

Akira, Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Trans. Paul Groner. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. (Chapter 16: the Origins of Mahayana, pp. 256+).

CHAPTER 16

The Origins of Mahāyāna

Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna

THE TERM “Mahāyāna” is usually translated as “Great Vehicle” and the term “Hīnayāna” as “Small Vehicle.” The original meaning of the element *hīna* in the term “Hīnayāna” is “discarded”; it also denotes “inferior” or “base.” The appellation “Hīnayāna” thus was a deprecatory term used by Mahāyāna practitioners to refer to Nikāya (Sectarian) Buddhism. No Buddhist groups ever referred to themselves as Hīnayānists.

It is unclear whether Mahāyānists referred to the whole of Nikāya Buddhism as Hīnayāna or only to a specific group. The arguments of the *Ta-chih-tū lun* (T 1509, *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*) are primarily directed against the Vaibhāṣikas of the Sarvāstivādin School. The Sarvāstivādins were viewed as Hīnayānists in this and many other Mahāyāna texts. Unfortunately, it is not known whether the term “Hīnayāna” in Mahāyāna scriptures also referred to the Theravādins and Mahāsaṅghikas.

In his travel diary, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Fa-hsien (d. 423?) divided the areas where Indian Buddhism was practiced into three categories (*Fo-kuo chi*, T 2085, *Record of Buddhist Lands*): Mahāyāna, Hīnayāna, and mixed (Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna practiced together in the same area). A comparison of Fa-hsien’s travel diary to that of another Chinese pilgrim, Hsüan-tsang (600–664), *Hsi-yu chi* (T 2087, *A Record of Travels to Western Regions*), clearly indicates that Fa-hsien used the term “Hīnayāna” to refer to all of the schools of Nikāya Buddhism. Hsüan-

tsang understood Indian Buddhism in approximately the same manner. Hsüan-tsang placed the epithet “Hīnayāna” in front of the names of certain schools, such as the Sarvāstivādin, Sammatīya, and Lokottaravādin. In other cases, he noted that the people of an area were Hīnayāna Buddhists or that they followed Hīnayāna teachings, but he did not designate the name of their school. When he discussed the two areas where he found Theravādins and the three places where he found Mahāsaṅghikas, he used only the name of the school without the epithet “Hīnayāna.”¹ This difference is probably not significant. However, when he discussed the five areas where he found groups associated with the Sri Lankan Theravāda School, he referred to them as “Mahāyāna Theravādins.”² The Abhayagiri sect of the Theravāda School that was influential in Sri Lanka at this time seems to have adopted many Mahāyāna teachings. Later, it was expelled from Sri Lanka by the Mahāvihāra sect, which dominates Sri Lankan Buddhism today. The surviving commentaries (*Aṭṭhakathā*) of the Mahāvihāra sect, when closely examined, include a number of positions that agree with Mahāyāna teachings. Consequently, Hsüan-tsang referred to the Sri Lankan Theravāda School as “the Mahāyāna Theravāda School.” Thus, Hsüan-tsang did not regard all sects of Nikāya Buddhism as Hīnayāna. However, he regarded the Lokottaravādin sect, which is of Mahāsaṅghika lineage, as Hīnayāna despite the many Mahāyāna elements found in the Lokottaravādin biography of the Buddha, the *Mahāvastu*.

Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism are not so clearly distinguished in I-ching’s (635–713) travel diary, the *Nan-hai chi-kuei nei-fa chuan* (*T* 2125, *A Record of Buddhism in India and the Malay Archipelago*). I-ching observed no significant differences in the life styles of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna monks. Both followed the *vinaya*, were expected to use three robes and a begging bowl, and based their practice on the Four Noble Truths. I-ching noted that “those who paid homage to bodhisattvas and read Mahāyāna *sūtras*” were Mahāyāna practitioners, while those who did not do so were Hīnayāna. Only the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools were consistently referred to as Mahāyāna.³ I-ching spent most of his time at the large monastery at Nālandā in central India. His use of the terms “Hīnayāna” and “Mahāyāna” may indicate that the divisions between the two types of Buddhism were not very clearly observed at Nālandā in the seventh century.

Hsüan-tsang and I-ching traveled in India when Mahāyāna Buddhism was in its middle period. Their writings, consequently, do not describe Early Mahāyāna Buddhism. However, in general, the term “Hīnayāna” was most often applied to the Sarvāstivādin School.

The terms “Śrāvakayāna” (vehicle of the listener) and “Bodhisattvayāna” (vehicle of the bodhisattva) are even older than the terms “Hīnayāna” and “Mahāyāna.” Hīnayāna was eventually substituted for Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna for Bodhisattvayāna. Śrāvakayāna was probably used to refer to Nikāya Buddhism in general.

The Meaning of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna

The element *yāna* in the terms “Hīnayāna” and “Mahāyāna” literally means “vehicle,” and it refers to Buddhist doctrine. By practicing in accordance with doctrine, a person could cross the river of cyclic existence, traveling from the shore that represented the realm of delusion to the other shore, which represented the realm of enlightenment. Doctrine was compared to a vehicle that would take the practitioner to salvation.

The differences between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna doctrine are many. But the major difference, at least according to the Mahāyāna tradition, lies in the attitudes of each toward the salvation of others. The Mahāyāna tradition maintains that a person must save himself by saving others. The Mahāyāna descriptions of religious practice as the six perfections (*pāramitā*) illustrate how a person could benefit himself only by helping others. These doctrines reflected a view of the world based on the teaching of Dependent Origination.

In contrast, according to Sarvāstivādin and Theravādin doctrine, the goal of practice was to attain salvation for oneself by cutting off all defilements. Once salvation had been attained, the practitioner had accomplished all that was to be done and entered *nirvāṇa*. Saving others was not a necessary requirement for the completion of practice. Even after enlightenment had been attained, helping others was not required. Śrāvakayāna Buddhism was sometimes called “Buddhism for disciples” because it could be mastered by practicing under qualified teachers. The practitioner was not required to progress from being student to teacher. The term “*śrāvaka*,” which means “listener” or “one who studies,” also reflects these qualities. This lack of social concern is probably related to the understanding of the doctrine of Dependent Origination professed by many of the schools of Nikāya Buddhism. For them, Dependent Origination referred to the interaction of discrete entities, each with its own nature.

Within the Śrāvakayāna tradition, teachings were transmitted from teacher to disciple. Preaching the Dharma and teaching were practices performed by monks. Because Śrāvakayāna doctrines did not require

monks to help others as an integral part of their practice, however, these doctrines were considered “Hīnayāna” by Mahāyāna advocates. While Mahāyānists called the Hīnayāna tradition “Buddhism for disciples,” they conceived of the Mahāyāna tradition as a form of Buddhism that would allow them to become teachers. It was a teaching that would enable them to become Buddhas, to become equal to the Buddha, the teacher of the *śrāvakas*. Mahāyāna Buddhism encouraged the practitioner to teach even while he was studying, an attitude based on the premise that the practitioner already possessed the potential necessary to realize Buddhahood. A person who knew that he had this potential was called a bodhisattva. The Mahāyāna conception of the bodhisattva was modeled on the accounts of Śākyamuni Buddha’s former lives, which were related in Buddhist literature. Thus, Mahāyāna Buddhism was a teaching or vehicle for bodhisattvas, a *bodhisattvayāna*. Some Mahāyāna practitioners believed that all people, not only themselves, possessed the potential to become Buddhas. These practitioners wished to help all other people realize that they too had this potential and consequently stressed the importance of helping others. Their beliefs eventually developed into the doctrine that all sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature. Thus, Mahāyāna Buddhism was concerned with lay people and this world while Hīnayāna Buddhism was a monastic form of Buddhism characterized by withdrawal from the everyday world.

These differences in attitudes between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism resulted in a variety of divergent doctrines. For Hīnayāna Buddhists, *nirvāṇa* was the final goal, characterized by some Mahāyānists as the extinction of body and mind. In contrast, Mahāyāna Buddhists argued that the practitioner was to attain “active *nirvāṇa*” (*apraṭiṣṭhita-nirvāṇa*) in which he did not remain quiescent. Bodhisattvas such as Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and Avalokiteśvara had more powers than Buddhas, but continued to devote themselves to saving sentient beings instead of attaining Buddhahood. Buddhas such as Amitābha or Śākyamuni (as an eternal Buddha) never entered extinction (*parinirvāṇa*). They continued to help sentient beings. Entering *nirvāṇa* was seen as nothing more than an expedient means to help save sentient beings. Nobody actually entered *nirvāṇa* as an ultimate state, according to this Mahāyāna view.

The emergence of these teachings was made possible by the development of the doctrine of nonsubstantiality (*śūnyatā*) and new interpretations of the concepts of the Middle Way and Dependent Origination that diverged from the views of Nikāya Buddhism. Mahāyāna views of the Buddha also differed from those of Nikāya Buddhism. Mahāyāna Buddhism distinguished three bodies of the Buddha: *dharmakāya* (*dharmā*

body), *saṃbhogakāya* (body of bliss), and *nirmāṇakāya* (manifested body). The stages of practice for the Mahāyānists led to the attainment of Buddhahood. Consequently, Mahāyāna paths to enlightenment such as the ten stages (*daśabhūmi*) or forty-two stages had little in common with the Hīnayāna list of four candidates and four fruits or with the Hīnayāna goal of becoming an *arhat*. Some Mahāyānists conceived of the Buddha as a savior of helpless beings and developed doctrines concerning easier paths to salvation or the Buddha's use of his own power to save men. Such doctrines were found only in Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Still other differences between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism could be indicated, but the basic distinction lies in the Mahāyāna insistence that helping others is a necessary part of any effort to save oneself while Hīnayāna doctrine stresses the salvation of oneself.

The Three Sources of Mahāyāna Buddhism

The origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism are still not completely understood. Three sources appear to have made significant contributions to the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. These sources are stated briefly here and then explained in more detail in the following sections of this chapter. The first source is Nikāya (Sectarian) Buddhism. Many modern scholars have maintained the view that Mahāyāna Buddhism developed out of the Mahāsaṅghika School. But since the Mahāsaṅghika School continued to exist long after Mahāyāna Buddhism arose, the rise of Mahāyāna cannot be explained simply as the transformation of the Mahāsaṅghikas into Mahāyānists. While it is true that the many similarities between Mahāsaṅghika and Mahāyāna doctrines prove that the Mahāsaṅghika School did influence Mahāyāna Buddhism, teachings from the Sarvāstivādin, Mahīśāsaka, Dharmaguptaka, and Theravāda schools were also incorporated into Mahāyāna Buddhism. The doctrines of the Sarvāstivāda School in particular were often mentioned in Mahāyāna texts, and Sammatīya teachings also were influential. The relation between Nikāya Buddhism and Mahāyāna Buddhism clearly is not a simple one.

The second source is the biographical literature of the Buddha composed by people sometimes said to have belonged to the "vehicle that praised the Buddha" (Ch. *tsan-fo sheng*).⁴ Although this literature may have had its origins in Nikāya Buddhism, it eventually developed in ways that transcended sectarian lines and contributed to the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

The third source is *stūpa* worship. After the Buddha's death, his

remains were divided and placed in eight *stūpas* built in central India. These became centers where pious Buddhists congregated. Later, King Aśoka had *stūpas* built in other parts of India, further contributing to the spread of *stūpa* worship. These cults appear to have contributed significantly to the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Since Mahāyāna texts do not describe the circumstances that gave rise to Mahāyāna Buddhism, any investigation must be partially based on speculation. In the following pages, the three sources of Mahāyāna Buddhism introduced above are discussed in more detail.

Nikāya Buddhism and Mahāyāna

As was noted earlier, Nikāya Buddhism was often referred to by the deprecatory epithet “Hīnayāna” (inferior vehicle) by Mahāyāna Buddhists. Nikāya Buddhism, however, contributed much to Mahāyāna Buddhism. For example, Mahāyāna texts such as the *Ta-chih-tu lun* (T 1509, *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, attributed to Nāgārjuna) and the *Ta-pin pan-jo ching* (T 223, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-PP**) often included references to Sarvāstivādin teachings. Mahāyāna works also adopted the twelve-fold classification of the Buddhist scriptures used by the Sarvāstivādin, Mahīśāsaka, and Dharmaguptaka schools. The Vātsīputriya fivefold classification of *dharma*s (Ch. *wu fa-tsang*) was cited in the perfection of wisdom *sūtra*s. Thus it is apparent that authors of many of the Mahāyāna scriptures had studied Hīnayāna doctrines.⁵

Doctrinal similarities between Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna works do not prove that the authors of Mahāyāna texts were current or former members of the schools of Nikāya Buddhism. Although Sarvāstivādin doctrine is far removed from Mahāyāna thought, Sarvāstivādin teachings were often mentioned or incorporated into Mahāyāna texts. In terms of content, however, Mahāsaṅghika doctrine is much closer to Mahāyāna thought than is Sarvāstivādin doctrine. The best summary of Mahāsaṅghika doctrine is found in Vasumitra’s *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* (T 2031).⁶ Although Vasumitra was a member of the Sarvāstivādin School, he seems to have been an unbiased scholar and to have accurately collected and summarized the teachings of other schools. In one of the sections of his work, Vasumitra grouped together the doctrines of four schools (the Mahāsaṅghika, Lokottaravādin, Ekavyavahārika, and Kaukuṭika) of Mahāsaṅghika lineage and noted that the four taught that “the Buddhaḥ, the World-honored Ones, are all supermundane. All the Tathāgatas are without impure (*sāsrava*) *dharma*s” (T 49:15b). This position differs from that of the Sarvāstivādin School, but

is close to Mahāyāna teachings. The four schools also upheld the doctrine that “the Buddha can expound all the teachings with a single utterance” (*T* 49:15b). According to the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (*T* 27:410a-b), this doctrine was also maintained by the Vibhajjavādins. It is also referred to in a well-known passage in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* (*T* 14:538a). Vasumitra also noted that these schools upheld the positions that “the *rūpakāya* (form-body) of the Tathāgata is limitless. The divine power of the Tathāgata is also limitless. The lifetimes of the Buddhas are limitless. The Buddha never tires of teaching sentient beings and awakening pure faith within them” (*T* 49:15b-c). These teachings are close to Mahāyāna ideas about the *sambhogakāya* (body of bliss) of the Buddha and are evidence of the close relationship of these schools to Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Vasumitra also described the doctrines concerning bodhisattvas maintained by the schools of the Mahāsaṅghika lineage. “No bodhisattvas have any thoughts of greed, anger, or doing harm to others. In order to benefit sentient beings, bodhisattvas are born into inferior states through their own wishes” (*T* 49:15c). The position that bodhisattvas can consciously choose where they will be born is similar to Mahāyāna teachings and differs significantly from the Sarvāstivādin position that birth is determined only by karma.

The Mahāsaṅghikas maintained that “the original nature of the mind is pure; it becomes impure when it is affected by adventitious defilements” (*T* 49:15c). This teaching is also important in Mahāyāna Buddhism. It was maintained by other groups within Nikāya Buddhism. For example, it is found in the *Sāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* (*T* 28:697b). It was also advocated by the Discriminators and appears in the Pāli *suttas*. Although this doctrine was not unique to the Mahāsaṅghika School, Mahāsaṅghika views of the Buddha were certainly close to those found in Mahāyāna Buddhism and provide evidence of a deep tie between the thought of the two groups. The exact nature of the relationship between the Mahāsaṅghika order and Mahāyāna adherents unfortunately is still unclear. Since the Sarvāstivādins also made doctrinal contributions to Mahāyāna Buddhism, the most significant and difficult problem that remains to be solved is determining what institutional ties might have existed between the Mahāsaṅghika order and Mahāyāna Buddhists.

Biographies of the Buddha

The *Mahāvastu* is a biography of the Buddha produced by the Lokottaravādins, adherents of a school related to the Mahāsaṅghika School. The

*Mahāvastu*⁷ describes ten grounds (*bhūmi*) or stages a future Buddha would pass through on his way to Buddhahood. Mahāyāna texts such as the *Shih-ti ching* (T 287, *Daśabhūmikasūtra*) contain similar teachings on the ten stages that have often been cited as evidence indicating that Mahāyāna Buddhism arose from the Mahāsaṅghika School. However, the *Mahāvastu* and similar literature concerning the Buddha's life transcend sectarian lines. For example, at the end of the *Fo pen-hsing chi ching* (T 190, *Abhiniṣkramaṇasūtra*?), a Dharmaguptaka text, it is noted that the very same biography is called the *Ta-shih* (*Mahāvastu*) by the Mahāsaṅghika School and various other names by the Sarvāstivādin, Kāśyāpīya, and Mahīśāsaka schools, thus indicating that these schools shared a common biography of the Buddha (T 3:932a).

Differences do exist between the biographies of the Buddha extant today. The Mahāsaṅghika *Mahāvastu*, the Dharmaguptaka *Fo pen-hsing chi ching*, and the Sarvāstivādin School's *Lalitavistara*⁸ are not identical. The *Mahāvastu* in particular diverges from the others. But earlier, the schools do seem to have shared the same biography. Perhaps the story's literary qualities enabled it to transcend sectarian differences. For example, Aśvaghōṣa, author of the *Buddhacarita*, had close connections with the Sarvāstivādin School, but he has also been connected with the Bahuśrutīya, Kaukuṭika, Sautrāntika, and Yogācāra traditions,⁹ and thus cannot be said to belong to any single school. Rather, he and other poets, such as Mātṛceta, may be said to belong to the "vehicle of those who praise the Buddha" (Ch. *tsan-fo sheng*).

Mātṛceta lived in the second or third century and ranks next to Aśvaghōṣa as a Buddhist poet. His poems, exemplified by such works as the *Satapañcāśatka-stotra* (One-hundred-fifty strophes) and the *Varnāharvarṇa-stotra* (Four-hundred strophes), were well loved throughout India.¹⁰ In his poems, Mātṛceta praises the Buddha. Because the Buddha is portrayed in a very human way, Mātṛceta seems to have been influenced by Sarvāstivādin doctrines. However, Mātṛceta also praises the Buddha's virtues as innumerable, the Buddha's wisdom as thorough, and his mind as limitless, descriptions close to Mahāyāna views of the Buddha's character. Some of the verses praise the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna). Others explain the six perfections and the doctrine of non-substantiality, both Mahāyāna teachings, leading some modern scholars to believe that Mātṛceta belonged to the Mādhyamika School.

To stress the importance of faith in the Buddha, poets fervently praised him and used literary expressions that transcended sectarian doctrinal considerations. Buddhist poets wrote their works with purposes different from those of scholars who were concerned with doctrinal issues. The term "vehicle of those who praise the Buddha" appears in Kumārajīva's translation of the *Saddharmapūṇḍarikasūtra* (T 9:9c); but

a corresponding term does not appear in the Sanskrit versions of the *sūtra*. In the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the teaching of the Discriminators who argued that the Buddha expounded all his teachings in a single sound is criticized: "Those (who compose) hymns of praise for the Buddha are too verbose and exceed the truth" (*T* 27:410a-b). This passage evidently refers to the poets who were composing hymns of praise for the Buddha.

The biographers of the Buddha were probably identical to those people who belonged to the "vehicle of those who praise the Buddha." In the following discussion, the relationship between Mahāyāna Buddhism and the early authors of these biographies (those who preceded Aśvagoṣa) is considered.

Biographies of the Buddha probably developed out of *vinaya* literature. In the beginning of the *Mahāvastu* is a statement that the *Mahāvastu* was originally included in the Lokottaravādin *vinaya*. The title of the biography, *Mahāvastu*, corresponds to the first chapter (*Mahākhandhaka*) of the *Mahāvagga* portion of the Pāli *Vinaya*. The terms "vastu," "vagga," and "khandhaka" all were used with the meaning of "chapter" or "division." The title "*Mahāvastu*" could thus be translated as "The Great Chapter." Moreover, a biography of the Buddha is found at the beginning of the Pāli *Mahākhandhaka*, and E. Windisch has demonstrated that, in fact, parts of the *Mahāvastu* correspond to sections of the *Mahākhandhaka*. As the biography of the Buddha was expanded, it was separated from the *vinaya* and assumed the form of the *Mahāvastu*. The title of the Mahīśāsaka equivalent of the *Mahāvastu*, *P'i-ni-tsang ken-pen* or "basis of the *vinaya-piṭaka*," indicates that the biography's origins were in the *vinaya*.

As the *nidāna* (stories illustrating the origins of the precepts) and the *avadāna* (cautionary tales warning against infringements of the precepts) in the *vinaya* developed, the biography of the Buddha was enlarged and eventually separated from the *vinaya*. The people who compiled the Buddha's biography had motives different from those who had studied the *nidāna* and *avadāna* in the *vinaya*. Their interest in the Buddha developed out of a desire to understand the causes of the Buddha's enlightenment and the practices that led to enlightenment. Narratives of the Buddha's life were compiled and expanded with these issues in mind, resulting in literature that had much in common with the *jātakas*, the tales of the Buddha's previous lives. The biographies of the Buddha did not have a necessary relationship to the *vinaya*. Rather, the compilers of biographies of the Buddha were searching for the causes of enlightenment and by chance chose the biographical material in the *vinaya* as the basis for their works.

Among the extant biographies of the Buddha are the *Mahāvastu*, produced by the Lokottaravādin branch of the Mahāsaṅghika School; the *Fo pen-hsing chi ching* (T 190, *Abhiṅskramaṇasūtra*?) of the Dharmaguptaka School; and the *Lalitavistara* (Sanskrit, Tibetan, and two Chinese versions, T 186 and 187, exist) of the Sarvāstivādin School. Although the last work is Sarvāstivādin, some of the extant versions, the Sanskrit and T 187, were altered so much in later times that they are completely Mahāyāna in character and contain terms such as *ju-lai-tsang* (*tathāgata-garbha*) and *ch'ing-ching fa-chieh* (pure *dharma*-realm). The above-named texts are Sectarian works; but much of their content does not reflect any Sectarian affiliation.

A number of other biographies that do not have any clear doctrinal affiliation are also extant. Among them are *Kuo-ch'ü hsien-tsai yin-kuo ching* (T 189), *T'ai-tzu jui-ying pen-ch'i ching* (T 185, possibly of Mahīśāsaka origins), *Hsiu-hsing pen-ch'i ching* (T 184), *Chung pen-ch'i ching* (T 196), *I-ch'u p'u-sa pen-ch'i ching* (T 188, *Abhiṅskramaṇasūtra*?), *Fo pen-hsing ching* (T 193), and *Fo-so-hsing tsan* (T 192, *Buddhacarita**). The terms “*pen-ch'i*” (original arising), “*pen-hsing*” (primordial practices), and “*so-hsing*” (practices) in the titles reflect the compilers' concern with the origins and basic activities that led to enlightenment. The biographers focused their attention primarily on the events leading up to enlightenment, often abbreviating or ignoring events that followed the Buddha's enlightenment.

The biographies all include a number of the same type of events. The first is the prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) by Dīpaṅkara Buddha that the future Śākyamuni would in fact be successful in his quest for Buddhahood. The stories begin by noting that the future Śākyamuni was a young Brahman at that time. Texts differ about his name, but among those given are Sumati, Sumedha, and Megha. Regardless of the name, later biographies all begin with a former Buddha predicting the future Śākyamuni's eventual attainment of Buddhahood. The stories behind the prediction also varied. According to some versions, the prediction occurred when the young Brahman offered five flowers that he had bought from a woman to Dīpaṅkara Buddha. According to other versions, the young man was watching Dīpaṅkara approach in a religious procession when he realized that a mud puddle lay in Dīpaṅkara's path. The young man quickly unfastened his long hair and spread it over the mud puddle so that Dīpaṅkara's feet would not be soiled. Dīpaṅkara then predicted that the young man would eventually attain enlightenment and the future Śākyamuni responded by vowing that he indeed would attain it. Apparently, these stories of Dīpaṅkara's prediction circulated widely among the biographers of the Buddha.

Predictions of Buddhahood are an important element in Mahāyāna thought. Dīpaṅkara's prediction of Śākyamuni's Buddhahood is mentioned often in Mahāyāna scriptures. Eventually questions were asked about the religious practices the future Śākyamuni Buddha had performed before he had received Dīpaṅkara's prediction. The Buddha's biography was consequently extended further back in time until it covered his practices for three incalculable eons.

According to these scriptures, after he received Dīpaṅkara's prediction, the future Buddha practiced the six perfections. The people who were so vitally concerned with the events and practices that led to enlightenment naturally supposed that a future Buddha performed practices different from those who aspired to become an *arhat* or *pratyekabuddha*. Expositions of the six perfections were first developed by the authors of biographies of the Buddha to characterize the special practices of a future Buddha. The list of ten perfections in the introduction (*nidāna-kathā*) of the Pāli *Jātaka* is probably a later expansion of the six perfections. According to the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (T 27:892b-c), doctrines of both four perfections and six perfections were maintained by Sarvāstivādin thinkers, with the doctrine of the four perfections eventually being declared orthodox within the Sarvāstivādin School. The biographies of the Buddha, without exception, all list six perfections, and this list of six perfections was incorporated into Mahāyāna scriptures. The authors of the biographies of the Buddha thus devised the six perfections to describe the unique practices that would lead to Buddhahood, practices that differed considerably from those followed by the Buddha's disciples.

These thinkers were also concerned with the stages of practice through which a bodhisattva passed on his way to Buddhahood. In some biographies, the following fixed phrase appears: "He had attained the tenth stage. Only one more life remained before he attained Buddhahood. He was nearing omniscience." (For example, see *Kuo-ch'ü hsien-tsai yin-kuo ching*, T 3:623a.) The ten stages are explained in detail only in the *Mahāvastu*. However, other biographies often contain the phrase "He had attained the tenth stage." Even though other biographies do not contain detailed explanations of the ten stages, the authors of the biographies obviously knew about the ten stages. The authors thus widely believed that a bodhisattva passed through ten stages and finally reached a position from which he would be reborn and attain Buddhahood in his next life. These doctrines concerning the ten stages were later utilized in Mahāyāna scriptures. The concept that a bodhisattva might attain a stage from which only one more birth

would be required before he attained Buddhahood (*eka-jāti-pratibaddha*) was also applied to Maitreya. Determining whether this idea arose first in relation to Śākyamuni or to Maitreya has proved to be surprisingly difficult.

Additional important points concerning biographies of the Buddha could be raised, but the above discussion should demonstrate the special characteristics of this genre of Buddhist literature. Many of the doctrines found in this literature later appeared in Mahāyāna scriptures. For example, the story of how the future Śākyamuni Buddha descended from Tuṣita heaven, assumed the form of a white elephant, and entered the womb of Māyā probably was developed by these biographers, as was the list of the eight key events in a Buddha's life (descent from Tuṣita heaven, entering his mother's womb, birth, leaving lay life, defeating the demons that represent the defilements, attaining enlightenment, preaching, and death).

Many similarities between biographies of the Buddha and Mahāyāna scriptures can be indicated. However, the fundamental differences between the two types of literature must not be overlooked. Biographies of the Buddha investigated the background of an individual who was already recognized as a Buddha. The bodhisattva discussed in these biographies had already received a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*) of his eventual Buddhahood and was therefore assured of success in his religious quest. In biographies such as the *Mahāvastu*, the possibility of many Buddhas appearing in the world at the same time was recognized. Consequently, many bodhisattvas, all of whom were assured of their eventual Buddhahood, had to exist.

In contrast, the bodhisattva portrayed in many Mahāyāna scriptures was only an individual who aspired to attain enlightenment. His eventual enlightenment was not assured. He had not received a prediction that he would eventually attain enlightenment and he even backslid in his practice. He was the ordinary man as bodhisattva. Of course, great bodhisattvas (who were not subject to backsliding and other ills) such as Samantabhadra, Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, and Maitreya were also mentioned in Mahāyāna scriptures along with the obscure, ordinary practitioner of Mahāyāna Buddhism who considered himself a bodhisattva. The question of what caused ordinary Buddhist practitioners to consider themselves bodhisattvas still remains to be answered. Since the lavish praise given the Buddha in biographies does not explain this development, another explanation must be sought. Thus, although similarities between the biographies of the Buddha and Mahāyāna scriptures exist, fundamental differences are also present.

Jātakas and Avadānas

Closely related to the biographies of the Buddha are the *jātakas* (stories of the Buddha's former lives) and the *avadānas* (P. *apadāna*, 'edifying tales concerning the Buddha'). The full title of the *Mahāvastu* is, in fact, the *Mahāvastu-avadāna*. The difference between the terms "*jātaka*" and "*avadāna*" is difficult to distinguish, partly because the meaning of the word "*avadāna*" changed over the long period during which the genre of stories was recited. Both the *jātakas* and *avadānas* are mentioned in the twelvefold classification of Buddhist literature, indicating that they were considered literary genres early in Buddhist history. Among the *Nikāyas* are texts, such as the *Mahāpadānasuttanta*, that incorporate the word *apadāna* into their titles. In the context of the twelvefold division of Buddhist literary genres, the term "*avadāna*" can usually be explained as meaning a parable or edifying fable.¹¹ Sometime after the contents of the *Āgamas* had been fixed, the *avadānas* were compiled independently. The Pāli *Apadāna*, a work in the *Khuddaka-nikāya*, is representative of this development. Later, many *avadāna* tales were compiled and the genre flourished. However, many details of the process of compilation are still unclear.

Today numerous works classified as *avadāna* literature are extant. Many of these texts date from approximately the beginning of the common era. Besides the *Mahāvastu*, the Sanskrit texts of the *Avadāna-śataka* (cf. *T* 200), the *Divyāvadāna*, and the *Sumāgadhāvadāna* (cf. *T* 128-129) and others have been published. In addition, many later *avadāna* works are extant, but have not yet been published.¹² These unpublished texts were compiled over a period of several centuries and are mainly mythological. They differ from earlier *avadāna* literature in this respect.

Jātaka tales are listed in both the ninefold and twelvefold classifications of Buddhist literature, indicating that they were established as an independent genre of Buddhist literature early in Buddhist history. *Jātaka* tales are among the subjects found in the carvings at Bhārhut, with twelve such tales identified in the Bhārhut inscriptions.¹³ Thus, by the second century B.C.E. a number of tales had already been composed. During the subsequent centuries, many more were produced. *Jātaka* tales are presented as the former lives of the Buddha, but the material for the tales is frequently taken from Indian folk tales and fables. The content is often close to that found in the *avadāna* literature. The Pāli work, the *Jātaka*, contains 547 tales and was named after the genre it epitomizes. A five-fascicle Chinese translation (*T* 154) of the text exists. In addition, many works composed primarily of *jātaka* tales

are extant, including the *Tā chuang-yen lun ching* (T 201, *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā**), *Avadānaśataka*, *Divyāvādāna*, *Wu-pai ti-tzu tzu-shuo pen-ch'i ching* (T 199), *P'u-sa pen-hsing ching* (T 155, *Bodhisattvapūrvacarya?*), and *Seng-ch'ieh-lo-ch'a so-chi ching* (T 194). The *Liu-tu chi-ching* (T 152, *Ṣaṭpāramitāsaṅgraha?*) and the *P'u-sa pen-yüan ching* (T 153, *Bodhisattvāvādāna?*) include *jātaka* tales reworked to illustrate Mahāyāna themes. The *jātaka* tales cited in the *Tā-chih-tu lun* (T 1509, *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*) exhibit prominent Mahāyāna characteristics. Consequently, some scholars have argued that the *jātaka* tales contributed significantly to the development of Mahāyāna thought. However, the *Liu-tu chi-ching* (T 152, *Ṣaṭpāramitāsaṅgraha?*) contains sections composed after the perfection of wisdom *sūtras*. Extreme care must be exercised in determining whether the "Mahāyāna *jātaka* tales" were composed before or after the earlier Mahāyāna texts.

Drawing clear distinctions between the genres of biographical literature on the Buddha, such as the *jātakas* and *avadānas*, is very difficult. The authors of this literature must have played a significant role in the early development of Mahāyāna thought. It would be revealing to know how these people made their living, what type of place they lived in, and what type of people they associated with. Answers to these problems would contribute greatly to our understanding of the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Unfortunately, the available literature does not shed light on the answers to these questions.

Some of these parables and metaphors were called *upamā*. They are found in such works as the *Po-yü ching* (T 209) and the *Hsien-yü ching* (T 202, *Damamūkanidānaśūtra*). Buddhists have used parables and metaphors to explain their teachings since the time of the Buddha. The tales used by the Dārṣṭāntikas (those who explain by using metaphors and parables) probably belong to this tradition. Many of the doctrines taught by the Dārṣṭāntikas are cited or introduced in the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (T 1545). The Dārṣṭāntikas are said to have been forerunners of the Sautrāntikas, but the validity of this claim is questionable.¹⁴ One of the most famous Dārṣṭāntikas was Kumāralāta, the author of several works. Although he is said to have been a contemporary of Nāgārjuna, he is not mentioned in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. Rather, his poems are cited in the *Ch'eng-shih lun* (T 1646, *Tattvasiddhiśāstra?*).¹⁵ Consequently, he probably lived sometime between the compilation of the *Mahāvibhāṣā* and the *Tattvasiddhiśāstra*. A Sanskrit fragment of a work said to have been written by him, the *Kalpanāmaṇḍitikā*, was discovered in Central Asia. However, a Chinese translation of this work (T 201) that is close to the Sanskrit fragment is said to be by Aśvaghōṣa. Modern scholars still disagree about the authorship of the text.¹⁶

Stūpa Worship and Mahāyāna Buddhism

The role of *stūpa* worship in the rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism cannot be ignored. It is important in many Mahāyāna *sūtras*, including the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (T 262) and the *A-mi-t'o ching* (T 366, "Smaller" *Sukhāvativyūha*).¹⁷ In addition, the Mahāyāna concern with a savior Buddha can be traced to worship at *stūpas*.

In Nikāya Buddhism, the Buddha was thought of as a teacher of the Dharma. The Dharma he preached was particularly emphasized because if a person followed that Dharma, it would lead him to salvation. No matter how much the Buddha was viewed as a superhuman being, he was not considered to be capable of acting as a savior. Rather, he was praised because he had successfully accomplished that which was difficult to accomplish. Nikāya Buddhism focused on the Dharma rather than on the Buddha and consequently emphasized monasticism and rigid adherence to the precepts. In contrast, Mahāyāna Buddhism was originally concerned with laymen. Doctrines for lay bodhisattvas play a prominent role in the oldest Mahāyāna *sūtras*. Only later did Mahāyāna Buddhism increasingly develop into a religion in which monks assumed prominent positions.

Laymen were unable to strictly observe the precepts or to devote much time to meditation and thus could not put the Buddha's teachings into practice in the traditional ways. Instead, they had to depend on the Buddha's compassion for their salvation. While monastic Buddhism emphasized the Buddha's teaching, lay Buddhism emphasized the role of the Buddha in salvation. Teachings concerning the saving power of the Buddha appeared in response to the religious needs of laymen. Beliefs in the Buddhas Amitābha and Akṣobhya reflected the layman's desire to depend on someone greater than himself. This need is reflected in the following statement by Śākyamuni Buddha in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (T 9:14c): "The three realms are completely insecure. They are like a burning house, full of suffering. Yet the three realms are all mine and the sentient beings within them are my children."

For lay Buddhism to develop doctrinally, centers were necessary where teachers could meet students and thereby transmit doctrines to the next generation. If the lay organizations had been subordinate to the monastic orders, they would have been compelled to receive and follow the instructions of monks. Any independent development of lay doctrine under such circumstances would have been difficult. Thus, centers independent of monastic control must have existed, where people could practice, develop teachings emphasizing the Buddha, and pass these traditions on to younger generations. *Stūpas* served as such centers.

Stūpas were predominantly for laymen. According to the Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasūta*, when the Buddha was about to die, he told Ānanda that the monks and nuns were not to conduct a funeral service over his remains. Rather the monks were "to strive for the highest good" (P. *sadattha*). As for his remains, the Buddha stated that "Brahmans with deep faith and worthy householders would pay reverence to the remains (P. *sarīra-pūjā*) of the Tathāgata."¹⁸ After the Buddha's death, the Malas of Kuśinagara performed the funeral. His remains were then divided and eight *stūpas* erected by laymen. Thus from the very beginning, *stūpas* were protected and maintained by laymen, and laymen did homage at them. According to another passage in the *Mahāparinibbānasūta*, four places were considered sacred to the Buddha after his death. Worship halls and memorial mounds (*ceṭiya*) were erected at all of them: his birthplace at Lumbinī, the site of his enlightenment at Buddhagayā, the site of his first sermon at the Deer Park, and the site of his death at Kuśinagara. Pilgrims soon began visiting these places. Thus was *stūpa* worship begun by laymen and later transmitted and maintained primarily by laymen. Even today, *stūpas* (*pagodas*) in Burma are administered by committees of pious laymen; monks may not participate in the administration of these *stūpas*.

King Aśoka commissioned many *stūpas*. Archeological investigations of the ruins of many of the older surviving *stūpas* have revealed that their oldest strata probably date back to Aśoka's time. The cores of the *stūpas* of central India at Bhārhut and Sāñcī and the Dharmarājikā *stūpa* at Taxila are all very early, with their oldest layers dating back to the second or third century B.C.E. Many more *stūpas* were built around the beginning of the common era. Almost all the old inscriptions excavated in recent times bear some relation to *stūpas*. Although *stūpas* were constructed and maintained by laymen, and although the majority of the donors were laymen and laywomen, they were not the only people who worshipped at them. Inscriptions on the pillars, railings, and finials at Bharhut and Sāñcī record the names of a number of monks and nuns who made donations to the *stūpas*. Since monks and nuns had few possessions, their presentation of goods suggests the profundity of their devotion.

By the beginning of the common era, *stūpas* were being built within the confines of temples. Alongside these *stūpas*, quarters for monks were constructed, making it easy for monks to present their offerings to the *stūpas*. The monasteries probably had the *stūpas* built on their grounds in response to the growing popularity of *stūpa* worship outside the monasteries. Proof of this change of attitude appears in a number of sources. For example, the Theravāda *Vinaya* does not mention *stūpas* even though *stūpas* have been built within the confines of Theravāda monas-

teries for centuries. Apparently, Theravāda monks began making offerings at *stūpas* only after the *Vinaya* had been compiled. In contrast, the Sarvāstivādin and Mahāsaṅghika *vinayas* (*T* 1435 and 1425) mention Buddha images, indicating that the compilation of these two *vinayas* was probably completed later than the Pāli *Vinaya*. Thus some *vinayas* compiled after monks had already begun worshipping at *stūpas* include discussions of *stūpa* worship. The Sarvāstivādin and Mahāsaṅghika *vinayas* state that a strict distinction must be maintained between properties and objects that belong to the monastic order and those that belong to the *stūpa* (*T* 22:498a; 23:352b). They could not be used interchangeably. If a monk used *stūpa* property to benefit the order, he was to be charged with a *pārājika* offense for stealing. According to the Dharmaguptaka and Mahīśāsaka *vinayas* (*T* 1421 and 1428), the *stūpa* represented “the Buddha in the order.”¹⁹ Although *stūpas* might be built within the monastery, items belonging to the Buddha were to be distinguished from those belonging to the order. Thus the *vinayas*, the legal codes for the orders, indicate that the *stūpas* were independent of the monastic orders.

Sources such as Vasumitra’s *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* suggest that the Dharmaguptaka School encouraged contributions to *stūpas* by maintaining that “offerings to *stūpas* produced great merit” (*T* 49:17a). In contrast, orders of the Mahāsaṅghika lineage such as the Caitika, Aparāśaila, Uttaraśaila, and Mahīśāsaka schools maintained that “offerings made to *stūpas* would result in only a small amount of merit” (*T* 49:16a). At least four inscriptions concerning the Caitika School have been found at Amarāvātī in southern India. These inscriptions are probably connected with the great *stūpa* (*mahācetiya*) at Amarāvātī, an important site in the third and fourth centuries. Although the Caitika School maintained that the merit earned by making offerings at *stūpas* was minimal, large *stūpas* were still associated with the school.

Later sources, such as the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (*T* 1545) and the *Abhidharma-kośa* (*T* 1558), also maintained that contributions to the monastic order produced much more merit than those made to *stūpas* (*T* 27:678b). Thus, although *stūpa* worship was practiced within Nikāya Buddhism, the monastic orders did not always coexist harmoniously with the *stūpa* cults. Buddhist believers were often discouraged from making offerings at the *stūpas*, suggesting that *stūpa* worship was introduced into the monastic orders after the orders had been established for a period of time and that the monks did not want to see *stūpa* worship grow in influence. In addition to *stūpas* within monasteries, there were other *stūpas* that were not affiliated with any of the schools of Nikāya Buddhism and that were managed by laymen. This division is clear from the many

inscriptions that have been discovered by archeologists in recent times. The vast majority of the inscriptions concerning *stūpas* do not mention the name of a school.²⁰

Flowers, incense, banners, flags, music, and dance were used in the ceremonies accompanying *stūpa* worship. Even at the Buddha's funeral, the Mallas of Kuśinagara employed music, dance, flowers, and incense to honor, revere, and respect the corpse of the Buddha before it was cremated, as is described in detail in the *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (*DN*, vol. 2, p. 159). The use of music and dance in such a ceremony was clearly forbidden to those living a monastic life. In the precepts for novices, monks, and nuns, the enjoyment of such entertainments was clearly prohibited. Music, dance, theater, architecture, and other arts conflicted with the standards of monastic life, which aimed at transcending worldly concerns. Such arts could not have flourished in Buddhist monasteries. But they did develop around *stūpa* worship and were later adopted into Mahāyāna Buddhism, where they were elaborated further. These traditions of music and dance were later transmitted to China along with Mahāyāna Buddhism, and then to Japan as *gigaku*.

Stūpa worship had a social as well as a religious dimension. It began immediately after the Buddha's death, and through the support of its adherents, *stūpa* worship gradually began to flourish. The *stūpas* erected in various areas were thronged with worshippers and pilgrims. To erect a *stūpa*, land had to be contributed by individuals. Since the land was given for a religious purpose, it was no longer owned by any particular individual. Besides the *stūpa* itself, lodging for pilgrims, wells, and pools for bathing were built on the land. These facilities were the property of the *stūpa*. A walkway around the *stūpa* was constructed so that pilgrims could worship as they circumambulated the *stūpa*. A fence with gates enclosed the area. Carvings on the fence and on the gates to the *stūpa* illustrated incidents from the Buddha's biography and the good deeds and selfless acts he had performed in his past lives. Religious specialists who explained the *jātaka* tales and the biography of the Buddha to the worshippers probably resided at the *stūpa*, as did people who managed the lodgings for the pilgrims. A religious order began to take shape.²¹

Since the *stūpas* had property, people must have been present to manage it. Gold, silver, flowers, incense, and food must have been given to the *stūpa* by believers and pilgrims. Although such alms were presented to the Buddha, they were undoubtedly accepted and used by those people who cared for the *stūpa*. These people were very different from ordinary lay believers, but also were probably not members of a monastic order. They were religious specialists who were neither laymen nor monks. As these religious specialists repeatedly explained the illustra-

tions of the *jātakas* and the biography of Śākyamuni Buddha, they extolled Śākyamuni's religious practices in his past lives as the practices of a bodhisattva and praised his greatness and deep compassion. Gradually they must have advanced doctrines to explain the Buddha's power to save others. In this way they attracted more followers to the *stūpas*.

Worship at *stūpas* might well have led to meditations in which the Buddha was visualized. Even today Tibetan pilgrims at Buddhagayā can be seen prostrating themselves hundreds of times in front of *stūpas*. Long ago as people repeatedly performed such practices while intently thinking of the Buddha, they might have entered a concentration (*samādhi*) in which the Buddha appeared before them. This concentration would correspond to the *pratyutpanna-samādhi* described in some Mahāyāna texts. Thus Mahāyāna meditations in which the Buddha is visualized may have originated in the religious experiences of people worshipping the Buddha at *stūpas*. Such religious experiences might have resulted in people coming to the belief that they were bodhisattvas.

In conclusion, the establishment of *stūpas* and the accumulation of property around them enabled groups of religious specialists to live near the *stūpas*. These people formed orders and began developing doctrines concerning the Buddha's powers to save. The references in many Mahāyāna texts to *stūpa* worship indicate the central role of these orders in the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In some Mahāyāna texts, a bodhisattva group (*bodhisattvagāṇa*) is mentioned as existing separately from the order of monks of the Nikāya schools (*śrāvakaśāṅgha*).²² The *bodhisattvagāṇa* probably had its origins in the groups of people who practiced at *stūpas*. However, the origins of the advocates of the perfection of wisdom literature must be sought in different areas.