

Human-Centered Buddhism

*One that Accords with Dharma Principles
and Human Dispositions*

*by Venerable
Master **Yinshun***



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*Translated by Franz Li and
Dharma Translation Team*

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TRANSLATION TEAM PREFACE

The processes of Buddhism's transmission to China in the distant past and its present transmission to the West have striking parallels. The Buddhist scriptures and practices that came gradually into China from India had developed in different historical periods and in different environments. The ways in which the ancient Chinese made sense of the bewildering array of Buddhist doctrines that had developed over hundreds of years in India and adapted them to their own circumstances ultimately gave rise to a uniquely Chinese Buddhism. The West now seems to be much like ancient China, encountering many different threads of Buddhism coming from distant lands, threads which reflect many permutations of Buddhist thought and practice that developed in Asia over the past 2500 years under circumstances quite foreign to the present. Do these various forms have anything in common? What, then, is Buddhism? How will it adapt to Western culture and still be Buddhism? What does it have to offer people living a twenty-first century modern life? In this book, the eminent Chinese Buddhist Master Yinshun gives us some answers.

Venerable Master Yinshun (1906-2005) was a deeply respected Buddhist scholar monk, a disciple of the visionary Master Taixu (1889-1947). They were both well known in the Chinese Buddhist world for their efforts to reform Chinese Buddhism. When Master Yinshun began his study of Buddhist scriptures, he became aware of the ways in which Chinese Buddhist practices had diverged from the teachings he found in the sacred texts. As a result, he began an extensive and thoughtful study of the entire body of Buddhist scriptures along with their historical development. He sought within the scriptures the essence of Buddhism and also lessons for adaptations to modern life that would not dilute that essence. He then disseminated his findings and recommendations in lectures, articles and books throughout his long career in Taiwan, emphasizing a down-to-earth Buddhism centered on human life. At the time of his death at age ninety-nine, he had published a body of work comprising

seven million Chinese characters in forty-two volumes. Referring to this book, Master Yinshun wrote in *An Ordinary Life*:

My writings are so voluminous and wide-ranging that it is hard for readers to understand my core thought. For this reason, in March of 1989 at the age of eighty-four I set out to write this concise yet to the point book of thirty thousand Chinese characters. My intention is to reveal the meaning of “human-centered Buddhism” by explaining “the criteria for classification of Buddhist doctrines” based on “Indian Buddhism’s evolutionary journey.”

Members of the Translation Team encountered Master Yinshun’s work through the efforts of Venerable Master Jenchun, a senior disciple of Master Yinshun, at Bodhi Monastery in New Jersey. Master Jenchun established this monastery in January 2000 with help from the Chinese-American community, and with a determination to reach out to Americans of all backgrounds. As a result, the Translation Team came together to render Master Jenchun’s lectures into English. The need for an English version of Master Yinshun’s guiding philosophy soon became apparent. Fortunately, a visiting lecturer in English, Franz Li, had already prepared a draft translation of this book.

Using Mr. Li’s translation as a start, the Translation Team produced this version. With many alternative choices available for rendering Chinese terms and phrases into English, we made our choices based on clarifying Master Yinshun’s meaning in a way that we hope is most accessible to English readers. Words we have added for clarity that do not appear in the Chinese we have enclosed in brackets. To increase readability, we minimized the use of italics and diacritic marks in Sanskrit terms by adopting the anglicized format of those which appear in English language dictionaries such as Webster’s Third New International edition. Only when such words appear in titles do we use italics and include their diacritic marks. Citations to the *Taishō Tripitaka* in footnotes refer to the digitized version provided by

the Chinese Buddhist Text Association (CBETA), available online at www.cbeta.org.

Finally, we are deeply grateful to Master Yinshun and his disciple Master Jenchun for their wisdom and compassion, and to Franz Li for his extensive work upon which we have built this effort to make Master Yinshun's thought available to the English-speaking world.

Dharma Translation Team
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www.dharmatranslation.org

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ONE

Conviction and Attitude in the Study of Buddhism

Three years ago, Venerable Hongyin wrote in his essay, "Probing into the Teaching Objectives of the *Miao Yun Collection*," "After many years of observation, I still feel that the comments and criticisms of these people fail to grasp Master Yinshun's core thought. In other words, they do not understand the message conveyed by the *Miao Yun Collection*." Recently, in his article, "The Buddhist Thought of Elder Yinshun," Venerable Shengyan wrote, "His writings are so voluminous and so wide-ranging, which makes it a hard act for his students to follow. It also makes it impossible for his readers to tell which school or sect he belongs to." Both of their comments are quite correct.

Throughout my study and practice of the Buddha's teachings, I adhere to one conviction: To investigate and research the entirety of Buddhist teachings incessantly in order to discern those parts of the Dharma methods that I would promote. And since the scope of the subjects that I have touched on is a bit too extensive, unexpectedly I confused readers as to the teaching objectives I intended to promote. In fact, my thoughts have been expressed very clearly in the preface of my book, *The Buddhism of India* (1942), in which I stated:

One should be firmly grounded in the simplicity of Original Buddhism, promote the understanding and practice of Early Mahayana Buddhism (being cautious toward the heavenly* deification tendencies), and incorporate appropriate

* Rather than "Brahmanic", "heavenly" is the better word as it is the deification of the ghosts and spirits of the lower heavenly realms that I am referring to. [TR: See also Chapter 2, page 10, regarding "the oneness of deities and the Buddha."]

teachings of Late Mahayana Buddhism. These should give hope for Buddhism's rejuvenation and fulfill the Buddha's original intentions.

I am not a revivalist of ancient ways, and I am definitely not an innovationist creating new doctrines. What I propose is that we invigorate the pure Dharma by adapting to present conditions without deviating from the essence of the Buddha's teaching. For this reason, in the preface of my book, *A Summary of the Buddha's Teachings* (1949), I wrote:

I deeply feel that with regard to Early Buddhism, the teaching that was appropriate for its time is not one that could fully express the Buddha's Truth. Mahayana Buddhism, rising in popularity with the changing trends...has indeed a unique strength. The propagation of Buddhism must not be confined by the expedient means of the past, and we should let the Buddha's teaching unfold through a process of adapting to the new. ... Our focus should be to selectively adopt and extend the expedient means of the past, aiming at a complete breakthrough to open up the two opposing sides, i.e. not being biased toward either Mahayana or Hinayana, but rather to connect them together. In this way, Buddhism could gradually obtain new expedient means appropriate for the right path of human life and thereby gain wider acceptance.

This is what I firmly believe. And this is also the Buddhism I want to promote.

This conviction, which I totally dedicated my life to achieve, is derived from my studies and practice. When I was still a lay Buddhist, "my studies and practice of Buddhism progressed in the midst of aimless searching. With no one to guide me the choice of scriptures I would study was entirely decided by chance. I began with the Three Treatises School and the Mere-Consciousness School as the subjects for my investigation (these

doctrines are utterly abstruse). It goes without saying that the results were not worth half my effort.” “After four or five years of reading and reflection, I more or less gained some understanding of the Buddha’s teachings.... An enormous gap exists between the Buddha’s teachings that I understood (at the time they were the doctrines of the Three Treatises and the Mere-Consciousness Schools) and the actual practices in the Buddhist community. This issue has been the source of my grave concern ever since I started practicing Buddhism.”

“The gap between the Buddha’s teachings and the actual practices in the Buddhist community’ has been an issue that I grappled with all along. After eight years of study since my renunciation, I realized that even though the Buddha’s teachings have been distorted by Chinese culture to no small extent, this gradual degeneration of its purity had begun long ago back in India, and the deterioration severely worsened as Indian Buddhism was reaching its end. As a result, I felt obligated to devote myself to the study of Indian Buddhism.”¹

During the course of my pursuit of the Dharma, I always felt that what Buddhism constantly teaches—the great compassion of benevolence to the world, the utmost importance of generosity in the six paramitas (perfections), and the spirit of helping and benefiting others both materially and spiritually – does not correspond with what I had observed in the Chinese Buddhist circle. Right at that moment of great calamity in China and Chinese Buddhism, I came upon a passage in the *Ekottara Āgama Sūtra* (*Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*), which says, “All buddhas emerge from the human realm. None has ever attained buddhahood in the heaven realm.”²

I turn my thoughts back to the time when I studied the Chinese *Tripitāka* at the Putuo Shan monastery: when I was reading the volumes covering the *Āgama* sutras and the Detailed Vinaya (monastic disciplines) from the various sects I felt a sense of intimacy and genuineness, so true-to-life, quite unlike the

¹ 《華雨集五》〈遊心法海六十年〉。

² CBETA, T02, no. 125, p. 694, a4-5.

display of faith and idealistic visions in some of the Mahayana scriptures. My recollection of such feelings led me to the profound conviction that Buddhism is about “the Buddha among mankind” and is “centered on human beings.” This conviction determined the standpoint and objective of my research into Indian Buddhism. As I stated in the preface of my book, *The Buddhism of India*:

I am deeply convinced that during its long period of evolution, Buddhism must have suffered distortions through the torrent of changing conditions. To investigate Buddhism’s original tenets, to understand how it has changed over time, to discern the original teachings from extant scriptures and to further refine these components by filtering out dubious alterations—I am resolved to begin this process through the investigation of Indian Buddhism. To find out the source of Buddhist thoughts, to examine the driving force behind their emergence, and to study what actual benefits they bring to our body and mind, our families and countries, without being blinded by embellished argumentations—I am resolved to delve into the Buddhism of India according to these intentions.

Although I had also written books such as *The History of China’s Chan Schools* and *A Study of China’s Ancient Ethnic Mythologies and Cultures*, and in regard to non-Buddhist philosophy, *A Critique of Xiong Shili’s New Mere-Consciousness Doctrine*, *God So Loves the World*, etc., yet my main focus has always been to research the history of Indian Buddhism. Moreover, the investigation into the history of Buddhist thought is no ordinary academic research. It is an investigation that delves into Buddhism’s original principles, comprehends how the doctrines changed, discerns and purifies them. It is an investigation to enable Buddhism to adapt to modern times, the Buddhism that centers on humanity and brings benefits to body and mind.

In my case, research into the history of Indian Buddhism is research for the sake of Buddhism, not research for the sake of

research. My research attitude, approach and methodology were expressed in an essay, “Applying the Dharma to Investigate All Buddhist Doctrines” (year-end 1953).³ The way I study Buddhism (the extant historical facts, literature and institutions) follows the most common and basic principles found in the Buddha’s teachings, which are mainly that:

All conditioned things are impermanent. All phenomena are non-self.

Nirvana is the state of quiescence.

“Nirvana is the state of quiescence.” This is the ultimate ideal for all students of the Dharma. “All conditioned things are impermanent.” This tells us to discover the sound and proper adaptations in Buddhism that accord with the Dharma’s true meaning from the viewpoint of Buddhism’s evolution. “All phenomena are non-self.” Non-self in an individual human being means that during the process of investigation and research into Buddhism, one does not cling to one’s own bias; one does not conduct the investigation with any preconceived idea. Non-self in phenomena means that everything in actuality is the result of mutual reliance and mutual resistance. Thus all phenomena are non-self, and everything is nothing but existence arising from the convergence of many conditions that are interconnected and interdependent. For this reason, our understanding must be based on “the mutual causality of one thing and another,” “the interconnectedness of the whole and the parts,” “the crisscrossing, convergence and divergence of all conditions.” In this manner, “the research methodology and its results would not be altered forms of Buddhist doctrines that violate the Dharma.”

These convictions that resulted from my research into Buddhist doctrines are expressed in my essay, “A Discussion of Engagement in Society and Buddhist Studies” (Summer 1967). I listed three points about Buddhist studies: “Value its religiosity,” “emphasize the search for truth,” and “recognize the practical implications of learning from historical lessons.” Furthermore,

³ 〈以佛法研究佛法〉《以佛法研究佛法》p.1-14.

“genuine Buddhist researchers must possess the courage to self-examine and reflect deeply and thoroughly. Their investigations should aim for the Truth in Buddhist doctrines so that Buddhism can adapt to modern times to help and benefit humanity, and to be the lasting refuge for all sentient beings.”⁴ In the winter of the same year (1967) in the preface of my book, *A Study of the Abhidharma Scriptures and Commentators, Primarily from the Sarvāstivāda School*, I listed eight aspects of “my basic convictions and viewpoints” that formed my principles of Buddhist studies and research. (Details are omitted here).⁵

Such are the convictions, attitudes and ideals under which I carried out my research into the history of Indian Buddhism. However, I am handicapped by my lack of academic qualifications and physical strength, thus I have had limited success. Just as I wrote in a letter to Venerable Jicheng (June, 1982):

Due to the wide scope covered by my thought and my poor physical strength, I am unable to complete my work. In general, if one is to discern another school of philosophy, one must have a solid philosophical understanding of both one’s own school of thought and those of the other schools. For this reason, my lecture notes on the scriptures of the three Mahayana schools are included in the first part of the *Miao Yun Collection*. They explain clearly the distinctions in the philosophies of the three schools and how they formulate their doctrines differently. My writings from later years take on the perspective of historical evolution: starting from the causes and conditions that gave rise to Mahayana Buddhism’s popularity, then its subsequent development and evolution into the “tathagatagarbha buddha-nature” doctrine, i.e. the marvelous-existence theory. Furthermore, I investigated the tenets of Early Buddhism by examining the sectarian doctrines during the schism of Buddhism. My intentions are: to clarify the developments, to trace back to

⁴ 〈談入世與佛學〉《無諍之辯》pp. 239-247.

⁵ 《說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究》pp. a1-a4.

the source, to place the original tenets of the Buddha's teachings at the core of Buddhism, and to embrace all the excellent ideas that have been developed throughout Buddhist history while breaking out of the old ways of deification (of spirits and deities). However, despite my efforts I have not been able to accomplish all of this fully!

TWO

Classification of the History of Indian Buddhist Thought

Buddhism as taught and transmitted in various parts of the world today varies greatly in terms of its goals, practices and rituals. But as a whole, all Buddhism originated from India and evolved differently according to time and place.

The Buddhism of India began in the fifth century B.C.E. with the Buddha's enlightenment and his dissemination of the Dharma, and became extinct in the twelfth century C.E. I classified the 1,700 years of Indian Buddhism into five periods (rounded-off to 1,500 years) in my book, *The Buddhism of India*:

- (1) The universal goal of liberation with the sravaka doctrine at the core.
- (2) The offshoot of the sravaka doctrine inclining towards the bodhisattva doctrine.
- (3) Concurrent dissemination of both Mahayana and Hinayana doctrines with the bodhisattva doctrine at the core.
- (4) The offshoot of the bodhisattva doctrine inclining towards the tathagata doctrine.
- (5) The oneness of the Buddha and Brahma with the tathagata doctrine at the core.

Of these five periods, the first, third and fifth mark the dominance of the sravaka, the bodhisattva and the tathagata doctrines, respectively. This means that the practices of each of these three doctrines have distinct characteristics. The second and the fourth periods mark the transition from one period into another.

In the preface of *A Research of the Abhidharma Scriptures and Commentators*, I classified Indian Buddhism into three stages: Early Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism. Early Buddhism spans the first and second

of the five periods, and is what are generally called Pre-Sectarian Buddhism and Sectarian Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism spans the third and fourth of the five periods, which I usually call Early Mahayana and Late Mahayana. In terms of doctrine, Early Mahayana proclaims that all phenomena are empty, whereas Late Mahayana proclaims that all are mere mind. Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism is distinctly different; thus I put it in a separate category.

This three-period classification precisely agrees with the classification used by Esoteric Mahayana Buddhists which can be seen in *Lamp for the Collection of Deeds*⁶ as “abandonment of desire practice,” “stages of paramita practice,” and “lust-driven practice.” It is also described in *Lamp for the Collection on Three Doctrines* as “nature of truth doctrine,” “paramita doctrine,” and “magnificent esoteric mantra doctrine.” For this reason, unlike other people, I do not call the last three periods [of the five] together as one Mahayana doctrine that is subdivided into early, middle and late stages. Instead, I classified the last period independently as Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism separating it from Early Mahayana and Late Mahayana.

Such a classification is based on the dominant doctrine of each period. For example, during the Mahayana Buddhism period, sectarian Buddhism was still developing; and during the Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism period, Mahayana Buddhism continued to be disseminated, although relegated into a subordinate role.

With regard to Mahayana Buddhism, I wrote in “Treasure Hunting in the Dharma Ocean” (1940) that there are three Mahayana systems, namely: “empty nature mere name,” “delusive discernment mere consciousness,” and “true permanence mere mind.” Later these three systems were also called “the three doctrines.”

Both Late Mahayana which asserts the existence of a true, eternal and inherent “tathagatagarbha, Self, or inherent pure mind,” and Early Mahayana which asserts everything is inherently empty, began in southern India and later spread to the

⁶ *Caryā-saṃgraha-pradīpa*.

north. However, the “delusive discernment mere consciousness” doctrine that became popular around the third to fourth century C.E. began in northern India. True permanence, i.e. the tathagatagarbha, Self, and inherent pure mind doctrines, appropriated “delusive discernment mere consciousness” ideas into its own system and this syncretizing process was completed in central southern India, producing the “True Permanence Mere Mind” treatises that define this doctrinal system (examples are the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahāyāna Ghana-vyūha Sūtra*). This is how I listed and described these three sequential systems.

Looking at the development after [Late Mahayana], the “true permanence mere mind” system, which was about “the inherent existence of Buddha-virtue,” precisely provides the doctrinal basis for Esoteric Mahayana. The idea is that all sentient beings must already possess inherent virtues of the Tathagata in order for instant buddhahood in one lifetime (the “easy practices vehicle”) to be a possibility.

Looking at the development prior to [Early Mahayana], the reasons behind the Sravakayana’s sectarian schisms are primarily as follows:

(1) The legendary stories of Śākyamuni Buddha’s past lives were being circulated via the *Jātaka*, *Avadāna*, and *Nidāna* scriptures. They provided the basis for the great bodhisattva deeds, i.e. the causal actions that lead to buddhahood.

(2) The Mahāsaṃghika School evolved into several other schools, and their doctrines were similar to that of the Mahayana tenets. For instance, the so-called “all phenomena are just names school,” i.e. the Ekavyāvahārika School, is very similar to the Prajna School which asserts the doctrine of “empty nature mere name”.

Such was the course of evolution from Sravakayana-dominated Early Buddhism into Mahayana Buddhism.

In addition, Buddhism in the fifth period, which I previously characterized as “the oneness of Brahma and the Buddha,” should be renamed “the oneness of deities and the Buddha.” The reason is that the emphasis of Esoteric Mahayana is not so much on the Brahmanic practice of abandonment of

desire but on [embracing] the lust-driven practice of the desire-sphere deities in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and the four Deva-kings heavens. Thus, the characterization as “the oneness of deities and the Buddha” is more appropriate.

The history of Indian Buddhist thought can be classified in five periods or three periods. If Mahayana Buddhism in the three-period classification is further subdivided into Early Mahayana Buddhism and Late Mahayana Buddhism, we can speak of four periods. The three systems of Mahayana Buddhism correspond differently to the period classifications. The following chart attempts to clarify.

5 Periods	3 Systems	4 Periods	3 Periods
(1) The universal goal of liberation with the sravaka doctrine at the core.		Early Buddhism	Early Buddhism
(2) The offshoot of the sravaka doctrine inclining towards the bodhisattva doctrine.			
(3) Concurrent dissemination of both Mahayana and Hinayana doctrines with the bodhisattva doctrine at the core.	Empty nature mere name	Early Mahayana Buddhism	Mahayana Buddhism
(4) The offshoot of the bodhisattva doctrine inclining towards the tathagata doctrine.	Delusive discernment mere consciousness True permanence mere mind	Late Mahayana Buddhism	
(5) The oneness of deities and the Buddha with the tathagata doctrine at the core.		Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism	Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism

THREE

A Discussion of the Tiantai and Xianshou Classifications of Buddhist Doctrines from the Historic Perspective of Indian Buddhism

[Relocated to Appendix for those interested in Chinese Buddhism with respect to Indian Buddhism]

FOUR

Indian Buddhism's Evolutionary Journey

[As noted above] in my research into the historical reality of Indian Buddhism, I divided its development into five periods, four periods, or three periods. I also classified Mahayana Buddhism into three systems. These doctrinal classifications [generally] correspond with those made by the ancient Chinese masters, but my criteria for categorization are different since my analyses are based on an historical perspective.

From its emergence to its decline and extinction, Buddhism in India “went through five periods of evolution. If we draw the analogy of a human life, then it is comparable to birth, childhood, young adulthood, gradual decline, then old age and death.” (From my book, *The Buddhism of India*.) In the Preface to *A Research of the Abhidharma Scriptures and Commentators*, I put it even more clearly:

The emergence, development and decline of Indian Buddhism are exactly like the childhood, young adulthood, and old age of a human life. Childhood is filled with vitality; it is worthy of praise. However, isn't it more meaningful to

enter adulthood? When an adult does not appreciate or embrace the prime of life, in the wink of an eye old age sets in. Do the rich experience and abundant knowledge of old age necessarily represent maturity? Perhaps it simply indicates the nearing of death. Therefore, I do not subscribe to the idea that “the more ancient the teaching, the more authentic it is.” And, I am even less sympathetic to the view of “the later the teaching, the more perfect and complete it becomes.”

Observing the rise and fall of Indian Buddhism, it is clear that Buddhism emerged in the eastern region of central India, gradually spreading to southern and northern India (including east and west). Furthermore, it expanded beyond India’s borders resulting in the transmission of the Southern and Northern traditions. However, after the fourth century C.E. Buddhism in northern and southern India gradually declined and its influence shrunk to central eastern India. It eventually became extinct because of Hinduism and the invasion of Islam. Although Buddhism’s decline and subsequent extinction were certainly influenced by external factors, there must have been main factors from within Buddhism itself that account for its development and decay (degeneration, deterioration). Just as in the eventual death of an old person, the main cause of death is the gradual aging of the body and mind.

Therefore, I respect Early Buddhism (the childhood) and also extol Early Mahayana Buddhism (the young adulthood). Thus I proclaimed, “One should be firmly grounded in the simplicity of Original Buddhism, promote the understanding and practice of Early Mahayana Buddhism, and incorporate appropriate teachings of Late Mahayana Buddhism. These should give hope for Buddhism’s rejuvenation.”

All the Buddhist scriptures from India transmitted in each period, whether from Early Buddhism, Early and Late Mahayana Buddhism, or from Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism, declare themselves to be the most profound, complete and the ultimate teaching. For example, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus*

Sūtra) proclaims itself to be the king of all sutras; likewise the *Suvarṇa-prabhāsottama Sūtra* (*Golden Radiance Sūtra*) makes the same claim. Some Esoteric Mahayana scriptures are titled the *Great Tantra King*, the *Great Ritual King* (translated in Chinese as the *Great Doctrine King*). Some scriptures use the metaphor of the five grades of cow milk products, lauding their doctrines with a comparison to the ghee being the best. The *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* compares itself to the ghee, and in the *Mahayana Doctrinal Objectives of Six Paramitas Sūtra*, the *Dhāraṇi Piṭaka* is compared to the ghee. To sum up, the scriptures from each period proclaim themselves to be the most profound, the most perfect. But which of the scriptures is indeed the most profound? That depends on the differences in understanding of each believer.

First, let's discuss the scriptures from the perspective of the practice and realization of the Right Dharma.

According to Early Buddhism, the doctrine of conditioned origination is very profound and is described as Dharma nature, Dharma abiding, Dharma realm, (true) suchness, and immutable nature. Early Buddhism also declared that nirvana is utmost profound. The Sutra says, "One must first understand Dharma abiding (conditioned origination) before one can understand nirvana."⁷ Thus, Buddhist disciples gain insight into conditioned origination by examining its impermanence, suffering, non-I and non-Mine (i.e. emptiness), in order to eradicate defilements and realize ultimate nirvana.

The *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra* from Early Mahayana as well as most of the scriptures connected to the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī state "true suchness is the defining standard," and "all must rely upon the supreme meaning." These scriptures do not propose discernment, understanding, and examination of conditioned origination. Instead, they advocate the practice of direct insight into how all phenomena are merely names devoid of substance; and the realization of how all phenomena are empty, as-it-is, ungraspable and unborn. The *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā*

⁷ The *Susīma Sutta* from *Nidāna* of the *Samyutta Nikāya* or 《雜阿含 須深經》 (CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 97, b6).

Sūtra clearly states, “Those [teachings] which are most profound, the meaning of which are about emptiness, ... and true suchness, Dharma nature (realm), reality, nirvana, and all such teachings—all these are profound teachings.”⁸ Emptiness, true suchness, etc—such labels are nothing more than other names for nirvana. Nirvana is the most profound teaching and it is indeed what Early Buddhism affirmed. However, despite the admonition that “all must rely upon the supreme meaning,” most people easily misunderstand the profound meaning of “all phenomena are empty”—no aggregates, no bases and elements; no wholesome, no unwholesome; no ordinary people, no sages; no practice and no realization. Therefore, the *Prajñā* sutras say, “For the advanced, one explains that both arising-ceasing and non-arising-ceasing are illusory and transient.” This means that all phenomena and even nirvana are illusory and transient. These [adjectives] are metaphors for emptiness according to Nāgārjuna’s commentaries. This is the profound meaning of the *Prajñā* sutras which more advanced disciples can have confidence in, understand, practice and realize. On the other hand, “for newly-initiated bodhisattvas, one explains that arising-ceasing is illusory and transient, but non-arising-non-ceasing is not illusory or transient.”⁹ This is similar to Early Buddhism saying that conditioned origination is illusory and transient, but nirvana is not.

Because the profound meaning of the *Prajñā* sutras can easily lead to misunderstanding, in the second to third century C.E. Nāgārjuna’s commentaries—representative of Early Mahayana philosophy—reconciled and united Early Buddhism’s concepts of conditioned origination and the middle way based on the *Prajñā* sutras’ concepts of “all phenomena are empty” and “they are merely names without substance,” and proclaimed, “All phenomena that arise from conditioned origination, I say they are empty in nature. These are just conventional names, at the same time also the middle way.”¹⁰ Moreover, Nāgārjuna stated, “If one

⁸ CBETA, T08, no. 223, p. 344, a3-6.

⁹ CBETA, T08, no. 223, p. 416, a13-14.

¹⁰ CBETA, T30, no. 1564, p. 33, b11-12.

does not rely on conventional truth, one cannot attain the ultimate truth”, thus reverting to Early Buddhism’s standpoint of “one must first understand Dharma abiding before one can understand nirvana.” Because all exist on account of conditioned origination, being illusory and without inherent nature, conditioned origination as it is, is empty. ”Due to emptiness all phenomena are possible.” It is precisely because all phenomena are empty that everything can arise due to conditioned origination.

The *Lotus Sūtra* also says, “All phenomena from their origin have always had the characteristics of nirvana.”¹¹ Also, “All phenomena never had inherent nature, thus the seed of buddhahood is born from conditioned origination.”¹² (Mahayana Buddhism asserts that the world is inseparable from nirvana.) By unifying emptiness, nirvana and conditioned origination, Nāgārjuna established the Madhyamaka School that teaches the doctrine of “empty nature mere names”. This is a very profound teaching that connects to Early Buddhism while revealing “the teachings intended for the advanced.”

The *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* from Late Mahayana is the underlying scripture of the Yogācāra School (i.e. delusive discernment mere consciousness doctrine). It says, “All phenomena are without inherent nature, neither arising nor ceasing; being originally quiescent, their inherent nature is nirvana. Thus the sutras (such as the *Prajñā*, etc.) say that if there are sentient beings who have already (1) planted higher level wholesome roots; (2) cleared [major karmic] hindrances; (3) matured body and mind; (4) extensively practiced supreme understanding; and (5) managed to accumulate higher provisions of merits and wisdom; [then] upon listening to such teachings [intended for the advanced]...they can swiftly realize the ultimate because they rely on this wisdom to penetrate thoroughly and practice skillfully.”¹³ Such instructions given to those who have fulfilled these five criteria, and who are able to have confidence and understand, penetrate thoroughly, and practice and realize the

¹¹ CBETA, T09, no. 262, p. 8, b25.

¹² CBETA, T09, no. 262, p. 9, b8-9.

¹³ CBETA, T16, no. 676, p. 695, b13-20.

teachings, are what the *Prajñā* sutras mean by “the teachings intended for the advanced.”

However, such profound teachings presented many problems to the mind of those disciples who had not fulfilled the five criteria. According to the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, some people cannot understand the teaching of emptiness, some misunderstand it as nothing exists, and some go even further by opposing the Mahayana teachings. For this reason, the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* tried to provide a clear explanation by means of the three [Self-]Natures:¹⁴

“Self-nature of existence produced from attachment to illusory discrimination” is explained from the standpoint of “all phenomena are empty”.

“Self-nature of existence arising from causes and conditions” is explained from the standpoint of “phenomena arising from conditioned origination do exist”.

“Self-nature of existence being perfectly accomplished” is explained from the standpoint of emptiness, Dharma realm, etc. in which everything that manifests on account of emptiness is existent and not nonexistent.”

Based on this “complete teaching”, even those lacking the five criteria can have confidence in Mahayana Buddhism and practice its teachings. This explanation is essentially the same as that which the *Prajñā* sutras call the “explanation given to the newly initiated (in the bodhi mind).” Providing a simple and clear explanation for the very profound and secret doctrines, sounding neither profound nor secretive, is what the [*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*] calls “the complete teaching.” These two types of explanation found in the *Prajñā* and the *Samdhinirmocana* sutras originally shared the same objective of accommodating those with different dispositions, just that the compilers differ in their view [of what the complete explanation entails].

The sutras of Late Mahayana treated the tathagatagarbha, the Self, buddha-nature and the inherent pure mind as their

¹⁴ CBETA, T16, no. 676, p. 693, a15-25.

mainstream doctrines; they have been transmitted non-stop ever since the third century C.E. For example, the beginning section of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* proposed that upon *parinirvāṇa* (complete nirvana) the Tathagata is eternal, blissful, autonomous (self) and pure. This means that since the Tathagata is eternal, then all sentient beings (who potentially can attain buddhahood) possess the Tathagata intrinsically—and that is the true Self. “The Self is the tathagatagarbha. All sentient beings possess buddha-nature, and that is the Self.” Also, “The Self is the same as the Tathagata.”¹⁵ Scriptures such as the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* and the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* proclaim that a majestic Tathagata lies within each sentient being, but is obscured by the entanglement of defilements (karma and suffering) just like a baby inside the womb (*garbha*). This is the doctrine of “true eternal Self”. The “Self” [here referring to the tathagatagarbha] has awareness and therefore is consistent with the concept of “inherent pure mind” being tainted by external defilements. Hence, the tathagatagarbha is equal to “true eternal mind”.

The tathagatagarbha doctrine considers the teachings of the *Prajñā* sutras not ultimate and states that, “all the sutras about emptiness leave something unsaid.” It proposes the concepts of emptiness and non-emptiness. As stated in the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*, “What is empty refers to the non-existence of the twenty-five realms of existence and all defilements, all sufferings, all characteristics, and all conditioned actions. What is non-empty refers to the real wholesome virtue, which is eternal, blissful, autonomous (Self), pure, immovable and unchanging.”¹⁶ [The same doctrine] regards the Tathagata’s true liberation, i.e. his complete nirvana, as non-empty, but it considers the arising and ceasing of all phenomena to be empty. This is a very close match to the *Prajñā Sūtra*’s description of the “explanation given to the newly-initiated in the bodhi mind”.

In later development, the *Śrīmālā Sūtra* used the concept of the “Tathagata’s wisdom of emptiness” (this has the

¹⁵ CBETA, T12, no. 374, p. 407, b9-10.

¹⁶ CBETA, T12, no. 374, p. 395, b25-28.

connotation of suchness and wisdom being inseparable) to explain the existence of an empty tathagatagarbha and a non-empty tathagatagarbha. These explanations share the same idea. (This concept of “there exist things that are empty; there exist things that are non-empty” is different from the syncretized concept developed in China which says “empty is the same as non-empty; non-empty is the same as empty”.)

In the conventional language [of India], “*tathāgata*” carries the meaning of Self (the *ātman*); moreover, “*garbha*” (fetus/embryo) can be traced to the mythology found in the *Rgveda*. Therefore, the concepts of tathagatagarbha and the Self are far from the tenets of traditional Buddhism (i.e. Early Buddhism and Early Mahayana).

The end section of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* [of Late Mahayana] uses emptiness and conditioned origination to explain buddha-nature (no longer mentioning the tathagatagarbha), and asserts that all sentient beings “shall (in the future) have buddha-nature” but not that all sentient beings “decisively have buddha-nature.” The Yogācāra School [of Late Mahayana] regarded the tathagatagarbha doctrine based on the suchness concept as incomplete teaching. Nevertheless, the tathagatagarbha doctrine is the mainstream [of Late Mahayana], regarding it to be the most profound—only buddhas are able to know and see it in totality, and even tenth-stage bodhisattvas can only partially glimpse it. As for sravakas and ordinary people, they are only capable of utmost reverence [for the doctrine] which exists merely as an ideal or belief in their minds.

The tathagatagarbha doctrine was influenced by Hindu theology. The transmission of the tathagatagarbha scriptures coincided with the revival of Hinduism. Thus we can rightly deduce that this doctrine was an expedient means to accommodate the masses who believed in the Self (*ātman*). The Lion’s Roar chapter of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* mentions five hundred ascetics who could not accept the Buddha’s teaching of non-self. The sutra says, “I often proclaim that all sentient beings possess buddha-nature. Am I not suggesting that buddha-nature is

the same as the Self?”¹⁷ When the ascetics heard that the Self exists, they immediately generated the bodhi mind. The sutra followed by saying, “Buddha-nature is not really the Self. However, for the sake of sentient beings it is called the Self.”

The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which syncretized “the delusive discernment mere consciousness doctrine,” explained it this way: “For the sake of the ignorant who are afraid of the concept of non-self; ...in order to instruct and entice these non-Buddhists who are fixated on the Self I speak of tathagatagarbha. ...However, one should rely on the doctrine of the non-self tathagatagarbha.”¹⁸ So this is how orthodox Buddhists clarified the concept of true-eternal-Self in the tathagatagarbha doctrine.

The true-permanence-mere-mind doctrine adherents represented the mainstream true-eternal-self and true-eternal-mind ideologies. This suited the thinking of the general masses. Examples are found in the *Gāthā* Chapter of the later-version of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahāyāna Ghana-vyūha Sūtra* where they proposed that non-self means that the non-Buddhist idea of Self (*ātman*) does not exist, yet a true Self does exist. They cited all kinds of parables to prove their point, claiming that the true Self can only be seen by the wise. Such inherent buddha-virtue doctrine (for the sake of beings) suited the theistic idea of the tathagatagarbha, the Self, buddha-nature and inherent pure mind inherently existing within all sentient beings. This doctrine is the basis for Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism. And in China, both the Tiantai and Xianshou Schools are based on the same doctrine from which they proposed the Perfect Doctrine of “sentient beings and buddhas are one”.

Second, let’s discuss the scriptures from the perspective of expedient means.

Early Buddhism teaches that conditioned origination is very profound and nirvana is even more difficult to fathom. Liberation from samsara is easier said than done! This accounts

¹⁷ CBETA, T12, no. 375, p. 769, c7-8.

¹⁸ CBETA, T16, no. 670, p. 489, b7-20.

for the tale that the Buddha was hesitant about expounding the Dharma. In the end, the Buddha was driven by his compassion to teach the Dharma. Many of the Buddha's followers became monastics but there were also many lay disciples. Yet the ones who achieved liberation were ultimately very few.

Other than the standard Eightfold Noble Path, the Buddha taught separately "the six kinds of recollection" for those followers who were strong in faith but weak in wisdom (mainly the lay disciples) in order to teach and transform the masses so that they would cultivate wholesome roots that gradually lead them towards liberation (though not necessarily in this very life). These six are: recollection of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, morality, generosity, and the heavenly realms. That is, to recollect the Triple Gem's meritorious virtues in which one takes refuge and has confidence; to recollect the meritorious virtues of one's moral conduct, one's acts of generosity and the majestic heavenly realms where one's rebirth is possible. When one is worried and fearful, particularly when one is seriously ill and close to death, the practice of the six kinds of recollection can free the mind from fear and bring peace. This practice is somewhat similar to those in other religions but it is not the same as praying for the help and protection of some external power. When the practice of these expedient means such as recollection of the Buddha, etc, is in tandem with wisdom, even faith-dominant Buddhists are able to realize the fruition called "the four kinds of realized confidence."

The evolution of Early Buddhism into Mahayana Buddhism was a result of "the Buddhist disciple's everlasting nostalgia for the Buddha following his complete nirvana." During Early Mahayana, the practice of recollection of the Buddha underwent unusual development. Just as the *Lotus Sūtra* explained, "In addition, different expedient means are employed to help reveal the Ultimate Truth."¹⁹ "Different expedient means" refers to special practices such as:

¹⁹ CBETA, T09, no. 262, p. 8, c10.

Recollection of the Buddha's deeds during the causal stage of his practice [in his past lives], led to the formulation of the great bodhisattva's deeds of the six paramitas.

In remembrance of the Buddha, stupas were erected to house the Buddha's *śarīra* (cremated relics); and from the first century C.E. onwards Buddhist sculptures appeared, followed by the rituals of making offerings and prostrations towards the stupas and Buddha statues.

Recitation of the Buddha's name was introduced.

All these were special expedient means introduced for attaining buddhahood (which were non-existent in the Buddha's time).

The great bodhisattva deeds of the six paramitas which require lengthy cultivation for eons of kalpas were too demanding for those of timid and inferior disposition. Thus the "Easy Path" of "rebirth in the Pure Land" emerged. Though such rebirth is possible in all Pure Lands, in particular, Buddha Amitābha's Western Pure Land garnered the most respect from the Mahayana community.

Other rituals that are performed in front of the present buddhas in all ten directions were introduced, e.g. homage, repentance, supplication, rejoicing, and transference of one's merits towards others, etc. These rituals were also designed for those of timid and inferior disposition. If their confidence and vow are thus strengthened, they can then be led to the standard bodhisattva path.

Methods of recollection of the Buddha described above were common (they can be shallow or profound), but the most important is "the visualization of the Buddha". As a result of the popularity of Buddha statues at the time, Buddhists who practiced recollection of the Buddha all visualized his majestic appearance. The realization through this visualization of the Buddha's physical attributes is called the *Pratyutpanna samādhi* (understood as all buddhas appearing clearly before one face to face). Out of this samadhi experience evolved the doctrines of "the mind is the Buddha" and "all three realms of existence are mere mind." (The delusive-discernment-mere-consciousness

doctrine of the Mere Consciousness School likewise evolved from a samadhi experience.)

Upon the arrival of Late Mahayana, visualization of the Buddha was no longer limited to external buddhas; it further included visualization of one's own body as the Buddha. It was asserted that all sentient beings inherently possess the tathagatagarbha, the Self, or inherent pure mind; in other words that there is innate tathagata virtue in every sentient being.

Esoteric Mahayana is the "Easy Vehicle" that evolved from the "Easy Path." Its opinion is that the practice of bodhisattva deeds for eons of kalpas to attain buddhahood is just too indirect and slow. Thus its practitioners aim for buddhahood in one lifetime by visualizing the Buddha's body,²⁰ the Buddha's kingdom,²¹ the Buddha's wealth,²² and the Buddha's deeds—these are called "Heavenly Yoga". Attaining buddhahood becomes their sole ambition and goal. It follows that "to liberate sentient beings" can wait till after buddhahood.

Visualization of the Buddha had the most profound and lasting impact on the evolution of Buddhism.

Of the expedient paths, "Recollection of Dharma" underwent a unique development during Early Mahayana. For example, sutras such as the *Prajñā* and the *Lotus* call for the practices of reading, reciting (memorizing or reading aloud), copying, and donating the scriptures, by stressing the unfathomable benefits here and now. The *Prajñā* is even called "the great mantra of power, the great mantra of wisdom, the supreme mantra, the king of all mantras."²³

The practice of mantras, originally forbidden in Early Buddhism, gradually infiltrated during the period of Mahayana Buddhism mainly because of its reputed role in protecting the religion and overcoming evil forces. The chanting of sutras and

²⁰ Using images of various deities and buddhas.

²¹ The mandala diagram.

²² Symbolized by jewelry, gold and silver vessels, precious conch shells, precious stones, etc.

²³ CBETA, T05, no. 220, p. 580, c5-7.

the recitation of mantras share the same aim; so does reciting the Buddha's name in the recollection of Buddha method. Buddhist sound rituals, especially the mantras, became Esoteric Mahayana's essential practice.

Other than recollection of the Buddha and recollection of the Dharma, "recollection of the heavens" became very significant. Early Buddhism accepted and recognized the existence of the Indian deities. However, with regard to the ghosts and spirits in the heavens of Brahma, Śakra-devānām-Indra and the four Deva-kings, Buddhist disciples did not pay respect or homage to them. On the contrary, these deities respected, praised, and sought refuge in the Buddha and his lay and monastic disciples. The deities, with the exception of evil spirits and ghosts, willingly and sincerely protected Buddhism. The Buddha and his human disciples are considered superior to the deities and spirits—this is Buddhism's basic stance.

During the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, deity-bodhisattvas were introduced in Mahayana scriptures such as the *Ocean-Dragon King Sūtra*, *Questions of the King Drumakinnara Sūtra*, and the *Vajrapāṇibalin Sūtra*, etc. This development stemmed from the Jataka (stories of the Buddha's past lives) where the Bodhisattva manifested as deities, spirits or animals. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* with its view of unobstructed perfect interfusion, introduced innumerable spirits and deities such as Vajradhara (thunderbolt-bearing spirits), city spirits, Pṛthivī (earth spirits), Maheśvara, etc; all of whom were great bodhisattvas, participants of the *Avataṃsaka* assembly. Even a few yakṣiṇī (female yakṣas) are included among the list of good spiritual teachers whom Bodhisattva Sudhana visited. The yakṣa-bodhisattva Vajrapāṇi, also known as Vajradhara or Vajragarbha, is given a rank higher than a tenth stage bodhisattva.

The Early Mahayana sutras integrated the profound insight and all-embracing bodhisattva deeds with those expedient means that the general public liked. This resulted in practices which tended to be world-engaging, and at the same time, mysterious.

Arriving at the period of Late Mahayana, scriptures such as the *Lankāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Mahā-saṃnipāta Sūtra* presented the famous deities of India as the Tathagata's other names. Likewise to the worshippers of ghosts and animal deities, the Tathagata was introduced as such. Doctrinally, Late Mahayana reached the point of "the oneness of deities and the Buddha," which is also "the spirits and the Buddha are one." These developments were related to the flourishing of Hinduism at the time.

By the time of Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism, the influence of the recollection of heavens is even more entrenched. For example, there were descriptions of the assembly of the Tathagatas from five directions modeled after the assembly of the five tribes of yakṣas and also after the assembly of the four Deva-kings, each king sitting at one side of the square with Śakra seated in the middle. The deity-bodhisattvas were mostly depicted as figures with wrathful expressions and in lustful body postures. There is the practice of visualizing oneself as the Buddha, called Buddha Pride or Deity Pride. The practice of sexual intercourse without ejaculation engaged by the male and female deities of the Trāyastriṃśa heaven and heavens of the four Deva-kings became the ideal spiritual practice to actualize great bliss and realize instant buddhahood. The deities and spirits of the Desire Sphere such as the king of powerful ghosts and the high-ranked animal deities all find their way into Buddhism. Not only the "five ambrosia", i.e. urine, feces, bone marrow, sperm and blood, but also the "five meats", i.e. the meat of dog, cattle, horse, elephant and human, were used as offerings to the ghosts and spirits.

In addition to the incantations that were forbidden in Early Buddhism, Indian theistic rituals such as fortune telling, psychic mirror reading, astrology, and fire offerings (*homa*) were all incorporated into Esoteric Mahayana. The recollection of heavens which evolved into methods used by the religions of the deities (ghosts and spirits) eventually became mainstream Buddhism. Such development is best described by a worldly saying, "Out of expedient means the obscene emerges."

Stressing [blind] faith, stressing secrecy (such as saying that those who share the secret teachings with an uninitiated will go to hell), stressing practice [over doctrine], such is the secretive and peculiar Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism. This is the ultimate unification of the practices of recollection of the Buddha and recollection of heavens (of the Desire Sphere).

FIVE

Criteria for Classification of Buddhist Doctrines

In my research into the history of Indian Buddhism I discovered important criteria for the classification of Buddhist doctrines. Although I am not able to read the Pali writings of the *Tipiṭaka* Master Buddhaghosa from the Southern Buddhist tradition, I was inspired by the titles of his commentaries on the four *Nikāyas*:

The *Dīgha Nikāya* commentary is titled “Auspiciousness and Delight,”

The *Majjhima Nikāya* commentary is titled “Dispelling of Doubts,”

The *Samyutta Nikāya* commentary is titled “Proclamation of Truth,”

The *Aṅguttara Nikāya* commentary is titled “Fulfillment of Wishes.”

The titles of these four commentaries are clearly related to the four *siddhāntas* (four principles, four doctrinal objectives) described by Nāgārjuna.²⁴ For instance, “Proclamation of Truth” corresponds to supreme-meaning *siddhānta*, “Dispelling of Doubts” corresponds to therapeutic *siddhānta*, “Fulfillment of Wishes” corresponds to individually adapted (for the procurement of wholesomeness) *siddhānta*, and “Auspiciousness and Delight” corresponds to worldly *siddhānta*. I have a deep conviction that these titles were passed down from the ancient traditions. They were used for the purpose of compiling the four *Āgamas* since the titles describe the primary intention of each.

In the fall of 1944, I lectured at the Chinese-Tibetan Dharma Institute on “The Essence of the *Āgamas*.”²⁵ The lectures

²⁴ CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 59, b19-20.

²⁵ Later was renamed *A Summary of the Buddha's Teachings* 《佛法概論》.

began with “The Classification of the Four *Āgama Sūtras*,” how their classification is based on the four *siddhāntas*. In my research into the compilation of the earliest (Pre-Sectarian) sacred scriptures, I learned that the earliest compilation resembles that of the extant *Samyukta Āgama*. Furthermore, the *Samyukta Āgama* consists of three parts: Buddha’s exposition of the Dharma in prose (*sūtra*), verses which repeat the ideas already expressed in prose (*geya*), and prophecies regarding disciples’ attainment or rebirth (*vyākaraṇa*). In terms of the four *siddhāntas*, *sūtra* corresponds to the supreme-meaning *siddhānta*; *geya* represents worldly *siddhānta*; *vyākaraṇa* by disciples is therapeutic *siddhānta*, while *vyākaraṇa* by the Buddha is individually adapted (for the procurement of wholesomeness) *siddhānta*. Thus, the Buddha’s teachings since ancient times demonstrate the four kinds of doctrinal objectives. From this we can see that although the *Samyukta Āgama* is primarily about the supreme-meaning *siddhānta*, it actually includes the other three kinds of *siddhāntas*. On further analysis, even the *sūtra* component also contains the other three *siddhāntas*. Thus, such a classification scheme is based on the main doctrinal objective in each sacred scripture.

When the four *siddhāntas* were introduced to China, the Tiantai School primarily explained them in terms of the different benefits imparted to sentient beings upon hearing the teachings. In actuality, the [Tiantai] classification scheme is derived from an objective [observation] of the literary characteristics of the scriptures. On the basis of these four major intentions, one can see that the long-term historical development of all the Indian Buddhist scriptures did not deviate from the four *siddhāntas*, as shown in the table below:

<i>Historical Periods of Indian Buddhism</i>	<i>Siddhānta (Teaching Approach/Intention)</i>	<i>Buddhaghosa's Nikāya Commentaries Subtitles</i>
Early Buddhism	Supreme-meaning <i>siddhānta</i>	Proclamation of Truth
Early Mahayana Buddhism	Therapeutic <i>siddhānta</i>	Dispelling of Doubts
Late Mahayana Buddhism	Individually adapted (for the procurement of wholesomeness) <i>siddhānta</i>	Fulfillment of Wishes
Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism	Worldly <i>siddhānta</i>	Auspiciousness and Delight

In my book, *The Compilation of the Pre-Sectarian Buddhist Canon*, completed in 1970, I classified the scriptures chronologically, as shown above. Here I will describe them again. Let us look at the characteristics of the scriptures at each stage from the perspective of their development over a long period:

(1) With the *Samyukta Āgama* (equivalent to the *Samyutta Nikāya*) as the primary text, the four *Āgamas* (each corresponding to one of the four *siddhāntas*) represents the supreme-meaning *siddhānta* in Buddhism. Infinitely profound teachings are derived from this root source.

(2) The Mahayana sutras related to emptiness from the early period of Mahayana Buddhism extensively explain the emptiness of all phenomena, [which help one] eradicate all emotional attachments and penetrate the nature of emptiness. The *Mūla-madhyamaka Kārikā* said, “The Tathagata explained the teaching of emptiness [to help us] relinquish all views,”²⁶ and this is based on the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*. Thus the Mahayana sutras

²⁶ CBETA, T30, no. 1564, p. 18, c16.

related to emptiness are mainly characterized as therapeutic *siddhānta*.

(3) In the late period of Mahayana Buddhism, the teachings turned to the concepts of a truly permanent non-empty tathagatagarbha, the Self, and buddha-nature. The aim of these teachings is to point out that the minds of sentient beings are originally pure, and that this purity is the original cause (first cause) of all goodness and of the attainment of buddhahood. The emphasis is on the individually adapted (for the procurement of wholesomeness) *siddhānta*. [Note that] there are many ways to procure the wholesomeness of mankind. [Two major doctrinal developments arose during this period.]

The first one is the doctrine that the mind's inherent self-nature is undefiled, i.e. the "mind-nature's original purity." This doctrine can be traced to the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, which teaches how to attain "Fulfillment of Wishes." The *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* also said, "In order to teach indolent sentient beings, the Buddha said that the mind is originally pure. For if they heard that the mind was not originally pure then they would say that the mind's nature could not be changed, and they would not have the motivation to purify their minds."²⁷ In Late Mahayana this explanation became the basis for the assertion that all living beings possess the tathagatagarbha, the Self, or buddha-nature.

The second doctrinal development is the tathagatagarbha tenet, i.e. to be mindful that there is a buddha within one's own body and mind. In Early Mahayana, followers were taught to practice "recollection of the Buddha" in order to be reborn in the Pure Land, and also the practice of *Pratyutpanna samādhi* to remember and visualize the Buddha. Similarly, in Early Buddhism the teaching of the Six Kinds of Recollection included recollection of the Buddha. All these practices are designed for followers whose dispositions are faith-oriented, who are timid and fearful. All these teachings that are "individually adapted for the procurement of wholesomeness" tend to deploy "easy practices" to entice followers.

²⁷ CBETA, T32, no. 1646, p. 258, b19-20.

(4) The popularity of Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism resulted in the inclusion and embracement of all religious rituals in India's theistic religions. One of the rationales given was: "Those dim-witted people blinded with ignorance and desire know only clinging to existence.... In order to liberate such people, one resorts to teachings that conform to their inclinations."²⁸ In terms of practices, the focus is on the power of samadhi, taking "the heavenly beings of the Desire Sphere" and regarding them as manifestations of the buddhas and as their ideals. Thus they cultivate wind (*vāya*), wind channels (*dhamani*) and drop of springtime (*vasanta-tilaka*) within their bodies, seeking buddhahood from lustful pleasures. All these belong to the worldly *siddhānta*.

The compilation of all sacred scriptures in Buddhism merely demonstrates the different emphases of the four major doctrinal objectives. I use the parable of the herdsman who keeps adding water to the milk she is selling as a metaphor for the desire to best benefit people by adapting and resorting to expedient means. This is just like trying to make a few more dollars by adding water to the milk. In a similar way, continual adaptation and mundane expediency were being added to the sacred texts compiled throughout the four stages of Indian Buddhism. This is just like milk cut with water over and over again. Ultimately, the true flavor of the Dharma was diluted and thus Indian Buddhism vanished!

Such a classification is based on the shifting focus of the teachings at each stage of Buddhism's development. This does not mean that Early Buddhism is all about the supreme-meaning *siddhānta*. Neither does it mean that Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism is all about worldly *siddhānta*. Thus, what I am saying is this:

The compilation of all the Buddhist scriptures demonstrate the shifting focus along the four major doctrinal objectives under

²⁸ CBETA, T18, no. 848, p. 5, a1-5.

different circumstances of adaptation. They are derived directly from the truth realized by the Buddha himself.

And:

Even the worldly *siddhānta* teachings are still superior to the theistic religions of the world, because at least they contain some elements that could lead one to liberation [from samsara].

All these are Buddhism. Esoteric Mahayana was the mainstream of late-period Buddhism, and this is a fact in Buddhist history. For this reason, I do not agree with the criticism that Esoteric Mahayana is the “usurper of orthodox Buddhism.” All these are forms of Buddhism being transmitted. Therefore I would not completely reject any particular type of Buddhism.

However, I am not a sectarian disciple of any particular school of Buddhism. Nor am I the fan of any particular tenet or spiritual practice. I study Buddhism for the sake of [understanding] the Buddha’s teachings, [and] to find out how the Buddha’s teachings can adapt to the modern era. For this reason, I investigated how Buddhism evolved along different lineages to appreciate and understand the many interesting modes of Buddhism from different periods so that the discernment for adaptations would be more correct as well as more relevant to modern times. Because of this position, my classification of Buddhism into three stages or four stages is similar to the classification by ancient masters. Yet the difference in our interpretations stems from [my view of] our modern era's need for a Buddhism that is unadulterated and adaptive. Thus, I come to this conclusion:

One should be firmly grounded in the simplicity of Original Buddhism, promote the understanding and practice of Early Mahayana Buddhism (being cautious toward the heavenly deification tendencies), and incorporate appropriate teachings of Late Mahayana Buddhism—these should give hope for Buddhism’s rejuvenation and fulfill the Buddha’s original intentions!

SIX

Buddhism that Accords with Dharma Principles and also Accommodates the Needs of the World

What does “being firmly grounded in the simplicity of Original Buddhism” mean?

What Buddhists should pay special attention to are the *Āgama* and the Vinaya texts. They are the root source of all Buddhist teachings and contain Śākyamuni Buddha’s doctrinal and disciplinary teachings. They are the sacred scriptures compiled in the early period. In the *Āgama* and the Vinaya texts, the Triple Gem—the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha—are plain and unembellished, yet familiar and immediate.

The Buddha was a prince from the ancient Indian city of Kapilavastu. Following renunciation of household life, through spiritual practices he attained perfect enlightenment, became a buddha, taught the Dharma, and entered the state of nirvana. All these are verifiable facts based on historical records and relics found in India. The *Ekottara Āgama Sūtra* states, “All buddhas emerge from the human realm; no one has ever attained buddhahood in the heaven realm.” A buddha is not a deity or an angel, but a human being who attains buddhahood through spiritual practices right here on Earth. It is only when one is born as a human being that one can follow and practice the Buddha’s teachings, personally experience insight into the Truth (Dharma), and attain the liberation rooted in perfect enlightenment. For these reasons, it has been said that “the human form is hard to obtain.”²⁹

“All buddhas emerge from the human realm” and the Buddha’s teachings were taught in the human world. The teachings offer a mighty path that enables human beings to attain enlightenment through their own efforts and to help others attain

²⁹ CBETA, T02, no. 125, p. 767, a23-24.

enlightenment. Therefore, the Buddha's teachings should be recognized as human-centered Buddhism and ought not to be turned into a religion associated with ghosts and spirits.

Nonetheless, in Buddhism's long history of propagation, influenced by the "undying nostalgia for the Buddha among his followers after his nirvana," it was inevitable that the Buddha was gradually idealized and deified. As a result, the unique characteristic of the Buddha being "the Honored One on two feet (i.e. a human being)" has gone amiss!

The Sangha is a congregation of Buddhist monastic disciples. The Buddha's Dharma is the path of liberation. Following the noble path laid out by the Buddha will lead to the state of liberation for householders and monastics alike. However, in accordance with the Indian culture and customs of his time, Śākyamuni Buddha lived the life of a renunciant. It is an indisputable fact that the promulgation of Dharma was accomplished through the sermons given by the Buddha and his monastic disciples during their extensive travels. Conforming to the social conditions of his time, no organizational structure was created for his householder disciples. For the monastics, the Buddha instituted the training of discipline (ethical rules) and regulations to govern their communal and economic lives.

This congregation of monastics is called the Sangha, which means a peaceful, harmonious and pure (functional) community. In a peaceful, harmonious and pure Sangha, the internal organization is based on equality, democracy and law-abidance, with a *Karman* system that settles monastic affairs. Other than their clothing, alms bowl, sitting and sleeping bedding, and a few everyday implements, monastics have no personal possessions. The monastery, real estate and financial assets are owned by the Sangha, which the current residents can use as governed by the monastic rules. Moreover, the ownership rights to all these assets do not belong to the current (resident) Sangha. Because the Buddha's teachings transcend ethnicity and nationality, Buddhist monks and nuns from all places, as long as they are qualified and have been given residency at a monastery, are to be treated as the equals of other long-time residents. For

this reason, in principle all Sangha assets are owned collectively by the congregation of monastics from all four corners of the world.

Within a Sangha, the thinking is based on “doctrinal unity in view and explanation,” the economics are based on “economic unity in the sharing of goods,” and the regulations are based on “moral unity in observing the precepts.” Only under such a system can the Sangha members cohabit in peace and joy, practice diligently and help themselves and others. Thus, the goal of preserving the Right Dharma for a long time can be fulfilled.

Nevertheless, “the Vinaya is real within the context of the world.”³⁰ Under the principles of Vinaya, rules cannot do without adaptations due to differences in time and place. Unfortunately, during the transmission of Buddhism, those who overemphasized discipline tended to be rigid and obstinate; over time they became engrossed in complicated and cumbersome formalities. On the other hand, those who overemphasized personal practice and realization, or those who overemphasized world-engaging activities, tended to overlook the importance of the Vinaya; inevitably they descended into freewheeling individualism. I think that modern day Buddhists, whether they are monastics or householders (nowadays they, too, have their own organizations), ought to pay attention to the [aforementioned adaptability] of the Vinaya. The Vinaya is a part of the Dharma.

The foremost description of the Dharma is the Noble Eightfold Path: right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. It is only by adhering to correct knowledge and views that one can practice to attain liberation from all suffering. In terms of sequence, the Noble Eightfold Path is the practical journey toward the three modes of attaining wisdom: from hearing, reflecting, and practicing (associated with right concentration). These are compulsory steps for all seekers of liberation. For this reason this journey is called “the path of the ancient sages,” without which there can be no liberation.

³⁰ CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 66, a4-6.

During the process of establishing right view (by which confidence and vow are aroused), practitioners must engage in proper speech and writing, and proper bodily action. Moreover, they must engage in right livelihood, which is a proper economic life. All beginners must follow these practices, not to mention those who are liberated. With the cultivation of right speech, right action and right livelihood—all based on right view—one proceeds to purify one's mind. When combined with concentration and wisdom, they give rise to undefiled wisdom. Of the five spiritual faculties (i.e. confidence, diligence, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom), the Buddha compared wisdom (prajna) to the main pillar of a house; it is both the foremost and the concluding factor. Because Buddhism is a rational and ethical religion, Buddhist faith (confidence) is aroused through right view, unlike theistic religions that regard faith as the foremost [factor].

To attain wisdom one must practice concentration. A Buddhist considers this an expedient means. Unlike theistic religions [in India], Buddhism does not overemphasize concentration. Theists, in their concentration, are mesmerized by the mystical phenomena triggered during the concentrated state. Most Buddhists do not attain root concentrations (*mūla-dhyāna*) and have no access to the associated supernatural power. Yet they are able to achieve liberation through “Dharma-abiding wisdom.” This is unfathomable to those mesmerized by mysticism.

Buddhists armed with right view will forsake fortune telling, incantations, mantras, and fire offerings (*homa*). The Buddha's teachings should be kept pure. Right view means to know and see reality as it really is; it is governed by conditioned origination. (Conditioned origination is another description of the Dharma.)

All the unsatisfactory affairs and suffering in the world owe their existence to sentient beings including humans. Families, societies and nations, etc., are all human creations. The Dharma directs us to understand the truth of everything based on the experiences of our body and mind here and now. One will find that all these—mind- matter, self-other, subject-object—are

interdependent and exist due to a myriad of causes and conditions. Within the context of the continuation of interdependently existing body and mind, it can be said: nothing remains unchanged, thus [everything is] impermanent; nothing is ever stable, thus [everything is] unsatisfactory, and there is no true freedom (i.e. to decide and to control everything else), thus [everything is] non-self.

Such is the state of the world, yet sentient beings and humans cannot correctly understand the law of conditioned origination. [There is] ignorance. With regard to oneself, other people (including other living creatures) and [material] objects, humankind cannot see all these with the right view, thus defilement (i.e. craving) arises. With ignorance and craving come volitional actions (karma) which lead to suffering and other unsatisfactory consequences. Such is how samsara, the incessant cycle of birth and death, continues from the past into the present and the future. And such is how our own being (mind-matter) interacts with our surroundings in this present life. And such is how the big mass of suffering that all sentient beings helplessly bear is formed.

If we know that the root cause of suffering is in its accumulation (through defilements such as ignorance and craving), then by seeing that conditioned origination is “this arises, therefore that arises,” we can understand “this ceases, therefore that ceases.” With this insight into conditioned origination, i.e. right view, one can eliminate ignorance, let go of fixations on the fallacies of eternal existence and bliss as well as the I-mine duality, and put an end to craving. This way, one will no longer be perturbed by external circumstances (including taints from the past) and will attain complete liberation in this present life. And at death, one will attain “quiescence” (nirvana) because all the causes of this mode of existence will have been exhausted and there is no more karmic effect left to arise. This state cannot be regarded as either existent or nonexistent. Nirvana is just a term to describe the ending of all suffering. Nirvana is the supreme Dharma.

Buddhism is a rational, ethical religion, and its goal is to [help sentient beings] attain liberation from samsara (the cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death). This goal was also the mainstream Indian thought during Buddha's time. However, the Buddha's insight into the reality of conditioned origination and his perfect enlightenment sets Buddhism apart from theistic religions. Here is the root source of Buddhism: the correct, standard yet ultimate perfect enlightenment. Buddhist practitioners must not forget this distinctive characteristic that separates Buddhism from all other religions and worldly teachings.

What does "promoting the understanding and practice of Early Mahayana Buddhism" mean?

The emergence of Mahayana Buddhism is founded on the bodhisattva practice and is consistent with Original Buddhism. During this period, the ideas of "all phenomena are non-arising" and "all phenomena are empty" unfolded based on the concept of nirvana. Nirvana is a most profound concept and could certainly be regarded as a supreme-meaning *siddhānta*. However, such emphasis on the concept of nirvana clearly possesses a therapeutic characteristic.

First of all, Original Buddhism takes conditioned origination as the core tenet to explain the Four Noble Truths, the Triple Gem, and all the mundane and supramundane laws. During the dissemination of the Buddha's teachings, there were clearly many disputed opinions that led to conflicting ideologies and polemics within Buddhist communities. Mahayana Buddhism addressed this problem from a higher vantage point (i.e. the transcending standpoint of nirvana) and tried to sweep away all the contesting views yet at the same time syncretize them. Thus it is stated: "all phenomena are wholesome and all phenomena are unwholesome."³¹ (Nāgārjuna commented: "The unwise hear [such teachings] and think that they are contradictory

³¹ CBETA, T15, no. 587, p. 66, a28.

and wrong. The wise attain Prajñā-pāramitā and enter into the Three Dharma Gates without any obstruction.”³²)

Secondly, the Buddha explained conditioned origination and that nirvana is its quiescence. Nirvana cannot be attained without following the principle of conditioned origination that states, “This ceases therefore that ceases.” During the dissemination of the Buddha’s teachings, there was a tendency to polarize mundane affairs and nirvana, i.e. contrasting the conditioned against the unconditioned state. Thus the Mahayana doctrines proclaim “Form (etc), i.e. the five aggregates, is none other than emptiness; and emptiness is none other than form (etc)” to explain and reveal the true reality of the world. Likewise the Mahayana scriptures associated with the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī say: “Affliction is [in itself] bodhi (enlightenment),” etc. And according to the *Viśeṣacinta-brahmā-pariprcchā Sūtra*, this (nirvana) is a therapeutic method [which teaches the Dharma] “appropriately according to the audience.”³³

Thirdly, with the development of stately monasteries surrounding the stupa structures, in general the traditionalist Sangha regarded the monastic rules established in the later years of the Buddha’s life as the standard, and that only strict observance of these rules could qualify as upholding the precepts. They knew not that “the Vinaya is real within the context of the world.” The failure to revise the monastic rules rationally to accommodate different times and places inevitably left certain disciplines mere formalities. Those who were dedicated to their spiritual practice were dissatisfied with such rigidity and conservatism. They subscribed to the ethical practices taught by the Buddha in earlier times (i.e. right speech, right action and right livelihood; or purification of the four areas of body, speech, mind and livelihood). Their tendency was to emphasize the Dharma, so they asserted that, “One who sees that culpability (violation of precepts) and non-culpability (upholding of precepts)

³² CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 192, a27-29.

³³ CBETA, T15, no. 586, p. 40, c25.

are both unobtainable, would have achieved *Śīla-pāramitā* (perfection of ethical conduct).”³⁴

If the therapeutic *siddhānta* were developed in a biased manner, [undesirable] side effects would emerge.

Although the *Prajñā* sutras are dedicated to disseminating the profound ideas of emptiness and suchness, which are synonymous with nirvana, yet in fact emptiness and conditioned origination are one and the same. For example, the extensive exposition on the eighteen aspects of the nature of emptiness offers up the rationale behind the concept of emptiness: “It is because everything is neither eternal nor nonexistent. Why? Such is the nature of it all.”³⁵ The inherent nature of everything is emptiness. “Neither eternal nor nonexistent” is the same as conditioned origination.

For example, the *Small Prajñā Sūtra* uses the simile of a burning wick to state that, “causes-and-conditions (conditioned origination) is very profound.” In what sense is it profound? The sutra continues: “When a thought has passed away, does this same thought reappear again?” “No, venerable sir!” ...“If a thought arises, does it have the characteristic of passing away?” “Yes, venerable sir!” ...“Does the characteristic of passing away pass away?” “No, venerable Sir!” ...“Such thought, does it abide just like suchness?” “Venerable sir, they abide in the same manner as suchness.” ...“If they abide in the same manner as suchness, are they eternal?” “No, venerable sir!”³⁶ From this exchange, we can see that conditioned origination is neither eternal nor nonexistent, and it is not different from emptiness.

Therefore, when the sutras say that all phenomena are illusory and transient, they are describing conditioned origination, and likewise the nature of emptiness. According to the profound meaning of the *Prajñā* sutras, all phenomena are illusory and transient, and so is nirvana. However, the Mahayana doctrine that says “the world is itself nirvana” could be misleading if one fails to understand the doctrinal objective of such a teaching.

³⁴ CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 153, b8.

³⁵ CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 393, c7.

³⁶ CBETA, T08, no. 227, p. 567, b4-13.

All phenomena are empty. And based on emptiness one can see how the Four Noble Truths, the Triple Gem, and all laws governing mundane and supramundane phenomena flow out of the principle of conditioned origination. Nāgārjuna refuted all heretical fallacies and expounded extensively on the meaning of emptiness. Furthermore, he said that it is through the understanding of no “I and mine” that one accords and penetrates Dharma-nature. This concept is identical to the Buddha’s original teachings.

All phenomena fall into place on the basis of conditioned origination, in particular the twelve links of dependent arising that is often explained in the *Āgamas*. In Nāgārjuna’s *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā Śāstra*, the explanations of all the characteristics of conditioned origination are for the most part similar to that offered by the Sārvastivādins, though Nāgārjuna’s view is that nothing has substantial existence, and that everything has merely an illusory existence.

“‘The Three Dharma Seals’ are identical to ‘The One Dharma-Seal of True Reality’.” These two characterizations of reality differ only in that one is more cumbersome while the other uses a deft touch. Their usage is dependent upon the capacities of the audience. These concepts are connected to the *Āgamas* and the Early Mahayana sutras.

With regard to the practice of Mahayana Buddhism, it consists mainly of the bodhi vow, great compassion and prajna (i.e. “nothing is obtainable” as an expedient means). Since all beings have different dispositions, the practices of the bodhisattva path can also have different emphases: focusing on confidence and vow, on compassion, or on wisdom. Even the scriptures themselves have different emphases. However, over the entire journey of the bodhisattva path, all three aspects are mandatory and none should be lacking. If there is only compassion but no bodhi vow and wisdom of emptiness, then one is nothing more than a worldly philanthropist. And if one only develops the wisdom of emptiness but not compassion and vow, neither can one be regarded a bodhisattva. Thus, the practices of the Mahayana bodhisattva path, mainly the cultivation of the six

paramitas and the four all-embracing virtues, are based on these three minds (mental factors). Generosity and so forth are the traditional items of practice in Early Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, generosity is the entry point of practice due to the fact that more householders resolved to follow the bodhisattva path.

The unfolding of the great bodhisattva path has two impetuses. One of these stems from the recollection among Buddhist disciples of the Buddha's past meritorious practices as a bodhisattva, which inspired them to dedicate themselves to the same path. The other impetus was a response to the changing world, a resolve due to compassion for the world. Nāgārjuna's teachings extol the bodhisattva spirit. I said in my book *Indian Buddhism*:

Nāgārjuna described the bodhisattva spirit as follows:

(1) Although all three vehicles can lead to nirvana without remainder, those choosing the bodhisattva vehicle motivate themselves to generate the bodhi mind. Their spirit is to selflessly help others.

(2) The bodhisattva path censures the reliance on external help as inferior and timid. It favors self-help and non-reliance on others. The spirit is in doing one's best.

(3) A bodhisattva considers the three *asaṃkhyeya*-kalpas (infinite eons) as finite. The spirit is to shoulder heavy responsibilities for the long haul.

These briefly summarize the spirit of a bodhisattva that deserves to be studied and followed.

The greatness of the bodhisattva path lies within its adaptability to and its benefits to the world. The difference between Early Mahayana Buddhism and Early Buddhism is best described by an ancient Chinese saying: "In the old days, learning was for one's own sake; nowadays learning is for the sake of others."

What does "being cautious toward the heavenly deification tendencies" mean?

From 50 BCE to 200 CE, Early Buddhism evolved into the age of Early Mahayana Buddhism. Motivated by Buddhist

disciples' everlasting nostalgia for the Buddha, idealized and faith-driven components were increasingly being reinforced in Buddhism, naturally sharing more common characteristics with theistic religions in India [with the following results]:

(1) The Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī is a synthesis of Śāriputra and the deity Brahmā, while Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is a synthesis of Maudgalyāyana and the deity Śakra- devānām-Indra. They became the Tathagata's two "new" personal assistants. The perfect Buddha Vairocana was modeled after the deity Śiva (from the Akaniṣṭha heaven of the Form Sphere). Other deities of lower level heavens such as the king of māras, the king of nāgas, the king of yakṣas, the king of kiṃnaras resurfaced as great bodhisattvas in the Mahayana scriptures. Granted that these beings speak of generating the bodhi mind and resonating with the compassion and wisdom of the bodhisattva practice, however, they are portrayed as being superior to human sages. The implication is that cultivation in the human realm is inferior to that of the ghosts and spirits, i.e. the heavenly realm. Countless spirits and deities assumed the role of great bodhisattvas in the assembly described by the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. The yakṣa-bodhisattva, a.k.a. the deity Vajradhara, ranks even higher than the tenth stage bodhisattva. All these represent the elevation of the deities and spirits and the devaluation of humans. This deserves the attention of Buddhist disciples in the human realm.

(2) Incantations and mantras practiced in [Indian] theistic religions appeared in the Mahayana scriptures, mainly playing the role of protecting the Dharma. However, seeking protection and support for the Dharma through the chanting of incantations and mantras was in a sense conjuring, and this was different from the voluntary protection of the Dharma offered by the deities as described in Early Buddhism. Thus the theistic concept of conjuring protection from the other-power began to develop in Buddhism.

(3) In the practices of "reciting the Buddha's name" (also "reciting the Bodhisattva's name") and "reciting the Dharma," the followers were either seeking rebirth in a Pure Land elsewhere or seeking benefits here and now, e.g. avoiding

disasters, recovering from ailments, prolonging life, etc. All such pleading for benefits here and now was very similar to the low-level theistic religions and sorcery. Although Mahayana Buddhism became more popular, [some of] its faith-oriented practices became more backward!

I do not deny the efficacy of faith-oriented practices in theistic religions. For example, last year someone (who practiced Chan meditation) wrote me a letter, protesting that, “Otherwise, ...all of them including the authors and saints of the Upanishad and Jain scriptures are swindlers!” My reply was, “Not only are the authors and saints of the Upanishad and Jain scriptures not swindlers, even Christianity... and the lower practices of sorcery should not be regarded as completely fraudulent. All religions (whether advanced or elementary) have their own share of mystical experiences. Often after having experienced some sort of mystical episodes, these people become full of self-confidence and self-righteousness. As they share their experiences with other people, we must not say that they are liars.... However, not lying is not the same as being correct. Otherwise if the Upanishads and Jainism were just fine, then why bother learning Buddhism?”

If we consider those parts of Early Mahayana which involve deification such as in the *Dīrgha Āgama*, they can be understood as worldly *siddhānta* characterized by “auspiciousness and delight.” This way it suffices to respond with a knowing smile.

It is commonly found in many Buddhist scriptures that the more expedient the method is, the more unimaginable the virtues are. When Buddhists are mesmerized by the promises of boundless virtues in all kinds of seemingly expedient methods and follow their mundane hearts in the pursuit of desires, they will forget that “all buddhas emerge from the human realm” and neglect the proper practices of human-centered Mahayana Buddhism. The consequence is that they will get lost in the wrong paths.

What does “incorporating the appropriate teachings of Late Mahayana Buddhism” mean?

In the sutras, concepts such as tathagatagarbha, buddha-nature and the [true] Self in Late Mahayana Buddhism are still associated with the practice of the bodhisattva path. We should recognize that these concepts belong to the individually adapted for the procurement of wholesomeness *siddhānta*. They qualify as expedient means as long as they are able to accommodate the mundane human mind, and incite the generation of the bodhi mind and the practice of the bodhisattva path.

The teachings of tathagatagarbha and buddha-nature as the true Self are used to entice people to follow the Buddha’s teachings. Subsequently, people are informed that, “In order to instruct and entice these non-Buddhists who are fixated on the Self I speak of tathagatagarbha. ...However, one should rely on the doctrine of the non-self tathagatagarbha.” (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*)³⁷ Also, “buddha-nature is truly non-self. The designation of self is used in order to attract sentient beings.” (*Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra*)³⁸ Once drawn in they are further introduced to the correct meaning of the Dharma. If people were to believe that the tathagatagarbha is the true Self and were to conform to their mundane desires and inclinations, they would mistake the tathagatagarbha as the ultimate teaching. In that case, the marvelous benefit of such expedient means would be compromised resulting in negative side effects.

Other [expedient teachings] can be seen in scriptures such as the *Yogācāra-bhūmi Śāstra* taught by the Delusive Discernment Mere-Consciousness School. Their principles, practices and results, are common to the Three Vehicles. Even “The Division on the Collection of Matters” is in fact the *mātrkā* (or the table of contents) of the sutras in the *Samyukta Āgama*. The mere-consciousness doctrine of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu still adheres to the principle of impermanent arising and ceasing when

³⁷ CBETA, T16, no. 670, p. 489, b15-20.

³⁸ CBETA, T12, no. 374, p. 525, a29-b1.

explaining “the conditioned origination of discerning inherent nature”. Consequently, they called the twelve links of dependent arising “the conditioned origination of discerning wholesome and unwholesome.” Such concepts came from the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas who emphasized the “effect must arise from cause” aspect of conditioned origination. If we can appreciate that these concepts were simply teachings designed for those lacking in the five criteria,³⁹ then we can affirm the mutually illuminating effects of the mere-consciousness doctrines and Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka theory of eightfold negations of conditioned origination.

The ancient scriptures were written to explain doctrines and practices. As long as we can firmly maintain the principle of human-centered Buddhism which is free from deification tendencies, much of these scriptures are usable in our studies. Human dispositions are all different and the sutras say that “there exist different desires, different understandings and different convictions.”⁴⁰ Buddhism deploys different methods such as the worldly, therapeutic, individually adapted, and supreme-meaning *siddhāntas* to direct people towards further understanding and practice of the Dharma, towards the path of liberation of the sravakas and the buddhas.

Such is the Buddhism that I believe conforms to the Dharma and at the same time does not conflict with our modern circumstances.

³⁹ Refer to Chapter 4 for explanation.

⁴⁰ CBETA, T01, no. 1, p. 70, a15.

SEVEN

The Youthful and Strong Human-Centered Buddhism

My advocacy of human-centered Buddhism is, of course, influenced by Master Taixu. However, our views are somewhat different.

Firstly, in his “How I Classify All Buddhist Doctrines” (1940) Master Taixu explained appropriate practice in accordance with human dispositions in relation to the three ages of Buddhism. He believed we are entering the age of declining Dharma and proposed that we base our practices and aspirations on the human vehicle, then further advance to Mahayana practices. In other words, we must “begin by perfecting our wholesome human qualities based on the correct practices of the human vehicle...with this as the foundation we can further pursue Mahayana practices.” Although this concept is quite appropriate for our world today, it would not be readily accepted by average Buddhists without presenting evidence of scriptural support. In addition, there are those who propose that reciting the name of the Buddha is the one and only Dharma method left to practitioners in the age of declining Dharma. Thus, I became motivated to find the basis and support for human-centered Buddhism by investigating the evolution of Buddhist thought.

Secondly, the core of Master Taixu’s thought is still rooted in traditional Chinese Buddhism. According to the history of Indian Buddhism, the thought of the Tiantai, Xianshou, Chan and Pure Land Schools in China (which were originally considered expedient paths from Early Mahayana) in fact belongs to the period of Late Mahayana Buddhism. I wrote about such thought in Chinese Buddhism in “A Discussion of Engagement in Society and Buddhist Studies” and listed three of its claims: (1) its theory is the most perfect, (2) its method is the simplest, (3) its

realization is the fastest. Of the deeply faithful, none is exempt from seeking realization in haste. As a result, rhetoric such as “attainment in one lifetime,” “perfect realization in three lives,” “directly pointing to the human mind, to see one’s nature and attain buddhahood,” “instantly attain buddhahood,” or “rebirth in the Pure Land at the time of death,” is promoted with great fanfare. Because of the cloud of this traditional thought extolling “the most perfect,” “the simplest” and “the fastest,” it has been a hopeless cause to promote the true Mahayana spirit such as Maitreya’s concept of “refraining from practicing (deep) concentration, refraining from (fully) abandoning defilements”⁴¹ and the doctrine of attaining buddhahood through extensive practice of benevolent bodhisattva deeds. Master Taixu commented that, “Chinese Buddhism has been speaking the Mahayana doctrines and yet practicing the Hinayana way.” But can thought and action be truly so disconnected? Certainly not. Chinese Buddhism thought of itself as the most supreme vehicle; naturally it deemed its practice to be supreme!

Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism, which came later, actually considered the bodhisattva practice winding and slow. Thus it developed and promoted the “easy-practice-vehicle” that promised instant buddhahood within this lifetime. One could say that this is the very last expression of this line of thought. From the history of Indian Buddhist thought, I discovered this countercurrent of Mahayana philosophy, namely, the inherent buddha-virtue theory (i.e. sentient beings are originally buddhas, etc.). As a result, I came to categorically endorse the understanding and practice of Early Buddhism and Early Mahayana Buddhism.

Thirdly, Buddhism was originally a teaching for mankind. It allowed for the existence of pantheistic Indian deities, but only as a measure to reduce the resistance towards its own mission. Moreover, the Indian deities were described in Buddhism as sincerely respectful and protective of the Buddha’s teachings. For example, in the creation of mandalas, the deities and spirits are

⁴¹ CBETA, T14, no. 452, p. 418, c8.

depicted as guardians standing outside the gates, with few admitted inside. They were considered members of the outer-circle in Buddhism. In Mahayana Buddhism, the idealized Buddha was somehow deified which led to the representation of heavenly beings (including ghosts and spirits) as bodhisattvas. This development expanded further to bring into Buddhism other Indian deities, theistic behaviors and rituals. This is a major obstacle to human-centered Buddhism, so I wrote *The Buddha among Mankind* in 1941 and stated, "Considering how the Buddha was elevated to the heavens, we must in the same way welcome him back to the human world. Followers of human-centered Buddhism! It is either the human world or the heavens. There is no room for you to be cutting both ways!" I compared the stages of Indian Buddhism from its emergence, development, decline and then to extinction to be "...exactly like the childhood, young adulthood, and old age of a human life. Childhood is filled with vitality; it is worthy of praise. However, isn't it more meaningful to enter adulthood? When an adult does not appreciate or embrace the prime of life, in the wink of an eye old age sets in. Do the rich experience and abundant knowledge of old age necessarily represent maturity? Perhaps it simply indicates the nearing of death." Everything that pertains to this world cannot escape the maxim, "All phenomena are impermanent." It is with this point of view that I promote and emphasize the thoughts of Early Buddhism and Early Mahayana Buddhism.

The period from childhood to adulthood is, in general, of tremendous vitality. And the young tend to focus on the tangible part of life. At its extreme, this could become materialism. Rarely is found [philosophical] idealism among the young. During the period from adulthood to old age, one gradually feels a sense of hollowness which is why many old people come to embrace theistic religions. Also, one's thought tends to resonate with idealism (mere Self, mere God). This is how people become idealists. Yet, more often this means a more self-centered way of thinking, in particular about one's own bodily health. The wishful belief in eternal youth is in general a result of premature physical

decline and gradual aging. Old people are more attached to material wealth as they become preoccupied with security. (As the adage goes, “Although one’s lifespan rarely exceeds a hundred, there exist worries of a thousand years.”) Thus Confucius said, “In old age, one should abstain from acquisitiveness.” In India, Late Mahayana Buddhism and Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism very much corresponded with the mindset of old age. The first characteristic of these two later periods was the great expansion of mind-only thought. The second characteristic was the practice of visualizing oneself as the Buddha, which further evolved into the cultivation of wind (*vāya*), wind channels (*dhamani*) and drop of springtime (*vasanta-tilaka*) within one’s body. All these were intended to inculcate within the physical body a great state of pleasure so that one could attain buddhahood in this lifetime. The third characteristic was that both the Madhyamaka School and the Yogācāra School of the later period taught meticulous and rigorous philosophical systems, and displayed abundance of knowledge and experience. It is with such discernment that I promote and emphasize the Buddha among humans, the human-centered Buddhism.

When I began to study Buddhism, i.e. the Three-Treatises and Mere-Consciousness doctrines, I felt the discrepancy between the Buddha’s teachings and actual life in Buddhist communities. The answer to the question that lay hidden in my heart was inspired by Master Taixu’s thought, and finally a new inspiration [from the *Āgamas*]: “All buddhas emerge from the human realm, and none has ever attained buddhahood in the heavenly realms.”

I am not a disciple of the sectarian schools (and never aspired to be a patriarch of any school), neither am I a Dharma master specialized in the sutras and *śāstras*. I am not a scholar who engages in textual research for the sake of research, nor investigation for the sake of investigation. I am merely driven by my conviction that came from studying the sacred texts—to study for the sake of [understanding] the Buddha’s teachings and to study for the sake of Buddhism. My hope is to make sense of the

doctrines by finding a correct path that does not contradict the original principles of the Dharma yet is appropriate for our times. I just hope to fulfill the responsibility of a Buddhist disciple in preserving the Buddha's teachings for posterity. My early publications are mostly based on lecture transcripts; only in my later years did I write books myself. Whether from my lectures or from my writings, these publications are all based on the scriptures themselves. They are about the search for Dharma teachings that are appropriate for our times. By stripping away the influences of spiritism and deification, we can return to the original tenets of the Buddha's teachings, one that is intended for the human realm here and now.

I discussed unequivocally the meaning of human-centered Buddhism in my 1951 lectures such as "An Introduction to Human-Centered Buddhism," "An Explanation of Human-Centered Buddhism from the Perspective of Formulating the Teachings According to the Audiences' Capacity," "Human Nature," and "An Abstract of Human-Centered Buddhism." In my plan, all these were merely prefaces to more elaboration. Here I briefly recount the ideas in "An Abstract of Human-Centered Buddhism:"

(1) *The main theme revolves around humans, bodhisattvas, and buddhas.* It is about how a human being aspires to the practice of bodhisattva deeds and through the perfection of such deeds attains buddhahood. Since we are humans aspiring to the bodhisattva mind, we must recognize clearly and admit that we are full of defilements (except for those who are reborn long-time practitioners). We must not be pretentious nor try to mislead others with supernatural feats. We must undertake the higher training of compassion. Anyone who practices bodhisattva deeds, in addition to having correct confidence and correct understanding, must endeavor to pursue the enterprise of helping others by means of the ten wholesome actions. One should benefit all sentient beings by preserving the Dharma.

(2) *The theoretical principles are three-fold.* First is the unification of the Dharma and the Vinaya. "Leading with the Dharma while regulating with the Vinaya" is Buddhism's

fundamental principle in teaching the world. If one were to emphasize the Dharma but overlook the Vinaya, then even if one had the good intention of engaging in society and helping people, one would end up being merely a liberal individualist. Second is the integration of conditioned origination and the nature of emptiness. This Mahayana doctrine, in particular, is a unique characteristic of Nāgārjuna's philosophy which integrates the extremely profound teaching of conditioned origination with the extremely profound teaching of nirvana. Third is the integration of benefit to self and benefit to others. When one is dedicated to helping others, one must not neglect the purification of one's own body and mind. Otherwise, how can one expect to liberate others while failing to liberate oneself? Thus, in order to help all sentient beings, one must extensively learn everything, and purify one's body and mind (just like a student who vows to serve society must study hard in school). This study has only one goal—to help and benefit sentient beings. When one is motivated not by selfish interest but by one's compassion, then these right actions in the world will be bodhisattva deeds.

(3) *The trends of our times:* We live in an era when vibrant and strong youth is gradually becoming the nucleus of our society. Therefore we must pay attention to Buddhism for them. This is not to say that older people cannot practice bodhisattva deeds, but rather that we must focus on the recruitment of the young adult into Buddhism. The Buddhism that is appropriate to the young adult must inevitably focus on helping others. Thus, the Mahayana teaching of human bodhisattva deeds is the only teaching that is suitable for the youthful and strong.

We live in an era of social engagement. Buddhism is essentially centered on the human world. The Buddha and his disciples often traveled about the land preaching. Even when living in the mountains and forests, they would enter the village or city daily for alms round, making human contacts that provided the opportunity for preaching the Dharma. Bodhisattva practitioners should engage in enterprises that are beneficial to mankind while disseminating the voice of Dharma. They must purify and enlighten themselves under the guiding principles of

not removing themselves from mundane affairs and not disengaging from other sentient beings.

We also live in the era of collectivism (organizations). When Mahākāśyapa practiced the *dhūta* form of asceticism the Buddha tried to convince him to return to the Sangha's communal living. When Upāli was considering solitary practice the Buddha asked him to stay with the Sangha. The Buddha always counted himself as a member of the Sangha. He called for communal living to accomplish personal practices in order to ensure survival of correct Dharma teachings. This is fundamentally different from the reclusive living favored by the [ancient] Chinese.

The call for adaptation to the modern world is not merely a proposition that the monastic Sangha should be more rational to better accord with the Buddha's intention, but also a suggestion that lay followers who have undertaken the bodhisattva path should rely on a sound organization to help themselves and others—not for personal gain of fame, position, power or profit.

(4) *Practice according to the core teachings*: The bodhisattva practice should be based on the core essentials of confidence, wisdom and compassion. When helping others based on these virtues, one's every action is a bodhisattva deed. For this reason, I especially wrote an essay called "The Three Essentials of Buddhist Practice." The three essentials are confidence and vow (in Mahayana this would be called the "Vow of bodhi mind"), loving-kindness and compassion, and wisdom (the verification of emptiness based on the understanding of conditioned origination). "When there is confidence but no wisdom, ignorance will fester. When there is wisdom but no confidence, wrong views will multiply."⁴² If confidence and wisdom are enhanced but compassion is lacking, then one will remain a practitioner of the Two Vehicles (the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* vehicles). If confidence and wisdom are deficient, one is inevitably a "deserter bodhisattva"⁴³ (meaning

⁴² Source unknown.

⁴³ CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 271, a28.

one who vowed to follow the bodhisattva path but failed) even when one engages in charity with compassion. For these reasons, everyone who practices the bodhisattva path in the human realm must not neglect any one of these three virtues.

EIGHT

The Path of Liberation and the Practice of Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Master Taixu promoted the idea of “human-life Buddhism” and I furthered the concept calling it human-centered Buddhism. Prior to 1951, Chinese Buddhist communities were not receptive to these ideas. Though the situation in Taiwan’s Buddhism today is a bit better, people in traditional Buddhist circles may still be reluctant to investigate this concept and give in to rumors that trigger antagonistic feelings. Among those who support the idea of human-centered Buddhism, some may lose themselves to secularized and shallow ways [for the sake of mass appeal]. Everything arises dependently and causes impact, and may include [undesirable] side effects. Inevitably these side effects result in either resistance or submission to secularized ways. All these reactions should be kept to the minimum.

The concept of human-centered Buddhism places emphasis on human bodhisattva deeds. However, some people might find it odd how this concept is related to the idea of “being firmly grounded in the simplicity of Original Buddhism.” Ordinarily, most people label Original Buddhism as Hinayana, and they imagine it to be the reclusive self-benefiting way of monasticism which is lacking in loving-kindness and compassion. How could this be taken as the foundation for human-centered Buddhism, the practice of human bodhisattvas? People do not understand that originally there was no such distinction as big or small in Buddhism. [The labels] Mahayana and Hinayana were the products of later Buddhist development, and Hinayana was a term used to reproach the opponents of Mahayana.

The teachings expounded by Śākyamuni Buddha were tailored to the social mores of his time and focused on the monastic (*śramaṇa*) disciples, but there were also lay disciples.

Both lay and monastic disciples practiced the path of liberation and both aimed at liberation from samsara as the ultimate goal. The path of liberation involves applying correct view and understanding to induce correct confidence and vow (right thought or intention). And resting on the foundation of proper conduct in body and speech, and right livelihood, one further cultivates mindfulness to attain concentration (samadhi) which triggers the arising of right wisdom (prajna, or enlightenment). Only through this path can one achieve liberation.

In the Eightfold Noble Path, right livelihood of a householder is different from that of a monastic. [During the Buddha's time], the monastics lived on alms provided by faithful benefactors. Besides three monastic robes, a begging bowl, mats and a few everyday items, they were not permitted to have other personal possessions. The livelihood of a householder, as long as permissible under the law and in agreement with Dharma teachings, were those legitimate professions that could support a reasonable economic lifestyle. Since the monastics possessed nothing, it was impossible for them to give material offerings. They engaged in their own cultivation while traveling about and preaching to people, except for the monsoon seasons. Everyday they met with ordinary people and taught them Dharma in accordance with their conditions.

The Buddha's teachings rejected the social caste system and refuted the idea that supplication to the gods could absolve one's sins and endow one with blessings. Buddhism rejected fire offerings (*homa*), and was against improper livelihood such as the practice of divination, sign reading and incantations, etc. Instead, Buddhism instructed people to understand the wholesome and unwholesome, cause and effect, action and consequence, and that there exist ordinary people and sages.⁴⁴ One's future, as well as that of humanity, is dictated by one's choices and decisions. A bright future can only be attained through one's right view (correct understanding), right speech, right action, and right livelihood—proper conduct. Likewise,

⁴⁴ CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 203, a4-9.

liberation can only be attained through actual cultivation. Śākyamuni Buddha was the teacher (hence we call him our “original teacher”) who gave us guidance. Thus the monastics conducted themselves in a manner that was loving, peaceful, dignified, simple, and pure. They frequently engaged with people, and shouldered the responsibility of inspiring and motivating them to improve themselves, and to seek emancipation from samsara. This is called Dharma offering. In today’s terminology it is social education in a broader sense.

Lay disciples were required to have right view and to observe right conduct, and there were also those who expounded the Dharma such as upāsaka elder Citta.⁴⁵ They typically practiced the offering of wealth and material comfort. Some cultivated the “field of compassion” by establishing charitable enterprises; some cultivated the “field of respect” by supporting their parents, elders, and the Triple Gem.⁴⁶ Some engaged in public welfare projects such as planting orchards to provide shade (these were the places of comfort in India’s scorching heat), building bridges and ferries for crossings, constructing homes for the desolate, drilling wells to supply the thirsty and tired, and providing lodging for travelers.⁴⁷

There are four groups of Buddhists, female and male laity and monastics. Yet most Chinese always equate Buddhism to renunciation, wrongly thinking that “supramundane” means to break away from human society. They fail to understand that “supramundane” means to transcend the world. It is neither about reclusive living nor about going to some faraway place. Under the Buddha’s monastic system, the monks “always begged for alms” and were not permitted to live a reclusive lifestyle in the forest. For this reason, in my book, *The Buddha Among Humanity*, I proclaimed “having renounced secular life, one becomes even closer to humanity.” This concept would be

⁴⁵ CBETA, T02, no. 125, p. 559, c10; CBETA, T02, no. 99, pp. 152a24 - 153b28.

⁴⁶ CBETA, T08, no. 261, p. 884, c17-21.

⁴⁷ CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 261, b7-9.

incomprehensible to those confined solely to the idea of a family-based life.

The human bodhisattva deeds of human-centered Buddhism regard the Buddha's teachings during his lifetime as its foundation. In the mind of those who consider Pre-Sectarian Buddhism as Hinayana this might seem bizarre. Nevertheless, though the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to be liberated from samsara, this aspiration and the aspiration to help others are not incompatible. Although Pre-Sectarian Buddhism was limited by its time and could not fully express the original intentions of the Buddha, most definitely one cannot say that it only dealt with liberation and did not care about loving-kindness, compassion and helping people. For example, the Buddha's lay-disciple Sudatta was benevolent and took pleasure in philanthropy. He was honored with the title Elder Anāthapiṇḍika, the benefactor of orphans and widows.⁴⁸ The Isidatta brothers were likewise charitable.⁴⁹ And Mahānāma willingly sacrificed his own life to save his Śākya clansmen.⁵⁰ They were all lay disciples who had attained sagehood. Is it correct to say that Buddhists who practice the liberation path do not have moral consciousness?

[As noted above] monastics in the Buddha's time had few personal possessions, so of course they could not practice charity of material goods. However, in the example of the Venerable Pūrṇa, we see him risking his life in the mission to teach the rough and uncivilized savages in the hinterland.⁵¹ Can we really say that the sravaka followers did not have selfless and benevolent compassion? They practiced diligently in order to attain liberation of the mind. However, each day as they begged for alms, they taught the Dharma according to conditions. Why did they preach the Dharma? The scriptures explained why numerous times. For example, once when the Buddha was going for alms he met a Brahmin farmer who slandered him for not planting the fields. (This is similar to the mindset of the Chinese

⁴⁸ CBETA, T01, no. 26, p. 460, c11-13.

⁴⁹ CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 219, a18-20.

⁵⁰ CBETA, T02, no. 125, p. 692, a1-6.

⁵¹ CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 89, b17-c16.

Neo-Confucian scholars who derided the monastic as parasitic). The Buddha said to the Brahmin, “I also plant the fields.” He proceeded to tell the simile of planting the fields to illustrate Dharma principles. When the Brahmin farmer listened to the talk, he was greatly moved and invited the Buddha to a sumptuous meal. The Buddha turned down the offer because he felt that Dharma should be taught out of concern for others, wishing that they would improve themselves towards wholesomeness, the higher purpose, and liberation. The teachings were not given out of any expectation for material gain.

The aspiration for liberation is certainly not devoid of any aspiration for loving-kindness and compassion. Throughout the evolution of Buddhism after the Buddha’s complete nirvana, there have been some people who were labeled Hinayana. Although this has been deliberate belittlement by Mahayanists, indeed some people have departed from the original intentions of the Buddha.

For example, in the Buddha’s time the upāsaka elder Citta discussed the four kinds of samadhi (a.k.a. the four liberations) with the venerable monks. These four are boundless samadhi, emptiness samadhi, nothingness samadhi, and signless samadhi.⁵² Boundless samadhi refers to loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy, and equanimity, i.e. the four boundless minds. Loving-kindness is to make other people happy. Compassion is to relieve other people’s pain and suffering. Altruistic joy is to rejoice in other people’s happiness when relieved from suffering. Equanimity is to treat friends and foes alike with equality. These four mental states are referred to as moral conscience in the mundane world. [The liberation attained through] the boundless samadhi is identical to the liberation attained through the realization of wisdom via the other three kinds of samadhi (emptiness, nothingness and signless). They share in common the abandonment of the egocentric self and its defiled attachments, i.e. emptying out greed, hatred and ignorance. This shows that the mind of liberation and the mind of moral conscience are

⁵² CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 149, c10.

inseparable. However, in Sravakayana Buddhism, boundless samadhi is understood as a mundane practice, meaning that it cannot lead to liberation from samsara.

Likewise, take the monastic precepts for example. In the mind of Vinaya masters, precepts are a list of “do nots”, strictly legislative and institutional. Some masters fail to understand that “the Vinaya is real within the context of the world,” not realizing that it must adapt to the time and place. Instead, they rigidly adhere to tedious aspects of the rules which they assume to be the equivalent of observing precepts. Yet the original intention of ethical conduct (*śīla*) in the Three Higher Trainings is nothing like this. For instance, the scripture states: “*Śīla* (this word means ‘wholesome nature’) is the preference for practicing the wholesome path and not being negligent. Whether good deeds are performed after one has taken the precepts or without taking them, all are called *śīla*.”⁵³ Also, “the ten wholesome deeds are ancient precepts. ... These ten virtues, whether a buddha (has appeared in the world) or not, are always valid.”⁵⁴

Śīla has always been translated in the past as precept. Actually, a fuller meaning is “the preference for practicing the wholesome path, not being negligent,” i.e. it is the virtue of enjoying doing wholesome deeds yet remaining vigilant to prevent (oneself) from committing unwholesome actions. This virtue is innate in humans, and since it is strengthened continually by wholesome behavior (abandoning the unwholesome), it is therefore explained as “wholesome nature” or “repetitive conditioning.” *Śīla* provides moral guidelines for interpersonal relations. Narrowly speaking, it means “personal virtue.” The ten wholesome deeds are representative of good behaviors in Indian society, thus not only Buddhists practiced them, the deity worshippers and those without religious faith would also practice them. *Śīla* does not require the formality of taking the precepts (one by one itemized rules, i.e. the “training

⁵³ *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā Śāstra*, chapter 13; CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 153, b9-10.

⁵⁴ *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā Śāstra*, chapter 46; CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 395, c8-12.

of discipline," also translated by the ancients as "precepts"). Taking the precepts is essentially based on a self-motivated desire to do so. It is rational, it is out of caring for others, and it is a feeling that one must do so.

Let's examine the precept of not killing which is one of the ten wholesome deeds. The scripture says, "Stop killing, refrain from the taking of life, throw away the knives and clubs, feel remorse and moral dread, be kind and compassionate, benefit and bring peace and happiness to all sentient beings."⁵⁵ "If there is one who wants to kill me, I would not like it. If I do not like it, others would not like it either, thus why would I want to kill others? Upon such realization, one upholds the precept of not killing sentient beings, and does not delight in killing."⁵⁶ Refraining from killing is based on the idea of "treating others as one would wish to be treated." Since I do not wish to be killed or harmed, and other people feel the same, then how could I kill anyone! For this reason, the mind that refrains from killing feels remorse and moral dread, i.e. the attitude of "honoring and showing respect for the noble and good while despising and resisting the violent and evil." Such a mind also feels loving-kindness and compassion, i.e. the attitude of "benefitting sentient beings while empathizing and showing pity." (According to Buddhism, the mind is the interaction of a mixture of complicated mind factors.)

The rationale behind not killing is, of course, based on causality, but this is definitely not the same as how it is commonly explained. Some talk about how much transgression is created from killing and which hell one will be falling into. With this in mind, one dares not kill in view of the liabilities. This offers a utilitarian perspective on not killing. When we refrain from killing (as with the other wholesome deeds), our action is really based on our collective human awareness (either consciously or unconsciously) that in our interdependent existence, we are really not all that different from others, and as a

⁵⁵ The *Numerical (Aṅguttara) Nikāya*, "the group of ten."

⁵⁶ *Samyukta Āgama*, chapter 37; CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 273, b16-18.

result we care for them and empathize with their feelings. This is what leads us to decide not to kill.

At the very beginning of the Buddha's teaching career, there were no itemized precepts (the training of discipline). The Buddha merely said, "Right speech, right action, and right livelihood" and "purity of bodily action, purity of speech, purity of thoughts, and purity of livelihood." One by one, the precepts were legislated because of the needs of the Sangha to maintain harmony, happiness and purity. Whenever the Buddha instituted a rule, he would also admonish the offender for lacking loving-kindness. Thus it is evident that within the Sangha, the establishment of precepts which emphasize personal morality is also based on loving-kindness. For those interested in additional reading, I once wrote the essays "Loving-Kindness and Compassion are the Fundamental Principles of the Buddha's Teachings" and "Conventional Morality and Buddhist Morality."

In summary, the ten wholesome deeds of *śīla* are based on loving-kindness. When the practice of giving wealth and Dharma, as well as the practice of samadhi in loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity are cultivated to the extent of reaching every sentient being, they are called "boundless." This is similar to the Confucian ideal of an all-encompassing benevolence, an awe-inspiring energy that occupies the space between heaven and earth. Still, even this is merely a mundane and conventional idea of morality, though grand, but not the ultimate. The Boundless samadhi that is grand as well as ultimate must come through the liberation path of non-self. Only in this way can there be the highest morality that allows one to help others selflessly.

Early Mahayana is about the bodhisattva path. The development of the bodhisattva path doctrine has its origin in the Jataka stories, the past lives of the Buddha. The practice of "understanding nirvana but not realizing" (same as attaining the conviction of non-arising yet not realizing true reality) is seen as a powerful impetus of this path. The grand bodhisattva deeds that include the six paramitas and the four all-embracing ways are practiced on the basis of "all phenomena are unarisen," "all

phenomena are empty,” and “non-attainment is the basis for expedient means.” These all progress based on the wisdom of emptiness.

Not deviating from prajna, the liberation path of Early Buddhism, the cultivation of the bodhisattva path merely demands a stronger compassion, more consideration for sentient beings, and not hastily seeking quick realization. That’s all.

NINE

A True Picture of Human Bodhisattva Deeds

The practice of human-centered Buddhism, i.e. human bodhisattva deeds, takes three mind factors as the foundation: Bodhi mind (Mahayana confidence and vow), great compassionate mind, and vision of emptiness.

(1) Generating the vow of bodhi mind.

In brief, it is to take the Buddha as one's ideal and goal, to make the great vow to attain buddhahood. Generating the great bodhi mind begins with having confidence and appreciation of the Buddha's lofty greatness: the profundity and thoroughness of his wisdom (virtue of wisdom), the expansiveness of his compassionate mind (virtue of compassion), and the ultimate purity of his mind (virtue of abandonment), superior to all human and heavenly beings. Even the *arhats* are no match for the perfection of the Buddha. This confidence must not be based on hearsay, legends or imagination. It is best to begin with the historical record of Śākyamuni Buddha's life and mission to understand why his virtues and merits are magnificent, and thereby gain a deep confidence that would lead one to generate the great bodhi mind.

Sentient beings in our world have so much suffering, so many calamities. If we could improve the affairs of the world in a relative sense, of course it would be good but it would not be a thorough solution. When we have deep confidence that the Dharma contains the noble path to thorough liberation, we would have the impetus to commit to the bodhisattva path and to aim for buddhahood so as to purify the world and relieve sentient beings from their suffering. The vow of bodhi mind is to upwardly seek enlightenment, and to downwardly help liberate beings. Nevertheless, beginners cannot avoid "drifting with the wind,

east and west like a feather.”⁵⁷ Thus, one must cultivate the bodhi mind, reaffirming one’s aspiration to reach the non-regression of bodhi mind.

(2) Great compassionate mind is the foundation of bodhisattva deeds.

Loving-kindness offers peace and happiness to all; compassion removes their suffering and affliction. Why then do we say that great compassion alone is the foundation? Buddhism regards liberating sentient beings from the suffering of samsara as its highest ideal. The relative degree of relief from suffering here and now are secondary. Compassion has to be practiced with the understanding that mankind and all living beings are interdependent until one realizes all are equal and empty of real substance. If all of our actions were based on self-interest then even if we were engaged in charitable enterprises, such activities would not qualify as bodhisattva deeds.

(3) Vision of emptiness, that which is based on conditioned origination.

Beginners must first attain the mundane right views of conditioned origination. This means that one understands the wholesome and unwholesome, cause and effect, action and consequence, and that there exist ordinary people and sages. Going a step further, one must learn that everything in the world is based on conditioned origination. Birth and death are governed by conditioned origination. The arising of birth, death, and the accumulation (arising) of suffering all have their causes and conditions. Likewise, the ceasing of birth, death, and the ending of suffering have their causes and conditions. Since everything is based on conditioned origination and thus relative, nothing is permanent—meaning eternal existence is impossible. Since everything that arises dependently is impermanent, its consequence is suffering (unsatisfactoriness)—unstable and

⁵⁷ CBETA, T07, no. 220, p. 240, b8.

forever imperfect. The fact that impermanence leads to suffering means that there is no self, independent or inherent. And without the self, there is also nothing that can belong to the self. “No I and Mine” means emptiness.

Emptiness, desireless, and signless are the three gateways to liberation. The emptiness gate is the insight into “no I and Mine”. The desireless gate is the insight into impermanence and suffering. The signless gate is the insight into non-attachment to sign (form). Actually, nirvana is liberation from samsara and is transcendent; it neither has signs nor is it signless. Mahayana reveals that nirvana is very profound, and describes it as empty (of nature), signless, desireless, true suchness, the realm of phenomena, etc.

When one penetrates “no I and Mine,” labeled emptiness, one understands that the concept “emptiness” is also unattainable. In Mahayana sutras connected to emptiness, conditioned origination is deemed the same as emptiness, and emptiness is deemed the same as conditioned origination. Emptiness has other names such as “true suchness” and should not be interpreted as “nothingness.” This is how the very profound nirvana (quiescence) is penetrated by understanding the very profound conditioned origination.

In the bodhisattva career, it is extremely important to attain the insight of no I and Mine, i.e. emptiness, and also the correct knowledge of conditioned origination in order to stop grasping forms. “Without non-grasping as the expedient means,”⁵⁸ one would be incessantly grasping at everything; then how could one possibly accomplish the great deeds of the bodhisattva!

All three mind factors are necessary for the practice of bodhisattva deeds, with compassion being the most important. If compassion is lacking, then whatever methods one practices, they will not relate to the causal actions that lead to buddhahood. In the *Collection of Bent Elbow Studies*⁵⁹ is this story: There was a

⁵⁸ CBETA, T07, no. 220, p. 70, a15-16.

⁵⁹ A collection of esoteric Buddhist writings by Chen Jianming.

person who practiced the supreme yoga method (*anuttara-yoga*) that involved visualization of the deity Yamāntaka, and he [supposedly] succeeded to have great realization. In theory this person ought to have been very close to buddhahood. Now the Yamāntaka radiance king has a ferociously angry and hostile appearance, thus this person who practiced this method and attained such realization also looked ferociously violent and cruel. People in his presence were terrorized and scared witless, some even frightened to death! What happened was that this person with [supposedly] great realization never cultivated loving-kindness and compassion. It is evident that without loving-kindness and compassion, no matter what ancient [supposedly] superior method one studies, none of them could be the causal action that leads to buddhahood.

The bodhi mind, great compassionate mind and vision of emptiness—these three are the requisites of a bodhisattva career. One must begin learning from the immediate here and now and refrain from speculating about the attainment of the sages, as I have written in several short articles, such as “The Sequential Practice of Bodhi Mind”, “Loving-Kindness and Compassion Is the Fundamental Principle of Buddhism”, “Benefiting Self and Others”, “An Overview of the Learning of Wisdom”, etc.

If one’s practice is based on the three mind factors, then everything one does is a bodhisattva deed. Beginner bodhisattvas are described in the scriptures as follows: “The bodhisattvas of the ten wholesome deeds generate the great mind.” The ten wholesome deeds are: Refrain from killing, refrain from taking what is not given (i.e. stealing), refrain from sexual misconduct (for monastics this means celibacy). These three are related to proper and reasonable physical conduct. Next, refrain from lying, refrain from divisive speech, refrain from harsh speech, and refrain from frivolous speech. These four are related to proper and reasonable verbal conduct (including writing). Finally, refrain from covetousness, refrain from hatred, and refrain from wrong views. These three are related to proper and sensible mental conduct. Here, to refrain from covetousness means to rid oneself of the craving for wealth, fame, and power. To refrain

from hatred is the same as having feelings of loving-kindness and compassion. To refrain from wrong views means to understand what is wholesome and unwholesome, karmic consequences, and to have confidence in the virtues of the Triple Gem. Moreover, it means to know that a bright future, i.e. both liberation and buddhahood, stems from one's practice and accumulation of wholesome deeds; thus one would not be deluded into praying to the spirits and deities for salvation and protection.

These ten wholesome deeds when practiced based on the three mind factors would be the actions of the "bodhisattvas of the ten wholesome deeds." Some might think that these ten merely focus on personal morality, and have nothing to do with the proactive attitude of bringing welfare to humanity. This would be a misunderstanding. Buddhism is a religion. If we overlook the purification of our own body and mind and cannot even help ourselves, then how can we help others? Yet the scripture says, "Even before one is liberated, one endeavors to liberate others. As such, a bodhisattva generates the bodhi mind."⁶⁰ How does one put others ahead of oneself?

Consider this: If someone has the aspiration to bring welfare to his country and fellow citizens, yet does not have the [requisite] knowledge and skills, or lives a self-indulgent life or is stubbornly set in one's way, can this person fulfill such a great aspiration? Therefore, when the bodhisattva makes a vow, of course it is "to put others ahead of one's own interest." This is a lofty ideal. But in order to reach this goal of helping others, there is no other way but to purify one's own body and mind. This is to say, one's goal must be lofty, but in practice the work begins with those things that are immediate and close at hand.

With unwavering bodhi mind, with steadily cultivated loving-kindness and compassion, and right view based on penetrative understanding of conditioned origination and emptiness, bodhisattvas purify their bodies and minds; day-by-day they improve themselves. This does not mean that one must first achieve liberation and become a great bodhisattva or attain

⁶⁰ CBETA, T12, no. 375, p. 838, a5.

buddhahood before helping others. Instead, one should keep making progress in practice while at the same time helping others to the best of one's ability. With continuous improvement and practice, one's merits and wisdom will gradually increase, so too will the ability to help others. This understanding should be mastered by all beginners of bodhisattva deeds.

Both Early Buddhism and Early Mahayana serve as fine inspirations for the practice of human-centered Buddhism, the career of a human bodhisattva. Take the elder Vimalakīrti for example. In addition to cultivating the six paramitas and helping other beings, he engaged in business enterprises, participated in politics, lectured on the Right Dharma at public forums, and was involved in education to counsel and inspire the young. He even paid visits to brothels and taverns in order to warn people of the dangers of lust, yet was able to remain resolute in proper conduct—unseduced.⁶¹ He engaged all levels of society guiding others toward wholesomeness and higher practice, motivating people to cultivate the bodhi mind. This is the image of a great householder bodhisattva.

The story about the Bodhisattva Sudhana who visited many virtuous and learned friends (*kalyāṇamitras*) is also significant. The first three were monks, and the methods they taught him were to be mindful of the Buddha, to gain insight into the Dharma, and to spend time with the Sangha of monks, i.e. to correctly develop confidence and understanding in the Triple Gem which are the prerequisites to further study in Buddhism. Others who were not monks or nuns included a linguist scholar, an artist, an architect, a mathematician, a medical doctor, a king, an incense vendor, an ocean navigator, and a judge. In other words, besides monastic bodhisattvas, lay bodhisattvas could be found in all strata of society. There were even those who ventured deeply into other religions and used their positions within those religions to teach the Dharma.

The expedient means by which the *kalyāṇamitras* (in later periods of development even ghosts and spirits were introduced)

⁶¹ CBETA, T14, no. 475, p. 539, a25-29.

taught people were based on their personal knowledge and expertise, thus establishing a group “with the same vow and same behavior.” This is precisely why bodhisattvas participate in different professions to befriend and convert people in their social circles, and guide them onto the grand path of buddhahood. (Based on this approach, I wrote *The Youthful Buddhism*.) To teach others based on one’s own personal example, the *Āgama Sūtra* had this to say: “When one undertakes the ten wholesome deeds, one should personally practice them, teach them to others, praise others for practicing them, and rejoice at their actions.”⁶² Such is the meaning of benefitting oneself and benefitting others. This is the wholesome and skillful way to propagate the Dharma.

Imagine if a Buddhist practices the Dharma (such as the ten wholesome deeds) by fulfilling all responsibilities within the family and creating a more harmonious and blissful family environment, the family members will have a good impression. Then surely the entire family will be motivated to become a pure Buddhist family. Within our society there exist many people who work together in their respective groups whether in the fields, stores, factories, etc. Buddhist practitioners can certainly influence their colleagues and turn them to the Buddhist path if they perform with distinction, and on top of being knowledgeable and able, more importantly show moral character. Not only would they look after themselves but also care about others, winning them over with generosity, kind words, beneficial help and comradery. For example, as a doctor, one attends to one’s patients by curing their physical and mental illnesses. In addition, one could explain to them the illness of defilements as the source of their physical and mental suffering, as well as its cure as prescribed by the Buddhist path. This is precisely what each one of the *kalyāṇamitras* visited by Sudhana taught him during his sojourn, which is to guide others onto the bodhisattva path by using one’s knowledge and expertise. It is the most ideal method.

From Early Mahayana to the present, from India to China, the separation and distance are so vast in both time and space. In

⁶² CBETA, T01, no. 80, p. 892, a6-8.

its spirit of benefitting self and others, today's human-centered Buddhism will certainly have more varieties of Buddhist activities. The bodhisattva deeds of benefitting others are all within the realm of wisdom and merit. Deeds pertaining to wisdom refer to those actions that enable people to understand the Buddha's teachings and achieve inner purification. Deeds pertaining to merit refer to those actions that enable people to obtain well being from everyday living. These two types of deeds are also mutually related.

With regard to wisdom-deeds, other than giving Dharma talks, there are newspapers and magazines to publish, Buddhist books to circulate, and Buddhist radio and TV programs to broadcast. There are Buddhist colleges, research institutes, and universities to establish. There are winter or summer Dharma camps to be organized for groups of different levels (children, youths, etc.). Also, there is a need for networking among various Buddhist academic communities. The focus [of these deeds] is on introducing the Dharma to remove misunderstandings about Buddhism, allowing people to gain correct understanding of the Dharma and engraving it deeply into their hearts.

With regard to merit-deeds, there are the undertakings of social welfare programs to help those in poverty, sickness, disabilities, orphans, senior citizens, and disaster relief, etc. And wherever there is discord in families or workplaces resulting in suffering, wherever there are conflicts among different social strata resulting in chaos, a Buddhist disciple should take an objective yet caring position to help everyone improve and live in peace, harmony and happiness. As long as they do not go against the Dharma, such undertakings are all good deeds.

However, one who practices bodhisattva deeds to benefit others must cultivate the ten wholesome deeds based on the three mind factors the foundation for the practice of both wisdom-deeds and merit-deeds. Otherwise, whether it be missionary work or charitable activities, at best it is only worldly good, because the true meaning of the Buddha's teachings is getting more and more diluted (becoming confused with mundane knowledge). At worse, it would be just like the Chinese saying, "the clay

bodhisattva crossing the river” (vanished), leading to negative side effects for Buddhism.

To conclude, if a bodhisattva is to generate the mind to benefit others, he or she better first find a firm footing!

TEN

Advancing Towards the Right Goal

The development of human bodhisattva deeds, i.e. human-centered Buddhism, is well suited for today, though it is possible that it might bring side effects. I believe that the unique characteristics of Buddhism which distinguish it from theistic religions must be unmistakably identified and recognized.

I recall someone asked me twenty years ago, “Why is it that in the (Southern) Buddhist regions such as Thailand and Sri Lanka, followers of other religions cannot easily take foothold, yet Mahayana Buddhists are easily converted to other religions?” At the time I just sighed and did not know what to say. This situation ought to be seen as related to the special tolerance demonstrated by Buddhism. However, the tolerance exhibited in the original teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha does have principles. For example, the Buddhist Sangha would never worship the Indian deities and spirits, but instead were venerated by them. The Sangha did not deny their existence but emphasized that human existence is superior to heavenly existence. Early Buddhism thoroughly rejected fortune telling, incantations, *homa*, and invocations, i.e. all the lower forms of religious rituals practiced by theists in India. The unlimited tolerance exhibited by Mahayana Buddhism (which is the prime cause of the decay of Buddhism in India) was extended eventually to regard everything as expedient means, and ultimately the deities and the Buddha became one. The doctrinal theses of Chinese Buddhism ultimately reached a form of syncretism that is marvelous to the extreme. However, if they were actually applied to real life, what would happen to Buddhism?

Contemporary Master Taixu was especially accomplished in syncretism. In 1941 he tried to organize the “Master Taixu Students Association.” The qualifications for membership stated

that ex-monastics are welcome, disciples of other religions are welcome, and even communist sympathizers are welcome. In the master's mind, "even malignant spirits, the *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas*, serve their purpose." (See my book, *A Chronological Biography of Master Taixu*.) As it turned out, organization of the student association did not take off. With such a hodgepodge membership, had this association actually proceeded to organize activities, what kind of negative effect would these *yakṣas* and *rākṣasas* (like the mafia) bring to Buddhism?

The all-inclusive tolerance of Mahayana Buddhism and the need to promote Mahayana ideology led to the gradual syncretizing of all kinds of expedient means into Buddhism, which eventually evolved into the concept of "the oneness of the deities and the Buddha." I am not against expedient means for they cannot be ruled out in Buddhism. However, the suitability of expedience has its time and place, and Buddhism must also maintain the Early-Mahayana spirit of "straightforwardly relinquishing expedient means."

In "How I Classify All Buddhist Doctrines" Master Taixu wrote, "At this day and age, ... if Buddhists were to follow the practices and goals of the heavenly vehicle schools (such as the Pure Land School's aim for rebirth in the heavenly realms, or the Esoteric School's aspiration for transformation into a celestial body), they would be criticized as being superstitious theists. Such practices are not expedient means for they may turn into impediments." Master Taixu was good at syncretism, yet able to give up expedience in order to highlight and promote "human-life Buddhism," which is better suited to modern times. For taking this stand he is indeed a rarity among rarities. However, as for the impact on his readers, Master Taixu's "human-life Buddhism", so dear to his heart, could not help but become bogged down by syncretism in the end.

In Taiwan nowadays, "human-life Buddhism," "human-centered Buddhism" and "human-vehicle Buddhism" seem to be gradually gaining popularity. However, they are mostly expedient adaptations to modern needs and rarely do they conform to Dharma principles. In essence their ideology remains that of "the

oneness of the deities and the Buddha.” It is also a fact that among the advocates of “human-centered,” “human-life” and “human-vehicle” there exist proponents of “syncretized exoteric and esoteric Buddhism.” Needless to say, as long as one does not have a correct view of the Dharma, aiming merely to organize social activities is nothing more than a vulgar popularization of Buddhism.

More notably, some people believe that Early Buddhism is essentially a [personal] path of liberation from samsara, thereby, as far as moral conscience is concerned, remaining in the budding stage. And since moral conscience is integral to the bodhisattva path, they believe that the bodhisattva path and the liberation path cannot merge. This idea comes as a result of ignoring the scriptural teachings that explain how prajna is connected to great compassion.

Then there are those who aspire to disseminate the Buddha’s teachings without using Buddhist terminology. This development appears to be well thought out. However, in the end this results in the unhindered coexistence of theism and Taoism within Buddhism. This group still belongs to the same old syncretists who promote “anything goes.”

There are some who advocate human-centered Buddhism, yet with regard to Buddhism versus other religions (or Buddha versus God), their all-inclusive tolerant attitude is that these religions are interconnected. Mostly the development along this trend is similar to late period Indian Buddhism when the belief was “the oneness of the deities and the Buddha.” It also resembles a modernized version of late period Chinese Buddhism when the belief was that Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism all come from the same source. If this is just a matter of fulfilling one’s personal goal and aspiration, perhaps what they advocate will succeed. However, if the objective is to purify and modernize Buddhism, this trend may not necessarily bring a promising future. On the contrary, there is the worrisome danger of repeating the ultimate ruination that occurred to Indian Buddhism (being eroded and destroyed by theistic religions).

Genuine human bodhisattva deeds demand an unerring understanding of the distinct characteristics of the Buddha's teachings, yet are "able to adapt to the pragmatic needs of the present time, the present place and the present people," as Master Taixu wrote in his essay "A Discussion of Today's Bodhisattva Path from the Perspective of Pali System Buddhism." Adhering to the traditional view, Master Taixu regarded the Buddhism practiced in places like Sri Lanka as Hinayana, but now we must look into such a view and investigate further.

With buddhahood as the goal, how long does it take to become a buddha through practicing the bodhisattva path of loving-kindness, compassion and benefiting others? This is a commonly discussed question. There are various estimates: three large *asamkhyeya*-kalpas, four, seven,⁶³ or infinite; or even attainment of buddhahood in a single lifetime. All these are mere assertions that have no definitive agreement. The human mind is contradictory. If we say that buddhahood is easy to attain, then the bodhisattva path seems not grand enough. If we say that it takes eons of kalpas to reach the goal, that seems too difficult and one shies away from taking such a vow. For these reasons the scriptures must resort to expedient sayings that suit the audience.

The truth of the matter is that when a bodhisattva actually commits to the great vow, he would not care about these small matters. The bodhisattva only knows that the goal must be lofty but the actual practice must begin at the ordinary and practical level. The maxim is "Do what one can according to one's abilities," giving one's best. As our practice gradually deepens and expands, we will gain a profound confidence in the inevitability of causality. Thus, we will cultivate the land and not wonder about the harvest. The idea is that when the work is done, naturally the accomplishment follows. If one's compassionate vow were deeply rooted and one attained the conviction of non-arising, then one would directly experience and realize profound nirvana which is beyond time, space and quantification. Would one still wonder about how slow or how fast?

⁶³ CBETA, T31, no. 1593, p. 126, c1-3.

The Indian Abhidharma masters of Early Buddhism discussed the bodhisattva path with their limited mindset. For this reason Nāgārjuna criticized them thus: “The Buddha stated that he performed meritorious deeds for infinite *asamkhyeya*-kalpas in order to liberate sentient beings. Then why did he speak of three *asamkhyeya*-kalpas? Because three *asamkhyeya*-kalpas is measurable and finite.”⁶⁴ In the later period of Mahayana Buddhism, people instead felt that it takes too long to attain buddhahood, thus arose talk about speedy or instant buddhahood.

Master Taixu stated, “(a) I am not a scholar who does research on Buddhist scriptures, (b) I am not a sectarian disciple of any one school, (c) I do not pursue the greedy idea of instant buddhahood, (d) I am a practitioner who aspires to follow the example of the bodhisattvas. ... I vow to make use of this ordinary human existence to learn from the bodhisattvas’ examples of aspiration and cultivation. These are my doctrinal intentions.”⁶⁵ People fantasize about instant buddhahood and are in such a rush to get there they cast aside the bodhisattva practice. What nonsense! Master Taixu’s doctrinal intentions can be regarded as the best compass for human-centered Buddhism and the human bodhisattva practice. The human bodhisattva practice in human-centered Buddhism not only accords with the disposition of its followers; it is also the pure standard path for bodhisattvas.

I offer a passage from my old essay called “Benefitting Self and Others”:

Bear not seeing the decline of our sacred religion,
bear not seeing the suffering of sentient beings—may the
great-minded Buddhist disciples march forth openly
along the standard path of the bodhisattvas.

⁶⁴ *Mahā-prajñā-pāramitā Śāstra*, chapter 4; CBETA, T25, no. 1509, p. 92, b7-9.

⁶⁵ From *Discourse on the Upāsaka Ethics Sutra*, Master Taixu.

In order to be good at the practice of bodhisattva deeds within samsara, naturally one must learn within samsara. One must develop abilities that allow one to navigate in samsara and universally benefit sentient beings. ... Besides affirming confidence and vow (bodhi mind) and nurturing loving-kindness and compassion, the ability that allows a bodhisattva to navigate in samsara and universally benefit sentient beings is for the most part verifying the nature of emptiness. This skill is of utmost importance and it involves gaining insight into all phenomena, understanding that they are illusory and transient, without inherent nature, and thereby attaining the right view of unhindered Two Truths. It is for this reason that the *Samyukta Āgama* states, ‘For one who has attained superior right view in this world, even with the passing of hundreds or thousands of lives, this one will never fall into perdition.’⁶⁶

It is only when one reaches the realization that both samsara and nirvana are illusory and transient that one can...survive the ups and downs of samsara, empowered by confidence and vow (bodhi mind), loving-kindness, compassion, and especially the verification of emptiness. One manages to gradually tame mental afflictions to the extent that when minor troubles come to the surface nothing major untoward would happen. Although mental afflictions have not been completely eradicated, major serious transgressions would not be committed. (Note that hatred, anger, resentment, vexation, jealousy, harmfulness, and all afflictions that are contrary to loving-kindness and compassion must be brought under control, eradicated so that they do not arise.) Why would anyone fear lapsing if one constantly regards another’s pain and suffering as one’s own, another’s

⁶⁶ CBETA, T02, no. 99, p. 204, c11-12.

success and happiness as one's own; if one's ego-self view diminishes day by day, and the feeling of loving-kindness and compassion deepens and expands day by day? Only those who care about no one but themselves would worry that they could relapse any time.

One should make the vows while in samsara of always encountering the buddhas, of always having the opportunity to hear the Dharma, and of following the bodhisattva path life after life. These are the common teachings of early Mahayana, which are also shared tenets between the Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Schools. Śākyamuni Buddha said in the *Madhyama Āgama*, 'Ānanda! I practice emptiness often.'⁶⁷ This is explained in the *Yogācāra-bhūmi Śāstra* as, 'Being a practicing bodhisattva in his previous lives, the lord Buddha frequently practiced abidance in emptiness. Thus he was able to rapidly attain realization of the *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi* (supreme perfect enlightenment).'⁶⁸ ... The extensive expositions in the Mahayana sutras about emptiness in all things are indeed great expedient means that show us how not to abide in samsara, not to abide in nirvana, but to practice the bodhisattva deeds leading to buddhahood.⁶⁹

Finally, I would like to restate my positions again:

I have investigated the Buddha's teachings from many angles, written a little, lectured a little, but I am not a sectarian disciple or a treatise master.

I have no wish of becoming neither a well-learned and knowledgeable Buddhist scholar, nor do I wish to open a Dharma department store, the kind that whatever the customer wants the store offers (such is how the great bodhisattvas are portrayed).

⁶⁷ CBETA, T01, no. 26, p. 737, a4.

⁶⁸ CBETA, T30, no. 1579, p. 813, a6-8.

⁶⁹ 〈自利與利他〉《學佛三要》第八章 pp.149-152.

I am an heir of Master Taixu's way of thinking, which is human-life Buddhism, breaking away from the tendency of spiritism. Moreover, I have further provided theoretical evidence in Buddhism to help break away from the tendency of deification.

In my investigation of how Indian Buddhism evolved and was transformed, I searched for the teachings that accord with Dharma principles and human dispositions. In other words, I worked to discard from today's Buddhism that feeble and old part of historical Indian Buddhism that was on the verge of extinction, and I worked to extol the part of Indian Buddhism that was vibrant and youthful. This is the Buddhism that suits the modern era and is more adaptive to the progressive era of the future.

Now my body is feeble and old, but in my heart the joy of the Dharma from the young adult era of Buddhism has never left. May I be reborn in this human world of tribulations life after life, and dedicate myself to expound the voice of perfect enlightenment in the human realm!

APPENDIX

A Discussion of the Tiantai and Xianshou Classifications of Buddhist Doctrines from the Historic Perspective of Indian Buddhism

My classification of Buddhist doctrines based on the historic reality of Indian Buddhism, as discussed previously, is different from those of the ancient Chinese masters. Of their many classifications, those of two schools, Tiantai⁷⁰ and Xianshou⁷¹, are the most comprehensive. These masters assumed that all sutras are records of the Buddha's direct utterance and thus based their classifications on a chronological order [as suggested in the sutras]. For instance, there are the ancient theory of "Five Periods of Teaching"⁷² and the *Avatamsaka Sūtra's* "Three Stages of Shining."⁷³ These, of course, are not realistic portrayals of the historical chronology.

⁷⁰ The Tiantai School is also known as the Fahua School (Lotus School).

⁷¹ The Xianshou School is also known as the Huayen School (Avatamsaka School).

⁷² The Tiantai School classified the Buddha's life-time teachings (forty-five years) according to the following five periods: (1) *Avatamsaka* period, the first three weeks after the Buddha's enlightenment in which he expounded the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*; (2) Deer Park period, the following twelve years of his preaching the *Āgama* sutras in the Deer Park; (3) *Vaipulya* period, the following eight years of his preaching Mahayana associated with Hinayana doctrines; (4) Prajna period, the next twenty-two years of his preaching the *Prajñā* sutras; (5) Lotus and Nirvana period, the last eight years of his preaching the *Lotus Sūtra* and, in a day and a night, the *Nirvana Sūtra*.

⁷³ The three stages of shining: the sun first shines on the hill-tops, then the valleys and plains. According to the Tiantai teaching of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, the Buddha's doctrine had three periods of such shining: (1) he taught the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*, transforming his chief disciples into bodhisattvas; (2) the Hinayana sutras in general to sravakas and *pratyekabuddhas* in the Lumbinī garden; (3) the *Vaipulya* period sutras, *Prajñā* sutras, *Lotus Sūtra* and *Nirvana Sūtra* for all sentient beings.

Nevertheless, from a doctrinal perspective, the Tiantai School's classification of "Four Doctrinal Categories of Teachings" and the Xianshou School's classification of "Five Doctrines (and Ten Theses)," when compared to the historical development of Indian Buddhist thought, are rather close matches. I have put them in a table and will explain further. (See figure 3.1 below.)

Early Buddhism in India is comparable to Tiantai's classification of "*Tripitaka* Doctrine" and Xianshou's "Hinayana (Small Vehicle) Doctrine." Tiantai's *Tripitaka* Doctrine is named after the three baskets: Sutra, Vinaya and *Śāstra*. Although the *Lotus Sutra* used the term "Hinayana *Tripitaka*," in essence the *Tripitaka* Doctrine includes not only the sravakas (Hinayana), but also the bodhisattvas and buddhas (Mahayana) as well –

The great bodhisattva deeds are found in *Tripitaka* texts such as the Jataka stories in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* (the division of small books) of the Southern tradition. They are also seen in the *Ten Recitations Vinaya* of the Chinese *Tripitaka*, which speak of the "five hundred Jataka stories."

The Buddha's words and actions are found not only in the Sutra and Vinaya baskets but also in the Southern tradition's *Cariyā-piṭaka* (collection of deeds) and *Buddha-apadāna* (stories of the Buddha, a subdivision of the *Apadāna*), which are parts of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*. In the Chinese *Tripitaka*, the *Buddha-apadāna* is compiled into the *The Vinaya Matters from the Mūla-Sarvāstivāda School*.

Since the doctrine of Early Buddhism is connected to the sravaka (and *pratyekabuddha*), bodhisattva and buddha vehicles, Tiantai's naming of this group, *Tripitaka* Doctrine, is somewhat better than Xianshou's Hinayana Doctrine. The Hinayana Doctrine covers the first six of its Ten Theses, which range from the Vātsīputrīyā School thesis of "the self and phenomena inherently exist" to the Ekavyāvahārika School's "all phenomena are just names." From this we can see that the Tiantai *Tripitaka* Doctrine mainly refers to the *Tripitaka* texts, whereas the Xianshou Hinayana Doctrine emphasizes the historical [schism] in Indian Buddhism. Xianshou's Hinayana Doctrine, consisting

of the first six theses, pertains to Sectarian Buddhism, and is not representative of Pre-Sectarian Buddhism which was a homogenous and unified teaching. Thus, “Hinayana Doctrine” is clearly not as accurate as the name “*Tripitaka* Doctrine.”

The Tiantai classifications of Connected Doctrine and Distinct Doctrine are comparable to both Early and Late Mahayana. I think the word “connected” used by the Tiantai School is rather nice. For example, the *Prajñā-pāramitā* is commonly studied by all three vehicles. The arhats’ realization is equivalent to the bodhisattvas’ conviction of non-arising, only that bodhisattvas have generated the profound vow of compassion, thus they attain the conviction but choose not to actualize it. Mahayana sutras explain in detail the meaning of emptiness and frequently site examples of sravaka sages’ attainments to illustrate their point. The *Prajñā Sūtra* says that when sravaka disciples enter into the realization of sagehood, they can no longer generate the bodhi mind. This concept is connected to the earlier *Tripitaka* Doctrine. The stream entry sravaka sages who only have seven lifetimes left in samsara are not able to practice bodhisattva deeds that require many aeons. However, the sutra continues, “if such a sage generates the mind of *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, I will rejoice and not deny him such virtues. Why? Higher beings must further seek higher principles.”⁷⁴ This means that it is possible for sravaka sages to generate the mind and advance towards the Mahayana way.

From the standpoint of how the doctrines developed, the realization of “no I and mine” is the same as the realization of emptiness. Emptiness liberation, signless liberation and desireless liberation, i.e. the three gates of liberation, are found in the *Āgamas*. The sectarian schools asserted that:

There exist present buddhas in the ten directions;
Bodhisattvas who have attained decisiveness (the conviction of non-arising) are able to take rebirth in the lower realms according to their vows;

⁷⁴ CBETA, T08, no. 223, p. 273, b29-c5.

Realizing and understanding the truth of cessation (non-arising and non-ceasing) instantly penetrate the four noble truths;

Attainment of buddhahood and exposition of Dharma in the human realm were accomplished by the Buddha's transformation body (*Nirmāṇa-kāya*).

Thus, Early Mahayana is not unrelated to the *Tripitaka* Doctrine of Early Buddhism, but rather evolved from it. Promoting the Mahayana ideal while embracing the traditional *Tripitaka* Doctrine was exactly the position held by Mahayana Buddhism at its very beginning.

Early Mahayana frequently expounds the meaning of emptiness yet the explanations vary. For example, the *Nirvana Sutra* equates emptiness with buddha-nature. This concept is connected to Tiantai's Distinct Doctrine and Perfect Doctrine. The word "connected" of the Connected Doctrine means that "it is connected to the earlier *Tripitaka* Doctrine, and also connected to the later Distinct Doctrine and Perfect Doctrine." In the history of Indian Buddhism, the doctrine of Early Mahayana is the key that connects "the Dharma common to the Three Vehicles" to "the distinctive Dharma of the Mahayana."

Tiantai's Distinct Doctrine is the Mahayana doctrine (not shared by the Two Vehicles) about the practice and realization unique to bodhisattvas. It provides a distinct Mahayana explanation of defilement, karma and suffering:

Besides "the defilements from view and deliberation," it further established the concept of "entrenched ignorance;"

Besides "defiled karma," it established the concept of "undefiled karma;"

Besides "fragmentary birth and death," it established the concepts of "body arisen from mind-only," and the "inconceivable transformative birth and death." Thus, the Tiantai School has the concepts of "birth and death within the realms" and "birth and death outside of the realms."

During Early Mahayana, the concept of ultimate truth and conventional truth emerged which proposed that illusory existence under conditioned origination is inseparable from the nature of emptiness. During Late Mahayana, the concepts of tathagatagarbha and inherent pure mind emerged. Proponents regarded the concept of emptiness as an incomplete teaching and therefore distinctly formulated the “non-emptiness” concept which the Chinese in general called “sublime existence” and the Tiantai School called “truth of the middle.” This would form the Distinct Doctrine. All these are the unique characteristics of Late Mahayana Buddhism (and scriptures).

The Five Doctrines of the Xianshou School stem from Venerable Tushun’s five kinds of insight meditation. Of these five, the second is called “the arisen is the same as the unarisen” and the third is called “practice and principle are perfectly fused.” These two are similar to Tiantai’s Connected Doctrine and Distinct Doctrine.” When Xianshou’s Five Doctrines are compared to its own Ten Theses, the Initial Doctrine is the “all phenomena are empty” thesis and also the same as Tiantai’s Connected Doctrine. However, the Xianshou School further subdivided its Initial Doctrine into two: “Initial on existence” (Initial Doctrine on phenomena) and “Initial on emptiness” (Initial Doctrine on emptiness). This is where Xianshou and Tiantai differ in their interpretation of the Initial/Connected Doctrines.

Tiantai places more emphasis on the sutras. Its founder, Grand Master Zhiyi, lived during the Chen and Sui dynasties. At that time, the *Daśabhūmika Śāstra* masters asserted that the *ālaya* consciousness is real; by contrast, the *Mahāyāna-saṃparigraha Śāstra* masters asserted that the *ālaya* consciousness is both real and illusory. Both of these views were included in Tiantai’s Distinct Doctrine.

During the era of Master Xianshou, Master Xuanzhuang compiled the *Treatise on the Theory of Mere Consciousness* (it belongs to the same philosophical system as the *Daśabhūmika Śāstra* and the *Mahāyāna-saṃparigraha Śāstra*). Xuanzhuang provided a different scriptural interpretation of the

tathagatagarbha, the inherent pure mind, and buddha-nature. Under this influence, Xianshou finally included the Mere Consciousness (Yogācāra) School into the classification of Initial Doctrine and divided it into Initial on existence and Initial on emptiness.

Xianshou's Final Doctrine expounds the One Vehicle idea, i.e. all sentient beings possess buddha-nature. However, the *Treatise on the Theory of Mere Consciousness* speaks of the sravakas' and *pratyekabuddhas*' (Two Vehicles) decisive nature, and also another class of beings devoid of (sagely) nature called the *icchantika*—beings who can never become enlightened. Thus it is not the same as Xianshou's Final Doctrine. The Final Doctrine is mainly based on the commentary, *The Awakening of Mahayana Faith*, which asserts that true suchness becomes tainted; in other words, it relies on "true suchness" to explain the cause and effect of defilement versus purity. However, the *Treatise on the Theory of Mere Consciousness* relies on the arising and ceasing of "other-dependent-arising nature" to explain the causality of defilement versus purity, another major difference between them. Because of this divergence with its own Final Doctrine, the Xianshou School classified Xuanzhuang's Mere Consciousness teaching as Initial Doctrine on phenomena, belittling it to the category preceding the Initial Doctrine on emptiness.

According to the Mere Consciousness School:

The idea that all phenomena are empty is not a complete teaching. It spoke of the nature of existence as "other-dependent-arising nature" and "perfectly accomplished nature of reality."

The *Mahāyāna-saṃparigraha Śāstra* set forth ten kinds of superior doctrines, and all are distinctly different from the sravaka doctrines.

Everything is merely the manifestation of the mind.

There are also the doctrines of the two obstructions, two types of samsara, three types of bodies (sometimes four types of bodies), and four types of wisdom.

All these are distinctly Mahayana doctrines.

Furthermore, [the Mere Consciousness School] not only considered that the concept of “all phenomena are empty” was incomplete, it further asserted that tathagatagarbha is just the alias of true suchness, and that the nature of the mind is originally pure (i.e. inherent pure mind), referring to the mind’s true suchness. In the history of Buddhist thought, this assertion undoubtedly belongs to Late Mahayana Buddhism and emerged even later than some of the tathagatagarbha sutras. Nevertheless, the *Yogācāra-bhūmi Śāstra*, which is this School’s fundamental scripture, stresses that the *Samyukta Āgama* is the root source of Buddhism in explaining the Dharma principles in all three vehicles (as stated in its “Division of the Collection of Matters”). This outlook is connected to the Sarvāstivāda School, including both the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas. Since they regarded the arising and ceasing of “delusive discerning consciousness” as the basis for defilement and purity, one might say that Mere Consciousness doctrine is not too far from the teachings of Early Buddhism. For this reason, Xianshou classified it as belonging to the Initial Doctrine.

The (Final Doctrine) scriptures focusing on tathagatagarbha, inherent pure mind, and buddha-nature, emerged even earlier than the commentaries of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Coincidentally, the “tathagatagarbha store consciousness mind” doctrine and also the “Buddha-realm, Buddha Bodhi-wisdom, Buddha-virtues and Buddha-enterprises” concepts in the *Ratnagotra-vibhāga Mahāyānottaratantra Śāstra (Jewel-Nature Treatise)* are all parts of the “true permanence mere mind” Mahayana doctrine. The consummation of this doctrine happened alongside the development of the “delusive discernment mere consciousness” doctrines. Therefore, if we were to divide Tiantai’s Distinct Doctrine into two categories, (1) asserting that true suchness is *independent* of conditions, i.e. the “delusive discernment mere consciousness” doctrine, and (2) asserting that true suchness is *dependent* on conditions, i.e. the “true permanence mere mind” doctrine; such a classification would appear to be even more apropos than Xianshou’s classification of

the “delusive discernment mere consciousness” doctrine as belonging to the Initial Doctrine.

The Xianshou School created the Immediate Doctrine category solely out of respect for the Chan School. As it was prominent in the Tang Dynasty, a place was reserved for this school.

Both the Tiantai and Xianshou Schools regard the Perfect Doctrine as the most profound and marvelous. Tiantai highly valued the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Nirvana Sutra*, whereas Xianshou emphasized the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. In the developmental history of Indian Buddhism, the *Lotus Sutra* emerged towards the later stage of Early Mahayana. Although Tiantai’s Perfect Doctrine is also related to the emptiness doctrine in the *Prajñā* sutras, it was influenced by the doctrines that assert an eternal nirvana, buddha-nature, and also embraced the *Avataṃsaka* concept of “mind, Buddha, sentient beings—all three are indistinguishable.” The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* contains elements of Late Mahayana Buddhism, and since the Xianshou School was developed from the philosophy of the *Daśabhūmika Śāstra* masters of the *Avataṃsaka*, its emphasis was on mere mind.

What Tiantai and Xianshou share in common is the doctrine of “the Tathagata at the core.” The *Lotus Sutra* explains and demonstrates the teachings so as to awaken beings to the knowledge and vision of the Buddha. It proposes that the Dharma is One Vehicle and that the individual is the Tathagata. It explains how all paths (expedient means) are meant to unveil the source (buddhahood). It shows that the Buddha has a lifespan measured in infinite *asaṃkhyeya*-kalpas, and that he is eternal and imperishable. The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* reveals the resultant virtues of the Vairocana Buddha and says that Buddha Śākyamuni and Prince Siddhārtha are all aliases of Vairocana Buddha. Both the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* equate the Śākya Buddha to Vairocana Buddha; moreover, Vairocana Buddha is never mentioned without the Śākya Buddha.

An idealized buddhahood and the belief in its perfection originated from the Mahāsaṃghika School which asserted that the Buddha is omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent, with an

infinite lifespan. Such an idealized view of buddhahood in Mahayana Buddhism is evident in both the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra*. This idealized buddhahood and the belief in its perfection share the same doctrinal objective as Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism's concept of "oneness of deities and the Buddha with the Tathagata at the core." Although the Tiantai and Xianshou Schools came across Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism, they were only exposed to *Kriyā-tantra*—the ritual portion of esoteric teachings. Nevertheless, they still have much in common as far as their frame of mind is concerned.

[Other points of interest:] The venerable Zhu Daosheng proposed that "the *icchantikas* have buddha-nature." Both Tiantai and Xianshou Schools promoted the Perfect Doctrine, i.e. the Tathagata at the core. One might say that with their superior intellect the Chinese masters were able to foresee the inevitable trend of Buddhist philosophy and foretell what Buddhism would evolve into.

At the time of Emperor Xuanzong in the Tang Dynasty, the Indian monks Śubhākarasiṃha and Vajrabodhi (and his disciple Amoghavajra) transmitted the esoteric practices. From what we can see of extant Japanese transmissions, the Shingon Sect (Eastern esoteric) is based on the Xianshou School's Perfect Doctrine, whereas the Tendai Sect (Tiantai esoteric) is based on the Tiantai School's Perfect Doctrine. However, since both Tiantai and Xianshou focused on the Perfect Doctrine [which is comparable to] the theoretical aspect of esoteric doctrine, they were quite different from Esoteric Mahayana's focus which was on the ritual aspect. Evidently, Chinese Buddhism ultimately accepted Mahayana Buddhism as the mainstream teaching. The Xianshou School was established a bit later than Tiantai. In the Yuan dynasty, "all phenomena are unobstructed" was cited by the foreign monks (lamas) to advocate their Supreme Yoga practices.

I subdivided Mahayana Buddhism into three systems: empty nature mere name, delusive discernment mere consciousness, and true permanence mere mind. They are sequentially similar to Master Taixu's classification of three schools (namely, Dharma nature emptiness wisdom school,

Dharma characteristics mere consciousness school, and Dharma realm perfect enlightenment school). In fact, Venerable Guifeng Zongmi of the Tang Dynasty already classified Buddhist doctrines into the Dharma characteristics school, the refutation of characteristics school, and the Dharma nature school—encompassing all Final, Immediate, and Perfect doctrines. The Venerable Yonming Yanshou called these the characteristics school, emptiness school and nature school, respectively. Evidently, the three systems that developed out of Mahayana Buddhism correspond with the findings of the ancient masters. Any discrepancies among the sequences of these classifications are due to the fact that Venerable Guifeng and others based their classification on the Xianshou School doctrines. The true distinction lies in the ways these schools use their systems to categorize [all the Buddhist scriptures]. The differences in the sequence of the three systems are shown in figure 3.2.

Figure 3.1

天臺四教 Tiantai Classification of Doctrines	賢首五教 Xianshou Classification of Doctrines	四期 Four Periods of Indian Buddhism
藏教 <i>Tripitaka</i> Doctrine	小教 Hinayana Doctrine	佛法 Early Buddhism
通教 Connected Doctrine	始教 Initial Doctrine	初期大乘佛法 Early Mahayana Buddhism
別教 Distinct Doctrine		終教 Final Doctrine
	頓教 Immediate Doctrine	
圓教 Perfect Doctrine	圓教 Perfect Doctrine	秘密大乘佛法 Esoteric Mahayana Buddhism

Figure 3.2

Yinshun	Taixu	Guifeng	Yonming
性空唯名論 Empty nature mere name doctrine	法性空慧宗 Dharma nature emptiness wisdom school	法相宗 Dharma characteristics school	相宗 Characteristics school
虛妄唯識論 Delusive discernment mere consciousness doctrine	法相唯識宗 Dharma characteristics mere consciousness school	破相宗 Refutation of characteristics school	空宗 Emptiness school
真常唯心論 True permanence mere mind doctrine	法界圓覺宗 Dharma realm perfect enlightenment school	法性宗 Dharma nature school	性宗 Nature school