five methods of spiritual liberation are mentioned, here given in abridged form:

1. the Teacher or a monk teaches Dharma...
2. the monk himself teaches Dharma in detail...
3. **the monk recites Dharma in detail...**
4. the monk examines the Dharma...
5. the monk masters an object of meditation...

...and that monk experiences the meaning and the Dharma [his mind is liberated]. (A 3:21)

Such practices would also correspond to the *pratyutpanna, samādhi* (concentration here and now) described in some Mahayana texts. Thus, Mahayana meditations in which the Buddha is visualized may have originated in the religious experiences of people worshipping the Buddha at stupas. Such religious experiences might have resulted in people coming to believe that they were Bodhisattvas. Some Mahayana texts mention "Bodhisattva groups" (*bodhisattva, gaṇa*), existing separately from the monastic order of Nikāya Buddhism.¹⁶

¹⁵ See G Schopen, "Doing business for the Lord: Lending on interest and written loan contracts in the Mulasarvastivada-Vinaya." *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114,4 Oct-Dec 1994:527-554.

¹⁶ See Hirakawa Akira, *Shoki Daijō Bukkyō no kenkyū* (Studies in Early Mahayana Buddhism), Tokyo: Shunjūsha, 1968: 797-811. Also "Stūpa Worship" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, 14:92-96.

24. DEVOTIONAL BUDDHISM <slide>

Emperor Kanishka [17] of the Kushans was a patron of Mahayana Buddhism. He was often associated with **Aśvaghōṣa** (80?-150?), the first great Mahayana scholar. Aśvaghōṣa, however, was a shadowy figure who probably lived either slightly before or after Kanishka. Aśvaghōṣa was also credited with the writing of *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*, a work which was probably written much later. He did, however, write the **Buddha-carita** (“Life of the Buddha”) that is universally regarded as one of the greatest poems in Sanskrit or any other language. This work is a product of a genre that was highly developed by his time, that is, inspirational biography of the divinized Buddha.

Mahayana Buddhists were not the only ones who venerated the Buddha. By the time of Kanishka, several of the Nikāya schools had incorporated mythologized versions of the Buddha life into their Vinaya Piṭakas or in the “Miscellaneous” sections of their Tripiṭakas. The monk Saṅgarakṣa, a Sarvāstivādin, believed to be one of Kanishka’s teachers, wrote his own biography of the Buddha also called **Buddha-carita**, which survives in the Chinese. The **Mahāvastu**, the only complete text of the Mahāsaṅghika to survive in Sanskrit, is also a divinized account of the Buddha and his previous lives.

Bhagavad Gītā

As we have seen, Buddha images [19] were common enough by the time of Kanishka, by which time, too, popular deities of classical Hinduism were also becoming widespread, especially through the public performances of such inspirational works as the **Bhagavad Gītā**. Such works recount the exploits of gods, kings and heroes for public edification.

The first part of the Bhagavad Gītā, says A.L. Basham (*The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989: 95 f), suggests that it was composed at a time when the ethics of the warrior, glorifying righteous warfare and stressing the martial virtues, were being questioned. This indicates that the Gītā as a whole is posterior to the rise of Buddhism and Jainism in the 5th century BCE. A verse from the Gītā, for example, is directed against Buddhism, as such postdating it:

“The world has no virtue,” they [the anxious persons] say:
“No basis, no Lord,
It has not come about through causation,
It is caused by desire only.” (Bhagavad Gītā 16.8)

The Bhagavad Gītā is the first known work to encourage **religious devotion (bhakti)** towards a classical Hindu deity, namely, Krishna. The work, however, probably was not complete until about the time of Kanishka. From our current knowledge, scholars can only say that *bhakti* only gained widespread popularity amongst the religions of India between the reigns of Aśoka and of Kanishka.

Zoroastrianism

From what information we have right now, scholars cannot justify any conclusion that *bhakti* first developed in Hinduism or that Buddhist devotionalism derived from Hindu devotionalism. It is most likely that *bhakti* in Indian religion was a spontaneous development within India. If *bhakti* were a foreign import, it was most likely introduced from Zoroastrian Persia by way of Buddhism.

Zoroastrianism, which originated in the 6th century BCE, is a dualistic religion positing a saving deity of light, Ahura Mazda, who was opposed to an evil deity of matter, Angra Mainyu. According to Zoroastrianism, the responsibility of human beings is to transcend the material world and connect to the spiritual light of Ahura Mazda. According to Noble Ross Reat:

Because of its devotional content and Persia’s proximity to India, Zoroastrianism is often cited as a possible source of Indian *bhakti*. The several non-Indian cultures which influenced India after the reign of Aśoka—the Greeks, the Śakas, the Pahlavas, and the Kushans—were all in contact with Persia and all favored Buddhism among the religions of India. Therefore, if *bhakti* was imported from Persia, it probably entered India first in a Buddhist guise. During that period which *bhakti* appeared in India, Hinduism as we

know it was only beginning to emerge from the orthodox Brahmanism that had been eclipsed by Buddhism since the time of Aśoka, a period of some three to four centuries.

(*Buddhism: A History*, 1994: 67)

25. PHILOSOPHICAL BUDDHISM <slide>

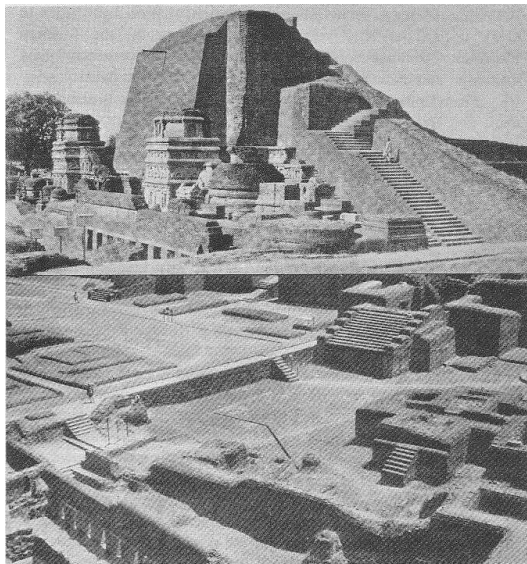
The other major development in Mahayana by the end of the Kushan period is the rise of philosophical Buddhism. Two of the foremost philosophers of Mahayana Buddhism, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, probably belonged to the Kushan period. **Nāgārjuna** (2nd-3rd century, S. India), probably the greatest of the Mahayana philosophers, founded the Madhyamaka school.

According to the Madhyamikas, all phenomena are embedded in the one absolute “emptiness” (*śūnyatā*), which in itself is without essence, “empty.” Thus the remarkable conclusion is drawn that the absolute emptiness (Nirvana) and the world of phenomena (*saṃsāra*) are identical. Since all concepts are conditioned, that is, denote only by virtue of their opposites, nothing can be said about this emptiness which lies in between the notion of being and nonbeing. Realization of this fact constitutes spiritual liberation.

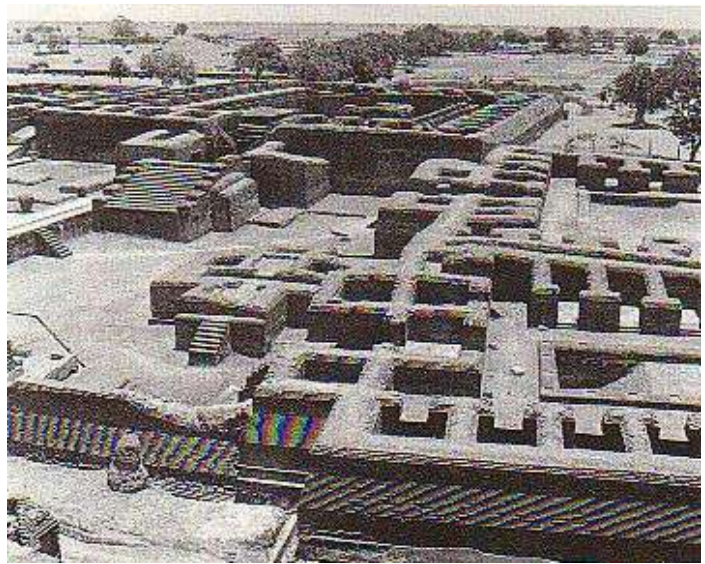
In Nāgārjuna’s own time, there were already a fair number of Mahayana sutras presenting quite different versions of the Buddhist teachings. Nāgārjuna concentrated on the class of sutras known as the **Prajñā Pāramitā** or Perfection of Wisdom. His major work is the **Mūla, madhyamaka Kārikā**, the Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way.

Nālandā

Nāgārjuna is often regarded as the founder, or at least the first major figure, of the Mahayana **academic tradition**. He is traditionally associated with the great Buddhist **University of Nālandā**, whose imposing ruins still stand today, north of Rājgīr, in the state of Bihar. Later Tibetan sources say that he began his studies there.



Remains of the great University of Nālandā (stupa, above, and monastery, below). About ten thousand monks (and laymen) lived, taught and studied here when it was burnt and destroyed by the Muslim Turks in B.E. 1740/1197 C.E. The burning away of the university library took several months.



The ruins of Nalanda University

It is unlikely that Nālandā was founded as early as Nāgārjuna’s time (2nd century), but it was associated with Buddhist scholarship from very early times (6th-5th centuries BCE). Tradition has it that the followers of Śāriputra (the Buddha’s right-hand monk) often gathered there for study. By the 5th century, reliable accounts by Chinese pilgrims record that **the library** at Nālandā was housed in three multi-story buildings and that the university had an enrollment of several thousand monk-students,

Ch 1 Buddhism in India

representing all the schools of Buddhism and governed by strict admission procedures and academic standards.

If the Nālandā university were indeed founded by the Kushans [17], then it is **one of the world's oldest institutions of higher learning**. It is also one of history's longest running universities, since it existed right until its abrupt end in 1197. Nālandā was patronized by the Guptas and reached its maximum size under the Pāla kings (8th-2nd centuries CE).

Other great Buddhist universities

Besides Nālandā, many other Buddhist universities arose in India. In western India, **Valabhi** had become second only to Nālandā by the 5th century, frequented by the followers of the Saṃmitīya and Vijñānavāda schools. Under the Pāla patronage several other universities flourished in their empire, the greatest being Vikramaśilā, Uddāṇapura (Odantapurī, modern Bihār town), Somapurī, Jagaddala, Vajrāsana (at Buddhagayā) and Trikaṭuka. [See A.K. Warder, *Indian Buddhism*. 1970:ch 12.]

These great universities—notably Nālandā, Vikramaśilā and Uddāṇapura—were dominated by sectarian scholar-monks debating the relative merits of increasingly arcane academic opinions. The diaries of the Chinese pilgrims record that the various Buddhist institutions co-existed peacefully albeit in a constant state of scholarly debate.

The primary scholastic positions represented in these institutions were those of the several Nikāya schools (especially the Sarvāstivāda), and the Madhyamaka and the Vijñānavāda schools of Mahayana. One important school, the **Sautrāntika** (“those concerned only with the sutras”)¹⁷ broke away from the Sarvāstivāda, and rejected the Abhidharma and commentarial literature of all schools. [27]

Another group, the **Pudgalavādin** (“those who affirm the person”), significantly numerous in number, came so close to affirming a soul that they were regarded as heretics by all the other schools of Buddhism. The general atmosphere was one of open study, debate and scholarship.

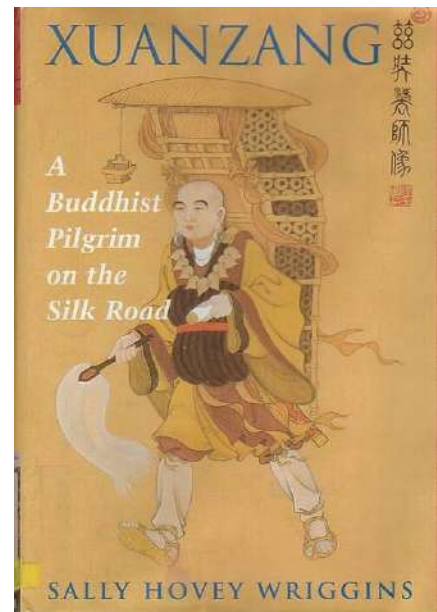
26. GUPTA PERIOD & AFTER <slide>

The Gupta dynasty (320-c. 500 CE) ruled a centralized state with an hierarchical social system firmly established in the spirit of Brahmanism which was facing a revival. It was during the Gupta periods that Chinese pilgrims¹⁸ like **Faxian** (340?-420?) visited India. His *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* is a valuable source on India at the beginning of the 5th century.

After the Gupta period, the Hūṇa¹⁹ king Toramāṇa (early 6th cent.) and his son Mihirakula (c. 515) invaded northern India, mercilessly and randomly murdering thousands of people. Mihirakula, a patron of Śaivism, recorded in Buddhist tradition as uncouth and extremely cruel, persecuted Buddhism. Despite these persecutions and the predominance of Hinduism in the Gupta period and persecutions, Mahayana Buddhism flourished. [27]

Harsha (c. 590-c. 647)

In the post-Gupta period, the influence of Buddhism was still evident in the Indian courts. The open-minded emperor **Harsha** (c.590-c.647) who ruled over a large portion of northern India (extending from Gujarat to Assam), was a Buddhist convert in a Hindu era. After his elder brother was assassinated by king Śaśāṅka of Gauḍa,



¹⁷ The term **Sautrāntika** comes from *sūtra*, “sūtra” + *anta*, “end” + *ika* (adjective form), so called because it gave pre-eminence to the *sūtra* portion of the canon.

¹⁸ On Chinese pilgrims in India, see §3:14-19.

¹⁹ Hūṇa is the name the Indians gave them; also called Hun. They were a branch of the Hephthalite or Ephthalite or White Hun, one section of which migrated to the Volga Valley and another to the Oxus.

Harsha was made regent at the age of 16, after an encouraging “communication” with a statue of Avalokiteśvara.

The Chinese pilgrim **Xuanzang** (c. 596-664), who recorded his travels in his *Record of the Western Regions*, visited India during Harsha’s time, and both of them became good friends. In 641, Harsha sent an envoy to the Chinese emperor and established the first diplomatic relations between India and China. Himself a poet, Harsha composed a few works, the best known of which is *Nāgānanda*, in which the Buddhist ideal of self-sacrifice is extolled.

27. CLASSICAL MAHĀYĀNA

Despite the predominance of Hinduism in the Gupta period and the persecutions by the Toramāṇa and Mihirakula [26], Mahayana Buddhism flourished. In fact, the formulation of classical Mahayana philosophy which began under Nāgārjuna, reached its completion under **Asaṅga** (fl. 4th-5th centuries), **Vasubandhu** (fl. 4th century) and **Dignāga** (fl. late 5th century). The brothers Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are generally credited with the founding of the Vijñānavāda or Consciousness school.

Asaṅga (fl. 4th-5th centuries)

Asaṅga (fl. 4th-5th century, b. Puruṣapura, modern Peshāwar, Pakistan), was the influential Buddhist philosopher who established the **Yogācāra** (“Practice of Yoga”) school of idealism (“mind only”). Originally ordained as a Sarvāstivāda monk, he became dissatisfied with the Nikāya concepts of *śūnyatā* (“emptiness”) and *pudgala* (“person”), and turned to the Mahāyāna. He was also credited with winning over his brother, Vasubandhu, from Nikāya Buddhism to Mahayana.

Asaṅga’s teacher in the Yogācāra tradition was **Maitreya, nātha** (c. 275-350). This school (also called Vijñāna, vādā, or “Doctrine of Consciousness”) held that the external exists only as mental images that have no real permanence. A “store-house” of consciousness (*ālaya, vijñāna*) contains the trace impressions of the past and the potentialities of future actions.

Asaṅga’s great contribution was his development of Maitreya-nātha’s teaching, analysis of the *ālaya-vijñāna*, and setting forth of the stages (*bhūmi*) leading to Buddhahood. Amongst his important works is the ***Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*** (“Compendium of the Mahāyāna”). Because of great reverence for him, many of his works have been attributed to the future Buddha, Maitreya.

Vasubandhu (fl. 4th century)

Vasubandhu (fl. 4th century), Indian Buddhist philosopher and logician, refined classical Indian syllogistic logic by distinguishing procedure for reaching inferences in formal debate (five steps) from the method in personal thought (three steps). He also wrote several *śāstras* (“treatises”) holding that all seemingly external objects are only mental representations.

Vasubandhu’s greatest work was the ***Abhidharma, kośa*** (“Treasure of the Abhidharma”), which became the basic text for the study of Mahāyāna philosophy. It was based on the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, but interpreted according to Vasubandhu’s Sautrāntika propensities. [25]

28. IN WHAT SENSE IS MAHAYANA “GREAT”?

Historically, there were two streams of early Mahayana development. The first stream was the continuation of **the Mahāsaṅghika school** [8], the faction which separated from the main body of Buddhism after the Council of Vaiśālī [7]. The Mahāsaṅghika continued to criticize the Sthaviras (orthodox elders) for their literal interpretation of the Buddhist texts, especially in connection with arhathood.

The second stream of early Mahayana development involved the cult of **stupa worship** [22] that in turn led to the rise of **lay religious specialists** [23]. As such, early Mahayana, vitalized by its power of assimilation and adaptation, had greater appeal for the lay masses.

The Mahayana was “great” (*mahā*) for another reason: **its doctrines became more comprehensive** than those of the traditional schools. Mahayana mainly developed in the northwest and south of India. The theory of **a southern origin of Mahayana** assumes that the Mahāsaṅghika monastic centres of Andhra developed such radical ideals regarding the nature of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva that they saw themselves as a movement completely distinct from the Nikāya schools.

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In southern India, Mahayana thought responded to the popular **mother-goddess cults**, such as the female tutelary village deity (*grāma,devatā*), leading to the rise of celestial Bodhisattvas, which further contributed to the elevated spiritual roles of women in Mahayana. The mythology behind **Avalokiteśvara**, the most popular Bodhisattva of Mahayana, and worshipped throughout most of Asia, probably originated in south India.

Further west, there was **Greek influence**, from which the Mahayanists adopted new techniques of **iconography** of beautiful life-like images of the Buddha. Devotees could now *see* the Buddha, even after his Final Nirvana. The Mahayanists probably adapted the Gnostic notion of *Sophia* or Wisdom, which in due course flowered into the **Perfection of Wisdom philosophy**. In northwest India, there was lively contact with Zoroastrianism [24] and Manichaeism (a Persian religion founded by Mani, the “Apostle of Light”), to which it is likely that the Mahayanists responded by adopting its notion of light as embodying good by contextualizing and hypostasizing it into **the Buddha Amitābha**, the Buddha of Boundless Light.

The Catholic “skilful means”

What the Mahayana did during the early centuries of the Common Era by way of contextualizing local cults and indigenizing imported ideas is better appreciated if we look at what Roman Catholicism is attempting to do today since **second Vatican Council** or Vatican II (1962-65) to spiritually renew the church. Since it lost its political power after the Renaissance and with the rise of science and liberal education, the Roman church had to look for other ways to arrest its downgrade and to inspire a revival.

The key notion of Vatican II is **ecumenism**. On a simple level, it means the “unity” of all faiths. On a more theological level, the term as used by the contemporary Catholic church refers to an awakened conscience of the church towards its universal aspects and its renewed sense of mission and service. Through this philosophy the Catholic leaders hope to re-empower themselves through two broad methods: **reunion** with other churches (such as the Church of England) and **dialogue** with other religions, particularly the world religions.

The Catholic church is now more open to Buddhism and we often find the faithfuls of both religions in dialogue over a wide range of subjects. The Catholic practitioners are especially attracted to **Buddhist meditation** so much so that it is hard to meet a Catholic priest who has not practised it or who has not heard of it. In the Fall 2001 issue of the US Buddhist magazine, *Tricycle*, **Huston Smith**, scholar of world religions puts the fruits of the new Catholic dialogue with Buddhism succinctly thus:

One of the important roles that Buddhism has played in the West is that the West took the esoteric or mystical aspects of Buddhism out of the monasteries and made them available to the laity. This helped revitalize interest in the mystical aspects of Christianity and Judaism. In some cases, it furthered the return of contemplative practices in those religions that had fallen into neglect. Mystics all speak the same language. They understand each other. Buddhism has brought new life to the Abrahamic religions, and this has been a wonderful contribution. (Tricycle, Fall 2001: 31; my emphases.)

Even so, Buddhists cannot rest on their laurels: that would be like the hare sleeping in its race with the tortoise, except that in this case, the hare, upon waking up, would find great difficulty finding a mate in a tortoise world.

Writing

In his paper on “How the Mahayana Began,” Richard Gombrich proposes the hypothesis that the rise of the Mahayana is due to the use of **writing**, that is to say that

...the early Mahayana texts owe their survival to the fact that they were written down; any earlier texts which deviated from or criticized the canonical norms (by which I mean approximately the contents of the *Vinaya Khandhaka* and *Sutta Vibhanga* and the Four *Nikāya* of the *Sutta Piaka*) could not survive because they were not included among the texts which the Sangha preserved orally.

(Journal of the Society for Pali and Buddhist Culture, 1988; my emphasis.)

Scholars generally agree that the earliest surviving Mahayana texts date to **the 2nd or 1st century BCE**, which coincides with a time when writing of religious texts, especially Buddhist texts, became more widespread. Perhaps this development had to do with the availability of **better writing implements and materials**. Gombrich says that Patañjali's *Mahā.bhāṣyā* is clearly a written text and is commonly dated to the 2nd century BCE on rather strong evidence (1988).

Gombrich agrees to the assertion that written works, too, may perish, and are likely to do so unless an institution guards them. A great majority of Mahayana and all later Buddhist works were lost in their original versions in Indian languages. Two interesting and important points must be raised here. Firstly, that **this loss of the original Mahayana texts** is further proof that the Mahayana is a written tradition. The oral tradition is not likely to lose its texts because they have been committed to memory, unless the reciter forgets or is exterminated.

My second point is a corollary to the first and based on the fact that many Mahayana works did survive long enough to be **translated into Chinese or Tibetan**. Such works could have been translations of an *oral* tradition, but this is difficult to prove. Nevertheless, my second point further supports the hypothesis that Mahayana is not only a written tradition, but also **a tradition of translations**.²⁰

29. THE RISE OF TANTRA

The growing success of the Mahayana and the great Buddhist universities [25] led to a tendency to look inward, with students and scholars debating finer philosophical, logical or grammatical points. Although constructive religious thought was not dormant, as the Mahayana became more established and conventional, the natural need for religious revival found expression in other forms.

Hindu roots

Most likely, in their search for new forms of expression, the Mahayana scholars and thinkers were attracted to the visionary, revolutionary and charismatic leaders. These new expressions were first found in *Buddhist Tantra*, and eventually as *Hindu Tantra*, since the former borrowed heavily from the latter.

Tantra philosophy is mostly **Madhyamaka** [25], ie mainstream Mahayana, but as a practical religion it has more in common with *Hindu Tantra* than with other forms of Buddhism. It can be said that Buddhist Tantra borrowed from Hindu Tantra in the sense that “Buddhist Tantra is so much more discontinuous with earlier Buddhism than Hindu Tantra is with earlier Hinduism” (Gombrich 1984:86).

Radical departures

Buddhist Tantra, as such, makes two radical departures from mainstream Buddhism, that is, in its method and in its goal. The **Tantric method** comprises primarily complicated, even secret, **rituals**. Such rituals are believed to lead one towards salvation—and magical powers. Although mainstream Buddhism says that some kind of **psychic powers** do attend the higher levels of meditation, it does not place much significance on such powers as Tantra does. Both these new emphases of Tantra—ritual and magic—are foreign to earlier Buddhism.

The shift from the Mahayana to the Tantra seems to have gained momentum as Mahayana philosophy began to lose its creative energy. We know, for example, of Tantric practices in *Nālandā* in the 7th century. These practices were criticized by the *Nālandā* scholar **Dharmakīrti** but apparently were well received by its distinguished scholars in the following century.

As Tantra gained respectability, the first Pāla king **Gopāla** (mid-8th century) established a new university at **Uddanāpura** (Odantapurī, modern Bihār town), about 20 km northeast of *Nālandā*, rivalling it. The death of Harsha in 657 marked the decline of Mahayana in India, whereas the construction of the University of **Vikramasīlā** under **Dharmapāla** (r. c.770-810) about 800 marked the beginning of the Tantric period.

²⁰ On the Scribal Tradition, see Piyasilo, *A Guide to Buddhist Studies*, 1990f: section IV The Sutra 2. (Unpublished MS). Photocopies may be ordered from the Pali Centre, Singapore.

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Tantric masters

The Tantric followers became **the new critics of the establishment**. Some asserted the superiority of **ritual and meditation** would lead one to a direct, spontaneous realization of Buddhahood in this life. As wandering saints called **siddha** (“possessed of *siddhi*, spiritual accomplishment,” ie magical powers), they assumed the demeanour of madmen, and abandoned the monastic rules. Others saw Tantra as the culmination of Mahayana and chose to **integrate it with earlier teachings**, following established monastic practices despite their contradictory outlooks.

A number of famous Tantric masters arose in this period. **Atīśa** (980/90-1055) was a patriarch of Magadha and teacher at Vikramaśilā. One of the most colourful monk-scholars of Nālandā was **Naropa** (1016-1100), who resigned as abbot of Nālandā (some sources say Vikramaśilā) in 1057 to seek his predestined Tantric master, and so becoming a major figure in this phase of Buddhist history. Both went to Tibet to propagate Buddhism there.

30. RISE OF HINDUISM

In 637, during Harsha’s reign, the Muslim armies conquered Ctesiphon, capital of the Persian empire. No one in India could have known of the impending disaster at the time. However, in an uncanny way, Buddhism began to shrink eastward of northern India. After Harsha’s death, the centre of Buddhism was in the northeast corner of India **under the patronage of the Pāla dynasty** that ruled present-day Bihar and Bengal (c. 650-950).l

By 711, Muslims had occupied territory in present-day Pakistan, but without any religious persecution that would characterize the blitz of northern India in the 13th century. Meanwhile, the internal conditions of Indian Buddhism led to its own decline, especially in the face of the rise of **populist Hinduism**.

Śaṅkara (700?-750?)

The first and foremost figure in the Hindu response against Buddhism was **Śaṅkara** (700?-750?), the most famous exponent of the Advaita Vedānta school of philosophy, and the source of the main currents of modern Indian thought. Śaṅkara’s thoughts were mainly based on the **Upanishads**, working on the proposition that there is no difference, no duality, between the essence of human consciousness and the essence of the universe, hence the name “Advaita” or “non-dualism” for his school.

Despite **Śaṅkara’s vehement opposition to Buddhism**, his conception of ultimate reality corresponds so closely to that of Nāgārjuna, that Śaṅkara’s Hindu rivals referred to him as a “surreptitious Buddhist” or **crypto-Buddhist**. Given his late date and the closeness of his ideas to Nāgārjuna’s, it is almost certain that Śaṅkara was significantly influenced by Madhyamaka, which was fully formed and well known in India of Śaṅkara’s time in the 8th century.

Hindu assimilation

No western or Buddhist scholars have ever seriously taken the sweeping statement by some Indian scholars that the Buddha was “born a Hindu, lived a Hindu, died a Hindu” for the primary reason of chronology. **“Hinduism” as an organized religion only arose in the Gupta age** [26]. Furthermore, the term “Hindu” is not Indian, but Persian, and was used by the ancient Chinese to denote India in general.

With the rise of **Mahayana** [24], however, Buddhism **came closer to Brahmanism**, especially in terms of folk beliefs and lay worship, and the use of images, chants and rituals. In the post-Gupta period, **Tantra** [29] virtually identified Buddhism with Hinduism by almost wholesale assimilation of Śaiva gods, goddesses, mantras, dhāraṇīs and mystical practices.

One of the most important doctrines of the **Bhagavad Gītā** [24] is that of the **avatāra** (lit. “descent”), that is, incarnation of Krishna in various forms through the ages of the world. Later Hindus developed this idea and applied it to the “ten incarnations” (*daśāvatārā*) of Vishnu, **the ninth of which was the Buddha**, who latter Hindus claimed was really a “demon” to lead astray other “demons” in our age of moral evil. The Buddha was depicted as an incarnation of Vishnu in the Mahābharata, certain Purāṇas and Jayadeva’s Gita.govinda. Such a teaching successfully prevented most Hindus from becoming Buddhists, since the Buddha is after all one of Vishnu’s incarnation. So it would suffice to worship Vishnu (or Krishna). [S.R. Goyal, *A History of Indian Buddhism*. Meerut: Kusumanjali, 1987:398.]

31. DISAPPEARANCE OF BUDDHISM FROM INDIA

Bhakti

Scholars like P.S. Jaini have remarked that one of the real reasons for the assimilation of Buddhism into Hinduism was **the failure of Buddhism to effectively respond to the rise of *bhakti* (devotionalism)** [24]. The popularity of devotional cults associated with Rāma and Krishna, for example, must have caused many defections from the lay ranks of Buddhism.

Jainism has many historical parallels with Buddhism (both arose around the same time and have similar teachings of non-violence). For the Jainas, however, **no synthesis of the human and the divine was ever possible**, and such Tantric practices as the identification of the self with the deity were simply out of question. Hence, **the Tīrthaṅkaras (“ford-makers” or saviour) remained the highest model and ideal of spiritual development.**

In the Mahayana conception of celestial bodhisattvas, **Mañjuśrī** and **Avalokiteśvara** often usurped the place of the historical Buddha himself, who ceased to be the ultimate spiritual goal. Interestingly, even though Buddhism virtually disappeared from India after the Muslim onslaught, **non-violent Jainism survived there to this day.**²¹

Lack of royal patronage

The popularity of Buddhism in India, as elsewhere in Asia, has been mainly due to **royal patronage**. After the Gupta period, Buddhism in India received no significant support from any king, except from the Pāla monarchs [25]. On the contrary, some later kings, such as Puṣyamitra Śuṅga (r. 181-151) and Śaśaṅka of Gauḍa (c. 7th century), **actually persecuted Buddhism**, as did the Hun kings Toramāṇa (c. 500) and Mihirakula (c. 515) [26].

Some scholars postulate **“religious brain-drain” of Indian minds** to Tibet, China, Korea, Japan and southeast Asia as a contributory factor to the eventual decline of Buddhism in India. Radhakrishnan, for example, listed 24 eminent Indian scholars who left for China to propagate Buddhism from the 3rd century to 973 (*India and China*, p. 27). According to Joseph Edkins, at the beginning of the 6th century, there were over 3000 Indian Buddhists in China (*Chinese Buddhism*, p. 99).

Deathblow

By the time the Muslim armies devastated India,²² Buddhism as an entity was found primarily in its great monasteries (*mahā, vihāra*) and universities. Once these were destroyed and the students and scholars killed or driven away, Indian Buddhism lost the core of its identity. Hinduism, on the other hand, had no identifiable core at which to strike. Moreover, the Buddhist establishments were mostly in the urban areas which became easy targets for the enemies.

The destruction of Nālandā in 1197 and of Vikramaśilā in 1203 by Muḥammad Ghūrī marked the effective end of Buddhism in India. The Ghurid invaders saw themselves as wielding the sword of Muhammad destroying the idolatrous Hindus and Buddhists. The Muslim invaders looted the temples and enslaved thousands.

Like most military campaigns, they used religious indoctrination to fire their troops. Their main objective, however, was territory, wealth and power. The temples and monasteries that were looted and destroyed were wealthy centres.²³ The Ghurids did not pay their generals or governors, or provide them with supplies. They were expected to support themselves and their troops from local gains. Understand-

²¹ PS Jaini, in his paper, “The disappearance of Buddhism and the survival of Jainism in India: A study in contrast” [1980], mentions the main reason for the survival of Jainism due to the work of the *śramaṇopāsaka* (“lay ascetics”) or laymen Dharma teachers who propagated the teachings without arousing the curiosity of antagonists. In *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies*, 2001:139-154 (ch 7).

²² For details of the Muslim destruction of Buddhism, see, for example, A.K. Warder, 1970: 502-513; also N.R. Reat 1994:75-77. See Berzin, “Historical Sketch of Buddhism and Islam in Afghanistan,” 2001. For a Muslim’s response to Buddhism here, see S.M. Yusuf, 1955:1-28.

²³ On the wealth of the Buddhist monasteries around this time, see §22 above & Schopen 1994 & 1997:3-5.

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Mahabodhi Temple, Bodh Gaya, India

ably, they did not seek to conquer Kashmir or convert the Buddhists there, since Kashmir was impoverished then, and the monasteries had little or no wealth worth plundering.²⁴

For a time, Indian Buddhism persisted in the southern, eastern and northern extremities of India,²⁵ beyond the reach of the Muslims. Small groups of Buddhists probably survived in the Gangetic plain for a while despite the widespread destruction, but were eventually too weak to resist being assimilated by Hinduism.

Pockets of Indian Buddhism may have survived to the present day in the northeast, in what is now Bangladesh and the several far eastern states of India (like Nagaland and Assam). Buddhism does appear to survive since ancient times in mountain states of the Himalayas—Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir, Lahul Spiti and Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan.

32. BUDDHISM IN THE COLONIAL INDIA

By the time of British colonialism, the Buddhist sites of Gangetic plain of India were in a bad state of neglect, compounded by the problem of the negligible population of Buddhists in that area. In 1885, **Sir Edwin Arnold** (who wrote the epic poem, *The Light of Asia*) wrote a

series of articles in the London *Telegraph*, pointing out the sad state of the Buddhist sites in India. The British authorities restored the temple at Bodh Gayā, but the place was in the hands of Hindu Saivites, who were exploiting it as best as they could as a centre of pilgrimage.

A young Sinhalese Buddhist, David Hewavitarne (1864-1933; then about 21, and who later became **Anāgārika Dharmapāla**), hearing of this, visited the site. What he saw dismayed him so much that upon his return to Sri Lanka in 1891, he formed what later became the **Mahā Bodhi Society**, a Buddhist organization in a predominantly Hindu country with its 14 states and 400 million people including a wide variety of religions.

The Maha Bodhi Society started at Bodh Gayā, and by 1900, it had 2 branches in India (Madras and Kusinagara) and one in Sri Lanka (at Anuradhapura). Despite the powerful advocacy given by Sir Edwin Arnold and Colonel Henry Olcott, the Society failed to retrieve Bodh Gayā from the Hindu landlord.

However, the publicity aroused the interest of educated Bengalis in Buddhism. In 1920, a Buddhist vihara was opened in Calcutta. In 1931, another vihara was built at Sarnath, near Benares, which previously was a grazing ground for pigs surrounded by jungle. In due course, the Sarnath vihara had a library, a free dispensary, a primary school and a training college.

33. BUDDHISM IN MODERN INDIA

Buddhism, in post-War India certainly rose in status. This was at two different levels. First, amongst intellectuals, a characteristic case of which was India's first Prime Minister, **Pandit Nehru**, born of a Kashmiri brahmin family. Although at his death he was cremated a Hindu, his life did not seem to have been Hindu at all, as is attested in his book, *The Discovery of India* (1956; 4th ed. London: Meridian Books, 1960).

²⁴ As a rule, the invading Muslims did not forcefully convert everyone under their power to Islam. For if they did so, they could not exploit large portions of the population for additional taxes. As such, as in Afghanistan, the Ghurids continued the traditional custom of granting dhimmi status to non-Muslims in India and exacting the jizya poll tax. See Berzin 1955:10 online ed.

²⁵ The Jagaddala monastery in northern Bengal, for example, flourished untouched by the Muslim invasions.

In 1956, the Indian government published two special volumes, *2,500 Years of Buddhism* and *The Way of the Buddha* (a pictorial album on Buddhist art), in honour of the Buddha Jayanti or 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's enlightenment. A large number of scholars contributed articles to *2,500 Years of Buddhism*, and the President of India, Dr. Radhakrishnan (who himself has translated and commented on Buddhist texts) himself wrote the foreword acknowledging India's debt to Buddhism.

The other level at which Buddhism saw revival was among the **Harijans**, former "untouchables" of India, which effectively began with the conversion of **Dr B R Ambedkar** (1891-1956; PhD Columbia, 1916), who opposed Gandhi's policy of reforming the caste system rather than outlawing it. Ambedkar later became Minister of Law in the government of post-war, secular state of India, "the father of the Indian Constitution"—and the leader of the untouchables.

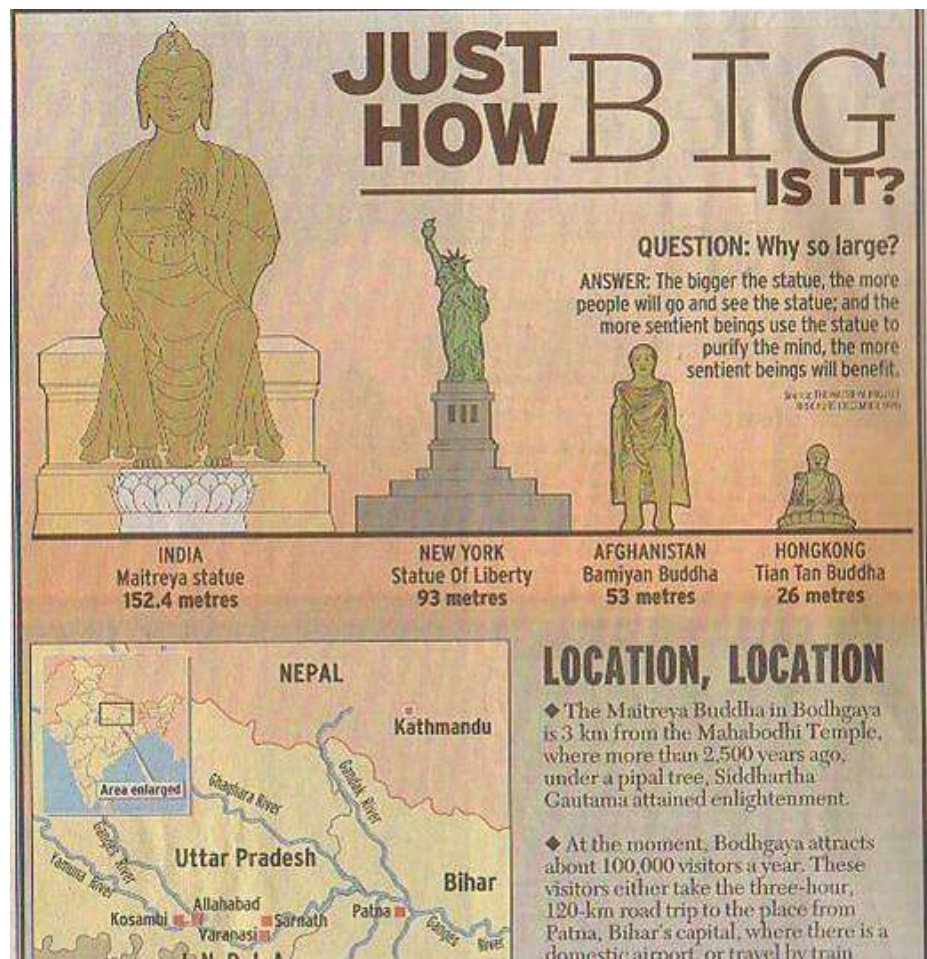
On 14 October, 1956, at Nagpur, he formally declared **his conversion to Buddhism**, together with a large number of the people he led. The conversions grew in number, and soon various Buddhist monks arrived to instruct the converts in their duties. By 1965, there were about 4 million ex-untouchable Buddhists, mostly in Maharashtra.

In 1959, when Tibet came under Chinese rule, **the Tibetan diaspora**—some 100,000 Tibetans—spilled into India where they were welcomed. The Tibetan immigration into India had a more pronounced effect than Ambedkar's Neo-Buddhist movement to re-establish Buddhism in India. The highly visible presence of exiled Tibetan Buddhists in India attracted international attention, aid and academics. As such, India became the primary haven for the tradition that has most faithfully preserved the Mahayana in its Indian origins.

Buddhism is generally better received in India today, and there are many new Buddhist viharas and educational institutions at such places as Nālandā (a new university), Sārnāth (near Benares) and Sāñcī (Caityagiri, an ancient centre of the Sthavira-āda). The spruced up Buddhist holy places of India and Nepal today draw countless pilgrims and tourists, contributing to the economic growth of both countries. With the efforts of native Indian Buddhists and migrant Tibetan Buddhists, India is playing a significant role in global Buddhism today.



BR Ambedkar (1891-1956)

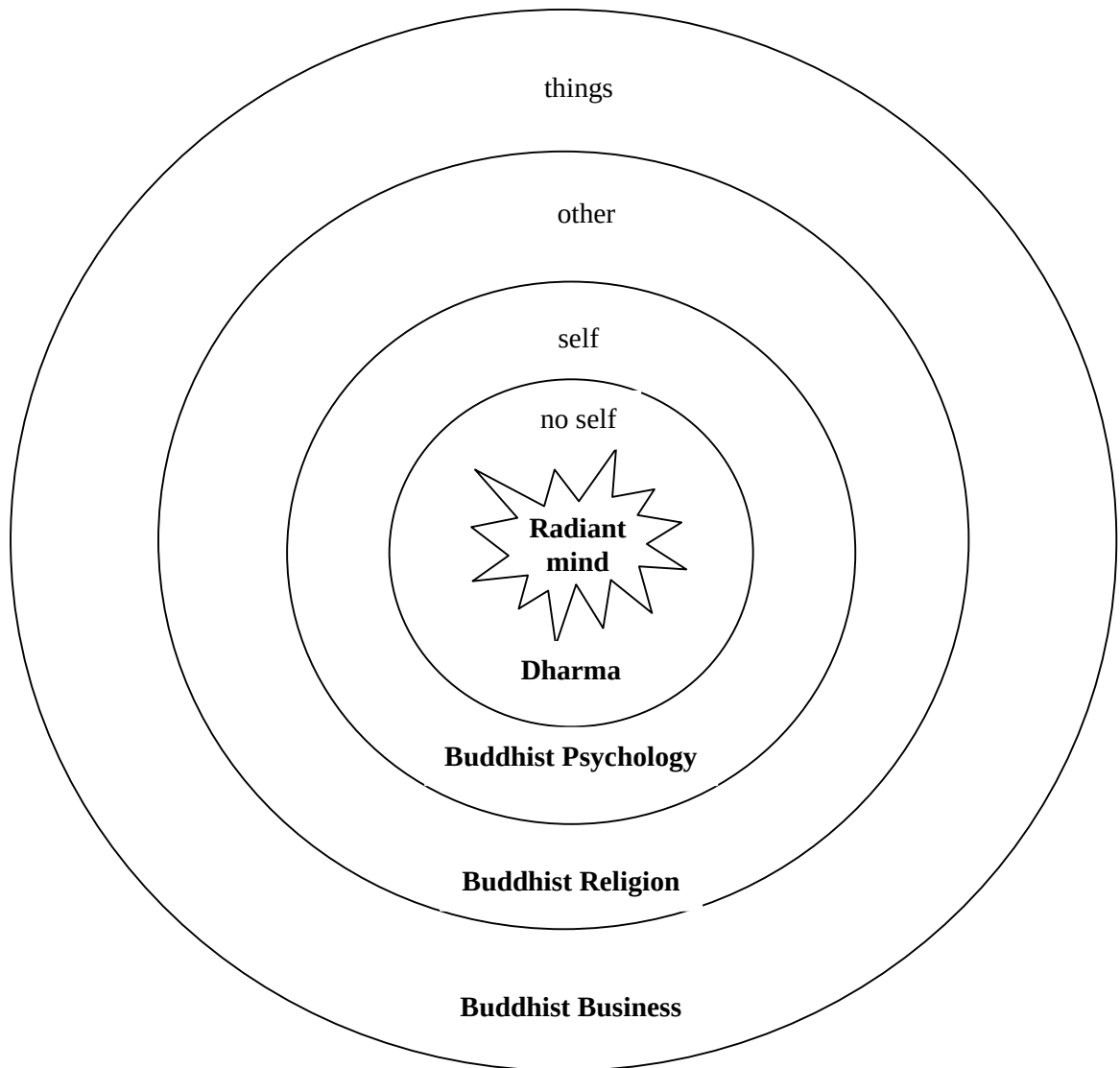


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The Religion Pyramid (map with peak at centre)

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

A study of strategic patterns in global Buddhist growth

Piya Tan

SYLLABUS

- (1) Buddhism and mission.
- (2) Levels & development of Buddhism.
- (3) Buddhism in Sri Lanka: traditions & contradictions.
- (4) Buddhism in south-east Asia: kingship; Indianization.
- (5) Buddhism in east Asia: politics, persecutions & syncretism.
- (6) Lay Buddhism: Responses, utopias & cults.
- (7) Buddhism: the West & Oceania.
- (8) Buddhist studies.
- (9) Buddhist responses to external challenges.
- (10) Buddhism today.

2. BUDDHISM AS A MISSIONARY RELIGION

While in India (the land of its birth), Buddhism grew socially mainly because of royal patronage and support of the merchant class. Supported by these two pillars of society, Buddhism successfully spread itself all over northern India. During Asoka's official patronage of Buddhism, it not only spread throughout his empire in India, but also, through the missions supported by him, spread throughout most of the ancient world, reaching south and southeast Asia; northwards to Bactria and the Tarim Basin; westwards to Middle Asia, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Italy, and probably as far north as Britain, and to north Africa (Egypt and Libya). During the early centuries CE, Buddhism went beyond Central Asia, into China, Korea, Japan and as far south as Vietnam, and into Tibet in the 7th century. Today, Buddhism has grown into a global religion. This effectively makes Buddhism the world's first missionary religion.

Outside of India, the continued spread of Indian Buddhism was carried out mostly by merchants, overland as well as overseas. The reasons are historical and psychological. Even during the Buddha's time, Buddhism had been widely supported by the merchant class. As Buddhism is versatile in teaching and adaptable in practice, it easily became a portable religion (unlike localized traditional Brahmanism). Merchants, monks and pilgrims would bring along Buddha relics or images, or Buddhist shrines, and along their long and foreign routes, would inspire the locals with their Buddhist experience. They sponsored the building of local shrines, which grew into viharas (monastic residences with shrines), which also acted as safe stopovers and refuges for them. The Silk Road is the most famous example of such a development.

After about 1,500 years in India, Buddhism had abruptly and virtually disappeared from the sub-continent by 1203 when Vikramasīlā University was destroyed by the Muslim hordes. (Nālandā was destroyed earlier in 1197.) What Buddhism lost in India, it got back in bigger ways outside India.

Ironically, Muslim violence in India at the end of the 12th -13th centuries marked the beginning of the end of its Golden Age (which was the 9th to the 13th centuries).

The Tibetan diaspora beginning in 1959 as a result of the Chinese invasion parallels **the Indian Buddhist diaspora** during the Muslim invasion of India. From the smouldering ashes at the devastated epicenter, not one but innumerable phoenixes arose and spread in different directions in a rebirth of wisdom and beauty. Indeed, we today have greatly benefitted from such Buddhist diasporas.

Missionary ideal

In the verse section of the **Dūta Sutta**, the Buddha lists the five qualities of an ideal missionary (dūta) as follows:

Before an assembly, he is not nervous;
He is not at a loss for words;
He hides not the message;

2. The spread of Buddhism

He speaks without doubtfulness; [alt. tr.: “He can speak views not his own” (Peṭk:Ñ 115)]
He is not agitated when questioned—
That monk is worthy to go on a mission. (V 2:201f = A 4:196)

In other words, a Dharma missionary or Buddhist worker should be confident before a crowd, a good and clear speaker, full of faith (even if representing the views of another), and calm and compassionate when questioned.

The Great Commission

From the very beginning—from the moment the Buddha delivered the First Discourse to the Five Monks and their subsequent enlightenment—Buddhism has been a **missionary religion**. In fact, Buddhism is the world’s first missionary religion.

The Buddha’s **Great Commission** (admonition to go out and teach the Dharma) was recorded over 2,500 years ago in the Vinaya account, where the Buddha himself sent out the first 60 enlightened disciples, shortly after the First Discourse:

Go forth, O monks, for the good of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world; for the good, the gain and the welfare of gods and men.

Let not two go the same way. Teach, O monks, the Dharma, good in the beginning, good in the middle, good in the ending.

Declare the Holy Life, altogether complete, altogether pure, both in the spirit and in the letter.

There are beings with little dust in their eyes, who not hearing the Dharma, would fall away. There will be those who will understand the Dharma.

I, too, O monks, will go to Uruvilva in Senānī, nigama, to expound the Dharma.
(V 1:20 f.; cf D 3:219, M 3:280)

The **missionary spirit** of early Buddhism is further reflected in the work of the Arhats converting individuals and groups in various regions of India and beyond: Mahā Katyāyana in Mathurā; Ānanda’s disciple, Madhyāntika, in the northwest; Mahendra in Sri Lanka; Gavāmpati in Burma; the “500 Arhats” in Kashmir and so on.

Factors favouring the spread of Buddhism

In his paper “The Movement of Buddhist Texts from India to China and the Construction of the Chinese Buddhist Canon” (1993b:518 ff.), Prof. Lewis Lancaster, summarizes **the factors favouring the spread of Buddhism** (especially outside India):

1. **Holy persons** who could travel freely without being polluted.
2. **Sacred relics** of the Buddha and other esteemed dead that could impart power to whatever site they were placed.
3. **Images** of the Buddha in sculpture and paintings that could be freely moved from place to place.
4. **Teachings**, presented in oral and written form, that retained their importance in translation.

The four factors all point to the fact that Buddhism is **a religion of portable sanctity**. These four factors of portable sanctity are embodied, for example, in the Chinese pilgrims who went to India from China, bringing back with them religious relics, Buddha images and Buddhist texts.



Fig 1. Portable Japanese Buddha shrine

Portable religion

If Buddhism is the world's first missionary religion, it follows that it is also the world's **first “portable” religion**. Unlike Buddhism, Brahmanism (and Hinduism that followed) is an example of fixed sanctity “since out of caste people cannot be a part of it, holy men cannot travel long distances without becoming ritually impure” (Lancaster, 1993a: 41).

Portable religions are characterized by **freedom from pollution fears**, especially the pollution of the dead. Again, we can look at Hinduism, where pollution can be associated with ritual purity, or it can occur with corpse contact or in other cases result from the mixing of castes and through intermarriage. The Buddha had no fear of the dead: in fact, he went to the charnel grounds and picked up pieces of rags and shrouds from corpses and so clad himself with the clothing of the dead. He had disciples who came from all the castes of ancient India. Without fear of pollution, Buddhism spread far and wide without any loss of sanctity. (Lancaster, 1993a: 42 f.)

Canons and translations

Once the Buddhist texts were **canonized**, Buddhism became even more “portable.” The missionary activities were accompanied by the propagation of texts, both orally and, later, in writing (especially after the rise of Mahayana).

One of the key reasons for Buddhist growth beyond the “middle country” of India, indeed, outside India itself, was the Buddha's injunction that his Teaching should be taught and learnt in **“one's own language”** (*sakāya niruttyā*, V 2:139), without any preference of a “sacred language.”

The middle of the 2nd century marked the **“linguistic breakthrough”** in the history of Buddhism, when

...for the first time scriptures had to be translated into a language totally unrelated to any Indian tongue, instead of being “transposed” from one Prakrit to another, or from Prakrit to Sanskrit, a process that allowed for an almost word-by-word transposition without any appreciable loss as regards content and way of expression. (Zurcher, 1993:9)

As we shall later see, this change from transposition to “restatement through translation” was to have far-reaching consequences following the spread of Buddhism in China, Korea and Japan.

3. LIFE-CYCLE OF BUDDHIST SOCIAL GROWTH

The “life-cycle” of Buddhism in its social growth can be analyzed as being fourfold:¹

1. **Assimilation:** Formative period.
2. **Indigenization:** Developmental period.
3. **Legitimization:** Formalistic period.
4. **Rejuvenation:** Revival and Growth.

When Buddhism first arrived in a new country, it also brought along the culture of the society from which it came. In the case of **south Asia**, it would be Indian culture; in the case of **east Asia**, it would be Chinese culture, and in the case of Japan, both Korean and Chinese cultures.

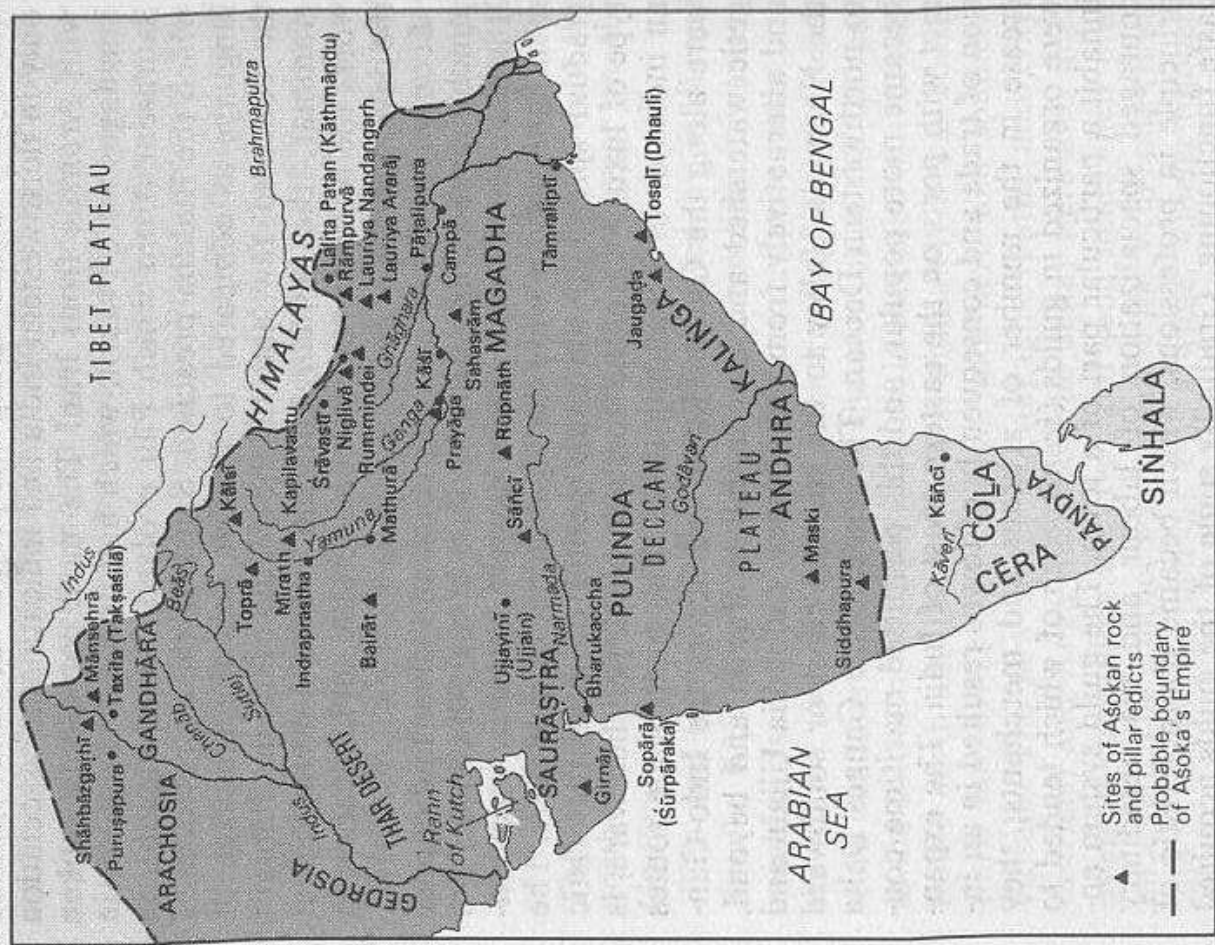
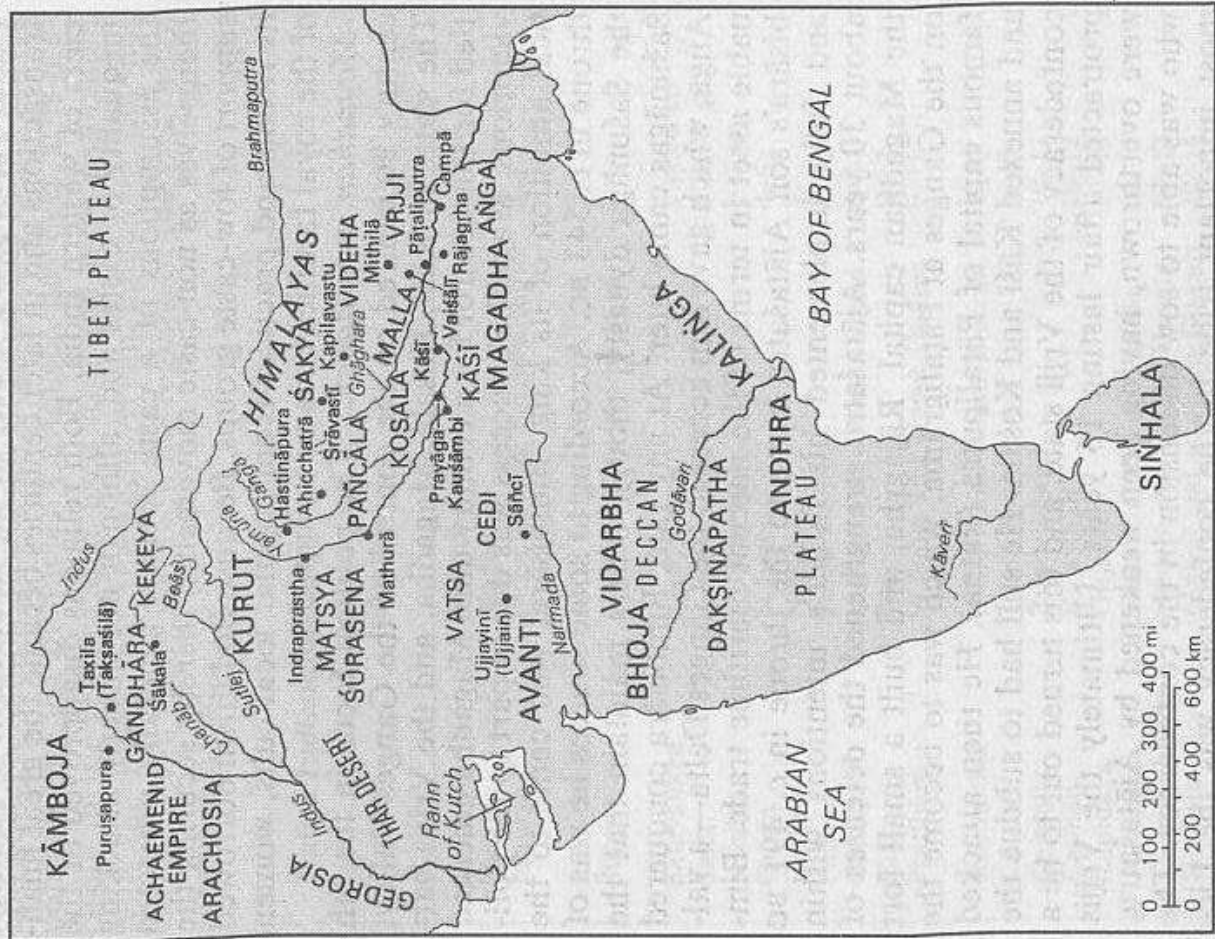
Except for **China**, which was already very culturally advanced when Buddhism arrived, the other countries in the rest of Asia were generally culturally and technologically less advanced. As such, Buddhism and the culture it brought along were assimilated wholesale during this **formative period**, which would last for at least a few centuries.

In due course, especially after more local people had joined the Buddhist Order, these local monastics would select various aspects of Buddhism and **indigenize** them to suit their local needs and harmonize with local conditions. Some new ideas and practices might also be introduced during this

¹ See, for example, Edward Conze, 1980; cf. Michael Pye, 1969.

2. The spread of Buddhism

Adapted from C.C. Davies, *An Historical Atlas of the Indian Peninsula* (1959); Oxford University Press



(Left) India c. 500 BC and (right) Asoka's empire at its greatest extent, c. 250 BC.

1980	<u>Population</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Literate</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Sri Lanka	16.1 M (1985)	Over 15		86.1% (Male 90.8%; Female 81.2%)
Myanmar	37.7 M (1985)	Over 15	13.7 M	65.9% (Male 75.0%; Female 56.3%)
Thailand	51.3 M (1985)	Over 10	29.8 M	88.8% (Male 92.4%; Female 85.3%)

[Encyclopaedia Britannica 1986 Yearbook]

Indigenous beliefs

Finally, Buddhism often emerged as **the official religion** of the country, to such an extent that Burmese monasticism and sanctuaries still have a powerful attraction to many Buddhists, including pilgrims from abroad.

Despite the status of Buddhism as the “elite tradition” (centralized system with well-developed organization and doctrine), it co-exists with Hinduism and popular superstitions in a two-tier system [32]. In Sri Lanka, for example, while affirming the overarching supremacy of the Buddha and his saints, the traditional Sinhalese would turn to **the folk tradition**—a myriad of local deities (usually Hindu) and indigenous spirits in times of need and emergency.

This two-tier religious structure pervades the Buddhist societies of south and south-east Asia. The Sinhalese Buddhists believe in **deva**, for whom they build the *devāle* (deva-house) that often stands beside or behind the Buddhist shrine. The Burmese turn to a wide range of **nat** (of which 37 are the most important) for spiritual assistance. Every traditional Thai house has a *sālchao* or “spirit house” for the tutelary deity to pacify or keep away the **phī** or demons.

Before the arrival of Buddhism, such folk traditions and other superstitions ruled the lives of the people. The village monasteries are agents of a two-way process of cultural interpenetration between Buddhism and local indigenous beliefs. This process has not corrupted Buddhist values, but rather **the Buddhist presence has a civilizing influence** on what was formerly barbaric (Ling 1966: 57 f).

Buddhists remain tolerant of the indigenous deities, spirits and traditions insofar as they provide certain well-defined temporal benefits in a secular context. This harmonious coexistence results from the gradual permeation of Buddhism into the whole cultural system.

In a similar way many Christians who believe in God nevertheless also visit the doctor from time to time. The latter may or may not be a Christian; he may be an atheist or a Marxist, but Christians see nothing religiously incongruous in thus seeking a temporal benefit from a non-Christian source. Nor does the villager of Ceylon in following a similar procedure.

(Ling 1968:310)

Tibetan Buddhism

Buddhism arrived in Tibet around 650. The person who made the first attempt to bring Buddhism to Tibet was **Śāntirakṣita** (fl. 8th century) on the invitation of king Thī-srong-detsan (r. 740-786). Even though Śāntirakṣita was a scholar of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra, he failed in his missionary efforts. In fact, he was forced to flee to Nepal after adherents of **the nativistic Bon religion** blamed him for the outbreak of an epidemic.

On his return to Tibet, Śāntirakṣita urged the king to invite the Indian Buddhist teacher **Padmasambhava** to help him. Where Śāntirakṣita’s rationalistic approach failed, Padmasambhava’s mystical attainments were successful in subduing the demons of Tibet and converting them to Buddhism. By **mysticism** here is meant Buddhist meditation and mythology that assimilated the Bon ways and gods into the Buddhist system to become uniquely Tibetan.

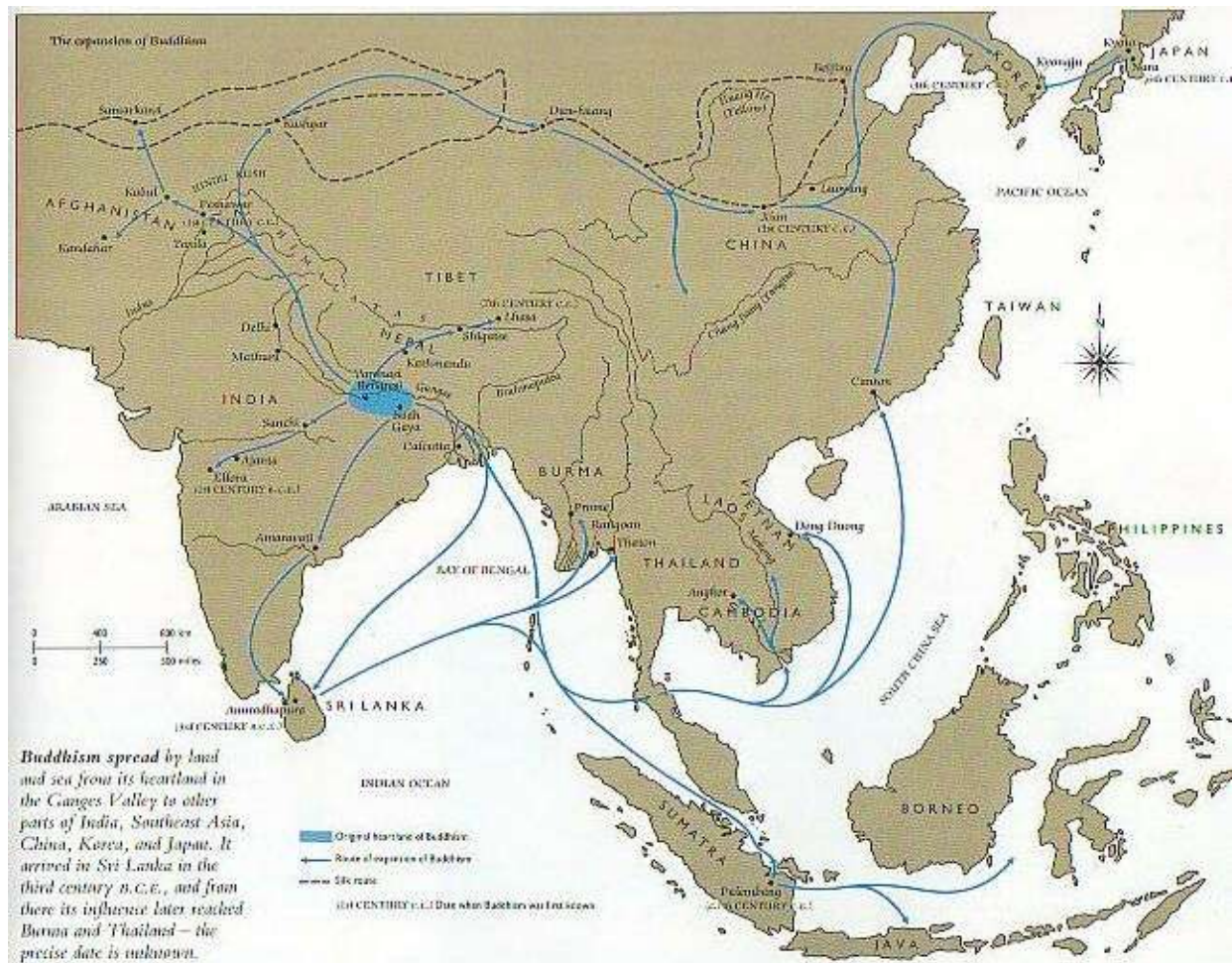
5. ASOKA’S MISSIONS

The Sinhalese chronicles say that **Aśoka** (r. c.268-239 BCE) sent various monks to spread Buddhism throughout India and abroad. Buddhism spread into southern India and lasted there longer than in the north. We hear of a Theravada monk being invited from Kāñcī (Conjeeveram) in Tamilnadu to **Sri Lanka** as late as the 14th century, over a century after the Muslims gave the deathblow to Buddhism by destroying the monastic universities of north India.

2. The spread of Buddhism

The Buddhists used the two main routes out of India: the overland route through the Hindu Kush (NW India) and by sea from its long coastline of 3,535 miles (5689 km).

By land, Buddhism spread first into eastern Iran and Central Asia, and then along the caravan route into China. Striking evidence showing that Buddhism early moved **west** through the Hindu Kush out of India is found in the Aśokan inscriptions in Greek and Aramaic found at Kandahar (now in Afghanistan). The Phra Pathom Chedi in Thailand also belongs to this period.



Map 2. Spread of Buddhism beyond India.

By sea, Buddhism spread from the east coast, in the middle of the first millennium CE, to **continental south-east Asia and Indonesia**. Some of the greatest Buddhist monuments, notably the Borobudur in Java and the temples of Angkor in Kampuchea, arose from this seaborne expansion.

The Buddhist missionaries introduced aspects of **Indian culture**—notably the first system of writing using the Indian script in one form or another—to parts of Central Asia and most of south-east Asia.

Some scholars (such as Herbert Plaeschke 1970:41-45) think that it is possible to find traces of Buddhist influences in **the Essenes and the Therapeutae**, two heterodox Hebrew sects, as well as on Christianity. [39]

BUDDHISM IN SRI LANKA

6. EARLY HISTORY



Map 3. India & Sri Lanka

Arrival of Buddhism

According to Sinhalese tradition, **the Buddha visited Sri Lanka three times** (Mahv 1:12 ff, 77; Dīpv 1:45 ff, 2:1 ff.). She was also visited by two past Buddhas (VA 1:86; Mahv 15:63, 131 f; Dīpv 15:38, 17:14, 32). The Burmese claim that the Buddha visited Burma and went to the Lohita, candana Vihāra, presented by the brothers Mahāpuṇṇa and Cūlapuṇṇa of Vāṇijagāma (*Indian Antiquities*, xxii; Sāsana, vaṃsa 36 f.).

When Aśoka was reigning in India, king **Tissa** (250-210 BCE = 236-276 AB) ruled in Sri Lanka from his capital at **Anurādhapura**. After his coronation in 250 BCE (236 AB), Tissa sent valuable gifts to Aśoka, both of whom were friends. This event was in the same year the 3rd Council (Pāṭalīputra) which had just concluded.

In return, Aśoka sent royal regalia for a **second coronation** and the title of *Devānampiya* (“beloved of the gods”), which was also Aśoka’s title. Henceforth, the Sinhalese king came to known as **Devānampiya Tissa**, Sri Lanka’s first historical king.

2. The spread of Buddhism

Later that same year, according to legend, one of Aśoka's sons, **Mahinda**, who was himself a monk and Arhat, together with six companions landed in **Mihintale** (8 miles north of the capital), meeting the king and his hunting party. This momentous meeting traditionally marked the arrival of Buddhism on the island.

Later, one of Aśoka's daughters, **Saṅghamittā**, a nun, was said to have brought a sapling of the original **Bodhi tree** to Sri Lanka. It was planted in Anurādhapura and still stands today as **a living tree (or living thing) with the longest history**. She also started the Order of Nuns in Sri Lanka. [11]

Mahāvihāra

Of the construction projects initiated by Devānampiya Tissa, the most significant was the **Mahāvihāra** ("the great monastery"), established in the royal park near Anurādhapura as a residence for Mahinda and his companion monks. It is said that while he was residing there, Mahinda wrote **commentaries on the Theravada canon**. (The Canon was finally closed at the Council of Pāṭaliputra around this period).

During the reign of **Mahānāma** (r. 409-431), an Indian monk from Buddha Gayā by the name of **Buddhaghosa** (fl. early 5th cent.) came to Anurādhapura, where he translated the Sinhalese Commentaries into Pali. That is, only after he had completed his own classic work, **the Visuddhi, magga** ("The Path of Purity"), an encyclopaedic introduction to the Theravada Buddhism.

Such events, together with the events affecting Buddhism during colonial rule [9, 34], understandably made Sri Lanka the **world centre for Theravada Buddhism**.

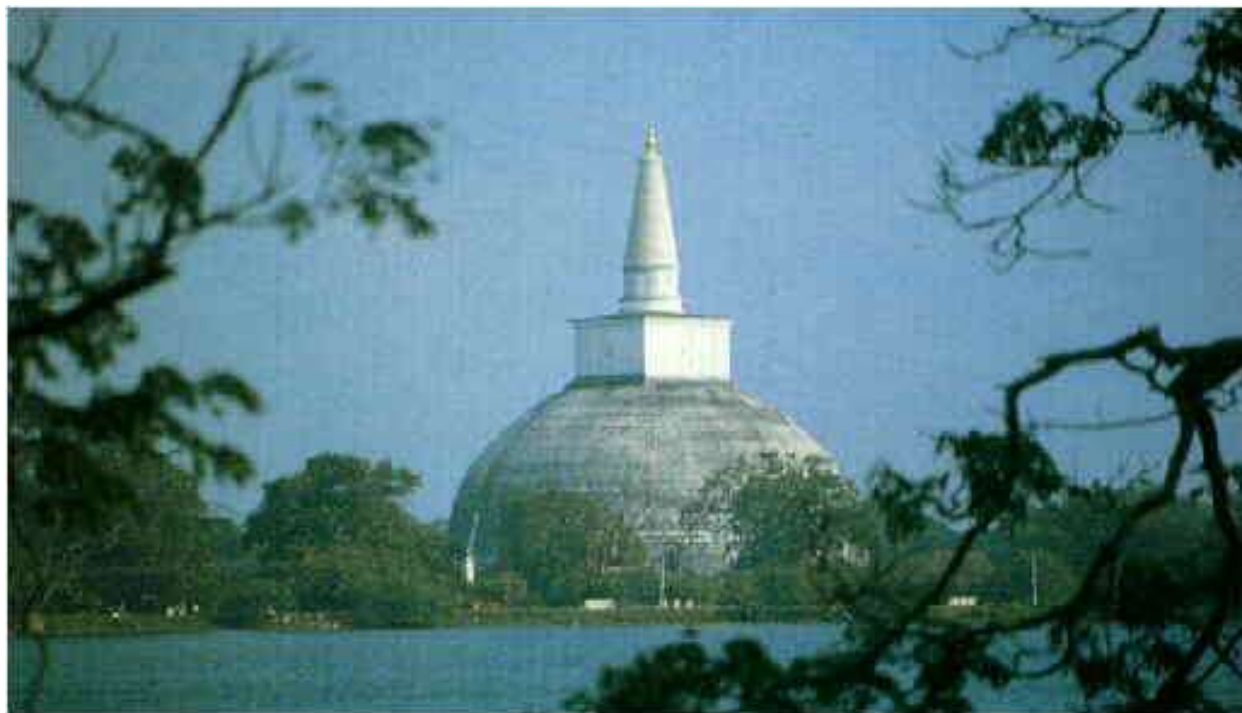


Fig 2. Stupa, Sri Lanka.

7. TAMIL INVASIONS

During the 1st century BCE, Sri Lanka was invaded by south Indians. Two Sinhalese kings were important during this period: Duṭṭhagāmaṇī and Vaṭṭagāmaṇī. **Duṭṭhagāmaṇī** (r. 161-137 BCE) is more of a national hero to Sri Lankans than an exemplary Buddhist. He went so far as to place a Buddha relic in his battle lance and call for a company of 500 monks to escort his troops into battle! (Greenwald 1978:13). After liberating his land from the Damiḷas, he constructed famous monuments which are still the glory of Sri Lanka today: the Maricavaṭi Thūpa (Mirisaveṭi Dāgaba), the Brazen Palace (Lohapāsada), and especially the Mahāthūpa (Ruvanveli Dāgaba).

After defeating the south Indian invaders, **Vaṭṭagāmaṇī** (r. 89-77 BCE) became king at Anurādhapura. His reign was marked by two important events in Buddhist history: the founding of the thūpa and vihāra of Abhayagiri and the written compilation of the Pali Canon. Vaṭṭagāmaṇī, wary of the immense power and wealth of the Mahāvihāra monastery, attempted to counter it by founding a second grand monastery, the **Abhayagiri**. He named **Mahā Tissa** as its abbot as a reward to him for maintaining the loyalty of Vaṭṭagāmaṇī's generals during the military campaigns.

Written canon

In Vaṭṭagāmaṇī's time, Sri Lanka had just suffered 12 years of famine, and the Mahāvihāra had lost royal patronage (mostly because of its meddling in palace intrigues). Fearing for the survival of the Buddha's Teaching—and their own existence—the Mahāvihāra monks initiated a novel move: they parted ways with the oral tradition (for fear of lack of competent reciters) and **committed the Pali canon to writing** on oḷa (talipot palm) leaves at the **Alu Vihāra**, in a central province remote from Anurādhapura. This was also around the time that the early Mahayana texts were written on the continent.⁴ It is however possible that the canonical texts were written down in India even earlier than in Sri Lanka.

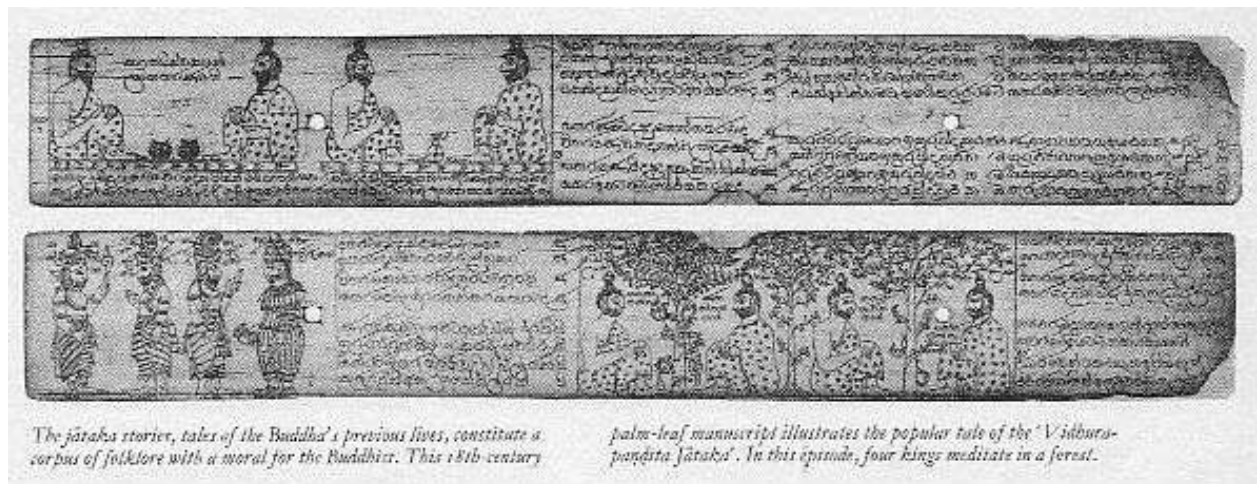


Fig 3. Oḷa leaf manuscript (Sinhalese).

8. ORDINATION LINEAGE

The authenticity and religiosity of a monastic order lies in its link with its founder. A properly ordained monk or nun would be able to trace **his or her lineage (paramparā)** through the preceptor back to the Buddha himself. The ordination itself is a corporate act (*kamma, vācā*) that must be conducted in a consecrated area (*sīmā*) by a quorum of properly ordained senior monks who would recite the act which, if no objection is raised by anyone in the assembly, would raise the status of the candidate to that of an ordained monastic.

The Sinhalese monks faced both **internal threats** (from the political caprice of their kings) and **external dangers** (from Tamil invasions). When Vaṭṭagāmaṇī founded the Abhayagiri, the Mahāvihāra monks expelled Mahā Tissa from their ranks, and so effecting a schism. The Abhayagiri monks came to be associated with scriptural and doctrinal innovations originating in India, becoming some sort of Mahayana school in Sri Lanka. In due course, Sri Lankan kings would support either the Mahāvihāra or the Abhayagiri, depending on their political agenda.

In a new effort to neutralize the power of the Mahāvihāra, King **Mahāsena** (r. 334-361) seized its lands and set up a third monastic order, the **Jetavana Vihāra**. In due course, **Parākrama Bāhu I** (r. 1153-86), ruling from **Polonnaruwa**, reformed the Sinhalese Sangha by abolishing both the Abhaya-

⁴ On the writing down of the Pali Canon, see Adikaram, *Early History of Buddhism in Ceylon*, 1946:79, and Malalasekera, *The Pāli Literature of Ceylon*, 1928:44-47.

2. The spread of Buddhism

giri and the Jetavana Vihāra, not so much for religious as for political expediency of centralized control. The **Mahāvihāra** finally became the supreme Theravada authority in Sri Lanka under royal patronage.

During the 11th century, the Paṇḍu and Chola kingdoms of south Indian launched new attacks on Sri Lanka. Around 1070, king **Vijaya Bāhu I** (r. 1055-1110), with substantial assistance from king Anuruddha (Anawrahta) of Burma, managed to throw off Chola domination. Vijaya Bāhu made his capital at **Polonnaruva**, the erstwhile Chola capital.

Alliances with Burma

Chola persecution of the Sinhalese Buddhists had been so bad that Vijaya Bāhu had to invite a contingent of Mon monks from Burma in order to hold a **proper ordination** and to

transact the affairs of the Sangha (Cuvs ch. 60 ll .4-8). Apparently, the Order of Nuns had lapsed by this time, but no efforts were made to revive it.

King Anuruddha of Burma was a Mahayanist, but his territory included the Mon (Talaing) people of Lower Burma (a delegation of whose monks he had sent to Sri Lanka). Since south-east Asia had no complete canon of its own at that time, the Burmese delegation that went to Sri Lanka stayed on for several years to make a complete copy of **the Pali Canon**, the first such copy ever to leave Sri Lanka and to arrive in south-east Asia.

Burmese ordination

Parākrama Bāhu I established a unified Sangha (the Mahāvihāra) regulated by the state. It was during his reign that a **Burmese delegation** came to Sri Lanka seeking reordination in the Mahāvihāra lineage. The development marked the complete transplantation of the Sinhalese Theravada into south-east Asia. In subsequent centuries, after the Sinhalese Theravada tradition had spread through Burma and beyond, Sri Lanka and other southeast Asian states would **support one another to keep the monastic lineage unbroken**.

When **the Portuguese** conquered coastal Sri Lanka, it heralded the darkest times for Sinhalese Buddhism. In their determination to establish Christianity on the island, the Portuguese ruthlessly persecuted the Buddhists. To aggravate matters, the Sinhalese king **Rājasinha I** (1581-1592) who ruled from Sitiawaka was a tyrant. Although he was a gallant leader who opposed the Portuguese, he was a ruthless parricide who turned to Saivism and persecuted the Buddhists.

By the Dutch period in Sri Lanka, the situation was so bad that during the reign of **Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha** (1747-1779), although there were numerous *sāmaṇera* (novices) and white-robed lay monastery-holders (*gaṇinnāṇse*), not a single fully-ordained monk could be found on the island. The island was anomic (lacking in social norms and values) where people resorted to astrology, magical healing and devil-worship. The older novices initiated the sons of relatives so that they could retain the vast wealth that generations of kings and ministers had dedicated to the service of the Sangha.

9. CASTE BUDDHISM

During the 18th century, when Sinhalese Buddhism was at its lowest ebb, a reformist movement developed within the order, largely through the initiative of one person, **Vālavīṭa Saraṇaṅkara**



Fig 4. Ordination into the Mahā Nikāya by the Supreme Patriarch, Thailand. (Ordination of Ven. Piyasilo.)

(1698-1778). He joined the Order at 16 as a pupil of Sūriyagoḍa Rājasundara (who had received *upasampadā* or higher ordination from the Arakan monks of Burma in 1697). In 1715, Rājasundara was executed on a charge of treason. Left on his own, Saraṇāṅkara retired to the mountains where he continued his monastic studies and attracted a growing group of dedicated and pious followers.

Saraṇāṅkara soon became a powerful inspiration for the revival of Sinhalese and Pali literature, but his greatest desire was to **re-establish *upasampadā*** in Sri Lanka. After two failed attempts to send envoys to Siam, a third delegation was sent in 1750 by king Kīrti Śrī Rājasinha with the aid of a Dutch vessel. The delegation was received by king **Dhammika of Ayutthaya** (central Siam) who favourably responded by sending a party of 25 monks led by **Upāli Thera** to Sri Lanka.

Kaṭika.vatta enforcing caste system

The Siamese delegation arrived in Trincolamee in **1753**, and proceeded to Kandy, where they established two **consecrated chapter houses** (*sīma*), one at Malvatta Vihāra and the other at Asgiriya Vihāra, where ordinations could be performed. These new generation of Sinhalese monks formed the core of what came to be called the **Siyam** the only order recognized by the Kandyan king, who proclaimed for them **a code of conduct** (***kaṭikā,vatta***) that would become a national and religious embarrassment to Buddhists in modern times.

According to the *kaṭikā,vatta*, only a **govi** (landed cultivator), who form the Goyigama caste, may ordain into the Siyam Nikāya. In the Kandyan temples, the situation was more restrictive: **ordination was further limited only to the aristocratic Radaḷa**, the highest sub-caste of the Goyigama. [Piya-silo 1992a: 6-9]

This tragic anomaly of Sinhalese Buddhism—**caste Buddhism**—was instituted by the royal decree of Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha, whose personal religiosity remains doubtful despite flowing tributes paid to him by all the contemporary Sinhalese documents. At any rate, he persisted in Śaivite practices, such as applying ash on his forehead. (Malalgoda 1976: 58-69)

New nikāyas

During the British period, Sinhalese Buddhism made significant progress. New monastic lineages were founded by and for the lower castes of Sri Lanka. In 1799, a Sinhalese delegation, headed by the novice **Ambagahapitiya Ñāṇavimalatissa**, left for Burma. They were from the lower castes that predominated in the coastal regions of the island. The king of Burma himself received them in the capital, **Amarapura**, where they were ordained. They returned to Sri Lanka in 1803. In 1807, three more delegations, representing other castes, also journeyed to Burma to receive ordination. Together, these monks established the **Amarapura Nikāya**.

In 1863, another delegation from yet lower castes, headed by **Ambagahawatte Srī Saraṇāṅkara Thera**, traveled to Burma for ordination and formed the **Rāmañña Nikāya**, named after the Burmese city where they were ordained.

These three caste-bound Nikāyas exist to this day “**in blatant contradiction of, and with little apparent concern for, the historical Buddha’s repudiation of the caste system.**” (Reat, 1994: 96). Even today, not only is ordination restricted by caste, but even responsibilities to the laity are divided among the three Nikāyas according to caste divisions. The Siyam Nikāya services the upper castes,



Buddhism and the state. Another Sri Lankan mural tells the story of how an 18th-century monk was accorded the title of king of the sangha. Links with the state have remained close. Below: Mrs Bandaranaike, as prime minister.

Fig 5. Kīrti Śrī Rājasimha appoints Nikāya, Saraṇāṅkara as saṅgha,rāja.

2. The spread of Buddhism

and the Amarapura and the Rāmañña Nikāyas service the middle and lower castes. While all this is objectionable in the spirit of Buddhism, it does at least allow all levels of Sinhalese society direct access to the Sangha, instead of very limited access to the official tradition of the nobility and high castes.

10. RELICS RULE

When the Chinese pilgrim **Faxian** (340?-420?) visited Sri Lanka in the 5th century, he reported that both the Mahā, -vihāra and the Abhaya, giri were flourishing. From his accounts, however, it is clear that the Abhayagiri was the larger and more influential monastery of the two (1971:101-107). In the 7th century, the Chinese pilgrim **Xuanzang** (c 596-664) noted that the Mahāvihāra was Theravadin, while the Abhayagiri practised both Mahayana and Theravada (1884 2:247).

Both pilgrims also mentioned regarding what had become of the most important relic in Sri Lanka—the **Buddha’s eye tooth**—that was brought to the island during the reign of king **Megha,vaṇṇa** (r. 352-379). This symbol of religious and political authority was in the custodianship of the Abhayagiri. Apparently, the situation was not very good for the politically ambitious Mahāvihāra, which the king saw as not conducive to his own political plans. (It was at this crucial juncture that Buddhaghosa [6] arrived in the Mahāvihāra.)

Legend has it that during the visit of Mon monks to Sri Lanka [8], Vijaya Bāhu miraculously produced a **copy of the eye-tooth relic of the Buddha** which was presented to Anuruddha, who in turn installed it in the **Shwezigon Stupa** in Pagan. This gift of Buddha relic would become a popular diplomatic gesture from the Sinhalese.

Sri Lanka

By the end of the 13th century, it was customary that every ruler of Sri Lanka must have **the Buddha’s eye-tooth relic** in his custody to legitimize his reign. After Parākrama Bāhu I, no Sinhalese king ever actually regained control of the whole island, but the tooth accompanied the recognized king to various strongholds and refuges. Towards the end of the 13th century, the inevitable happened: the tooth relic (or its replica, some claimed) was captured and brought to **the Paṇḍu kingdom** in South India.

During the 13th century, **Kublai Khan**, the Mongol emperor of China, sent an envoy to Sri Lanka demanding or requesting that the tooth relic be sent to him. The reigning king having obliged by sending not one, but two tooth relics, which Kublai received with great pomp and ceremony. Having become well known throughout the Eastern world as the possessor of the Buddha’s eye tooth, the Sinhalese king apparently exploited this reputation in a diplomatic manner by trading freely in dubious Buddha relics. The real tooth



Fig 6. Ancient Indian reliquarium



Fig 7. Sri Lanka’s palladium: Relic Chamber housing the Buddha’s eye-tooth.

remained jealously guarded.

Finally, in the 17th century, the tooth relic was enshrined in the famous **Dalada Maligawa** or Temple of the Tooth in the mountain capital of Kandy. On at least two other occasions, the Buddha relic was spirited into the mountainous jungles around Kandy in order to preserve it from capture by foreign powers, this time the Portuguese and the Dutch. **The British**, however, succeeded in taking possession of the tooth relic, but later surrendered it voluntarily to its monastic custodians in Kandy after having conquered the island.

The Buddha's eye-tooth has become the **palladium of the nation**. Apparently, when the tooth was taken into hiding or was in foreign hands, the island itself had suffered period of instability and hardship. Even in modern Sri Lanka, as a token of legitimacy of the elected government, the prime minister holds one of the three keys to the enclosure in which the tooth relic is enshrined. (Reynolds 1978:175-193; Tambiah 1984:214 f, 217 ff.)

Laos

During the time when **Khmer** power had declined and **Siam** (modern Thailand) was undergoing a political shift, **Fa Ngum** seized the opportunity to establish an independent Laotian kingdom along the upper reaches of the Mekong River. Fa Ngum's coronation at **Luang Phrabang** in 1353 marked the birth of the Lao kingdom, modelled along the empire of the Khmer, to whom the Lao were racially related.

Fa Ngum invited his teacher, a Theravada monk at the Khmer court, to act as his advisor and head monk. Under this monk's influence, the kingdom of Laos became firmly **Theravadin**, as it has remained so to this day, despite its avowed Marxist state ideology. This Theravada master brought with him a Buddha image known as "**Phra Bang**," which accounts for the capital's name and, like the Sinhalese tooth relic, became the palladium of the kingdom.

In 1178, Siam conquered the southern kingdom of **Vieng Chan** (Vientiane), asserted control over the northern kingdom of Luang Phrabang, and removed both the **Phra Bang** and **Phra Kaeow** Buddha images to Siam. In 1782, the Siamese restored the Vietnamese dynasty as a puppet regime in Vieng Chan and returned the Phra Bang.

During the reign of **Tiloka** (r. 1442-87), the Phra Kaeow was adopted as the **national palladium**, and has remained permanently so in Siam ever since. Today, it is enshrined in **Wat Phra Kaeow**, the royal chapel. This image is popularly called "the Emerald Buddha." However, the stone is probably jasper, a semi-precious stone.

S.E. ASIA & CHINA

11. INDIANIZATION

Early Khmer kingdoms

According to Chinese records, the most important source of information concerning the early history of south-east Asia, the earliest historical state to arise in the region was **Funan**. A proto-Khmer kingdom, Funan, comprising the territory surrounding the Mekong River delta, arose in the 1st century, that is, about the time that Indian influence, mostly through traders (Buddhist and later brahmin), began to spread in the region.

By the 3rd century, of all the south-east Asian states, only Funan had established relations with China, probably because it was recognized as the supreme power in the region. In the 4th century, in what was regarded as the "**second Indianization of Funan**," the kingdom was taken over by an Indian or Iranian ruler, possibly a displaced member of the Kushan dynasty that had collapsed in India.

Relationships between Funan and China continued right up to the 6th century. Chinese records of these relationships show that the state religion was **Śaivite Hinduism** but that Buddhism, probably Mahayana, was common. The greatest king of Funan was **Jayavarman I** (6th century), its last powerful ruler.

2. The spread of Buddhism

When Jayavarman I died in 514, a conflict over succession to the throne ended in the collapse of the kingdom. By the 7th century, Funan was overshadowed by its former vassal, the inland Khmer kingdom of **Chenla**, whose royal line was probably linked to that of Funan. Chenla, however, remained weak and divided until the rise of the Khmer kingdom of **Angkor** in the 9th century.

Guṇavarman of Kashmir (367-432)

As for Buddhism in **Java** (called Cho-po in the 5th century Chinese annals), it was the Kashmiri prince-monk **Guṇavarman** (367-432) who introduced Nikāya Buddhism there (but, later in China, he disseminated Mahayana). **Faxian** reached Java from Sri Lanka in 413 or 414, and from his records, we are told that there was no Buddhism in Java then. Guṇavarman was a very successful Buddhist missionary, who probably converted **P'o-to-chia (Vadhaka?)**, the king of Java and his mother to Buddhism, and they undertook the Five Precepts.

The King of Java went on express **his desire to renounce the world**. Because of the strong opposition of his court, he finally relented, that is, only if they fulfilled these three conditions:

- (1) That all his subjects showed respect to Guṇavarman.
- (2) That all his subjects completely stopped killing living beings.
- (3) That the accumulated wealth in the royal treasury be distributed among the sick and the poor.

In due course, the king built a vihara for Guṇavarman. In 424, Guṇavarman left for China, and in 431 went to Nanjing, and died shortly thereafter. In China, Guṇavarman made the first translation of a Buddhist text, a Dharma, guptaka work, into Chinese.

Liang Wudi (464-549)

A similar story of royal renunciation was that of Liang emperor **Wudi** (Wu Ti) (464-549), who proclaimed himself first emperor of the **Liang dynasty** in 502. Chinese Buddhism saw its highest flowering during this period. A devout Buddhist, Wudi diligently promoted Buddhism, lavishly patronized the Sangha, and decreed the compilation of the first Chinese **Tripiṭaka**.

In his religious and political zeal, Wudi ruthlessly **persecuted Taoism**, at the same time ordering all members of his court to become Buddhists. In 527 and again in 529 he renounced the world and lived in a monastery. He was persuaded to resume office only with great difficulty. In 549, the capital was captured by a “barbarian” general, and Wudi died of starvation in a monastery.

Similarly, in **the North**, the Buddhist clergy became closely connected with secular government. The lavish treatment of the monastics was, however, counterbalanced by repeated attempts at government control of the Sangha. The North, however, remained open to influence brought by travelling monks from Central Asia, and an enormous amount of Indian Buddhist texts of all schools and periods was translated.

Guṇavarman in China

It is interesting that **Guṇavarman** was one of the few Kashmiri teachers who took the sea route to China. When news of his missionary activities in Java reached China sometime before 424 CE, **Huiguan** (Hui Kuan) requested the emperor to invite Guṇavarman to China. The Liu emperor **Wudi** (Wu-ti) of the **Former Sung** (424-452) sent a delegation headed by Fazang (Fa-zhang) to invite Guṇavarman to China.

However, Guṇavarman was already on his voyage to a small country. Coincidentally, the seasonal winds blew his vessel to the shores of Canton in southern China. He only reached the capital Nanjing in 431. In China, he translated over 10 works of which these 5 are extant:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|
| (1) Upāli, paripṛcchā Sūtra | (Nanjio no. 1109) |
| (2) Upāsaka Pañcasīla, rūpa Sūtra | (Nanjio no. 1114) |
| (3) Dharmaguptaka Bhikṣuṇī Karma | (Nanjio no. 1129) |
| (4) Śramaṇera Karmavācā | (Nanjio no. 1164) |
| (5) Nāgārjuna Bodhisattva Suhrillekha | (Nanjio no. 1464). |

Guṇavarman's most important contribution to Chinese Buddhism was to validate the **Chinese Order of Nuns** by performing the “double ordination” (before the Assemblies of Monks and of Nuns). Through his efforts, the proper quorum was finally found when enough **Sinhalese nuns** [4]

finally arrived by sea from Sri Lanka. Sadly, this occurred just after he had passed away. (Pachow, 1960).

Śrīvijaya

From about 600 to 800 CE, the predominantly Buddhist kingdom of **Śrīvijaya** ruled much of south-east Asia. It comprised several states that developed on the Malay peninsula and the islands of Sumatra and Java. The coastal regions of this kingdom served as important trade and diplomatic links between India and China.

Little is known about Śrīvijaya before the visits of the Chinese pilgrims like **Yijing** (671-695). In 671, Yijing stopped over in **Sumatra** for 6 months on his way to India. After spending some 13 years in India, he returned to Sumatra in 685 and stayed near the modern site of **Palembang** until 695, working on his translations. The fact that this important Buddhist pilgrim chose to spend such a long time in Sumatra indicated the importance of the area as **a centre of Buddhist learning**. In fact, according to Yijing, both Nikāya Buddhism and Mahayana flourished in the region.

Śrīvijaya had many rival kingdoms, but they were all minor states scattered in the north. By the 6th century, there were **Langkasuka** (in Pattani), **Ch'ih-t'u**, the “Red-earth Land” (probably located in Kelantan, Malaysia), and **Tan-Tan** (which some scholars thought was on the east coast of peninsular Malaysia probably in or around Terengganu).

All these kingdoms were well known in China as **Buddhist centres** (especially Langkasuka, which was visited by Buddhist pilgrims in the late 7th century). These small states maintained their stability and sovereignty through their paying **annual tribute** to China. Śrīvijaya, too, maintained contact with China. (Andaya & Andaya, 1982: ch. 1, esp. pp. 20-23)

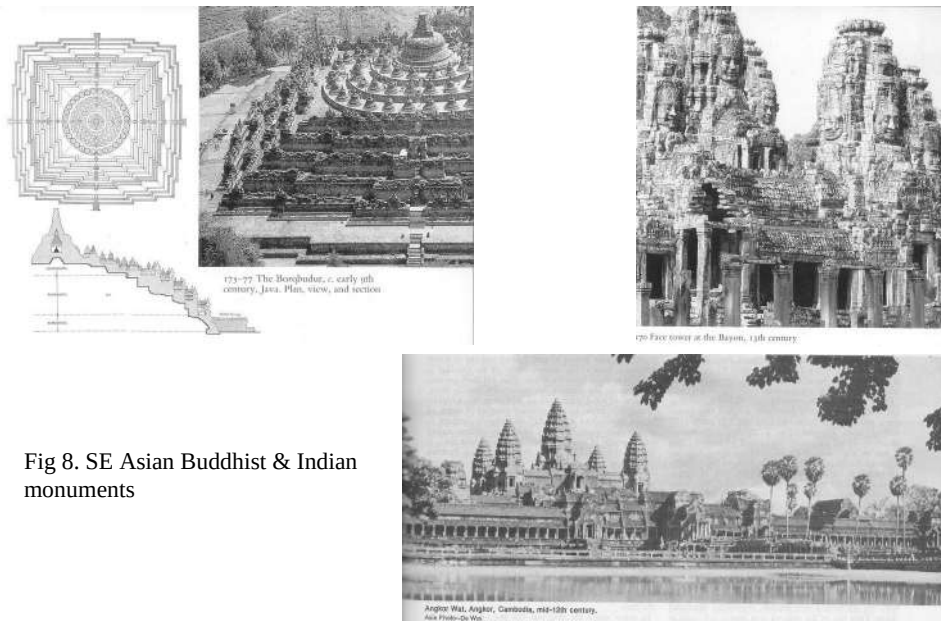


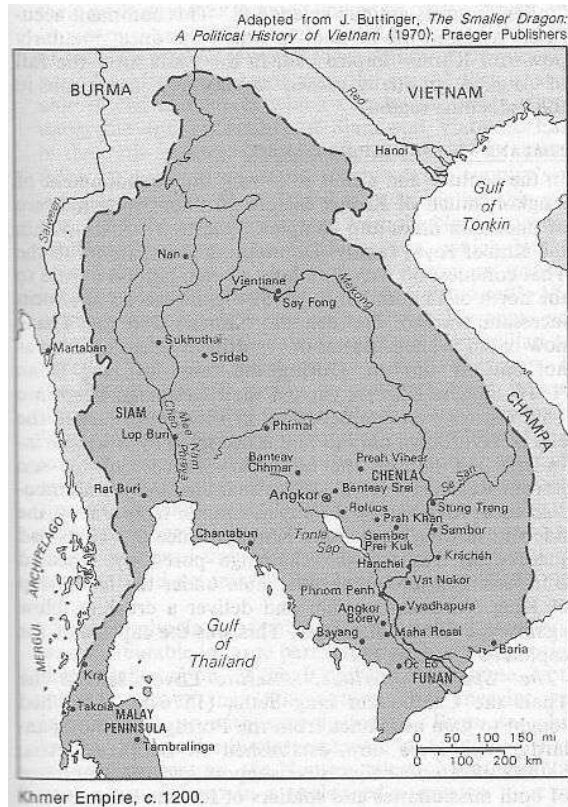
Fig 8. SE Asian Buddhist & Indian monuments

- Angkor Wat (top right), c early 9th cent.
- Bayon (top right), Khmer Republic, 13th century. Angkor Wat (bottom right), mid-12th cent, Khmer Republic.

Borobudur

In the island of **Java**, Śaivite Hindus vied with Buddhists for supremacy. In the 8th century, the Buddhist **Śailendra** (Kings of the Mountains) dynasty established itself and immortalized itself by building the **Borobudur** (c. Java, end of 8th cent.-early 9th cent.), one of the largest religious monuments ever built. The Borobudur is actually a series of carved stone terraces built on a natural hill and culminating in a huge stupa that originally stood over 60 feet tall (18 m) and the top of its terraces rose nearly 150 feet (46 m) above the surrounding plain.

2. The spread of Buddhism



The entire length of the four galleries spiralling to the top of the stupa totals about a mile (1.6 km), past some 400 Buddha images (originally 504) and thousands of **bas-reliefs** depicting events from the Jātakas and the Mahayana sutras.

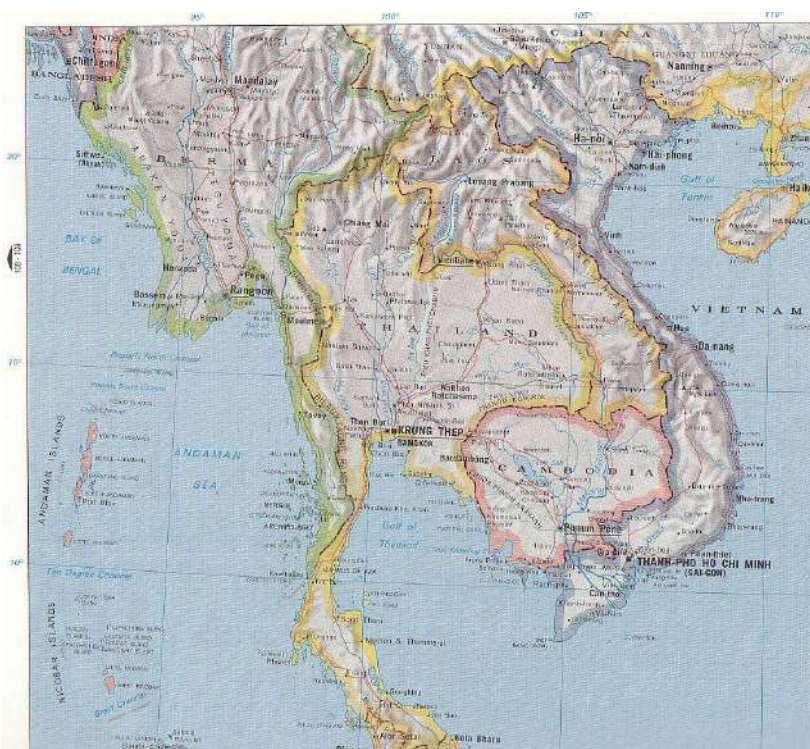
Angkor Wat

The Khmer kings appeared to have been deeply impressed by the Śailendras, the kings of the mountains. **Jayavarman II**, the founder of the kingdom of Angkor, who ascended the throne around 800 CE, visited Java. He built a “temple mountain” to consecrate his reign.

The greatest of these temple mountains, the **Angkor Wat**, was built under **Sūryavarman II** (r. 1113-50), the most powerful of the Khmer kings, who dedicated it to the Hindu god, Vishnu. The entire temple complex is almost a square mile. The central shrine rises 140 feet (42.7 m) from a square colonnaded pediment measuring about 100 yards (91.4 m) from each side, which in turn stands on another colonnaded pediment of about 200 yards (182.9 m) square, surrounded by yet another

enclosure about half a mile (804.7 m) on each side. All this is surrounded by a moat over 200 yards (182.9 m) wide. From the grand western entrance to the central shrine is a half-mile (804.7 m) walk along a broad causeway and up tier after tier of steep staircase. (Reat 1994: 104)

Maps 4-5. The Khmer empire (top) & modern Thailand (below)



12. CAMBODIA

Khmer empire

The Khmer dream of an empire was only realized in the reign of **Jayavarman VII** (r. 1181-1218), a fervent Mahayanist. In response to Angkor, he built nearby, on a smaller scale, a Buddhist temple mountain known as the **Bayon**. It is not certain why he converted to Buddhism. His inscriptions indicate that his father before him had converted to Buddhism, and that

Jayavarman himself was anxious to win the support of his subjects.

Perhaps the Khmer kings wished to distinguish themselves from their traditional Śaivite enemies, the Cham, who were finally subdued by Jayavarman VII. Perhaps he felt that **the identification of the king as a loving Bodhisattva** would be more appealing than one as an exalted but distant god.

One of Jayavarman VII's sons is believed to have been ordained into the Theravada order in Sri Lanka (Coedès 1975:178). **The first Theravada king of Angkor**, however, was **Indravarman III**, a usurper. After him, the royal Khmer inscriptions were in **Pali** rather than Sanskrit. During his reign, temple construction abruptly ceased. It is possible here that there was a general rebellion against the burden of costly and exhausting construction projects of the Hindu and Mahayana kings.

Another factor for the Khmer conversion to Theravada is probably that of the growing power of **the Siamese**, who were beginning to invade Angkor in the early 13th century, shortly after the reign of Jayavarman VII. Cambodia remained a powerful and prosperous Theravada kingdom for several centuries. Throughout the 16th century, however, the Siamese remained the enemies of the Khmer.

In the 17th century, **the Vietnamese** annexed Cambodia's south-eastern coast all the way down to the Mekong delta. By the mid-18th century, Vietnam occupied more of Cambodia, resulting in roughly the current border between the two countries.

Modern Kampuchea

In the northwest, **the Siamese** gradually controlled more and more of Cambodia's territory. The Siamese justified their incursions into Cambodia **to protect Theravada from the Mahayanist Vietnamese**. In a way, this was true because in the territories occupied by the Vietnamese, Theravada was totally wiped out. In 1842, a bloody rebellion, probably organized by the Theravada Sangha of Cambodia, finally drove out the Vietnamese.

The Cambodian king, in 1863-64, negotiated a treaty with **France**, which annexed Cambodia. As a result, Cambodia was finally free from invasion by Siam or Vietnam. The worst is yet to come, this time from within the country. Cambodia gained independence in 1953. In 1970, **Gen. Lon Nol** usurped power in a coup backed by the United States (during the infamous Vietnam War period).

In 1975, when the US finally withdrew from Vietnam, the communist **Khmer Rouge** under Gen. Pol Pot seized power in **Kampuchea** (her new name since 1979) and so began a terrible **genocide** that uprooted Khmer culture in its effort to return Kampuchea to **"year zero,"** free from all foreign influence so that the old glory of Angkor could be re-established.

Just as the Muslim hordes gave the deathblow to Buddhism in India, the Khmer Rouge exterminated the Buddhists and "intellectuals" (anyone who looked educated) in Kampuchea since **Pol Pot** did not tolerate any potential rival for the allegiance of the Khmer people. In 1981, **only some 600 monks** had survived the holocaust. Even today, Kampuchea is still recovering from the holocaust, working slowly to regain its economy and culture.

13. EARLY ROOTS

Early disciples

The emperor Aśoka is believed to have sent missionaries to **Suvaṇṇa, bhūmi**, "the land of gold" (which the Burmese claim is **Thaton**, Mon state, Lower Burma), around 250 BCE. However, according to Burmese tradition, its Buddhist history goes back right to the Buddha's time. The Burmese believe that the Buddha's first two lay disciples taking the Twofold (*dvevācika*) Refuges, **Tapussa and Bhallika**, were from Ukkāla, variously identified as Okkalapa near Yangon or modern Orissa (Utkala) on the east coast of India.

After offering alms to the Buddha, they requested from him an object of worship. The Buddha presented them with **eight hair relics**. On returning to Burma, it is said that they enshrined

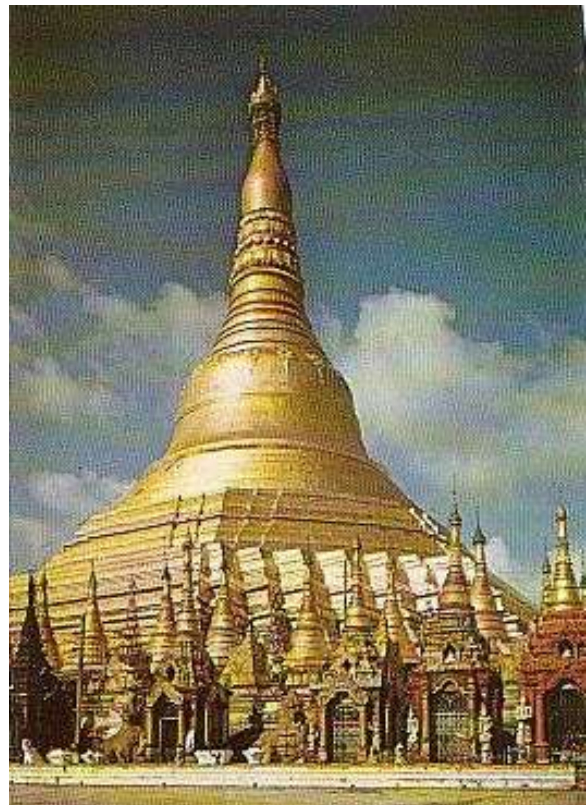


Fig 9. Shwe Dagon, Yangon

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these relics in a stupa (said to have been 8.2 m or 27 ft high) which is now the **Shwedagon Pagoda** (over 112.8m or 370 ft high) in Yangon.

According to the *Sāsana,vaṃsa* (“History of the Religion” introd. p. ix), the region of **Aparānta** or *Sunāparānta* (whose inhabitants were fierce and violent) mentioned in the **Puṇṇovāda Sutta** (M 3:68; S 4:61 f.; Tha 70; ThaA 1:156 ff.) was situated on the west shore of the Irrawady at the latitude of Magwe. The Burmese chronicles say that **Puṇṇa**, in the course of his mission in ancient Burma, invited the Buddha to visit Burma. The *Sāsana,vaṃsa* says that the Buddha stayed in Burma for 7 weeks.

Probably it was the **Mon** or Talaing people of the eastern delta region of Burma who first historically adopted Buddhism through Aśoka’s missions. However, the Buddhism of the Mon was mixed with belief in various spirits (*nat*). It was the Mon people who introduced **Pali** into Burma.

Beyond Burma

The pattern of Buddhist development in Burma is very similar to those in Siam and Cambodia. Beginning in the 13th century, the Siamese of **Sukhothai** (NW Thailand), the first independent Siamese state, adopted Burmese Theravada, and in the 14th century, helped pass it on to Laos and Cambodia.

In the early 14th century, Sinhalese Theravada was introduced into **Nakhon Si Thammarat** (on the east coast of the peninsula beside the Gulf of Thailand), one of Thailand’s oldest cities. (The kingdom was often called Ligor until the 13th century.) This forest tradition, which came to be known as the **Laṅkā,vaṃsa**, soon reached Sukhothai (1257-1350) where it became the state religion. (Payutto 1985:19 f.; Ishii 1986:60)

In due course, Theravada completely replaced the local Mahayana in Siam. Similarly, in **Cambodia** (Khmer), as a result of Siamese influence, Tantric Buddhism that had been there since the 11th century, was replaced by Theravada.

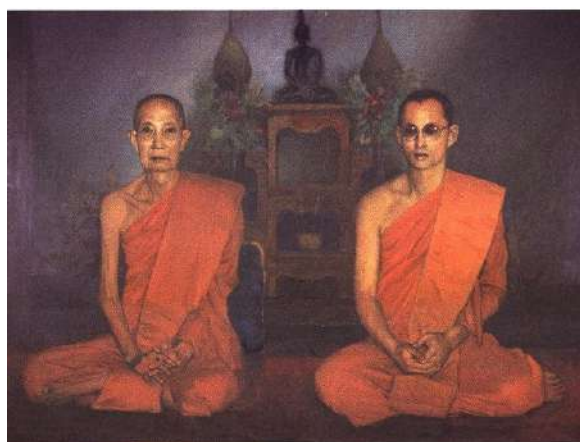


Fig 10. Buddhist kingship: Thailand.

14. KINGSHIP

Unlike the sinicized Buddhism of East Asia that for centuries remained only the religion of the elite, **the indianized Buddhism of south-east Asia** was a religion of the people as well as that of the ruling elite. As such, the Theravada of south-east Asia has been a stable and stabilizing influence in the region.

Just kingship

An important common characteristic of **Buddhist kingship** in south-east Asia—that is, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia—is that they adhered (and still adhere in the case of Thailand) to the notion of kingship as expounded in the early Buddhist texts. This is the notion of the “just monarch” (*dhammika,raja*) as exemplified by emperor Aśoka in the Buddhist chronicles.

Even though the king enjoyed an extremely exalted status at the centre of the *maṇḍala* or Buddhist universe, he ruled by a **social contract** between the ruler and the people (Sarkiyansz 1965:15, 107; Holt 1991:189 f). However, insofar as the Sangha was concerned, the king had the inferior status of a layman and, as such, he was required to accept the moral guidance of the monks, and frequently did. (Phra Rajavaramuni, in Sizemore & Swearer, 1990: 36-40; Piyasilo 1992a:93-98)

When a king was disposed to rule despotically and violently, **the monks would intervene to promote justice and save lives**. E. Sarkiyansz, on the basis of his intensive and authoritative study of mediaeval Buddhism in Burma, considers that

Burma's Buddhist monkhood went further in the protection of human life than did the historical Churches of Christendom who have hardly resisted and on the whole tacitly recognized the claims of temporal powers to inflict death. (Sarkiyansz 1965:76)

The Roman Catholic missionary, **Sangermano**, who was in Burma at the end of the 18th and the start of the 19th centuries, commented on the curious behaviour of the monks in saving even “the lives of criminals” (quoted by Ling, 1968: 311).

Siamese monarchy

The stability of **the Siamese monarchy** (like the present Chakri dynasty) has been achieved by a political process that goes back to the emperor Aśoka himself. The whole system is like a snake, or rather three snakes, each biting the other's tail in a circular fashion, or like a triangle of forces: the king patronizes the Sangha; the Sangha is respected by the people; hence, the king's position is legitimized by both Sangha and people. In reality, the situation is, of course, more complex. (Piyasilo 1992a: 96-98)

The people respect the Sangha as a religious institution and the monks as spiritual exemplars. Except for the Buddhist virtuosi (especially the forest monks), the religiosity and future of the Sangha is traditionally dependent on **state patronage**. **The Sangha meditates on its belly**. For this reason, it is often the case that when the monarchy falls in the midst of widespread chaos, the Sangha as a social institution usually disintegrates, too. In such a situation, the more scrupulous monks would probably disrobe, while others would resort to more worldly means of sustaining a living.

Sinhalese & east Asian kings

The great Buddhist kings of ancient Sri Lanka—such as Duṭṭhagāmaṇī, Vaṭṭagāmaṇī, Parākrama Bāhu and Kīrti Śrī Rājasiṃha (with perhaps the exception of Devānampiya Tissa, her first historical king) —are more comparable to **the emperors and rulers of east Asia** than to the Buddhist kings of South-east Asia, for the simple fact that they were all **absolute monarchs**, ruling over, at times even punishing, the Sangha itself.

Like the emperors and kings of east Asia, the Sinhalese monarchs promoted the Sangha only when it had a place in their political agenda. The installation of Saraṇāṅkara as the *saṅgha,rāja* of the Siyam Nikāya parallels the appointment of the East Asian **National Preceptor**—the Chinese *guoshi* and the Korean *kuksa*—by the lord of the realm. In all these cases, the appointment was an integral part of the court's bureaucracy. The case of Thailand, however, is unique. Although the **Saṅgharāja** is appointed by the king, the former is not a part of the royal court. Indeed, the king shows public deference to him and the Sangha.

On the other hand, the ancient Sinhalese monks' general conduct towards the ruler closely paralleled that of the powerful clerics of the Nara period in Japan. In both cases, they were wealthy **landholders** (or, “monastic landlords” to use Max Weber's term, 1958a:257): the Sinhalese monks with their *vihāra,gam* and the Nara clergy with their *shoen*. While the Sinhalese monks have retained their *vihāra,gam* to this day, the Buddhist clergy of Japan have lost most of their *shoen*.

There are two kinds of monastic succession in Sinhalese Buddhism: the consanguine succession and the pupillary succession. The **landed monks** of the Siyam Nikāya maintain the consanguine succession, usually by ordaining the abbot's nephew who would train to be the future abbot so that the *vihāra,gam* and temple wealth remain within the family (Gothóni 1986:13-29). This practice is

2. The spread of Buddhism



Fig 11. Royal reformers: Mongkut of Siam (above) & Mindon Min of Burma (right)



similar to that of the married clergy of Japan, especially of the Pure Land school, who maintain their own temples.

The Amarapura and the Rāmañña Nikāyas, on the other hand, maintain their abbacy and lineages through the **pupillary succession**. The south-east Asian monasteries have never adopted the consanguine succession system. The abbacy of a monastery is either appointed by the king or automatically falls upon the seniormost able resident monk, or in the absence of one, a suitable elder from elsewhere would be selected by the monastic community. [Piyasilo 1992a: 9-16]

15. ROYAL REFORMS

Mindon Min (r. 1853-1878)

King Mindon was forced to accept British annexation of a large part of Burma, but his reign was notable both for its reforms and as a period of cultural flowering before British colonial rule. During this golden age, in 1857, the capital was moved from Ava to newly-built **Mandalay**, with palaces and monasteries that are masterpieces of traditional Burmese architecture.

Mandalay was the venue of **the 5th Council** convened by Mindon in 1871 to recite and purify the Pali canon. The revised Pali canon was then engraved on 729 marble slabs and installed in the Kuthodaw Temple that he had built in Mandalay.

Mindon's reign compares favourably with that of king **Mongkut** of Siam. While Mongkut founded the reformed **Thammayuttika Nikāya**, the second branch of Siamese Buddhism alongside the ancient and larger Mahānikāya, Mindon introduced the reformed **Shwegon Nikāya** as an alternative to the larger and older Sudhamma Nikāya. Both reforms, however, were not in point of doctrine, but in terms of a more conservative approach to the Vinaya. Mindon was succeeded by **Thibaw** (r. 1878-85), the last king of Burma. The Siamese monarchy, however, has lasted to this very day.

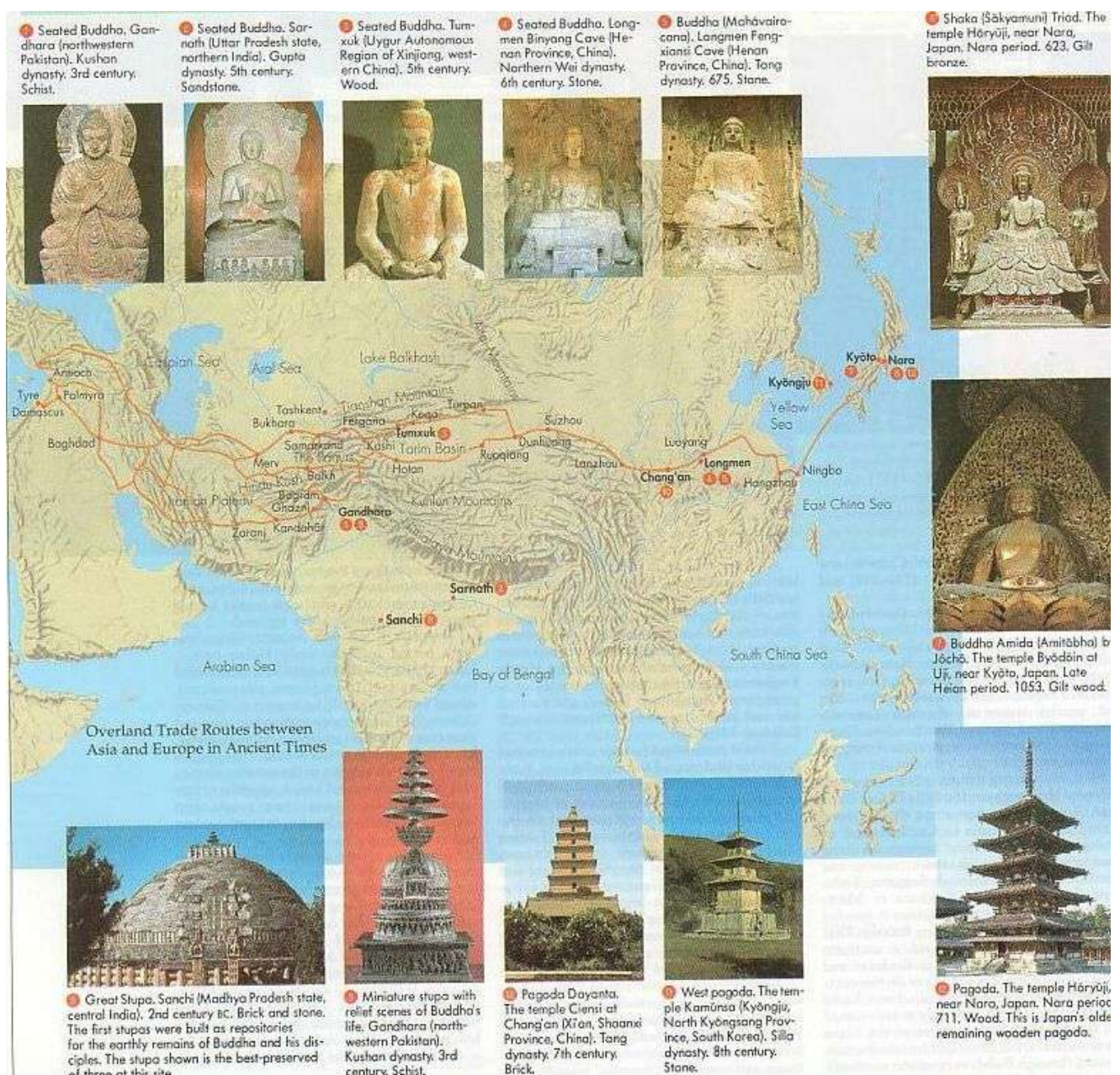
Mongkut (r. 1851-68)

King Mongkut (Rama IV) of Siam opened his country to western influence and initiated reforms and modern development. Although he was designated *chaofa mongkut* (crown prince), he entered monkhood in 1824 when his elder brother, Phra Nang Klao, seized the throne. During **the 27-year monkhood**, he freed himself from traditional isolation of the Siamese royal family by going on

pilgrimages in the country to see for himself the living conditions of the people and to preach to them in the Siamese vernacular rather than in Pali.

Religiously tolerant, Mongkut was **schooled by western missionaries**, particularly the **French** bishop Pallegoix, who taught him mathematics, astronomy and Latin, and by **Americans**, who taught him English. When he ascended the throne in 1851, Mongkut invited foreign teachers and advisers to help him begin the reorganization of the country's social, political and military institutions, carried forward successfully by his son and successor, **Chulalongkorn** (1853-1910). Through his patient diplomacy, rather than the xenophobia and isolationism of his neighbours, Mongkut managed to keep Siam as a buffer state between Burma (absorbed by the British) and Indochina (controlled by France).

King Mongkut standardized the procedures and standards of the **monastic examinations** (the 3-year *nak tham* and the 9-year Pali *parien* studies). He also saw through the completion of the revision of the 45-volume Siamese **Pali Canon** that had been in progress since the time of Rama I. The whole set was subsequently translated volume-for-volume into Thai.



2. The spread of Buddhism

As in contemporary Sri Lanka and Burma, Mongkut's Siamese reforms were **inspired by the annoyance at the Christian missionary triumphalism as much as by western rationalism**. All at the same time, as it were, the Theravada Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Burma and Siam recognized that their "heathen" religion, in its canonical roots, was more compatible to a **rational, scientific world-view** than was the Christianity of the missionaries (Reat 1994: 125). Mongkut's tolerance and admiration of western civilization made him the central character in the western parody entitled "Anna and the King," featured in at least two full-scale movies.

BUDDHISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

16. THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road was in the most part a linear network of oasis towns in Central Asia stretching from Eastern Iran to Dunhuang. It is a major missing piece in our knowledge of the evolution of Buddhist civilization. [Xinru Lu, 1988.]

Despite the welter of Central Asian languages and cultures, Buddhism in Central Asia appears to have been transmitted exclusively in **Indian languages** prior to the 6th century. The subsequent flourishing of Buddhist vernacular literature in the eastern parts of this region—but not in the west—may well have occurred under Chinese influence. From this, **Jan Nattier** argues, we can draw two conclusions:

- (1) That the "language policy" followed by Buddhist believers has been far from monolithic, but rather varied from place to place and from time to time, according to differing local cultural conditions.
- (2) That while China did indeed play a receptive role with respect to Buddhists from Central Asia during the early centuries of the 1st millennium, its role shifted to a far more active one after the beginning of the 6th century.⁵

Indeed, it might be fair to say that by the 8th century for at least some Central Asian believers—most notably the Sogdians and the Uighurs—the centre of gravity of the Buddhist world had shifted from India to **China**. This shift from the "middle country" (*mādhya,deśa*) of India to the "middle kingdom" of China would last until the advent of the Muslims.⁶

EAST ASIA

17. SYNCRETISM

Korean syncretism

When Buddhism arrived in Korea, the country was largely **tribal** (exemplified by tribal worship) with a deep belief in **shamanism**, a belief system centring on the occult, psychic transformation and healing powers believed to be possessed by a particular religious person called a **mudang** (shamaness) or **paksu** (shaman), who performed the **kut** or shamanistic seance.

Traditional Korean society had not yet developed the **concept of the whole**. The concept of the whole is a philosophical view that enables a systematic structure, e.g. social or religious, to be built. The early Koreans held to **a system of appendages**, as in parts of the body, that allowed for a **syncretism** that was rich and vital. Thus, shamanism has often intermingled with Buddhism in Korea and has withstood social changes, preserving many of its quaint customs of the folk culture. This gives Korean society and religion its second characteristic: the desire and tendency **to syncretize discordant parts into a harmonious whole**.

Buddhism helped the Koreans **to see existence as an interconnected whole**, for example, through its cosmology. Moreover, during much of Korea's early history, she was threatened by

⁵ "Church Language and Vernacular Language in Central Asian Buddhism", Numen 37,2 1990: 195-219.

⁶ For a general introduction to Buddhism in Central Asia (up to the 15th century), see Richard C. Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road*, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1999. The book is not always accurate, but it has good source references.

foreign invasions, especially from China. As such, the Koreans were motivated to seek some kind of national consensus, as it were, through a syncretic Buddhism, as exemplified by the **unitarian vision** of the monk **Wŏnhyo** (617-687) [22], whose personality and beliefs combined the ideas of Zen, Tantra, Huayan and Pure Land Buddhism.

Won Buddhism

During the Japanese occupation, various sectarian movements arose in Korea. After the Second World War, more than 170 new religious sects emerged. They were **syncretic** (accommodating various religious ideas and practices), messianic (looking for a saviour in the hope of establishing a spiritual kingdom here and now), and shamanistic.

One of the most prominent new Korean Buddhist sect was **Won** (more fully, Wonbulgyo) or “Round” Buddhism, founded in 1916 by Pak Chung-bin (1891-1943). It is a reformed, simplified school that combines Buddhism with a disparate variety of elements drawn from Confucianism, Daoism, Tonghak (anti-western, anti-Catholic movement), and even Christianity.

Japanese syncretism

During the Heian period (794-1185), a similar syncretism was found in Japan with the **Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō** (Mountain-king One Truth Shintō), also simply known as Ichi-jitsu Shintō or Tendai Shintō. **Sannō** is the name of the Shintō mountain god who resides on Mt. Hiei (HQ of the Tendai Buddhist school) and who is considered by members of the Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō to be a manifestation of **Sakyamuni** and also identical with the chief Shintō divinity, the sun goddess **Amaterasu**.

The name of the school further refers to the Tendai teaching that there is **only one absolute reality** (*ichi-jitsu*) behind the universe. This is interpreted to mean that the Shintō *kami* (gods or sacred powers) are historical manifestation in Japan of Buddhist divinities, all of whom are ultimately one reality.

18. PROTECTION OF THE COUNTRY

The sutra against the sword

Like the Japanese Buddhists of the **Kamakura period** (1185-1333), the Koreans of the **Koryŏ period** (935-1392), looked up to Buddhism as an apotropaic or magical means of warding foreign invasion, especially the Mongols from China. During the Koryŏ period, **the Koreans** suffered six Mongol invasions (between 1231 and 1258). In their desperation to ward off the Mongols, the Koreans piously printed at least two editions of the Mahayana canon, that came to be known as **the Koryŏ editions**, but they were destroyed by the Mongols.

During this same period, the Koreans produced a new print of the Mahayana canon which is today known as the **Tripitaka Koreana**, and which became the basis for the authoritative **Taishō Shinshu Daizōkyō** of Japan. The Japanese efforts, however, were made rather late by the scholars of the Taishō period (1912-1926), that is, academics who were inspired by western learning. [33]

Prayers for national safety

Buddhism was officially introduced into Japan from **Korea** in the middle of the 6th century. Between 550 and 600, various Korean kings sent **Buddha images and Buddhist texts** to the Japanese imperial court. Some Korean monks were already resident in Japan. Following the traditional chronicles of Japan, the formal date would be **552 or 538**. However, it is likely that Buddhist influence and presence might have been earlier.

The early Japanese (whose society was still in a **formative stage**), in their ignorance of Buddhism, had the idea that worshipping the Buddha, **a foreign “deity,”** would bring good luck to the nation and at first judged the new religion on an entirely short-term pragmatic consequences. When a plague broke out, the Buddha images were dumped into the moat, and the first temple burnt down. When another plague occurred later, images were again thrown into the moat and nuns were defrock-

2. The spread of Buddhism

ed. When the plague continued, the fearful emperor then permitted the Buddhist cult to be practised freely.

Sutra of the Golden Light

The devout prince **Shotoku** (573-621), was considered the real founder and first great patron of Buddhism in Japan. It was during his time that **Japan first became a centralized nation**. Shotoku based his nation-building specifically on the **Konkomyo-kyo** or Suvarṇa,prabhāsōttama Sūtra.⁷ Familiar with this sutra, Prince Shotoku built the **Shitennō-ji** (Temple of the Four Guardian Kings) in 593 CE.

Chapter 6 of the sutra is called **“The Four Great Kings”** or “The Four Heavenly Kings,” featuring the guardian deities of the four cardinal points. In Japan, they go by various names, some of which are merely translations of their functions, others are translations of their Sanskrit names. Collectively, they are known **Shitennō**, “the Four Heavenly Kings”:

East	Dhṛtarāṣṭra	Jikoku-ten, “protector of the land; Hoppoten, “god of the north.”
South	Virūḍhaka	Zōchō-ten, “one who gains power.”
West	Virūpākṣa	Kōmoku-ten, “wide-eyes.”
North	Vaiśravaṇa or Kuvera	Tamon-ten, Bishamon-ten, “much-hearing.”



Fig 12. Todai-ji, Nara, Japan.

The Konkomyo-kyo says that the Shitennō pay honour to the Buddha and promise that they will, first of all, **protect any monk who recites this sutra**. Furthermore, they will **protect the king who protects such a monk**. A human king who acts in this manner is assured that whenever a foreign power moves against him the Four Heavenly Kings will fight with their heavenly armies to keep out the invaders. Conversely, any country, having heard of this sutra, neglects to honour through reciting it, would be deserted by the Heavenly Kings and be left open to invasion.

For the blessing of the country, Shotoku built no less than 40 Buddhist temples throughout the kingdom. Later, during the Heian period (710-784), when **Nara** became the first permanent capital Japan, emperor **Shomu** (701-756), in 741, went on to establish **two state temples (kokubun-ji)** in every province (a monastery and a convent). They were supported by the state as long as the residents make the recitation of the Konkomyo-kyo as a major part of their daily routine to bring divine protection and blessing upon the whole country.

A network of Buddhist temples grew up in the provinces with the **Todai-ji** (710-784) at Nara as the central cathedral. Its principal image (*honzon*) is the 16 m (53 ft) tall gilt-bronze image of Birushana (Vairocana) (752), called the Nara Daibutsu (Great Buddha of Nara).

⁷ Suvarṇa,prabhāsōttama Sūtra, Eng. tr. R.E. Emmerick, *The Sutra of Golden Light*, London: Luzac, 1970.

By the Meiji period (1868-1911), this principle had become enshrined in the slogan *goho-gokoku*, “When Buddhism is protected, the country is protected.” When Japan lost the Second World War in 1945, the Soka Gakkai, echoing Nichiren, claimed that it was because the Shitenno desecrated Japan when the Lotus Sutra was neglected. (Corless 58 f.)

19. PERSECUTION OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism in East Asia—China, Korea and Japan—at one time or another enjoyed the status of being the **state religion**, which brought the Buddhist clergy great wealth and power. The monks, **because of their education and diplomacy**, often served as royal advisors and envoys to other royal courts, and were often involved in political intrigues.

Above all, the fate of the Buddhist clergy and Buddhism was, as such, tied to that of their patrons. When a new dynasty replaced the one that patronized Buddhism, the new ruler would often adopt a new religion, usually Confucianism. During the Tang dynasty (618-907) in China and the Yi dynasty (1392-1910) in Korea, **the Confucian advisors** pressured the rulers to persecute the Buddhists.

The position of National Preceptor was abolished. Monastery land and property were confiscated and monastic serfs drafted into the army. The Yi persecution of Buddhism was very severe. Not only were the monks deprived of their wealth and power, but were banned from entering the large cities of Korea. In due course, all ordination was banned and monasteries destroyed during the period.

Japanese occupation

The fall of the Yi dynasty was followed by the Japanese occupation of Korea (1910-1915). In their effort to implement their colonial policy, the Japanese issued a decree that **all Korean monks should marry**. After independence in 1945, Korean Buddhism was badly split into two irreconcilable sects. The **T’aego-chong**, a liberal sect of married monks, had flourished under Japanese patronage and was based principally in the cities where it ministered to the lay Buddhists.

The **Chogyo-chong** was a smaller, religiously conservative order of monastics who managed to maintain their celibacy during the long years of Japanese occupation. The main concern of the Chogyo-chong was to restore the contemplative, scholastic and disciplinary orientations of traditional Korean Buddhism. After some years of intense conflict, the Chogyo-chong in 1954 finally won government support for its position. While litigation continued between the two sects, all of the major monasteries have reverted to its control.

20. POLITICAL BUDDHISM

Power, worldly and other-worldly

Politics and religion are generically similar—former is **worldly power**, the latter **other-worldly power**—and mixing them invariably leads to explosive consequences, exemplified by the mediaeval Catholic church that crowned kings, ruled kingdoms and sent Crusades to exterminate the “infidels.”

While Islam apparently presents an interesting case of **the identity of religion and politics**, it only works well in the hands of a righteous ruler with the support of an enlightened elite (such as the Mu’tazilites). However, as the recent terrorist violence (especially the 11 September 2001 devastation of the World Trade Center in New York) have shown, this potent mixture, when in the wrong hands can have extremely grave consequences for both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Legitimation of power

Similar examples can be found in Buddhism where religion and politics mix, such as in the case of the **Nara clergy** (8th century) and **Sri Lanka today**. At one time or another, Buddhism in Asia has been used by the rulers and politicians to **legitimize their power** and even start wars. The Siamese invasion of Cambodia under the pretext of defending Theravada Buddhism from attack by the Mahayanist Vietnamese in the mid-18th century in a case in point [10].

2. The spread of Buddhism

Defending the country

On the other hand, it is understandable that a country has to defend itself against external dangers and prevent internal strife. If a Buddhist country (or a secular state where there are significant number of Buddhists) were attacked and conquered by non-Buddhists, the Dharma might be exterminated (as in the case of India in the 13th century). If the Dharma were lost, so would be the opportunity for liberation of sentient beings, or at least that liberation would be long delayed.

As such, Buddhists would rather opt for **committing a lesser evil of defeating the enemy** rather than standing by to watch the Dharma being wiped out. In preserving Buddhist humans or good people, the Dharma is preserved and also the opportunity for the liberation of sentient beings. This is **the rationale for lay Buddhists serving in the defence of the country**.

21. VIETNAM

Religion of the oppressed

Buddhism is used by not only rulers to legitimize their **power, position and plans**. Colonized or oppressed people have also used it when they rose in revolt, as were the case in Burma (Sarkiyansz, 1965), Sri Lanka (Goonetilleke, 1978), and Vietnam (Thich Nhat Hanh, 1967).



Fig 13. Self-immolation of a monk, Vietnam.

Vietnam received Theravada Buddhism around the 1st century CE and Chinese Mahayana, in various forms, between the 6th and the 17th centuries. Theravada monasticism formed the foundation on which were built both forms of Mahayana, lay and monastic. Vietnamese Mahayana is mainly a combination of Zen (Vietnamese *Thi'ên*) and Pure Land, especially in the distinctive Vietnamese lineage of 11th-century Thao-duong.

In 1963, all lineages merged to form **the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam** (*Viet-Nam Phat-Giao Thong-Nhat Giao-Hoi*). Vietnamese Buddhism has been a strong ally in revolts against foreign dominations and persecutions, first by China, then the Roman Catholic regime of the **Ngo Dinh Diem**, and more recently by the US.

The Buddhist community in Vietnam were not politically activated until it was mistreated by the excessively partisan Roman Catholic and anti-Buddhist Ngo Dinh family. In 1963, the government forbade the flying of the Buddhist flag on Vesak Day (8 May), though the Roman Catholics were allowed to fly their flag. The riot that erupted because of this order was put down by well-armed government troops. Understandably, the coup against the Ngo Dinh Diem regime on 1st November, 1963, was actively supported by militant Buddhists.

Usually claiming to be politically neutral, the Buddhist call for peace was treated by the Saigon government as weakness in the face of Communism. During the Ngo Dinh Diem regime, over 30 monks and nuns **peacefully self-immolated** in South Vietnam in protest against the ruin of their country, including the imprisonment and killing of hundreds of Buddhists (suspected to be communists). Such events finally persuaded the US to withdraw its support. Diem was assassinated by his own generals during a *coup d'état*.⁸

CULTURE & CULTS

22. BUDDHIST UTOPIA

Countries with a significant population of Buddhists such as China, Korea, Japan and Tibet all have been invaded at various times by foreign powers. The Buddhist communities in these countries have also suffered persecution from the ruling powers usually at the instigation of rival religions. To compound the problem, at time one or another, Buddhism is troubled by internal politics and dissension. Under such circumstances, it is understandable that such Buddhists would long for a world free from such sufferings, persecutions and insecurities. The idea of a **utopia** is common to all such societies.

Sukhāvātī

One of the most remarkable new developments in Buddhism was the conception of **the Buddha-field (*buddha,kṣetra*)** that came to be called *chingtu* or “pure land” in China. This conception probably arose in India around the 1st century with the rise of the Mahāyāna in response to Iranian religions, especially Manichaeism (that regarded light as the embodiment of good).

The most popular of these Pure Lands or Paradises (found in all directions of the universe) is that of **Amitābha**, the Buddha of the West. The Western Paradise, properly called **Sukhāvātī** or Happy Realm, is especially popular in China and Japan partly because of their geographical location. The west is not only the direction of the setting sun (signifying death) but also the direction of the Buddhist holy land (as exemplified in the Chinese classic, “Journey West” by Wu Ch’eng-en).

Western Paradise is the Buddhist utopia in the sense that it is totally free of suffering and attended by wholesome beauty of the senses (beautiful music, precious stones, purifying water, level land). At the centre of this utopia sits Amitābha Buddha, teaching the Dharma, surrounded by a host of bodhisattvas and saints. The faithful devotee needs only to piously recite Amitabha’s name and upon dying would be reborn in this wonderful paradise, which is really **a worldly hypostatis of Nirvana**.

Hwarangdo

Not all Buddhists envision utopia as out of this world. Indeed, there were movements in Korea and Japan that regarded their respective countries as a Buddha Land, or the centre of a Buddha Land that they hope to build. In Korea, this vision was expressed through the **Hwarangdo** (Order of the Flower Boys) and in Japan it was an idea that supported the political ambitions of **the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere** of the 1930s and 1940s with Japan as its centre.

One of the most prominent institutions of Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms (c. 57-668 CE) was the **Hwarangdo**, the Order of Flower Boys. According to the *Samguk sagi*, this chivalric order was instituted by king Chinhŭng of Silla. It comprised younger male members of the nobility, who were drilled in ethical virtues and refined culture, centring around mystical experience of the native cult of

⁸ On the Buddhist attitude towards war and peace, see Harvey 2000: ch 6. On a Theravada viewpoint of self-cremation, see Rahula, 1978: ch 11.

2. The spread of Buddhism

shamanesses, military skills, and comradeship, and fused with **the messianic faith in the Bodhi-sattva Maitreya**, the coming Buddha.

This fusion of chilvaric code and messianic faith generated an unexpected zeal to **transform Korea into a Buddha land of the world** and established the impetus for unification of Korea under Silla. As such, the formation of the Hwarangdo is considered to have been part of the expansionist policies of the Silla court. A later Silla writer related that the Hwarang boys were trained in Confucian filial piety and patriotism, Daoist quietism, and Buddhist morality. As such, it is not a paramilitary organization, as is popularly misunderstood.

Dancing in the streets

Pure Land Buddhism is popular because it only demands faith in **the saving grace of Amida**. There was another reason for its popularity: the efforts of evangelists like **Kūya**. He was the best example of the prototype of the **hijiri**, charismatic itinerant “holy men.”

Kūya (903-973), also known as Kōya, is best known for his popularization of Pure Land Buddhism, dancing in the streets, singing simple Japanese hymns about Amida. He organized **self-help projects** for the common people, and even spread the Amidist gospel among the indigenous Ainu in the remote north.

Following a period of evangelization in the far northwestern provinces of Mutsu (now Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori prefectures) and Dewa (now Akita and Yamagata prefectures), he returned to Kyōto in 938 and took up the role of **a mendicant monk**, distributing the alms he received among the poor and the sick. He came to be known as **Ichī no Shōnin** (Saint of the Marketplace) or Ichī no Hijiri (Holy Man of the Marketplace).

Korean Buddhism produced a similarly remarkable free-spirited evangelist. **Wŏnhyo** (617-687) [17], a married monk” who founded the **Pŏpsŏng** (*dharma*tā) school, which taught an syncretic, even ecumenical, form of Buddhism that included all schools and branches. He used music, literature and dance to express the meaning of Buddhism. He attempted to remove the barrier between the sacred and the secular, asserting that all beings had inherent and eventual Buddhahood: their difference, he proclaimed, was a matter of degree in development.

Dharma-ending age⁹

Pure Land Buddhism became very popular during the middle of the Heian times (794-1185). The reason for this was the Mahayana idea of **mappō or Dharma-ending age**, the concept that the Dharma would go through three stages after the Final Nirvana of the Buddha: 500 years of prosperity, 1000 years of decline, and finally its disappearance in the Dharma-ending age.¹⁰

During the Kamakura period (1185-1333), it was believed that three calamities and seven disasters would plague the people one after the other. The three calamities were of two categories—the lesser and the greater. **The lesser calamities** were inflation (especially because of shortage of food), war and pestilence. **The greater calamities** were fires, floods and storms, one of which would cause the destruction of the universe at the end of the world-period.

Kūya An early-13th-century statue of this Buddhist monk invoking the name of the Buddha Amida (represented by the small figures issuing from his mouth). Rokuharomitsuji, Kyōto.



Fig 14. Kūya, charismatic Buddhist evangelist.

⁹ On an important remark regarding the Dharma-ending age, see Miln 130 f.; Peter Masfield, 1986:163 f.

¹⁰ See for example, Jan Nattier, *Once Upon a Future Time*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991.

During the years 1253-60, east Japan was struck by **a series of natural disasters**. From 1256 onwards, torrential rains and floods hit Kamakura. There were some major earthquakes, the worst being that of 1257. In the provinces there were heavy rains accompanied by typhoons and epidemics. The bad weather caused widespread crop destruction that led to famines. Growing gangs of brigands roamed the land and pirates infested the high seas.

Once *mappō* began, widely believed in Japan to have been in 1052, it would be extremely difficult to attain enlightenment or spiritual liberation through self-effort, as traditional Buddhist schools taught. The only hope was **faith in the saving grace of Amida**. Thus, the court nobles and ladies chanted the *nembutsu* with fervour and built Amida halls within their residences to show their faith.

“Shambhala” of the Tibetans

The most positive conception of a utopia probably came from the Tibetan mind. The Tibetan myth of **Shambhala** comes from the *Kālacakra Tantra* (the Wheel of Time system) that gives them the resources **to understand the historical tragedy they are suffering**. Shambhala is a magical country somewhere in the polar regions, shielded from the world by a force-field of invisibility. [“Shangri-la,” probably a corruption of Shambhala, is a fictional name invented in *The Lost Horizon*, a 1933 novel, made into a movie by Frank Capra in 1937.]

The agents of Shambhala are invisible, working for the welfare of humanity, reincarnating where needed, but the nation as a whole remains hidden until the barbaric impulse for war and destruction had abated and the whole world becomes one global community. After this, true decentralization becomes possible within a global moral and legal framework, and **a new golden age** begins. The Tibetans expect all this to happen after about three more centuries.

Such a prophecy helps the Tibetans understand the holocaust precipitated by the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet beginning in 1959 **as part of the agonizing process of the unification of the world**. Like all thinking Buddhists, they hold that the inner workings of the individual’s heart is capable of preventing mutual and global destruction by manifesting enlightened principles in life.

They regard **technology** as being basically useful, but only as good as the wisdom and compassion of those who wield it. Most importantly, they see this planet as having a positive destiny, not as a mere stepping-stone for a heavenly ascent, nor as a mere accident in a galactic chemical ocean.

They see this world as an emerging Buddha Land, a land of enlightenment and compassion, in which it is crucial that those who can see through the sometimes horrific surface appearances work to help others see that it is only fear and hatred that cause sufferings, and not some fundamental inadequacy of life and its environment. And they readily acknowledge that ultimately some higher power must intervene, when people’s hearts and minds are ready. Their optimism is amazing, and they are rarely discouraged in their small individual efforts, however hopelessly insufficient they may appear to be.

(R.F. Thurman, *Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism*, n.d.: 32)

23. CULTS

Nichiren (1222-1282)

As a result of the fears of the Dharma-ending age, palpably suggested by the various national disasters hitting Japan [22], the people desperately invested their faith in Amidism. The Buddhist prophet **Nichiren** (1222-1282), however, viewed all these calamities as the result of the people giving themselves up to “false” teachings, especially caused by the rising popularity of Honen’s *nembutsu* movement. Nichiren prophesied that the wellbeing of the nation would only be assured if the Pure Land sect was banned, and the true belief in the Lotus Sutra promoted.

Nichiren is unique in the history of Buddhism in that he was **totally uncompromising in his vision of the Buddhist utopia**. Nichiren’s ideas drew the most enthusiasm from the warrior class. Although a failure in his own lifetime, his sect continued to grow during the violent years of the latter half of the 15th century and most of the 16th, up to the Tokugawa period. In modern times, the Nichiren

2. The spread of Buddhism

sect finds its most radical expression in the **Nichiren-shōshū** and the lay organization, **Sōka Gakkai**, which in Singapore is known as Singapore Sōka Association. [Piyasilo 1988d: 137]

Komeitō

The **Komeitō** or Clean Government Party is a Japanese political party formed by the Sōka Gakkai. Its rapid growth in the 1960s alarmed traditional parties of both right and left. After the 1962 elections of the 250-seat upper house of the Japanese Diet, **Sōka Gakkai** held 15 seats and replaced the Democratic Socialists as Japan's third party.

The Komeitō was founded in **1964**, and in July 1965 its representation in the upper house increased to 20. In the elections of January 1967, 25 Komeitō candidates won seats in the 486-seat lower house. Their representation grew to 47 seats in 1969, and by 1979 Komeitō members held 57 seats in the lower house.

In late 1970, members of the Sōka Gakkai and Komeitō became concerned at charges that they hoped to introduce a fascist regime in Japan and to impose Nichiren-shōshū as the state religion. As a result, the party **renounced any formal ties to the Sōka Gakkai**, although a relationship remains.

Singapore Soka Association

In recent times, mainly through the efforts of its president, Daisaku Ikeda, the Soka Gakkai has matured into a more open organization in its growing involvement in social projects and greater dialogue with other Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. This new development was regarded by the Nichiren monks (Nichiren Shōshū) as **a betrayal of Nichiren's original struggle and ideas**. The situation reached a point when in the early 1990s the Nichiren Shōshū **actually excommunicated the Sōka Gakkai**, which as such became an independent organization.

With the impending presence of the **Nichiren Shōshū** in Singapore, **the Singapore Soka Association** has stepped up its attempt at dialogue with mainstream Buddhists. The main stumbling-block to this dialogue however remains the same: the Soka Nichirenists are still **unwilling to allow their members to be open to the ideas and activities of mainstream Buddhists**; they only welcome outsiders to participate in their own public activities.

Friends of the Western Buddhist Order

This exclusivist policy of the Soka Nichirenists is not unique in Buddhist history as it is also the policy of **the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order** (FWBO), founded by Sangharakshita in 1967. Although generally rejected by mainstream Buddhists (who often bear the brunt of FWBO criticism), the FWBO is often accepted by more open-minded Buddhists. However, the FWBO (certainly in its formative days in the 1970s and 1980s) has a tacit ban on “outside” teachers giving teachings to the FWBO.

Like the Jōdo Shin founder, **Shinran** (1173-1263), the first Buddhist priest to publicly marry and declare himself to be **hisohizoku** (“neither monk or layman”), Sangharakshita (who has remained single, living in a men's community since founding his Order) regards himself and his Order Members as “neither lay nor ordained.”

Was the Buddha a bhikkhu?

In 1993, Sangharakshita, wrote *Forty-Three Years Ago: Reflections on my Bhikkhu Ordination on the Occasion of the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Western Buddhist Order*, in which he basically (consciously or unconsciously) tries to resolve his non-celibate lifestyle with his monkhood by attempting to make **a distinction between a “Vinaya-style” monasticism and a “Sūtra-style” monasticism** (1995: 12). By the latter, he means “a full time spiritual life defined by commitment and practice rather than technical status, and to recognize, even, that a ‘bad’ monk might be the better Buddhist than a good one”! (1995: 10).

Only **Ajahn Brahmavamso** (from the Thai forest tradition) [39] responded to this challenge by proving, on the basis of his knowledge of and training in the Vinaya, that Sangharakshita actually had received a valid ordination, albeit for a short period of time. As noted by Brahmavamso, it was clear that Sangharakshita had “the misunderstandings of an outsider, one with little experience of the rich

and beneficial lifestyles of both the bhikkhu and the layperson in the traditional Theravada countries.”¹¹

In 1995, Sangharakshita replied Brahmavamso in a small book entitled *Was the Buddha a Bhikkhu?*, an aggressive attack on the Theravada establishment, in particular on Ajahn Brahmavamso. In this second book, Sangharakshita attempts to establish that **the Buddha himself did not receive an ordination** and was therefore of the same non-ordained status as himself!¹² The Buddha, however, led a **totally celibate** life but Sangharakshita did not; above all, the Buddha was **the first and only fully enlightened one** in this part of our history.

The Buddha was a bhikkhu

The Buddha was clearly a *bhikkhu*, in more ways than one, that is, by recognition from others (Bimbisāra, Sn 405-424; Sela Sn 551 = Tha 821) and by his own enlightenment (Sn 87 f., 513 f.). When king Milinda asked the question “Was the Buddha ordained?” Nāgasena answered:

Great king, when the Buddha attained omniscience at the foot of the Bodhi tree, that was for him his ordination. There was no conferring of ordination upon him by others by the way that he has laid down for his disciples. (Miln 76)

The Paṭisambhidā, magga and the Niddesa, however, speak of three kinds of *bhikkhu*: the good ordinary person or good worldling (*kalyāṇaputhujjana*), the learner (*sekha*) and the Arhat (Pm 1:176; Nm 465 = Nc 477b). A “good or noble ordinary person” (*kalyāṇa, puthujjana*) is an ordinary person, **“layman or monk** who is still possessed of all the 10 fetters (*samyojana*)¹³ binding [him] to the round of rebirths, and therefore has not yet reached any of the four stages of holiness” but who has “knowledge conforming to the Truths” (*saccānulomika ñāṇa*)¹⁴ “and earnestly strives to understand and practise the Teaching.”¹⁵

Sangharakshita might have a case for becoming a “Sutra-type bhikkhu” or a “lay monk” or “one neither lay nor ordained”—the first to do so, to boot—on the strength of the Paṭisambhidā and Niddesa passages (that he failed to mention). On the other hand, to simply put it, Sangharakshita’s ordination would not have been problematic if he had (upon realizing its technical “invalidity”) officially renounced it and had continued his Buddhist work as a virtuous lay follower. It might here be argued why there is a need for undoing something that was undone in the first place. Then again, perhaps he was hoping to have the benefit of both worlds, to have his cake and eat it.

Apotheosis

Nichiren, towards the latter part of his life, in 1271, when exiled to Sado island, came to regard himself as **the embodiment of the Jogyo Bosatsu** (Viśiṣṭa, cāritra Bodhisattva), who is mentioned in the chapter 15 [ch. 14 of Sanskrit ed.] of the Lotus Sutra as the leader of a vast army of Bodhisattvas who emerge from below the earth, signifying for Nichiren, the release of the lowly from injustice. By this incarnation, Nichirenists believe that Nichiren contains the “life-force of the true Buddha...proving himself to be the original Buddha of Supreme Wisdom” (Piyasilo 1988d: 93f.)

¹¹ Review in the journal of the Buddhist Publications Society, 1993.

¹² *Golden Drum* Oct 1987 No. 6: 12; *Shabda* October 1988:91; Harvey 2000: 429.

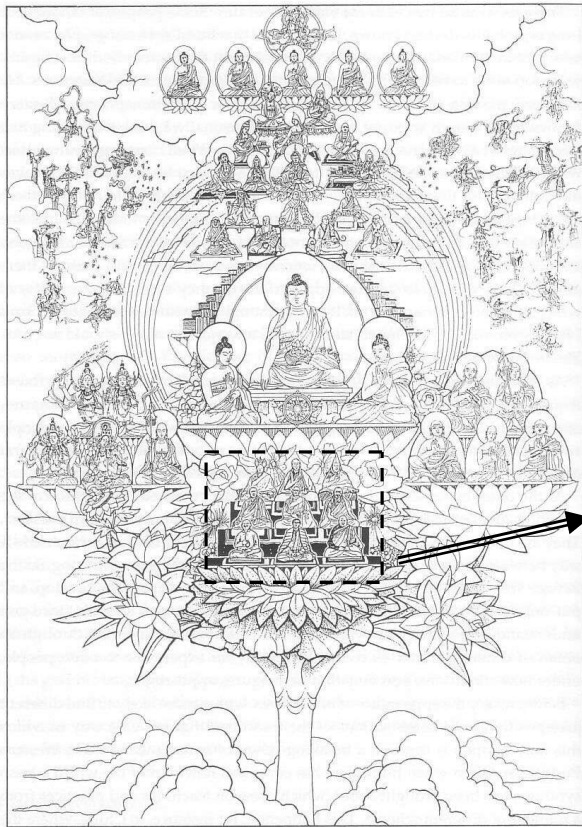
¹³ **Ten fetters**: self-view, doubt, adherence to rites and rituals, sensual lust, repulsion, attachment to form-existence, attachment to formless-existence, conceit, restlessness, ignorance (S 5:61, A 5:13, Vbh 377). On **saccānulomika ñāṇa**, see *Buddhist Dictionary*, under “Visuddhi (9).”

¹⁴ Also called “adaptation-knowledge” or “conformity knowledge” (*anuloma, ñāṇa*), the last of the 9 insight-knowledges (*vipassanā, ñāṇa*), that constitute the “purification of knowledge and wisdom of the path-progress.” Cf Vism ch 21.

¹⁵ *Buddhist Dictionary*: “puthujjana”; see DhsA:PR 451 & Commentaries to D no 1, M no 1. The PED is in error in saying that the “good worldling” in defining it only as “a layman of good character” and only mentioning two types of *bhikkhu*, omitting the Arhat (see “bhikkhu,” PED 504).

2. The spread of Buddhism

In another radical move, Sangharakshita recently wrote **his own *sādhana***¹⁶ based on a Refuge Tree with Sakyamuni at the centre and Sangharakshita himself sitting prominently right up front, surrounded by Bodhisattvas, lineage gurus and divine beings (Vessantara 1998:320 f). He has also prefixed his Sanskrit name with the toponym, *Urgyen*, the birthplace of Padmasambhava, with whom he apparently identifies himself, perhaps even of whom he regards himself as an incarnation. Sangharakshita, in his sunset years, is now ***Urgyen Sangharakshita***. [Traditionally, such a toponym identifies the bearer's birthplace place (commonly prefixed before a Sinhalese monk's name) so as to distinguish between persons bearing the same given name.]



A SHAKYAMUNI REFUGE TREE (FROM A SĀDHANA WRITTEN BY SANGHARAKSHITA)



Fig 15. Sangharakshita “canonizes” himself in his *soi-disant* *sādhana*.

The Buddha's teaching against cults

In the **Lohicca Sutta** (D no. 12), the Buddha makes an important remark against cults. The Buddha lists three kinds of monastic or “left-home” teachers who are **blameworthy**:

- (1) one who has gone forth, but has not gained the goal of asceticism (sainthood); but his pupils neither listen to nor practise what he teaches;
- (2) **one who has gone forth, but has not gained the goal of asceticism; but his pupils listen to and practise what he teaches, “they rouse the thought of enlightenment, and the teacher’s instructions are not flouted”;**
- (3) one who has gone forth, and who has gained the goal of asceticism; but his pupils neither listen to nor practices what he teaches. (D 1:233)

¹⁶ Basically, a visualization exercise for guru pūjā. “A *sādhana* is a key form of tantric meditation through which a practitioner aims to achieve union or identity with a particular divine being through a process of visualization and subsequent dissolution of subject and object into emptiness.” (*A Dictionary of Buddhism*)

The second teacher concerns us here, as he is the equivalent of what today is a **cult leader**. The Buddha declares that it is as if such a teacher, “leaving his own field, were to think that another’s field needs weeding” (D 1:233).

An important implication of this passage is that a renunciant (monk or nun) should not teach Dharma unless he has attained Stream-winning, or at least follows a morally virtuous life and practises what he preaches. Interestingly, the Lohicca Sutta is silent with regards to **the laity teaching the Dharma**.¹⁷

BUDDHISM BEYOND ASIA

24. THE WEST: EARLY BUDDHIST CONTACTS

When Buddhism spread westward in modern times, it first reached Europe before going to the Americas. European contacts with Buddhism went back to ancient times and later on as an important result of **European colonialism** in the East. However, there were important historical factors in Europe itself that favoured the planting of Buddhism.

Hellenistic expansion

Long before Alexander, there was mutual influence, for indirect contact between Greece and India by the trade routes. In the form in which they are known the Greek fables, for example, are older, but “this may be an accident of transmission” (Angus Stewart Fletcher, *Ency Brit* 15th ed. 1983 7:138f). The fable was apparently **first used in India as a vehicle of Buddhist instruction**. Some of the Jātakas or birth stories of the Buddha, which relate some of his experiences in previous incarnations mostly as animals, resemble Greek fables and are used to point to a moral.

The Indian expedition of **Alexander the Great** (327-325 BCE) opened up the “land of the philosophers” to the West, which competed with ancient Egypt as a source of Gnosis, spiritual wisdom. Contact continued along the trade routes, along which the **aretologies** (miraculous stories of gods and heroes) of both worlds traveled and mingled. Some of these myths can be found in the Bodhisattva legends. There are also scattered references to *Boutta* in the ancient Greek texts.

Christian crusades

Jerusalem, sacred to all the Abrahamic religions, was captured by the Arabs in 637, and fell to the Seljuk Turks in 1071, stopping Christian pilgrimages there and threatening Christendom itself. This led to the eight **Crusades** (1096-1270). At the same time, there was a legend of **Prester John**, believed to be a priest-king ruling in over a Christian



Barma was conquered by the British in three wars, the last ending in 1885. This engraving, based on a sketch made on the spot, shows troops advancing on a fortified village, the unmistakable Buddhist stupas rising in the background.

Fig 16. Early contact with Christian power: the British conquer Burma

¹⁷ On lay Dharma teachers, see “Laymen Saints,” Sutta Discovery 8.6.

2. The spread of Buddhism

state in India. It is likely that this legend was based on certain Biblical and Patristic passages, and the observed similarity of Tibetan and Catholic religions.

All this motivated Europeans to go the East where they encountered eastern religions. We have factual accounts like *The Journey of William of Rubruck* (1220-1293), who visited **Kublai Khan** in China, as did Marco Polo (1271-1295). Kublai was a powerful patron of Buddhism and one of his court advisors was the Tibetan Sakyapa abbot, **Phags-pa** (1235-80) (Almond 1986:91-101).

Islamic (especially Persian) literature contain many tales with Indian themes. Most, if not all, of the stories of the *Kitāb Kalīlah wa Dimna*, a work translated by the Persian Ibn al-Muqaffa' (d. 760), for example, can be traced to the Indian *Panca,tantra* (the “Five Chapters,” known as “Tales of Bidpai” in Europe) and other Indian sources. Through their Crusades, western Christians encountered such oriental stories through the Muslims.¹⁸

The legend of **Saints Barlaam and Josaphat**, commemorated on 27 November (that is, until the recent “revision” of the Catholic hagiography) by the Catholic church, is derived from the Buddha story. “Josaphat” is the corruption of “Bodhisattva.”

Exploration and missions

On 22 November 1497, the Portuguese navigator **Vasco da Gama** (c. 1460-1524) rounded the Cape of Good Hope (the southern tip of Africa) and successfully reached India, and so opened the sea-route to the Far East in the European quest for “gospel, glory and gold.” Discovering the East to be “heathen,” the Catholic Church, through their various monastic orders, tried to convert it.

Various **Catholic missionaries** sailed east: Francis Xavier (1506-1552) to India, Malacca, China and Japan; Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) to China, and Ippolito Desideri (1684-1733) to Tibet. For various reasons, mostly through infighting and the human weaknesses of their own church leaders, they had very limited success.

Nevertheless, there were some **mutual influences**, for example, Japanese aristocrats influenced Portuguese dress and the Chinese calendar was revised under Jesuit influence, while the West gained grammars and dictionaries of Eastern languages and **Latin versions of Buddhist texts**.

25. FACTORS FAVOURING BUDDHISM IN THE WEST

European enlightenment

Beginning in the 17th century and climaxing in the 18th century, **the European Enlightenment** looked up more to **reason and science** rather than the Bible for explanations of life and the universe. Many people, such as the Scottish philosopher and historian **David Hume** (1171-76) saw that there was a “natural religion” held in common by people of all cultures, albeit best expressed in Christianity.

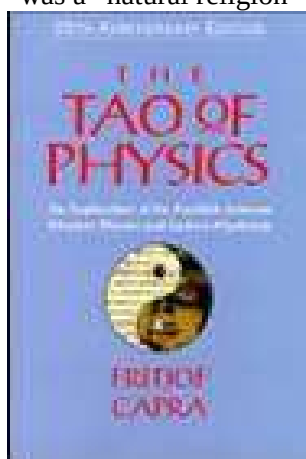


Fig 17. Science and eastern religions.

In the 19th century advances in **geology** (the history of the earth is longer than Biblical scholars claimed) and **Biblical studies** itself led to a weakening in Biblical literalism. Darwin’s **theory of evolution** further seriously cast doubt on the “revealed” Biblical account of creation as history.

Modernist and “scientific” religion?

This atmosphere of doubt, discovery and freedom culminated in the last two decades of the 19th century, when Buddhism in **a modernist form** was fashionable amongst the middle class in Britain, Germany and America.

Like Christianity, Buddhism has **a noble ethical system**, but Buddhism teaches **self-help** without dependence on God or priests, as in Christianity. Like science, Buddhism was **based on experience**, saw the universe as

¹⁸ On Buddhist presence in the Middle East in ancient times, see Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993:84 (incl refs).

ruled by a **cosmic law** (or a personal creator), and did not regard humans and animals as radically distinct. Yet Buddhism provided a **human-centred mysticism** which cold science totally lacked.

In 1975, **Fritjof Capra**¹⁹ published his ground-breaking book entitled ***The Tao of Physics: an exploration of the parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism*** (Boulder: Shambhala, 1975), which was followed by various works in a similar tone by other scientists, and other more exploitative titles on the “Tao” of almost everything. The highlight of the book is chapter 14 entitled “Emptiness and Form,” where Capra declares that “the distinction between matter and empty space finally had to be abandoned” and then quoting the Heart Sutra: “Form is emptiness, and emptiness is indeed form” (1975:222 f.).

Buddhism is not science, nor science Buddhism

The 1980s might be said to be a high point when modernist Buddhists piously delighted in **identifying Buddhism with modern science**, a trend that began probably with Protestant Buddhism in Sri Lanka [34]. For good reason, scientists who are Buddhists or influenced by Buddhism have a more sombre outlook against the modernist claim of a “scientific” Buddhism.

After all, scientist **Ken Wilber** writes, “the physicist is looking at *nothing but a set of highly abstract differential equations*—not at “reality” itself, but at mathematical symbols of reality” (1985:8) but

...in mystical consciousness, **Reality is apprehended directly and immediately**, meaning without any mediation, any symbolic elaboration, any conceptualization, or any abstractions; subject and object become one in a timeless and spaceless act that is beyond any and all forms of mediation...beyond words, symbols, names, thoughts, images.
(Ken Wilber 1985:7)

Wilber takes pain to point out (echoing the Buddha’s admonition in the Chapter on the Fool, A 1:59, regarding those who misrepresent him) that

...to even claim that there are direct and central similarities between the findings of physics and mysticism is necessarily to claim that the latter is fundamentally merely a symbolic abstraction, because it is absolutely true that the former is exactly that. At the very least, **it represents a profound confusion of absolute and relative truth**...this is what repelled the physicists in this volume [his book *Quantum Questions*]. (Ken Wilber 1985:8)

What attracts thinkers and scientists like **Albert Einstein** (1879-1955) to Buddhism is, in his own words, “**a cosmic religious feeling...which knows no dogma and no God conceived in man’s image**” (Wilber, 1985:102). For this reason, Buddhist enthusiasts have quoted (and misquoted) Einstein *ad nauseum*, especially this best known remark:

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. (Einstein, *Los Angeles Times*, 1954)

26. BUDDHIST INFLUENCES ON WESTERN CULTURE

Intellectual attraction

The early non-Buddhist Westerner usually did not distinguish Buddhism from other Oriental systems. In this mixed form of monolithic Buddhism, certain Buddhist ideas have influenced Western intellectuals and truth-seekers.

¹⁹ See Lopez (ed) 2002:236-243.

2. The spread of Buddhism

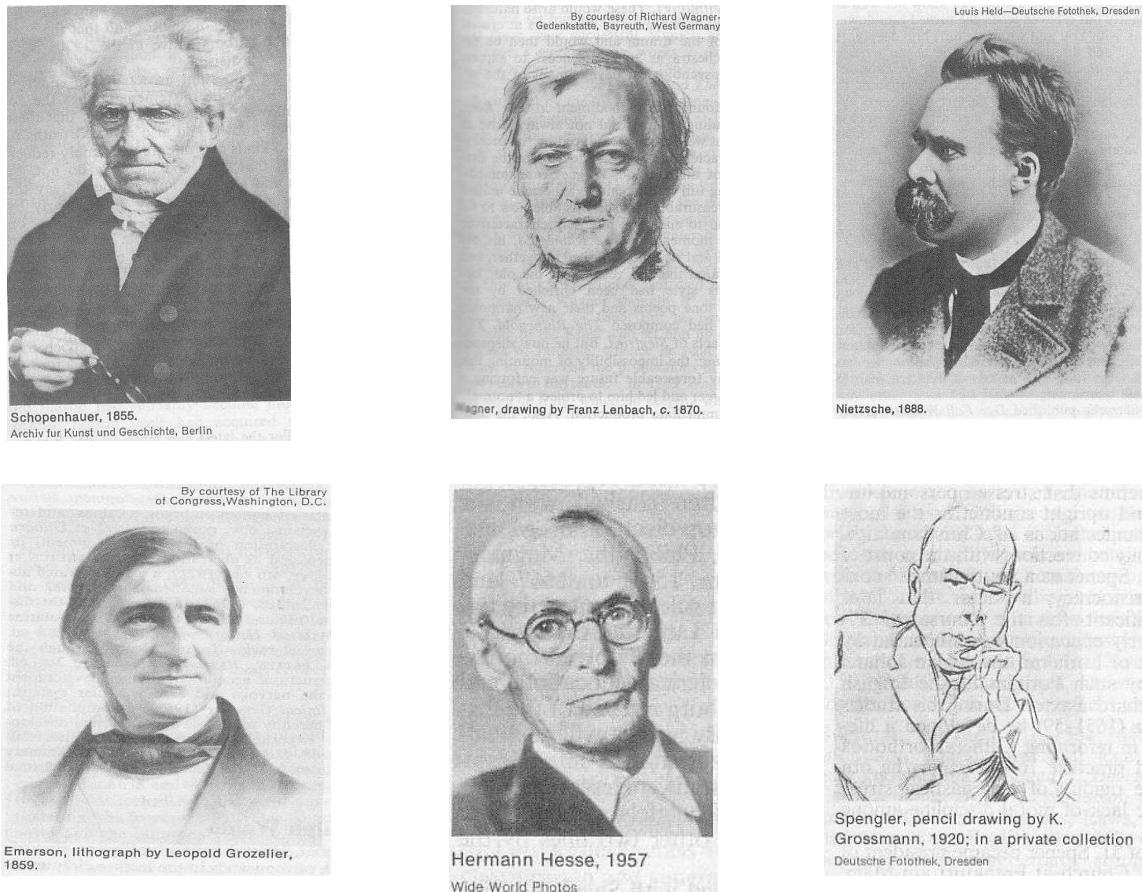


Fig 18. Great western minds influenced by Buddhism and eastern thought.

Top l-r: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), German philosopher; Richard Wagner (1813-83), German musician; Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900), German philosopher.

Below l-r: Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), American lecturer, poet and essayist; Hermann Hesse (1877-1962), German author; Oswald Spengler (1880-28), German philosopher and social theorist.

The German philosopher **Arthur Schopenhauer** (1788-1860) adopted some Buddhist ideas in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818; “The World as Will and Idea, 1883-86). He in turn influenced **Richard Wagner** (1813-83) in the composition of the opera *Tristan und Isolde* (1865). Wagner also attempted an opera on the Buddha but never completed it.

Both Schopenhauer and Wagner influenced **Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche** (1844-1900), who developed the **Übermensch** (Superman) theory, expressed particularly in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-92). This superior man is not the product of evolution, but rather, would emerge when any man with superior potential completely masters himself and strikes off conventional Christian “herd morality” to create his own values, which are completely rooted on this earth.

The lecturer, poet and essayist **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803-82) and the philosopher, poet and activist **Henry David Thoreau** (1817-62), both New England Transcendentalists, incorporated elements of Buddhism into their theory and practice. **Transcendentalism** is an idealistic system of thought based on a belief in the essential unity of all creation, the innate goodness of man, and the supremacy of insight over logic and experience for the revelation of the deepest truths.

Many openly soteriological organizations (that seek spiritual truth and salvation) have been influenced by Buddhist ideas. The **Theosophical Society** was founded by Col. Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and Blavatsky (née Helene Hahn von Rottenstern, 1831-91) in 1875 [31]. Although unlike Buddhism in many ways, Theosophy highly regarded Buddhism, which encouraged interest in

Buddhism amongst many American and Europeans. In many books of the period, Theosophy was called “Esoteric Buddhism.” [34]

The novels of **Herman Hesse** (1877-1962), especially *Siddhartha* (1922), a lyrical novel based on the early life of the Buddha, remain popular. Hesse won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1946.

The German philosopher **Oswald Spengler** (1880-1936) presents his two-volume *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918; “Decline of the West,” 1926-28), a major contribution to social theory, in a Buddhist manner. This study on a philosophy of history contends that most civilizations must pass through a life cycle of creativity followed by decline, and the cycle resumes.

Reasons for European attraction to Buddhism

At the turn of the 20th century (around 1880s-1920s), European interest in Buddhism was mainly that of an ethical and intellectual interest in the Theravāda. These early Western Buddhists

stressed particular advantages in Buddhism that they considered were the disadvantages of the Christianity that they had previously rejected. For example, they argued that Buddhism was a religion of reason, and rested on insight and knowledge alone. (Burnett 2003:292)

Two other reasons appeared to have drawn these Westerners to Buddhism. The first was an interest in the esoteric. Most of the early converts came into contact with Buddhism through **the Theosophical Society** (such as Christmas Humphreys) or through occultism (Ānanda Metteyya) or spiritism. The second reason is connected with the Romantic movement that glorified ancient wisdom and culture.

Buddhism was presented as the oldest and wisest religion that would enable European culture to step out of the gloom into a new and glorious century. In practice, most of the early Buddhists approached the subject as little more than a hobby, which left other aspects of their lives unchanged. (Burnett 2003:292)

New Age attractions

The 1950s and 1960s saw the rise of what has come to be called the New Age movement. It was deeply influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions, as a result of which Buddhism is wrongly perceived by some people (mostly westerners) as a New Age religion. While there are Buddhist influences on New Age lifestyle, there are many important differences so that no practicing Buddhist would say that they are a New Age religion, even if they were erstwhile New Agers. Briefly, the characteristics of the Buddhism and New Age are as follows:²⁰

Similarities between Buddhism and New Age teaching

Holistic view generally based upon monistic philosophy.

Reincarnation (rebirth) is a general assumption.

The greatest human problem is “ignorance” rather than sin.

The quest therefore is for “enlightenment.”

Difference between Buddhism and New Age teaching

Buddhism is not “new” but comes from the systematic teachings of the Buddha (6th-5th cent BCE).

New Age speaks of “body, mind and spirit” where “spirit” is vaguely equivalent with a soul or abiding entity, a notion radically foreign to Buddhism.

The monastic discipline of Buddhism has no counterpart in New Age.

New Age often draws hodgepodge upon ideas and practices from traditions other than Buddhism.

New Age is primarily concerned with coping with the present life while Buddhism teaches ultimate liberation.

²⁰ Based on Burnett 2003:296.

2. The spread of Buddhism

27. BUDDHISM IN THE AMERICAS

The United States

The US is a melting pot of cultures and religions. In recent times, all the Buddhist traditions and lineages are found in this open society. An American Buddhist, **Rick Fields**, has written a comprehensive book on Buddhism in America, entitled *How the Swans Came to the Lake* (Shambhala, 2nd ed. 1986).

Buddhism entered the US in two main ways: through the culture of **Asian immigrants** and through invitation. In the 1860s and 1870s, hundreds of thousands of Chinese immigrants came to the West Coast (mostly California) of the US and Canada to work in gold mines and on the railroads. After 1882, Japanese labourers followed.

From 1868, significant numbers of Japanese and Chinese immigrants came to work on the sugar plantations of **Hawaii**, which was annexed by the US in 1898. Asian migration to **California** was halted in 1902, but continued in Hawaii, which thus became an important centre for the transmission of Buddhism to America.

Chinese religion kept a low profile in North America, though a Pure Land mission was active among the Chinese. Most Chinese religions are **Shenist**, that is, the traditional syncretic folk religion, mostly a mixture of ancestor worship, Daoism and Buddhism. However, since 1950 the Shenist temples began to decline as their members age and die.

The Buddhist Churches of America

Japanese immigrants were more active in religious matters, especially the Jōdo Shin school. In 1889, the priest Sōryū Kagahi from the **Honpa Honganji** sub-sect arrived in Hawaii and established the first Japanese temple there. This sub-sect was for a long time the largest Buddhist denomination in Hawaii and North America. In 1889, Sokei Sonada came to San Francisco and established the Honpa Honganji as the **North American Buddhist Mission**.

The Second World War was a painful period for Japanese Americans who were interned in prison camps in the US since she was at war with Japan. During this period, to show where their hearts were, the American Japanese re-organized the Mission as **the Buddhist Churches of America (BCA)**, and became independent of its Japanese parent body. We have here a good example where Buddhism is used as a **social cement** to keep the Japanese Buddhist community together in the US.

To help pass on its traditions, the BCA organized a **Young Men's Buddhist Association** (1900), Sunday Schools, Buddhist women's societies and educational programme. Such westernized activities had also developed in Japan itself. The BCA consciously adopted **Christian terminology** so as to be identified as part of the dominant culture of America. Besides calling themselves a "Church," they also adopted Christian-style religious services held on Sundays, used organs and sang hymns such as "Buddha, lover of my soul..."

After the War, two **institutes of training priests** were established. One of the Church's members was an astronaut killed in the 1986 Challenger space shuttle disaster. In 1987, the US Defence Department allowed the Church to commission **Buddhist chaplains** to work in the military. In that same year, the Church claimed 170,000 adherents with 66 clergy and 63 churches in the US. Most adherents are of Japanese descent.

Other parts of America

In **Canada**, in 1985, **the Buddhist Churches of Canada** had 18 member churches and a membership of around 10,000. Japanese immigration to **Brazil** began in 1909. By 1990, there were around 500,000 people of Japanese descent in Brazil. Various sects of Buddhism are found there: Zen, Jōdo Shin, Jōdo, Shingon, Tendai, Nichiren and Brazilian Buddhists, numbering between 100,000 and 200,000, mainly of Japanese descent.

28. THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Australia

Buddhism probably first arrived in **Australia** in 1882 with a small group of immigrants from Sri Lanka. Most Australian Buddhists, however, are from the Asian continent, mostly from **Chinese immigration**. Chinese migration to Australia had been concentrated in two periods: the latter half of the 19th century and the three decades since the 1960s, coinciding with the major watersheds in Australian history.

In the first period, Australia's population grew rapidly and the associated development of **nationalism** culminated in the federation of the six former British colonies into the Australian nation in **1901**. In the second period, **multiculturalism** replaced assimilation as the official policy on inter-ethnic relations.

In the 19th century, despite the transitory nature of their sojourn, **the Chinese** built joss houses or temples, sponsored often by local associations. These places of worship accommodated not only the ancestral tablets and bodies of the deceased awaiting repatriation to China, but also new arrivals, the elderly and the indigent.

As the Chinese population grew, so too did the Buddhist congregations. The older Chinese joss houses were renovated, sometimes by non-Chinese heritage groups.

Figures for the breakdown of **Chinese by religious affiliation** are as follows:

<u>1986</u>		
Christian	33 %	
Non-Christian	17 %	
No religion	50 %	(including ambiguous affiliation)

Of the 1986 "Non-Christian" category, nearly half were Buddhists from Vietnam, while a fifth were Buddhists from Malaysia and Brunei.

<u>1991</u>		
Christian	25.0%	
Buddhist	12.5 %	(31.3% Vietnamese; 28.6 Chinese)
No religion	50.0 %	
No response	12.5 %	

In the **1991** figures, over a third of the Vietnamese-born Chinese were Buddhists, less than 10% of those from the PRC were Buddhist. A quarter of the Malaysian Chinese described themselves as Buddhists, a rate that was even higher than among the Taiwan-born.

The arrival of Vietnamese refugees was a watershed in the expansion of Buddhism, now **the fastest growing religion in Australia**, increasing 300% between 1981 and 1991. Large cities like Melbourne and Sydney have their own Buddhist temples, from such like the Bright Moon temples supported by local Vietnamese Chinese community, to more lavish ones built with international support from Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The **Foguangshan missions** have their own temples in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The largest Buddhist temple in the southern hemisphere is their **Nantian temple** (1995) at Wollongong, 75 km south of Sydney. Their activities include educational, cultural and religious programmes serving Chinese and non-Chinese alike.

Africa

In **Africa**, the first Buddhist society was started probably in 1917. During the 1920s and 1930s, low-caste Indians who were indentured labourers in South Africa, mainly Natal, faced growing discrimination through the apartheid policy. As such, some of them westernized, while some turned to Buddhism, attracted by what they saw as **a liberating teaching free of caste and superstition**.

2. The spread of Buddhism

A Buddhist monastery was established in Tanzania in 1927 by immigrant labourers from Sri Lanka. Sinhalese migrants also started Maha Bodhi Societies in Ghana and Zaire, and a Buddhist society in Zambia, where the indigenous population are showing growing interest in Buddhism.

In recent times, however, a growing number of white South Africans are becoming interested in Buddhism. The Foguang San has also set up the first Buddhist monastery in South Africa, the **Nan Hua Monastery**, complete with black Sangha members.

BUDDHISM AND THE WEST

29. EARLY WESTERN BUDDHISTS AND BUDDHIST GROUPS

One of the first Europeans to be ordained as a Buddhist monk was Gordon Douglas. He joined the Order at the Jayasekerarama, Colombo, 1899. He died in 1905 in relative obscurity. Allan Bennet McGregor (1872-1923), a former member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occultist association, entered a Burmese monastery in 1901, and was given the name of **Ānanda Metteyya**.²¹ He returned to Britain in 1908 and formed a small Buddhist society supported by members of the Theosophical Society, including Travers Christmas Humphreys, who in 1924 founded the Buddhist Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

The first Buddhist groups established for the practice of Buddhism in the West were **often independent of academic societies and without any contact with Asia**. As such, early Western Buddhism often held **misconceptions** such as a monolithic idea of Buddhism, that all Buddhism was the same in doctrine and practice, and was non-sectarian.

Many articles in the Buddhist societies's journals clearly show that they were thus avoiding the errors of traditional sectarian Christianity. They might have been **implicitly influenced by the Christian Ecumenical Movement**, began in 1900. Buddhists in present-day Europe and North America, however, are in **close contact with Buddhist scholars and traditional practitioners both locally and from Asia**.

France

In 1929, **Les Amis du Bouddhisme** was founded in Paris by a remarkable Chinese monk, **T'ai-hsü** (1889-1947) and G. Constance Lounsberry. T'ai-hsü was the force behind the reformist "humanistic Buddhism" in Asia [35]. The magazine ***La pensée bouddhique*** ("Buddhist Thought") begun in 1939 with some contacts with Tibet, Cambodia, Siam and Vietnam.

United Kingdom

The Buddhist Society of Great Britain and Ireland was founded in London in 1907 by T.W. Rhys Davids [30]. ***The Buddhist Review*** was published from 1909 to 1922. **The Buddhist Lodge** of the Theosophical Society was founded in 1924 by Travers Christmas Humphreys. It published ***Buddhism in England*** from 1926-43. In 1943, the Lodge was renamed **the Buddhist Society** and the periodical ***the Middle Way***, which is still in circulation.

A **Sinhalese vihara** opened in London in 1954. The Tibet Society was formed in London in 1959. In 1967, Chogyam Trungpa Rimpoche founded the **Samye Ling** (the first and largest Tibetan centre in the West) at Eskaldamuir, a village in isolated SW Scotland. Trungpa himself moved to the US in 1970.

The English Sangha Trust was formed in 1962 [39]. A **Thai wat** opened in Wimbledon, outside London, in 1966.

²¹ E J Harris, *Ananda Metteyya: The first British emissary of Buddhism*. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1998.

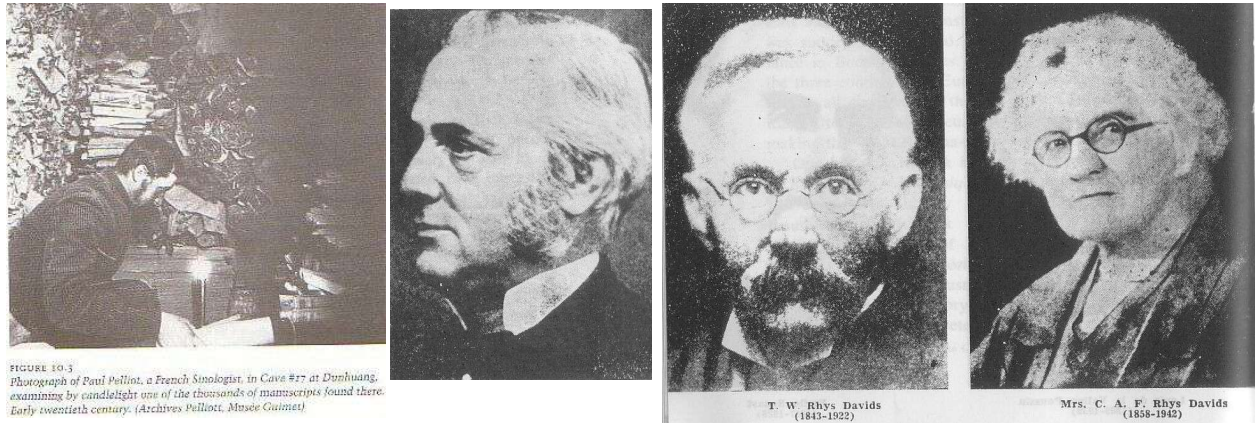


Fig 19. Paul Pelliot, Friedrich Max Müller, Mr TW Rhys Davids & Mrs CAF Rhys Davids

30. EARLY BUDDHIST STUDIES IN THE WEST

The first Buddhist texts in Europe were Sanskrit and Tibetan ones (mostly Mahayana) from Nepal, collected by the British Resident **B.H. Hodgson** (1800-94). The French scholar, **Eugène Burnouf** (1801-52) used these Sanskrit texts for his *Introduction à l'histoire du bouddhisme indien* (1845; "Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism") and a translation to the Lotus Sutra (1852). He also wrote *Essai sur le Pali...* (1826; "Essay on Pali...")

In Sri Lanka, **Christian missionaries** began to study Buddhism, even Pali, but their accounts tended to be distorted because of their evangelical agenda, presenting Buddhism as a pessimistic pseudo-religion. From around 1800, this distortion was rectified by the work of various European scholars.

Thus Protestant Britain holding Ceylon, looked for the pure Gospel of Buddha and found the Pali Tipiṭaka, while Catholic France, holding Indo-China, looked for scholastic *Summae* and found the great Sanskrit commentaries.

(Roger Corless in Prebish 1975: 249)

Denmark

Viktor Fausbøll published the **Dhammapada**, with copious extracts from its Commentary (1855). From 1858 on, he published many of the Jātakas, and in 1877 began his monumental edition of the **Jātaka** book.

[Carl Wilhelm] V. Trenckner (1824-1891) produced an edition of the **Milinda,pañha**, a model of editorial workmanship. During his 35 years of academic work, he initiated the **Critical Pali Dictionary**, first published in 1924 but has since been taken over by an international team of scholars. However, due to its monumental scope, so far only 3 volumes have been completed, covering only about a third of the Pali alphabet. [40]

France

Besides Burnouf, there were other famous French explorers and scholars who brought Europe into closer contact with Buddhism. **Paul Pelliot** (1878-1945) of the *École Française d'Extrême-Orient* [French School of the Far East], Hanoi (later Saigon, then Paris) collected manuscripts from Central Asia and published *La Mission Pelliot en Asie Centrale* in 1924.

Louis de la Vallée Poussin (1859-1938) worked on the Abhidharma and Mahayana, and published *L'Abhidharmaśāstra de Vasubandhu* (1923-31), *Nirvana* (1925) and *La Siddhi de Hiuen-tsang* (Vijñapti, mātratā, siddhi) (1928-48).

2. The spread of Buddhism

Russia

Fedor Ippolitovich Shcherbatskoi (Th. Stcherbatsky) (1866-1942), an awesome Russian aristocrat, worked on epistemology and logic, and produced *Buddhist Logic* (1930). Stcherbatsky wrote *The Conception of the Buddhist Nirvana* (Leningrad, 1927) as a response to Poussin's *Nirvana*.

Stcherbatsky's *Conception of the Buddhist Nirvana* contains his interpretation of Nagarjuna's thought, in response to Poussin's views on Madhyamaka, serving as a landmark in the great ongoing Russo-Belgian debate. It was also Stcherbatsky's major contribution to the theory of Nirvana and represents an important study in the evolution of the conception of Nirvana in Europe.

Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), German-British, edited the *Sacred Books of the East* translation series (1880-1910), among which are many Buddhist works (such as the Lotus Sutra).

Thomas William Rhys Davids (1843-1922), after completing Foreign Service in Sri Lanka, founded the **Pali Text Society** (PTS) in 1881, overseeing the editing (in roman characters) and translating of the Pali Canon, and the compilation of the *Pali-English Dictionary* (1921-25, 738 pp) with 160,000 citations, including etymologies. (The work was completed by William Stede.) [32]

His wife, **Caroline Augusta Foley Rhys Davids** (1858-42) succeeded him as president of the Pali Text Society, continuing to oversee the *Sacred Books of the East* series (begun in 1895) and arguing for a "positive" original Buddhism antedating the "negative" accretions of Abhidhamma.

Mark Aurel Stein (1862-1943), Hungarian-British, followed the route of Alexander the Great and published *Serindia* (1921) and *Innermost Asia* (1928). To Stein and Pelliot, we owe the rediscovery of Dunhuang (Tun-huang).

Germany

German academic interest centred mainly on Indology and linguistics, but **Herman Oldenburg** (1854-1920) produced important studies of "**Urbuddhismus**" (original Buddhism) in *Buddha: Sein Leben, seine Lehre, seine Gemeinde* (1881; "Buddha: His life, his Teaching, his Work") and *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus* (1915; "The Teaching of the Upanishads and the Origin of Buddhism").

Transylvania

Körösi Csoma Sándor (1784-1842) of Transylvania (in eastern Europe) travelled to Tibet in search of the original Hungarians. He compiled a *Tibetan-English Dictionary* and *Grammar* (1834).

USA

Henry Clarke Warren (1854-1899) of Cambridge, MA, overcame a crippling physical deformity due to a spinal injury to produce *Buddhism in Translations* (1896), a still unsurpassed anthology from the Pali Canon. Together with **Charles Rockwell Lanman**, he launched the **Harvard Oriental Series** in 1891. The most popular in the series are volumes 28, 29 and 30, *Buddhist Legends* (translation of the stories of the Dhammapada Commentary) by **Eugene Watson Burlingame**, Pali lecturer (1917-18) in Yale University.

31. INVENTING BUDDHISM

Western interest in Buddhism during the 19th and 20th centuries stem from two important reasons, namely, as a reaction against Christianity and a sense of the oriental exoticism. Those who had turned away from Christianity were looking for something that could answer their needs and notions. However, certain Christian notions dogged these early seekers. Having rejected the Bible as religious authority, they sought a highly textualized representation of "original Buddhism."

This notion found its way into Sri Lankan Buddhism, influencing an educated Sinhala elite who played a vital role in the movement of Sri Lankan independence. *The History of Ceylon*,²² for example, notes that the Buddhist Theosophical Society schools served "as the training ground for a new elite educated in a Buddhist atmosphere, who in the twentieth century made their presence felt in politics, education and in the Civil Service" (1960, 3:203). Gombrich and Obeyesekere note the

²² *History of Ceylon*, ed HC Ray et al. 3 vols. Colombo: Ceylon University Press, 1960.

continued influence of this “Protestant Buddhism” [34] in contemporary Sri Lanka: “What is printed in Sinhala in newspapers, books and above all in school textbooks derives largely from the English-language Orientalist view of Buddhism (1988:448).

In fact, Henry Olcott was first drawn to Sri Lanka by a report of the Pānadūre debate of 1873 [34]. He was informed by a fellow spiritist, JM Peebles, who had obtained a report of the debate by the editor of the *Ceylon Times*, and Peebles later published this report.²³ Helene Blavatsky and Henry Olcott [26] went to Sri Lanka in 1880 and officially “converted” to Buddhism in a public ceremony, “an event that appears to have been of great psychological importance for the Sri Lankan leadership of the Buddhist revival” (Trainer 1997:13). However, Olcott, clarifies in his diary what this “conversion” really meant for him and Blavatsky:

But to be a regular Buddhist is one thing, and to be a debased modern Buddhist sectarian quite another. Speaking for her as well as for myself, I can say that if Buddhism contained a single dogma that we were compelled to accept, we would not have taken the *pansil* [Five Precepts] nor remained Buddhist ten minutes. Our Buddhism was that of the Mater-Adept Gautama Buddha, which was identically the Wisdom Religion of the Aryan Upanishads, and the soul of all the ancient world-faiths. Our Buddhism was, in a word, a philosophy, not a creed. (Old Diary Leaves: The only authentic history of the Theosophical Society, 2nd series, 1878-1883. London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1900:168 f)

Olcott worked especially towards promoting a resurgence of the indigenous Sinhala Buddhism as an alternative to the Christianity of colonial missionaries. He skillfully made use of the missionaries’ own organizing methods, and built Buddhist schools under the Theosophical Society supervision to provide the institutional foundation for a revival of Theravāda Buddhism with Theosophical leanings. His *Buddhist Catechism*, used as a basis for Buddhist Sunday School instruction throughout Sri Lanka, was bereft of its traditional devotional and cultic aspects.

This was a religious creed imbued with the scientific ethos of nineteenth century Europe, one shaped in self-conscious opposition to the Christian tradition’s dependence upon a revealed scripture seemingly incompatible at many points with the findings of modern science. [25]
(Trainer 1997:14)

Understandably such a biased approach to Buddhism failed to bring out the best that is the Buddha’s teachings. It was veritably a Buddhism of Olcott’s teachings. In connection with such developments mentioned here, Trainer remarks

In one respect it is, of course, misleading to speak of an ancient “Buddhism,” unless we consider the nineteenth-century ancient, since the term as such is a creation of nineteenth-century European scholarship. In another respect, however, there clearly is a sense in which we can meaningfully trace a material relationship between a person whom Buddhists remember as Gotama Buddha and communities of people living in Sri Lanka today who understand themselves to be Buddhists. (1997:28)

²³ Rev Migettuwatte & Rev D Silva, *Buddhism and Christianity Face to Face: or an oral discussion between the Rev Migettuwatte, a Buddhist priest, and Rev D Silva, an English Clergyman, Held at Pantura, Ceylon, with an Introduction and Annotations by JM Peebles*. Boston: Colby & Rich, 1878.

20TH-CENTURY ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENTS

32. INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST STUDIES

Christian scholars

Surprisingly, **Roman Catholic priests** are amongst the top-notch scholars who have made groundbreaking and major contributions to Buddhist studies.

The Belgian Thomist priest, **Etienne Lamotte** (1903-93), gained indisputable international recognition by editing, translating and commenting on some of the most significant works of Mahayana



Fig 20a. Prof Robert Thurman

Buddhism (such as the *Surāṅgama, samādhi Sūtra* (1936) and the *Mahāyāna, saṅgraha* of Asaṅga (1938-39). His *magnum opus* is the voluminous *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, des origines à l'ère Saka* (1958), translated as *History of Indian Buddhism, From the Origins to the Saka Era* (1988). For his erudite and open-minded scholarship, he was declared “Expert in Buddhist Scriptures” a few weeks before his death.

Another famous Christian scholar of Buddhism is the Jesuit priest **Heinrich Dumoulin** (1944-), who is one of the world’s foremost Zen scholars. He wrote on Zen for the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (Macmillan). His *magnum opus* is the acclaimed two-volume *Zen Buddhism: A History* (1959 in German; 1963 English translation; 1988 revised English translation).

The Trappist monk and mystic, **Thomas Merton** (1915-1968), is well known for his dialogue with Buddhism. The Trappist Order is famous for its vow of silence. For Father Merton, his experience of Zen meditation, besides making him an authority in that Buddhist tradition, has also enriched his own Christian roots. In fact, he has written 29 books, such as *Mystics and Zen Masters* (NY: Dell Publishing, 1961), inspired by his quest for “trans-Christian ecumenism through religious experimentation” (Ency. Brit. 12:342h).

Since the late 20th century, we see a growing number of Christian scholars whose open-minded scholarship, especially in comparative religion and religious dialogue, is of such a high standard of learning and honesty that they could be used as textbooks in any faith (that is equally open-minded, of course). Such scholars include illustrious names like **Hans Küng** (Germany) and **John Hick** (Britain) [40], whose remarkable works can be found in the bookshops and libraries of Singapore.



Fig 20b. Prof Peter Harvey

Chairs in Buddhist Studies

Buddhism is found in many university curricula in Asia, Australia, Europe and N. America,

usually as a branch of Comparative Religion or Asian Studies. In 1988, **Robert Thurman** was appointed to the first endowed chair in the United States in the field of Tibetan Buddhism. He is the **Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies** at Columbia University, New York, USA..

In 1995, **Peter Harvey** was appointed the first professor of “Buddhist Studies.” (University of Sunderland) in the UK. He is also a practicing Theravāda Buddhist and teaches meditation. He has an interest in **the cross- cultural development of religion**.

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Integrated Buddhist Studies programmes are now growing, such as the one at the University of Wisconsin (1961) under **Richard Hugh Robinson** (1926-70). A similar programme is being

offered in the University of Sunderland, UK, under the leadership of Peter Harvey (<http://www.sunderland.ac.uk>).

Unlike the colonial days, when Buddhism was a curiosity or something to be exploited for political reasons, more non-Asian scholars and enthusiasts are becoming practising Buddhists and the number of Buddhist centres and groups are growing the beyond Asia.

Intellectual developments

Partly because of the Internet explosion, and for various historical and technical reasons **English is now the global language**.

Understandably, many informed Buddhist scholars, especially in countries whose predominant language is not English (like Thailand and Japan) realize that if they were to reach out to a wider audience, they need to use English. Or, if they think and write best in their native tongue, then their works need to be translated into English.

One of the greatest contemporary Buddhist minds is the monk-intellectual and meditation teacher **Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu** (1906-63),²⁴ who from his forest monastery in south Thailand, away from the centres of power, was able to influence many educated professionals in Thailand, including judges, teachers, educators and doctors. His approach is generally this-worldly, such as his **interpretation of rebirth** as referring to a series of mental states within this life itself. However, one should aim to be “reborn” into a new kind of selfless, Nibbanic living, beyond the birth and death of ego-thoughts. Such a **“theology”** (rational inquiry into religious questions) of Buddhism [40] easily gains acceptance amongst the scientists and scientific-minded intellectuals of Thailand.

Buddhadasa’s appreciation of some Mahayana ideas has led him to translate some of its sutras into Thai. The **art** he uses for spiritual education is drawn from various traditions and religions. He teaches that **both Dhamma and God**, properly understood, refer to a reality beyond concepts. Although his philosophical approach is this-worldly, he is critical of monks who are involved in development projects, which he regards as inappropriate.

Thailand’s leading monk-scholar is **Ven. Prayudh Payutto** who, despite holding a high ecclesiastical rank, maintains his original ordination name in his writings. This idiosyncrasy reflects two important ideas he holds vital: the need to bring the deeper teachings of Buddhism within reach of the common people and the need to address contemporary problems.

His *magnum opus* written in Thai, entitled **Buddha,dharm** (Bangkok: Dharmasatharn, 1982), reveals his comprehensive command of Buddhist doctrines which he expresses in clear contemporary language. Sections of this work have been translated (by Bruce Evans) as *Good, Evil and Beyond: Karma in the Buddha’s Teachings* (1992) and *Dependent Origination, the Buddhist Law of Conditionality* (1994), two of the clearest expositions of the subject in the English language.

Another excellent work by Payutto is his **Dictionary of Buddhism** in Thai and English (Bangkok, 1985) which was published for free distribution. This work awaits translation since it would greatly benefit those who are interested in Theravada doctrines from the primary sources. Its special usefulness is that Payutto gives his sources both from the Royal Siamese Tipiṭaka and the Canon of the Pali Text Society [30].

Payutto’s socially engaged side is found in his vision of human-centred economics, as expressed in his **Buddhist Economics: A middle way for the Market place** (1994). He advocates ethical

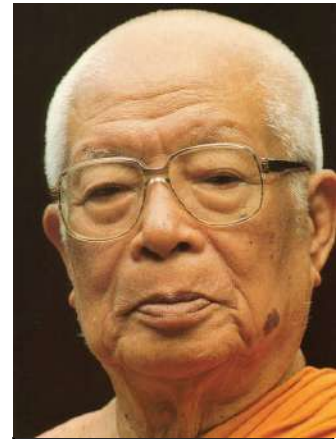


Fig 21. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu



Fig 22. Phra Prayudh Payutto

²⁴ See Lopez (ed) 2002:138-145; Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism*: Buddhadāsa.

2. The spread of Buddhism

considerations in economic behaviour. For example, he criticizes the reluctance of investors to invest where there is social disorder, which ironically needs economic growth the most (1994: 24).

Payutto distinguishes between “right consumption” (to satisfy the desire for true well-being) and “wrong consumption (for pleasing sensations and ego-gratification) (1994: 41). Such ideas are also found in the works of **E.F. Schumacher**, such as *Small is Beautiful: A study of economics as if people mattered* (1973), similarly inspired by Buddhist economics.

Buddhist psychology

In the West, especially in the US, there is a great preoccupation with **psychotherapy and self-help groups** partly because of the pressures of urban living and partly because of the alienation of the First World urbanized life. Since Buddhism deals directly with the mind, it is able to offer mind-healing and self-help services. When Buddhism is offered to Westerners as a **therapy** rather than as a religion it seems to gain wider acceptance.

Similarly, when Buddhism first arrived in **Korea and Japan**, it was looked up to as an **apotropaic** (magical and healing) system. A majority of the Buddhists in Asia today (as in the past) belong to the **folk tradition** of Buddhism [4], taking Buddhism for the spiritual security and support it offers to get through one’s daily life.

Westerners generally would meditate so that they can handle stress, a practice that is fast catching on in the East as well with the growing popularity of **lay meditation teachers and groups**. A growing number of psychologists and psychotherapists are studying Buddhism and merging it with their practice into a cross-discipline with greater efficacy of service for their clients. The Buddhist scholar and psychotherapist **Joy Manné**, for example, calls her method **Breathwork**, and has formed an international network centring around Breathwork, which blends traditional breath meditation and modern psychotherapy.

James H. Austin is a trained neurologist with a thorough knowledge of anatomy, physiology and chemistry of the brain, and a Zen practitioner, fully familiar with meditation. His book, ***Zen and the Brain: Towards an understanding of meditation and consciousness*** (1998. xxiv + 844 pp) went through its 5th printing in 2000 within only 2 years of publication. In his book has become a classic on the working of the brain and the effects of meditation on the human personality.

Electronic Buddhism

The Internet today serves as **the Buddha’s “long tongue”** (Amitabha Sūtra). Almost every conceivable aspect of Buddhism can be found on the Net. One can easily locate sutras, texts, or any other Buddhist information, or learn Pali, through the various freely available search engines. Informative Buddhist websites are often interconnected like **Indra’s Net of Jewels**. Once you browse one site, you are immediately linked up to a mind-boggling maze of Buddhist information and addresses. You only need, for example, to start with <http://www.dharma.per.sg>. Piya Tan’s sutta translations and other works can be found on the Dharmafarer Website:

<http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.²⁵

In the late 1980s, **Prof. Lewis Lancaster** of the University of Berkeley at California, USA, started **the Electronic Buddhist Texts Initiative** (EBTI) to look into the digitization of the Korean Tripiṭaka. Since then he has pioneered or participated in various other initiatives to digitize other Buddhist canons, especially those of East Asian (which entail special problems regarding Asian



Fig 23. Joy Manné

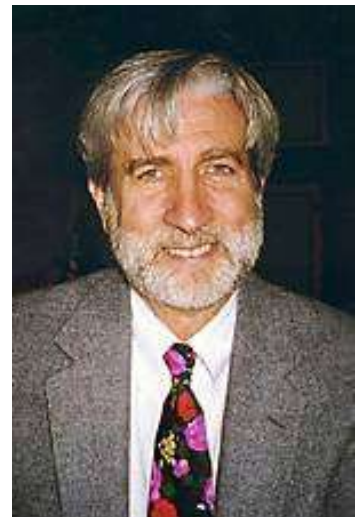


Fig 24. Lewis Lancaster

²⁵ For more details, see Wiki Piya: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piya_Tan.

characters). His current project is the **Electronic Cultural Atlas Initiative** (ECAI) (<http://www.ecai.org>)

The whole Pali Canon and its ancillary texts can now be found in compact discs (CDs), through the effort of the **Vipassana Research Institute**, under the spiritual leadership of the meditation teacher Goenka (<http://www.vri.dhamma.org>). The Burmese 6th Council Pali Canon—the **Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā CD (CSCD)**, as it is called—is freely available. The text is given in seven alternative scripts: roman, Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, Khmer, Devanagari, and Mongolian, with an internal search engine.

On the occasion of the Thai king's 60th birthday (1987), a project to put the whole **Siamese Tipiṭaka** was launched. In due course, not only all the 45 volumes of the Siamese Canon was digitalized, but also the 70 volumes of Commentaries and other ancillary texts, totally 115 texts. This compilation also gives the **Pali Text Society (PTS) cross-references** and the **Thai translations**. This project, done by the Mahidol University and known as the **Buddhist Scriptures Information Retrieval** or **BUDSIR**, is today found in some 400 libraries around the world.

The BUDSIR is available on the Net at <http://www.budsir.org/program/> for free browsing. The PTS **Pali-English Dictionary** [30] has been put on the Web as part of a program being run in Chicago by Dr. James Nye (<http://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/pali/>). Besides Pali, this Unicode-based website—Digital Dictionaries of South Asia—includes dictionaries of Prakrit, Sanskrit and many other South Asian languages.

Anyone can now easily create a page of Pali in **roman text** and include any other Indian or south-east Asian characters if necessary. This is made possible through the free availability of various **Indian fonts** (Devanagari and roman) and **south and south-east Asian fonts** (Sinhalese, Burmese, Thai, and Khmer). One of the most popular of such fonts is the **Times Norman**, which K.R. Norman, a Cambridge scholar and a past president of the Pali Text Society, has devised especially for the Pali texts. A helpful and comprehensive site to browse on the subject of **Pali** is <http://members.home.net/j-andrew-shaw/> run by Andrew Shaw.

33. JAPANESE SCHOLARSHIP

Buddhism's open secret today is **Japanese Buddhist scholarship**. Anyone who has referred to the works of **Hajime Nakamura** (1912-99), especially his *Indian Buddhism* (Osaka 1980) would notice the wealth of Japanese sources he quotes in his notes and bibliography but which remains untranslated.

Sources of inspiration

The Japanese Buddhist genius ironically was re-awakened as a result of **widespread persecution** that began in the Tokugawa period (1600-1867) and peaked in the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912) and modern period (1912-1945). The **reaction to Christianity** also fuelled the Buddhist revival of 1877-1889.

One of the most important Buddhist responses to the persecution and disestablishment of Buddhism in modern Japan was **the effort to modernize Buddhism**, especially by way of westernized scholarship. The Japanese Buddhists founded schools, reorganized their old temple schools and transformed them

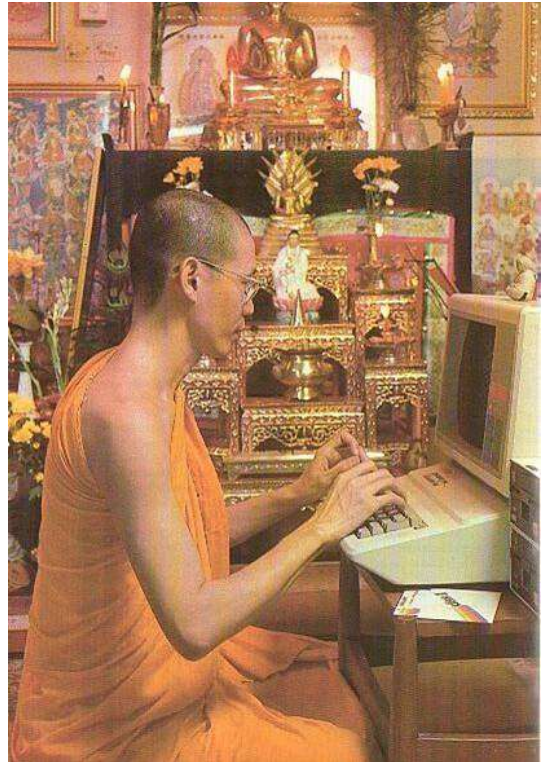


Fig 25. Piyasilo Bhikkhu (Malaysia) was awarded “Apple User of the Year” title in the 1980s.

2. The spread of Buddhism

into universities, even founding new ones. Their spirited response was reflected in the rise of numerous **Buddhist universities**:

- 1882 — Komazawa University, Tokyo (Soto Zen) [founded as a temple in 1759].
- 1905 — Otani University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [founded in 1655 as a study centre].
- 1922 — Ryokoku University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [started as a temple in 1639].

Other examples include Hana-zono University (Rinzai Zen), Bukkyo University (Jodo Shin-shu), Shuchiin University (Shingon), Koyasan University (Shingon), Rissho University (Nichiren), Taisho University (serving the Jodo Shin, Tendai and Shingon sects), and the Kyoto Women's University (Jodo Shin-shu).

The number of **research institutes** specializing in Buddhism and oriental studies is also growing, e.g. the Nippon Buddhist Research Association and the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku-bukkyogaku-kai). The Japanese Buddhists found **the compatibility of Buddhism with the theories and discoveries of modern science** a redeeming inspiration. They became better equipped to ride the waves of Westernization and modernism and to ward off Christian influence.

Early efforts

In 1876, the eminent Japanese Buddhologist and Sanskrit scholar, **Bun'yū Nanjō** (1849-1927), a priest of the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin sect, went to England to study English and Sanskrit, and to research Buddhist texts in Europe. In the course of his studies, he discovered that *The Buddhist Tripitaka* (1876), Samuel Beal's English-language catalogue of all sutras in the Obaku Edition, was full with errors. Nanjō corrected Beal's errors and in 1883 published *Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka*, commonly known as **Nanjio's Catalogue**.

The most significant contribution of Japanese scholarship during the Taishō period (1912-26) was the publication of the Japanese Buddhist canons. The first of these Japanese Tripitaka editions was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Daizōkyō**, popularly known as the Shukusatsu-zōkyō, or Small-type Canon (1880-1885). The second was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Zōkyō**, generally called the Manji-zōkyō, or Fylfot-letter Tripitaka (1902-1905). The third was the **Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō**, generally called the Taishō Daizōkyō, or Taishō Edition of the Tripiṭaka (1924-1934). Each of these Canons was an enlargement of its predecessors.

The best known of these is **the Taishō Edition**, published through the effort and sacrifices of **Junjirō Takakusu** (1866-1945), a pioneer Japanese Buddhologist. Unlike the other Canons that followed the traditional arrangement of sutras according to whether they were Nikāya Buddhism or Mahayana, the Taishō Edition organized the sutras chronologically, according to the historical development of their teachings.

Modern methods

Most of the modern Japanese Buddhist scholars belong to one of the traditional Buddhist orders of Japan. They responded in a positive manner to the challenges thrown at them by the disestablishment of Buddhism by which their temples lost state patronage. In response to such challenges, they have shifted from their traditional temple-centred traditions to **westernized and modernized education-centred systems** focusing around Buddhist studies.

International scholarly cooperation has provided two positive results on Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Where formerly Japanese knowledge of Buddhism was filtered through Chinese Buddhism, concerned Buddhists hoping for reform now have **a direct knowledge of early Indian Buddhism**.

A second positive feature of Japanese scholarship is its confident application of **western methods of critical scholarship and western philosophy**. Scholars like **Nishida Kitaro** (1870-1945) have brought Japanese Buddhist philosophy to international standards.

Openness and honesty

A third remarkable feature of modern Japanese Buddhist scholarship is its **openness and honesty**. This is clearly evident, for example, in Hajime Nakamura's *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (1964), where he makes such candid remarks as: "the Japanese frequently misinterpreted the original Chinese texts" (1964:348).

Such openness is more the rule than the exception in modern Japanese scholarship. One of the latest trends in Buddhist scholarship has been called "**Critical Buddhism**" (Hubbard & Swanson, edd. *Pruning the Bodhi Tree: The storm over critical Buddhism*, 1997), where one of the scholars, Hakamaya Noriaki, declares: "**Criticism alone is Buddhism**" (1997:vii).

Hakamaya Noriaki and Matsumoto Shirō examine what Buddhism is and it most definitely is not. "Why They Say Zen is Not Buddhism," says the first article; "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* is Not Buddhist," says the first article in Part 2 of the book. Such **honesty** is possible mainly because the background is Japan and the critics are Japanese scholars. Japan being a Buddhist nation, Japanese Buddhist scholars always have a **more public voice** than their Western counterparts. These scholars are also **heads of Buddhist temples**, roles which are ancient and important, giving them "sectarian, institutional, political, community, and pastoral roles and voices." (1997:xi)

Being **critical** (that is, seeking the truth through cause and effect reasoning) began with the Buddha himself and has been rooted in Buddhism all the while. We are re-discovering this vital spirit of Buddhism: **the spirit of inquiry and sharing the truth**. In no small way is Japan today **the real stronghold of modern Buddhism**.

As the number of excellent works of the Japanese scholars are translated into English and published, their impact on global Buddhist scholarship and Buddhism in general is being positively felt. It is a matter of time when we will have the full benefit of Japanese Buddhist scholarship as we now have from Western and Australian scholarly progress.

BUDDHISM IN THE 21st CENTURY

34. BUDDHIST REVIVAL IN SRI LANKA

Protestant Buddhism

However selfish and senseless Christian triumphalism may be, it only reaffirms the superiority of Buddhist openness and wisdom. In Sri Lanka, the efforts of Anglican evangelists were returned in kind by the Sinhalese Buddhists. In response to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, the Buddhists started their own **The Society for the Propagation of Buddhism** (1862), which printed and distributed Buddhist tracts.

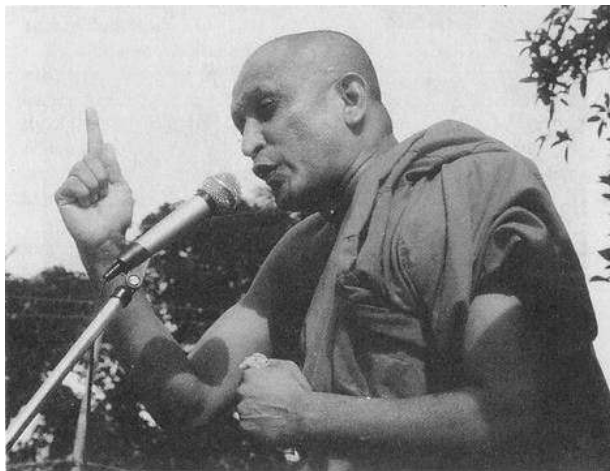


Fig 26. M Sobhita (1980s, Sri Lanka).
[See Tambiah 1992:83 f, 87]

The most exciting exchange between the Anglicans and the Buddhists in Sri Lanka began when the over-confident Anglican Seminary, in 1865, challenged the monks of the local temple to a **public debate**. To their greater surprise, nearly 50 monks, led by **Hikkaḍuve Sumaṅgala** (1826-1911) of the Siyam Nikāya, and **Miḡeṭṭuvatte Guṇānanda** (1823-90) of the Amarapura Nikāya, turned up, and so did about 2000 lay Buddhists.

This first debate was followed by a series of five, in most of which Guṇānanda played the major role. The most important debate in which he took part was held at **Panadura**, south of Colombo, in 1873, with Rev David de Silva as his principal opponent. It was a two-day debate, the first day of which was attended by 5,000, and swelled to 10,000 on the second day. With

2. The spread of Buddhism

such undivided support, the missionaries realized they had underestimated the Buddhists, and ceased to issue challenges.

The text of the whole debate was published in the newspapers, both in Sinhalese and English. The English version then appeared in book form, which reached Col Henry Steele Olcott [26, 31], co-founder of the Theosophical Society which far-reaching consequences.

The success of the Sinhalese Buddhists against the Christians was to answer the latter in their own coins. Guṇānanda, for example, adopted **the Christian style of preaching** (while traditional monks would as a rule preach seated and observing proper decorum). The Buddhists have rendered unto Caesar what was due to him. (Malalgoda 1976: ch. VI)

It was in the face of such missionary threats that the Sinhalese Buddhists, especially the English-educated middle class, were motivated to present Buddhism **as a scientific, rational and modern teaching**, and not as a “religion” and with greater involvement of lay Buddhists. This is what some scholars have termed **“Protestant Buddhism”** (Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988 ch 6; Gombrich 1988 ch 7).²⁶

Buddhist education

Sinhalese Buddhist culture survived the Western onslaught for centuries. The reform of Sangha initiated by the Saṅgharāja Saraṇāṅkara in the 18th century and the foundation of reformist orders (the Amarapura Nikāya and the Rāmañña Nikāya) during the 19th century showed the vitality of the Buddhist tradition on the island.

In 1845, the monk Valānē Siddhārtha founded the first **pirivena** (monastic college), the **Parama Dhamma Cetiya Pirivena** at Ratmalane, a few miles south of Colombo. In due course, two other great centers of Buddhist learning, the **Vidyodaya Pirivena** (1873) was founded by H. Sumaṅgala in Colombo and the **Vidyālaṅkāra Pirivena** (1875) by Ratmalānē Dhammāloka at Kelaniya near Colombo. They are now full-fledged universities.

The Vidyālaṅkāra University is now called **the University of Kelaniya**. The **Buddhist Library**, Singapore, houses the **Buddhist Graduate School** (2001), accredited to this university through link programmes.

35. AGAINST THE CURRENTS

China

During the modern period, especially after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Buddhism in China was characterized by **revival and reform**. It was during this period that there arose a remarkable Chinese Buddhist monk, named **Taixi** (T'ai-hsü, 1889-1947) [29], who succeed in initiating a **“humanistic Buddhism”** to carry out a series of Buddhist reforms.²⁷ In 1929, he organized **the Chinese Buddhist Society**, which by 1947 had over 4½ million members.

T'ai-hsü emphasized **the international character of Buddhism** and initiated contacts between Chinese Buddhists and those of other Asian countries, especially of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan. Institutes for the training of large number of Buddhist leaders were set up in various parts of China, with the aim of reforming the Sangha (Ch'en 1964:456 f.).

Buddhist texts were studied in a way that had not happened for a very long time. A notable feature of Taixi's revival movement was the appearance of an increasing number of **Buddhist periodicals** devoted mainly to **hermeneutics** (the exposition of Buddhist thought) and **apologetics** (the rebuttal of criticisms against Buddhism). Between 1920 and 1935, there were a total of **58** such periodicals. Mainly as a result of the efforts of Taixi and his followers to popularize Buddhism, in the 1930s, between 60-70% of China's lay Buddhists were **Pure Land Buddhists** (Ch'en 1964: 460).

Malaysia

²⁶ On the laicization of Buddhism and political monks in Sri Lanka, see: (1) SJ Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed?* 1984; (2) HL Seneviratne, *The Works of Kings*, 1991.

²⁷ Chan Wing-tsit 1953:56; Bapat 1956:397 f.

In the face of common problems, **inter-religious cooperation** often provides disadvantaged religions with vital cooperation for survival and growth. In **Malaysia**, various government restrictions on the religious use of land to build churches and use of language (ban on the use of certain Arabic words in non-Muslim worship) especially affecting the Christians have intensified non-Muslim leaders' sense of religious persecution and increased their awareness that they should stand together to protect their rights.

Non-Muslims sitting on the National Unity Board, feeling that their presence was merely cosmetic, decided in 1983 to form their own inter-religious organization, known officially as the **Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism (MCCBCHS)**.

Since its formation, the MCCBCHS has made several public statements concerning the threat of Islamization to non-Muslims, but its role seems to be limited to that of organizing seminars and releasing press statements. In the 1990s, when there were proposals to introduce **Hudud**, or the Islamic penal code, on a national level, the MCCBCHS's unified objection was strongly voiced and the matter was judiciously left aside.

The more difficult tasks of negotiating with the government authorities over land and language issues continue to fall on the shoulders of the non-Malay politicians and organizations representing specific religions. Despite such problems, the MCCBCHS is the only inter-religious body of non-Muslims in Malaysia that provides **a united non-Muslim front against Islamic domination**.

Indonesia

As for **Indonesia**, despite the importance of Buddhism amongst the Chinese today, little literature exists about either their Buddhist history or practice. In the 1930s, however, the Peranakan writer **Kwee Tek Hoay** published a 10-volume work on Buddhism, and a Buddhist revival of sorts followed.

Most Chinese temples in Indonesia contain Buddhist and other religious figures, often juxtaposed. For example, the images of Guandi and Guanyin would be found together on the same shrine. Kwee himself promoted a syncretism of the three Chinese religions, **Sam Kauw** (*sanjiao*)—Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—or “Tri Dharma,” as it is now called.

In 1965, as a result of an attempted Communist coup, the Indonesia government outlawed all organizations that doubted or denied **the existence of God** through their national ideology called **Pancasila** (“Five Principles”), which ironically is a Buddhist term. This was a problem for “non-theistic” Theravada Buddhism. A senior Indonesian monk, Ashin Jinarakkhita, proposed that the Buddhist “God” was the **Ādi-Buddha**, the primordial Buddha of Mantrayāna that had existed in the region.

The more orthodox Theravadins, however, claimed that **Nirvana**, the “unborn, uncreated, unconditioned,” was their “God.” Another response, personally conveyed to me, was the interpretation of *Tuhan* (“God”) as **Ketuhanan** (**Godliness**), which was more acceptable to Buddhists since it reflected a quality rather than a being, such as the Divine Abodes (*brahma,-vihāra*).

36. BUDDHISM IN SINGAPORE

Singapore is unique in that it is the only country outside China and Taiwan with **a majority of Chinese as the citizenry**. In the 1990 census of 3 million, over 2.1 million (77.7%) are Chinese, with Malays 14.1% and Indians 7.1%. In 2000, the population rose to 4 million, with a slight increase in percentage of Indians and “Others.” (In 1824, only 31% of the population were Chinese.)

The high percentage of Buddhists in Singapore is due to a number of factors. First and foremost, Singapore is a **secular society**, that is, it has no state religion, but there is religious



Fig 27. Thian Hock Keng priest & followers. Singapore, 1900s

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freedom. Buddhist missions from a growing number of traditions have been active here ever since the early years of Singapore (founded in 1819).

Kong Meng San Phor Kark See

The largest, wealthiest and most influential Buddhist temple in Singapore is the **Kong Meng San Phor Kark See** or Bright Hill Temple. Its full Chinese name translates as Samanta, bodhi Dhyāna Vihāra in Sanskrit. It was founded by Shi Zhuan-dao (1871-1943) in 1920 and was the first traditional forest temple in Singapore. With the country's rapid urbanization, the monastery grew into its most built-up and busiest Buddhist centre.

During the abbacy of Shi Hongchuan (Hong Choon) (d 1990), the monastery set up the Evergreen Bright Hill Home for old folks. After the Hongchuan's demise, the temple continued to grow



Fig 28. The Kong Meng San Phor Kark See's original building

in Buddhist work. The temple has an effective Dharma Propagation Division Ministries that employs qualified professional and university graduates as full-time fully-paid workers. The temple also runs bookshop chain, the Awareness Place, to sell Buddhist books and products. On 5th June, 2005, Shi Guang-sheng, a Singaporean, was installed as temple's 6th abbot.

Buddhist Studies

The introduction of **Buddhist Studies** in the 1980s as part of the Ministry of Education's Religious Studies for Secondary Schools project gave Buddhism a phenomenal boost, especially in a subsequent rise in the younger population of Buddhists who populated the tertiary educational institutions' Buddhist societies.

The main reason for the success of Buddhist Studies—the most popular of the four electives of Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism—was the introduction of **a well-written set of textbooks and teacher's guides** in simple language and approach that the teachers and students received favourably. **Piyasilo (Piya Tan)** was invited by the Singapore Buddhist Federation to join the Buddhist Studies project at a crucial point when the proposed syllabus (based on Narada Thera's ideas) were rejected by the Cambridge Examinations Syndicate as being unsuitable for examinations purposes. The project successfully moved again based on the ideas of Piyasilo's Integrated Syllabus and textbooks which he had used in Malaysia. Piyasilo served as **consultant and lecturer** in this project under the directorship of **Dr Ang Beng Choo**.

Global vision

During the late 1980s, a group of like-minded young Buddhist graduates, conscious of the need to reform the Buddhist movement in Singapore founded **the Buddhist Graduate Fellowship (BGF)** with a mission to break new ground in the propagation of the Dharma and to foster greater Buddhist solidarity in Singapore. Many other young Buddhist graduates and professionals dismayed at the lethargy and backwardness of the Buddhist community joined the BGF. The small pioneer group numbered less than 50 active members.

The year 1999 was a watershed for the BGF. Through a consensus, it was transformed from an alumni to an open fellowship—it became **the Buddhist Fellowship (BF)**—opening its doors to all Buddhists. The following year, 2000, was even more significant with its organization of the 1st Global Conference on Buddhism and the appointment of Ajhan Brahmagamso as the BF spiritual

patron. The organization of the conference involved almost all the active Buddhist organizations in Singapore and this fostered greater cooperation amongst these various groups in Buddhist work. In June 2004, the BF organized 3rd Global Conference on Buddhism.

On 28th August 2002, Ajahn Brahmavamso opened the **Brahm Education Centre (BEC)**, formed by the Buddhist Fellowship as a limited company to serve as “a non-profit organization dedicated to continuous education and personal enrichment to improve the well-being of the individual, company, family and community.” The BEC runs not only courses on Buddhism but also any courses that interest the members and the public (such as management and yoga classes). The BEC also supports full-time lay Dharma teachers through such projects.²⁸

It is interesting to note the Singapore Buddhists’ capacity and tendency for being global in vision. The Kong Meng San Phor Kark See’s 5th abbot, for example, was Sik Sui Kim, the abbot of Xing Yuan Temple and Hwa Zhang Temple in the Philippines. The spiritual patron of the Buddhist Fellowship is Ajahn Brahmavamso, an English monk of the Thai forest tradition and abbot of the Wat Bodhinyana, near Perth, Western Australia. The reason for this globality is clear. Singapore is a small city state (616 sq km = 238 sq mi) and a cosmopolitan one that thrives on “foreign talents.”

Inter-religious cooperation

Buddhism is a member of the **Inter-Religious Organization, Singapore** (1949), run by a Council of 29 members representing the 9 major religions in Singapore: Hindu, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Taoist, Christian, Muslim, Sikh and Bahai. This organization reflects the freedom and vitality of religious life in Singapore, which is a **secular state**.

In June 2001, the **Metta Welfare Association**, a Buddhist-affiliated charity, teamed up with the Salvation Army, a Christian organization, to collect old clothes for the benefit



Fig 29. Dharma talk by Ajahn Brahmavamso, Singapore



Fig 30. Inter-religious Organization, Singapore

²⁸ The first lay Dharma teacher to benefit from this programme is Piya Tan.

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of the underprivileged in Papua New Guinea. The event was highlighted by a charity walk and a whole-day family carnival at the National Stadium. This is only one good example of Buddhist initiatives in Singapore at social work and responding to the needs of the unfortunate and needy not only in Singapore and also overseas.

On 16 June 2001, 25 undergraduates from the **National University of Singapore Buddhist Society** began their one-week humanitarian Myanmar mission, codenamed “The Song of the Apsaras.” The project, initiated by the **Buddhist Fellowship**, provided needy children in Myanmar with 260 hearing aids, two hearing testers, old clothes, medicine and other assistance. The project, co-ordinated by Dr. Ng Yee Kong, was funded by the Buddhist Fellowship (non-sectarian), the Burmese Buddhist Temple, the Palelai Buddhist Temple (Thai) and the Phor Kark See Temple (Chinese Mahayana). This is a good example of intra-Buddhist interdenominational cooperation involving young Buddhists and academia.



Fig 31. NUS Buddhist Society members visiting Myanmar, 2001

Buddhist growth

In the latest census (2000), the population of Buddhists in Singapore has risen to **42.5%**, from only 31.2% in 1990. In the 2001 general elections, at least two practising Buddhists made it to Parliament (Ong Seh Hong and Khaw Boon Wan). Meantime, the new generation of Singaporean Buddhists have shown remarkable vision in their mission by emphasizing **educational and right livelihood projects** besides the traditional practices such as meditation.

Various national courses (such as the Buddhist Youth Leadership Training Camps) and global conferences (like the Y2000 Global Conference on Buddhism) are being held on a regular basis. The follow-up Y2002 Global Conference will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

The **For You Information**, a monthly publication of Buddhist activities in Singapore has a permanent list of **at least 120 Buddhist temples and groups** in Singapore.



Fig 32a. Khaw Boon Wan, MP



Fig 32b. Dr Ong Seh Hong, MP

Religion	1970	1980	1990	2000
Resident Population Aged 15 Years & Over by Religion (%)				
Buddhism	..	27.0	31.2	42.5
Taoism	..	30.0	22.4	8.5
Islam	..	15.7	15.3	14.9
Christianity	..	10.1	12.7	14.6
Hinduism	..	3.6	3.7	4.0
Other Religions	..	0.5	0.6	0.6
No Religion	..	13.0	14.1	14.8

Religion in Singapore.

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37. THE VIDYADHARA

37.1 In my previous lecture entitled “Buddhism in India,” I briefly mentioned the **religious virtuoso** or “religious specialist” as a person who is perceived as having a vital grasp of Buddhist doctrine and spirit by **sheer personality and social status**. In terms of salvation, each of the four periods of Buddhist history in India differs in the conception of its religious virtuoso or ideal.

We shall now extend this framework of the four periods of Buddhist history, lasting roughly 500 years each (except the last), to **the social development of Buddhism**.

1st period (500-0 CE)—the arhat or liberated saint, in whom all cravings are extinguished and who will no more be reborn: this is the period of early Buddhism.

2nd period (0-500 CE)—the bodhisattva, the hypostasis or embodiment of compassion, that is, a being (human or cosmic) who wishes to save other beings, even at the cost of postponing his own awakening; it is period of great philosophical development, that is, the era of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

3rd period (500-1500)—the siddha, the holy man or religious adept who is totally in harmony with his environment, that he is under no constraint whatsoever, and as a free agent is believed to be able to manipulate the cosmic forces both inside and outside himself; this period of dominated by the shamanism of Tantric Buddhism.

4th period (1500-2000)—the seth,²⁹ a professional or entrepreneur, especially one with social status, wealth or academic title, which are regarded as blessings of good karma, and, as such, worthy of emulation and respect as a teacher or leader: this is corporate Buddhism.

5th period (2000- ?)—the vidyadhara, person of great learning that effectively promotes Buddhism; such a person may range from being a well known lay academic scholar to an accomplished monastic figure, or ideally one who is a master of both Buddhist spirituality and worldly learning, that is, one who champions a “scientific” Buddhism.³⁰

²⁹ Skt *śreṣṭhī*, P *seṭṭhī*. *Seth* is a modern Hindi word for a wealthy entrepreneur or businessman. The traditional definition of *seṭṭhī* is given in the PED as “foreman of a guild, treasurer, banker, “City man,” wealthy merchant, V 1:15 f, 271 f, 2:110 f, 157, S 1:89...etc.”

³⁰ Skt *vidyā, dhara*, lit tr as “knowledge holders.” Although the term is found in Vedism and Tibetan Buddhism, I use it by way of convenience to represent the new Buddhist ideal of one who is knowledgeable not only in Buddhist lore, but also in modern learning. Interestingly, Ajahn Brahmavamso, is a good example, as he graduat-

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In the final analysis, only **the arhat** is the true ideal of early Buddhism. Each of the other three types are the “ideal Buddhists” as envisioned in later times. Each of these types appears to be a quantum leap from the original Arhat ideal. However, we should view them as “social ideals” reflecting the religious needs of contemporary society.

These ideals are not mutually exclusive, but overlap as concentric circles emanating from the Arhat ideal at the centre. **The arhat ideal actually underlies all the other three social ideals** since as long as the Noble Eightfold Path exists, it is possible to gain enlightenment.

37.2 Buddhism in modern Singapore

An interesting feature of current Buddhist work in Singapore and Malaysia is **the strong involvement of lay Buddhists**, especially successful professionals and corporate leaders—**the seth**—as exemplified in the highly successful **Buddhist Fellowship** in Singapore and the Buddhist Gem Fellowship in Malaysia). Such lay workers also organize overseas missions (for example, to India and Burma) to help the less fortunate. If this goes on in a larger and more sustained manner, we can happily say the Singapore (that is more involved in such projects) would become the true “heart of Buddhist south-east Asia.”

An interesting development in lay Buddhism in Malaysia and Singapore is the promotion of the notion of **Buddhism as corporate success**—that Buddhism in urban Malaysia and Singapore is effectively defined and propagated by successful lay professionals. The success—academic, social and economic—of a lay Buddhist teacher or leader is regarded as his or her “good karma,” and such a person serves as a model or ideal for other lay Buddhists.

According to the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [by Max Weber, 1930], Calvinist belief in predestination encouraged what became an irresistible need to determine whether one was among the chosen; such predestination made sacraments unnecessary and led to devaluation of the sacred; in its place, economic success in this world came to be accepted as the demonstration of God’s favour; this created the psychological and sociological conditions for importing ascetic values from the monastery into worldly vocations, as one labored to prove oneself saved by reinvesting any surplus rather than consuming it. Gradually this original goal became attenuated, yet inner-worldly asceticism did not disappear as God became more distant and heaven less relevant. (David Loy, 1998:19)

Such a development is almost reflective of a Buddhist version of **the Protestant work ethic** of the West (Max Weber, 1930), which expresses the theory that modern capitalism arose out of an association of a Calvinistic concern for moral obligation and economic success—except that in the Singapore case, the ethic is less ascetic and more pragmatic.

37.3 Religion of the rich

In the history of world religions, there is a clear pattern, even during the founder’s life, showing a close connection between wealth and faith. The main reason for the religion’s success is closely linked to worldly wealth and patronage of the wealthy (defined as those with surplus income), and in church religions, the support of the elite and the powerful. The religion of such a group, in the case of Buddhism, is that of an “elite Buddhism,” that is, one defined by popular trends and notions, often leaning on superficiality and status. Religion is attractive to the powerful or power-inclined often for its ability to hold or mold the minds of the faithful, and whoever controls and defines God or faith, controls the faithful.

ed in theoretical physics from Cambridge, UK, and is a spirited defender of Buddhism as “the only real science” (2004). See SD 17.8c(10).

The effects of such a trend of the elitism of the wealthy can be seen in recent history. In Europe, as a result of political and economic effects of the Seven Years' War (1756-63),³¹ and the beginning of the Industrial Revolution,³² the European bourgeoisie prospered, and, George Savage notes,

their wealth enabled them to become patrons and arbiters of taste. Primarily interested in the arts as a method of display or as status symbols, they demanded an excess of intricate and expensive ornament. In the Far East the same process of degeneration began at the same time, at least partly as a result of the large number of export orders received. This pernicious influence was kept at bay for awhile [sic] by the emperor Ch'ien Lung, who stigmatized the English as cultural barbarians, but became more pronounced in the 19th century. Similar tendencies may be seen in Japanese pottery after 1853, when many factories worked almost entirely in styles demanded by their customers in the West.

(Encyclopaedia Britannica 15th ed 1983 14:915)

Savage's article is about pottery, but the reaction here very well applies to religious trends and taste, and in both cases, it typifies the affluent milieu.

There is nothing wrong in being rich and religious; in fact, worldly wealth and spiritual wellbeing are regarded as the results of one's good karma and conducive current circumstances. As long as spiritual virtues define the person, wealth would be in wise hands, benefiting self, other and the environment. Buddhism should not be merely a fashionable badge, or a trophy or trinket on one's cluttered showcase, to be admired or exhibited or prattled about after a round of golf or a drink at the country club. Then, one is only tasting yesterday's stale fare. Let us be ants while the bright warm sun shine, so that we are well even in inclement times.

38. DISENGAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT

Buddhism and violence

Although we are living in a technically advanced world with high-speed global connections, we have seen that the year 2001 was **a religiously violent one**, especially with the total destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha image in Afghanistan and the 11th September (911) bombings of the World Trade Centre in New York by Muslim terrorists. Religious violence, too, gave Buddhism the deathblow in **India** during the 13th century. We also witnessed how hatred was answered by hatred, an-eye-for-an-eye violence, with the US bombing of Afghanistan. 2001 was indeed **year of religious and political terrorism**.

Buddhism has launched no crusades nor hurled any dharmacakras against those who violated against them. **Some may think that Buddhism is politically weak**, but history has witnessed otherwise, as in the cases of mediaeval Japan [20] and of modern Vietnam [21], where Buddhists acted politically in their own interests. In the case of Japan, it was for selfish end; in Vietnam, it was against persecution.

Buddhists may not be outwardly violent, but if non-violence is a spiritual virtue, then Buddhists should not, by holding on to a certain view (be it Abhidhamma or the teachings of a lama), condemn other views as wrong simply because they are different. This is a violence of another kind—that of **intolerance**. No matter how convinced one is about a doctrine, there must be room for **doubt, understanding and openness**. This space for doubt, understanding and openness is beholden to all unawakened beings.

Otherwise, we would only prove the secular scholars right—that religion may not be about war but it is certainly not about peace, that **“every religion is about absolute belief in its own superior-**

³¹ **The Seven Years' War** was a conflict between the major European powers: France, Austria and Russia on one side, and Great Britain and Prussia on the other. As a result of it, Great Britain emerged as the undisputed leader in overseas colonization and Prussia the most powerful force in Europe.

³² **The Industrial Revolution** refers to the economic and social changes that mark the passage from an agrarian handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machinery. In simple terms, it is a switch from human-centred productivity to profit-centred mass production where supply is guided by demand.

2. The spread of Buddhism

ity and the divine right to impose itself upon others” (Pervex Amirali Hoodbhoy, “Getting on the right path,” *Sunday Times*, 6 January 2002).³³

Roots of intolerance

Like politics, religion deals with power: **politics** is the search for this-worldly power, **religion** is about other-worldly power. When the two paths cross in violence, the other-worldly power often triumphs, usually at great human cost: the Crusades, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 which ended the Pahlavi dynasty, and the self-immolating monks of Vietnam who toppled the Diem regime. These are extreme cases, of course, the climax of protracted tension between two diverse social orders.

Buddhism, like any religion, has **a dark side**, the Jungian “shadow,” that continually lurks in the shadows of the Bodhi tree. There are often those who feel they have finally attained some penetrative insight into the Buddha’s “secrets,” perhaps through the Abhidharma, Tantra or meditation; or they have finally found that guru who is perceived as being enlightened or a saint. In their hearts, **they fervently think that what they have found is right**—the “only way,” all else is “wrong view.” These are the “Buddhist” fanatics and cult leaders; but their kind is found in all religions.³⁴

In his instructive even if jingoistic book, *Fighting for the Future: Will America Triumph?* (1999), Ralph Peters identifies **five social pools** that exist in some form in all significant cultures, from which today’s and tomorrow’s warriors (and zealots) may emerge. Of these five, two apply to Buddhist zealots:

- (1) **The entrepreneurs of conflict** form the most dangerous pool, because in their cultural context, they generally possess the best and most varied intelligence networks of all warrior groups. Touched by a dark genius, they are masters of timing and surprise. They have the makings of merciless warlords who can take control of cities, regions and countries.
- (2) **The underclass males**, losers who have little or no education, no skills, no abiding attractiveness to women, and no future. For them, the end of fighting means the end of good times.

(Quoted by Richard Lim, “From terrified to terrorising,” *Sunday Times* 30 Sep 2001)

From these two pools, one may expect Buddhist zealots to arise. The best teachings of Buddhism do not permit the birth of religious warriors in its ranks, but these zealots would be violent in their own way, finding lost causes to draw attention and followers.

If these zealots are **identified early and exposed**, they would be taken less seriously. Then, surely Buddhists would be spared much pain and would not contribute to social hardship. **Proper Buddhist education and social welfare services** are vital to keep people to the wisdom and compassion of the Middle Way.³⁵

The new world religion

In his lectures and writings, **David Loy** often jokes that the new world religion as **“money-theism,”** “the religion of the market” (1998), but the joke is on us, he declares, “For more and more people, the value-system of money is supplanting traditional religions, as part of a profound secular conversion we only dimly understand.” (“Buddhism and Money” in Fu & Wawrytko, 1991: 297, 306)

The Buddhist attitude towards wealth is a positive one, in the sense that **what is well-earned should be well-enjoyed** (A 2:67 f, 3:44-46, 3:76-78; S 1:89-91). From these Buddhist texts, it is

³³ Recommended reading: Chappell, *Buddhist Peacework*, Boston: Wisdom, 1999.

³⁴ On the shadow in Buddhism, see, for example, Katy Butler, “Encountering the Shadow in Buddhist America” in Abrams & Zweig, ed. 1991:137-147. There are current “cult” cases detailed in the “FWBO Files”, see www.fwbo-files.com.

³⁵ The fundamentalists can only hold on to power when people are totally wretched and uneducated and can be kept in complete ignorance or simply occupied by a desperate struggle for existence. (George M. Spencer, “Why government must remain secular”, ST 15 Nov 2001).

clear that Buddhists have a **utilitarian view of wealth**: money is what money does. One's wealth is for "making merit," for accumulating good karma for a better life here and hereafter, while waiting for Nirvana.

Good karma cannot arise if one is all alone without other beings. One gains good karma in one's wholesome interaction with others, primarily by **giving (dāna)** to others. **Wealth**, in other words, **is to be shared**. To Buddhists, there is **the joy of sharing**: "By means of wealth thus acquired [through wholesome self-effort], I both enjoy my wealth and do meritorious deeds." Thinking thus, joy comes to him, satisfaction comes to him (A 2:68).

In a remarkable passage in the **Cakkavatti, sīhanāda Sutta**, the Buddha using mythical language tells an ancient story of how³⁶

...from not giving of wealth to the needy, poverty became rife; from the rise in poverty, stealing increased; from the rise in theft, the use of weapons increased; from the rise in use of weapons, the taking of life increased—from the taking of life, people's life-span decreased, their beauty decreased. (D 3:68)

But not all crimes are committed by the dispossessed; not all terrorist acts are those of the oppressed. **Greed, hatred and delusion** are the religion of all alike, religious and secular.

While we await the coming of the one world, the global village, "we should know that of the world's 100 largest economies, 51 are not countries but **corporations**. There is a lot of poverty out there." (Richard Lim, "How the New War will be fought," Sunday Times, 30 Sep 2001)³⁷

The arrogance of the secularists led to a civil war between two power groupings, capitalism and communism, that divided the world, which was asked to believe that the victor would have the Truth....

Most important of all, secularists have to admit that there are fundamentalists amongst them, too, including those who couch their faiths in terms of sovereign nationalist interests or insist that only their claim of universalism is valid and all others must conform to their standards.

Without sufficient attention to spiritual needs, especially of people in the poorer nations of the world, secularism does not deserve the respect it has had so far.

(Wang Gangwu, "Limits of secularism," Sunday Times 25 November 2001)

Engaged Buddhism

Although Buddhism began as **an other-worldly monastic system**, the Buddha gave **social teachings** such as those found in the Sigālovāda Sutta (D 3:180-193) and the Ādiya Sutta (A 3:44 f.). One remarkable contemporary monk who sees Buddhism as radically "socially engaged" is **Thich Nhat Hanh**, Vietnamese Zen master, poet and peace activist.³⁸

On the invitation of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, in 1966, at the beginning of the Vietnam War (1965-75), he left Vietnam for the West where he has lived and worked ever since. In 1967, he was nominated by Martin Luther King for the Nobel Peace Prize. Unable to return to Vietnam, he received asylum in France, where he currently lives in Plum Village, a small community he founded.

His philosophy and teachings have inspired many Buddhist activists such as the Siamese Buddhist **Sulaks Sivaraksa**,³⁹ who formed the **International Network of Engaged Buddhists**, whose headquarters are in Bangkok (Harvey, 2000: 218-224). The **Buddhist Peace Fellowship** in Berkeley, USA, works along the same lines. Modern Buddhist academics and practitioners like **David Chappell** and **David Loy** are giving socially-engaged Buddhism a powerful voice today.

³⁶ For a discussion on this passage, see M.L. Fenn, "Two Notions of Poverty in the Pali Canon", *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3 1996: 98-125.

³⁷ Recommended reading: Peter Harvey, 2000: ch. 5 (Economic ethics).

³⁸ See Lopez (ed) 2002:201-206.

³⁹ See Lopez (ed) 2002:211-216.

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Buddhist drug therapy

One of the most dramatic and successful stories of Buddhist social engagement is that of **the herbal drug therapy of Phra Chamroon** (1926-1999) of Wat Tham Krabok, a forest temple in Saraburi, 125 km north of Bangkok. The centre started over 20 years ago. Phra Chamroon claims that his radical therapy—using only homegrown herbs and Buddhist spirituality—cures 70% of addicts and has treated Thais as well as foreigners, including wealthy businessmen, Italian fashion designers, rock stars, senior Muslim politicians, Asian politicians, and children of the rich and famous.

According to Phra Gordon Baltimore, an ex-mercenary, who has now found peace at Wat Tham Krabok, “One American drug company came here and offered us millions of dollars for our secret. Even President Bush sent people here to study what we do. What these people don’t understand is that it’s not just the *yaa* [“medicine”] that cures an addict. If you take the *yaa* out of this sacred place it will lose its power—everything here is sacred. The hills, the stones, the plants and trees.”

Phra Chamroon received the **Ramon Magsaysay Prize for Public Service** in 1970 and other awards in recognition of his humanitarian work. Phra Chamroon’s work is being carried on by his brother Phra Charoen. This website http://www2.gol.com/users/isett/features/pages/drug_temple.html provides not only update on his work, but a feature on **Wat Prabat Nampoo** in Lopburi province, a hospice for the AIDS stricken.



Fig 33. Wat Tham Krabok (Thailand) treating an ex-addict patient.

39. THE FOREST TRADITION OUTSIDE ASIA

Christian monasticism

There are two parallel traditions of **contemplative monasticism** in the world today: the Buddhist forest tradition and the Catholic contemplative orders. It is possible that Buddhism or Buddhist monasticism was known to the early Christians especially at **Alexandria** that housed the ancient world’s most famous library. The library was started by Alexander the Great, and flourished under the royal patronage of the first two book-loving Ptolemies (4th-3rd centuries BCE), and survived until Roman times in the 3rd century CE. (The new US\$200 million hi-tech **Bibliotheca Alexandrina**, located very near the original ancient library, is due to be inaugurated on 23 April 2002.)

Hesychasm, a type of Eastern Christian monastic life, bears interesting parallels with Buddhist contemplative monasticism. The Hesychasts aimed to attain divine quietness (Greek *hēsychia*) through the contemplation of God in an un-interrupted manner. **St. John Climacus** (c. 579-c. 649), one of the greatest Hesychast writers produced a very precise “method of prayer,” advising novices to fix their eyes

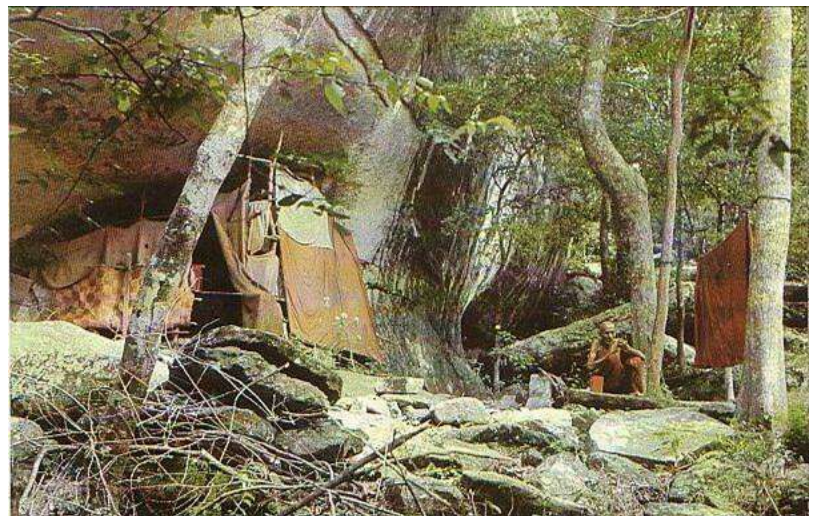


Fig 34. Forest monk, Sri Lanka

during prayer on the “middle of the body,” in order to “attach the prayer to their breathing.” Anti-Hesychasts attacked the Hesychasts, calling them *omphalopsuchoi*, that is, those having their souls in their navels!

St. Pachomius (c 290-346) founded **Christian coenobitical (communal) monasticism**, which was “theologically bolstered by Basil the Great, passed on to the Latin West by John Cassan, and exemplified for all of Western monasticism in Benedict of Nursia and the Benedictine Rule, can also be found in Buddhism (and in Qumran).” (Küng 1993: 346). The essential elements of **Christian coenobitic life** are:⁴⁰

- (1) common quarters for living, working, and praying;
- (2) uniformity in dress, diet, and ascetical bearing;
- (3) safeguarding of the community by means of a written rule based on obedience.

Despite differences in background and many modifications (such as no vow of obedience), “**this pattern is also characteristic of the Buddha—but not of Jesus, the Christ of the Christians.**” (Küng 1993: 346)

Buddhist-Christian dialogue

If the Church’s current vigil of Buddhism by way of **dialogue** and its growing assimilation of **Buddhist meditation** is anything to go by, it would not be surprising that it had done the same in the past. In that case, both religions have a common contemplative tradition going back to the Buddha himself.

The Buddhist-Christian dialogue that began in academic circles is building up, increasingly involving more practitioners from both sides. In 1987, a conference entitled “Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Toward the Human Future,” held in Berkeley, California, was attended by over 750 people from 19 countries and 34 states. From this conference **The Society for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue** was formed

The first such Buddhist-Christian conference was first held in Honolulu in 1980, bringing together a core group of practitioners and scholars for a significant exchange of views. It resulted in the formation of **the North American Theological Encounter Group**, led by Professors Masao Abe and John B. Cobb, Jr., which has been meeting regularly every since. The Society also publishes a scholarly journal called the ***Buddhist-Christian Studies***.

A growing number of Buddhist monks and nuns are becoming more involved in Buddhist-Christian dialogue on a personal basis. **Santikaro Bhikkhu**, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu’s pupil and translator, for example, has conducted retreats for Catholic religious in Thailand and the Philippines. For many years, he has been a special friend of **the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM)**. In 2001, he came to Singapore on invitation of the Catholics to conduct talks and meditation at local churches.

In June 2001, at the invitation of Perth’s Dean, John Shepherd, **Ajahn Brahmavamso**, a teacher from the Cittaviveka Order, of the Thai forest contemplative tradition, became the first Buddhist to preach at a Eucharist (“thanksgiving,” the most sacred of the Anglican liturgies) in St George’s Anglican Cathedral, Perth, Western Australia. In *The West Australian* newspaper, which reported the event, Dr. Shepherd said that the Mass celebrated “creation in all its diversity” and that “Christianity needed to move away from the idea that it was the only way to God.”



Fig 35. Santikaro & friend at Thomas Merton’s 25th death anniversary, 1993

⁴⁰ K Baus, “Kionobitenum” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 6:368.

2. The spread of Buddhism

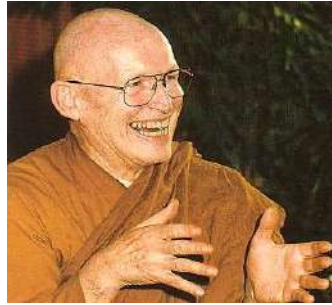
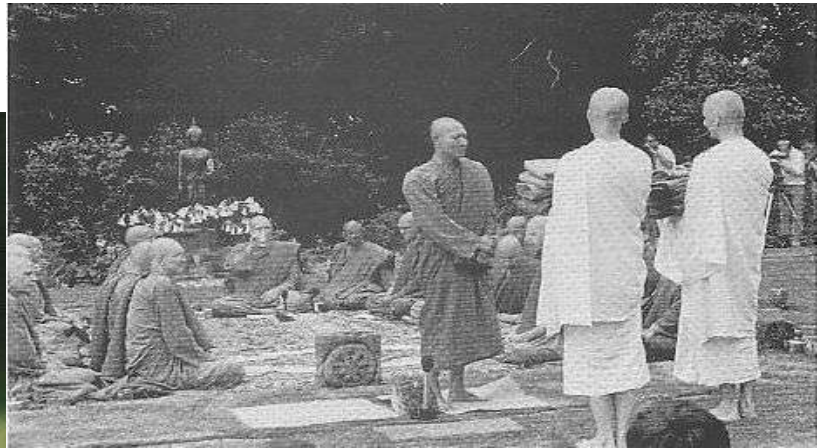


Fig. 36 Cittaviveka Order (forest monastic tradition)
(Clockwise l-r) Ajahn Chah, Ajahn Sumedho, nuns' ordination at Chithurst, England, Ajahn Brahmavamso (Australia)



The Cittaviveka Order

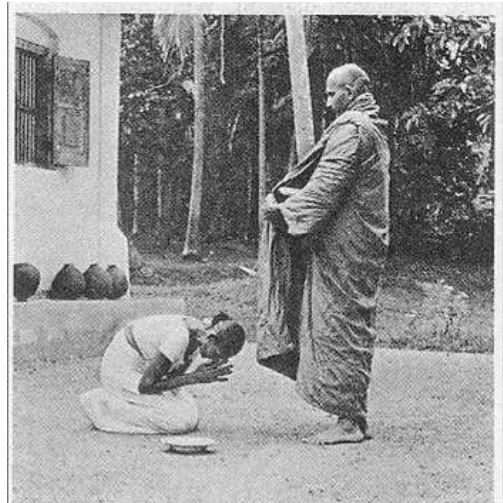
One of the most important turning-points in Buddhism in the West began in **1977**, when, on the invitation of the English Sangha Trust [29], **Ajahn Sumedho** accompanied his teacher Ajahn Chah on a visit to England and then stayed behind to establish a successful **Theravada forest Sangha**.⁴¹

In 1979, the 108-acre Chithurst Buddhist Monastery or **Cittaviveka** was founded in West Sussex. In 1984, a large training centre, **Amaravati Buddhist Monastery**, was established just outside the village of Great Gaddesden near Hemel Hempstead in Hertfordshire. In 1985, two monks were sent to establish a branch monastery in **New Zealand**. Another branch monastery was also set up in **Switzerland**.

Roman Catholics have been showing great interest in **Buddhist meditation**. This is evident in their growing dialogue and affinity with the Cittaviveka Order—the forest tradition of Ajahns Chah (1918-1992), Sumedho, Brahmavamso and their lineage—wherever they have their monasteries.

Australia

In 1972, the **Buddhist Society of Western Australia** for formed with its headquarters at the Dhammaloka Buddhist Centre in Nollamara, near Perth. In 1983, the **Bodhinyana Monastery** was established at Serpentine, 60 km south-east of Perth, co-founded by Ajahn Jagaro (now a layman) and Ajahn Brahmavamso. In 1998, the **Dhammasara Nuns' Monastery** was established on a large property at Gidgegannup, 45 km



Woman worshipping at the feet of a *bhikkhu* after offering him alms, while he blesses her
By courtesy of the Ceylon Tourist Board, photograph, Gamini Jayasinghe

Fig 37. A traditional and true role of a monk (Sri Lanka)

⁴¹ On the inspiring account of how Ajahn Chah established the forest order in Britain, see Sandra Bell, "Being Creative With Tradition: Rooting Theravāda Buddhism in Britain," 2000.

northeast of Perth, with Sister Vayāmā as head.

By fully keeping to the letter and spirit of the Vinaya, the Cittaviveka Order has been receiving massive lay patronage and respect from co-religionists. It has clearly proven the relevance, indeed necessity, of traditional monasticism in today's society. As long as people **wish to change themselves for the better rather than to change Buddhism to suit themselves**, the Buddha Dharma is alive to them. This is the rationale behind Buddhist monasticism—that **spirituality need not be updated**. Lay Buddhism, being the way of the world, however, is a different matter.

40. A FUTURE VISION

Converting Buddhism

Contemporary scholars of Buddhism like Gregory Schopen (1988) and Robert Sharf (2002) have clearly shown us that much of post-Buddha Buddhism (and religion in general) is what we have created and invented depending on our views and needs, propping up a prescriptive “textbook Buddhism” often without being aware of historical realities of the religion as actually practised by the faithful. Despite the wealth and availability of authoritative Buddhist teachers and teachings,

most American converts, including many educated and well-respected Western Buddhist teachers, show little interest in appraising the fidelity of their Buddhist understanding against Asian norms. This is not to say that they are unconcerned with issues of authority; it is just that authority is deemed to lie in the transcendent (ahistorical and transcultural) truth of the teachings rather than in correspondence to Asian archetypes, and this view gives North Americans the freedom to pick and choose... Indeed, many American Buddhists see their challenge as extricating the essence from centuries of Asian cultural accretions, and they have little patience for scholars who would question such an enterprise on historical or doctrinal backgrounds. Accordingly, American Buddhists prefer tracts by modern Western or Westernized Asian teachers to translation of classical texts or scholarly expositions of doctrine. Needless to say, these attitudes do not reflect traditional Buddhist ideals, but rather bespeak deeply ingrained Protestant American attitudes toward religious truth, authority, and institutions. The Zeitgeist is so persuasive and compelling (not so mention lucrative) that many Asian Buddhist missionaries have, consciously or otherwise, assimilated Western religious attitudes, thereby becoming complicit in the American reinvention of Buddhism. (Sharf 2002:23 f)⁴²

Such a situation is of course not restricted to North American alone, but can be found wherever Buddhists are motivated by negative roots, so that instead of looking for a proper Buddhist system of personal development, they create their own Buddhism of greed, Buddhism of hate and Buddhism and delusion.

Buddhist theology

Scholars of religions, too, have made important contributions to giving new life to the Buddhism as a religion. Only last year, for example, a group of academics discussed the notion of a Buddhist “theology” and published their thoughts in ***Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*** (ed Jackson & Makransky 2000).

Understandably, the concept of “**theology**” has broadened from being specifically “the study of the nature of God and religious truth” to being “a rational inquiry into religious questions.” Even before the advent of such helpful technical terms, Buddhist theology had existed in practice, in terms of (1) explaining the Teaching for the benefit of the masses (**homiletics**); (2) commentarial gloss on difficult passages (**hermeneutics**); and (3) clarification of apparent contradictions in doctrine and defence of dialectical attacks from others (**apologetics**). [We shall look at these a little more closely in “Teaching Methods of the Buddha.”]

⁴² For a discussion of the manner in which Tibetan teachers are implicated in the domestication of Buddhism in the West, see Lopez 1988:181-207. For a study of DT Suzuki, see Sharf 1995b.

2. The spread of Buddhism

Although Buddhism today still emphasizes a direct transmission of the Dharma through the oral tradition between teacher and pupil, the religion is even more popularly transmitted as a **written tradition** to people who either are new to the Buddhism or do not wish to be identified by the Buddhist label. As such, it is vital to have a broad base of textual discipline so that Buddhism can benefit the greatest number of beings.

Buddhist text translations

The Buddhist texts are so extensive—the Pali Canon itself is estimated to be **over 11 times the Christian Bible**—that it takes great faith, patience and some bookish sense to be able to effectively digest them even in an abridged translation. Moreover, only recently have we more authoritative translations of Buddhist texts done by practising Buddhists themselves. Such important translations include:

- o **the Long Discourses of the Buddha** (Dīgha tr. Maurice Walshe, Kandy: BPS, 1995);
- o **the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha** (Majjhima tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Boston: Wisdom, 1995) and
- o **the Connected Discourses of the Buddha** (Saṃyutta tr. Bhikkhu Bodhi, Boston: Wisdom, 2000). [See illustration]

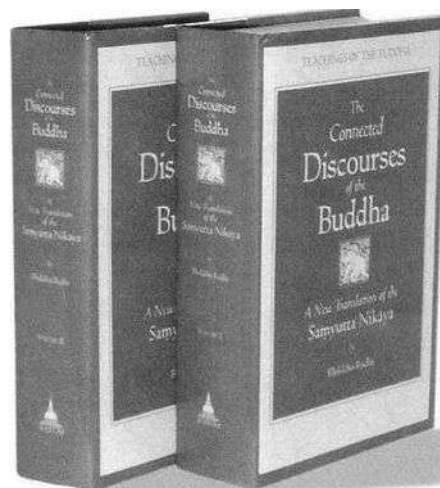


Fig 37. Authoritative annotated translation of Saṃyutta Nikāya by Bhikkhu Bodhi (2000)

The fourth volume, a translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, is being prepared by Bhikkhu Bodhi at the time of writing.

Unfinished symphonies

Of the Pali Canon, only the Aṅguttara Nikāya now awaits a new authoritative translation, and with its completion, **the four Nikāyas**, embodying the early teachings of the Buddha would be complete. Sadly, there are a number of other major “Unfinished Symphonies” in Buddhist academia today. One such unfinished masterpiece is the **Critical Pali Dictionary** (CPD) [30], begun in 1924.

The Pali Tipiṭakam Concordance (PTC) started in 1950 under the editorship of Edward Miles Hare and was published by the Pali Text Society. After his death in 1958, work on the Concordance was painfully slow. To date (after more than 40 years) the PTC has only reached Vol. III (P-Bārāṇasīyaka, 1993). This Concordance is useful because it lists (according to the Indian word order) all the occurrences of a Pali word or phrase in the Pali Canon so that they could be located easily.

Another unfinished work is **the Encyclopaedia of Buddhism**, begun in 1955 in Sri Lanka as part of the Buddha Jayanti (Buddhist Era 2500), of which only the first few volumes have been completed to date.

The PTS has begun publishing a new Pali-English dictionary, entitled **A Pāli Dictionary**, Part I (A-Kh) by Margaret Cone (2001).

Learning from others

Before we close, let us look ahead a bit to see what Buddhism might face in the immediate future, say for the next generation. There was a time, especially from the 1950s at the height of the influence of **Protestant Buddhism** from Sri Lanka, when Buddhists (in Malaysia and Singapore at least) regarded terms like “religion,” “church,” “faith,” etc. as being “unbuddhist” since they were common Christian terms or terms (like “religion”) that the evangelists condemned.

Consciously or unconsciously, many English-educated Buddhists, especially in former colonies (like Malaysia and Singapore) **have taken evangelical Christianity as their standard**. This “religious pegging” is obvious in the popularity of Buddhist music and “hymns,” and even the Buddhist liturgy (partly due to the influence of the Buddhist Churches of America), as in the responsive

prayers. Such Buddhist responses, however, have been common ever since the rise of Mahayana in the 1st century BCE.

Obviously, Westerners and those familiar with Christianity who turn to Buddhism are not as much attracted to Christian doctrines as they are to Buddhism. Much less do they approve of Christian evangelical marketing and biblical packaging. Buddhists generally, albeit tacitly, admire most Christians for their **faith** in their religion and for their **textual discipline** centering around the Bible.

While the Christians are openly attracted to Buddhist meditation and Christianizing it, many Buddhist workers are returning the compliment by studying and adopting **Christian methods of education and preaching**. This propensity for learning from each other is what makes them **living world religions**—because they are willing to learn from challenges and adapt to social conditions in the contemporary free market of faiths.

Universality of Emptiness

Let me close on an open note. As I have mentioned earlier, I envision that Buddhism, at least its spirit, would be **at the core of peaceful and engaged religions of the future**. As religions have better information, experience and understanding of one another, it is easier to find a common ground on which all religions can agree.

Buddhism is unique in that it **rejects the idea of a creator God and yet is a religion**, teaching Nirvana as the ultimate reality. Buddhism has been called a **non-theistic religion**. John Hick [31] proposes the Buddhist term *śūnyatā*, “emptiness” (that is, something that transcends conceptualization) as the ultimate reality, the Real. This ultimate reality manifests itself in Buddhism in the doctrine of Interdependent Origination:

Let us humour Hick by regarding *śūnyatā* **as the ultimate reality**, in itself physically inexperienceable and beyond the scope of human conceptuality (1993:114). It can be directly experienced in a range of different ways, however, made possible by the different spiritual disciplines and systems of religious thought:

There are Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu and other theistic experiences of *śūnyata* as a personal deity. There is the advaitic Hindu experience of *śūnyata* as Brahman. And there is the Mahayana Buddhist experience of *śūnyata* as the world-process, *pratitya-samutpada*.

(Hick, 1993:114)

Of course, Hick adds, this is not the only authentic mode of experience of the ultimate, but there is a range of it.

Spiritual openness

While it is unbuddhist to attack other religions, it is also unbuddhist to ignore them. **The middle way** is to have open and wholesome **dialogue** amongst thinkers and practitioners, between Buddhist and the non-Buddhist alike.⁴³

The task of reasoning from within a tradition and between traditions cannot be left only to believers of a religion but must engage people from different traditions in a larger public and international environment that is hospitable to open and honest debate.

(Kwok Kian Woon, “The worlds of the war,” Straits Times 31 Dec 2001)

In closing, I would like to return to the present, and let Professor **Lewis Lancaster**, a rare humble man of great vision and learning who is truly a friend to all Buddhists, have the last word:

Buddhism has always been characterized by a willingness and ability to adapt to new locations and to allow for the presence of other meta-narratives within its sphere. Taoism, Confucianism, shamanism, and popular cults have all served the religious life and

⁴³ On religious pluralism, see Yagi & Swidler, 1988; John Hick, 1985 & 1993: Sect. C.; Chappell 1991.

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practices of Buddhism. This rare ability to accept the value of other narratives may turn out to be Buddhism's greatest contribution to our contemporary situation.

(Lewis Lancaster in Fu & Wawrytko, 1991:352)



Fig 39. Stingel (1994). A modern western artist's vision of Buddhist relevance in our times.

ABBREVIATIONS

[For other abbreviations and textual conventions, please refer to Piyasilo, *Guide to Buddhist Studies*, 1990 (unpublished MSS).]

AA	Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā = Commentary to the Numerical Sayings (volume: page).
DA	Dīgha Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā = Commentary to the Long Sayings (volume: page).
DhsA:PR	<i>The Expositor</i> , 2 vols. [Attha,sālinī, Commentary to the Dhamma,saṅgaṇī] tr. Pe Maung Tin & Mrs. Rhys Davids, London: PTS, 1920-21. 2 vols.
JPTS	Journal of the Pali Text Society, London.
MA	Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā = Commentary to the Middle Length Sayings (volume: page).
Petk:Ñ	<i>The Peṭaka-disclosure, Peṭakopadesa</i> . Tr. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli. PTS Translation Series 35. London: Luzac, 1964.
PTS	The Pali Text Society (1881).
SA	Samyutta Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā = Commentary to the Connected Length Sayings (volume: page).

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THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

A strategic analysis Buddhist history in East Asia
Piya Tan

BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Tradition & Innovation
(2 lectures)

Lecture 3 (First of 2 lectures) RISE OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA



Fig 1. Xuanzang's triumphal return to China from India, 645 (by a Japanese artist).

SYLLABUS

- (1) Introduction of Buddhism into China and the Han dynasty.
- (2) Buddhism during the partition of China after the fall of Han.
- (3) Eminent monk translators Kumārajīva, Pāramārtha, Amoghavajra.
- (4) Xuanzang, Chinese pilgrim and translator.
- (5) Other Chinese pilgrims: Faxian, Yijing.
- (6) Translation of Indic texts into Chinese: problems and process.
- (7) Decline of Buddhism in China: what we can learn from it.

1. FAVOURABLE PRECONDITIONS

Historical & social conditions.

- (a) Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), Asoka and the merchants on the Silk Road.
- (b) Of all the religions of India, Buddhism alone succeeded in establishing itself in China and E. Asia.
- (c) During the time of Asoka (r. c.265-238, or 273-232 BCE), Buddhism had spread throughout India and beyond in all directions.
- (d) By the 2nd century BCE, Buddhism was well established in the Indo-Greek Bactrian kingdom in the NW of India.

2. EARLY DEVELOPMENTS

Dan Lusthaus in his 1998 entry on “Buddhist philosophy, Chinese.” in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*¹ divides the development of Chinese Buddhism roughly into four periods:

- (1) Early introduction of Indian and Central Asian Buddhism (1st-4th centuries);
- (2) Formative development of Chinese versions of Indian and Central Asian Schools (5th-7th centuries);
- (3) The Emergence of distinctively Sinitic Buddhist schools (7th-12th centuries); and
- (4) The Continuance of Chinese Buddhism into the present day (13th century on).

When Buddhism first entered China from India and Central Asia over two thousand years ago, the Chinese who favoured it generally viewed it as an offshoot of the native Huang-Lao Daoist tradition, a form of Daoism rooted in texts and practices attributed to Huangdi (黃帝, the Yellow Emperor) and Laozi. Others, less accommodating of this “foreign” intrusion from the “barbaric” western countries, viewed Buddhism as a dangerous challenge to the social and ethical Chinese civil order. For several centuries these two attitudes fashioned the Chinese understanding of Buddhism.

The situation remained unchanged even as more and more missionaries arrived (mostly from Central Asia) bringing new texts, concepts, rituals, meditative disciplines and other practices. Buddhists and Daoists borrowed ideas, terminology, disciplines, cosmologies, institutional structures, literary genres and soteric models from each other. This exchange sometimes was so profound that today it can be very difficult to determine whose original idea it was. Meanwhile, polemical and political attacks from hostile Chinese quarters (such as the Confucianists) forced Buddhists to respond with apologia and ultimately revise Buddhism into something the Chinese would find more attractive and acceptable.

In the fifth century, Buddhism began to emerge from its quasi-Daoist label by clarifying definitive differences between Buddhist and Daoist thought. Daoist vocabulary and literary styles were shed and new distinctively Buddhist terminology and genres were developed. Even though Mahāyāna Buddhism was a minority school in India and had few followers in Central Asia, it became the dominant form of Buddhism in China to the extent that the ancient Chinese Buddhists would often polemically label non-Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism as *hīna, yāna* (literally “little vehicle”).

By the sixth century the Chinese had been introduced to a various Buddhist theories and practices representing a wide range of Indian Buddhist schools. As the Chinese struggled to master these doctrines it became evident that, despite the fact that these schools were all supposed to express the One Dharma (Buddha’s Teaching), their teachings were not homogenous, and were frequently incommensurate.

By the end of the sixth century the most pressing issue facing Chinese Buddhists was how to iron out the disparities between the various teachings. Responses to this issue produced the Sinitic Mahāyāna schools, ie, Buddhist schools that originated in China rather than India. The four Sinitic schools are Tiantai (天台), Huayan (華嚴), Chan (禪) and Pure Land (Qingtu 清土). Issues that these schools share in common include Buddha-nature, mind, emptiness, Tathāgata, garbha, skillful means (*upāya*), overcoming birth and death (*samsāra*), and awakening.

3. LATER DEVELOPMENTS

From the 4th through the 7th centuries, Buddhist scholars in China periodically realized that their Buddhist texts and notions were at often variance with their Indian antecedents. They tried to correct the problem either through the introduction of additional translations or by clarifying differences between Buddhist and native Chinese ideas.

By the 8th century the Chinese had apparently become satisfied with the types of Buddhism they had developed since, from that moment on they lost interest in Indian commentaries and treatises, and instead turned their attention toward Chinese commentaries on the texts—such as the Lotus Sutra and Huayan Sutra—that had assumed importance for the Chinese Buddhist traditions.

Moreover, even though Buddhist missionaries continued to arrive in China and new translations continued to be produced through the 13th century, none of the significant developments in Indian Buddhism (such as Buddhist syllogistic logic) from the 7th century on had any lasting impact on Chinese

¹ See biblio.

Buddhism, and many important texts and thinkers (eg, Dharmakīrti, Candrakīrti, Śāntarakṣita) remained virtually unknown in East Asia until modern times.

4. EMPEROR HAN MINGDI'S DREAM

In 64 CE, the emperor Han Mingdi (r. 58-75 CE) had a dream of a golden deity. After being told that it was the Buddha, he sent a delegation to India. The delegation returned with a group of monks including Kaśyapa, mataṅga and Dharma, rakṣa (a Median), who together translated a number of works, including The Sutra in Forty-two Sections (jointly translated by Kaśyapa, mataṅga and Dharma, rakṣa). [But the current version we have, though fairly old, was probably made during the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280).]

According to Chinese tradition, Buddhism arrived in China in the middle of the 1st century BC. By this time, the Kushans, former allies of China against the Huns, were well on their way to establishing a Buddhist dynasty in northern India and Central Asia.

5. SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN CHINA

From about the middle of 2nd century CE, certain social conditions in China favoured the rise of Buddhism there:

- (a) Anomie. China was passing through a period of cultural unrest, as the Han dynasty declined. Traditional moral and social structures were weakened. Many people were looking for some satisfactory way of life that would provide some meaning and significance in human existence,
- (b) Adaptability. Buddhism met just the needs of the people because, unlike Brahmanism and other Indian religions at that time, it is not rooted in local cults. It was more socially adaptable.
- (c) Mission. The Buddhist monks belong to a missionary tradition: Buddhism is India's (perhaps the world's) first missionary religion.

6. RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS IN CHINA

By the time Buddhism entered China, indeed, long before that, China was an ancient and well-established culture with its own indigenous philosophy and religion. As such, Buddhism faced severe difficulties following its introduction into China.

- (a) Confucianism emphasizes family values, obedience to authority and social stability. Confucian scholars constituted the most influential sector of society. They generally disapproved of "barbarian" religions. It was precisely because of the religious character of Buddhism that appealed to the Chinese masses. For Confucianism was by its nature incapable of having popular religious quality.
- (b) Taoism was China's own popular religion, but it did not have the rational and philosophical depth that gave Buddhism greater prestige.
- (c) Discipline and standard of morality of Buddhism which was exemplified in the Buddhist missionaries inspired the Chinese.
- (d) Antecedents. Confucianism and Taoism had long provided the Chinese people with a vocabulary and philosophy of something beyond the daily grind. The cultural and intellectual bedrock helped Buddhism tremendously to express itself by means of contextualization.
- (e) Adaptation. The Buddhist monks adapted themselves to the local conditions. It was mainly Mahayana Buddhism that grew China. With its emphasis on the Bodhisattva ideal, used various skilful means (e.g. adjustment of Vinaya rules) to spread Buddhism and gain local support.

7. TRANSLATIONS

The Chinese language is deeply sophisticated, as attested by the various indigenous schools of philosophy. An important early step the Buddhist missionaries took was the translation into Chinese of numerous Buddhist texts (mostly from the Mahayana tradition).

An Shigao 安世高, from Anxi (An-hsi) (Parthia) was a prince of the Iranian Arsacid dynasty who renounced his claim to the throne to become a missionary. He arrived in China around 150 CE. He worked in Luoyang (148-170 CE). As the first great translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese, he formed a

translation team that produced rough translations² of some 35 texts (in 41 fascicles; 20 texts extant), most of them were Nikāya texts concerned primarily with meditation. Through the assistance of pupils like Yan Fotiao, his work was passed down to posterity. He set the precedent for future missionaries. Anyway, these are the oldest extant translations we have.

Among other translators of Iranian origin were the layman An Xuan (An Hsüan) (169-189) and the monk An Faqin (An Fa Ch'in) (281-306).

Lokakṣema (147-185, a Kushan) arrived about about the same time as An Shigao. Translated 12 texts (27 fascicles), but only 9 works extant. Among them are the oldest extant translation of the Perfect-ion of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines (*aṣṭa,sahaśrika prajñā,pāramitā sūtra*). His translation of the term “5 aggregates” is the same as that of An Shigao, but he has many unique transliterated terms, some of which do not correspond to the correct Sanskrit terms. It is therefore assumed, says Kōgen Mizuno,³ that the original version of Loka,kṣema’s translations were not in Sanskrit but in some Indic vernacular or Central Asian language.

Contrasts. In contrast to An Shigao’s translations, which were chiefly of Nikāya sutras, Loka-kṣema’s translations were mainly of Mahayana sutras. Therefore, concludes Mizuno, we can suppose that Nikāya Buddhism was practised in Parthia (Iran), An Shigao’s homeland, while Mahayana was popular in Kushan.

8. MOUZI

In addition to the translations by Central Asian monks, a Buddhist treatise, called Mouzi (Mou Tzu), written in Chinese by a Chinese author (of the same name), survives from the Han dynasty. It is an apologetical work, a defence of Buddhism against Confucian critics.

Among other things, Mouzi addresses the Confucian concerns regarding filial piety as opposed to the Buddhist monastic ideal of renunciation, and the Confucian accusations that Buddhism is of foreign origins. Most surprising is its defence of the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth, where Mouzi asserts that when one dies one’s immortal soul lives on to be born again and again.

Mouzi’s preoccupation with Confucian criticism of Buddhism, and his misunderstanding of basic Buddhist doctrine, indicate how tenuous was Buddhism’s foothold in Han dynasty China. Nevertheless, from this foothold, Buddhism was to develop into the dominant religion of the empire.⁴

9. PARTITION OF CHINA

The Han dynasty collapsed in 220 as a result of both internal decay and continual warfare with nomadic tribes on its frontiers. This was followed by the period of the Three Kingdoms, from which the Jin (Chin) dynasty emerged victorious in 280.

But after 60 years of war, China was weakened. Then a non-Chinese tribal people, known to the Chinese as Xiongnu (Hsiung Nu), seized both the traditional capitals of imperial China: first Luoyang in 311 and then Chang An (modern Xian) in 316. The Chinese gentry and intelligentsia fled to southern China. As a result, China was divided between a “barbarian” north and a Chinese south that was ruled by a series of weak Chinese dynasties.

As it turned out, China’s loss was Buddhism’s gain. Before the southern exile, few ethnic Chinese became monks or even lay converts. After the exile, the number of Chinese Buddhists grew rapidly. In the south, too, Buddhism grew rapidly. There was great opposition from the Confucians but there was little that the weakened southern aristocracy could do. Eventually the Sangha grew into a virtual state within a state.

The situation for Buddhism in northern China was altogether different from the south. One of the initial disadvantages for Buddhism was its “barbarian”, non-Chinese origins. However, this was not to be a hindrance in the north, now ruled by a succession of “barbarian” dynasties comprising various non-Chinese peoples from beyond China.

² Rough translation: for example, *arya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*, tr, as Eightfold Right Practice.

³ *Buddhist Sutras; Origin, Development, Transmission*, Tokyo: Kōsei Press, 1982: 45 f.

⁴ Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History*. Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing, 1994: 139.

10. THE SECOND PARTITION

China unified

The Sui dynasty (581-618) was able to reunify China. Great monks, like Zhiyi (Chih I), founder of the Tiantai school flourished during this period. The brief Sui dynasty was overtaken by the Dang (T'ang) dynasty (618-906), which is said to be the classical period of Chinese Buddhism, whose brightest Buddhist luminary was the pilgrim scholar Xuanzang [16].

With the fall of the Dang, the Song (Sung) dynasty (960-1279) ruled, but not alone, as it had to compete with alien Mongol and Manchu dynasties. Effectively, China went through a second partition.

Little is known of the fate of Buddhism under the Mongol Liao dynasty (907-1124) or the Manchurian Jin (Chin) dynasty (1115-1234). However, it appears to have fared rather well. For example, a Liao edition of the Chinese Tripiṭaka, printed in 1031-64, served as the primary basis for the Korean Tripiṭaka, which is now widely regarded as the best existing edition of the Chinese Buddhist scriptures.

Legitimization of power

These foreign dynasties understandably embraced the foreign religion Buddhism as the most appropriate religion to legitimize their rule in China. For this reason, Buddhism was both promoted and controlled by the northern imperial court. In order to control the Buddhists, a remarkable doctrine developed. The reigning emperor came to be regarded as a living incarnation of the Buddha himself.

The office of National Preceptor (*guoshi*), the head of all the monks, was set up in the imperial bureaucracy, which brought Buddhism into very close relations with the government. As such, the Sangha was prevented from becoming a state within a state. The Buddhist monasteries were lavishly supported by the government.

In turn, the monasteries became administrative centres for the collection of taxes and depots for the storage of grain to be distributed to the peasantry during famines. The monasteries even served as low-security work farms for convict labour.

11. RELIGION OF THE MASSES

In theory, the taxes and grain collected by the monasteries remained the property of the emperor; but in practice, the Buddhist monasteries became the equivalent of feudal estates, administering large tracts of land and large pools of labour. These arrangements made the common people directly dependent on the local Buddhist monastery was their landlord and as their source of relief during periods of hardship and famine.

In order to reinforce the allegiance of the masses, the northern rulers carried out lavish Buddhist construction projects. These stunning monuments can still be witnessed in the enormous complexes of man-made grotto sculpture carved out of living rock at Datong (Ta T'ung) and Luoyang. They depict the legend of the Buddha and mythology of Buddhism in gigantic proportions designed to impress the simple, illiterate masses. Fortunately or unfortunately, the Datong and Luoyang sites were severely plundered by Western treasure-hunters in the 19th century, and many of the finest carvings may now be seen only in the museums of Europe and the US.

For the first time in China, Buddhism became a religion of the masses. As such, since Buddhism provided the ideological cement of the , it is understandable that the Buddhism that flourished was



Fig 2. Partition of China, 3rd-4th cent.

popular, devotional Buddhism, as opposed to the intellectual Buddhism that generally gained acceptance in the south.

12. EMINENT MONKS

During the period of first partition, many eminent monks operated in both Chinas, north and south.

In the south, the meditation masters Huiyuan (慧苑 Hui Yüan) (1st patriarch of the Pure Land School), his disciple Daosheng (道生 Tao Sheng) (founder of the Nirvana School) and the Kashmiri monk Buddha,bhadra, all of whom were influential in the dialogue with neo-Daoism. Bodhiruci (菩提流志 P'u-t'i-liu-chih, arrived in China, 508). Paramârtha (波羅末陀 Chen-ti, c. 499-569) [20], an Indian monk and translator, was primarily responsible for the introduction of the Yogâcâra or Vijñânâvâda (Consciousness School) into China.

Such monks facilitated the development of Chinese counterparts to Indian exegetical systems, including San-lun (based on Indian Mādhyamika treatises). Ti-lun (based on the Daśa,bhūmika Sūtra Śāstra) and She-lun (based on the Mahāyāna Saṅgraha). These schools evolved during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (c 317-c 589), “a period in which the more ascetic, devotional and thaumaturgic forms of Buddhism found a form in the ‘barbarian’ kingdoms of the north, while the more metaphysical and philosophical facets of Buddhism proved attractive to segments of the displaced Han elite in the south” (Sharf 2002:5).

13. KUMĀRAJĪVA

None of these southern monks, however, could compete with the Central Asian monk, Kumārajīva (344-413) and his team of translators in the northern capital of Chang An. Kumārajīva was a child prodigy, known from a very young age as a scholar of Buddhism. The northern emperor summoned him, but en route to Chang An, Kumārajīva was seized by a renegade warlord of Kucha in NW China and detained for 17 years. Although rendered inactive by this detention, Kumārajīva nevertheless used the time to master Chinese.

Finally, the emperor sent an army to liberate him but by the time he arrived in Chang An in 401, Kumārajīva was well over 50. Using the foundation laid by Dao An (Tao An), Kumārajīva organized a translation team on a grand scale, with hundreds of editors, subeditors, proofreaders and scribes.

Works of Kumārajīva

Between 401 and his death in 413, over just a decade, Kumārajīva translated 35 sutras and treatises (in 294 fascicles). Including:

- Prajñā,pāramita Śūtra (The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras)
- Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Śūtra (The White Lotus Sutra)
- Sukhāvatī,vyūha Śūtra (The Amitābha Sutra)
- Mahā,prajñā,pāramitā Upadeśa (The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom)
- Mūla,madhyamika Kārikā (The Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way)
- Śatika,śāstra (The Treatise in One Hundred Verses)
- Dvādaśa,mukha,śāstra (The Treatise on the Twelve Gates)
- Sarvāstivāda Vinaya (The Ten-Category Vinaya).

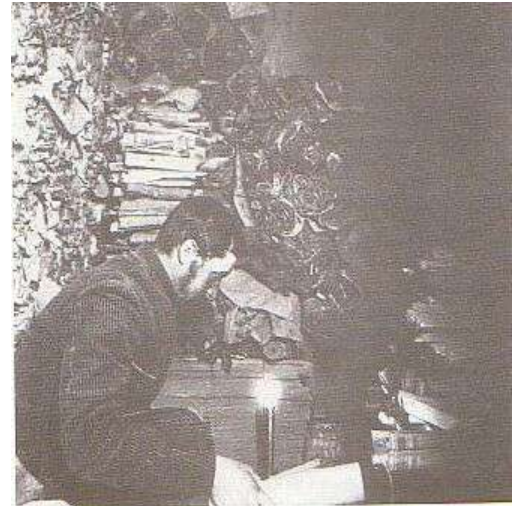


FIGURE 10.3
Photograph of Paul Pelliot, a French Sinologist, in Cave #17 at Dunhuang.
at the bottom of the thousands of manuscripts found there.

Fig 3. Paul Pelliot in Cave 17 at Dunhuang (early 19th cent)

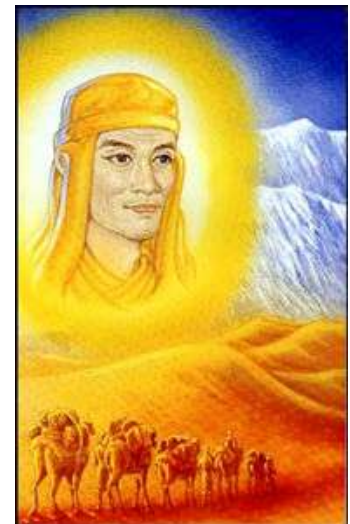


Fig 4. Kumārajīva

Under Kumārajīva, the language of Chinese Buddhism attained maturity, finally liberated from the Daoist terminology that had distorted earlier translations. His translations contributed both to the development of true Buddhism in China and to the establishment of various Chinese Buddhist sects. For example:

Sanlun (Three Treatises) School

The Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way, the Treatise in One Hundred Verses, and the Treatise on the Twelve Gates.

Tiantai School

The White Lotus Sutra and the Treatise on the Fundamentals of the Middle Way.

Chinese monks, such as Dao-an 道安, felt there was an urgent need for a translation of the Buddhist monastic precepts, such as the Ten-Category Vinaya.

14. CHINESE PILGRIMS

From the 4th through the 7th centuries, Buddhist scholars in China periodically realized that their Buddhist texts and notions were at often variance with their Indian antecedents. They tried to correct the problem either through the introduction of additional translations or by clarifying differences between Buddhist and native Chinese ideas.

The early Chinese masters like Dao'an 道安 (312-385) and Sheng'yu 僧祐 (445-518) were aware of the profusion of inauthentic texts. They composed Chinese catalogues of Buddhist works⁵ “in large part precisely for the purpose of separating the dragons from the snakes, and the jewels from the stones.”⁶ Most of the early translators of Buddhist texts were Central Asian or Indian monks, like Kumārajīva, who have taken the original sutras in China and translated them in order to transmit Buddhism to the Chinese.

At the end of the 4th century, there began an important new development: Chinese monks themselves travelled all the way to India to retrieve the Buddhist texts. The best known of these pilgrims were Faxian 法顯 (401-414), Xuanzang 玄奘 (629-645) and Yijing 義淨 (671-695) who made valuable records of their travels:

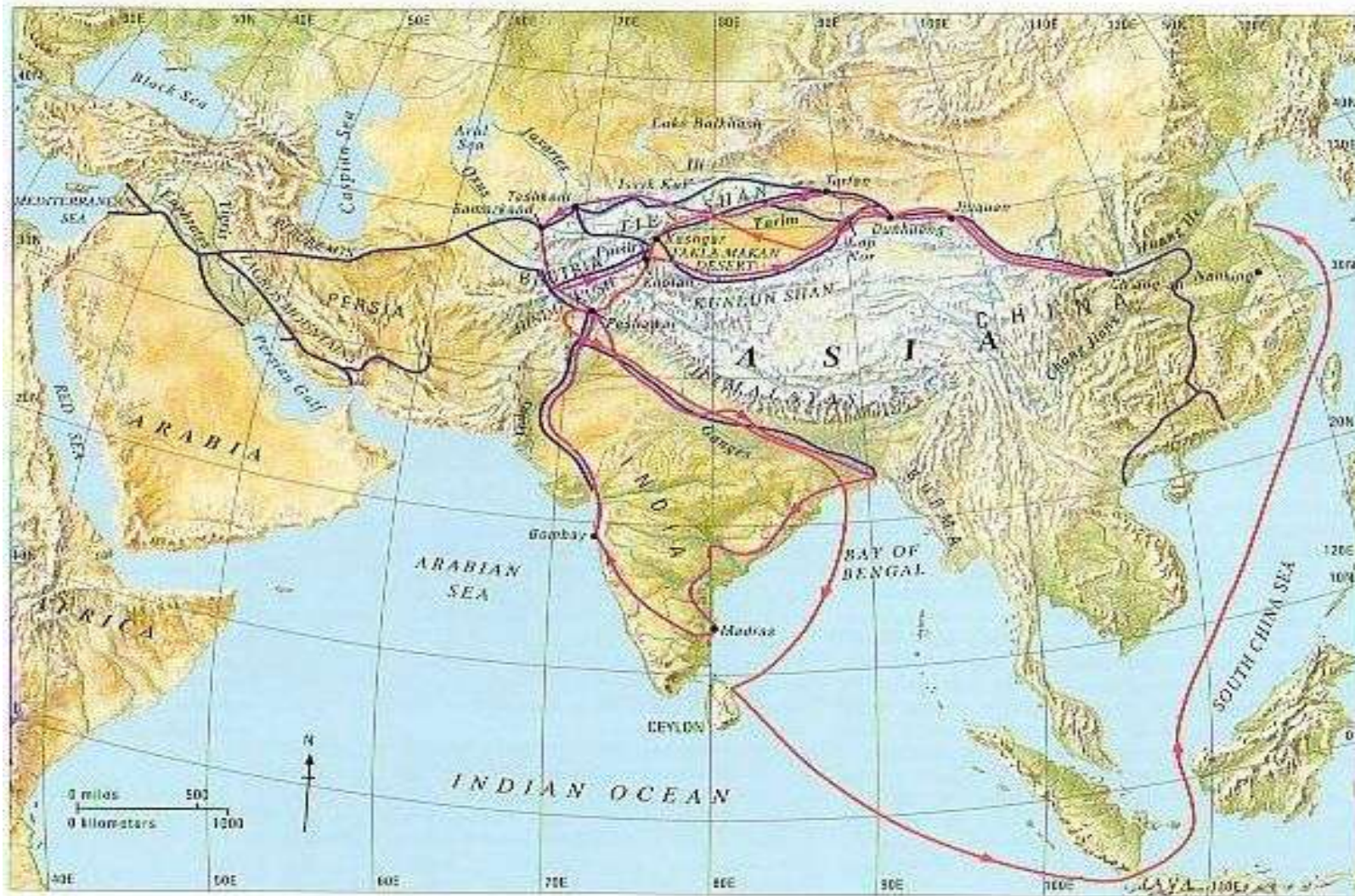
Faxian *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms* 佛國記 (India at the beginning of the 5th century).

Xuanzang *Record of the Western Regions* 大唐西域記 (Central Asia and India in the mid-7th cent).

Yijing *Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms in the Southern Archipelago* 南海寄歸內法傳 (SE Asia and India in the late 7th century).

⁵ Dao'an 道安 composed his catalogue in 374, Seng'you 僧祐 in 515 and Zhisheng 智昇 in 730.

⁶ Makita Tairyō 牧田諦亮. Gikyou kenkyū 疑經研究 (Studies on Apocryphal Sutras). Kyoto: Jimbun kagaku kenkyūsho, 1976:99. Quoted by Charles Muller, “East Asian Apocryphal Scriptures: Their origins and role in the development of Sinitic Buddhism,” http://www.tyg.jp/tgu/school_guidance/bulletin/k6.acmuller/acmuller.htm 2004:1.



KEY TO ROUTES	
—	Trade routes
—	Fu-Hai AD 293-414
—	Hsuan-Tsang AD 629-645

The Silk Road

15. FAXIAN (FA HSIEN) 法顯 (340?-420?)

During the time of Faxian (340?-420?), many Chinese monks had attempted to travel to Central Asia or India. However, Faxian was the first notable Chinese pilgrim to make the overland journey to India (via Central Asia) and return to China by sea (stopping for 2 years in Sri Lanka).

He left in 399, only two years before Kumārajīva arrived, and returned in 414, only two years after Kumārajīva died, to devote the rest of his life to translating the sutras he had brought back. One wonders if Faxian might have remained in China, avoiding all the hardships of the journey west to collect Buddha texts, had he known that Kumārajīva would be working in Chang An during his absence!

Faxian's courage and endeavour were to inspire more Chinese pilgrims to go west to study Buddhism and bring back Buddhist texts. All this efforts would contribute greatly to the maturing of Chinese Buddhism. Some of the important texts he himself translated or had translated were:

Vinaya of the Mahāsaṅghikas (T 1425)

Translated by Buddhahadra and Faxian at Nanjing in 416 from an original Faxian found in Pāṭaliputra, India.

Vinaya of the Mahīśāsaka (T 1421)

Translated by Buddhajīva and his team, 423-424, in Nanjing from a MS discovered in Sri Lanka by Faxian. It is very close to the Pali Canon.

Mahā,parinirvāṇa Sūtra (Sutra of the Great Decease)

Translated by Faxian and Buddhahadra, 416-418

16. XUANZANG (HSÜAN TSANG) 玄奘 (c. 596-664)

Xuanzang (ca 596-664),⁷ who traveled during his 30s and 40s, was a healthy and handsome young man, charismatic features which people admired. Moreover, he had an excellent memory, great intelligence and linguistic ability. As such, he suffered almost no hardships wherever he went. Faxian, on the other hand, was weak with age, and his obstinacy prevented his being good at foreign languages. He stayed in Magadha for a few years to learn the local languages and Sanskrit, but could not manage to master them.

In his influence on later Buddhist thought and development, Xuanzang was second only to Kumārajīva, and Xuanzang translated more texts than any other translators. Of the 32 volumes of the Taishō Daizōkyō, the definitive collection of the Chinese canon, almost 7 full volumes, or one-fifth of all the surviving Chinese translations of sutras, are attributed to Xuanzang. In comparison, Kumārajīva's extant translations total only about a quarter of those attributed to Xuanzang. Despite being an ethnic Chinese translator, Xuanzang rendered more and better translations than any of the others, Indian or Central Asian.

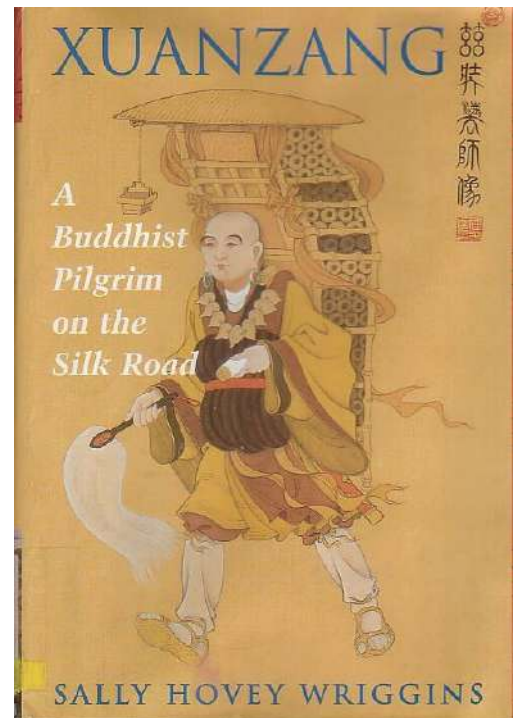


Fig 5. Xuanzang

Mahāyāna periods

Most of the texts brought to China by Kumārajīva belong to the early-period Mahayana, which presented Buddhism through the practice of faith. These texts contributed to the development of the doctrines of the Tiantai sect and the Sanlun school.

Middle-period Mahayana emphasized philosophical theory, such as the Vijñāna, vāda. However, even in India, different groups interpreted it differently, and when its texts came to China, local scholars

⁷ See Sally Hovey Wriggins, *Xuanzang: A Buddhist Pilgrim on the Silk Road*, Boulder, CO: WestView Press, 1996.

added their own interpretations. As such, conflicting theories resulted. Pāramārtha [21] was the most outstanding translator of the middle-period Mahayana texts.

By the time of Xuanzang's birth, the study of middle-period Mahayana Buddhism was still incomplete due to a lack of texts.

Life as a young monk

Xuanzang's father was a provincial governor, but not wanting to serve the new dynasty, he resigned his post. When the family experienced financial difficulties, Xuanzang's older brother joined the Sangha. When the situation worsened, he brought the young boy Xuanzang into his monastery in Luoyang to be ordained.

Even at an early age, Xuanzang showed a keen interest in the sutras. By 11, he was able to read the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, the Lotus Sutra and others with ease. By 13, he was giving lectures to assemblies of monks. By the time he was 15, he was studying advanced Buddhism. Then he moved to Chang'an in search of an able teacher.

When warfare and famine arose in that area, the two brothers fled to the west, eventually settling in the mountains of Szechuan, where he mastered Nikāya Buddhism. As such, Xuanzang became well-versed in both Nikāya and Mahayana Buddhism. However, while in India, he studied primarily the middle-period Mahayana doctrine of Vijñānavāda.

As a young monk in his 20s, Xuanzang wandered throughout China in search of capable teachers. When he was 29, the emperor, learning of his fame as a Buddhist scholar, invited him to reside in Chang An. Xuanzang refused because he was not confident in his understanding of Buddhism. It was then that he decided to go to India for firsthand study of Buddhism.

17. XUANZANG'S JOURNEY IN INDIA

His repeated requests were turned down by the emperor. In 629, when Xuanzang was about 30, severe frosts caused a famine in several cities, including Chang An and Luoyang. The government permitted and encouraged people to leave the stricken areas to search for food. In 629, joining the hungry refugees, Xuanzang finally slipped away towards the west without the permission of the government. His purpose of travelling to India was "to gaze on the sacred traces [relics], and earnestly to seek the law."⁸

For the next 16 years, Xuanzang, in his physical and mental prime, spent his time in travel and study. He mastered various Central Asian and Indic languages, and acquired a large store of Buddhist knowledge. His 16 years of travels (629-645) are recorded in the Xiyuji⁹ and immortalized in Chinese mythology as the Xiyouji.¹⁰

⁸ Shaman Hwui Li [Huili], *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang* [Datang Dacu'ensi Sanzang Fashi Juan, T50.2053], tr Samuel Beal. London: Kegan, Paul, 1911:44. Hui Li (completed by Yan Cong). Abr Eng tr **Li Yongxi**, *The Life of Hsuan tsang: The Tripitaka-Master of the Great Tzu En Monastery*, Peking: Chinese Buddhist Association, 1959. This contemporary biography of Xuanzang covers his childhood, studies, travel to India and events until his death. The last four fascicles were completed by **Yan Cong** (and others) after Hui Li's death. A few sections are omitted in this otherwise fine tr. Li's reconstruction of Sanskrit names, however, are not always accurate. First half also tr in **Samuel Beal**, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1973 (rpt. of 1911 Kegan Paul ed.)

⁹ The Tang emperor Taizong [T'ai Tsung] (r 626-649), impressed by Xuanzang's knowledge and character, urged him to leave the monkhood and accept a ministerial post. Xuanzang refused and was keen to translate the sutras he had brought back. The emperor, eager to learn from Xuanzang, constantly interrupted him to ask him about the western countries. Xuanzang might have written the **Record of the Western Regions** (大唐西域記 Datang Xiyouji) (containing descriptions of over 130 countries) and presented it to the emperor to prevent further interruptions! This work has been tr as *Si-yu-ki* [Xiyuji]: *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, 1884; pt 1 is Faxian's travel records, Foguoji 佛國記.

¹⁰ Partially tr by **Arthur Waley** as *Monkey: Folk Novel of China*, NY: Evergreen, 1958: delightful reading. As a companion to this, Waley wrote *The Real Tripitaka*, NY: Macmillan, 1952, an enjoyable account of Xuanzang's life, with much information not available elsewhere in English. **Anthony Yu**, *The Journey to the West*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977-83, 4 vols: an unabridged tr, not as exciting as Waley's version, but is more literally faithful to the original, giving a broader view of Chinese views and attitudes.

Xuanzang stayed in Kashmir for some time, studying both Nikāya and Mahāyāna treatises, such as the Abhidharma, mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra and the Abhidharma,kośa Śāstra, and also logic from Nikāya scholars, and Indic grammar. This was only a preparation by which time he had primed his linguistic ability and understanding of the texts.

Xuanzang in India

Xuanzang began serious study of Buddhist philosophy in Mathura (central India) and at the great Nalanda monastic university (to the east). At Nalanda, alongside 4000 monks and 2000 other scholars and students, he studied Madhyamaka and Yogācāra under prominent scholars. From the university's foremost scholar, Śīlabhadra he studied the Yogācāra,bhūmi Śāstra. Xuanzang studied both Nikāya Buddhism and Mahayana with Śīlabhadra for 5 years, at which point Śīlabhadra persuaded Xuanzang to return to China to propagate Buddhism.

While Xuanzang was in Kamarupa (modern Assam, in NE India), emperor Harsha (c. 590-607) invited him to the interreligious assembly which was held every 4 years and lasting 75 days. By then Xuanzang was already well-respected enough to be titled *Mahāyāna,deva*. Not surprisingly, he won the debate against India's foremost scholars at the assembly. Harsha and Xuanzang became good friends and in 641 sent an envoy to the Chinese emperor, establishing the first diplomatic relations between India and China.

18. XUANZANG'S RETURN JOURNEY

On his return journey, Xuanzang and his entourage journeyed through the NW Passage, crossed the Pamirs and into Central Asia. When he reached Khotan, he had lost the elephant that served as his vehicle. Xuanzang sent a messenger to the emperor of China asking for help. In the 1st moon of 645, when he was 46 years old, he arrived back in China.

When Xuanzang was ready to return home, he implored the Tang emperor Taizong (T'ai Tsung) (r. 626-649) for permission to bring into China the numerous texts and images he had collected. Although Xuanzang had left illegally, the emperor was delighted to receive him back. Hundreds of thousands of people lined the last 10 kilometres of the road into Chang'an, as if receiving a victorious general!

Impressed by Xuanzang's knowledge and character, the emperor urged him to leave the monkhood and accept a ministerial post. Xuanzang refused and was keen to translate the sutras he had brought back. The emperor, eager to learn from Xuanzang, constantly interrupted him to ask him about the western countries. Xuanzang might have written the *Record of the Western Regions* (Xiyouji) (containing descriptions of over 130 countries) and presented it to the emperor to prevent further interruptions!

Xuanzang's inventory

Xuanzang had brought back with him 150 grains of Buddha relic, gold and silver Buddha images, Buddha, 6 carved sandalwood Buddha images, and some 658 sutras and related writings. Of these, 224 sutras and 192 treatises were Mahayana works. He also had Nikāya writings (mostly sutras, vinayas and treatises): 15 Pali texts; 15 Mahāsaṅghika texts; 15 Saṃmitiya texts; 22 Mahiśāsaka texts; 17 Kaśyapiya works; 42 Dharmaguptaka texts; and 67 Sarvāstivādin texts. Furthermore, he obtained 36 general works on logic and 13 works on grammar. The Vinayas he brought back were:

Sthavira,vāda Vinaya
Mahā,saṅghika Vinaya
Mahī,śāsaka Vinaya
Saṃmitiya Vinaya
Kaśyapiya Vinaya
Dharma,guptaka Vinaya
Sarvāstivāda Vinaya

His translations include:

Yogācāra,bhūmi Śāstra (Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice) (646-648)

Abhidharma,kośa Śāstra (Treatise on the Treasure Store of the Abhidharma) (651-654)

Abhidharma, mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra (Treatise on the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma) (656-659), 2nd longest text, 1 full volume of the Taishō Daizōkyō.

Mahā, prajñā, pāramitā Sūtra (The Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra) (660-663), the longest text, filling 3 full volumes of the Taishō Daizōkyō.

19. YIJING (I TSING) 義淨

Yijing (635-713) was born near modern and entered the monastery at 14. At that time, however, the monastic rules of his order were incomplete. Beijing Inspired by Xuanzang's experiences, Yijing (635-713) had already decided to go to India by the age of 15 to seek the complete Vinaya. With scores of other monks, Yijing left Canton in 671 (when he was 36), taking the southern sea route. The group decided to remain in Java, Sumatra and other islands along the way. In Śrī, vijaya (modern Sumatra) Yijing studied Sanskrit, after which he alone left for India.

After visiting the holy places, Yijing studied at Nalanda. Yijing returned to China in 695 with almost 400 sutras, commentaries and other works. Of these, he eventually translated 46 works (in 230 fascicles):

Mūla, sarvāstivādin Vinaya (over 170 fascicles), which he regarded as the most important.

Suvarna, prabhāṣōttama, rāja Sūtra (Sutra of the Most Honoured King Golden Light), highly regarded in Japan.

The Sūtra on the Merit of Bathing the Buddha (710) (Taishō698 vol 16 pp 799c0800c).¹¹

20. PARAMÂRTHA

There are altogether about 200 notable translators of several thousand Buddhist works in China in the 1100 years (2nd-13th centuries). Of these the most renowned are Kumārajīva, Paramârtha, Xuanzang and Amoghavajra. We have already looked at Kumārajīva and Xuanzang. Now let us spend some time studying the lives of Pāramârtha and Amogha, vajra.

Paramârtha ((波羅末陀 Chen-ti, c. 499-569) was said to be the greatest translator in 6th century China. He was born in western India, where he mastered Buddhist doctrines. In his late 40s, he travelled to China by sea, arriving in Nanjing (the Liang dynasty capital) in 546. Soon after his arrival, a rebellion occurred.

In fact, Paramârtha had a difficult wandering life in China because of the situation then. Even after the Liang dynasty was succeeded by the Ch'en dynasty in 557, he was unable to find a permanent residence to do his work. Despite his difficulties, he managed to translate (in transit) a total of over 50 works (more than 120 fascicles), among which are:

Suvarna, prabhāṣa Sūtra (Sutra of the Golden Light) (552)

Vajra-c, chedika, prajñā, pāramitā, hrdaya Sūtra (The Diamond Sutra) (558-569)

Samdhi, nirmocana Sūtra (Sutra on Emancipation) (557-589)

Sapta, daśa, bhūmika Śāstra (Treatise on the 17 Stages)

Treatise on Buddha Nature (557-569)

Abhidharma, kośa Śāstra (Treatise on the Treasure Store of the Abhidharma)

While translating, he also wrote commentaries for the use in lecturing to his pupils. Unfortunately, they have all been lost. If Paramârtha had had similar salutary conditions as Kumārajīva or Xuanzang, he could have produced several times the number of translations than that he actually did.

21. AMOGHA, VAJRA

Amogha, vajra (不空, more fully 不空金剛, 705-774) was a great translator and master of Vajrayana. He was a native of Sri Lanka. At the tender age of 14 he left for China and became a disciple of Vajra-bodhi 金剛智 (probably same as 金剛智三藏). He was ordained at the Guangfu Si in Luoyang at the age of 20.

¹¹ See Daniel Boucher in Donald S Lopez Jr (ed), 1995:59-68 (ch 3).

When Vajrabodhi died in 741, Amoghavajra carried out his teacher's wishes and left for India and Sri Lanka. Amoghavajra was conversant in both Indic languages and Chinese, having lived in China for over 20 years. He returned to China in 746 with sutras and ritual implements. During the following 30 years, he served as the National Preceptor to three Tang (T'ang) emperors: Xuanzong (Hsüan Tsung) (r. 713-755), Suzong (Su Tsung) (r. 756-762) and Daizong (Tai Tsung) (r. 763-779).

22. PRINTING

Paper and printing are two Chinese inventions that have had an immeasurable effect upon Western culture, for without them the cheap and widespread circulation of books and knowledge that was one of the preconditions for the development of the modern world would have been impossible. (Denis Twitchett in Brian Hook (ed), 1991:340)

The oldest extant piece of paper in the world was discovered by archaeologists in 1957 in a tomb near Sian in Shensi Province, China. It is about 10 cm square and is dated between the years 140-87 BCE (Temple, 1991:81). Woodblock printing on paper and silk arose in China around the 7th century. It was the use of seals that in due course led to printing.¹² By the 2nd century, stone was used to preserve permanent canonical versions of the Buddhist and other religious texts. Some time between 605-617, a monk name Ching-wan of the Chih-ch'uan monastery of Yu'chou, began carving some of the texts of the Chinese Tripiṭaka on stone slabs in an effort to preserve some of the important sutras. The work continued for some centuries (the latest dated 1182), and today we have access to 14,620 stone slabs carved on both sides.¹³ From such stone records, the Chinese often produced (and still produce) stone-rubbings, which has become a Chinese expertise.

The entire Chinese Tripiṭaka (totalling 130,000 cut blocks) was first published in 971-983. The metal type, however, was developed in connection with the production of the Chinese Buddhist Canon during the Koryŏ period. This Korean invention is arguably the ancestor of the 15th century European development of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg and others [4.1].

¹² Although seals were used amongst the Sumerians (3000 BCE) and the Babylonians (2000 BCE), the idea never led to printing (Temple, 1991:110).

¹³ "The rock cut canon in China: Findings at Fang-shan" by Lewis Lancaster, *The Buddhist Heritage*, ed Tadeusz Skorupski, Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1989:143-156. Internet ed available.

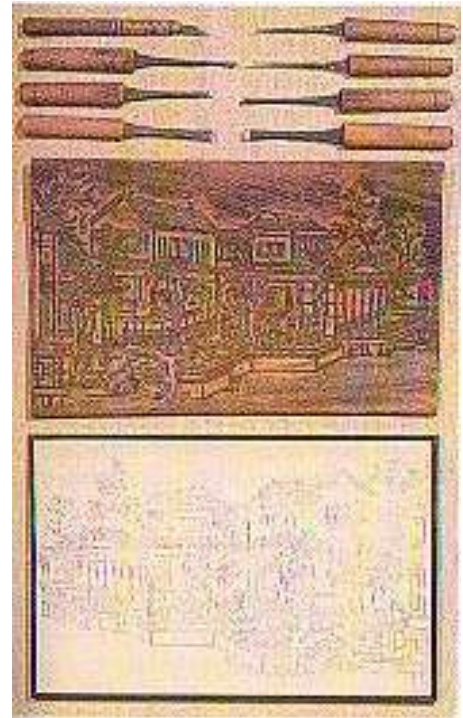
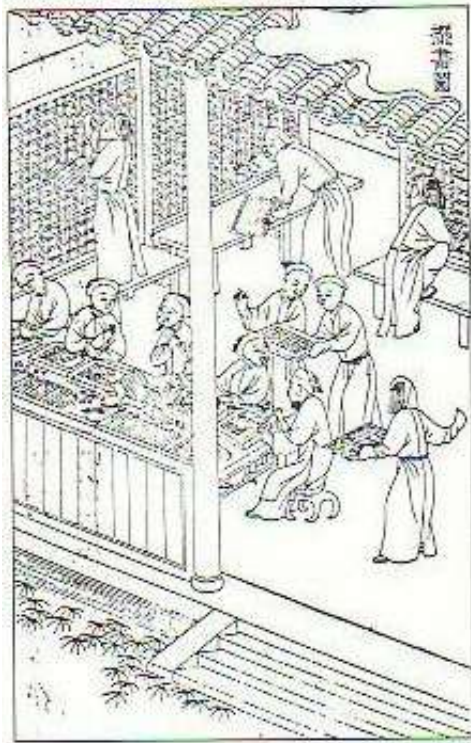


Fig 6. Printing was invented in China: (l) a printing workshop; (r) wood-carving tools for printing blocks. [Sources: (l) Merson, 1989:32; (r) Temple, 1991:111]

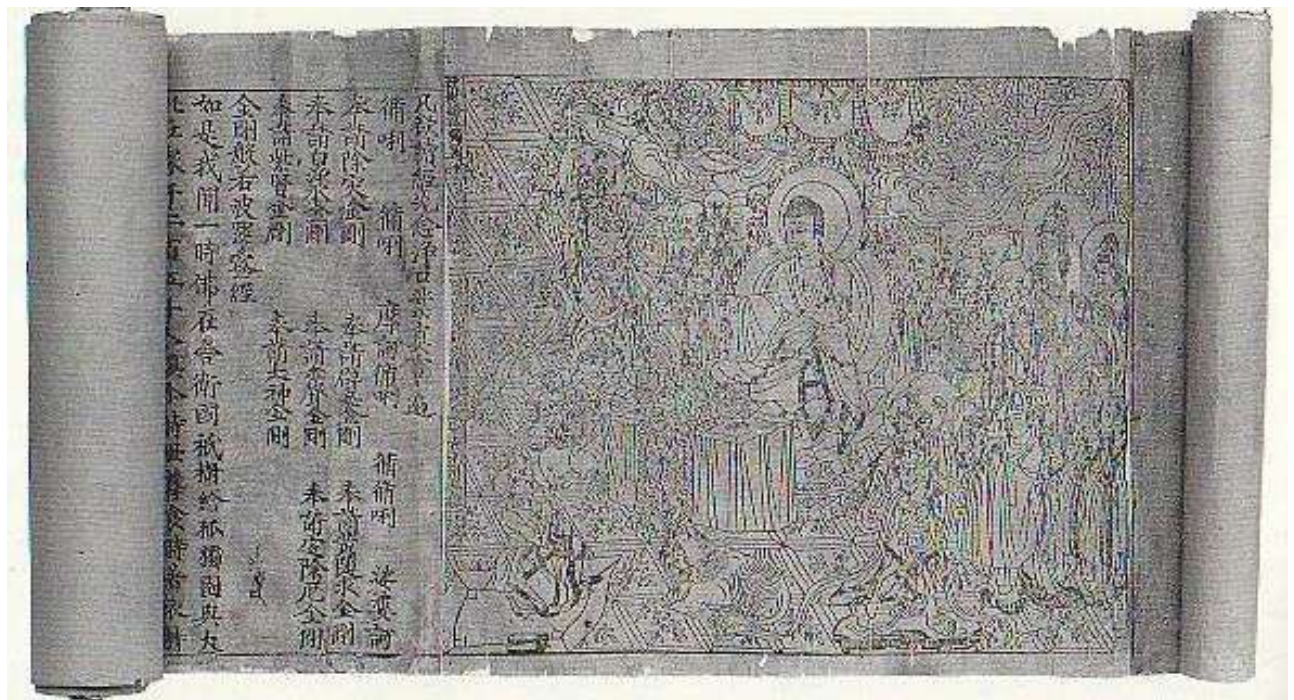


Fig 7. One of the oldest printed matter extant: the Diamond Sutra. [British Museum]

Oldest extant printed text

The oldest printed Chinese document is the Diamond Sutra (金剛經, or fully, 金剛能斷般若波羅蜜經, Vajracchedika Prajñāpāramitā Śūtra) discovered in Dunhuang by Sir Aurel Stein in 1907. The document, dated 868, is in the form of a roll with a total length of 5.3 m (17½ feet), printed from 7 separate blocks. The frontispiece (above) depicts the Buddha discoursing with his disciple, Subhūti, and surrounded by divine beings, monks and officials in Chinese dress. This is the earliest woodcut illustration in a printed book.

However, it is Korea that is the proud custodian of the world's oldest printed text. The oldest surviving printed work known to date is the *Dhāraṇī* scroll (dated between 704 and 751), discovered in the foundations of the Pulguk-sa pagoda at Kyongju, South Korea, in 1966 [4.9].

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Lecture 4

SUCCESS OF BUDDHISM IN CHINA

23. PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATING SANSKRIT INTO CHINESE

Many difficulties attended the translating of Buddhist sutras from Indic languages into Chinese.

There are two main problems:

- (1) The two languages come from completely different language stocks. Sanskrit, Pali and other Indic languages belong to the Indo-Aryan family, while the Chinese language Sino-Tibetan family. The Indic languages are alphabetic while Chinese is monosyllabic.¹⁴
- (2) There is a vast difference between Chinese and Indian cultures and philosophies. Not only did translators discover it was nearly impossible to find synonyms or near-synonyms, or equivalent concepts for the scriptures in the Chinese language, but they also found a very basic difference between the ways of thinking and of expressing thoughts in the two languages.

24. FIVE LOSSES, THREE DIFFICULTIES

Even before Kumārajīva came to China, Dao An (312-385) had introduced the concept of “five losses and three difficulties” in translating Indic texts into Chinese. The great translator, Xuanzang, explained the “5 kinds of untranslatable words”.

Dao An’s theory of the “five losses and three difficulties” referred to five points in which the meaning of the original was lost through translation and to three things that were not easy to accomplish in translating.

The 5 Losses

- (1) The word order in the Indic originals had to be reversed to conform to Chinese grammar.

For example, in Chinese the first of the Three Refuges is 自归依佛 *zì guī yī fó* (“I take refuge in the Buddha”), whereas in the Indic original it is expressed in the reverse word order as *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* (“To the Buddha for refuge I go.”)

- (2) The Indians preferred simple, unadorned writing, whereas the Chinese were fond of ornate, polished writing. When the translator gave priority to literary style to please the Chinese audience, the simplicity and accuracy of the original were lost.

For example, when Chih Ch’ien of the Wu dynasty (222-280) attempted to translate the Dharmapada in ornate Chinese style, the Indian monk, Wei-chi-nan—who had brought the original from India—cautioned him against shrouding the Buddha’s words in beautiful prose.

- (3) The Indic texts had many repetitive passages. To emphasize a point, they repeated a sentence or sentences several times, or in the case of the Nikāya texts, repetitions were a mark of the oral tradition. This textual style did not appeal to the Chinese, who deleted all repetitions when translating into Chinese.
- (4) The Indic texts often contained nested sentences (a sentence within a sentence). For example, it was not unusual to find a long explanatory passage of over a thousand characters introduced in the middle of a sentence so that it is difficult to trace the original point. These interpolations were generally deleted in the Chinese translations. As such, the complex meanings of the India originals were lost.
- (5) In Indic writing even after a point had been fully explained, the explanation was often repeated in a subsequent passage as stock passages. These repetitions were all deleted in the Chinese translations.

¹⁴ Linguistically, Chinese is said to be an **analytic, isolating, or root** language, that is, one in which the words are invariable, and syntactic relationships are shown by word order. Indic languages, on the other hand, are said to be **synthetic, fusional, or inflecting** (also inflected or inflectional).

25. THE 3 DIFFICULTIES

- (1) The graceful and highly inflected ancient Sanskrit, for example, had to be translated into plain, clear Chinese.
- (2) Although Sanskrit sentences expressed very subtle nuances, in keeping with Indian thought of the Buddha's time, the Chinese translations had to be palpable and clear to Chinese readers.
- (3) Although the 500 Arhats led by Mahā Kaśyapa had scrupulously compiled the texts by re-confirming the accuracy of each phrase, errors occurred in the course of their transmission. As such, the third difficulty actually referred to editorial skills and profound understanding of the Buddha Word that translators must have.

26. THE 5 KINDS OF UNTRANSLATABLE WORDS

Xuanzang's theory of the "five kinds of untranslatable words" referred to five instances in which Indic words whose meanings were so profound that they defied a single, simple definition.

- (1) Complex, pregnant Indic terms that defied a single, simple definition. For example, *dhāraṇī* (formulaic incantation) were simply transliterated into Chinese (as "tuoloni").
- (2) Polysemic words (word with multiple meanings). For example, the term *bhagavat*, Xuanzang pointed out, has six meanings, and all the meanings are integral to convey a complete understanding of the term.
- (3) Indigenous words for things that have no Chinese equivalents, such as the names of Indian plants, animals, minerals, places.
- (4) Words traditionally transliterated or transcribed phonetically. For example, *anuttara, samyak-sambuddha*. According to Xuanzang, such words had been transliterated ever since the time of Kaśyapa Mātāṅga (1st century CE).
- (5) Special terms that would lose their flavour or special meanings in translated into Chinese. For example, although *prajñā* does mean wisdom, its fuller meaning of perfect wisdom is preserved only when it is transliterated.

27. CATEGORIES OF TRANSLATIONS

The translation of Buddhist of Buddhist texts into Chinese first began around the 1st-2nd century CE, and continued over a period of over 1000 years. Understandably, this resulted in several different translations of the same texts and several different transliterations of the same terms, reflecting the inclinations and influences of the place, time, associates, and collaborators of the translators.

Chinese translations are usually designated by one of three terms: "ancient translation", "old translation" or "new translation":

Ancient translations are those made before the time of Kumārajīva.

Old translations are those made between the time of Kumārajīva and 645, when Xuanzang began translating.

New translations include works by Xuanzang and all later translators (who generally followed his choices in the translation of specific terms).

Terms from both the "old translations" and the "new translations" are commonly used today. Apart from the inherent difficulties of the theories and doctrines of Buddhism, present-day study of Chinese texts is hindered by the fact that there are a number of translations of the same term.

28. XUANZANG'S DREAM

There is an interesting story about Xuanzang's translation of the Abhidharma, mahā, vibhāṣā Śāstra, the Great Commentary on the Abhidharma. The Sanskrit original contains 200,000 verses (some 6,400,000 characters) and the Chinese translation comprises 3 full volumes of the Taishō Dai-zōkyō. It was the longest work translated by Xuanzang.

When Xuanzang began translating the Abhidharma, mahā, vibhāṣā Śāstra, he was already about 62. He and his disciples relied on three different Sanskrit manuscripts that he had brought from India. Because the sutra was long and repetitious, his disciples felt it would not appeal to the literary tastes of the Chinese, and they suggested that it would be better to merely tease the essence out of the sutra and eliminate the repetitions as Kumārajīva had done.

Xuanzang thought about this problem for a while. During that time, he began to suffer nightmares. He dreamed that he had to climb a steep and dangerous mountain road or was attacked by fierce animals, and he would wake up in cold sweat. He told his disciples about his dreams and at least decided to translate the sutra just as it was in the original. In his dream that night, the Buddha and Bodhisattvas appeared, emitting rays of light from between their eyebrows, and showed their great joy to him, and he revered them with incense and candles.

It was said that even the disciples assisting him with the translation had many auspicious dreams and saw favourable signs. For instance, at one point a mango tree outside the translation building blossomed out of season. Realizing that his life was drawing to a close, Xuanzang put all his energy into his work. The 600-fascicle translation was completed, after 4 years of toil, at the end of the 11th moon of 663.

On the first day of the following year, 664, Xuanzang's disciples pleaded with him to translate the Mahāratna, kūṭa Sūtra (The Discourse on the Great Accumulation of Treasures). After translating only a few lines, he realized that his stamina had gone. On 5th day of the 2nd moon of that year (lunar calendar) Xuanzang's extraordinary life came to an end.

29. SYSTEMATIZED TRANSLATION PROCESS

Those famous translators (whether native-born Indian, Central Asian or Chinese) who excelled in knowledge and skills in both Chinese and Indic languages, also have an excellent understanding of Buddhism faced very few problems in translating the Buddhist texts into Chinese.

One of the greatest translators before Kumārajīva was Dharmarakṣa (231-308?), born in Dun-huang, probably knew as many as 36 Indic and Central Asian languages. He translated over 150 works (over 300 fascicles) with very little assistance in transcription.

In the 6th century, Pāramārtha [21] also translated sutras into Chinese with little help. By the time that Kumārajīva, Xuanzang, and Amoghavajra were translating—in the 5th, 7th and 8th centuries respectively—translation work became more systematized. It was carried out with government support, and translators had the assistance of as many scholars as they required. This was the system of the translation bureau.

Kumārajīva's translation process

When Kumārajīva translated the Pañca, viṃśati, sahaśrika Prajñā, pāramitā Śūtra (The Discourse on the Perfection of Wisdom in 25,000 Lines) at the beginning of the 5th century, he worked with a company of many learned monks. He translated the original Sanskrit manuscript into Chinese and at the same time explained the meaning of the sutra.

It should be noted here that in Kumārajīva's time, copyists were occasionally employed to transcribe the recitations of people who had memorized sutras in Sanskrit.

Emperor Yao Hsing himself held other translation projects of the same sutra: one made by Dharmarakṣa in 286 and another by Wu-ch'a-lo in 291. Kumārajīva then used these translations for comparison to ensure accuracy.

About 500 learned monks and scholars then assembled to closely check the new translations and then refine the writing style. Then, they made fair copies of the manuscript, which they also proofread.

Although Kumārajīva's translations are very old, they are still widely read because:

- (1) the original meanings are fully conveyed in his translations;
- (2) his translations are so polished that they are smooth, being lyrical to read and pleasant to hear.

30. XUANZANG'S TRANSLATION PROCESS

When Xuanzang translated the Yogācāra, bhūmi Śāstra (Treatise on the Stages of the Practice), he proceed in these seven stages:

- (1) Xuanzang himself orally translated the Sanskrit manuscript into Chinese.
- (2) A recorder transcribed the oral Chinese translation.
- (3) A Sanskrit reader verified the correctness of the Sanskrit characters.
- (4) An ideogram corrector confirmed the accuracy of the written Chinese.
- (5) A meaning verifier carefully studied and discussed the meaning of each translated sentence.
- (6) A sentence arranger put them in the correct order.

(7) A revision supervisor oversaw the whole project.
As such, Xuanzang's translations are very accurate.

31. SONG TRANSLATION PROCESS

During the Song dynasty, the translation bureau system reached its highest perfection with a nine-phase process:

- (1) The person who had brought the manuscript to China read it out aloud in Sanskrit.
- (2) The copyist transcribed not the Chinese translation, but the Sanskrit as it was read from the original manuscript.
- (3) A translator then translated the Sanskrit into Chinese. [Kumārajīva and Xuanzang both knew Sanskrit and Chinese, so they immediately began their own translations.]
- (4) The Chinese translation was checked by verifiers by comparing it to the Sanskrit original. This stage entails two processes: one group made certain that the meanings in the Sanskrit original had been correctly translated; another group confirmed that the significance of its content had been correctly understood by the translator of the Chinese version.
- (5) Editors checked the Chinese translation so that it would read smoothly so that it would appeal to the Chinese audience. [Literary embellishments became a tradition since the time of the Chinese translator Zhiqian (Chi Ch'ien) of the Wu dynasty (222-280).]
- (6) Another group of editors then examined the translations for correctness of content and consistency.
- (7) The chanters then recited the Sanskrit original, a ritual that was performed at the commencement of scriptural translation work or lectures on the Dharma.
- (8) If there were other translations of the text available, a group of editors would refer to those other versions and compare the two to evaluate their respective merit and to weed out errors in content. [This method was also followed by Kumārajīva and Xuanzang, and the latter pointed out many errors in Pāramārtha's translations of sutras that Xuanzang himself translated.]
- (9) The supervisors then inspected the whole translation project at each stage and were responsible for its smooth progress.

2. GENUINE CHINESE SUTRAS

Canonical texts

Not all original Buddhist texts are the *ipsissima verba* of the Buddha alone. There are texts that record the statements by monks and by lay followers; some by Brahma or Indra; some by various demons; and some are statements made after the Buddha had passed away. Moreover, many sutras assumed to have been spoken by the Buddha have undergone considerable change during the several centuries of oral transmission.

However, we do know that some texts are very old. For example, the Aṭṭhaka, vagga (The Chapter of Eights) and the Pārāyana, vagga (The Chapter of Going to the Far Shore) of the Sutta Nipāta of the Pali Nikāyas are also found in the Sanskrit Āgamas (the Saṃyukta Āgama and the Ekōttara Āgama).

We now know that many sutras—in Pali, Sanskrit or any other Indic language—were most likely not spoken by the Buddha himself in exactly the form they have been handed down to us, and still less do the Mahayana texts (composed much later) contain the Buddha's exact words. Nevertheless, both the primitive sutras and the Mahayana sutras are considered Sakyamuni's genuine teachings because they embody the true spirit of Buddha Dharma. They may be regarded as the genuine records of the Buddha Word.

Genuine Chinese sutras

In Chinese Buddhism, however, there appeared sutras that were not translations from Indic languages, but that actually originated in China. Of these, there are two kinds: the genuine and the apocryphal. The genuine Chinese sutras were compiled because:

- (1) The sutras translated from the Indic languages often did not accord with Chinese thought or with Chinese understanding of Buddhism. They had to indigenize the texts.

- (2) The Chinese could not find in these translated texts what they considered as effective or ideal ways of teaching Buddhism.

33. GUIDELINES FOR GENUINE CHINESE SUTRAS

Like their Indian counterparts, the Chinese authors are unknown, but they composed Chinese sutras with the intention of dissemination of the Buddha more effectively and more correctly. Such sutras are in harmony with the original teaching when examined in the light of the Seal of the Three Laws:

- (1) All things in the universe constantly change. (“All things are impermanent.”)
- (2) All things in the universe are interrelated. (“Nothing has an ego.”)
- (3) The ultimate freedom is to be rid of greed, hate, self-delusion. (“Nirvana is quiescence.”)

Among such genuine Chinese sutras are:

- The Sutra of the Perfect Net (Fan-wang ching)
- The Sutra on a Bodhisattva’s Original Action (P’u-sa ying-loo pen-yeh ching)¹⁵
- The Sutra on the Meditation on Amitabha Buddha (Kuan wu-liang-shou ching)
- The Sutra on the Immeasurable Meanings (Wu-liang-i Ching). Preamble to the Threefold Lotus Sutra
- The Sutra of Diamond Meditation (Chin-kang sa-mei ching)

All such texts are accepted as genuine and included in the Taishō Daizōkyō.

34. APOCRYPHAL CHINESE SUTRAS

In the early days of translating sutras from Indic languages, apocryphal sutras may have been fabricated to interpret Buddhism in terms of the philosophy of Daoism and the philosophy of the Daoist writer Juangzu (Chuang-tzu) (fl. 4th cent.BCE). Such sutras were however used in good faith to adapt a “barbarian” religion to Chinese society. However, because they often distorted Buddhism, they are regarded as apocryphal, or even spurious.

However, it should be noted that apocryphal sutras are found throughout Chinese history. The apocryphal sutras produced in China are readily distinguishable from the genuine sutras. The apocryphal sutras and texts fall into seven general categories:

(1) Extended texts of the early translations.

John Brough first revealed an interesting case of apocryphal sutra (though he did not call it such in his study of the Chinese translation of the Jātaka,māla (Garland of Birth Stories).¹⁶ In the despair at translating the text, the few Sanskrit phrases the Chinese were able to construe served as clues for lifting entire stories verbatim from other texts that contained the same keywords.

For example, finding the term *vyāghrī* (tigress) in their manuscript, they simply wrote out the *Vyāghrī,parivarta*, the last chapter of the Suvarṇa,prabhāsōttama Sūtra (T 665). Compounding their problems, the translators were working often without dictionary or grammar, and not always with an Indian pundit to assist them in construing the text.

There is also evidence that they were working on a deadline and were not given time to revise their hurried work.¹⁷

(2) Texts that reconcile Buddhism with the indigenous Daoism, or that use Daoist terminology and ideas to express Buddhist thought.

The antecedence of Daoist and Confucianist terminologies and philosophies actually helped Buddhism adapt itself to Chinese society.

(3) Texts that attempt to adapt Buddhist doctrines to the indigenous needs of Chinese Buddhists.

This would include texts that promote filial piety and ancestor worship.

(4) Texts that relate Buddhism to traditional folk beliefs.

¹⁵ These two texts together set forth a system of discipline and spiritual attainment of Bodhisattvas that had not yet been codified in India.

¹⁶ John Brough, “The Chinese Pseudo-Translation of Ārya-Śūra’s *Jātakālā*,” *Asia Major* 11 (1964-1965): 27-53. Brough’s study has been summarized with additional textual sources cited for the storied pilfered by the Chinese translators, in Kōgen Mizuno, “J. Brough: The Chinese Pseudo-Translation of Ārya-Śūra’s *Jātakamālā*’ shōkai,” *IBK* 14 (1966): 801-805.

¹⁷ Robert E. Buswell, *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, 1990: 11.

Such texts were composed and expounded to palm off folk beliefs off as Buddha Word.

- (5) Condensed sutras (*ch'ao ching*) that are simplified abridgements of more complex, repetitive translated sutras.

It is said that the Southern Ch'i prince Ching-ling (459-494), a devoted Buddhist who encouraged Buddhist scholarship, himself compiled 36 abridged sutras (120 fascicles) so that his father's subjects could easily read and understand them. Among his abridgements are:

The Abridged Flower Garland Sutra (*Ch'ao hua-yen ching*), of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra.

The Abridged Great Collection of Sutas (*Ch'ao fang-teng ta-chi ching*), of the Mahāsaṃnipāta Sūtra.

The Threefold Lotus Sutra, chapter 23 (Bodhisattva Medicine King) and the "closing sutra" (Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue)

- (6) Texts "transmitted" by someone experiencing a state of possessive vision claiming to reveal teachings from the Buddha.

A psychic nun named Seng-fa (b. 489), of scholarly birth, had since childhood indulged in ecstatic meditation. In such a trance, she would recite various "sutras" as if she was acquainted with them. This even impressed the emperor Wu-ti of Liang (r. 502-549). In fact, some 21 apocryphal sutras of Seng-fa's are included in the Chinese canon.

The Tibetan "treasure" (*gter-ma*) texts would be examples of such scriptures, too.¹⁸

- (7) Sutras composed and expounded to exploit Buddhism for some agenda.

There are two such kinds of apocryphal texts: one done by the Buddhists themselves; the other, fabricated by non-Buddhists to discredit Buddhism.

35. DECLINE OF CHINESE BUDDHISM

Routinization of Buddhism

In pre-modern China, Buddhism as a social phenomenon had closely followed the political fortunes of the dynasties. Buddhism, as a social system, was often used to legitimize the power of the rulers and as such became state-controlled. As an advantage, Buddhism flourished as a protected system within a vast empire. In sociology, this is called the routinization of Buddhism.¹⁹

The disadvantage of Buddhism as a state-sponsored religion is greater, in that the fate of Buddhism is often closely connected with the whims of the powerful and the fate of the kingdom. Moreover, the final authority for Buddhists in such a system is not the Buddhist canon or Buddhist spirituality, but the worldly powers that be. Such a situation also attracts many other worldly problems. As a state-sponsored faith, Buddhism sometimes assimilated aspects of other religions, especially Confucianism, and so became eclectic.

Loss of state patronage

The An Lu-shan 安祿山 rebellion of 755, which almost brought political and financial collapse of the Tang, marks the beginning of the end of large-scale state patronage of Buddhism. This crisis was followed by some 90 years later by the persecution of Buddhists by emperor Hui-ch'ang, which was especially bad for those schools known for textual exegesis, such as Tiantai, Huayan and Faxiang. The Buddhist traditions that survived—Pure Land and Chan—did so simply because

...they were less dependent on scriptural learning, monastic ritual, and clerical tutelage, and thus less susceptible to the vagaries of state and aristocratic patronage. Pure Land and Ch'an were oriented toward individual faith and salvation gained through meditation practice, respectively, rendering them accessible and appealing to the masses. As such, these traditions, infused at time with popular forms of Tantra, came to dominate the Chinese Buddhist landscape down to the present day. However, this syncretic form of Buddhist practice failed to inspire the kinds of

¹⁸ Reading: Robert E. Buswell (ed.), *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*. Honolulu: Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1990. Chapters by Kyoko Tokuno and by Michel Strickmann.

¹⁹ See, for example, Trevor Ling, *A History of Religion East and West*, London: Macmillan, 1968: section 3.21.

doctrinal creativity and sophistication in the T'ang period. Intellectually, Buddhism went into a long and inexorable decline from which it never recovered. (Sharf 2002:6 f)

Song dynasty

When China became more stable under the Song dynasty, Buddhism enjoyed favourable support through this period. But this was not a dawning light or noonday sun, but a sunset glow for Chinese Buddhism. It was the “Memories of a Great Tradition”, as Kenneth KS Chen²⁰ puts it. Periods of greater recession and decline would follow.

In pre-Song Buddhism, for example, ordination certificates had to be earned by the candidate's passing an examination on the Buddhist scriptures. During the Song period, there was the widespread practice of selling ordination certificates for monks. These certificates had economic value, since they exempted the holder from tax and from corvée (a period of national labour service). Now that anyone could become a Buddhist monk without knowing anything about Buddhism resulted in easy access into the Order for any criminal or vagabond (Ch'en, 1964:391 f.).

State control of religion

Like pre-modern Theravada Buddhism in South and South-east Asian countries (Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia), in China, too, the rulers used religion to legitimize their power. However, in the case of the Theravada countries, the rulers were themselves generally devout Buddhists and they acknowledged the superior status of the Sangha.

In China, however, what was developing during the Song period, was what C.K. Yang describes as the stabilization of government control over religion.²¹ Moreover, during this period, there was a general reassertion of the superiority of what was Chinese over what was foreign. Under such circumstances, Buddhism was affected by the following situations:

- (1) All religions became increasingly eclectic as Confucian ideas rose to prominence again and the classical belief in the emperor as the Son of Heaven dominated Chinese society.
- (2) Among the Song Buddhists, there was a growing tendency towards forms of Buddhism that were more Chinese than Indian in origin, namely, Chan and Amidism.

Amidism

Even then, Amidism or Pure Land Buddhism 淨土宗 (centering around Amitabha Buddha) was declining in importance. A curious feature of Amidism during this period was the transformation of the next Buddha, Maitreya 彌勒, into the figure of the Laughing Buddha. He was generally believed to have appeared wandering about China as the laughing, pot-bellied simpleton Milo, surrounded by hordes of children.

The Laughing Buddha symbolized the values upheld by Chinese society then: his full hemp-bag symbolizing wealth, his fat belly a symbol of contentment, and the children the high value placed on a large family.²²

Chan

During the Song period, Ch'an Buddhism alone really flourished in China, mainly because it had the tradition of “a day without work, a day without food” self-sufficiency. Even though Chan became more widespread, there was less emphasis on meditation to prepare the mind for awakening. There was instead greater emphasis on the use of *gong'an* (koans or paradoxical statements meant to transcend the bonds of language and concepts) and the physical techniques of shouting and beating of disciples.

The scholar Dumoulin notes that though Chan enjoyed great prestige in Song China, “inner impoverishment accompanied outer splendour.”²³ It was also during this period that Chan was introduced into Japan as Zen.

²⁰ *Buddhism in China*, Princeton, 1964:389 ff.

²¹ C.K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1961: 106.

²² Ch'en 1964: 405-408.

²³ Heinrich Dumoulin, “Technique and Personal Devotion in the Zen Exercise”, in *Studies in Japanese Culture*, ed. J. Ringgendorf, Tokyo, 1963: 124.

36. NATURE OF CHINESE BUDDHISM

Robert Sharf, in his important “Prolegomenon to the study of medieval Chinese Buddhist literature” (2002:1-27), raised some vital issues in the study of Chinese Buddhism, which is often riddled with historical and hermeneutical problems. Some of his observations are summarized here. The claim that Kumārajīva’s translations were more “accurate” than those of his predecessors is problematic. The popularity of Kumārajīva’s translations was not due to their fidelity to the originals, but rather to the elegance and accessibility of his prose. As such, Kumārajīva’s translations continued to be favoured long after the more technically “accurate” translations of Xuanzang became available (2002:12).

Any of the so called Chinese schools of Buddhism are not really discrete schools. Such traditions as San-lun, Ti-lun and She-lun are better regarded as “organizational categories applied after the fact by mediaeval Buddhist historians and bibliographers” (2002:7). The notion that the Tang dynasty was the golden age of Buddhism is general and Chan in particular turns out to be the product of Sung Chan polemicists:

there is little evidence that the major Ch’an figures of the T’ang viewed themselves as belonging to an independent tradition or school. And despite its rhetoric Ch’an was no less dependent on the written word, on formal monastic ritual, and on state and aristocratic patronage than was any other Buddhist tradition in China. Pure Land never existed at all as an independent exegetical tradition, much less as an institution or sect, in T’ang or Sung China, and the same appears to be true of Tantra or Vajrayāna. (Sharf 2002:8)

Unlike in Japan, where Buddhism was from its inception subject to a degree of autocratic state control, in China, despite efforts by the state to regulate the Sangha, such efforts were tempered by geographical, cultural and political contingencies. Chinese monks, however, irrespective of their ordination lineage, were unified by their adherence to a more or less common monastic code, a common mode of dress, a common stock of liturgical and ritual knowledge, and so on. As such, Chinese monks could easily wander from monastery to monastery in search of new teachers and teachings. Such peregrinations were the norm that contributed to the consolidation of the Chinese Sangha across the empire. (Sharf 2002:9)

Above all, the Chinese looked to Buddhism for answers to questions that they found relevant. They approached Chinese translations of Buddhist texts not as glosses on the Indic originals,

but as valuable resources that addressed their own immediate conceptual, social, and existential concerns. Accordingly, in order to understand the answers they found, we must first deduce the question they were asking, questions, whose historical, linguistic, and conceptual genealogy was largely Chinese. (R Sharf 2002:12)

37. REVIVAL AND REFORM

During the modern period, especially after the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Buddhism in China was characterized by revival and reform. In reaction of the long dominant Chan, which placed a low value on intellectual pursuits, a new intellectual upsurge amongst the Chinese Buddhists (mainly through the influence of the progress of oriental studies in Europe) that largely rejected what was conservative and traditional. This development climaxed in the 1920s with the infusion of Marxist ideas into the Chinese “cultural renaissance”.

Taixu (T’ai-hsü, 1890-1947)

It was during this period that there arose a remarkable Chinese Buddhist monk, named Taixu (T’ai-hsü, 1889-1947), who succeeded in initiating a “humanistic Buddhism” (rensheng fojiao) to carry out a series of Buddhist reforms.²⁴ Two events strongly motivated Taixu’s reformist ideas. The first was the revolution of 1911 that toppled the Manchu dynasty and established the Republic of China. At this point,

²⁴ Chan Wing-tsit, *Religious Trends in Modern China*, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1953:56. Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism*: T’ai-hsü.

he was dismayed at the state of Buddhism and the disunity of the Sangha. The clergy generally neglected education and practice, and relied heavily on the performance of funerals rites and other rituals.

The second motivating factor behind Taixu's reformist ideas was his dialogue with the Norwegian Lutheran missionary, Dr Karl L Reichelt (1877-1952), who founded the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre.²⁵ Taixu criticized Christian theism and believed that Buddhism could give to Christianity what it desperately needed: a religious spirit that was not in opposition to modern science and that could be the foundation for trust and community.²⁶

Taixu emphasized the international character of Buddhism and initiated contacts between Chinese Buddhists and those of other Asian countries, especially of Sri Lanka, Thailand and Japan. He did this, convinced that

Buddhist doctrine is fully capable of uniting all existing forms of civilization, and should spread throughout the world so that it may become a compass, as it were, for the human mind.²⁷

Institutes for the training of large number of Buddhist religious leaders were set up in various parts of China, with the aim of reforming the Sangha.²⁸ Buddhist texts were studied in a way that had not happened for a very long time. A notable feature of Taixu's revival movement was the appearance of an increasing number of Buddhist periodicals devoted mainly to hermeneutics (the exposition of Buddhist thought) and apologetics (the rebuttal of criticisms against Buddhism). Between 1920 and 1935, there were a total of 58 such periodicals. Taixu's reform efforts, however, produced only patchy results, and he failed to unify the Chinese Sangha.

38. PURE LAND BUDDHISM

In the 1920s Taixu initiated a series of meetings with the World Buddhist Federation (an organization that existed only on paper). He helped organize the East Asian Buddhist Conference on 1925, and in 1928, convinced the Nationalist Government of China to send him on a nine-month tour of Europe and America. Although this tour failed to impress many westerners (mainly due to lack of preparation and of competent interpreters), it established his reputation at home as an international figure. In the 1930s he tried to establish an exchange programme with the Theravāda Buddhists of Sri Lanka. He met G P Malalasekera to discuss the need for an international Buddhist organization. After the Second World War, in 1950, Malalasekera set up the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

The success of Taixu's revival was especially evident in two areas of Chinese Buddhism:

- (1) A rediscovery of the monistic philosophy of Mahayana Buddhism and the awakening of interest in Buddhist philosophical ideas amongst young intellectuals.
- (2) A revival of religious life in Pure Land Buddhism (Amidism), with a growth of new societies which not only encouraged spiritual practice but also social services.

In the 1930s between 60-70% of China's lay Buddhists were Pure Land Buddhists (Ch'en 1964:460). In 1929, he organized the Chinese Buddhist Society, which by 1947 had over 4½ million members.²⁹

39. CHINESE BUDDHISM TODAY

The infamous and inhuman Cultural Revolution initiated by Mao Zedong was a sustained government campaign against all aspects of traditional Chinese culture, especially religion. The few vestiges of Chinese Buddhist heritage were destroyed or damaged beyond recognition. For a decade Buddhism (and religion) virtually ceased to exist in China.

The death of Mao in 1976 opened the way for social and economic reforms in communist China. The 1980s saw a cautious resurgence of popular (non-denominational) devotional Buddhism. A few of the major Buddhist temples were restored with government funds, mostly to encourage a foreign tourist

²⁵ See Burnett 2003:281.

²⁶ See for example "Science and Buddhism" in Donald Lopez (ed), 2002:85-90.

²⁷ Qu by C.H. Hamilton, "Buddhism" in *China*, ed. H.F. MacNair, Berkeley: Univ of California, 1946:297.

²⁸ Ch'en 1964: 456 f.

²⁹ The first modern Buddhist Society in China, however, was founded in 1900 (Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968: 10).

trade. Monks were allowed to return to their robes, though few did. Buddhist Associations were revived, and especially in the remote areas of China, the people themselves began to donate labour and money for the restoration of Buddhism.

If in pre-modern China, Chinese Buddhism was used by the rulers and their supporters to legitimize their power, making Buddhism a state-controlled system, in our own times, we are likely to see Chinese Buddhism as a national organization encouraged and patronized by the government mainly as a part of a greater economic plan and for social stability. The true success of Chinese Buddhism, as with any form of Buddhism anywhere, depends only the bona fide practitioners of Buddhism itself. However, if one-fifth of the human race could be in some way enlightened in the process, it would constitute a formidable religious and spiritual force on this global village.

40. CONCLUSION

We have taken a panoramic view of the spread of Buddhism in China, looking in some detail at a few important foreign and Chinese monks, the problems they faced and their successes, the process and problems of translating Indic texts into Chinese and how Buddhism became an important part of Chinese culture.

With the exception of Kumārajīva and a few thoroughly sinicized masters, the term “missionary” can hardly be applied to them: they have very little in common with the Christians, who controlled the whole process, from the translation of texts to their orthodox interpretations and Confucian adaptation, whereas with a few exceptions the foreign Buddhist monks were involved only in the first stage, the furnishing of raw materials. All the rest was done by the Chinese, and digested by Chinese minds.

The difference is significant, for it may go part of the way toward explaining why the Jesuit mission failed, and Buddhism was to stay in China. (Zurcher 1993:59)

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THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

A strategic analysis Buddhist history in East Asia

Piya Tan

Lecture 5

THE RISE AND GROWTH OF BUDDHISM IN KOREA



1. SYLLABUS

- (1) Indigenous Korean religion: shamanism.
- (2) The Three Kingdoms: introduction of Buddhism.
- (3) Silla Buddhism: Syncretism; Hwarang-do; Chajang & Wonhyo.
- (4) Sŏn.
- (5) Koryŏ.
- (6) Korean Buddhist Canons.
- (7) Yi: State control & persecutions.
- (8) Japanese occupation: innovations.
- (9) Modern reforms in the Korean Sangha.
- (10) Religions in Korea today: Sŏn Buddhism.

2. FOLK TRADITIONS

When Buddhism came to China, it was an empire (the Han) and Chinese society was very sophisticated with its own indigenous philosophies like Daoism and Confucianism. The situation was very different in the case of Korea. At the advent of Buddhism in Korea, the country was largely tribal (exemplified in tribal worship) and unified with a deep belief in shamanism, a belief system centring on the occult, psychic transformation and healing powers believed to be possessed by a “chosen” woman called a **mudang** or **female shaman**.

Korean shamans are similar in many ways to those found in northern Asia (Siberia, Mongolia, and Manchuria). They also resemble the *yuta* found on the Ryukyu Islands, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan. Cheju Island is also a center of shamanism. Shamans are enlisted by those who want the help of the spirit world. Female shamans (mudang) hold *kut*, or seances, in order to gain good fortune for clients, cure illnesses by exorcising evil spirits, or propitiate local or village gods. Such services are also held to guide the spirit of a deceased person to heaven.

Migrations into Korea

From the 3rd millennium BCE to historical times, Altaic people of NE Asia moved into the peninsula and became the dominant group.

By the 2nd millennium BCE, a new wave, the southern Tungus (an Altaic-speaking people from northern Asia), migrated into the country. Like other Altaics, their foundation myth asserted that their shaman-king, such as Tangun (prince of the sandalwood tree), was the descendant of Heaven. Tangun, who ruled over the tribes of Dragon, Horse, Deer, Crane, Eagle, and Egret, is regarded as the mythical founder of Korea in 2333 BCE.

Lack of concept of the whole

According to shamanism, curses on hair, nails, or any parts of the body can doom the whole of the victim. Dreams and omens are viewed not only as signs but also as causes of events. The shaman appeased the malice of evil spirits and invoked the protection of benevolent ones. Such beliefs remain strong even among some Koreans in our own time.

In pre-Buddhist Korea, such shamanistic beliefs and practices point to the fact that these folk traditions had not yet developed **a concept of the whole**. The concept of the whole is a philosophical view that enables a systematic structure, e.g. social or religious, to be built. As such, we would see that throughout Korean history, the rulers were (and still is) preoccupied with the hope of unifying their country—and Buddhism played a vital roles in this.

The early Koreans held to a system of appendages, as in parts of the body, that allowed for a **syncretism** that was rich and vital. Thus, shamanism has often intermingled with Buddhism in Korea and has withstood social changes, preserving many of its quaint customs of the folk culture. This gives Korean society and religion its second characteristic: the desire and tendency to syncretize discordant parts into a harmonious whole, as we shall presently see in the development of Buddhism in Korea.

3. HAN AND THE SILK ROAD

From the Warring States period (403-221 BCE) on, refugees from the northern Chinese states of Yen, Ch'i and Chao migrated to the peninsula to escape the ravages of the mainland wars. Since then, Han civilization began to increasingly eclipse the indigenous culture of Korea.

Furthermore, the Silk Road gave China closer ties with the Buddhism of India, Iran and Central Asia. China's overwhelming size, both in land and in people, inevitably led to its domination in the developments in East Asian Buddhism. However, as we shall see, the Koreans themselves exercised their genius in the **indigenization** of Buddhism into their own society.

4. THE THREE KINGDOMS 三國

The established religions of China—Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—began to penetrate Korea during the period of **the Three Kingdoms** (c.57-668 CE). To the north was the kingdom of Koguryō (高句麗) (about 2/3 of northern Korea), the Paekche (百濟) kingdom in the southwest, and Silla (新羅) in the southeast. After 668, Silla dominated all of Korea.

The traditional **Korean chronicles** such as *Samguk sagi* (Historical Records of the Three Kingdoms), *Haedong kosŭng chŏn* (Biographies of Eminent Korean Monks) and *Samguk yusa* (Memorabilia and Mirabilia of the Three Kingdoms) all agree that Buddhism came to Korea from China during this period.

Koguryŏ 高句麗

Buddhism was presumed to have been first introduced into Korea in **372 CE**, when King Fujian (Fu Chien 符堅 r. 357-384) of the Former Ch'in dynasty (351-394) sent a monk-envoy, Sundo (順道 Shundo, Shun-tao), to the **Koguryŏ** (高句麗) court with scriptures and images. Earlier in 370, Fujian had defeated the Former Yen state, which had laid siege to Koguryŏ—an action that brought closer ties between kings Fujian and Sosurim (小獸林 r. 371-383)

Tradition has it that in 376 king Sosurim built for **Sundo** the Sŏngmun (Hŭnguk) monastery, supposedly the first Buddhist structure on the peninsula. It is said that a mysterious person, **Ado** (阿道),¹ a native of Koguryŏ, became a Buddhist monk at 5, and traveled to China at 16 to study Buddhism. He is believed to have returned 3 years later in 383. The king was said to have built the second Buddhist monastery in Korea, the Ibbulan (Hŭngbok), for the first Korean monk, Ado. If this were the case, it is likely that Buddhism was known amongst the Koreans even earlier than the traditional date.

There is concrete evidence of an earlier introduction of Buddhism than traditionally believed. A mid-4th century tomb, unearthed near P'yŏngyang, is found to incorporate Buddhist motifs in its ceiling decoration.

Information regarding Buddhism in this period is scarce, but it is likely that it was characterized by magical practices, a symbiotic relationship between the Sangha (ecclesia) and the state, Maitreya worship and Mahayana scriptures.

5. PAEKCHE 百濟

In 384, the Serindian (Central Asian) monk, **Maranant'a** (摩羅難陀 Mālānanda or *Kumārānandī), was believed to have come via sea to Paekche from the Chinese state of Eastern Chin (317-420). His enthusiastic welcome by the royal court initiated the rapid spread of Buddhism throughout the Paekche kingdom.

Less than a year after his arrival, a monastery had been built on Mt. Han for Maranant'a and the first Korean natives ordained on Korean soil as Buddhist monks. Studies of the Vinaya (monastic discipline) appeared to have flourished in Paekche. In both Koguryŏ and Paekche, there is evidence of the presence of such schools as the Madhyamaka (Samnon), Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma, Nirvana, Satyasiddhi, and Tiantai (Ch'ŏnt'ae).

Paekche's **nautical skill** made it a veritable “Phoenicia of medieval East Asia”, and this played a vital role in the dissemination of Buddhism throughout East Asia. In 552 Paekche dispatched Buddhist doctrinal specialists, psalmodists, iconographers and architects to Japan, thus transmitting to the Japanese the rudiments of sinified Buddhist culture and laying the foundation for the rich Buddhist culture of Asuka and Nara periods.

6. SILLA, OR “UNIFIED SILLA” PERIOD 統一新羅

The Silla nobility, who continued their drive for peninsular unification, found strong incentive to embrace Buddhism in an effort to accommodate the newly conquered Koguryŏ and Paekche aristocracies, who had embraced Buddhism long before.

Silla expansion through southern Korea prompted massive emigration of Koreans to Japan (where they were known as *kikajin*). Many of the cultural and technical achievements of early Japan—such as the development of paddy fields, the construction of palaces and temples, and town planning—were direct results of the expertise introduced by these successive waves of emigrants.

During the reign of king Nulchi (r. 417-458), a monk named **Mukhoja**, was said to have cured the princess of a persistent disease by means of a ceremony involving a mysterious substance recently brought from China: incense.

¹ See Gim Yeongtae, *Han'guk bulgyosa* [History of Korean Buddhism], 1976:33-34.

Silla was the last of the three kingdoms to consolidate its power. It was only in 529, during the reign of king Pōphŭng (r. 514-540), following the martyrdom of **Ich’adon** (Pak Yōmch’ōk), that it officially embraced Buddhism. Political advantages probably motivated Silla to embrace Buddhism. In 540 Pōphŭng abdicated to become a Buddhist monk residing in a new monastery. The queen is also said to have become a nun and resided in another monastery. This is the first record of a **Buddhist nun** in Korea.

Toward the end of his reign, in 572, Pōphŭng’s successor, king Chinhŭng (r. 540-576) instituted the **P’algwanhoe**, a Buddhist ceremony to bless the departed spirits of soldiers who had died in battle in the expansion of Silla at the cost of Koguryō and Paekche. Performance of the P’algwanhoe, as well as another elaborate ceremony, the **Paekchwa kanghoe**, were supposed to bless the king and protect Silla. The construction of pagodas, in particular, was considered to be of direct, supernatural benefit to the king and the country.

7. COUNTERCULTURE

The Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms seemed to have been an ongoing amalgamation of foreign religion and indigenous cults. Local snake and dragon cults, for example, merged with the Mahayana belief in dragons as protectors of the Dharma, forming the uniquely Korean cult of **hoguk pulgyo** (“state-protection Buddhism”) which thenceforth characterized Korean Buddhism.

One of the earliest examples of this amalgamation was the vow of the Silla king **Munmu** (r. 661-681) to be reborn as a sea dragon after his death in order to guard his country and its new faith from foreign invasion. Buddhism and the state subsequently evolved a symbiotic relationship in which the monks entreated the Buddha and Bodhisattvas to protect the state and the state in turn provided active support for the dissemination of Buddhism throughout the empire. (This tradition would continue in the succeeding Koryō kingdom.)

In their efforts to indigenize Buddhism, monks attempted to show correspondences between Korean ancestral heroes and the new religion, thereby accelerating the adoption of the religion among Koreans. Attempts were made, for example, to prove that **Hwanin**, the Celestial Emperor, was identical to Śakra, the king of the devas (Chesōk-ch’ōn) of Indian Buddhism, and that **Tan’gun**, the progenitor of the Korean race, was the theophany (divine incarnation) of Śrīmālādevī (Kilsang-ch’ōn).

Vestiges of the dispensations of previous Buddhas were alleged to have been uncovered in Korea, and the advent of the future Buddha, Maitreya, was prophesied to occur in the south of the peninsula. Even today, visitors to a Korean monastery will notice the shrines to the mountain god or to the seven stars of the Big Dipper on its perimeter—testimonies to the synthesis of common sinified culture to Buddhism.

8. HWARANGDO

One of the most prominent institutions of Buddhism of the Three Kingdoms is the **Hwarangdo**, the Order of Flower Boys. According to the *Samguk sagi*, this chilvaric order was instituted by king Chinhŭng of Silla. The younger members of the nobility were drilled in ethical virtues and refined culture, centring around mystical experience of the native cult of **shamanesses**, military skills, and comradeship for national leaders, and fused with the messianic faith in the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the coming Buddha.



Silla gilt bronze Maitreya; 6th-7th century. In the National Museum, Seoul. Height 83.2 cm.

Fig 1. Maitreya, the coming Buddha

This fusion of chilvaric code and messianic faith generated an unexpected zeal to transform Korea into a Buddha land of the world and established the impetus for unification of Korea under Silla. As such, the formation of the Hwarangdo is considered to have been part of the expansionist policies of the Silla court. A later Silla writer related that the Hwarang boys were trained in Confucian filial piety and patriotism, Daoist quietism, and Buddhist morality. As such, it is not a paramilitary organization, as is popularly misunderstood.

To some scholars, the aesthetic celebrations—such as singing and dancing out in the open—that are commonly associated with the Hwarang seemed to be connected to shamanistic rituals of initiation journeys and pilgrimages. However, one thing is certain: their eventual identification with Maitreya clearly showed their intention to spread Buddhism among the Koreans.

9. SILLA BUDDHISM

In 668, Korea was finally unified under Silla (668-935) and with that, Buddhism grew in an unprecedented way. The major “official” schools of scholastic Buddhism that had developed in China were introduced into Korea were:

Ch’önt’ae-chong (天台宗 Tiantai School).

Hwaōm-chong (華嚴宗 Avatamsaka School).

Yōlban-chong (涅槃宗 Nirvāṇa School)

Tantric Schools (Chin. Zhenyan): **Shinin & Chinōn**.

Wōnyung-chong, early branch of the Hwaōm (Avatamsaka) School.

Kyeyul-chong (Vinaya School)

Pōpsang-chong (Yogācāra) based on the “consciousness-only” (*viññāpti, mātratā*, 唯識) teachings.

Worthy of mention, too, is the uniquely Korean school that stressed Buddhist syncretism, founded by the enigmatic Wonhyo:

Pōpsōng-chong or Beopseong-chong (法性宗 Dharmatā School) [11].

Ch’önt’ae-chong (Tiantai School)

Traditionally, the first identifiable school of Buddhism in Korea was the Chinese Tiantai, founded by **Hyōn’gwang** in Paekche in 565. However, it should be noted that Hyōn’gwang studied in China, not under Zhiyi (the Tiantai founder), but under Zhiyi’s teacher. Nevertheless, the early syncretic school related to Tiantai survived Paekche’s absorption into Silla and matured into classical Korean Tiantai, the Ch’önt’ae-chong in the 8th century.

Ch’önt’ae, however, did not gain significance until it won royal patronage under the Koryō dynasty in the 10th century. Like Chinese Tiantai, this royal favour towards Ch’önt’ae was part of a political agenda to promote national unity by creating a unified Buddhism as the state ideology.

Hwaōm-chong (Avatamsaka School)

The second identifiable school of Chinese Buddhism to take root in Korea was Huayan, which centres around the voluminous Avatamsaka Sūtra. Huayan, or Hwaōm as it is known in Korean, was introduced into Korea by **Ŭisang** ((義湘, 625-702) [10] in 670, after studying 20 years in China.

Related to Hwaōm is the Haedong or **Pōpsōng** school [10] founded by Ŭisang’s friend, Wonhyo. This, however, was an indigenous school since Wōnhyo did not study under any Chinese teacher, but claimed to have realized enlightenment in Korea itself

Yōlban-chong (Nirvāṇa School)

The Nirvāṇa school strictly speaking was not a school but a lineage of monks who centred their study and practice around the Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra. The Yōlban (like its early Chinese counterpart) is so called because it was inspired by the Sūtra which the Koguryō monk **Podōk** brought back from China into Silla (the new dominant state) in 668.

The Nirvāṇa Sūtra itself influenced the thought of both Ŭisang and Wōnhyo, but the Yōlban tradition had little lasting influence.

Tantric Schools (Chin. Zhenyan): Shinin & Chinŏn

The esoteric Zhenyan (Chen Yen; Jap. Shingon) or Tantric school was also influential during the Silla period. In Korea, it was divided into two sub-schools: the Shinin and the Chinŏn. They were associated primarily with the performance of magical rituals and the curing of diseases, which highlighted their similarity with Korea's indigenous shamanism.

The best known Korean exponent of Tantric Buddhism was the famous traveller **Hyech'o**. His diary of the long years of travel and study in China, Central Asia and India was rediscovered only in the 20th century and is now available in English translation.²

Oldest extant printed text

Korea is the proud custodian of the world's oldest printed text. The oldest surviving printed work known to date is the **Dhāraṇī scroll** (dated no later than 704)—the Diamond Sutra from Dunhuang is dated 868—found in the foundations of the Pulguk-sa pagoda at Kyongju, South Korea, in 1966.

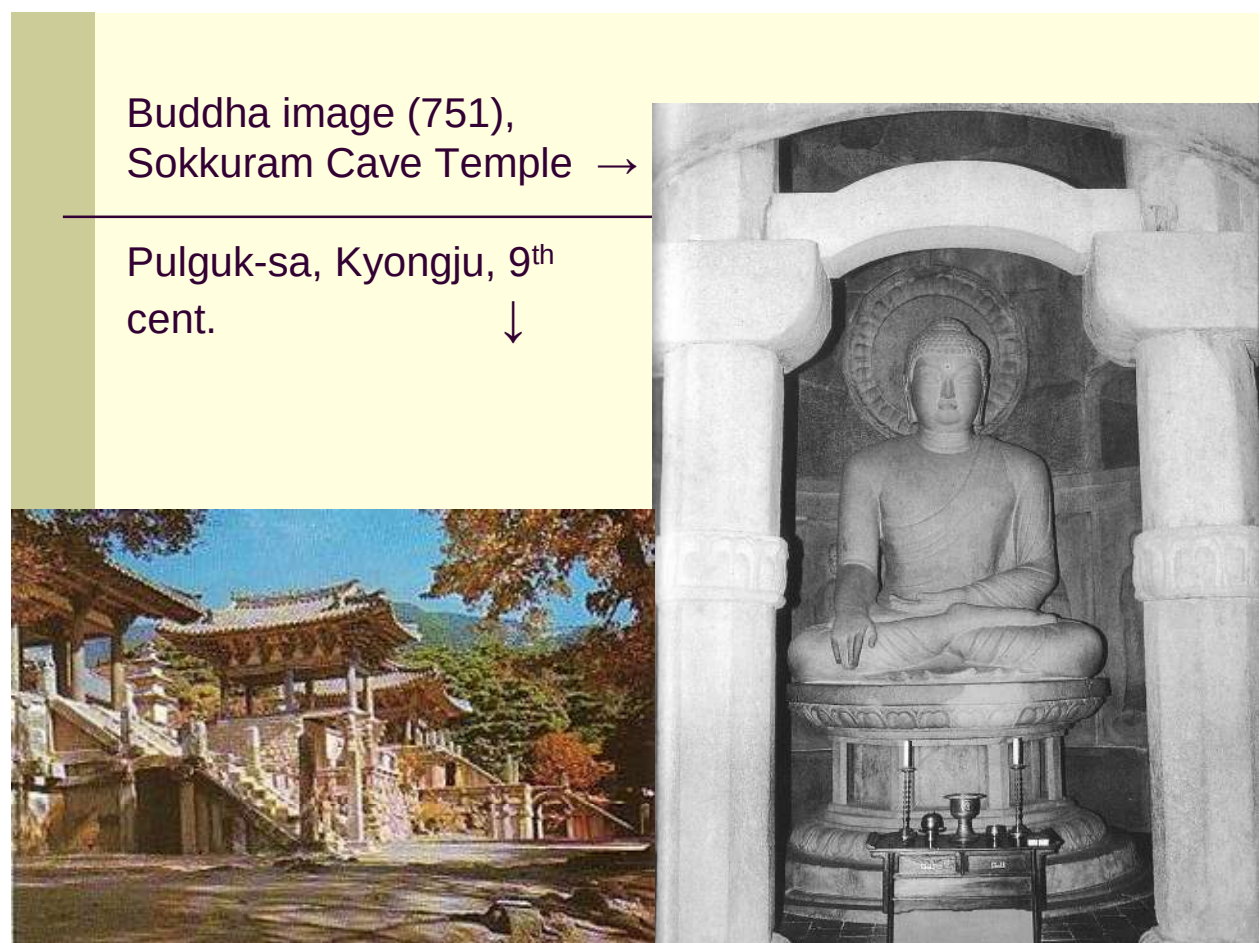


Fig 2. The oldest extant printed text, a Dhāraṇī scroll, was found in Pulguk-sa.

10. IMPORTANT SILLA MONKS

Pilgrims

During the reign of king Chinp'yŏng (r. 579-632), the monk **Wŏn'gwang** (圓光 c 570) left Korea in 589 for studies in China. Before him, other Korean monks had already traveled to China, even India, for studies. In 554, the monk **Ŭisin** returned from a tour of India, and in 565, **Hyŏn'gwang** returned to

² *The Hye Ch'o Diary*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1989.

Paekche from China, having studied under Huisi (Hui Ssu, 515-77), teacher of Zhiyi (Chih I), who founded the Tiantai school. Of these pilgrims, Wŏn'gwang was the most influential.

Wŏn'gwang (圓光 c 570)

Wŏn'gwang's departure for China in 589 coincided with its reunification under the Sui dynasty. In China, Wŏn'gwang specialized in the study of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, texts central to the Tiantai school that Zhiyi (Chih-I, 智顗, 538-597) was formulating at that time.

After his return to Silla in 599, he had great influence at court, and in 608 returned to China as an envoy to the Sui dynasty. In 631, when he was dying, king Chinpyŏng himself attended to him, and the king himself dying in 632.

Wŏn'gwang's fame and his close association with China initiated a flood of Koreans to and from China and India. This development was very remarkable considering the distance involved and that the 7th century was time of endless warfare.

After the death of Wŏn'gwang in 631 and the death of king Chinpyŏng in 632, Buddhism in Unified Silla was dominated by three monks: Chajang, Wŏnhyo and Ŭisang. They laid the groundwork that would become the hallmark of Korean Buddhist philosophy. Both of them were the vanguards of the Huayan School, as reflected in their influence on Fazang (Fa-tsang) (643-712), the systematizer of the Chinese Huayan school.

Chajang or Jajang (慈藏, 608-686)

Chajang (608-686) is notable for his determined renunciation of worldly affairs and his dedication to scholastic doctrines and moral discipline. Although born of the royal clan, he reputedly refused, even at royal threat of his execution, to leave his meditation to serve at court. In 636, he left for China, where it was said he had a vision of Mañjuśrī on the sacred mountain Wu Tai Shan.

Tang Emperor Taizong, founder of the Tang dynasty, invited Chajang to reside in one of the capital's grand monasteries, but he chose to live in a simple, secluded hut in the mountains. Still, many students sought him out for instruction, until in 643 queen Sŏndŏk requested the emperor Taizong to send Chajang back to Silla.

Back in Silla, Chajang was made *kuksa* or national preceptor, in effect becoming the head of all the monks in the country. Chajang used his influence to reform Buddhism there by instituting a four-point programme:

- (1) Increased scriptural study by monks;
- (2) Monastic examinations on doctrine every six months;
- (3) Establishment of a single ordination centre at the T'ongdo Monastery to administer entry into and dismissal from the Sangha; and
- (4) Creation of a government bureau to oversee and maintain Buddhist temples and their lands and contents.

Because of the third point, Chajang is often associated with the Vinaya school (concerned with monastic discipline), which had earlier developed in China.

Wŏnch'ŭk or Weonchuk (圓測, 613-696)

Wŏnch'ŭk (613-696), a close friend and disciple of Xuanzang (Hsuan-ts'ang, 玄奘, c. 596-664), was a prominent exegete in the Chinese Faxiang (Fa-hsiang) school, whose commentaries on such texts as the *Saṃdhi, nirmocana Sūtra* exerted profound influence on early Tibetan Buddhism.

Ŭisang (義湘, 625-702)

Ŭisang is remembered as a master of Hwaŏm (Chin. Huayan) Buddhism and as a great builder of monasteries and temples. He failed to reach China in his first attempt (648-9)—which he made with his friend Wonhyo—but made it in 650. Once in China, he stayed for 20 years, studying with the second and third patriarchs of the Huayan school: Zhiyan (ChihYen, 智儼; 600-668) and Fazang (Fa Tsang, 法藏, 643-712). Fazang and Ŭisang became good friends, and one famous letter of their correspondence survives.

In 670, when Ŭisang got wind of a Tang plot to attack Silla, he made a dramatic return to Silla and hastened to warn his king. No doubt, partly as a result of this act of courage and patriotism, and partly because of his eminent scholarship, Ŭisang was permitted to construct a total of ten monasteries, making him one of the greatest religious building contractors in history.

11. WŎNHYO (元曉, 617-686)

Ŭisang's friend and brother monk, **Wŏnhyo** (617-687), is best remembered for his radical efforts to popularize Buddhism among the Silla masses. At 32, in a dramatic experience in a pitch-black cave, after unwittingly drinking sweet water from a partially decomposed crown of a human skull, he had an enlightenment experience.

Wŏnhyo's wayward and exuberant personality is well-known. He then spent his time wandering amongst the populace and teaching Buddhism to all and sundry. In his teaching, he performed songs of his own composition, accompanying himself on a lute or by drumming on a gourd. Wŏnhyo frequented wine-houses and brothels, and in later life had a sexual affair with a princess who bore him a son, Sŏl-ch'ong, one of the greatest Silla intellectuals.

Wŏnhyo himself married and founded the **Pŏpsŏng** (*dharmatā*) school, which taught an syncretic, even ecumenical, form of Buddhism that included all schools and branches. He tried to use music, literature and dance to express the meaning of Buddhism. He removed the barrier between the sacred and the secular, asserting that all beings had inherent and eventual Buddhahood: their difference, he proclaimed, was a matter of degree in development.

Wŏnhyo's life epitomized his unitarian vision. His spontaneous enlightenment experience had a Zen flavour. His wayward personal behaviour was akin to that of the Tantric masters. He is recognized as a Huayan intellectual, but also remembered as a Pure Land evangelist.

Despite his unconventional lifestyle, Wŏnhyo was a prolific and influential writer of treatises and commentaries on Buddhist scripture. Of the twenty or so extant works attributed to him, the five major works are commentaries on the Lotus Sutra, the Nirvana Sutra, the Diamond Sutra, Aśvaghōṣa's Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana and a handbook of Buddhism for the laity.

In all his works, Wŏnhyo stressed the underlying similarities in the doctrinal divergences he perceived in Buddhism even before sectarian division arose in Korea. Although Wŏnhyo's conciliatory non-sectarian approach was influential and he is remembered one of the shapers of Korean Buddhism, his death in 686 generally marked the beginning of sectarian Buddhism in Korea.

12. SYNCRETISM

It was during the Unified Silla period, too, that one of the characteristic features of mature Korean Buddhism developed. This was **syncretism**, an attempt which began in China. From its inception in East Asia, Buddhism had formed around a number of disparate scriptural and commentarial traditions that had developed in India, Iran and Central Asia in the light of indigenous philosophies of Daoism and Confucianism.

In their attempts to syncretize the various disparate Buddhist traditions and teachings, Chinese Buddhism developed into a number of sectarian groups. In Korea, this approach became more refined and, because of its smaller geographical size, the syncretism was more widespread and homogeneous. Also because of the smaller size of Korea and its monastic population, Buddhism had little hope of being a stable influence on the religious life of the country.

Moreover, there was the constant threat of **foreign invasion**, which called for the need for a unified, centrally organized ecclesiastical institution. The quest for a common denominator or unifying factor to establish an interdenominational approach or Unified Buddhism (*t'ong pulgyo*) produced one of the most ecumenical forms of Buddhism found in Asia.

After becoming a court religion, Buddhism followed a form of **geomancy** (divination and placement by means of harmonious environment) called p'ungsuchirisol (theory of wind, water and earth) from Daoism in order to select temple sites vital for national safety. Pulguk-sa and Sokkuram grotto located on a high ridge near Kyŏngju, with a commanding view of the Eastern Sea, apparently were intended to protect the country from Japanese marauders.

13. SŎN (SEON)

Pŏmnang

Perhaps the most momentous development in the history of Korean Buddhism during the Unified Silla period was the introduction of Chan Buddhism, called Sŏn (or Seon) in Korean. Sŏn is said to have been introduced into Korea by the monk **Pŏmnang** (fl. 632-646), who is said to have trained with the 4th Patriarch of the Chan school, Tao-shin (580-646), just before the split of Chinese Chan into its northern and southern branches.

Little is known of the life of Pŏmnang, but there are indications that he attempted to combine the teachings of the two distinct Chan lineages—that of Bodhidharma (c. 5th century), Hui-k'o (487-592), and Seng-ts'an (d. 606) and that of Daoxin (Tao-hsin 道信, 580-651) and Hung-jen (688-761)—with the syncretic *tathāgata,garbha* doctrine of the Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana (Chin. *Ta-sheng ch'i-hsin lun*).



A patriarch of Pŏmnang's lineage eventually founded the **Hŭiyang-san** school, the oldest of the Sŏn schools. During the 8th and 9th centuries, other Korean adepts returned from the mainland and established eight other mountain Sŏn centres, forming what came to be called the **Nine Mountains School of Sŏn** (Kusan Sŏn mun).

Fig 3. Modern Son monks meditating.

Other Sŏn schools

The next seven lineages were established in rapid succession during the first half of the 9th century. All seven were one or other of the disciples of **Mazu Daoyi** (Ma Tzu Tao-i, 馬祖道一, 709-788), the second successor of Hui Neng, the founder of the southern Chan school of China.

Korean Sŏn masters also played major roles in the development of Chinese Chan. Perhaps the most prominent of these Koreans was the monk **Musang** (Kim Ho-shang) (694?-762), who was regarded as a patriarch of the Pao-t'ang school of the Szechuan region, and was the first Chan master known to the Tibetans.

The ninth and last Sŏn school, known as Sumisan (Sumi Mountain), was founded in 911 when **Iŏm** returned from China claiming to represent the northern school of Chan, which died out in China soon after.

Despite the regular traffic of Sŏn masters between China and Korea, the entrenched position of the scholastic schools within the Korean ecclesia prevented the growth of the Nine Mountains Sŏn. Continued frustration at their inability to disseminate their teachings led to Sŏn proponents like Toŭi (d. 825) and Muyŏm (799-888) to attack the scholastic schools, leading ultimately to a split in the Korean Sangha into two rival factions.

The Nine Mountains

These Korean Sŏn lineages are known as the "Nine Mountain" schools because of the location of their principal monasteries on nine sacred mountains in Korea. This intentional association with sacred mountains stresses the importance of including elements of indigenous shamanism into Korean forms of Buddhism.

Some have argued that the rapid success of so many schools of Sŏn Buddhism indicates a widespread desire to escape the tumultuous decline of Silla in favour of the contemplative life of a meditating monk.

Equally important was the fact that the discipline that meditation entails resembles the self-imposed ordeals of the traditional shaman.

In Korea, moreover, Buddhism is often associated with **national unity**, clearly seen in the association between the founders of Koryŏ and the Sumisan lineage of Sŏn. For these reasons, and perhaps others, Sŏn Buddhism saw a dramatic rise to prominence in the closing years of the Unified Silla period.

14. KORYŎ 高麗 (935-1392)

In 918, general Wang Kon (of the merchant group) overthrew the state of Later Koguryŏ (established in the north by the monk Kungye). In 935, Wang Kon unified the kingdom, changed its name to Koryŏ, and established his capital at Songak (present-day Kaesong). It was during this period—the Wang dynasty—that Korea began to form its own cultural tradition distinct from the rest of East Asia, and it is from the name Koryŏ that the Western word **Korea** is derived.

It is interesting to note that in 1036, Buddhist monks under state patronage, succeeded in getting the **death penalty** abolished. This perhaps the earliest example of human rights awareness and social action in recorded history!

The main contribution of Koryŏ Buddhism to the evolution of the Korean Sangha was the reconciliation between Sŏn and the scholastic schools. It was the monk **Uich'on** (1055-1101) who made the first such attempt by seeking to combine both the Nine Mountains and the scholastic schools into a Ch'ŏnt'ae school (revitalized by Uich'on himself).

Uich'on himself was a scholar, and after 25 years of research, published an outstanding 3-volume bibliography of Buddhist literature.

Chinul or Jinul 知訥

Following Uich'on some three generations later was **Chinul** or Jinul (知訥; 1158-1210), a charismatic Sŏn master similarly inspired by a vision of a unified Buddhist ecclesia. Unlike Uich'on's scholastic bent, however, Chinul attempted to merge the various Buddhist schools of his time into a new Sŏn school.

Chinul introduced into Sŏn the practice of the investigation of the **hwadu** or “critical phrase” (Chin. *hua-t'ou*), better known by the close synonym of *kongan* (Chin. *kung-an*; Jap. *koan*), as it had been developed in China by Ta-hui Tsung-kaio (1089-1163). Chinul sought to incorporate this investigation into the soteriology of sudden-awakening/gradual-cultivation taught by Tsung-mi (780-841), and finally to combine this approach to Sŏn with the interpretation of Hwaŏm thought of Li T'ung-hsüan (635-730).

Chinul's synthesis of Sŏn and the scholastic teachings came to be regarded as a distinctively Korean school of Sŏn, known as **Chogyŏ-chong**, which would remain the predominant school of Korean Buddhism down to the present day. Its 78th patriarch, the current one, Zen Master Seung Sahn, visited Singapore in December 2001.

Decline

During the Koryŏ period, Korean Buddhism reached its zenith, but then began to decline. Many temples were built funded by the national treasury, and monks assumed significant social positions, so much so that in 1197, seven sons of the king became monks.

Towards the end of this period, Buddhism began to suffer internal corruption (gained through royal favours) and external persecution (especially those inspired by the Neo-Confucianist). The government now began to limit the privileges of the monks, and Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the state religion.



Fig 3. Haein-sa

15. THE KORYŎ BUDDHIST CANON

The Koryŏ period was renowned for its productions of the Chinese Buddhist Canon, made possible by the development of **metal type**, a Korean invention that is arguably the ancestor of the 15th century European development of movable type by Johannes Gutenberg and others.

The Koryŏ Canons were based on the Chinese models of the Shu and the Liao (Khitan) editions. Both have been called the Koryŏ Edition. It is believed that the **first Koryŏ Edition**, initiated and completed under king Hyeonjong (r. 1009-31), contained 5,048 fascicles of the K'ai-yüan shih-chiao-lu and that it followed the format of the Shu Edition.

The **second Koryŏ Edition**, produced during the reign of king Munjong (r. 1046-82), included translations not incorporated into the K'ai-yüan shih-chiao-lu, in addition to a number of sutras from the Shu and Liao editions. It is believed that together the two Koryŏ editions contained some 1,524 works.

Over a century after its publication, the second Koryŏ Edition was reprinted at Haein-sa 海印寺, a mountain monastery in southern Korea. It is the Haein-sa printings that are generally called the **Koryŏ Edition**. The wood blocks used to print the Haein Temple Edition, numbering over 8,000, are still maintained at Haein-sa and have been used again in the late 20th century to print additional copies of the Koryŏ Edition. One of these copies was presented to Japan and is readily available to scholars.

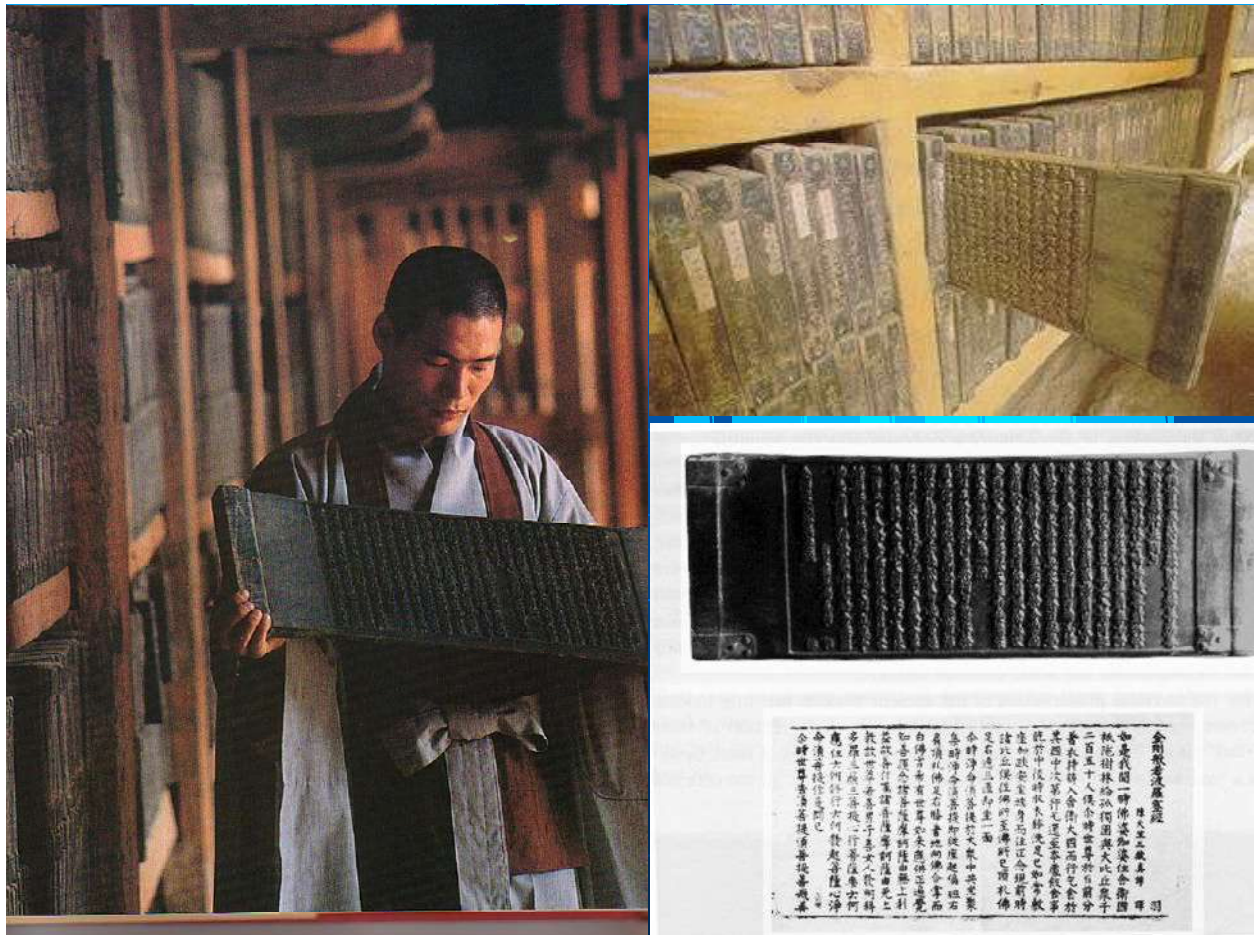


Fig 4. Haein-sa library of the printing blocks for the Korean Tripiṭaka.

Mongol invasions

Between 1231 and 1258, Koryŏ suffered six Mongol invasions. These attacks were so devastating that most of the surviving artifacts were those exported to Japan before these invasions and are now housed in Japanese museums. Koryŏ formally surrendered in 1258, and the Wang dynasty remained nominally in power as a puppet government of the Yuan emperor in China.

In between the Mongol invasions and thereafter, a glorious achievement of the Koryŏ was the production of **the Restored Koryŏ Tripiṭaka**, based on the Liao and Northern Song Chinese editions, to replace the earlier canon and supplement destroyed by the Mongols. In the hope of winning Buddha's protection against the invaders, the carving project was restarted in 1236, and took 16 years. The completed Tripiṭaka was moved to Kanghwa Island, but after pillaging from Japanese pirates, it was removed to Chichun Temple in Seoul, and then stored in the Haein-sa in 1398 during the reign of Taejo.

The 81,258 blocks of the ***Tripiṭaka Koreana***, or the Korean Tripiṭaka, as it came to be popularly known, is the most complete and accurate of the several extant block print editions of the Buddhist canons in Chinese characters. In the 1920s, it was chosen by Japanese scholars as the basis of the authoritative **Taishō Shinshu Daizōkyō** 大正新脩大藏經 (or the Taishō, for short), the Japanese Buddhist Canon, which is in turn the basis of virtually of all modern scholarship on Chinese Buddhism.

In the 1990s, through the assistance of Prof. Lewis Lancaster of the University of California at Berkeley, the **computerization** of the Tripiṭaka Koreana project was launched centred in the Haein-sa in Korea. The whole canon is now available on CD.

16. YI DYNASTY OR JOSEON PERIOD (朝鮮, 1392-1909)

With the advent of the Yi dynasty, the fortunes of Korean Buddhism began to wane. King Yi Sŏng-gye, a renegade general of Koryŏ and founder of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910), adopted **Confucianism** as the state religion and recruited government officers through examinations based on the Confucian Classics.

Despite official policies of Confucian as state religion, many of the Yi kings continued to give generous support to Buddhism. For example, the founder Yi Sŏng-gye, appointed the renowned monk, **Muhak Chajo** (1327-1398), to the official post of preceptor to the royal family (*wangsa*) and the *Yijo sillok* (Veritable Record of the Yi Dynasty) is full of references to his sponsorships of temple building projects, alms offerings to monks and various Buddhist rites.

The Confucianist bureaucrats however continued to pressure the throne for stricter selection procedure for Buddhist monks, limits on the number of temples and hermitages, reduction in the number of officially sanctioned sects, and reorganization of the ecclesiastical system, all in order to effect downsizing and more centralized supervision of the religion. Such policies were adopted by T'aejong (r. 1400-1418), the third Yi king, and carried out on a massive scale by his successor, king Sejong (r. 1418-1450).

17. PERSECUTIONS

The number of monasteries was reduced to only 242. In **Sejong's proclamation of 1424**, only 36 monasteries were allowed. The Buddhist schools were reduced to seven, and then cut down to only two. The Chogyŏ, Ch'ŏnt'ae (Tiantai) and Kyeyul (Vinaya) schools were amalgamated into a single **Sŏn** school—the Contemplative Order—and the remaining scholastic schools were merged into the **Kyo** school—the Doctrinal Order.

New regulations were adopted for obtaining monk's certificates, making ordination much more difficult, and many ordained monks were defrocked. The official ranks of national preceptor (*kuksa*) and royal preceptor (*wangsa*) were abolished. In the early 15th century, temple paddy land and forest properties were confiscated by the state and the legions of serfs retained by the monasteries were drafted into the army.

Buddhist temples were no longer permitted within the capital or major cities. In 1623, king **Injo** (1623-1649) banned Buddhist monks from entering the capital. [Park 1964: 7]. The children of aristocrats were forbidden to ordain. King **Hyongjong** (1659-1674) banned all ordinations and destroyed monasteries located in the capital or converted them into Confucian halls.

In 1765, king **Yongjo** struck a blow at the Buddhist role of handling death ritual by demanding that all ancestral tablets be removed from the monasteries. King **Chongjong** (1776-1800) again denied the monks admission into Seoul and his proscription lasted until the end of the 19th century. [Yoshikawa 1920: 46]

Small hermitages

Such strictures on Buddhism in Korea caused the monasteries to shrink in number as well as in importance within the cities. Yoshikawa attributes the survival of Buddhism under these hostile rulers to the fact that women of the royal house and the upper classes remained devout believers and gave it support.

Around the city walls there were **small hermitages** housing monks who performed prayers for the women who went there seeking forgiveness for whatever bad karma has caused them to be born as women [Yoshikawa 1920: 47]. While the men gave their full support to the Confucian tradition and its social codes within the family and nation, the women found Buddhism to be more attractive. This meant that many of the Korean families were split with regard to religious allegiance.

Buddhist response

Official disfavour and even persecution brought Buddhism to a low state. In its desperate struggle for survival, it often combined with folk beliefs maintained in Daoism and shamanism, thus losing its distinctive intellectual characteristics.

During this extremely difficult period for Korean Buddhism, **Sōsan Hyujōng** (1520-1604) epitomizes the continued Sōn orientation of the Sangha. Inspired by Chinul's vision of the unity of the Sōn and the scholastic schools [9], Hyujōng produced a succinct manual of practice, titled *Sōn'ga kugam* (Guide to the Sōn School). His other guides to Confucianism and Daoism were intended to effect a reconciliation between Buddhism and its rival religions that began in mid-Koryō times and to show many similarities of purpose.

18. JAPANESE INVASIONS

Despite being eclipsed by Confucianism, Korean Buddhists fought bravely against the invasion of Japanese armies under **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** (1537-98) in 1592 and 1596. In 1592, when Hideyoshi invaded Korea, a Jesuit priest, Gregorio de Cespedes, came with them, but his stay was brief and uneventful. The Japanese invasions led to the rise of a uniquely Korean response from the monastic community.

The "righteous monk" (*uisa* 義士) or monk-warrior movement spread during the eight-year war, including several thousand monks, led by the aging **Seosan Hyujeong** (西山休靜, 1520-1604). They operated out of the Heungguk-sa temple deep in the mountain, Yeongchwisan, launching guerrilla warfare against the invaders, and were a critical factor in the eventual expulsion of the Japanese invaders in 1593 and again in 1598.³

In the decade before the 1910 annexation of Korea by Japan, some efforts were made to unify Korean Buddhism. These efforts, as well as the subsequent efforts of Buddhist "missionaries" from Japan, were largely in vain.

Tonghak and Ch'ōndogyo

Before the Japanese occupation, there arose an indigenous religious movement that was anti-western and anti-Roman Catholic—the **Tonghak** (Eastern Learning). Founded in 1860 by Ch'oe che-u, who was executed four years later, it emphasized social action and the principle that God and man are one. Tonghak, a syncretism of Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism caused a revolt in 1894 that precipitated the Sino-Japanese War. In 1905, it was renamed **Ch'ōndogyo**, the religion of the heavenly way.

After the signing of the Korea-Japan treaty of 1876, Japanese Buddhist sects, beginning with the Higashi Honganji sect of Pure Land, began to proselytize among the increasing number of Japanese immigrants living in Korea, an activity which soon spread to the native Koreans as well. Following complaints from the Japanese Nichiren missionaries, the Yi court in 1895 lifted the centuries-old prohibition against the presence of Buddhist monks in the capital of Seoul. During this period, too, the Sōn master **Kyōnghō** (1857-1912) and his disciples revived Sōn practice. His lineage continues to teach to this day.

³ Before ever having tested his hand as a military commander, Seosan was a first-rate Sōn master and the author of a number of important religious texts, the most important of which is probably his *Seonga gugam* (禪家龜鑑), a guide to Sōn practice which is studied by Korean monks down to the present day.

19. JAPANESE OCCUPATION

When the Japanese finally occupied Korea (1910-15), they used religion as a means to implement their colonial policy. They first united the scholastic Gyo (敎) and contemplative Sŏn (禪) sects⁴ into one **Cho-ke-jong** in 1911, and forced the various denominations of Christianity into one Reformed Congregation of Churches (1942), then forced them to join in Shintō worship. Nearly 1000 Shintō shrines were erected by the Japanese, but Shintō gained very little support. These Japanese modifications ended as soon as Korea obtained independence in 1945 with the defeat of Japan in World War II.

Korean innovations

During the Occupation, some Korean monks thought that the fortunes of Buddhism were dependent upon arranging a merger with a major Japanese sect. **Yi Hoe-gwang** went so far as to negotiate a combination of the Korean Sangha with the Japanese Sōtō sect. Most Koreans, however, regarded the “gradual” teachings of the Sōtō sect as going against the “sudden” (subitist) orientation of their own tradition, and blocked the move.

In 1913, **Hae Yong-un** (1879-1944), the only Buddhist signatory to the 1919 Korean independence declaration and a major literary figure, shocked his contemporaries by advocating that monks be allowed to marry, a move he felt necessary if Buddhism were to maintain a viable role in modern secular society. Despite objections from the traditional quarters of Korean Buddhists, the Japanese colonial government endorsed the proposal in 1926. Within a decade, virtually all temple abbots were married, thereby bringing a radical change to the traditional moral discipline of the Korean Sangha.

20. CHRISTIAN SUCCESS

During the decade before the beginning 20th century, Buddhism in Korea faced another powerful foreign threat—Christianity. Protestant Christianity which failed to spread elsewhere in East Asia, profoundly affected the Korean Buddhists. According to David Burnett,⁵ this was probably the result of two unique aspects of Korean history.

The first was the influence of the Protestant missionary John L. Nevius, who moved to Korea in 1890 after working in China. He immediately began to implement the same pattern of indigenous principles that were known as the “**Nevius method**.”⁶ They were as follows:

- (1) Each Christian should “abide in the calling wherein he was found.” The convert would continue to remain in his local community and support himself.
- (2) The church organization was to be developed only so far as the Korean Church was able to take responsibility for it.
- (3) The church was to appoint and support full-time national pastors.
- (4) The church buildings were to be built in Korean style.

This attempt to establish an indigenous church removed much of the anti-foreign feeling so significant in China that it prevented Christian growth.

The second factor important in the growth of the church in Korea was the social trauma the Koreans experienced through Japanese rule [19-20], and later, the Communist invasion resulting in the Korean War of 1950. The war left Korea totally destroyed. Through massive US support, South Korea is now one of the economic miracles of Asia. This radical social change has affected every aspect of society, and made every Korean open to the American way of life.

As Protestant Christianity is seen as a part of the American way of life, the Protestant church was eagerly accepted by the Koreans. Korea still boasts some of the largest Protestant congregations in the world, and is even sending missionaries to other countries. However, it is clear that this trend has now slowed down with the renaissance of Korean Buddhism at the turn of the century [24].

⁴ These two groupings coincides with the Pali Commentarial dichotomy of the duties of *gantha, dhura* (study-centred training) and *vipassanā dhura* (meditation-centred training) (AA 1:312; DhA 1:7; ThA 2:101; ApA 275).

⁵ David Burnette 2003:284. This section is mostly based on this reference.

⁶ John Nevius. *Methods of Mission Work*. London: Morgan & Scott, 1898.

21. NEW SECTS

During the Japanese occupation, various sectarian movements arose, many of them similar to Ch'öndogyo [19]. After the war, more than 170 new religious sects emerged. They were syncretic (accommodating various religious ideas and practices), messianic (looking for a saviour in the hope of establishing a spiritual kingdom here and now), and shamanistic.

One of the most prominent new Korean Buddhist sect was **Won** or "Round" Buddhism (more fully, Wonbulgyo), founded in 1916 by Pak Chung-bin (1891-1943), later known as So-tae-san, with the Dharma-name of Tae-jong-sa. It is a reformed, simplified school that combined Buddhism with a disparate variety of elements drawn from Confucianism, Daoism, Tonghak, and even Christianity.

Its sole focus of worship is a black circle representing the emptiness of the Dharma, kâya. Western influences are apparent in its religious services, which include Sutra-readings, prayers, hymns and a sermon. It seeks to balance inner quiet with selfless social service. Its numerous charitable activities include the building of many schools. By 1973, it had 600,000 followers and 200 temples, mainly in the cities.



Fig 5. Tae-jong-sa



Fig 6. The Won symbol

22. SCHISM

After independence in 1945, Korean Buddhism was badly split into two irreconcilable sects. The **T'aego-chong**, a liberal sect of married monks, had flourished under Japanese patronage and was based principally in the cities where it ministered to the lay Buddhists. The **Chogye-chong** was a smaller, religiously conservative order of monastics who managed to maintain their celibacy during the long years of Japanese occupation. Their concern was to restore the contemplative, scholastic and disciplinary orientations of traditional Korean Buddhism.

Only after years of intense conflict did the Chogye-chong in 1954 finally win government support for its position. While litigation continued between the two sects, all of the major monasteries have reverted to its control. In recent times, the Chogye-chong, the predominant sect of Korean Buddhism, has been considerably successful in attracting a new generation of monastic postulants and lay followers. The population of celibate monastics (around 23,000) is, however, about the same as that of the married clerics (20,000).

The Christian inroads into Korea in the early 20th century profoundly changed the general Korean view of religion. When non-Christian Koreans began adopting the Christian practice of identifying with a specific religious community, some also adopted the common Christian belief that the road to salvation is a narrow one, and is doctrinally defined. This led to fragmentation into sub-denominations among the Buddhists and among some of Korea's new religions.

For example, the Chogye denomination, which has its headquarters in downtown Seoul, claims to represent the vast majority of Korean Buddhists, but that claim is today (2001) challenged by at least 53 other Buddhist organizations, some of which report that they have hundreds of thousands of members.

South Korea now has nine Pure Land sub-denominations, five Esoteric sub-denominations, and eight Maitreya sub-denominations, as well as



Fig 7. Chogye monks battling for their temple. (*Korea Times*, 23/12/98). The warrior spirit is still strong in the modern Korean monks [19].

several other Buddhist organizations which insist that they offer a better path to salvation and awakening than that offered by Chogyé.⁷

23. RELIGION IN KOREA TODAY

When Korea gained independence from the Japanese in 1945, its region north of the 38th parallel came under Communist domination and freedom of religion was suppressed. In South Korea, however, freedom of religion was guaranteed by the Constitution, and a great revival of religions occurred.

Attracting the masses with their claims of healing and prophetic powers, these religions demonstrated a potential for social and political power. Among the Confucian, Buddhist, and Christian religions, however, schisms had reduced their effectiveness for social reform. Under the impact of the 1960 student revolution, however, a new wave of social concern became evident in the major religions of Korea.

In the 1960s, the religious population of Korea was as follows:

Roman Catholic churches	1,150	790,000	members
Protestant churches	7,500	900,000	members
Confucian <i>hyanggyo</i> (schools)	230	170,000	members
Buddhist temples	1,700	940,000	members

North Korea

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica 1986 Yearbook, in 1985 **North Korea** had a population of 20,082,000. The 1980 figures for religious affiliation are as follows:

Atheist or non-religious:	67.9%	
Traditional beliefs	15.6%	
Ch'öndogyo	13.9%	
Buddhist	1.7%	340,000
Christian	0.9%	

South Korea

In 1985, the population of **South Korea** was 41,215,000. The 1981 figures for religious affiliation are as follows:

Buddhist	37.4%	15,400,000
Protestant	25.7%	
Confucian	17.5%	
Roman Catholic	4.8%	
Ch'öndogyo	3.6%	
Wonbulgyo	3.2%	
Other	7.8%	

In South Korea, there are around 23,000 monks and nuns, and perhaps 20,000 married clerics.⁸

The new religions of Korea [20] appealed to those of the lower levels of Korean society and claimed the allegiance of millions. The folk religions, imbued with shamanism, continue to dominate the lives of many more millions, including Buddhists.

24. THE BUDDHIST RESPONSE TO THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE⁹

In the 1920s and the 1930s, when Korea was under Japanese rule, less than 200,000 Koreans on the entire peninsula were willing to identify themselves publicly as Buddhists. In fact, Japanese statistics show more Christians than Buddhists or any other religious adherents in Korea during the colonial

⁷ These preceding 2 paras, mainly from Don Baker, "Looking for God in the Streets of Seoul: The resurgence of religion in 20th century Korea." *Harvard Asia Quarterly* no 104, Saturday, May 15 2001.

⁸ Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990: 284.

⁹ This section is mostly from Don Baker, 2001.

period. After the Korean War, as the number of self-proclaimed Christians in the independent Republic of Korea rose dramatically, the number of those who called themselves Buddhists rose dramatically as well.

In 1962 Buddhist denominations claimed almost 700,000 followers in South Korea, three times as many as were found on the entire peninsula when it was ruled by the Japanese. Nevertheless, Korea's Buddhist population at that time was only a little more than half the size of the more than 1.3 million-strong Christian population.

As the numbers of Christians in Korea grew, the number of self-identified Buddhists grew even faster, as Buddhists adopted the Christian practice of identifying with a specific religious community. By 1985, the percentage of the population calling itself Buddhist had roughly equaled with the percentage of the population calling itself Christian. **The census in 1995**, for example, found 10.3 million Buddhists in South Korea, compared to 8.7 million Protestants and slightly less than 3 million Roman Catholics.

Modernization is a hallmark of urban Buddhism in Korea today. The modern Buddhist temples in urban areas run kindergartens, publish glossy magazines, and sing hymns at Sunday worship services, just as Christian churches do. In fact, in **Pusan**, South Korea's second largest city and the only potential rival to Seoul for cultural domination of the southern half of the Korean peninsula, it appears that it is Buddhism rather than Christianity which is the mark of urban modernity. According to the 1997 Gallup poll, almost 35% of the population in Pusan and the surrounding Kyeongnam province call itself Buddhist, compared to less than 12% who say they are Protestant and around 3% who say they are Catholic.

Korea 2003 update

Population 47,925,000 (estimate as of July 2003)

Population growth rate: 0.6%.

Ethnic groups: Korean; small Chinese minority.

Religions: **Buddhism 46%**, Protestantism 39%, Catholicism 13%, Confucianism 1%, Chōndogyo (the Religion of Heavenly Way) and others 1% (Source: Korean National Statistical Office).

Language: Korean, spoken by 70 million people and 5 million overseas Koreans.

Writing system: Hangeul, the Korean alphabet, was invented by King Sejong the Great in 1443, consisting of 10 vowels and 14 consonants.

Literacy rate: 97.75% (2000 estimate), male: 99.1%, female: 96.4%

25. CONCLUSION

Early Korean Buddhism was characterized by a this-worldly attitude. It emphasized the pragmatic, nationalistic and aristocratic aspects of the faith. Nevertheless, an indigenous tradition of shamanism influenced the development of Buddhism throughout its history in Korea. Buddhist monks danced, sang, and performed the rituals of shamans.

Korean Buddhism today, without state patronage in a secular society, is thriving on its own genius. State patronage of religion is a bane when it works the other way, such as, during the Yi dynasty, when Confucianism was the state religion. Understandably, Buddhism would thrive better in a secular state that is tolerant towards religions and where freedom of religion is guaranteed.

While it is true that folk beliefs (like shamanism in the case of Korea) appeal to the less sophisticated masses and the less fortunate, it also provides immediate and effective panacea to the problems of the increasing non-religious sophisticated masses, especially in highly urbanized societies like Korea and Singapore. The rise and phenomenal growth of Christianity during the early 20th century has been met with an even stronger growth of Buddhism in the late 20th century.

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THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

A strategic analysis Buddhist history in East Asia
Piya Tan

BUDDHISM IN JAPAN (2 lectures)

Lecture 6 RISE OF BUDDHISM IN JAPAN

1. SYLLABUS

- (1) Japanese social and religious characteristics.
- (2) Arrival of Buddhism: Shotoku; success of Buddhism.
- (3) Nara period: the 6 schools.
- (4) Heian period: Saichō, Kūkai; Pure Land Buddhism; religious & cultural developments.
- (5) Kamakura period: Hōnen, Shinran; Nichiren, Zen: Dōgen; indigenization.
- (6) Muromachi period: Zen contributions.
- (7) Momoyama period: Christianity.
- (8) Tokugawa: Buddhism as instrument of state; Buddhist contributions.
- (9) Meiji, Taishō, Showa periods: Buddhism in decline; revival; New Religions.
- (10) Heisei period: modern Buddhist scholarship.

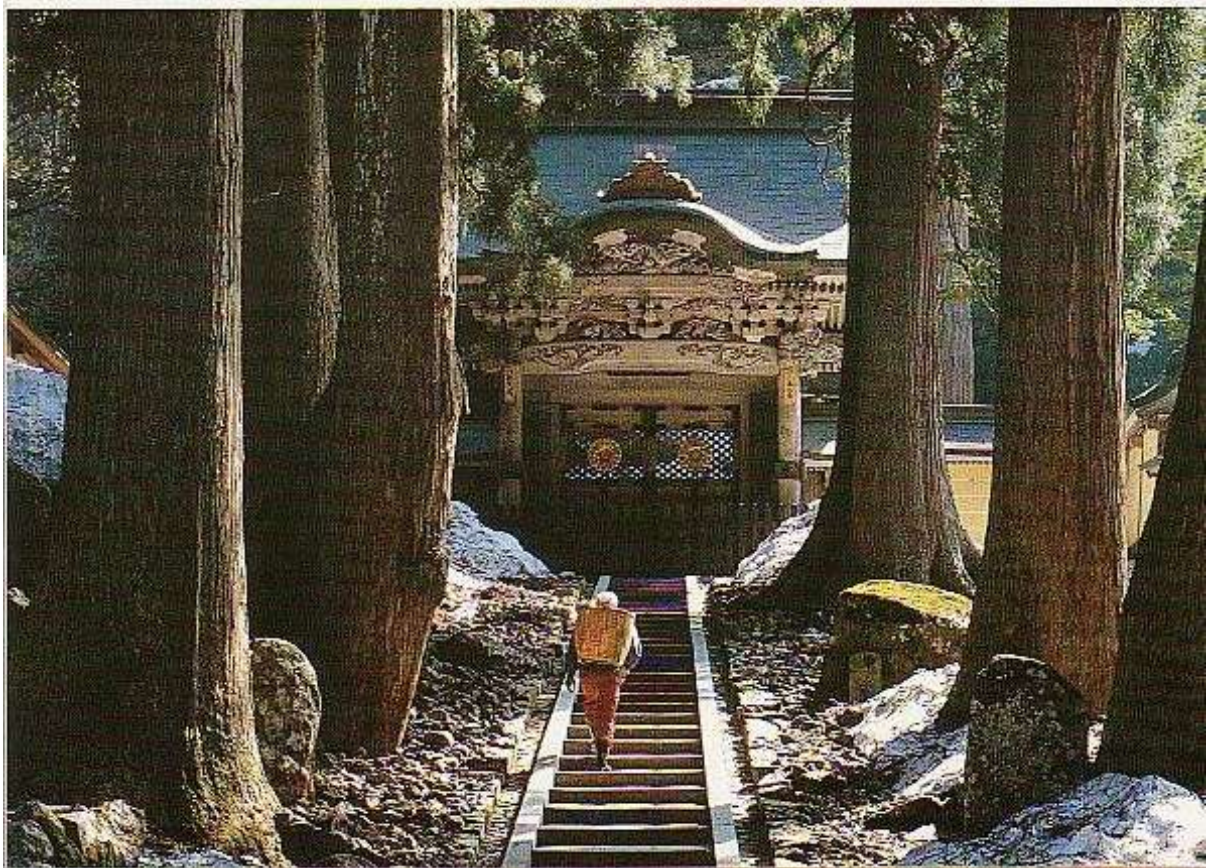


Fig 1. Eiheiiji with 600-year-old cedar trees.

2. JAPANESE CHARACTERISTICS

The Japanese psyche, or the way the average Japanese thinks, is dominated by two notions:

- A. Traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns.
- B. Propensity for borrowing ideas and institutions from abroad.

A. Traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns.

The traditional hereditary and hierarchical patterns of Japanese society comprises two dimensions: the horizontal and the vertical. The horizontal dimension is a linear progression in its history stretching back into time immemorial, anyway, at least to the mythical creation of their homeland by Amaterasu, the Sun Goddess. The vertical dimension is the functional levels of existence that govern their daily lives—the hierarchies.

On closer examination, we will notice 6 persistent aspects or themes of the social and religious life of the Japanese: (1) the closeness of humans, gods and nature; (2) the religious character of the family; (3) the significance of purification, rituals and charms; (4) the prominence of local festivals and individual cults; (5) the pervasiveness of religion in everyday life; and (6) the natural bond between religion and the nation.¹

(1) The closeness of humans, gods and nature.

In Japanese religion, the gods and mortals alike share in the beauty of nature. As it were, god, man and nature are all on the same level in a harmonious interrelationship. However, it is important to understand that the Japanese term *kami* is much more inclusive than the English word “god.” Motoori Norinaga (1730-1801), one of the greatest Shintō scholars, defines *kami* in these words:

Generally speaking, (the word) *kami* denotes, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient texts and also the spirits enshrined in the shrines; furthermore, among all kinds of beings—including not only human beings but also such objects as birds, beasts, trees, grass, seas, mountains, and so forth—any being whatsoever which possesses some eminent quality out of the ordinary, and is awe-inspiring, is called *kami*. (In Shigeru Matsumoto, *Motoori Norinaga, 1730-1801*.

Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1970: 84)

The primary notion is that a *kami* has the power to inspire. As such, the closest general term we have in English for *kami* is “the notion of the sacred.”²

Humans, too, can rise to the status of a *kami*. The emperor was regarded as a living *kami*. Other human beings, such as the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616) and the founders of Buddhist sects have been revered as *kami*. During the recent centuries, the founders of the New Religions, too, have been regarded as living *kami*.

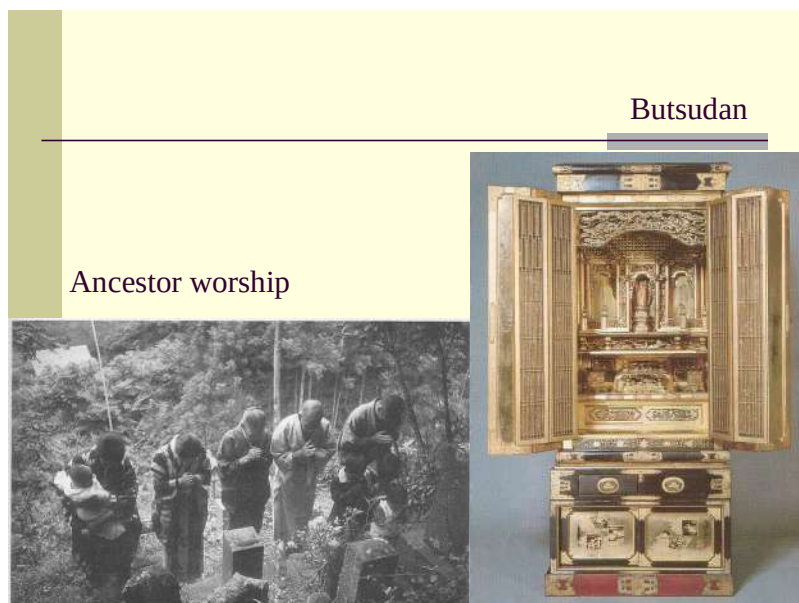


Fig 2. Traditional Japanese religions.

¹ H. Byron Earhart, *Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity*, 3rd ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1982: ch. 2.

² See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, tr. Willard R. Trask, NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959.

(2) The religious character of the family.

The family, including both living and dead members, are sacred and have a crucial religious function. Family unity and continuity are vital for rituals honouring the spirits of the family ancestors. The dead can rise to the level of *kami*. A dead person is euphemistically referred to as a “Buddha” (*hotoke*).

In Japan, the family unit is an extended one, covering over three or more generations and several sets of related parents, sometimes including family workers not biologically related. In ancient times, the head of the family was a priest, and such individuals from prominent families were political and religious leaders combined.

Traditionally, in every Japanese family, there are two shrines: the miniature “*kami*-shrine” (*kamidana*) for daily prayers, and the Buddha altar (*butsudan*) serving as ancestral shrine for periodic worship of specific ancestors. The *butsudan* is found even where the *kamidana* is missing. This is the extent to which the Japanese revere the family.

This sacredness of the family explains why when Shintō and Buddhism became highly organized they developed a hereditary priesthood. Understandably, the reverence for the family entails respect for elders and seniors. Even the New Religions and modern businesses are organized in terms of loyalty and belonging based on the model of the Japanese family.



Fig 3. Kannon (Avalokiteśvara)

(3) The significance of purification, rituals and charms.

The Japanese perception of the close presence of the sacred that pervades all around, especially in nature and sacred places, entails their need to be ritually pure in order to win the favour and protection of such powers. These elements of purification, rituals and charms are often borrowed from Indian and Chinese traditions, but became well integrated into Japanese life.

In front of every Shinto shrine or Buddhist temple, for example, water is provided for washing the hands and rinsing the mouth before approaching the shrine. Paper charms are often distributed by shrines and temples for various kinds of blessings and to ward off specific ill fortunes. Buddhist scriptures and verses are commonly recited for the same magical purposes.

(4) The prominence of local festivals and individual cults.

Unlike synagogues, churches, or mosques, Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples are not places of weekly worship services, but this does not diminish their importance. **Periodic festivals** are the expression of the whole village or section of a large city, serving as unifying forces that link individual homes with the larger religious community.

The local festival with its carnival atmosphere is typical of Japanese religiosity. In this light, it is understandable why the celebration of Christmas has become popular in Japan, even though Christianity is not widespread.

Individual cults, though not organized on a national scale, also play a crucial role in the religious life of a Japanese. Especially popular are the Bodhisattvas, such as Jizo (Kṣitigarbha) and Kannon (Avalokiteśvara), whose statues can be found in the temples or the villages or along the roadside. Individual *kami* are revered by groups of tradespeople like fishermen and others.

(5) The pervasiveness of religion in everyday life.

From all the previous four aspects of Japanese religion, we can surmise that religion is an important part of the average Japanese. Although the modern Japanese may appear outwardly irreligious and secular, he is part of an important cycle in Japanese society. At regular stages in his life, he would visit shrines and temples.

Traditionally, a young infant is carried to the local Shintō shrine and presented to the guardian deity. In times of illness or special need, one usually visits a shrine or temple that grants an appropriate blessing. Likewise, in recent times, the traditional wedding often takes place in a Shintō shrine, and the funeral mass and the subsequent memorial celebrations are performed in a Buddhist temple.

Even fertility and sexuality are seen in religious terms. For example, conjugal harmony and fertility for rice fields are requested from wayside deities (*dosojin*). Religion is also expressed in the Japanese sense of humour. For example, Bodhidharma, the 1st Zen patriarch is represented as a legless doll called Daruma (since Bodhidharma is said to have meditated until his legs fell off!).

(6) The natural bond between religion and the nation.

A central myth of ancient Japan relates that the emperor was a descendent of the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu. In fact, throughout Japanese history up to 1868 (the Meiji period), the emperor, being a sacred person is only the symbolic head of ritual and government.

While Shintō expresses this connection between religion and nation, Buddhism brought it to the highest level by becoming the state religion in various historical periods of Japanese history. Between 1868 and 1945 (the period of the Second World War and Japanese expansionism), the natural bond between religion and nation was used by the state to support nationalism and militarism.

B. Propensity for borrowing ideas and institutions from abroad.

The Japanese **indigenous religions** are folk religion and Shintoism. The other major religious traditions—Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism—were imported. Let us have a quick look at each of these by way of introduction.

3. RELIGIOUS ROOTS

Japanese religion is a blend of at least 5 major strands: folk religion, Shinto, Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Christianity, which arrived in the 16th century, may be regarded as the 6th strand, but since it did not contribute to the formation of traditional Japanese religion, we shall only make a brief mention of it.

(1) Folk Religion.

“Folk religion” generally refers to popular (but informal) beliefs and practices that have existed outside highly organized religion. Some folk practices, such as rituals connected with hunting and rice-growing, may date back to prehistoric times. Such beliefs touch people’s everyday life, such as work, home and annual celebrations.

(2) Shintō.

Shintō, “the way of the gods”, is a formal religion of myths, rituals, shrines and priests. It arose from prehistoric times, but is deeply influenced by Chinese religions. The central belief in Shintō is that Japan is the land of the *kami* (gods or spirits), who embody the national tradition and inhabit nature. The presence of Shintō shrines in the remotest villages and on the roofs of city department stores shows the pervasiveness of the religion even today.

(3) Daoism.

The three major non-indigenous traditions—Daoism, Confucianism and Buddhism—all came from Korea and China. The Daoism that is found in Japan is the religious version (as opposed to its philosophy). Daoism developed out of the ancient Chinese reverence for nature and the notion of order in the ever-changing pattern of the cosmos.

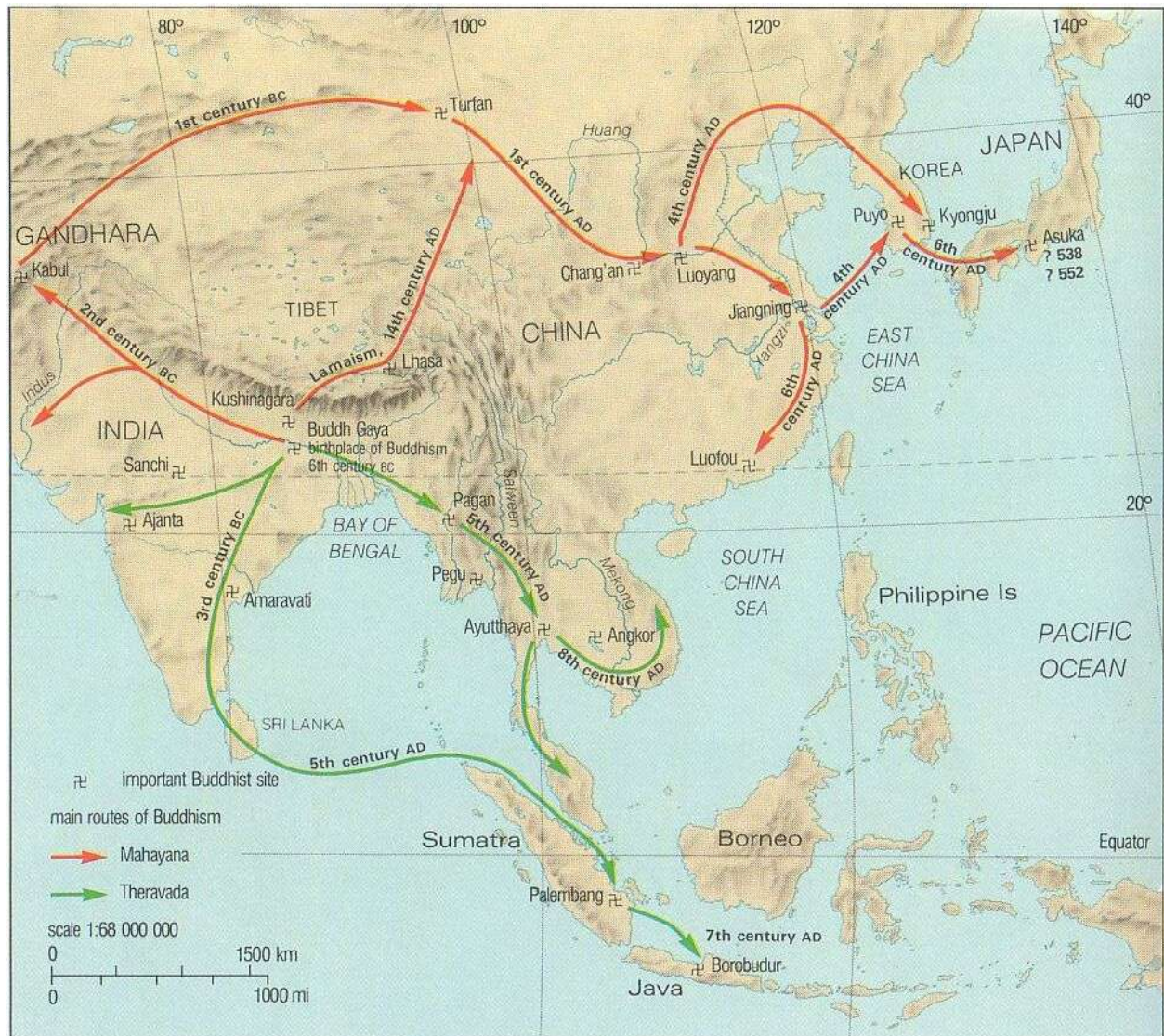
(4) Confucianism.

Confucianism is a Chinese tradition based on the teachings of Confucius (6th century BCE), who, living in a time of great social and political turmoil, taught a return to virtue and benevolence. Central

to Confucianism are filial piety and social harmony that provided the basis for an orderly society and centralized government.

(5) Buddhism.

Of the three non-indigenous religions, Buddhism is the most important. However, the Buddhism that arrived in Japan was a sinicized new tradition that had further been indigenized in Korea by way of which it arrived in Japan.



Map 1. Early spread of Buddhism in south and east Asia.

4. THREE PERIODS OF JAPANESE HISTORY

The unity in diversity of Japanese religions is best understood when we have some idea of the major developments in the history of Japanese religions. This survey is best done by looking at the three periods of Japanese history. As we shall soon see, this chronology will centre around discontinuity in religious institutions.

(1) Prehistory to 9th century CE.

This was the formative period, when the major non-indigenous religions appeared in Japan.

(2) The 9th-17th centuries.

This was the developmental period when the major religions developed independently, but at the same time, they interacted with one another, and with the indigenous religions.

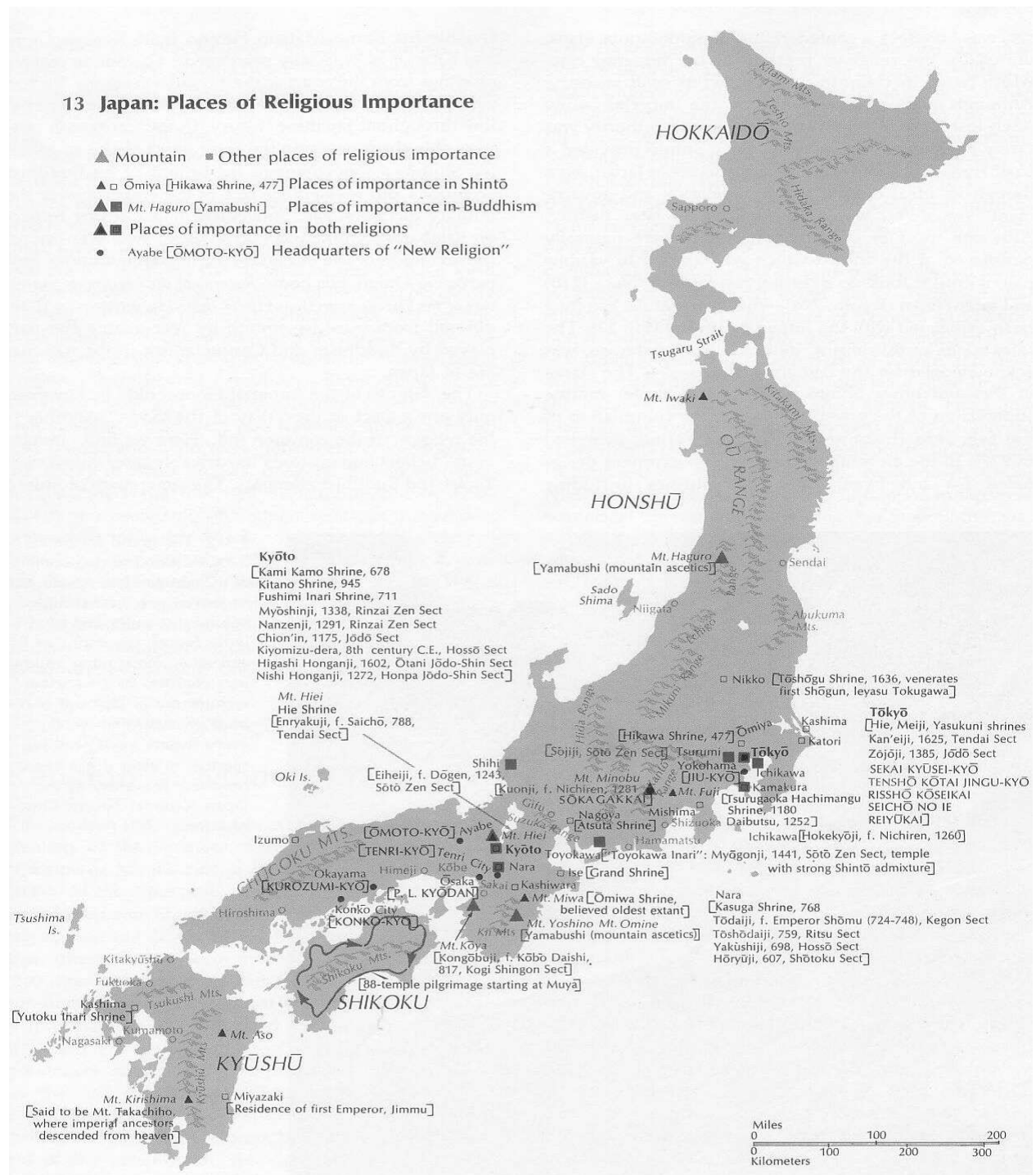
(3) The 17th century to the present.

This is the formalistic period. The general tendency in this period was that of **formalism**, which in turn generated renewal.

Prehistory

The three prehistoric cultures of Japan were known as the Jomon, Yayoi and Kofun. This period, spanning from the 5th millennium BCE up to mid-6th century CE, saw hunting and gathering culture giving way to rice agriculture and settled village life. Such an arrangement favoured the rise of family life.

Japanese religion at that time was indigenous folk religion centring around agricultural festivals, reverence for the dead, the divine descent of the imperial line, and the family as a religious unit.



5. INTRODUCTION OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism was officially introduced into Japan from Korea in the middle of the 6th century. Between 550 and 600, various Korean kings sent Buddha images and Buddhist texts to the Japanese imperial court. Some Korean monks were already resident in Japan. Following the traditional chronicles of Japan, the formal date would be 552 or 538. However, it is likely that Buddhist influence and presence might have been earlier.

The *Nihongi* (720 CE) records the first Japanese reference to Buddhism, when in 552, **king Sōng (r. 523-554) of Paekche** (southwest Korea) sent the Japanese emperor a tribute including a Buddha image and Chinese translations of the Buddhist scriptures. The Korean king praised Buddhism as the religion of distant India whose doctrine surpasses even the understanding of the Chinese and whose value is without limit.

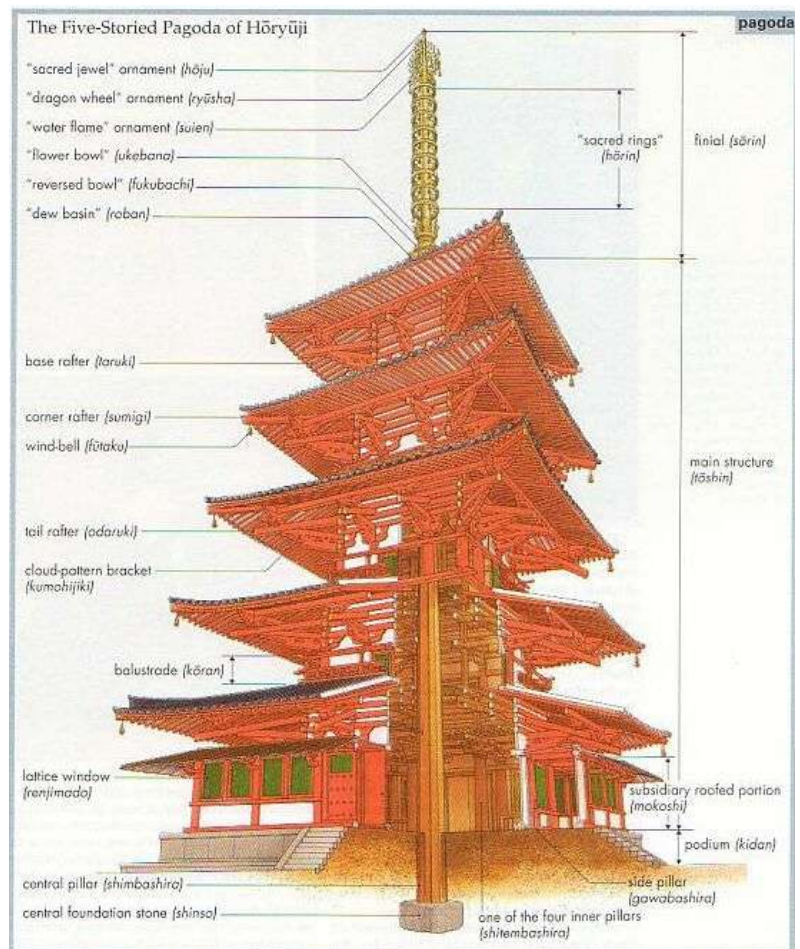
Since Buddhism was the first foreign religion to enter Japan, it provoked opposition from the established religious tradition. **The Soga clan** were managers of imperial estates whose work entailed much contact with foreigners, especially the Koreans and the Chinese. Seeing that Japan had much to gain from cultural imports, they argued that Japan should accept Buddhism. Others, particularly the Mononobe family and the Nakatomi clans, insisted that the divine descent of the Yamato family be accepted as legitimizing their claim to the throne, a claim that would be threatened by the importing of a rival religion, and that the native (Shintō) gods would be offended by the respect shown to a foreign deity. The immediate religious concern, however, was not doctrinal but whether the nobility should worship the statue of the Buddha. As a compromise, the emperor allowed the Soga clan to adopt Buddhism, while not insisting that other clans, including his own Yamato clan, take a position. As such, the Soga were the earliest “converts” and patrons of Buddhism in Japan, and it took root under their auspices.

The early Japanese, however, in their ignorance of Buddhism, had the idea that worshipping the Buddha, a foreign “deity” would bring good luck to the nation and at first judged the new religion on an entirely short-term pragmatic consequences. When a plague broke out, the Buddha images were dumped in the moat, and the first temple burnt down. When another plague occurred later, images were again thrown into the moat and nuns were defrocked. When the plague continued, the fearful emperor then permitted the Buddhist cult to be practised freely.

6. PRINCE SHOTOKU (573-621)

Buddhism probably arrived in Japan in the 6th century or earlier. The 6th century emperor **Yomei** (r. 585-587), is said to have “believed in the Law of the Buddha and revered the Way of the Gods (*Shinto*).” But it was his second son Prince Shotoku who is traditionally honoured as the founder of Japanese Buddhism.

Fig 4. Hōryūji, Nara



Buddhism was publicly accepted after the Soga family’s political and military victory over the Mononobe and became prominent in the reign of the **empress Suiko** (r. 593-628) in the 7th century. Her

nephew and regent, the devout prince **Shotoku** (673-621), was considered the real founder and first great patron of Buddhism in Japan.

Tradition credits Shotoku with writing several **commentaries** on difficult Buddhist texts, such as the Saddharma,puṇḍarīka Sūtra, the Vimala,kīrti Nirdeśa, and the Śrī,mālā,simhanāda Sūtra. At Nara, he built a large temple complex, the **Horyu-ji**, whose architecture clearly shows Greek influences (through the Silk Road). Today it houses the finest collection of Buddhist art in Japan. It is also the oldest wooden building in the world.

Shotoku built no less than 40 Buddhist temples throughout his kingdom, and various cultural works were produced showing strong Chinese influence. (Some of the oldest extant inscriptions are found on the halos of Buddhist images of the early 7th century.)

Shotoku founded a great institution on the west coast of the Sea of Japan facing the mainland. It comprised a religious centre, an orphanage, an old folks' home and a dispensary. It served as a convenient guest-house for Buddhist monks, visitors and immigrants from Korea and China, and for the dispatch of Japanese monks and pilgrims to the continent, where they went to study and bring back to Japan the wisdom and culture of China and Korea.

These advancements ultimately paved the way for **Japan's first constitution**, purportedly written by Prince Shōtoku in 604. The constitution declared Buddhism to be one of the pillars of Japanese society. These advancements led to the Taika reform of 646, which initiated a sinicized bureaucracy in Japan.

The earliest manuscript of Japanese origin is the 7th-century **Hokke-gisho**, a commentary on the Lotus Sutra written in masterly Chinese by prince Shotoku. It is not certain if the manuscript is in his own hand. Japan's earliest surviving example of printed matter is the Great Dharani Sutra of the Immaculate Ray of Pure Light (Raśmī,vimala Visuddhi,prabhāsa Dhāraṇī Sūtra) (764-770). It is popularly known as the **Hyakumantō-darani** (One Million Pagoda Dharani) after the place where it was installed.

State control

However, even as early as 624, three years after Shotoku's death, **the empress Suiko** had to regulate the Buddhist clergy. **The Taiho Code of 702** included several sections dealing with religious administration, including the organization of the Shintō bureau and the bureau of religious Daoism. A special section of the code dealt with the regulation of monks and nuns.

This shows that not only had Buddhism become an influential religion, but by that very fact, the state had to take steps to curb its excesses and maintain a religious balance.

7. KOREA: SILLA (668-935)

In 4th or 5th centuries, some tribes in southern Korea formed a league called **Kaya**. Many Japanese scholars refer to the area as Mimana and claim that it was controlled by Japan in the Kofun period (c. 300-710). Located between the ancient Korean kingdoms of Silla and Paekche, it was conquered by Silla in two stages in 532 and 562.

Silla expansion throughout southern Korea prompted massive emigration of Koreans to Japan (where they called *kikajin*). Many of the cultural and technical achievements of early Japan—such as the development of paddy fields, the construction of palaces and temples, and town planning—were direct results of the expertise introduced by these successive migrations.

Reasons for success of Buddhism

The success of Buddhism in early Japan was partly due to the fact that the country was undergoing its initial stages of formation, and partly due to the depth of the Buddhist teachings and the great appeal of its **art, ritual and magic**. In fact, soon after the arrival of Buddhism in Japan, the Buddha was worshipped as a *kami*.

Soon after its arrival, Buddhism was gradually accepted by the leading families, then by the court and finally by the state. Later diplomatic missions from Korea brought more Buddhist images and scriptures, and most important of all—Buddhist monks.

The Japanese were just beginning to learn the **Chinese writing system**, so it took specialists like the Buddhist monks to read and expound the Chinese translations of the Buddhist texts. The Buddhist monks also served the religious needs of the court and the state.

Rich heritages

It is important to note that when Buddhism entered China, she possessed a rich tradition of literature, philosophy, religion and government. It was an uphill task for Buddhism before it came to be fully accepted by the Chinese. At the time of the Buddhist advent, Japan, however, had no literature or philosophy to speak of, and her religion and government were only loosely formed.

The Buddhist monks who first arrived in Japan possessed two highly valued treasures: the religious heritage of Indian Buddhism transformed by Chinese language and custom, and the cultural heritage of China, which included the model for a well-ordered kingdom. These monks also brought with them many technical skills associated with Buddhism, such as paper, printing, carpentry and architecture.

Those Japanese Buddhist monks who went to China on court order, combined religious, commercial and governmental functions.

Cremation

As exemplars of Buddhism, monks are the best missionaries abroad. Even in death, they exert lasting influence on the people. The first record of **cremation** in Japan was that of the monk Dōshō (629-700). When Buddhism became established in the Nara period, cremation gradually spread from the Buddhist clergy to the imperial family and nobility. By the Kamakura and Muramachi periods, cremation became a common practice for the masses.

Cremation was banned during the Tokugawa period (1600-1868) under the growing influence of Neo-Confucianism, and during the Meiji period (1868-1912) due to upsurge of anti-Buddhist sentiments. In modern Japan, however, some 96% of Japanese burials are cremations (1989).

8. THE TAIKA PERIOD (645-710)

The Taika period saw an influx of Chinese culture, Japan's first contact with a literate and highly organized culture. It was in this period that Japan had its first truly centralized government, patterned after Chinese models (such as the legal codes).

Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism were imported from Korea and China. Shintoism was organized from indigenous traditions. The earliest interactions of these traditions occurred in this period.

Ikebana

Ikebana, originally referred to classical art of Japanese flower arranging, but today applies to a wide range of styles of Japanese floral art. It is based on the harmony of simple linear construction and an appreciation of the subtle beauty of flowers and natural material.

It was introduced into Japan in the 6th century by Chinese Buddhist missionaries who had formalized the ritual of offering flowers to the Buddha. In the 7th century, Ono no Imoko, the former Japanese envoy to China, formulated the rules of arrangement and founded Ikenobō, the first school of flower arranging in Japan.

9. THE NARA PERIOD (710-784)

Nara was the first permanent capital Japan had. Life in the imperial court and among the nobility was elaborate and highly formalized. It was a feudal system in which the commoner was widely separated from the higher classes. The first Japanese writings (dynastic chronicles) and the *Manyōshū* (a collection of poems) were composed during this period.

Todai-ji

A network of Buddhist temples grew up in the provinces with the **Todai-ji** (710-784) at Nara as the central cathedral. Its principal image (*honzon*) is the 16 m (53 ft) tall gilt-bronze image of Birushana (Vairocana) (752), called the Nara Daibutsu (Great Buddha of Nara). In 741 emperor Shōmu (701-756) ordered that two provincial temples (*kokubunji*) be built in every province: a monastery and a nunnery. The monks and nuns would copy and recite the Buddhist texts, thereby bringing divine protection and blessing on the whole country.

It is also noteworthy that the principal image in the Todai-ji is that of the Lochana (Vairocana), the Sun Buddha. Just as the sun sits in the centre of the physical universe, so Todai-ji sits in the centre of the Buddhist network of monasteries and nunneries.



Fig 4. Todaiji, Nara

Sutra copying

In the 8th century, copying of the entire Mahayana canon (Jap. issaikyō) was fervently promoted by emperor Shōmu. Sutra-copying was a major industry, institutionalized in the **scriptoria** (*shakyōsho*) set up within the imperial court and in many temples. The three complete sets of **Japanese Tripitaka** commissioned by the emperors consort, Kōmyō (701-760), represented the apex of disciplined elegance in Nara calligraphy.

10. THE SIX SCHOOLS OF NARA

During the Nara period, six philosophical schools of Buddhism were introduced: Jojitsu (625), Sanron (625), Hosso (654), Kusha (658), Kegon (736), and Ritsu (738). As in China, whence they came, each school focussed on one or more of the classic Chinese Buddhist texts, defining their distinctive view-points.

(1) **The Jōjitsu** and (2) **the Kusha Schools** were based mainly on Nikāya treatises. The Jojitsu tradition centred on the *Jojitsuron* (Chin. Ch'eng shih-lun; Satya,siddhi Śāstra by Harivarman). The Kusha focussed on the *Kusharon* (Vasubandhu's Abhidharma,kośa Śāstra). The texts of these two schools were also studied by other schools. In fact, these two were not really schools in their own right, but merely traditions based on the texts mentioned.

(3) **The Sanron School** (Chin. Sanlun) was a Chinese elaboration of the Indian Madhyamaka of Nāgārjuna. The word Sanron means “three treatises” on which the school was based: Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka Kārikā and Dvādaśa,dvāra, and Āryadeva's Śata,śāstra. The Madhyamika school negates all philosophical statements on the ultimate truth, calling for a direct experience of Nirvana which is said to be “empty” of all predications.

(4) **The Hossō School** (Chin. Faxiang) based itself on the Yogācāra tradition, that is, the Faxiang (Dharma Characteristic) school introduced into China by Xuanzang.

(5) **The Kegon School** (Chin. Huayan) is devoted to the study of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra (Chin. Huayan jing).

(6) **The Ritsu School** (Chin. Lizhong) is named after the Vinaya tradition, based mainly on Daoxuan's Nanshan branch of the tradition. In Japan, this sect was responsible for the ordination of the clergy.

Decline of Nara Buddhism

In due course, Nara became famous for its profound philosophy and magnificent temples. But as the Nara temples grew in prestige and wealth by attracting bequests from the nobility and favouritism from the state, it attracted politically ambitious people into its cloisters. In a short time, the temples became so rich and powerful that their interference in the politics of the state became intolerable.

The Buddhist clergy of Nara, especially under the leadership of Dōkyō during the reign of empress Shōtoku (r. 764-770), showed considerable influence in secular affairs. The situation reached such a critical level that during the transitional period (784-794), emperor Kammu (737-806) moved the capital to Nagaokakyo, between Osaka and Kyoto, and then in 794, again moved, this time, to Heiankyo (Kyoto), which would remain the capital until 1868. (Before the Nara period, it was a normal custom to move the capital at the death of every emperor in the belief that the emperor's death defiled the city.)

The Nara period saw further interaction between Buddhism and Shintoism. With this, the **Formative Period** of Japanese religion ended, followed by **the Period of Development** (794-1600).

11. THE HEIAN PERIOD (794-1185)

The capital moved to **Kyoto**, where a highly developed aesthetic life existed among the court and nobility. In fact, Heian was the apogee of the Japan's aristocratic age, which produced one of the world's most exquisite cultures. During this period, Japan fully assimilated the elements of Chinese society that the builders of the Japanese state had long emulated. It was also a period of **indigenization** of Japanese culture.

The leaders of Heian Buddhism were determined to *indigenize* Buddhism so that it was a genuinely *Japanese* religion. As a result, Buddhism became more closely related to Japanese culture and began to penetrate the countryside. While the "old Buddhism" (the 6 Schools of Nara) was mainly the religion of the nobility and the clergy, the "new Buddhism" of Heian was increasingly a religion of the masses.

Although the first Heian emperor, Kammu (737-806), disapproved of the Heian clergy, he was benevolent to two young monks of Kyoto: Saichō and Kukai. They founded the two new Buddhist schools that dominated the Heian period: the **Tendai** (Chin. Tiantai) was founded by Saichō in 806 and the **Shingon** (Chin. Chenyan or Mizong) by Kukai in 816. Saichō and Kukai, were both vastly different in character, but motivated by the same disillusionment: to break away from the suffocating domination of the Nara clergy; both went to China for the same purpose: to look for authentic Buddhist teachings. After their return, both monks were allowed to build their own temples, but outside the capital.

Saichō, founder of Tendai

Saichō (Dengyo Daishi, 767-822) founded the **Tendai** (Tiantai) school in Japan. His personal name was Hirono, began studying Buddhism at 12 and two years later took was initiated as a novice at Nara with the name of Saichō. After his higher ordination, he built himself a thatched hut on Mt. Hiei (Hieizan), northeast of Kyoto, intending to lead a life of meditation. This hermitage later became the Tendai headquarters of **Enryaku-ji** on Mt. Hiei, east of Kyōto.

Disillusioned by the scholasticism and formalism of the old schools of Nara, he sought a new form of teaching capable of uniting the different Buddhist viewpoints into one. Sometime in 797, he began to study the texts of Chinese Tiantai and lecture on its doctrines. Emperor Kammu supported Saichō's new movement, probably as a counterweight to the influence of the Nara clergy.



Fig 5. Saichō

Receiving permission in 802 to study under a Chinese Tiantai master, Saichō left for China in 804. After his return in 805, Kammu gave official recognition to the Tendai school (806). Tendai is the Japanese form of the Chinese Tiantai, the name of the mountain in China where the school was established by Zhiyi (fl. 6th century). An important contribution of the Tendai was the promotion of **the Lotus Sutra** (Saddharma, pūṇḍarīka Sūtra) in Japan, making it the key text for many of the later Japanese schools.

Saichō was uncompromising not only in doctrinal matters, but also in matters of training, ordination and meditation. He prescribed a 12-year period of training for monks on Mt. Hiei, during which time they were not allowed to leave the mountain.

Examinations for novices and their subsequent higher ordinations were all still conducted at Nara. Between 818 and 819, he petitioned for an independent ordination hall on Mt. Hiei. However, due to strong opposition from the Nara clergy, the Tendai sect was granted permission to ordain its own monks only seven days after Saichō's death in 822. With this permission, the Tendai became an independent sect. In due course, it became the monastic and scholastic headquarters of all Japanese Buddhism.

Rejection of the Absolute

One of the main features of Japanese thought has been its attitude of accepting **the phenomenal world as the Absolute**. They rejected the concept of an Absolute existing over and above the phenomenal world and have sometimes regarded the world itself as the Absolute. This can be seen as early as in the ancient Shintō belief that spirits reside in all kinds of things. [2(A)(1)]

The belief that the Absolute is the phenomenal world also conditioned the reception and assimilation of Buddhist philosophy. Because of this acculturation, the Tendai school on Japan is not the same as its Chinese counterpart. The Tendai scholars in mediaeval Japan, using the same nomenclature as that employed in continental Buddhism, arrived at a distinctively original system of thought, called **Honkaku-hōmon**, which asserts that the changing aspects of the phenomenal world are the Buddha.

Kūkai, founder of Shingon

When **Kūkai** (Kobo Daishi, 774-835) was 18, he entered the national college in Kyoto with the aim of becoming a statesman. However, after a year, he withdrew, justifying his actions by denouncing Confucianism and Daoism, and extolling Buddhism. He then pursued his Buddhist studies while wandering about the country as an itinerant hermit practising meditation.

In 804, he sailed to China as a student monk. In Chang'an, he studied under Huiguo (Jap. Keika), the patriarch of **Shingon** (Chin. Chenyan) or Tantric Buddhism. He returned to Japan in 806 as a Tantric master. The Shingon was established in 816 in Japan. In 819, he initiated the building of a monastic centre on Mt. Koya (Kōyasan) for the practice of Tantric Buddhist meditation. In 823, emperor Saga (r. 809-823) gave him the Tōji, the most important temple at the southern entrance to Kyoto, which became the headquarters for Shingon Buddhism.



Fig 6. Kūkai

For good reasons, Kūkai is considered the father of Japanese culture.

He is credited with the invention of the **kana syllabary** (*hiragana*) of 47 cursive signs in which, alone or mixed with Chinese character, Japanese is written. He is remembered as the originator of the pilgrimage circuit of 88 temples in Shikoku and a builder of lakes. He was also known as a poet, calligrapher, sculptor and lexicographer who compiled the *Tenrei banshō meigi*, the oldest extant dictionary in Japan.

To Japanese Buddhists, he was known to be a wandering saint who engaged in severe ascetic practices. Two of his most significant works are *Sokushin jōbutsu gi* (The Meaning of Attaining Enlightenment in This Very Existence) and *Jūjūshin ron* (Treatise on the Ten Stages of Development of Mind).

12. HEIAN: PURE LAND BUDDHISM

Grace through faith

Buddhism did not at once spread widely among commoners in Heian times, but it grew in popularity through the belief in **the saving grace (*tariki*) of Amida** (Amitābha Buddha), into whose Western Paradise (Sukhāvātī) the faithful dead would be reborn. According to the Pure Land texts, one of the original vows that Amida made was that all who call upon his name—a practice known as ***nembutsu*** (Chin, *nianfo*)—would be welcomed into Western Paradise.

This Pure Land or Sukhāvātī School was introduced from China by **Ennin** (794-864), a disciple of Saichō. He established the *nembutsu-zammai* (meditation by recitation of the Buddha's name) based on the musical *nembutsu* then current at the celebrated Mt. Wutai in Shanxi province. This was the very first beginning that would later make Mt. Hiei the centre of Pure Land Buddhism in the Heian period.

Kūya (903-972)

Pure Land Buddhism was popular because it only demands faith in the grace of Amida for one to be saved. There was another reason for its popularity: the efforts of evangelists like **Kūya** (903-972), also known as Kōya. He is the best example of the prototypes of the ***hijiri***, charismatic itinerant “holy men.”

Kūya is best known for his popularization of Pure Land Buddhism, dancing in the streets, singing simple Japanese hymns about Amida. He organized self-help projects for the common people, and even spread the Amidist message among the indigenous Ainu in the remote north.

After some years of study in various temples in the provinces, Kūya underwent a period of ascetic discipline and devotion to the Bodhisattva Kannon of Yushima (now Ishima) in Awa (now Tokushima Prefecture) on Shikoku.

Following a period of evangelization in the far northwestern provinces of Mutsu (now Fukushima, Miyagi, Iwate and Aomori prefectures) and Dewa (now Akita and Yamagata prefectures), he returned to Kyōto in 938 and took up the role of a mendicant monk, distributing the alms he received among the poor and the sick.

He came to be known as Ichi no Shōnin (Saint of the Marketplace) or Ichi no Hijiri (Holy Man of the Marketplace). In 948 he ascended Mt. Hiei and for the first time underwent formal ordination. In 951, seeking divine relief from an epidemic, Kūya constructed an image of the Eleven-Headed Kannon (still housed at Saikō-ji, later renamed Rokuharamitsu-ji, founded by Kūya in 963).

Gyōgi (668-749)

Another remarkable *hijiri* was Gyōgi who was Kūya's predecessor, before the introduction of Amidism into Japan. **Gyōgi**, also known as Gyōki (668-749), was a monk of the Hossō school (Chin, Faxiang). After studying Hossō teachings at the Yakushi-ji (in a western suburb of Nara), he devoted himself to the building of temples, especially the Todai-ji.

He also undertook numerous social welfare projects, such as dam and bridge building. During his later years, the emperor Shōmu bestowed on him the name Daibosatsu (Great Bodhisattva) and raised him to the rank of Daisōjō (great bishop or primate).

Because of his outstanding virtue, he was often known as Gyōgi Bosatsu (Bodhisattva Gyōgi) and was popularly taken to be a manifestation of the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī. Long remembered as an ascetic with great charisma, many temples were attributed to him.



Fig 7. Kūya

Dharma-ending age

Pure Land Buddhism became very popular in mid-Heian times. The reason for this was the Mahayana idea of **mappō**, the concept that the Dharma would go through three stages after the Final Nirvana of the Buddha: 500 years of prosperity, 1000 years of decline, and finally the disappearance in the latter days (*mappō*) or Dharma-ending age.

Once *mappō* began, widely believed in Japan to have been in 1052, it would be extremely difficult to attain enlightenment or spiritual liberation through self-effort, as most Buddhist schools taught. The only hope was faith in the saving grace of Amida. Thus the court nobles and ladies chanted the *nembutsu* with fervour and built Amida halls within their residences to show their faith.

Even then, it should be understood that religious belief in Heian society was highly eclectic. The courtiers seemingly made little distinction among the different schools of Buddhism, Shintō beliefs, Confucianism and Daoist concept of *yin-yang*.

13. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HEIAN PERIOD

Warrior monks

Major temples recruited **warrior monks** (*sōhei*) for protection in bitter doctrinal disputes within and among temples and in conflicts over *shoen* (landed estate) holdings. These monks were also effective in pressing demands at court. They would march into the capital bearing the sacred palanquin of the protective Shintō deity associated with their temple.

Ironically, it was the warrior-monks of Mt. Hiei at the capital's protective temple of Enryaku-ji who most terrified the court and the citizens of Kyoto. Yet despite occasional intimidation, the separation of religion and politics was largely maintained.

Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō

During the Heian period, Shintō became more highly organized. At the end of the period, an interesting synthesis of Shintō and Tendai arose: the **Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō** (Mountain-king One Truth Shintō), also simply known as Ichi-jitsu Shintō or Tendai Shintō. Sannō is the name of the Shintō mountain god who resides on Mt. Hiei (HQ of the Tendai Buddhist school) and who is considered by members of the Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō to be a manifestation of Sakyamuni and also identical with the chief Shintō divinity, the sun goddess Amaterasu.

The name of the school further refers to the Tendai teaching that there is only one absolute reality (*ichi-jitsu*) behind the universe. This was interpreted to mean that the Shintō *kami* (gods or sacred powers) are historical manifestation in Japan of Buddhist divinities, all of whom are ultimately one reality.

Cultural developments

During the Nara period, Buddha images were often made of bronze (like the Nara Daibutsu in Todai-ji). However, in the Heian period, wood became the favoured medium for sculpture and would remain so through the modern era. The Heian period saw the emergence of Buddhist monk-sculptors, called **busshi**, and sculptor lineages as an artistic and economic force in Kyōto and Nara. Through the 10th century sculptors resided at major temples, such as the Enryaku-ji.

As early as the Nara period, large temples such as the Tōdai-ji and Hōryū-ji provided a kind of **public steam bath**. Public baths were maintained by temples and by the wealthy for the poor and unfortunate until the Muromachi period (1333-1568). The public bath is still popular in Japan today, though most houses now have their own bath.

Some of Japan's oldest **maps** still extant today are from the Nara period. Wandering monks who explored distant parts of the country drew the first maps ever found in Japan.

A Japanese court lady, **Murasaki Shikibu** (c. 978-c. 1014), wrote *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji*, tr. Arthur Waley, 1935), which is not only the greatest work of Japanese literature, but believed to be the world's oldest full novel.

Heian was a time when **women** were able to be as independent as the men. This was not to become possible again for a thousand years.

14. KAMAKURA PERIOD (1185-1333)

In 1185, Yoritomo and his younger brother Yoshitsune defeated the forces of the Taira clan in a decisive naval battle in the Inland Sea. He had earlier led a successful campaign against the Ainu (an autochthonous Caucasoid tribe) pushing them northward and was awarded the title of *Seii-tai-shogun* (Barbarian-subduing General).

Shortened to **shogun**, it became the title of the major military commander. Theoretically, the shogun was the emperor's military adviser or chief of staff, but in fact he was the *de facto* head of state, a situation which continued until 1868. As such, this period is sometimes called the Kamakura Shogunate.

The seat of government was moved to **Kamakura**, where the focus of attention shifted from the effeminate nobleman to the powerful warrior. The merchant class was also rising. But there was a general uncertainty as civil strife grew. Political power had effectively passed from the hands of the aristocracy to the emergent military class, initiating an age of feudalism that would last until 1868.

The Mongol invasions

Among the most dramatic events of the Kamakura period were **the Mongol invasions** of Japan during the regency of Hōjō Tokimune, the 8th *shikken* (regent). The first invasion was launched in **1274** after the Japanese brusquely rejected a Mongol demand that they acknowledge the suzerainty of Kublai Khan (1215-94). Fortunately for the defendents, only a day after the invading force of about 40,000 men landed near Hakata in northern Kyushu, a storm suddenly arose, destroying a good part of the fleet and causing many of the invaders to drown.

Seven years later, in **1281**, the Japanese again rejected Kublai's demands and, furthermore, beheaded his envoys. Kublai dispatched a huge force of 140,000 and 150,000 men to Hakata Bay. Again, after nearly two months of fighting, a fierce typhoon arose, forcing the invaders to retreat.

The repulse of the invasions reinforced the national pride of the Japanese and raised the prestige of the Hōjō regency. The warriors however could not be rewarded since the enemies came from overseas, there were no land booty, so increasing domestic strife. Moreover, the Shintō priests and Buddhist monks also pressed for rewards, each insisting that their prayers had granted the **kamikaze** (divine wind) that routed the invaders.

Popularization of Buddhism

During the Kamakura period, Buddhism became more of a religion of the masses, most of them being adherents of Amida pietism, championed by Honen and his pupil Shinran. It was during this time that Nichiren lived and the Zen school was founded. These three schools dominated the Kamakura period. Buddhism had finally entered the life of the common people and spread throughout Japan.

By this time, the Sannō Ichi-jitsu Shintō [13], a highly eclectic combination of Shintō and Tendai became very well developed. In fact, full-scale blending of various the religious traditions became common.

15. KAMAKURA: PURE LAND BUDDHISM

During 12th century Kamakura, Pure Land (*jōdo*) Buddhism enjoyed a surge of popularity under Honen (1133-1212). His disciples established it as a school than became independent of the Tendai [11].

Hōnen (1133-1212)

Hōnen, whose real name was Genkū, was the founder of the **Jōdo school**, and who spearheaded the Kamakura Buddhist "reformation." The son of a samurai from the Mimasaka Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture), Hōnen entered the Buddhist Order at 8, following the death of his father.

He studied at the Enryaku-ji on Mt. Hiei, and became a monk at 15. Disenchanted with the worldliness and politics at Hiei, he decided to become a wandering ascetic (*hijiri*) [12] and, in 1150, retired to Kurotani, a monastery in another part of Mt. Hiei. After mastering the Tendai doctrines and the scholastics of the Nara schools, he still felt spiritually unfulfilled.

In due course, he realized that the *nembutsu* [12] was the only way to achieve *ōjō*, rebirth in Amida's Pure Land. In 1175, Hōnen began to teach the path of *nembutsu* in Kyōto and founded the Jōdo school.

Urged by his patron-disciple, Kujō Kanezane, he wrote the *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū* (The Selections of the Nembutsu of the Original Vow), or *Senchakushū* for short.

In 1204, the Kamakura Buddhist establishment launched a campaign against Hōnen's movement, leading to the execution of four of his disciples in 1206. Hōnen himself was defrocked and exiled to Shikoku in 1207. He was finally allowed to return to Kyōto in 1211, just a month before his death.

Shinran (1173-1263)

Shinran (1173-1263) was the founder of the **Jōdo Shin** school of Pure Land Buddhism, which teaches that pure faith (*shinjin*) alone is enough for one to be reborn into the Pure Land. Shinran entered monastic life at 8 and served as a *dōsō* (menial monk) at the Enryaku-ji until 1201, when he became a disciple of Hōnen.

While associated with Hōnen, he was permitted to copy the master's major work, the *Senchaku hongan nembutsushū*, and his portrait. When Hōnen was exiled to Shikoku in 1207, Shinran was banished to Echigo Province (now Niigata Prefecture). It was probably during this period that he renounced the robe and married to raise a large family.

Shinran was the first Buddhist priest to publicly marry, declaring that he is *hisohizoku*, "not monk, not layman." Thereafter the practice became fairly common. He did not return to Kyoto even after his pardon in late 1211, for his master died at the beginning of the following year. Instead, he migrated with his family to the Kantō region, where he gathered a body of followers.

A major development in this phase of his life was the compilation of his monumental work, *Kyōgyōshinshō* (Doctrine, Practice, Faith, Realization) (c. 1224). It is an anthology of quotations from the Buddhist texts and commentaries, interspersed with interpretative comments to clarify the True Doctrine (*kyō*), the True Practice (*gyō*), the Truth Faith (*shin*) and the True Realization (*shō*) of the Pure Land School.

From his return to Kyōto around 1235 until about 1260, Shinran devoted himself to literary efforts. He counseled his disciples through a variety of writings, especially correspondence. After he died in 1263 in Kyōto, his ashes were interred in the Ōtani area, west of Higashiyama in Kyōto. The site became a devotional centre and later the location of the school's major temple, Hongan-ji.



Fig 8. Shinran

Modern responses

The German theologian Karl Barth in his *Church Dogmatics* (German 1932; Eng. tr. 1936) has noted a striking resemblance between the Amida pietism and evangelical piety of the Christians. This is a positive statement if we consider that Buddhism as a living religion is so protean as to be able to freely accommodate and answer various spiritual needs of specific societies and times.

Trevor Ling is of the opinion that both Amidism and Zen are more correctly described as "Japanese religions." They can hardly be called Buddhist except in so far as historically their roots were in a Buddhist tradition. "Amidism is about as much as an authentic form of Buddhism as the sect of Jehovah's Witnesses is an authentic form of Christianity" (*A History of Religion East and West*, 1968:315).

16. NICHIREN (1222-82)

The most radical reformer in Japanese religion, though unsuccessful in his own lifetime, is undoubtedly Nichiren (1222-82). He was not so much interested in bringing the Buddhist past up to date as to create a totally new order within Buddhism itself. In this respect, he



Fig 9. Nichiren

serves as an inspiration for all the new and renewed religions of Japan.

During Nichiren's time, the imminent threat of Mongol invasions led to mixed feelings of fear and patriotism in Japan. He declared that the contemporary religions of Japan were leading the country to the verge of disaster. Rejecting all the religious forms of his time, he formulated a gospel of uncompromising aggression—the struggle of the Japanese nation against all foes—based totally on the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren's ideas drew the most enthusiasm from the samurai (warrior) class. His school continued to grow during the violent years of the latter half of the 15th century and most of the 16th, up to the Tokugawa period. In modern times, the Nichiren school finds its most radical expression in the Nichiren-shoshu and the lay organization, Soka Gakkai.³

17. ZEN

The arrival of the Chan school in Japan was one of the most important events in Japanese religious history. Although Chinese masters came to Japan to propagate the Chan tradition, it did not develop into a major branch of Buddhism until the time of **Eisai** (1141-1215) and **Dōgen** (1200-1253). Through their efforts arose two Zen schools of Kamakura: the Rinzai (Chin. Linji or Lin-chi) and the Sōtō (Chin. Caodong or Ts'ao-tung), respectively.

Both Eisai and Dōgen studied Chan in China, as did a number of other Japanese monks. However, when they returned to Japan, they faced very strong opposition from the Tendai and Shingon clergies. It was only after they were forced to resist these attacks that they were able to establish themselves.



Fig 10. Eisai (1141-1215)

Eisai (1141-1215)

Eisai (1141-1215) was the founder of Japanese **Rinzai Zen**, which emphasized sudden enlightenment. His father was the chief priest of Kibitsu Shrine in Bitchū Province (now part of Okayama Prefecture). Eisai began his study of Buddhism at 7. At 13, he took the preliminary Buddhist precepts at Enryaku-ji and later became a monk there. However, he became increasingly disillusioned with the laxity of monastic discipline there.

In 1168, he set out on a pilgrimage to Song China. During his five months in China, Eisai visited Tendai monastic sites and gathered Tendai texts. In 1187 he made a second journey to China, studying Zen under the Linji master Xu'an Huaichang (Hsü-an Huai-ch'ang), under whose guidance he combined meditation and *kōan* study with the study of Tantric practices and the Vinaya.

Upon his return to Japan in 1191, Eisai began to advocate the Chan teachings in Kyūshū and in Kyōto, quickly arousing the anger of the Enryaku-ji monks and their supporters at court. To defend himself against the charges of heresy, Eisai wrote *Shukke taikō* (1192, Essentials of the Monastic Life) and *Kōzen gokoku ron* (1198, The Propagation of Zen for the Protection of the Nation).

Eisai's apologia did little to appease his enemies in the capital. As such, in 1199, he traveled to Kamakura to seek the patronage of the newly established shogunate there. He was warmly received by Hōjō Masako, the widow of the shogunal founder Minamoto no Yoritomo, and her son, the shōgun Minamoto no Yoriie. In 1202 he was made founder-abbot of a new monastery called Kennin-ji, where he taught a combination of Zen, Tendai and Tantra, emphasizing on sudden enlightenment.



Fig 11. Dōgen (1200-1253)

Dōgen (1200-1253)

Dōgen (Shōyō Daishi, 1200-1253), also known as Dōgen Kigen, was the founder of the **Sōtō Zen** school which emphasizes sitting meditation. Unlike most of his contemporaries, he totally avoided contact with the ruling and military classes. His Sōtō Zen school

³ See Appendix: Nichiren: the New Buddhism of Modern Japan.

traditionally appealed to the farmers.

Taking the original Buddhist ideal of renunciation very seriously, Dogen rejected all worldly honours and preferred to resort to the solitude of the mountains. His writings, especially his chief work, the **Shōbō-genzō** (The Eye and Treasury of the True Dharma) (1231-53), are characterized by such terse and sharp wit that they are among the most fascinating literary documents of Japanese Buddhism.

Dōgen's Zen emphasized sitting practice (**zazen**), which alone is sufficient and true Buddhism. The foundation of Dōgen's teaching is the principle that practice does not *lead* to Enlightenment, but is carried out in the *state* of being enlightened; otherwise, it is not practice. He equates all being—the practitioner, the practice and the world—with the present, the moment of Enlightenment.

When Zen is mentioned in connection with Japanese culture, it almost always refers to the Sōtō Zen of Dōgen. Disapproving of any sectarian emphasis, he regarded Zen simply as the essence of Buddhism. In spite of this, Sōtō Zen ironically became strongly sectarian in Japan.

While Eisai brought back Chinese actors to Japan, Dōgen brought back potters and carpenters. A lay disciple of Dōgen introduced the Chinese art of making **ceramics**, a tradition which was perfected and handed down through the generations in the town of Seto (from which the Seto ware, *setomono*, got its name).

In 1244, Dōgen founded Daibutsuji, two years later renamed **Eihei-ji**, on a mountain that came to be known as Mt. Kichijo. He died in the autumn of 1253 in Kyōto.

18. MUROMACHI PERIOD (1338-1573)

In 1336, the warlord Ashikaga Takauji, coming to the assistance of the emperor Daigo II, overthrew the Kamakura shogunate and established a new *bakufu* (shogunate) in Kyōto, and achieved power by 1338. This rule by the warrior class would last until 1573. This rise and establishment of military culture had close association with Zen Buddhism.

The Muromachi generals, living in Kyōto, believed in **Zen Buddhism**, patronized Zen temples, and were influenced by Zen culture. Since Zen, at this time, was studied along with esotericism, it won the support of both the warrior and the noble classes. Later on, Southern Song monks were invited to Japan to introduce the pure Zen of China.

Cultural influences of Zen

The Muromachi period was one of decline of Buddhist art. The Zen monks, however, made important cultural contributions. The Zen culture of the Muromachi period included practically every form of art. The school's most outstanding contribution is in the field of **literature** (written in Chinese) but which was accessible only to the highly educated. This body of prose and verse became so venerated in the Zen monasteries that in the 15th century it was more important than Buddhism itself.

Zen literature and the other arts developed into what is known as **the Japanese "Ways" (dō)** which may be considered as a kind of secularization of Buddhist spirituality. The best known examples of these Ways that dwell on the principle of the highest fulfilment in every instant, every thought and every gesture, are swordsmanship, archery, the tea ceremony, and flower arrangement.

19. TEA CEREMONY & ZEN GARDEN

According to tradition, Bodhidharma, the first Zen patriarch, who came from India to China in 520, encouraged the custom of **tea drinking** for alertness during meditation. When Buddhism came to Nara, tea drinking was also introduced in connection with meditation. The practice was popular in Kamakura Japan, and later became an active part of a ceremony honouring Bodhidharma.

It is widely accepted that in 1191, the monk **Eisai** (1141-1215) brought **Chinese tea seeds** back from a temple in China. (They were called *honcha*, "true tea," because they were superior to the local breed.) These seeds were planted in Japan and so began the humble origin of Japan's tea industry.

Tea ceremony

Eisai later introduced the tea-drinking custom of the Song dynasty—called *yatsugashira* ("four heads"), using powdered green tea—that evolved into the famous **tea ceremony** (*cha-no-yu*) and became fully established as a Japanese ritual.

During the Muromachi period, the tea ceremony came to be a gathering of friends in an isolated atmosphere to drink tea and discuss the aesthetic merits of paintings, calligraphy, and flower arrangements displayed in the alcove called the *toko-no-ma*, or quite often to discuss the merits of the tea utensils themselves.

The tearoom (*cha-shitsu*) is so constructed that one has to enter on one's knees, symbolizing beginning the ritual with humility. A mood of meticulous ceremony and concentration follows. The various tea utensils themselves are carefully chosen by the tea master.

The most famous exponent of the tea ceremony was **Sen Rikyū**, an aesthete at the 16th-century Momoyama court of the military dictator Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who codified the ceremony into a style known as **wabi** (roughly meaning “simplicity”, “quietude” and “absence of ornament”), which still enjoys popularity in Japan.



Fig 12. Ryōanji Zen garden, Kyōto

Zen garden

It was during this period that the “dry landscape” (*kare sansui*) garden was introduced (so called because no water is used). This is the legendary **Zen garden**, ordinarily, a small garden south or east of the abbot's room. It consists of trimmed trees, sand and rocks, symbolizing a landscape in reduced scale. The landscape is a visual representation of the Zen spirit. An extreme example of the Zen garden is the garden of the Ryōanji in Kyōto, which consists solely of 15 rocks arranged in five groups on a field of white sand.

All considered, one might say that the closest modern notion that approximates (in a very generally sense) of the Japanese Buddhist notion of beauty is that of “small is beautiful.”

20. MOMOYAMA PERIOD (1575-1600)

By the 1570s, Ashikaga authority had declined completely, and Japan was torn by fighting between rival clans and their armies until the end of the century. In 1568, a minor feudal lord, **Oda Nobunaga** (1534-1582), won control of Kyoto, where he broke the military power of the major Buddhist monasteries.

Arrival of the Europeans

In 1498, the Portuguese navigator Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope and reached India. Within 50 years, in 1543, the Portuguese had reached an island off the southern coast of Kyushu. By 1545, they were trading actively in ports in other parts of Kyushu.

In 1549, the Jesuit priest Francis Xavier began a major missionary effort in Japan. By 1615, perhaps as many as half a million Japanese had become converts. However, probably many of them were motivated by their interest in trade and their general curiosity rather than genuine religious conviction.

Nobunaga encouraged the Portuguese as a counterweight against Buddhist power and was also motivated by the hope of trade profits.

In 1573, Nobunaga drove the last Ashikaga shogun out of Kyoto. To consolidate his power, he went on to destroy the great Tendai monastery of Enryakuji on Mt. Hiei. Having subdued the Buddhist monastic centres in the capital, he went on to take over the fortified headquarters of the Shin Buddhists at Kaya on the west coast. Then he laid siege to the Shin branch castle at Osaka and captured it in 1580.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi

Nobunaga's tactics against his opponents were ruthless, including the burning alive of captives and the slaughter of noncombatants. He himself was murdered by one of his own generals in Kyōto in 1582, but his power was seized by another of his generals, **Toyotomi Hideyoshi** (1537-98).

As Nobunaga's successor, Hideyoshi continued the campaigns against other feudal lords, and in 1585 conquered the island of Shikoku. In the following year, **Tokugawa Ieyasu** (1543-1616), a *daimyo* (land-holding magistrate) of eastern Japan, agreed to become Hideyoshi's vassal.

With Ieyasu guarding his rear, Hideyoshi assembled an army of 280,000 men, the largest field force yet in Japanese history, and invaded Kyushu. Having finally unified Japan politically on a larger scale than ever before, in his megalomania, he planned next to conquer China. He had to do this by way of Korea, which he raided twice, in 1592 and 1596. Fortunately for the Koreans, the Ming army came to their rescue. During his campaigns in Korea, anyway, Hideyoshi brought back some captive ceramicists and printers. Mercifully, he died in 1598, while his troops were in Korea.

Japan's "Christian century"

Unlike the Chinese and Indians, the Japanese, as a small community of remote and less developed people, were far more open to new ideas, even of foreign origins. The 16th century, sometimes called "Japan's Christian Century," saw significant numbers of Christian converts as well as flourishing trade with Europeans, centred in Nagasaki, Osaka, Edo (Tokyo) and other ports. Hideyoshi at first welcomed the Christian missionaries and the profitable trade with the Portuguese.

Challenge to the Christians

Earlier Portuguese missionaries in Japan were told that if Christianity was, as they asserted, the only true religion, it would long have been known to and adopted by the Chinese. This helped convince the Jesuits, like **Matteo Ricci** (1552-1610), to try to convert the Chinese first, as a key to the rest of East Asia, but as history witnessed, that effort failed mainly due to the human weakness of the church at its highest levels.

After missionary work in Goa and SE Asia, **Francis Xavier** spent two years (1549-1551) in Japan preaching, teaching and disputing with Buddhist monks. But the Christians were soon seen as trouble-makers.

More sinning than sinned against

The foreigners were rivals with each other in both trade and missionary effort, and they took sides in internal conflicts. Japanese converts also developed loyalties to a foreign pope, and the Catholics themselves were split among various orders: Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit, who contested with each other.

The Spanish, already established in the Philippines, tended to support the Franciscans; the Portuguese the Jesuits, and all four orders quarreled bitterly with each other. Following their usual strategy, the Jesuits concentrated on the elite, and even converted some of the *daimyo*, and later some of Hideyoshi's retinue.

The Spanish plotted against the Portuguese, and both were mortal enemies of the Dutch and the English (both were Protestants anyway). All of them had now reached Japan. It was understandable that Hideyoshi feared that the foreign missionaries were an advance guard for foreign political aggression.

In 1587, Hideyoshi banned the missionaries, but this order was not enforced for some years. He seemed to have feared that the spread of Christianity was becoming a disruptive influence in Japanese society and also a political menace.

In 1597, he officially banned Christianity and crucified 6 Spanish Franciscans, 3 Jesuits and 17 Japanese converts, though many Jesuits remained in hiding. However, he did not go further for fear of losing out in the trade with the Portuguese, which had also become an important source of technical knowledge, especially about firearms, and as the supply route for Chinese goods.

Highest percentage of Christians

The number of Catholic priests were always small, never exceeding 200, but they managed to convert as many as 300,000 converts by the first decade of the 17th century. If the population of Japan then were between 20 million and 25 million—the highest percentage of the population that the Christian population of Japan had ever reached!

The contending missionaries were seen as increasingly disruptive, even more so in the Tokugawa period. In 1639, during the Tokugawa shogunate, Christianity was finally suppressed. Thousands of converts were crucified, and all foreigners expelled. Contact with the outside world was limited to one Dutch ship a year, allowed to trade only in Nagasaki harbour.

The generally unfavourable treatment given by Nobunaga and Hideyoshi, and the ultimate expulsion of foreign Christians from Japan were not religiously motivated. Indeed, the Momoyama rulers had subjected all Japanese religions under their power, and during the Tokugawa period, all religions were state-controlled. The various military rulers, governing over a centralized Japan, saw the growing Christian community, Japanese and foreign alike, with their vastly non-Japanese values, as a growing threat to the established and centralized order.

Moreover, the bitter quarrels between the Portuguese Jesuits and the Spanish Franciscans, and between the Spanish and the Dutch priests, for example, made the rulers aware of danger of Christianity as a political machine, and that Christian evangelism was only a wedge for the subsequent colonization of the country (as had happened in south and southeast Asia and elsewhere).

21. TOKUGAWA PERIOD (1600-1867)

When Hideyoshi died, a power struggle ensued amongst his former vassals. After a decisive victory at Sekigahara in 1600, **Tokugawa Ieyasu** (1543-1616) brought Japan the longest period of peace and stability that lasted until the end of the shogunate in 1868. But Tokugawa Japan was still a feudal system closed to the outside world. In fact, the feudal system was becoming even more rigid and more effectively controlled from the centre of the shogun's power at **Edo** (modern Tokyo).

With the Tokugawa shogunate began the second period of Japan's Buddhist history, **the developmental period**.

Guns outlawed

In an interesting and unprecedented move in world history, the Tokugawa outlawed all guns, which the Japanese had learned from the Europeans in the 16th century, and which they had themselves used in internal wars and in Korea with devastating effect. Anyone with a gun could become a serious threat to authority or at least the civil order. Obsessed with order and control, the Tokugawa regarded guns as an obvious threat to both, and an invitation to disorder and rebellion.

Furthermore, guns were regarded as (in our modern terms) “ungentlemanly.” The elite warriors of ancient Japan were the *samurai*, the “gentleman warriors.” Peasants were made (as before) to surrender their swords and other weapons to the *bakufu*. In this way, the hereditary warrior class, the *samurai*, was left in complete charge of the military government.

Registration and guarantee

From 1630s onwards, in their effort to exterminate the Christians, the Tokugawa government formed a **religious inquisition** (*shūmon aratame*) and used the nationwide Buddhist temple network as their policing system by way of the *danka* and the *terauke* systems.

In a system known as **danka** (fr Sanskrit *dāna,pati*, lit “master giver,” ie “lay supporter” and *ka* Jap for “house”), all Japanese had to register periodically at Buddhist temples. A *danka* identified a family that requested a particular Buddhist temple to conduct all its funeral, memorial, and other services in exchange for which it offered remuneration and partial provision for the upkeep of the temple.

In addition to the *danka*, the Tokugawa authorities introduced the **terauke** (temple guarantee) system to seek out the adherents of the proscribed Christianity faith, but it had a wider effect of the surveillance of the entire population. A certificate of affiliation with a Buddhist temple was required as proof that a suspect was not a Christian. In 1665, the shogunate ordered a detailed scrutiny of the population, “listing the name of the temple that stood as guarantee of each person’s religion.”

At birth every person was enrolled as a parishioner of his family’s temple and the register was forwarded to the lord of the domain. The temple attestation was also required prior to marriage, travel, change of residence, or entry into service.

The **terauke** system was also used against other proscribed religious groups, such as the uncompromising Fūjū Fuse (“not giving, not receiving”) sect of Nichiren Buddhism from 1669. The system collapsed along with the Tokugawa shogunate in the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

Clearly, the Tokugawa had bitter experiences with the missionaries and did not want to repeat their mistake. However, the Tokugawa proscription of Christianity was not totally effective. Those few who escaped went underground and kept Christianity alive until the appearance of Western missionaries in the 1860s. “The Japanese purging of dangerous missionaries and their military arms was not a ‘Buddhist’ policy. The Catholic insurrection involvement was a Christian strategy.” (Dan Lusthaus, Buddha-L email 7 Nov 2007)

Hokusai

The art of **woodblock print** (especially in colour) reached its peak in the late 17th century. The best known of Japanese wood-block printmakers was **Hokusai** (not his real name) (1760-1849). He was a devout Buddhist from Edo who chose the name by which he is known (which means “north studio”), to honour a Buddhist saint who was thought to be an incarnation of the north star.

His early work centred on book illustration, but his fame rested on his magnificent set of “Thirty-seven Views of Mount Fuji.” Such works (and those of Hokusai’s contemporary, Ando Hiroshige) had a great influence on Western artists, especially the Impressionists in France and the American painter, James Whistler (1834-1903). Vincent Van Gogh (1853-90) carefully copied prints by Hiroshige.



Fig 13. Hokusai: 37 Views of Mt. Fuji

22. TOKUGAWA: BUDDHIST DEVELOPMENTS

Mahayana canons

The Tokugawa Shogunate encouraged the Buddhist clergy in scholarly pursuits, hoping thereby to divert them from political mischief. The Tokugawa period as such produced a vast body of learned literature, especially sectarian commentaries and monastic biographies.

During the first half of the 17th century, two editions of the **Mahayana Canon** appeared. The first was by the monk **Sōzon** but it was incomplete. The second edition was that of the Tendai monk **Tenkai**. However, it was the edition of **Tetsugen** (1630-1682) of the Ōbaku school, a new Zen sect, that gained the widest circulation. This is known as the Tetsugen-ban or Ōbaku-ban [*ban* = Chin. *pen*, meaning “edition”].

Zen monks

The **Ōbaku-shū** was founded by a Chinese master, Yinyen Longzhi (Ingen Ryōki, 1592-1673), a Linji Chan (Rinzai Zen) monk who came to Japan. It not only syncretized with Amidism, but also introduced

rituals, customs and a new architectural style imported from Ming China. Another innovation was the use of chairs.

The Zen monk, artist and writer **Hakuin** (1685-1768) helped in the restoration of Rinzai Zen in modern times. He revived the use of **koans**, statements of Zen masters that are used as problems set to novices in Zen monasteries. Hakuin's this-worldliness and realism are reflected in his *Hymn on Sitting in Meditation* which contains koans like "Outside the beings there is no Buddha"; "This very place is the land of the Lotus Flower"; "This body is the Buddha."

Hakuin belonged to the Zen tradition of **Japanese art** in which the object represented in a painting is not as important as what it evokes in the spectator's mind. Unlike the haughty monks who served the Shogunate, Hakuin lived humbly in great poverty among his peasant followers, and his humility and spirituality became the foundation for modern Zen in Japan.

Books

Buddhist **books** continued to be printed during the Tokugawa period but were given secular treatment. Doctrinal texts of the Amida school, for example, were printed with the phonetic *kana* syllabary [11] to assist the newly literate public. Mythical accounts of the lives of Japanese "saints" were published with profuse illustrations. Maps and pictorial guide-books for pilgrimages were issued in their thousands to organized tour groups.



Fig 14. A Buddhist text in rebus (pictographs)

Rebus

To reach out to the huge illiterate public of Tokugawa Japan, the Buddhists of Edo introduced an ingenious method of teaching the sutras and mantras through the use of **rebus**. A rebus is a representation of a word or syllable by a symbol or picture of an object the name of which resembles in sound the represented word or syllable (eg "IOU").

The Heart Sutra, for example, was transcribed into a rebus in an effort to bring Buddhist teachings within reach of the common people.

Outstanding monks

The period of Japanese reunification produced two outstanding Zen monks. One was the Rinzai monk **Takuan** (1573-1645) who is especially known for his application of the Zen spirit to the art of **fencing** (*kendō*). In his *Recordings on the Mystery of Motionless Wisdom*, he says: "To look at things without permitting the mind to stop at them is called 'to be motionless'."

The other figure is **Suzuki Shōsan** (1579-1655) who became a Sōtō Zen monk at 42 after having fought for the first Shōgun, Ieyasu. His conception of Zen was not so much monastic as it was of daily work that "everyone can become a Buddha in his own profession." There is no practice of the Buddhist Way outside the profession.

23. THE MEIJI RESTORATION (1868-1912)

Japan's modern era (1868-1945) encompasses three historical periods: the Meiji (1868-1911), the Taishō (1912-25) and the Showa (1926-). The Meiji Reformation was a period of transition from feudalism to the modern system. With the abolition of the feudal state, the military stepped down while the emperor was made the head of new nation-state with authority centralized at Tokyo.

Soon after the arrival of Commodore Perry of the US (1853, 1854), other foreign powers (England, Russia, France and the Netherlands) too signed treaties of trade and cooperation with the Japanese. Unable to repulse foreign demands after that, the people (especially the elite) began to lose faith in the military government as the protector of the nation.

State Shintō

After years of ideological and armed struggle amongst factions, the military regime finally yielded its power on 3rd January 1868 when a coup d'état restored imperial rule—and so began the Meiji Restoration (1868-1912). Within a few decades, the imperial regime modernized Japan's political and social system and brought her out of the feudal age into the modern era.

The fact that it was associated with the Tokugawa administration made Buddhism quite unpopular at the beginning of the Meiji period, at least among the elite who wished to install Shinto as the new state religion. To achieve this goal, it was necessary for the ruling class at that time to separate Shinto from Buddhism.

To purge Shinto of foreign (especially Buddhist) elements and to further unify religion and state, the new government decreed the “Separation of Gods and Buddhas” (1868). By this decree, Buddhist monks and priests attached to shrines were secularized. Buddhist images could no longer be objects of Shinto worship and were removed from Shinto shrines. Shinto priests and their families had to be given a Shinto (not Buddhist) funeral.

In 1889 a constitution was promulgated which declared the “sacred” and “inviolable” character of the emperor. He was proclaimed a direct descendent of the sun goddess Amaterasu Ōmikami and as such deified and regarded as *kami*, that is, a living deity. This concept formed the nucleus of Japanese imperialism that was to launch the country into the Second World War.

Buddhism persecuted

The new edict led to a nationwide zeal, originating mainly in Shinto circles, aimed not only at severing the ties between Buddhism and Shinto, but actually suppressing Buddhism. Temple lands were confiscated (mostly for agrarian reform) and many Sangha members were defrocked. In many cases, Buddhist temples and objects of worship were desecrated or destroyed. Buddhist beliefs and worship were forbidden in the imperial household.

The main force behind this persecution and iconoclasm against Buddhism was known as *haibutsu-kishaku* (Exterminate the Buddhas, destroy Shakyamuni). Though this was a grave setback for Buddhism, it also gave rise to some great Buddhist figures at that time. Many of them, such as Shimaji Mokurai (1838-1911) of the Jodo Shin-shu, went to Europe to study. During his European tour (1872-1873) Mokurai studied the religious situation there. On his return, he advocated the disestablishment of all creeds and the freedom of religion.

The persecution of the Buddhists came to a climax around 1871 but was soon brought under control. In 1875, **freedom of religion** was guaranteed to all. But to preserve a special status for Shinto, ranking above Buddhism, Shinto was officially not recognized as a religion, but as a form of state cult—**State Shintō**. This new religious freedom gave the Buddhists the impetus for revival.

24. STRUGGLE AND REVIVAL

The reaction to Christianity provided the Buddhist revival of 1877-1889 with its greatest inspiration. There was a general tendency toward nationalism and to attack “foreign” Christianity with slogans like *haja kenshō* [reject the wicked (Christianity); clarify the right (Buddhism)]. Buddhist apologetics stressed both the dangers of Christianity and the harmony of Buddhism with Shinto, and to a lesser degree with Confucianism.

This revival brought Buddhism into alliance with the government and a dependence on state funds. It failed, however, mainly because anti-Christian attitudes merely allied Buddhism to nationalism rather than brought resurgence of fundamental Buddhist doctrines. Japanese Buddhist ingenuity however found other ways of regeneration (Davis, 1989).

Buddhist universities

The Buddhists under the Meiji Restoration had learnt a valuable lesson from the widespread Shinto-inspired persecutions. With the impact of Westernization and modernization, the Buddhists have a new challenge to contend with. In the face of adversity, the Japanese Buddhist groups found themselves unified with the common objective of taking steps to modernize themselves.

The Japanese Buddhists founded schools and universities, and reorganized their old temple schools and transformed them into universities. Their spirited response was reflected in the rise of numerous **Buddhist universities**:

- 1882 — Komazawa University, Tokyo (Soto Zen) [founded as a temple in 1759]
- 1905 — Otani University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [founded in 1655 as a study centre]
- 1922 — Ryokoku University, Kyoto (Jodo Shin-shu) [started as a temple in 1639].

Other examples include Hana-zono University (Rinzai Zen), Bukkyo University (Jodo Shin-shu), Shuchiin University (Shingon), Koyasan University (Shingon), Rissho University (Nichiren), Taisho University (serving the Jodo Shin, Tendai and Shingon sects), and the Kyoto Women's University (Jodo Shin-shu).

A number of **research institutes** specializing in Buddhism and oriental studies were also founded, eg the Nippon Buddhist Research Association and the Japanese Association of Indian and Buddhist Studies (Indogaku-bukkyogaku-kai). The Japanese Buddhists found the compatibility of Buddhism with the theories and discoveries of modern science a redeeming inspiration. They became better equipped to ride the waves of Westernization and modernism and to ward off Christian influence.

Nanjō's Catalogue

In 1876, the eminent Japanese Buddhologist and Sanskrit scholar, **Bun'yū Nanjō** (1849-1927), a priest of the Ōtani branch of the Jōdo Shin sect, went to England to study English and Sanskrit, and to research Buddhist texts in Europe. In the course of his studies, he discovered that *The Buddhist Tripitaka* (1876), Samuel Beal's English-language catalogue of all sutras in the Obaku Edition was full with errors.

Nanjō corrected Beal's errors and in 1883 published *Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka*, commonly known as *Nanjio's Catalogue*. His catalogue generally follows the Ming Dynasty Catalogue of the Tripitaka (Daming sanzang shengjiao mulu), the compendium of the Northern Ming Edition of the Tripitaka, on which the Wanli Edition (and hence the Obaku Edition) was based. *Nanjio's Catalogue* was very well-received by scholars throughout the world and remains the only reliable English-language record of Chinese translations of Buddhist sutras.

Radical changes and responses

An interesting and important development in Japanese Buddhism after the Meiji Restoration was the practice of **married priesthood**, which had its roots in the examples of the Jodo Shin-shu pioneers like Shinran [15]. With the disestablishment of Buddhism the monks lost most of their lay patronage and were forced to support themselves and their temples in more mundane ways. During the Meiji era a decree was issued allowing the clergy of all sects to marry. Today, except for young monks under training, nearly all Japanese priests lead married lives.⁴

Some priests, instead of lamenting the **disestablishment of Buddhism**, recognised it as a blessing in disguise. They had the courage to acknowledge the criticisms levelled against Buddhism and advocated its spiritual rebirth. An outstanding example is that **Kiyozawa Manshi** (1863-1903) who openly criticized the traditional pattern of hereditary family membership in temples. He advocated a renewal of personal faith and a reorganization of Buddhism as a "brotherhood" based on small groups of believers. Although he was not successful, his ideas provided ideas for post-War Buddhist reforms.

25. TAISHŌ PERIOD (1912-1926)

The Japanese contact with the West also acquainted them with the methods and results of modern scholarship. Through the study of Sanskrit and Pali they gained direct access for the first time to the Indian

⁴ The term "priest" here applies to the non-celibate clergy while "monk" refers to the ordained who keep to the rule of celibacy. See Yoshiharu Tomatsu, "The Secularization of Japanese Buddhism" in 1998: 46-56.

sources of Buddhism. This resulted in the foundation of Buddhist universities at the beginning of this century.

During the Taishō period, the new liberal attitude of scholars towards Buddhist studies contributed much to the modernization of Buddhism in Japan. Buddhist thought found its way into literary and philosophical works. A prominent Japanese who was influenced by Buddhism was **Nishida Kitarō** (1870-1945), Japan's leading philosopher who established a truly universal philosophy transcending traditional Eastern and Western categories of thought. These modernists were, however, often criticized by their own sects. Some of them were even expelled and some lost their university positions.

Taishō Canons

The comparative study of northern and southern Chinese editions of the Tripitaka late in the Tokugawa period (1603-1868) [21] influenced Japanese Buddhist studies during the Meiji period and the following Taishō period, leading to the publication of three modern editions of the Chinese Canon produced by consolidating the Koryo (Korean) and Wanli (Chinese) editions.

The first of these Japanese Tripitaka editions was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Daizōkyō**, popularly known as the Shukusatsu-zōkyō, or Small-type Canon (1880-1885). The second was the **Dai Nippon Kōtei Zōkyō**, generally called the Manji-zōkyō, or Fylfot-letter Tripitaka (1902-1905). The third was the **Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō** 大正新脩大藏經, generally called the Taishō Daizōkyō or Taishō Edition of the Tripiṭaka (1924-1934). Each of these Canons was an enlargement of its predecessors.

The Taishō Edition was published through the effort and sacrifices of **Takakusu Junjirō** 高楠順次郎 (1866-1945), a pioneer Japanese Buddhologist who supervised its preparation with the assistance of Kaigyoku Watanabe and others, and published by the Taishō Issaikyō Kankō-kai. Unlike the other Canons which followed the traditional arrangement of sutras according to whether they were Nikāya Buddhism or Mahāyāna, the Taishō Edition organized the sutras chronologically, according to the historical development of their teachings.

The four-part Taishō Edition contains a hundred volumes which records 3,053 works in 11,970 fascicles. This Edition is still the most widely used edition of the Mahāyāna Tripiṭaka because of its easy system. For example, care was taken to point out each Pali or Sanskrit word that corresponded to or was similar to a particular Chinese rendering, and Chinese translations were frequently supplemented with Indic-language notations to increase clarity and to correct errors.

One of the immeasurable value of the Taishō Canon is that it preserves the Āgama sūtras, the Chinese counterpart of the Nikāya suttas in Pali, both of which constitutes collections of the earliest Buddhist teachings. Their current accessibility through printed and digital versions, and advanced Buddhist studies, provide rich ground for **a comparative study of the early Buddhist texts**. Comparative Buddhism is a new and rising field of Buddhist studies.

26. SHŌWA PERIOD (1926- 1989)

During the early Showa period (1926-1945), ie before the Second World War, Japan continued to experience the impact of modernization and Westernisation. It was also a period of **ultra-nationalism** (around 1930-1945) when Buddhist radicals called for the unification of the East in one great "Buddha-land" under the tutelage of Japan. This dangerous period saw Japan wage three major wars: the Sino-Japanese (1894-95), the Russo-Japanese (1904-05) and World War II (1938-45).

After the invasion of China (1937) and Japan's subsequent participation in the Second World War, the government tightened its grip on Buddhist institutions. Any Buddhist writing that placed Buddhism above the authority of the state or emperor was forced to be modified or was suppressed. There was little open opposition except from the Soka Gakkai.⁵

27. POST-WAR PERIOD (1945-1989)

The Allied occupation (1945-52) following Japan's defeat in the Second World War marked Japan's first major defeat and occupation of her territory. Pre-War nationalism and militarism gave way to greater liberty and tendency towards democracy and globalism. There was a remarkable rebuilding of

⁵ Appendix: "Nichiren: the New Buddhism of Modern Japan."

Japan's cities and industrial facilities. In due course, Japan emerged as a major economic and political power in Asia.

Early in this period, Shintō was disestablished. There was complete religious freedom but a general demoralization and disorganization among the older religions. Recovery and reorganization were gradual. Most conspicuous were **the New Religions**, but religious indifference and secularism were widespread.

After the war, however, Buddhist groups, new and old alike, began to emphasize Buddhism as a religion of peace and fellowship. In spite of financial difficulties and widespread indifference to religion, Buddhist activities revived. Religious bodies became more democratic in their composition. There were more contacts with Buddhists overseas. Missions were sent to the Americas and to Europe; contacts with Buddhist countries (especially those of southeast Asia) were renewed.

Social and cultural activities flourished under the Buddhist banner mostly run by the laity. As academic studies advanced and produced a stream of excellent scholarly publications, Japan was becoming the foremost "Buddhological" country in the world.

28. THE HEISEI PERIOD (1989-)

"Heisei," the era name of the present emperor, Akihito, is based on two quotations from the Chinese classics *Shiki* (史記 *Shih chi*, Book of History) and *Shokyō* (書經 *Shu ching*, Book of Documents) that signify the attainment of peace in heaven and on earth, at home and abroad. In *Shiki*, the sentence 內平外成 (peace inside, prosperity outside) appears in the part honouring the wise rule of the legendary Chinese emperor Shun. In *Shokyō*, there is the sentence 地平天成 (peaceful land, clear sky). By combining both meanings, Heisei connotes "universal peace." It began as a prosperous period: the Heisei Boom, ending in early 1991. This is also a period of excellent interdisciplinary Buddhist studies, most of which however are in Japanese.

Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990)

Keiji Nishitani (1900-1990) was a leading Japanese philosopher. He graduated from Kyoto University and became a professor there in 1943. His primary concern was the fundamental relation between human existence and religion. He compared "nothingness" and "detachment" in the mysticism of Meister Eckhart (c 1260-1327) with the Buddhist notion of "emptiness" (*kū*), finding a common transcendental or absolute stance.

He developed a philosophy of absolute nothingness as the religious realization of a self located in a bottomless abyss. The new kind of nihilism serves to synthesize Eastern and Western thought. His major works include *Kami to zettai mu* (1948) and *Shūkyō to wa nani ka* (1961).⁶

Hajime Nakamura (1912-1999)

Hajime Nakamura (1912-99) was a leading Japanese scholar of Indian philosophy and Buddhism. He graduated from Tokyo University and taught there from 1954 to 1973. He produced a large number of works in the comparative study of ideas and promoted cultural exchange between Japan and other nations.

His best known work is *Tōyōjin no shii hōhō* (1948-49), translated as ***Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan***.⁷ In 1974, he completed a three-volume dictionary of Buddhist terms, ***Bukkyōgo dajiten***. He received the Order of Culture in 1977.

In *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples*, Nakamura attempts to explain why after the Nara period onwards, celibacy was commonly disregarded by the clergy:

While the Japanese are keenly conscious of their membership in their small, closed nexus, they are hardly fully aware of themselves as individuals, or as social beings, to the extent the Western people are. In the light of such a way of thinking, it is easy to under-

⁶ *Religion and Nothingness*, tr. Jan Van Bragt, Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982).

⁷ Tr Philip P Wiener, Honolulu: East-West Center, 1964.

stand why Japanese Buddhists have tended to disregard the Universalistic Buddhist Precepts. (1964:415)

In *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes*,⁸ Nakamura gives us a good idea of the extensive scope and depth of recent Buddhist studies in Japan.

International academic cooperation

International scholarly cooperation has provided two positive results on Japanese Buddhist scholarship. Where formerly Japanese knowledge of Buddhism was filtered through Chinese Buddhism, concerned Buddhists hoping for reform now have **a direct knowledge of early Indian Buddhism**.

In *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet, Japan* (1964: pt. IV), Nakamura discusses various problems that Japanese Buddhism faced, such as, as he plainly put it: “the Japanese frequently misinterpreted the original Chinese texts” (1964:348).

A second positive result is the growing confidence in western methods of critical scholarship and western philosophy. Scholars like **Nishida Kitaro** (1870-1945) have brought Japanese Buddhist philosophy to international standards.

The next step is to collate the various studies on Buddhism by Japanese scholars, translate them into English for publication.

29. RECAPITULATION

We have looked at the Buddhist history of Japan in terms of the three periods, which scholars like H. Byron Earhart have used. First, there is the formative period from prehistory to the 9th century (that is, up to the Heian period), which was a period of **assimilation** of Korean and Chinese cultures.

Then follows the developmental period from the 9th century until the 17th centuries (that is, up to the Tokugawa period). This was a time of growing **indigenization** of foreign cultures, when Buddhism became distinctly Japanese, or simply more so.

Finally, we have the formalistic period from the 17th century Tokugawa era up to our own times, which is also accompanied by renewal and innovation, or what might be said to be **contextualization**, where Japanese culture and Buddhism are increasingly seen in the local as well as global contexts.

Robert Sharf, in his perceptive examination of Buddhism in China,⁹ has not only given us a good idea of the nature of Buddhism in East Asia but also a sociological understanding of what religion is. **Robert H Sharf**, for example, observes that

Japanese Buddhism, from its very inception, was subject to a degree of autocratic state control that surpassed anything seen in early Buddhist China. Government oversight of all aspects of Buddhist activity encouraged competition, if not open strife, among individual teachers, lineages, and temples as they contended for the patronage of the court and the aristocratic families in what was often a zero-sum game. State control was but one of the several factors that led to the over-riding sense of lineal and sectarian identity that came to characterize Japanese Buddhism. The Japanese Buddhist monastic institution quickly evolved into multiple independent and somewhat exclusionary schools, formally recognized and superintended by the central government, each holding to distinctive modes of dress, liturgy, ritual, and doctrine, and each governed by its own centralized ecclesiastical organization. (2002:8 f)

There are two strong currents in contemporary study of Buddhism. One is more of a “descriptive” ethnographic approach to Buddhism based on archaeological fieldwork and study of historical inscriptions. The other is a more “prescriptive” survey attempting to put together what might have been the “original” or “authentic” history or teaching of the Buddha and his disciples. Both approaches provide exciting insights into Buddhist studies today where we not only see Buddhist as an ancient Indian religion but also as a living spirit.

⁸ Osaka: KUFUS Publications, 1980.

⁹ See Sharf 2002 in biblio.



Fig 15. Zen garden

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Buddhist Psychology

A short history

Summarized from: “Consciousness and meditation: A random survey of recent developments”
Sutta Discovery vol 17 no 18c (2007)
by Piya Tan ©2006

1 The appeal of early Buddhism

In this paper, we will examine the current state of studies and understanding of consciousness, meditation and Buddhism, as they grow more closely related. Susan Blackmore provides a good introduction here (from her chapter on “Buddhism and consciousness”):

It may seem strange to end this book [*Consciousness: An introduction*] with what looks like a religious doctrine, when ancient dogma or doctrine cannot be what we are after. It is true that, like all religions, Buddhism has accumulated a vast superstructure of memes, including texts, rituals, beliefs, beautiful buildings, sculptures and statues, music and liturgies. Yet what the Buddha saw is not a meme. It cannot be spoken of directly, and can only be transmitted by tricks of pointing or showing, or doing something to provoke another mind into letting go. This is known in Zen as “transmission outside the scriptures.”

(Blackmore 2003:402)

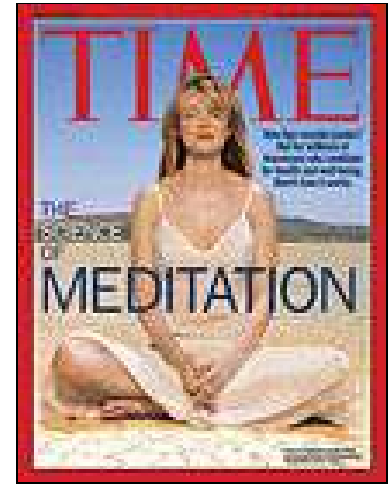


**Fig 1 Time Magazine,
4 Aug 03, Vol 162 no 5**

The uniqueness of early Buddhism, not only amongst religions, indeed, in practically all fields of human knowledge (until now), is that it teaches no creator-god, no need for reliance of a higher power, and no notion of an abiding soul. In fact, Buddhists are not required to *believe* anything, but to examine life for themselves in such a way that they would *wake up*.

The heart of early Buddhism is crystallized in the four noble truths, best translated into English in this way:

- | | |
|---|--|
| (1) <i>dukkha ariya,sacca</i> | the noble truth that is suffering, |
| (2) <i>dukkha,samudaya ariya,sacca</i> | the noble truth that is the arising of suffering, |
| (3) <i>dukkha,nirodha ariya,sacca</i> | the noble truth that is the ending of suffering, and |
| (4) <i>dukkha,nirodha,gāminī,paṭipadā ariya,sacca</i> | the noble truth that is the path to the ending of suffering. |
- (S 56.11/5:420-424) = SD 1.1

Buddhist practitioners, such as Stephen Batchelor, have pointed out that these truths are not propositions to be believed, for if they were, Buddhism would be just another religion like any other. Instead, they are truths to be *acted upon*.¹ Batchelor also speaks of how alienated self-centredness is often confused with individual freedom, and that

The aim of dharma practice is to free ourselves from this illusion of freedom. This is achieved by understanding the anguish that accompanies such delusive independence, and letting go of the confusion and craving that hold it in place. (1997:95)

Buddhism is, above all, a method of inquiry into self-discovery: it is an invitation to live an examined life. This inquiry, properly carried out through mindfulness practice and meditation, would reveal the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, the illusory nature of the self, and the emptiness of all phenomena, thus ending suffering.

¹ On the twelve ways of acting upon these truths, see Dhamma,cakka-p,pavattana S (S 56.11.9-12/5:422) = SD 1.1. See S Batchelor, *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, 1997:4 f.

This is probably one of the main reasons why many psychologists have turned to Buddhism in their efforts to understand the nature of the mind and consciousness.

Another important reason for scholars today find in Buddhism a complementary ally in their quest to understand the human mind is where Buddhism offers effective techniques to create altered states of consciousness while the West has the technological means to study them. Furthermore, Buddhism has a rich vocabulary of the mind, which Western psychology, philosophy and related fields find very operational.

Western academia's discovery of Buddhist psychology began over a century ago, and it is to this fascinating history that we now turn to.

2 William James

Those who relate the history of psychology and Buddhism would often begin with William James (1842-1910), and for good reason, and we shall discuss it here. James was a pioneering American psychologist and philosopher, who wrote influential books on the young science of psychology, educational psychology, the psychology of religious experience, and the philosophy of pragmatism.

In the twelve years that James took to write *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), he became interested in the existence of subconscious processes, and was instrumental in the founding of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1884. It was research into the subconscious that led James to the formation of the image of consciousness as a stream. Probably, he also drew on Buddhist teachings, as the term “stream of consciousness” is a literal English translation of the Pali *viññāṇa,sota*. He uses the phrase in *Principles of Psychology* (1890, ch 9) to indicate the flow of inner experience.

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as “chain” or “train” do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A “river” or a “stream” are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.* (William James, 1890 1:239)

James, in his landmark work, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), again breaks new ground by addressing the functional value of meditation. Considering his times, James shows a remarkable understanding of some higher aspects of Buddhist, even though in his footnote, he cites his source as a German book on Buddhism by the German Orientalist, CF Koeppen.²

The Buddhists use the word “samadhi” as well as the Hindus; but “dhyana” is their special word for higher states of contemplation. There seem to be four stages recognized in dhyana. The first stage comes through concentration of the mind upon one point. It excludes desire, but not discernment or judgment: it is still intellectual. In the second stage the intellectual functions drop off, and the satisfied sense of unity remains. In the third stage the satisfaction departs, and indifference begins, along with memory and self-consciousness. In the fourth stage the indifference, memory, and self-consciousness are perfected. [Just what “memory” and “self-consciousness” mean in this connection is doubtful. They cannot be the faculties familiar to us in the lower life.] Higher stages still of contemplation are mentioned—a region where there exists nothing, and where the meditator says: “There exists absolutely nothing,” and stops. Then he reaches another region where he says: “There are neither ideas nor absence of ideas,” and stops again. Then another region where, “having reached the end of both idea and perception, he stops finally.” This would seem to be, not yet Nirvana, but as close an approach to it as this life affords. (William James, 1902:246)

When the Sinhala anagarika (lay renunciant) Dharmapala (1864-1933),³ in 1903, attended one of James's lectures at Harvard, James was quoted as having said to him, “Take my chair. You are better equipped to lecture on psychology than I.”⁴ In 1904, after one of Dharmapala's meditation lectures there, on the topic of not-self,

² CF Koeppen, *Die Religion des Buddha*, Berlin, 1857, 1:585 ff.

³ Dharmapala attended the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, 1893: see 10.3 below.

⁴ Ananda Guruge (ed), *Return to Righteousness: A Collection of Speeches, Essays and Letters of Anagarika Dharmapala*. Sri Lanka: Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, 1965:681.

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James declared, “This is the psychology everybody will be studying twenty-five years from now.”⁵ But, as we shall see, he was too optimistic.

3 Fall and rise introspectionism [Section omitted: see <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.]

4 First-person approach

What do you discover when you look into your own mind? William James was confident: “*Every one agrees that we there discover states of consciousness*” he said. But a hundred years later we might be inclined to raise a few awkward questions. What does looking mean? Who is looking into what? Does the looking itself change what is seen? Does reporting destroy what we are trying to describe? Can everything be reported when some experiences are supposed to be ineffable? What are states of consciousness anyway? (Blackmore 2003:370)

Modern scholars have noted that it is not that introspection is a useless method for obtaining descriptive accounts of subjective experience, but rather that psychology needs to discriminate carefully between the description of subjective phenomena and causal-explanatory theorizing.⁶

In fact, we have many good examples of scientists looking inwards and reporting what they see. We have, for example, the methods of trained introspection developed by Wundt and Titchener, and James’ description of the “flights and perching” in the stream of consciousness,⁷ of getting up on a cold morning,⁸ and his studies of religious experiences. Various introspections on self-experience are found in Csikszentmihalyi’s studies of flow and various altered states of consciousness.⁹ Evan Thompson points out the facility of contemplative training as a research tool in the neuropsychology of consciousness, thus:

... it stands to reason that people vary in their abilities as observers and reporters of their own mental lives, and that these abilities can be enhanced through mental training of attention, emotion, and metacognition. Contemplative practice is a vehicle for precisely this sort of cognitive and emotional training. On the other hand, it stands to reason that mental training should be reflected in changes to brain structure, function, and dynamics. Hence, contemplative practice could become a research tool for developing better phenomenologies of subjective experience and for investigating the neural correlates of consciousness. (Thompson 2007:3)

So how does one cultivate such an accurate and useful first-person observation? A number of modern scientists, have examined this question.¹⁰ One of the clearest insight here is succinctly stated by David Chalmers:

The task of a science of consciousness, as I see it, is to systematically integrate two key classes of data into a scientific framework: *third-person data*, or about behavior and brain processes, and *first-person data*, or data about subjective experience....

Both third-person data and first-person data need explanation. An example is given by the case of musical processing. If we observe a subject listening to music, relevant third-person data include those concerning the nature of the auditory stimulus, its effects on the ear and the auditory cortex of the subject, various behavioral responses by the subject, and any verbal reports the subject might produce. All of these third-person data need explanation, but they are not all that needs explanation. As anyone who has listened to music knows, there is also a distinctive quality of subjective experience associated with listening to music. A science of music that explained

⁵ David Scott 2000: 335.

⁶ Hurlbert, RT; & CL Heavy, “Telling what we know: Describing inner experience.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 9, 2001:400-403.

⁷ W James, 1890 1:243.

⁸ W James, 1890 1:562.

⁹ Eg M Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. NY 1990.

¹⁰ See eg FJ Varela & J Shear (eds), *The View From Within*, 1999; DD Price & M Aydede, “The experimental use of introspection in the scientific study of pain and its integration with third-person methodologies: The experiential-phenomenological approach,” 2005:12.

the various third-person data listed above, but that did not explain the first-person data of musical experience, would be a seriously incomplete science of music. A complete science of musical experience must explain both sorts of phenomena, preferably within an integrated framework....

The lesson is that *as data*, first-person data are irreducible to third-person data, and vice versa. That is, third-person data alone provide an incomplete catalogue of the data that need explaining: if we explain only third-person data, we have not explained everything. Likewise, the first-person data alone are also incomplete. A satisfactory science of consciousness must admit both sorts of data, and must build an explanatory connection between them.

(Chalmers 2004:1-3, digital ed)

The Buddhist contemplative tradition provides excellent training in first person observation, and shows pragmatic refinement and theoretical sophistication.¹¹ Where James described introspection as simply “looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover” (1890 1:185), Buddhism teaches sustained attention to and analytic discernment of one’s own mental processes. Buddhist phenomenology distinguishes between attentional stability and instability due to the two hindrances of mental excitation and laxity, as explained by B Allan Wallace:

Thus, the first task in the Buddhist investigation of the mind is to so refine the attention and balance the nervous system that the mind is made properly functional, free of the detrimental influences of excitation and laxity. To do so, those two hindrances must be clearly identified in terms of one’s own experience. Excitation, the first obvious interference to observing the mind, is defined as an agitated, intentional mental process that follows after attractive objects,¹² and it is a derivative of compulsive desire.³¹³ Laxity, on the other hand, is an intentional mental process that occurs when the attention becomes slack and the meditative object is not apprehended with vividness and forcefulness. It is said to be a derivative of delusion.

(Wallace 1999:176)

Furthermore, Buddhist phenomenology discusses the metacognitive¹⁴ monitoring of these qualities of attention, and Buddhist epistemology looks at the degree to which a mental cognition ascertains or fails to ascertain its mental object, according to various conditions.¹⁵ According to this perspective, if the stream of thought and feeling is lucid, rather than turbulent or murky, then introspection, in James’ sense, will be much richer in its discoveries and report.¹⁶

5 Towards a contemplative science of mind

A dialogue is a two-way process, and in a successful dialogue both sides are somehow transformed. As mind science interacts with Buddhism learning about it and applying its mindfulness principles and methods, there is the process of what has been called “the buddhization of psychology.” And Buddhism, learning from the scientists, will have to fine-tune their religious approach, or even update or abandon outmoded teachings and practices: this is “the psychologization of Buddhism.” Or, in a more restricted, this latter expression would refer to the kind of Buddhism that the scientists are familiar with or accept.¹⁷ [10.3]

¹¹ Depraz, Varela and Vermersch, *On Becoming Aware: A pragmatics of experiencing*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamin Press, 2003

¹² Wallace 1998:168. A mental process is said to be *intentional*, not because one intends for it to occur, but because it has its own cognized object or objects. (Wallace’s fn)

¹³ Compulsive desire is a mental affliction that by its very nature superimposes a quality of attractiveness upon its object and yeats for it. It distorts the cognition of that object, for attachment exaggerates its admirable qualities and screens out its disagreeable qualities. Cf Guenther & Kawamura, 1975:96; Rabten 1979:74 f.

¹⁴ “Metacognitive” is the adj of **metacognition**, an important concept in cognitive theory, consisting of two basic and simultaneous processes: *monitoring your progress* as you learn, and *making changes and adapting* your strategies if you perceive you are not doing well enough. In simple terms, it involves learning about how we learn, thinking about how we think: see further: <http://coe.sdsu.edu/eet/Articles/metacognition/start.htm> or <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/fas/shuell/cep564/Metacog.htm>.

¹⁵ G Dreyfus 1997.

¹⁶ For a good summary of other technical benefits, see also Evan Thompson 2006:4 f.

¹⁷ See FA Metcalf 2002:353-361.

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Understandably, mind scientists are now more enthusiastic than ever to gain a deeper understanding of experience and consciousness by making contemplative phenomenology a partner in the scientific investigation of consciousness. Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991) have described this partnership approach as one of *mutual circulation*, a “back-and-forth communication between science and experience” (1991:237), where each domain of cognitive science, phenomenological philosophy, and contemplative mental training is distinct and has its own degree of autonomy—its own methods, motivations, and concerns—but they also overlap and share common areas. These domains, like circles, flow into and out of one another, so as to be mutually enlightening.¹⁸

An important catalyst in working towards a workable contemplative science of mind is not to take conventional categories, especially those of science and religion, for granted. Traditionally, in the West, ever since the rise of the scientific revolution in 16th century, science has become a secular discipline, often opposed to religion. In the East, however, science has generally always grown and worked in harmony with religion, even in the service of it. Piet Hut, in the Conclusion to *Buddhism and Science*,¹⁹ asks some relevant questions:

What can be the stage for a dialogue between Buddhism and science? Calling Buddhism a religion is a not very accurate description, and the very notion that science might produce a worldview is not correct, since there is still much that is left out from a scientific description. At this point it might be more prudent to start talking about mutual respect and inspiration between science and Buddhism, with an eye toward future more detailed discussions. One way of phrasing a possible middle ground between both is to start by viewing life as a laboratory, as an opportunity to examine ourselves and our world, using working hypotheses rather than doctrines.

(Piet Hut 2003:399)

This is not suggest that we stop viewing Buddhism as a religion, for there will be parts of Buddhism that are forever religious, especially for those who turn to it for personal or apotropaic way. Nor should science water down its measures and objectivity. The middle ground is the common desire to find some answers to a set of similar problems, such as those mentioned by Susan Blackmore (2003:370) [4]. Perhaps both sides would be able to see the same things if they share their insights, and help each other with the words and discipline to express these truths.

6 Meditation and the human brain

[6.1-6.3]: These sections may be downloaded from <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

6.4 HOW DOES MEDITATION AFFECT THE BRAIN? For decades, western researchers have tested monks and yogis and found their remarkable abilities to control respiration, brain waves, or core body temperature.²⁰ Scientists are now beginning to focus more on the normal rather than abnormal, by studying everyday adaptive qualities and their effects on health and wellbeing.²¹

In May 2001,²² a very significant meeting between science and religion in recent times took place when two key people—both studying the brain each in their own way—met and, in a sense, highlighted the growing dialogue and cooperation between mind science and Buddhist meditation. Richard Davidson, 54, director of the WM Keck Laboratory for Functional Brain Imaging and Behavior and University of Wisconsin professor of psychology and specialist in human emotions, took the Dalai Lama and his delegation on a tour of the new US\$10 million facility.²³

Scientists like Richard Davidson had sought the ideas and assistance of Buddhists like the Dalai Lama in their quest to answer such questions as: Can meditation be used to change brain circuits associated with emotions? Do different kinds of meditation practice produce distinct brain effects? Does the development of certain

¹⁸ For technical issues and difficulties of “mutual circulation,” see a summary by Evan Thompson 2006:6.

¹⁹ See esp Piet Hut’s “Conclusion: Life as a laboratory” in AB Wallace (ed), *Buddhism and Science*, 2003:399-415.

²⁰ Delmonte 1984.

²¹ Pollard 2004:30.

²² This section is mainly based on the article “The Dalai Lama and scientists unite to study meditation” (23 May 2001) by Dian Land, accessed 9 Nov 2006 from <http://www.news.wisc.edu/6205.html>.

²³ For related researches at [University of Wisconsin](http://www.news.wisc.edu/6205.html), see <http://psychz.psych.wisc.edu/web/news.html>.

brain areas through meditation impact physiological factors that may prevent illness? Which areas of the brain are developed in long-time practitioners of meditation? How long does it take before meditation produces significant brain changes?

Davidson's best-known work focusses on neuroplasticity, the capacity of the brain to develop and change throughout life, something Western science once thought impossible. By wiring up Tibetan Buddhist monk meditators, Davidson was able to demonstrate precisely how meditation alters brain function. His research effectively legitimizes the study of internal states of consciousness by linking them to the objective reality of electrical activity in the central nervous system.²⁴ Davidson and his team published their 1992 experiment and findings in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* in November 2004.²⁵ The research made its way into *The Wall Street Journal*,²⁶ and Davidson instantly became a celebrity scientist.²⁷

Davidson's studies on the Tibetan meditating monks yielded new and valuable data. It is possible, however, that the monks' positive emotional state is the result of a stress-free and ordered monastic lifestyle, or of a disciplined meditation regimen. However, that this need not be the case was shown with a series of studies with employees at Promega—a biotech firm in Wisconsin.

Prior to the study, it was established that the workers exhibited high levels of right-brain activity and reported feeling “stressed-out” and unhappy with their jobs. After eight weeks of meditation training and practice, the activity in the left prefrontal cortex increased significantly, and the workers reported feeling happier, with a renewed sense of enthusiasm for their life and work. This heightened activity persisted for at least four months after the experiment, when the subjects were tested again.

Moreover, the meditators who showed the greatest increase in prefrontal activity after training showed a correspondingly more robust ability to generate antibodies in response to receiving a flu vaccine. The findings, Jon Kabat-Zinn suggested, demonstrated qualitative shifts in brain activity after only two months of mindfulness meditation that mirror preliminary results seen in expert meditators like monks.²⁸

The control group showed no change. While more long-term research is required to eliminate confounding factors, the findings are very optimistic in that meditation practice can alter an individual's emotional setting towards the positive, which may then become the mind's default state.

[6.5-6.8]: These sections may be downloaded from <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

6.9 PROVEN BENEFITS OF MEDITATION. An imaging study led by Massachusetts General Hospital researchers showed that certain areas of the cerebral cortex, the outer layer of the brain, grew thicker in participants who were experienced in the Buddhist insight meditation. The cerebral cortex is associated with emotional, attention, interoceptive and sensory processes. The thickening of the cortical layer in the experienced meditators suggests that meditation can reduce the thinning of the cortex that typically occurs with aging.²⁹ Other important benefits of meditation attested by scientific researches include the following:

- Students who lost a night's sleep, after meditating, improved their performance due to better attention span and focus; meditation may give the sleepy brain an edge. (Time Magazine, 23 Jan 2006).

²⁴ See A Lutz et al 2007:61 f.

²⁵ See also R Davidson et al, “Alterations in brain and immune function produced by mindfulness meditation,” *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65 2003:564-570.

²⁶ See http://psyphz.psych.wisc.edu/web/News/All_in_Your_Head.html.

²⁷ See also “Is Buddhism good for your health?” (Stephen S Hall), *New York Times*, Sunday 12 Nov 2006: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?sec=health&res=940CE1DB173BF937A2575AC0A9659C8B63>. On the academic objection to Davidson's relationship with Buddhism (and the Dalai Lama), see Geirland 2006.

²⁸ R Davidson, Kabat-Zinn et al 2003; *Harvard University Gazette* 23 Jan 2006; A Lutz et al 2007:57.

²⁹ The increased thickness of the cortical layer is only about 4 to 8 thousandths of an inch. “These increases are proportional to the time a person has been meditating during their lives,” Lazar notes. “This suggests that the thickness differences are acquired through extensive practice and not simply due to differences between meditators and non-meditators.” (WJ Cromie, *Harvard University Gazette* 23 Jan 2006), <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/daily/2006/01/23-meditation.html>. A Lutz et al adds, “Increased cortical thickness could be due to greater arborization per neuron, increased glial volume, or increased regional vasculature, all of which are important for neural function.” (2007:30). Sara W Lazar et al, “Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness.” *Neuroreport* 16,17 November 28, 2005:1893-1897; USA Today 14 Nov 2005; *Medical Study News* 14 Nov 2005, http://www.news-medical.net/print_article.asp?id=14477; for Lazar interview, see <http://www.scicon.org/2006/02/meditation-may-increase-the-thickness-of-the-cortex/>.

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- Meditation make employees sharper, improves productivity, in large part by preventing stress-related illness and reducing absenteeism. (Time Magazine, 23 Jan 2006).³⁰
- Meditation not only activates the left prefrontal cortex (reflecting a positive mental state), but such subjects also showed a significantly greater antibody response to influenza vaccine (in other words, they responded very well to the immunization process).³¹
- Meditation causes healthy physiological changes: increase in blood-flow but reduced heart rate;³² lowered blood pressure;³³ muscles apparently stop producing carbon monoxide, decreased renal and hepatic blood flow, increased cerebral flow,³⁴ lower breathing rate (the body needs less oxygen).³⁵
- In some meditation (eg the Tibetan Tummo, or *caṇḍāli*, practice) heat is often a byproduct, and in some cases the meditator can voluntarily increase heat up to as much as 8°C in their toes and fingers.³⁶
- The mind can be trained through voluntary emotion regulation to be positive and happy.³⁷
- Even simple meditation brings one relaxation, self-awareness, greater self-control, greater awareness of one's senses, and deeper intuition within a nonreligious context.³⁸
- Vipassana meditation, a popular modern form of Buddhist meditation, is being successfully used in the rehabilitation of inmates in Indian prisons (especially at Tihar Central Prison, New Delhi, and at the Baroda Jail, Gujarat)³⁹ and in North America.⁴⁰

For Buddhism, the ultimate purpose of meditation is to free on from suffering and to gain spiritual liberation. However, meditation has its immediate and mundane benefits for those who need them. It can certainly create a more conducive environment for living. But meditation needs to be cultivated (*bhaveti*). Just as schoolchildren take PE, Davidson points out, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if they also attended a class called ME—mental education?”

7 The mind and the brain

7.1 IS THE BRAIN THE SEAT OF CONSCIOUSNESS?

In 1980,⁴¹ it is reported that John Lorber (1915-1996), neurology professor at the University of Sheffield, made an amazing discovery while treating one of the mathematics students for a minor ailment. A campus doctor, noticing that the student’s head was a little larger than normal, referred him to professor Lorber. The student in question was academically bright, with an IQ of 126 and was expected to graduate. Through a CAT-scan,⁴² however, Lorber discovered that the student’s cerebrum had been squeezed out by fluid pressure.

³⁰ On how Promega workers benefitted from meditation, see 7.2 above.

³¹ Rosenkranz et al 2003.

³² Delmonte 1984; Zeier 1984; Sudsuang et al 1991.

³³ Sudsuang et al 1991.

³⁴ Newberg et al 2001.

³⁵ Hirai 1974, Zeier 1984; Kesterson & Clinch 1989; Benson et al 1990.

³⁶ Benson et al 1982.

³⁷ RJ Davidson 2005.

³⁸ GF Kelly 1996: 49-66.

³⁹ **Kiran Bedi**, the former Inspector General of Prisons in New Delhi, successfully introduced Vipassana into these prisons. Their success has been so dramatic that the Indian Government has introduced Vipassana in all of India’s prisons. See <http://www.prison.dhamma.org/dtdv.htm>. See related film documentary, “Doing Time, Doing Vipassana,” winner of the Golden Spire Award (1998 San Francisco Film Festival), and winner of the 1998 NCCD [National Council on Crime and Delinquency] Pass Awards: <http://www.karunafilms.com/Dtdv/Dtdv.htm>.

⁴⁰ On the success of Vipassana meditation courses in various North American prisons, radio interview, Lucia Meijer’s article, history of Vipassana courses in American prisons, see <http://www.prison.dhamma.org/usprison.htm>. Listen to interview with **Lucia Meijer**, prison administrator of the North Rehabilitation Facility, a minimum-security of the King County jail system, Seattle, Washington: <http://www.prison.dhamma.org/lminterview.ram> (needs Windows Media player, Real Player or similar player).

⁴¹ This section is adapted from Roger Lewin, “Is your brain really necessary?” *Science* 210 12 Dec 1980:1232-1234, accessed on 7 Nov 2006 from http://www.alternativescience.com/no_brainer.htm. See also *Science Digest* 91,10 Oct 1983.

⁴² CAT = “Computed Axial Tomography” is the process of using computers to generate a three-dimensional image from flat (ie, two-dimensional) x-ray pictures, one slice at a time. Also called CT scan or body section roentgenography,

Instead of two hemispheres filling the cranial cavity, usually 4-5 mm thick, the student had less than 1 mm of cerebral tissue covering the top of his spinal column. The student was suffering from hydrocephalus, the condition in which the cerebrospinal fluid, instead of circulating around the brain and entering the bloodstream, is dammed up inside the skull. He had virtually no brain at all!

Normally, the condition is fatal in the first months of childhood. Even where an individual survives he or she is usually seriously handicapped. Somehow, though, the Sheffield student had lived a perfectly normal life and went on to gain an honours degree in mathematics.

This case is by no means as rare as it seems. In 1970, a New Yorker died at the age of 35. He had left school with no academic achievements, but had worked at manual jobs such as being a building janitor, and was popular in his neighbourhood. Tenants of the building where he worked described him as routinely doing his daily chores, such as tending the boiler, and reading the tabloid newspapers. When an autopsy was performed to determine the cause of his premature death he, too, was found to have practically no brain at all.

Professor Lorber had identified several hundred people who had very small cerebral hemispheres but who appeared to be normal intelligent individuals. Some of them he described as having “no detectable brain,” yet they had scored up to 120 on IQ tests.⁴³

No one knows how people with “no detectable brain” are able to function at all, let alone to graduate in mathematics, but there are a couple theories. One is that there is such a high level of redundancy of function in the normal brain that what little remains is able to adapt as a surrogate for the missing hemispheres. Another suggestion similarly refers to the popular notion that we only use a small percentage of our brains anyway—perhaps as little as only 10 per cent.

The trouble with these ideas is that recent research seems to contradict them. The functions of the brain have been mapped comprehensively and although there is some redundancy, there is also a high degree of specialization—the motor area and the visual cortex being highly specific, for instance. Similarly, the idea that we “only use 10 per cent of our brain” is a misunderstanding dating from research in the 1930s in which the functions of large areas of the cortex could not be determined and were dubbed “silent,” when, in fact, they are linked with important functions like speech and abstract thinking.

Lorber’s findings also remind us of the mystery of memory. At first, it was thought that memory would have some physical substrate in the brain, like the memory chips in a PC. But extensive investigation of the brain has surprisingly shown that memory is not located in any one area or in any specific substrate. As one eminent neurologist put it, “memory is everywhere in the brain and nowhere.”

But if the brain is not a mechanism for classifying and storing experiences and analysing them to enable us to live our lives then what on earth is the brain for? And where is the seat of human intelligence? Where is the mind?

One of the few biologists to propose a radically new approach to these questions was Cambridge-trained biologist, Rupert Sheldrake. In his book *A New Science of Life* (1999), Sheldrake rejected the idea that the brain is a warehouse for memories and suggested it is more like a radio receiver for tuning into the past. Memory is not a recording process in which a medium is altered to store records, but a journey that the mind makes into the past via the process of morphic resonance. Such a “radio” receiver would require far fewer and less complex structures than a warehouse capable of storing and retrieving a lifetime of data. This may sound like science fiction, but it is difficult to find a better explanation.

7.2 THE MIND IS NOT JUST THE BRAIN. One question that both western psychology and contemporary Buddhist psychology seek to answer is the one regarding the seat of consciousness: Where is consciousness located? Is the mind located in the brain? Is the mind the function of the brain? Let us begin with the basics. What is the brain? The brain can be defined as that portion of the vertebrate central nervous system that is enclosed within the cranium (the skull), connected to the spinal cord, and composed of gray matter and white matter. It acts as the primary centre for the regulation and control of bodily activities, receiving and interpreting sensory impulses, and transmitting information and instructions to the muscles and bodily organs.⁴⁴

⁴³ See also Brahmavamso 2001:3.

⁴⁴ For interactive 3-D MRI/PET view of brain: <http://www.med.harvard.edu/AANLIB/cases/caseNA/pb9.htm>.

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Buddhism, however, has never regarded the brain as the seat of consciousness, thought, memory, and emotion. As Hamilton notes

Nowhere in the early texts is “mind” in this context equated with the brain, and, in spite of its materialistic understanding of the form-*khandha*, the Theravāda tradition as a whole has not interpreted mind to mean brain. As explained in Chapter Two [“The Indian Context”], in the early texts “mind” seems to refer to the most preliminary stage of filtering and organizing of experiential data according to whether it is seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched or non-sensory (that is, abstract). (Hamilton 2000:167 n27)

Nowhere in the Canon does the Buddha assign a specific seat of consciousness, as those of the other senses. There was a popular cardiac theory of his time, one that was evidently upheld by the Upaniṣads, where we find that the breath is associated with “soul,” with death, and with the heart as well.

The Visuddhimagga clearly places the mind (*mano*), specifically in the heart, in the form (*rūpa*) aggregate: ‘The heart-basis has the characteristic of being the [material] support for the mind-element and for the mind-consciousness element’ (*hetu, mano, viññāṇa, dhātūnaṃ, nissaya, lakkhaṇaṃ hadaya, vatthu*, Vism 14.60/447). The characteristics of the mind are then shown, with its function (*rasa*) being to “subserve” (*ādhāraṇa*) and the “manifestation” (*paccupaṭṭhāna*) being “the carrying of them” (*ubbahana*).

Apparently, the Buddha knows of this cardiac theory, but nowhere in the Suttas do we find him referring to it. Even in the Vibhaṅga, in the definition of the mind-element and mind-consciousness-element, the word *hadaya* is used in a purely mental, and not physical, sense (Vism 88 f). The brain (*mattha, luṅga*), moreover, seems to have been added as the thirty-second part of the body in the Paṭisambhidā, magga (Pm 1.7). The earliest canonical allusion to the seat of consciousness is found in the Paṭṭhāna, even then very obliquely, almost cryptically, mentioned as “depending on that material form” (*yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya*, Paṭ 1.4), without ascertaining whether *rūpa* is the heart (*hadaya*) or the brain (*matthaluṅga*). However, for commentators like Buddhaghosa and Anuruddha,⁴⁵ the seat of consciousness is clearly the heart, despite the fact that the Buddha has never accepted the popular cardiac theory of his time. This has led SHJ Sugunasiri to conclude that

No doubt the much more detailed characterization of the heart in the Visuddhimagga speaks to the creative genius of Buddhaghosa that Ñāṇamoli [Vism 497 n26] talks about. But the parallel between the specific characterization of the heart in relation to the lotus and the placing of “the mind-element and the mind-consciousness element” in the blood that is in the hollow of the heart are too close to be dismissed as being merely coincidental or accidental. The inevitable conclusion, then, has to be that the origin of the view of the seat of consciousness as being in the heart is at least partly Upaniṣadic. (Sugunasiri 1995:417)

Sugunasiri strongly rejects the identification of the heart-base as the seat of consciousness as “a gross misrepresentation of the Buddha,” and concludes, by way of the commonly accepted Buddhist view today, that “the mind is extended throughout the body, through its neuroskeletal system” and that

the mind is in every one of over several trillion cells in one of us, residing in each DNA molecule and in instantaneous communication with every other DNA, with research assigning this function of communication to “neuropeptides” or “information molecules.” (Sugunasiri 1995:423)

Unfortunately, Sugunasiri only quotes from writers of popular psychology in popular psychology magazine articles.⁴⁶

7.3 THE MIND IS TRAINABLE. In the early texts, we are often told that the Buddha, when he teaches, would first ensure that the mind of the listener or the audience is well prepared by the gradual teaching (*ānupubbī, kathā*). On other words, the Buddha prepares the listening mind the disciple before going on the higher truths. The well known stock passage found in the early texts runs as follows:

⁴⁵ See Abhs:BRS 6.3/239(5).

⁴⁶ See a related story, “What is the biggest thing in the world?” [10.3].

Then the Blessed One gave him a gradual instruction—that is to say, he spoke on giving (*dāna*), on moral virtue (*sīla*) and on the heavens (*sagga*); he explained the danger, worthlessness, and impurity of sensual pleasures (*kām’ādīnava*); and the advantages of renunciation (*nekkhamm’ānisamsa*). When the Blessed One perceived that the listener’s mind was prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid, then he explained to him the teaching peculiar to the Buddhas, that is to say: suffering, its arising, its ending, and the path.⁴⁷

Only when the listener’s mind is “prepared, pliant, free from obstacles, elevated and lucid” (*kalla,cittam mudu,-cittam vinīvaraṇa,cittam udagga,cittam pasanna,cittam*), does the Buddha teach the four noble truths and deeper teachings. The Commentaries explain the key terms as follows:

- “prepared mind” (*kalla,cittam*) — “a healthy mind” (*aroga,cittam*) (DA 3:92);
- “pliant mind” (*mudu,cittam*) — “a mind free of stiffness, rid of ill will by way of lovingkindness” (*vyāpāda,vigamena mettā,vasena akathina,cittam*) (UA 283);
- “free from hindrances” — “an unobstructed mind due to non-agitation by the ridding of restlessness and remorse” (*udhacca,kukkucca,vigamena avikkhipanato na pihita,cittam*) (UA 283; PmA 1:232);
- “elevated mind” (*udagga,cittam*) — “not faint-hearted, supported by the ridding of sloth and torpor” (*thīna,middha,vigamena sampaggaha,vasena alīna,cittam*) (UA 283);
- “lucid mind” (*pasanna,cittam*) — “the mind that is focused on right practice by the ridding of doubt” (*vicikicchā.vigamena sammā,paṭipattiyā adhimutta,cittam*) (UA 283); “a mind brightened by faith by way of karmic fruit, by way of faith in the three jewels” (*ratana-t,taya,saddhāya kamma,phala,saddhāya ca pasanna,mānasam*) (ItA 1:73).

Basically, we see here that the Buddha, first of all, clears away any immediate issues troubling the listener, so that his mind is healthy (*aroga*), and other negative states, including the temporary suppression of unwholesome sense-desires (*kāma-c,chanda*) that is the basis for ill will (*vyāpāda*) and the other four mental hindrances (sloth and torpor, restless and remorse, and doubt). Such a clear and light mind is, in fact ready for dhyanic meditation, too.

In the early texts, the seat of consciousness is never located in the brain, nor is it in the heart (although post-Buddha teachings posit it so). In fact, consciousness or the mind is, in a broad sense, not located “anywhere, but is everywhere.” Buddhism sees the mind and consciousness as evolving processes: those of the spiritually undeveloped, they are “small” (*paritta*), in the highly evolved beings, they are “exalted” or “great” (*mahaggata*), even if such experiences are attained temporarily through dhyana, as Sujato notes:

Here again, as in the contemplation of feelings, a distinctive facet of all the satipatthana material is the direct experience of the “exalted” [*mahaggata*] mind, the “unexcelled” [*anuttara*] mind, the mind “in samadhi” [*samāhita*], the “released” [*vimutta*] mind—all synonyms for jhana. (Sujato 2004b:150)

The terms Sujato refers to here comes from the contemplation of the mind (*cittānupassanā*) in the Sati-*paṭṭhāna Suttas* (D 22; M 10), which is the locus classicus for the Buddhist view of the mind, and the formula is a stock passage found through the four Nikāyas:⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Atha kho bhagavā... ānupubbīkatham kathesi seyyathidam. Dān,akatham sīla,katham sagga,katham kāmānam ādīnavam okāram saṃkilesam nekkhamme ca ānisamsam pakāsesi. Yadā bhagavā aññāsi...kalla,cittam mudu,cittam vinīvaraṇa,cittam udagga,cittam pasanna,cittam, atha yā buddhānam sāmukkaṃsika dhamma,desanā, tam pakāsesi: dukkham samudayam nirodham maggam.* (The VRI read *ānupubbīkatham* as either *anupubbim katham* or as *ānupubbim katham*.) See Vinaya (V 1:15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 23, 37, 181, 225, 237, 242, 243, 248; 2:156, 181, 182 x2); Ambaṭṭha S (D 1:110); Kūṭa,danta S (D 1:148); Mahāpadānā S (D 2:41, 43, 44); Upāli S (M 1:379); Brahmāyū S (M 2:145); Sīha S (A 4:186); Ugga S 1 (A 4:209); Ugga S 2 (A 4:213); Suppabuddha Kuṭṭhi S (U 49). See also Udāyī S (A 3:184).

⁴⁸ *Sāmañña,phala* S (D 2.209/1:79 f); Subha S (D 10.21/1:209); Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna S (D 22.12/2:299) = SD 13.2; Satipaṭṭhāna S (M 10.34/1:59) = SD 13.3; Ākaṅkheyya S (M 6.16/1:34); Mahā Sīhanāda (M 12.8/1:69); Mahā Vaccha-gotta S (M 73.21/1:495); Mahā Sakul’udāyī S (M 77.33/2:19); Gopaka Moggallāna S (M 108.20/3:12); Kāya,gata,sati S (M 119.39/3:98); Susima S (S 12.70/2:122); Jhānābhīṇṇā S (S 16.9/2:213); Taṇha-k,khaya S (S 46.26/5:86 f); Nibbedha,bhāgiya S (S 46.28/5:88); Pubba S (S 51.11/5:263); Pamsu,dhovana S (A 3.100/1:255); Upakkilesa S (A 5.23/3:18);

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And how, bhikshus, does a monk dwell observing the mind⁴⁹ in the mind?

Here, bhikshus,⁵⁰

- (1) a monk is aware of a lustful mind as ‘Lustful mind,’
or, he is aware of a lust-free mind as ‘Lust-free mind.’
- (2) Or, he is aware of a hating mind as ‘Hating mind,’
or, he is aware of a hate-free mind as ‘Hate-free mind.’
- (3) Or, he is aware of a deluded mind as ‘Deluded mind,’
or, he is aware of an undeluded mind as ‘Undeluded mind.’
- (4) Or, he is aware of a contracted mind as ‘Contracted mind,’⁵¹
or, he is aware of a distracted mind as ‘Distracted mind.’⁵²
- (5) Or, he is aware of an exalted [great] mind as ‘Exalted mind [Great mind],’⁵³
or, he is aware of an unexalted mind as ‘Unexalted mind.’
- (6) Or, he is aware of a surpassable mind as ‘Surpassable mind,’
or, he is aware of an unsurpassable mind as ‘Unsurpassable mind.’⁵⁴
- (7) Or, he is aware of a concentrated mind as ‘Concentrated mind,’
or, he is aware of an unconcentrated mind as ‘Unconcentrated mind.’
- (8) Or, he is aware of a liberated mind as ‘Liberated mind,’
or, he is aware of an unliberated mind as ‘Unliberated mind.’

Of special interest here is the term *mahaggata*, “become great,” here referring to the mind during meditation. It has become great in two senses. Firstly, the “pliable (*mudu*) and workable (*kammañña*)” mind⁵⁵ has broken the barriers of the “normal” limited body-centric consciousness so that it enjoys dhyanic bliss, which is a supra-sensory or extrasensory experience because all the physical senses and consciousness as we know it have shut down. Secondly, the mind has “become great” in the sense that, if properly directed, it can cultivate various supernormal powers such as recollection of past lives (retro-cognition) and mind-reading (telepathy).⁵⁶

More importantly, on a spiritual level, the mind is free from thought, especially the kind of thinking that harps of issues and proliferates:

Becoming unrestricted by the boundaries of manifoldness [*papañca*], one sees that *all* manifoldness, including the grossest density of form, is correlated with ignorance [M 1:59]. And one is able there to release, so to speak, one’s dense body from its restrictions. (Sue Hamilton, 2000:197)

7.4 THE MIND CAN GROW BEYOND THE BODY. Only when the mind has transcended the world of the senses (*kāmāvacara*) that it can attain dhyanic bliss.⁵⁷ However, those reborn in such states (called *rūpāvacara*) are made of subtle form (*rūpa*) (such as light), and when this subtle form is further transcended, the formless realm (*arūpāvacara*), where consciousness become more pervasive, yet increasingly subtle.

Pañcāṅgika S (A 6.28/3:29); Āhuneyya S 2 (A 6.2/3:280); Gāvī Upamā S (A 9.35/4:421); Āhuneyya S (A 10.97/5:199); Pm 1:113, 2:234.

⁴⁹ “Mind,” *citta*, also tr as “mind consciousness” (Brahmavamso). See SD 13 Introd (5C).

⁵⁰ See SD 13 Introd (9b): “Mental noting,” & Gethin 2001:46.

⁵¹ “Contracted mind,” *saṅkhattam cittaṃ*, ie “contracted” or “compressed” due to sloth and torpor.

⁵² “Distracted mind,” *vikkhattam cittaṃ*, ie “distracted” by restlessness and worry.

⁵³ “Exalted mind,” *mahaggatam cittaṃ*, ie “exalted” through having reached a dhyana or a formless attainment.

Properly speaking, only the first 4 form dhyanas are called *jhāna*, while the higher four formless bases are called *samāpatti* (attainment); and that the 4 formless attainments actually belong to the 4th form dhyana since they all possess the same two factors (ie equanimity and samadhi).

⁵⁴ Unsurpassable (*anuttaram*) mind, probably synonymous with “developed” mind. See D:W 592 n667 & Anālayo 2005 ad M 1:59.

⁵⁵ See Paṇihita Acchanna Vagga (A 1.5/1:8) = SD 8.3(4).

⁵⁶ See Brahmavamso 2006:98.

⁵⁷ See Dhyana = SD 8.4.

Up to the last few decades the progress of psychology specifically, and science in general, can be said to have been impeded by its own methodology, that of third-person observation. One cannot learn much from *observing* another meditation; even the EEG (electro-encephalogram) readings measures only certain of the more “external” aspects of the still mind. It is like observing someone in love, but not really knowing how it really feels.

Similarly, meditation is a *first-person* experience, and has to be experienced directly: it is for one to “come and see” (*ehi,passika*). There is as yet no way dhyanas can be measured; in other words, there is no way scientifically useful reports could be written about such experiences: they cannot be shared. The next four levels of deep meditation, the four formless attainments (*arūpa samāpatti*) are even more profound. Brahmavamso list the following characteristics of the formless attainments:

- o The mind remains inaccessible to the world of the five senses and all knowledge of the body.
- o The mind persists in rock-like stillness, incapable of forming any thought or making any plan, for long periods of time.
- o Comprehension is so frozen that one can hardly make sense, at the time, of one’s experience. Comprehension is achieved after emerging.
- o The pure equanimity and mindfulness of the fourth jhāna remains as a foundation for each formless attainment. (Brahmavamso 2006:169)

The mind in the formless attainments perceives only the *mind-base*, very refined mind-objects. Here one feels as if one has transcended time itself:

Within the point of absolute now, time is without edge, undefined, empty, and immeasurable. It is infinite and nothing at the same time. It is unlimited (*anantā*). The experience of one-pointedness in time, seen early in the meditation, can be the key to understanding the simultaneous sense of infinity and emptiness in the immaterial [formless] attainments. (Brahmavamso 2006:169 f)

A brief definition of the four formless attainments will show that the mind is able to transcend space and time:⁵⁸

- (1) The attainment of unlimited space. Space is perceived as being infinite, empty, immeasurable and undefined. What usually limits space, that is, material form is perceived as being absent. Space has lost its meaning. This perception remains uninterruptedly for long periods as a state of profound contentment.
- (2) The attainment of unlimited consciousness. Within the attainment of unlimited lies the mind-base of unlimited consciousness. When the mind attends to this subtle nature of unlimited space, it totally disappears and is replaced by the perception of absolute one-pointed consciousness, which simultaneously feels infinite, empty, immeasurable and undefined. This perception remains uninterruptedly for a longer period.
- (3) The attainment of nothingness. Within the attainment of unlimited consciousness lies the mind-base of no-consciousness or nothingness: consciousness has lost its meaning. One has attained the one-pointedness of nothingness. This perception remains uninterruptedly for even longer.
- (4) The attainment of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Within the attainment of nothingness, lies the mind-base of not even nothingness. If the mind is able to notice this feature, then even the perception of nothingness disappears, and one cannot really say whether there is consciousness or not. Subtle as this state is, it is still a perception.⁵⁹ (A 9.42)

The subtlety of these four formless attainment, indeed, even of the four form dhyanas, are beyond the capacity of even the most sophisticated machines we have today to measure. There is only one way to observe these states: it is to experience them first-hand. There will come a time when there are scientists who are able to experience such states and to describe them meaningfully to other scientists. That would be a time when the dividing line between being a scientist and a spiritual teacher, at least in terms of mental cultivation, would be significantly blurred. That is a time when Buddhist psychology would become almost indistinguishable from mind science; but it will be a profoundly new kind of science, one very different from that of our own times. It

⁵⁸ Summarized from Brahmavanso 2006:170-172.

⁵⁹ A 9.42.11/4:451 = SD 33.3.

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might be asked then if Buddhism as we know it today would be relevant any more, and this could well be a sign of the advent of the Dharma-ending age, that is, except for those who truly hold the stillness at the centre of their lives.

7.5 THE GREAT SELF. Even on a worldly karmic level, says the *Loṇa,phala Sutta* (A 3.99), when one's mind is "immeasurable" (*appamāṇa*), that is, one is not "small-minded," even small moral lapses would not trouble one beyond itself.

(a) Bhikshus, what sort of person who has done only a slight evil karma that might take him to hell?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person is of undeveloped body,⁶⁰ undeveloped moral virtue, undeveloped mind, undeveloped wisdom: he is (mentally) limited (*paritta*), with a small self (*app'ātuma*),⁶¹ dwelling with little suffering.⁶²

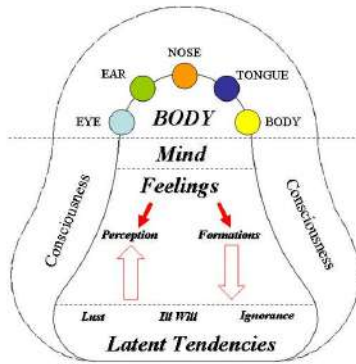
Such a person, bhikshus, is one who has done only a slight evil karma that might take him to hell.

(b) Bhikshus, what sort of person is one who has done that same slight evil karma that is felt right here and now—not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all?

Here, bhikshus, a certain person who is developed body,⁶³ developed moral virtue, developed mind, developed wisdom: he is mentally unlimited (*aparitta*), with a great self (*mah'attā*),⁶⁴ dwelling immeasurable (*appamāṇa*).

Such a person, bhikshus, is one who has done that same slight evil karma that is felt right here and now—not in the least does it seem to be abundant at all.

(A 3.99.2/1:249) = SD 3.5



A person with a "great self" might still commit a small evil karma but he does not experience its karmic fruits in hell (nor any of the lower states). In other words, this refers to a stream-winner, or a once-returner, or a non-returner: an arhat has already transcended rebirth.

One can transform the "small" self into a "great" one through such practices as the cultivation of lovingkindness (*mettā*) or of mindfulness (*sati*). The importance of the cultivation of lovingkindness is attested by the *Brahma, vihāra Sutta* (A 10.208),⁶⁵ where a meditator whose mind has "grown great" and "immeasurable" through lovingkindness knows:

Formerly my mind was limited (*paritta*) and undeveloped, but now my mind is boundless and well developed. Any karma done in a limited way⁶⁶ neither remains nor persists there.

Fig 7.5 The consciousness iceberg

©Piya Tan, 2006. Artwork by Vincent Kwan, Singapore.

⁶⁰ "Undeveloped in body," *abhāṇita, kāya*, here meaning "resorting to self-torture, not taking care of one's body or health". See *Intro* above.

⁶¹ "Small self" (*app'ātumā*) or "insignificant self" (Harvey 1995:25, 56).

⁶² *Appa, dukkha, vihārī*. Comy: *Appakena pi pāpena dukkha, vihārī*, "he dwells in suffering because of the little evil" (AA 2:361). This phrase is clearly to be contrasted with *appamāṇa, vihārī* below.

⁶³ "Undeveloped body," *abhāṇita, kāyo*. Comy to *Pinḍola Bhāra, dvāja S* (S 35.127/4:111) glosses it as *abhāṇita, pañca, dvārika, kāyā*, "undeveloped in the body that are the five (sense-)doors," ie lacking in sense-restraint (SA 2:395).

⁶⁴ On the "great self," see SD 3.5 *Intro*.

⁶⁵ A 10.208/5:299. See *Brahma, vihāra S* (A 10.208) in SD 2.10 (this volume).

⁶⁶ "Karma done in a limited way," or "limited karma," *pamāṇa, kattaṃ kammaṃ*, as in *Tevijja S* (D 1:251/13.77) & *Saṅkha (dhama) S* (S 4:322/ 42.8). AA here says that "limited karma" refers to sense-sphere karma (*kāmmāvacara, kamma*), and "unlimited karma" (*appamāṇa, kattaṃ kammaṃ*) refers to form-sphere karma. It is called 'unlimited' because it is done by transcending the limit, for it is developed by way of specified, unspecified and directional pervasion." SA on *Saṅkha S* explains that "When (simple) lovingkindness is said, this can be interpreted either as access concentration or absorption, but when it is qualified as 'liberation of mind' (*ceto, vimutti*) it definitely means absorption (*jhāna*). The point is that if a person masters the "liberation of mind by lovingkindness" at the level of absorption, the karmic potential of this absorption attainment will take precedence over sense-sphere karma and will generate rebirth into the form realm. See *Vism* 309-311/9.49-58. (S:B 1149 n346; A:B 315 n73)

Instructions in the practice of mindfulness with an immeasurable mind is given in the Mahā Taṇha,saṅkhaya Sutta (M 38), where it is stated that one who feels neither attraction nor repulsion for any of the six sense-objects, and who has mindfulness of the body, lives “with a mind that is immeasurable (*appamāṇa,cetaso*),” in contrast to someone with the opposite qualities who dwells “with a mind that is limited (*paritta,cetaso*)” (M 38.40/1:270).

In this diagram [Fig 7.5] we see a diagrammatic representation of consciousness as comprising the conscious “public” aspects (above the “water”), the preconscious level where feeling operates, the subconscious depths where the latent tendencies lie, and also around one’s whole being. While the “inner” conscious aspects can become more focused and clear, the “outer” consciousness can grow beyond oneself and the universe is the limit. One’s mind, in other words, is as far as where it can reach.

Nevertheless, due to the non-dogmatic and pragmatic nature of Buddhist inquiry, such questions pose no serious problem at all. While stating that he would change Buddhist beliefs should science demonstrate any of them to be false, the Dalai Lama⁶⁷ still insists that humans cannot be “reduced to nothing than biological machines, the products of pure chance in the random combination of genes, with no purpose other than the biological imperative of reproduction” (2005). This is of course a remarkable declaration of Buddhist faith, a contemporary lion-roar. In the same spirit, we see the commentators attempting to “update” certain Buddhist teachings and assumption, even if some of these innovations themselves need further updating to work for our own times.

8. Some meditation issues

8.1 IS GOD IN THE BRAIN? Michael Persinger, a professor of neuroscience at Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, conducted experiments where volunteers wore a helmet-like device fitted with a set of magnets, and ran a weak electromagnetic signal across the brain hemispheres, specifically the temporal lobes [Fig 7.3]. Four in five people, he said, reported a “mystical experience, the feeling that there is a sentient being or entity standing behind or near” them, or what Persinger call a “sensed presence.” Some wept, some felt God had touched them, others felt fear and talked of demons and evil spirits. “That’s in the laboratory,” said Persinger. “They know they are in the laboratory. Can you imagine what would happen if that happened late at night in a pew or mosque or synagogue?” According to Persinger, his research showed that “religion is a property of the brain, only the brain and has little to do with what’s out there.”

Those who believe that the new science disproves the existence of God say they are holding up a mirror to society about the destructive power of religion. They say that religious wars, fanaticism and intolerance spring from dogmatic beliefs that particular gods and faiths are unique, rather than facets of universal brain chemistry.⁶⁸ During a PBS interview, Persinger clarifies the situation in a positive way:

The fact that we can now understand the brain basis to faith simply tells us that we can understand it more effectively. It doesn’t make it go away any more than when you look at the brain and you are seeing a sunset, and it is beautiful. It doesn’t take the beauty away, it just allows you to understand more of it. (PBS 2001)

It is important to note here that Persinger’s point is *not* that the brain is the source of the God-idea, but rather that such religious experiences tend to stimulate certain areas of the brain. Not all Persinger’s subjects reported that they experienced “God,” but most of them reported some kind of experience related to the kind of religious beliefs they held (or did not hold). The BBC reported in 2003 that when Persinger tested his magnetic helmet on Richard Dawkins,⁶⁹ one of Britain’s most renowned atheists, in a session that 40 minutes, Dawkins

⁶⁷ For the Dalai Lama’s official biography and work, see <http://www.tibet.com/DL/index.html>.

⁶⁸ For a discussion, see <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week510/cover.html#right>.

⁶⁹ Clinton Richard Dawkins (1941-) is an eminent British ethologist, evolutionary scientist, popular science writer, and Oxford University professor. His 1976 book *The Selfish Gene* popularised the [gene-centric view of evolution](#) and coined term [meme](#), which became the basis for [memetics](#): see SD 26.3.

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found that the magnetic fields around his temporal lobes only affected his breathing and his limbs, but did not find god.⁷⁰

Scientists like radiologist Andrew Newberg⁷¹ have experimented on what happens in the brain during moments of faith. He worked with Buddhist scientist, Michael Baime,⁷² to study the latter's brain during meditation. By injecting radioactive tracers into Baime's bloodstream as he reached meditative focus, Newberg used a brain scanner to image the brain at the climax of his religious experience. [Fig 8.1]

Baime's blood-flow patterns not only activated his temporal lobes but the parietal lobes appeared almost completely to have shut down. The parietal lobes give us our sense of time and place. Without them, we may lose our sense of self. Followers of many of the world's religions often regard a sense of personal insignificance (a sort of "emptying of the self") and oneness with a deity as something to strive for. Newberg's work explains a neurological basis for such religious experiences.⁷³

8.2 TEMPORAL LOBE EPILEPSY. Why do we have religious beliefs? Might religion actually be a fundamental part of us like the need for sleep, food or sex? Is God in the brain? [8.1]. Such are the questions that neurotheology seek to answer. Neurotheology,⁷⁴ also known as biotheology, is the study of the neural basis of religion and spirituality. Neurotheology deals with the neurological and evolutionary basis for subjective experiences traditionally regarded as religious.

In recent times, "neurotheology" was used by Andrew Newberg [8.1], and others to describe the scientific study of religious experiences. Recently, it has been used by others to refer to specific religious perspectives, exploring brain states occurring as highly charged emotional and mental experiences that are universally regarded as "spiritual," "religious" or "mystical." Neurotheology has received renewed interest with the current encounter between eastern contemplative disciplines (such as Buddhist meditation) and the western mind sciences.

Some researchers claimed to have found evidence of a "God module" or "God spot" in the brain. In particular, they find an association between epileptic seizures in the left temporal lobe [Fig 7.3] and feelings of ecstasy sometimes described as a "sensed presence" (Persinger) of God [8.1].⁷⁵ This scientific notion is based on a long known fact, namely, that some subjects affected by temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE) report having intense spiritual experiences during their seizures, with some claiming that God spoke to them directly. Such patients would often become preoccupied with spiritual issues even during interictal (seizure-free) periods.

It is possible that the great names in religion, especially the God-centre ones, such as Moses, Ezekiel, Paul on the road to Damascus, and Joan of Arc had epileptic episodes which they attributed to religious experience.

⁷⁰ Persinger explained that there is a continuum in temporal lobe sensitivity and that Dawkins had temporal lobe sensitivity that was very much lower than most people (BBC 2003). **A more recent finding** was that of a 22-year-old woman, who, during a presurgical evaluation for epilepsy treatment, had her left temporoparietal junction undergo focal electrical stimulation, as a result of which she perceived an illusory figure that closely "shadowed" changes in the patient's body position and posture, but she did not recognize that the figure was an illusion of her own body (like many deluded schizophrenic patients). The researchers concluded that the patient was perceiving her own body. It is notable, the research team says, that hyperactivity in the temporoparietal cortex of patients with schizophrenia may lead to the misattribution of their own actions to other people. "Our findings may be a step towards understanding the mechanisms behind psychiatric manifestation such as paranoia, persecution and alien control." (Shahar Arzy et al 2006)

⁷¹ **Andrew Newberg** is an assistant professor in the department of Radiology in the Division of Nuclear Medicine, and an instructor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. With Eugene d'Aquili & Vince Rause, he co-authored *Why God Won't Go Away: Brain Science and the Biology of Belief*, NY: Ballantine Books, 2001. See Newberg et al 2001; also Newberg & Iversen 2003. For his works, see <http://www.andrewnewberg.com/pub.asp>.

⁷² **Michael J Baime** is a meditation expert who runs a stress management program out of the University of Pennsylvania. Baime is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. He has practiced meditation since the age of 14. See Newberg et al 2001 (which he co-authors).

⁷³ See also Alex Hankey 2006.

⁷⁴ The term was first used by English author Aldous Huxley (1894-1963), living in California, in his utopian novel, *Island* (1961), where he used it mainly in a philosophical sense.

⁷⁵ W Penfield records how stimulating the temporal lobe of epileptics made them have out-of-body experiences (OBE) (1955:458). See also Blackmore 2003:360.

Understandably, it has been called the “sacred disease” since the times of the Greek physician Hippocrates (c460–c370 BCE), often regarded as the father of Western medicine. Amongst famous literary figures who probably had the disorder were the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890), the Danish existentialist philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), and the English mathematician, writer and Anglican clergyman Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, better known as Lewis Carroll (1832-1898).

[Epilepsy box]: May be downloaded from <http://dharmafarer.googlepages.com>.

One of the most convincing studies in the TLE in a religious context is that American neurologist Gregory Holmes. He has studied the life of Ellen G White (1827-1915), the American religious leader whose prophetic ministry was instrumental in founding the Sabbatarian Adventist movement that led to the rise of the Seventh-day Adventist church.⁷⁶ Various neurologists, like Holmes, have commented that White’s traumatic brain injury caused her partial complex seizures and hallucinations, and as a result she was cataleptic and hysterical. They suggest that her visions were actually hallucinations and delusions during non-motor seizures which led her to believe that she had visions of God.⁷⁷

As we have seen, experiments by Persinger [8.1], using transcranial magnetic stimulators showed that one could produce these kinds of effects in subjects with no history of temporal lobe seizures. One researcher who stimulated his own temporal lobes, reported being amazed at having the experience of God for the first time in his life. As may be expected, while some people have taken this brain area to be the seat of a special human faculty for experiencing the divine, others see it as confirmation that such religious experiences are delusions caused by electrical disturbances in the brain.

At the University of California in San Diego, neuroscientist VS Ramachandran noticed that a disproportionate number of patients, about a quarter, with temporal lobe epilepsy, reported having deeply moving religious experiences. He discusses his research on the neural basis of religious experience in the same way as he does his work with people who feel phantom limbs or who see cartoon characters in a visual blind spot.⁷⁸ This leads us to the question: Did God create the brain, or did the brain create God?

[8.3 RELIGION IS MORE THAN MEDITATION.]

8.4 DOWNSIDE OF MEDITATION. The history of the meeting between western science and eastern meditation has not always been smooth. In a sense, the whole process is like a lotus rising from the mud of false and weak systems, a veritable evolutionary process of the survival of the fittest system by scientific selection.⁷⁹ By the mid-1970s, clinical reports of negative outcomes of various mantra meditation programs began to appear in the psychiatric literature.⁸⁰ These included people becoming unemployable because they were unable to control their mental states (eg everything around them seemed unreal), and more serious problems ranging from depression and agitation to psychosis.

Leon Otis, a psychologist at Stanford Research Institute, found that adverse outcomes were related to how long that person had meditated using such methods.⁸¹ Michael Persinger, neuroscientist at the Laurentian Uni-

⁷⁶ Gregory Holmes & Delbert Hodder, “Ellen G White and the Seventh Day Adventist Church: Visions or Partial Complex Seizures?” *Journal of Neurology* 31,4 1981:160-161.

⁷⁷ EL Altshuler, “Did Ezekiel have temporal lobe epilepsy.” *Archives of General Psychiatry* 59,6 2002:561-652. AW Beard, “The schizophrenia-like psychosis of epilepsy: Physical aspects.” *The Journal of Psychiatry* 109 1963:113-129. R Dewhust & A Beard, “Sudden religious conversions in temporal lobe epilepsy.” *Epilepsy and Behavior* 4,1 2003:78-87. BK Puri, “SPECT neuroimaging in schizophrenia with religious delusions.” *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 40,2 2001:143-148. J Wuerfel, “Religion is associated with hippocampal but not amygdala volumes in patients with refractory epilepsy.” *Journal of Neurology, Neuropsychiatry, and Neurosurgery*, 75,4k 2004:640-642.

⁷⁸ See Ramachandran & Blakeslee 1998.

⁷⁹ This section is mostly based on <http://www.ex-premie.org/pages/ismeditation.htm>.

⁸⁰ Clinical reports of negative outcomes. AP French, AC Schmid and E Ingalls, “Transcendental Meditation, Altered reality testing, and behavioral change: A case report,” *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 161 1975:55-58; RB Kennedy, “Self-induced depersonalisation syndrome,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 133, 1976:1326-1328; AA Lazarus, “Psychiatric problems precipitated by Transcendental Meditation,” *Psychological Reports* 39 1976:601-602.

⁸¹ N Mead, “Why meditation may not reduce stress,” *Natural Health* 23,6 Nov-Dec 1993: 80-85. LS Otis, “Adverse effects of transcendental meditation” in D Shapiro & R Walsh (eds), *Meditation: Classic and Contemporaneous*

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versity, Sudbury, Ontario, Canada, found that for some people, meditation can bring on symptoms of complex partial epilepsy, such as visual abnormalities, hearing voices, feeling vibrations, or experiencing automatic behaviors.⁸² Another concern, explored by Esalen founders, Michael Murphy⁸³ and Steven Donovan,⁸⁴ was that advanced practitioners of mantra meditation ranked high in suggestibility,⁸⁵ not surprising given its similarity to self-hypnosis.

A number of people in the US have successfully brought legal suits for damages suffered as a result of their participation in meditation programmes, especially commercialized methods such as TM (“transcendental meditation”).⁸⁶ Many such people suffered from problems and difficulties regarding thinking and attention. Other impairments included emotional difficulties, blackouts, anxiety, “spacing out” [feeling drowsy, weak, and bored], amnesia, and losing track of time.⁸⁷

This is not to say that everyone who meditates has had these difficulties. Many find brief meditation sessions relaxing, but these people are usually not part of groups which influence or induce them into continuing, regardless of their own feelings or experiences. The problem arises when meditation is claimed to be universally “good for mankind” and can be applied to anyone.

In those early years in the US, two approaches were common. The first was the empty-mind mantra meditation based on the Hindu tradition, which many had found useful. The second, from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, is reflective meditation, where you reflect as a way of focusing. In the former, a close relationship between teacher and pupil included attention to individual differences and any problems which might arise. In contrast to earlier approaches, meditation today is often being sold by mass marketing, and often by individuals who have no religious affiliation or do not declare it.⁸⁸

As early as 1967, when the Divine Light Mission arrived in the US, it used “meditation” as a marketing strategy. By the 1980s, numbers dropped off due to disillusionment, and its guru Maharaji (Prem Rawat) renounced its Asian trappings and changed the cult’s name to Elan Vital, and went on to seek new converts in third world countries such as Nigeria. Many more productive lives were destroyed as a result.

In the 1980s, Swami Muktananda, a respected meditation guru and avowed celibate of the Siddha Yoga cult, was accused of regularly having sex with his teenaged disciples.⁸⁹ Around the same time, Richard Baker,

Perspectives, New York: Alden, 1984; DS Holmes, “Meditation and somatic arousal reduction,” *American Psychologist* 39 1984:1-10.

⁸² Michael A Persinger, “Transcendental Meditation and general meditation are associated with enhanced complex partial epileptic-like signs: Evidence of ‘cognitive kindling’?” *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 76, 1993:80-82; MA Persinger, “Enhanced incidence of ‘The sensed presence’ in people who have learned to meditate: Support for the right hemispheric intrusion hypothesis,” *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 75, 1992:1308-1310; MA Persinger & K Makarec, “Temporal lobe epileptic signs and correlative behaviors displayed by normal populations,” *Journal of General Psychology* 114,2, 1987:179-195.

⁸³ The Esalen Institute, Big Sur, California, founded by Michael Murphy and Dick Price in 1962, is a center for humanistic alternative education, a nonprofit organization devoted to multidisciplinary studies ordinarily neglected by traditional academia.

⁸⁴ Entrepreneur & consultant, President of the Esalen Institute, 1985 to 1993.

⁸⁵ Michael Murphy & Steve Donovan, *The Physical and Psychological Effects of Meditation*, Big Sur, CA: Esalen Institute, 1989.

⁸⁶ Legal suits for damages. John Doe I-VI and Jane Doe vs Maharishi Mahesh Yogi; World Plan Executive Council-United States; Maharishi International University for the US District Court for the District of Columbia, 95-2848, 2849, 2851, 2852, 2853, 2854 (consolidated); Jane Green vs Maharishi Mahesh Yogi et al. US District Court for the District of Columbia, 87-0015-OG. Patrick Ryan vs World Plan Executive Council-United States et al. US District Court for the District of Columbia, 87-0016-OG. On the ineffectiveness and problems of TM, see A Lutz et al; 2007:41-43 & <http://onwww.net/trancenet.org/research/index.shtml#german>.

⁸⁷ Problems found in therapy. MT Singer & R Ofshe, “Thought reform and the production of psychiatric casualties,” *Psychiatric Annals* 20,4 1990:189-190.

⁸⁸ On various aspects of the commercialization of meditation and pseudoscientific claims, see eg Barry L Beyerstein, “Pseudoscience and the brain: Tuners and tonics for aspiring superhumans” at <http://www.sfu.ca/~beyerste/-research/articles/06Pseudoscience-and-Brain.pdf>.

⁸⁹ See open letter of an ex-follower, <http://leavingsiddhayoga.net/secret.htm>.

one of the foremost Zen teachers in the US, was forced to resign from his leadership of the San Francisco Zen Centre on charges of misuse of funds and having an affair with a married resident female student.⁹⁰

In the late 1980s, Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (also called Osho), the self-proclaimed enlightened Indian sage, who owned thirty Rolls Royce, fled the US in the wake of an ugly controversy involving charges of blackmail and murder.⁹¹ In 1981, on arriving in the US he bought the 64,000-acre Big Muddy cattle ranch in eastern Oregon for US\$6 million, and named it Rajneeshpuram, which he headed as a virtual autocrat. He was renowned for molesting young girls and women to “feel their chakra,” and impregnated many of them. His own sannyasins (monastic followers) were known to poison those they perceived as a threat. Members of Rajneesh’s own staff were poisoned by his personal secretary, Ma Ananda Sheela, when she thought they knew too much or had simply fallen out of her favour.

To prevent such misconduct and issues, the Western Vipassana teachers formed their own ethics committee. The Insight Meditation Society (Barre, Massachusetts) and Spirit Rock Meditation Center, two of the leading meditation centres in the US, for example, have their own ethical code⁹² and ethics committee.⁹³ More importantly, in terms of conflict-resolution, the Spirit Rock Meditation Center also has an Ethics and Reconciliation Council (EAR).⁹⁴

In March 1993, a ten-day conference of Western Buddhist meditation teachers was held in Dharamsala in a hotel near the Namgyal Monastery, the residence of the Dalai Lama, who headed the conference, themed, “Toward a Western Buddhism.”⁹⁵ One of the most important issues discussed was that of Buddhist ethics and the Dalai Lama strongly emphasized the right, and even responsibility, of students to object to any behavior of teachers deemed abusive, damaging, immoral, or unsuitable for the time and place: “Make voice,” he insisted, “Give warning! We no longer tolerate!” The Dalai Lama encouraged repeated open criticism of such behaviour; if all else fails, he proposed, “Name names in newspapers!”

Sadly, in early 2006, another scandal arose in Tibetan Buddhism in the West, involving Geshe Michael Roach,⁹⁶ whose teachings and behavior are causing controversy and concern within much of the Buddhist community, due to his relationship with female student, Christie McNally and his unconventional teachings about Tibetan meditation practices, to the extent of his being rendered as persona non grata.⁹⁷

The lesson of such scandals and tragedies is basically due to unhealthy teacher-pupil relationship, mainly that of transference and counter-transference,⁹⁸ leading to the teacher’s exploitation of his pupils, and of blind obedience and of grandiose perception of the teacher on the pupils’ part. When the teacher is placed above the teaching, there is always the danger of the teacher being misperceived as being more than what he is, and the pupils of being abused by the teacher. Meditation only succeeds when one sits alone and rises above one’s senses to a higher stillness.

9 The Mind and Life Conferences

9.1 BEGINNINGS. One of the most important events contributing to the dialogue between mind science and Buddhist psychology is the Mind and Life conference series and their related activities (such as their follow-up reports and publications).⁹⁹ The Mind and Life dialogues between the Dalai Lama and Western scientists began with collaboration between two Buddhist practitioners, R Adam Engle, a North American businessman, and the late Francisco J Varela

⁹⁰ See Sandra Bell, “Scandals in emerging Western Buddhism,” in Prebish & Baumann (eds), 2002:235-238.

⁹¹ See Hugh Milne (Shivamurti), *The God that Failed*, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1987.

⁹² That of the Spirit Rock Meditation Centre is called “Teacher Code of Ethics,” based on the Five Precepts: <http://www.spiritrock.org/display.asp?pageid=20&catid=4>.

⁹³ http://www.dharma.org/ims/insight/2003_spring_insight_newsletter.pdf.

⁹⁴ <http://www.spiritrock.org/display.asp?pageid=7&catid=1>.

⁹⁵ <http://www.mandala.hr/5/6-surya.html>.

⁹⁶ See <http://www.diamond-cutter.org/>.

⁹⁷ This section onwards is from <http://www.diamond-cutter.org/geshe-michael-roach/geshe-michael-roach-vows.html>.

⁹⁸ In psychotherapy, “transference” is the displacement of feelings and attitudes applicable to other persons (usually one’s parents, spouse, siblings, etc) onto the analyst or teacher; while “countertransference” is the analyst’s or teacher’s displacement of affect (feelings) (ie transference) onto the client or pupil.

⁹⁹ This section is based on a history of the Mind and Life conferences: <http://www.mindandlife.org/history.html>.

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(1946-2001), a Chilean-born neuroscientist living and working in Paris. In 1983, both men independently took the initiative to create a series of cross-cultural meetings between the Dalai Lama and Western scientists.

9.2 MIND AND LIFE I. The task of the first Mind and Life conference was a very notoriously difficult one: to serve a bridge for mutual enrichment between traditional contemplative disciplines and modern life science. Fortunately (or unfortunately), Varela had had a first taste of these difficulties while helping to establish a science program at Naropa Institute, a liberal arts institution created by scandal-ridden Tibetan shaman and meditation master Chogyam Trungpa, as a meeting ground between Western traditions and contemplative studies.

Thus in 1987, wishing to avoid some of the pitfalls encountered during the Naropa experience, several operating principles were adopted that have contributed significantly to the success of the Mind and Life series. These include:

- Choosing open-minded and competent scientists who ideally have some familiarity with contemplative traditions
- Creating fully participatory meetings where His Holiness is briefed on general scientific background from a nonpartisan perspective before discussion is opened;
- Employing gifted translators like Thupten Jinpa, Alan Wallace, and Jose Cabezón, who are comfortable with scientific vocabulary in both Tibetan and English; and finally
- Creating a private, protected space where relaxed and spontaneous discussion can proceed away from the Western media's watchful eye.

The first Mind and Life Conference took place in October 1987 in Dharamsala, and was later published as *Gentle Bridges: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Sciences of Mind*.¹⁰⁰ The conference ocused on the basic groundwork of modern cognitive science.

9.4 MIND AND LIFE II was held in October 1989 in Newport Beach, California, with Robert Livingston as the scientific coordinator. The conference focused on neuroscience and the mind/body relationship. Coinciding fortuitously with the announcement of the award the Nobel Peace Prize to His Holiness, the two-day meeting was atypical for the Mind and Life Conferences both in its brevity and its Western venue. It has been published as *Consciousness at the Crossroads: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Brain Science and Buddhism*.¹⁰¹

9.4 MIND AND LIFE III was held in Dharamsala, in 1990. Daniel Goleman served as the scientific coordinator for the meeting, which ocused on the relationship between emotions and health, and has been published as *Healing Emotions: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on Mindfulness, Emotions, and Health*.¹⁰² A new mode of exploration emerged: participants initiated a research project to investigate the neurobiological effects of meditation on long-term mediators. To facilitate such research, the Mind and Life network was created to connect other scientists interested in both Eastern contemplative experience and Western science. With seed money from the Hershey Family Foundation, the Mind and Life Institute was born in 1990. The Fetzer Institute funded two years of network expenses and the initial stages of the research project. Research continues on various topics such as attention and emotional response.

9.5 MIND AND LIFE IV was held in Dharamsala, in October 1992, with Francisco Varela again acting as scientific coordinator. The dialogue ocused on the areas of sleep, dreams, and the process of dying, and has been published as *Sleeping, Dreaming and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness with the Dalai Lama*.¹⁰³

9.6 MIND AND LIFE V was held in Dharamsala in October 1995. The topic was altruism, ethics, and compassion, with Richard Davidson as the scientific coordinator. The dialogue has been published by Oxford University Press as *Visions of Compassion: Western Scientists and Tibetan Buddhists Examine Human Nature*.¹⁰⁴

9.7 MIND AND LIFE VI opened a new area of exploration beyond the previous focus on life science, moving into the new physics and cosmology. The meeting took place in Dharamsala in October 1997, with Arthur Zajonc as the scientific coordinator. The dialogue has been published as *The New Physics and Cosmology: Dialogues with the Dalai Lama*.¹⁰⁵

9.8 MIND AND LIFE VII At the invitation of Anton Zeilinger, a participant in Mind and Life VI, the dialogue on quantum physics that had begun in Dharamsala was continued at a smaller meeting, Mind and Life VII, held at the Institut für Experimentalphysik in Innsbruck, Austria, in June 1998. That meeting has been described in the cover story of the January 1999 issue of GEO magazine of Germany.

¹⁰⁰ Boston & London: Shambhala, 1992.

¹⁰¹ NY: Snow Lion, 1999.

¹⁰² Boston & London: Shambhala, 1997.

¹⁰³ Boston: Wisdom, 1997.

¹⁰⁴ NY: Oxford University Press, 2001.

¹⁰⁵ NY: Oxford University Press, 2004.

9.9 MIND AND LIFE VIII was held in Dharamsala in March 2000. The topic was destructive emotions with Daniel Goleman as the scientific coordinator. The dialogue is published in *Destructive Emotions: How can we overcome them? A scientific dialogue with the Dalai Lama*.¹⁰⁶

9.10 MIND AND LIFE IX was a two-day meeting held in Madison, Wisconsin in May 2001, and was organized in conjunction with the HealthEmotions Research Institute and the Center for Research on Mind-Body Interactions at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, with Richard Davidson as the scientific coordinator. Participants presented an overview of modern methods for investigating human brain function and discussed with His Holiness the application of these methods in new research aimed at understanding the changes produced by meditation practice.

9.11 MIND AND LIFE X was held from 20 September to 4 October, 2002, in Dharamsala, coordinated by Arthur Zajonc. At the outset of his famous 1943 lectures “What is Life?,” the physicist Erwin Schrödinger posed the question, “Can that which takes place inside a living organism be accounted for by physics and chemistry?” Mind and Life X again explored this perennial question concerning the nature of life and its relationship to matter, but within a broader and modern context, through physics, chemistry, and biology.

9.12 MIND AND LIFE XI, themed “Investigating the Mind: Exchanges between Buddhism and Biobehavioral Science,” was held on 13-14 September 2003 in the MIT’s Kresge Auditorium in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The underlying conference question was: “Can western science, in the pursuit of its own research, make use of Buddhism’s 2,500 years of investigating the mind?” Up to now, science had been skeptical of this course of investigation because of its subjectivity—the use of the mind to investigate itself. Today, however, especially with the development of new technology, the biobehavioral sciences (neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology, biomedicine) are in the process of extending their methods in search of ever bolder approaches to studying the workings of the human mind.

9.13 MIND AND LIFE XII, themed “Neuroplasticity: The Neuronal Substrates of Learning and Transformation,” and coordinated by Richard Davidson, was held on 18-22 October, 2004, at Dharamsala. Here is the conference overview.

Neuroplasticity: Transforming the Mind by Changing the Brain. Neuroplasticity refers to structural and functional changes in the brain that are brought about by training and experience. The brain is the organ that is designed to change in response to experience. Neuroscience and psychological research over the past decade on this topic has burgeoned and is leading to new insights about the many ways in which the brain, behavior and experience change in response to experience. This basic issue is being studied at many different levels, in different species, and on different time scales. Yet all of the work invariably leads to the conclusion that the brain is not static but rather is dynamically changing and undergoes such changes throughout one’s entire life. The scientists assembled for this meeting represent the various levels of analysis in which these questions are being pursued. Research on structural plasticity will reveal how the literal composition of the adult mammalian brain is constantly changing and will show the factors that influence these changes.

9.14 MIND AND LIFE XIII, themed “Investigating the Mind: The Science and Clinical Applications of Meditation,” was held on 8-10 November 2005 at the DAR Constitution Hall, Washington DC. This conference addressed the growing interest in meditation within modern medicine and biomedical science that has arisen over the past thirty years and further explored the emerging clinical opportunities. In addition, an annual, week-long Mind and Life Summer Research Institute was started to advance the field of the scientific study of meditation, and a number of studies have also been initiated by participants in that program.¹⁰⁷

Meditation is becoming mainstream in Western medicine and society. Applications of meditation are now common in the treatment of stress, pain, and a range of chronic diseases in both medicine and psychiatry, and some approaches are currently the subject of NIH¹⁰⁸-supported clinical trials and research studies. At the same time, the power of our non-invasive technologies have made it possible to investigate the nature of cognition and emotion in the brain as never before, and to begin to explore the interfaces between mind, brain, and body, and the implications of particular forms of meditative practices for modulating and regulating biological pathways to restore or enhance homeostatic processes and perhaps extend the reach of both mind and body in ways that might potentially promote rehabilitation and healing as well as greater overall health and well-being.

9.15 FUTURE PROGRAMMES. In 2006, the Mind and Life Institute sponsored several meetings to continue the important work of creating and maintaining healthy minds:

- April - Mind and Life XIV, with the Dalai Lama in India.
- June - Summer Research Institute in Garrison, NY, USA.
- September - Public Talk by the Dalai Lama in Denver, CO, USA.
- November - Mind and Life XV with the Dalai Lama in Japan.

¹⁰⁶ NY: Bantam Dell, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ See <http://mindandlife.org/sri06.ml.summer.institute.html> for 2006, and navigate for other years’ institutes.

¹⁰⁸ National Institute of Health.

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Additionally, Mind and Life¹⁰⁹ is facilitating a major initiative in the field of Mindfulness in Education. The goal of this initiative is to develop practical tools for everyday use in our schools that foster mindfulness in our youth.

10 Closing remarks

10.1 BUDDHIST IDEALS AND MODELS. Compared to the other world religions, especially the God-centred ones (namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), Buddhism allows a wide latitude as to how it is defined and who defines it. In the God-centred systems, a religious individual, council, or community is, as a rule, defined by their avowed “confession of faith,” that is, a set of dogmas that sets one group apart from others. Naturally, such a system would be markedly sectarian, with very restricted or controlled exchange between confessional groups.

Although Buddhism has a huge collection of scripture and commentaries, much bigger than all the scripture of the God-centred religions put together, it is not a religion of the book. Although scripture, such as the early Suttas, provide an almost incontrovertible source of authenticating the Buddhist life, principles and goal, each Buddhist school, group, indeed, individual, is free to interpret it according to his conscience and wisdom. With a high literacy rate and the freer flow of information today through various mass and electronic media, the individual is truly free to decide or define what kind of Buddhism he wants.

Of course, this has not always been the case. Throughout Buddhist history, different types of individuals have been perceived as religious virtuosi or “religious specialists,” that is, those who are perceived as having a vital grasp of Buddhist doctrine and spirit by sheer personality and social status.

[On the 5 Buddhist ideals or models: see Ch 2.37.]

10.2 THE COST OF PROGRESS. From the four-period scheme of Buddhist history, we can see a growing tendency towards secularism, spirally downwards from the ideal of the spiritually liberated arhat, to the socially engaged bodhisattva (and the Buddhist philosopher), to the unconventional siddha of shamanistic Buddhism, and to the contemporary entrepreneurial Buddhist of corporate Buddhism. Secularism here refers to a socio-religious attitude where there is less emphasis on inner spirituality for oneself, but a greater perception that to be religious is to be engaged with the world.¹¹⁰

The arhat ideal has generally fallen out of favour in some circles for one simple but important reason: the difficulty of meditating, or more exactly, of not attaining dhyana. When Dharma as living word¹¹¹ became silent scripture—when spoken communication of spirituality came to be written down in dead letters, the Dharma in due course came to be regarded by many as a measurable commodity. The holy has become an external object, embodied in, say, a Buddha “relic” or a portable pantheon.¹¹² The power that was spiritually internal has been externalized or reified (made into an object). But once such power is invested in an external thing, whoever possesses the object would be perceived as possessing that power, too. In short, this is *priestcraft*. This is diametrically opposite of one being one’s own refuge, when spirituality is internalized, that is, the locus of control is within oneself.

Who or what is the seth of this new millennium? Could it be the psychotherapist, the modern shaman? One significant fact of the current dialogue between Buddhist psychology and academic mind science is clear: what early Buddhism sees as immeasurable, timeless, and a personal experience, namely, *the meditative experience*, is made into measurable scientific data, externalized so that scientists and experts can work and mull over them.

Buddhist psychology—by which I mean *Buddhist principles of mind-training and meditation*—is opening a new field of knowledge for the scientists. Knowledge is power. Power is very attractive because we can do things with them or make others do things for us. And if power can be put into little packages, they would sell

¹⁰⁹ <http://www.mindandlife.org/>. The current address is: The Mind & Life Institute, 589 West Street, Louisville, CO 80027. Phone: 720-891-4292. Fax: 303-665-5597. Email to Mind & Life Institute

¹¹⁰ See esp Upāya S (S 22.53/3:53 f) = SD 29.4. This is not a criticism of socially-engaged Buddhism, which is basically compassion and wisdom put into action with a distinction of self or other, or regarding other as self. What is meant here is a worldly and self-centred clinging to the world due to one’s sense of lack.

¹¹¹ In the sense of voice (*vacana*), as in *Buddha, vacana*.

¹¹² Eg the Buddha’s “Tooth Relic” in Sri Lanka and the “Emerald Buddha” of Thailand. See esp Piya Tan, *History of Buddhism*, rev 2005: Spread §10 (Relics rule).

very well, like high-powered batteries, or even weapons of crowd control. They are called *books*. Over the last two decades, there is a sudden and phenomenal explosion of Buddhist books, especially on meditation or meditation-related topics. Most of these books—expounding what might be called “vague Buddhism”—are written by non-practitioners, or by those lacking any deep understanding of Buddhism, or even by non-Buddhists. And they sell well—for, it’s in *the name*—but mostly it is a case of the blind reading the blind.¹¹³

10.3 WILL SCIENCE INVALIDATE BUDDHISM? Earlier on [5], we spoke of the “psychologization of Buddhism,” that is, on the impact that science would have on Buddhism today. At least one budding scholar, Jeff D Walker,¹¹⁴ has shown a special interest in “The interface of Buddhism and science: Will it alter a tradition?”¹¹⁵ he thinks that it is likely that such a collaboration

may lead to the invalidation of foundational beliefs of one of the traditions. However, if approached with careful attention and wholesome motivation, the interface of Buddhism and science presents an opportunity to progress toward a healthier society and a deeper understanding of human experience. (Walker 2006:1)

Walker first notes that like any religion that has left its point of origin—“there comes a point where we can say that, that which has dispersed has been removed from its original context...the ideas of Buddhism shaped the people, and the people shaped the ideas of Buddhism” (id).

In the late 19th century, cultural currency of science in the West led people to question the prevailing authority of Christianity. Buddhist evangelists such as Anagarika Dharmapala capitalized on this, declaring at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, that “it was Buddhism, not Christianity, that could heal the rift between Science in religion.”¹¹⁶ [2]. Such events not only planted the seeds of Buddhism in the West, but also acted as a precedent for an interdisciplinary dialogue between Buddhism and science. Walker quotes a contemporary Tibetan scholar, Thubten Jinpa,¹¹⁷ who explains the current argument for such collaboration, first Buddhism’s encountering the physical sciences, and in recent years, engaging with the mind sciences:

The following key features of Buddhism—its suspicion of any notion of absolutes, its insistence on belief based on understanding, its empiricist philosophical orientation, its minute analysis of the nature of mind and its various modalities, and its overwhelming emphasis on knowledge gained through personal experience—all make it easy for Buddhism to be in a dialogue with a system of thought that emphasizes empirical evidence as the key means of acquiring knowledge. (Jinpa 2003:83)

Even in India, a few centuries after the Buddha’s death, Buddhism began to develop new ideas (such as cosmic Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and the downplaying of the arhat ideal), and more dramatic developments set it as Buddhism spread across Asia, changing nations and in turn changed by them. And now interfacing with science, Buddhism is further experiencing a renewed decontextualization.

There is the problem of authenticating one’s religion. Unlike in the past when saints were seen to walk the earth, this is not so today. One of the most important observations that Walker makes, I think, is when he says:

Lacking such examples, the Western world turns to the authority of science to validate Buddhist practices. Superficially it may seem as though science is the dominant tradition, and, in order to be recognized as legitimate, Buddhism must have a scientific seal of approval. However, to understand the situation in its entirety one must examine intentions of the researchers, as well as context of the researcher. (Walker 2006:5)

¹¹³ Even successful writers on psychology and meditation such as Daniel Goleman have been accused of making unfounded, even false, claims, such as his ideas about “emotional intelligence.” For refs, See.

¹¹⁴ Wesleyan University, 2006. Walker is a neuroscience and religion double major student, and member of the class of 2008, from Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT, USA, who plans to pursue an advanced degree in cognitive neuroscience: see <http://www.wesleyan.edu/psyc/mindmatters/editors.html>.

¹¹⁵ See biblio: http://www.wesleyan.edu/aaai/2006_summer_papers/jwalker.html.

¹¹⁶ Fields 1981:126.

¹¹⁷ He is a renowned scholar with a PhD in religious studies from Cambridge, and since 1985 has been a principal English translator to the Dalai Lama and has traveled extensively in this capacity.

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To understand the nature of consciousness is to understand how the mind works, but more importantly for practitioners, it reminds us of the immeasurable capacity of the mind for goodness—and for evil. If we do not consciously choose to direct the mind towards good, we would, as a rule, be autopiloted by our past consciousness, living in the past, perceiving others as shadows of our past, and intoxicated by the future, measuring others by how much they are worth to us. Yet life's answer and liberation lies in the present moment: the life lived now is well lived. For it is consciousness at its best. [END]

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