

Glossary of Some Important Buddhist Names and Terms Used in this Course

Buddhism's highly detailed analyses of mind and mental states have generated an immense technical vocabulary. Notwithstanding, this glossary is limited to those names and terms that are used often in the lectures and that you may wish to remember or read more about. The definitions below are for ready reference only; they are hardly comprehensive. Fortunately, there is an abundance of literature on these and many other topics should you wish to pursue the subject further. A brief reading list is available in the repository.

In Western sources, many of the terms in Buddhist thought that date from early in the history of the religion—and thus from the Indian subcontinent—are given in either Pāli (the language of the Theravāda school) or Sanskrit, the “classical” language of India. Although translations of these terms were developed in each of the languages where Buddhism flourished, following the conventions of Western scholarship, when a name or a technical term is used throughout the Buddhist traditions of Asia, we render it here in Sanskrit. Of course, terms native to East Asian Buddhism appear here in Chinese. Cross-referenced terms are indicated in small capital letters.

Sections:

- Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
- Important Chinese Buddhist Scriptures
- Important Schools of Chinese Buddhism
- Technical Terms
- Eminent Monks

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

AMITĀBHA: “Buddha of Infinite Light.” The BUDDHA associated with the West, wherein lies his “Pure Land,” SUKHĀVATĪ, in which devotees can hear him preach the DHARMA. In this capacity, he is the central object of veneration in the PURE LAND school in China. See SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA SŪTRAS.

AVALOKITEŚVARA: “The Lord Who Looks Down” (on the sufferings of the world). The most prominent among the BODHISATTVAS who figure in East Asian Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara is associated with compassion. See GUANYIN.

GAUTAMA: Family name of ŚĀKYAMUNI, the historical Buddha.

GUANYIN: “Perceiver of Sounds” (of suffering sentient beings). Chinese name for AVALOKITEŚVARA. By about the tenth century, this BODHISATTVA becomes represented as a female in Chinese literature and iconography.

MAITREYA: The next BUDDHA destined to appear in this world.

ŚĀKYAMUNI: “Sage of the Śākya Clan.” The historical Buddha, born in what is now Nepal probably in the fifth century BCE.

Important Chinese Buddhist Texts

[The transmission of Buddhism to China was accompanied by the translation of (some of) its scriptural literature, the sūtras, into Chinese, a massive undertaking that unfolded over the course of several centuries. Of the many hundreds of texts that make up the scriptural portion of the Chinese Buddhist canon, the four listed below are among the most influential. Each of these scriptures was translated multiple times into Chinese, often with a different name each time.]

AVATAMSAKA SŪTRA: (Ch. *Huayanjing*, “Flower Garland Scripture”). A massive, heterogeneous scripture preaching, inter alia, the identity and “interpenetration” of enlightenment and everyday experience. The *Huayanjing* is the foundational scripture of the eponymous Huayan school, which views it as the ultimate expression of the Buddha’s teaching inasmuch as it represents itself as the very first and most comprehensive sermon of the Buddha following his enlightenment. See HUAYAN.

DASHENG QIXIN LUN: (“The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna”) Although attributed to an Indian author, this enormously influential philosophical treatise was almost surely written in China, perhaps by its alleged “translator,” Paramārtha, around the year 550. The text attempts to reconcile how it is that sentient beings, all of whom possess the inherent ability to become enlightened (often referred to as the “Buddha nature”), succumbed to delusion in the first place and thus must “become” enlightened. Their synthesis the author refers to as the doctrine of “one mind with two aspects.” From the perspective of the buddhas, the minds of sentient beings are ever in a state of “original enlightenment” (*benjue*, a term coined in China). From an ordinary, unenlightened perspective, the mind must be purified through meditative training, a process called “actualizing enlightenment” (*shijue*). Once actualized, the student realizes that the enlightenment achieved through cultivation is identical to the enlightenment that is innate. See TATHĀGATAGARBHA.

PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS: The earliest among the Mahāyāna scriptures (1st c. BCE?), the *Prajñāpāramitā* (“Perfection of Wisdom”) *sūtras* are a class of literature ranging in size from a single syllable (!) to 100,000 lines. Central to their teaching is the foundational Mahāyāna doctrine—that all things are “empty” (*śūnya*), devoid of “self-nature” (*svabhāva*)—as revealed through the practice of the “perfection of wisdom” (*prajñāpāramitā*). The so-called *Heart* and *Diamond Cutter sūtras* are its best-known versions and are used and practiced throughout East Asian Buddhism, particularly in the Chan school.

SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA SŪTRA: (Ch. *Miaofa lianhua jing*, colloquially, *Fahua jing* “Lotus of the Good Law”). Best known in English as the “Lotus Sutra,” this scripture, the central *sūtra* of the Tiantai school and one of the most popular scriptures in East Asian Buddhism, preaches that the “three vehicles” to salvation (ARHATS, *pratyeka* (self-taught) buddhas, and BODHISATTVAS) are really just provisional teachings, “expedient devices” (UPĀYA) taught by the

buddhas in order to bring beings of varying degrees of understanding and spiritual maturity to enlightenment. In fact, there is only the One Vehicle, Buddhahood, for which all beings, even the lowest and most debased, are destined. In the second half of the *sūtra*, Śākyamuni reveals that he actually attained NIRVĀṆA incalculable lifetimes ago, and out of his great compassion has been working to bring enlightenment to sentient beings since that time. His birth in this world cycle and (apparent) passing from this world into final extinction (*parinirvāṇa*) are really just parts of a salvific drama, an *upāya*, played out with the goal of spurring sentient beings into practice of the DHARMA. See also UPĀYA and THREE VEHICLES.

SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA SŪTRAS: A group of scriptures describing the “Pure Land” (SUKHĀVATĪ) created by the Buddha AMITĀBHA in the West. By virtue of the vows taken by Amitābha on his path to enlightenment, all who call upon his name and devote undisturbed attention to visualizing his Pure Land will be reborn there and hear him preach the Dharma, resulting in their enlightenment. The central scriptures of the Pure Land school. See also BUDDHAKṢETRA and PURE LAND school.

Important Schools of Chinese Buddhism

[Over time, the Chinese developed various schools of Buddhist thought and practice that had no direct antecedents or corollaries in India and that reflected a uniquely Chinese understanding of the tradition. Among them, the four listed below are perhaps the most prominent. While the scriptural warrants on which they were based came from the Indian subcontinent (see above), the development of these schools reflect the particular genius of the Chinese for the appropriation and Sinicization of foreign influences.]

CHAN: Better known in the West by its Japanese pronunciation, Zen, Chan styles itself as “a special transmission outside of the scriptures, not dependent upon words or letters,” but in fact the tradition is firmly rooted, both scripturally and doctrinally, in orthodox Mahāyāna Buddhism. Chan practice is centered on meditation (the word *chan* is a translation of the Sanskrit DHYĀNA, a type of meditation), aiming at seeing directly into one’s mind and attaining Buddhahood.

HUAYAN: Huayan is a philosophically dense, highly detailed, and textually rich tradition that is representative of the mature period of Chinese Buddhism. Like Tiantai, it represents itself as the culmination of Buddhist thought and practice and thus attempts to account for and classify all its major currents of thought. This is done most comprehensively in its *panjiao*, or system of classified teachings, for which, see PANJIAO, above. The Huayan school bases its practice on the AVATAMSAKA SŪTRA (*Huayanjing*), which claims, ahistorically, to be the first and most comprehensive exposition of Dharma, preached by the Buddha in the first weeks following his enlightenment. The scripture’s vision of an infinite number of interconnected

worlds led Huayan exegetes to describe existence as a boundless interconnectedness of all things, which continually and mutually create each other. See also FAZANG.

PURE LAND: Pure Land Buddhism involves veneration for the Buddha AMITĀBHA and the desire to be reborn in his Pure Land, SUKHĀVATĪ, as taught in the SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA SŪTRAS. These scriptures preach a broadly accessible path to enlightenment through what we in the West might term “faith” in Amitābha, thus constituting a suitable practice for laypeople.

TIANTAI. Tiantai is a philosophically dense, highly detailed, and textually rich tradition that is representative of the mature period of Chinese Buddhism. Like HUAYAN, it represents itself as the culmination of Buddhist thought and practice and thus attempts to account for and classify all its major currents of thought. This is done most comprehensively in its fivefold PANJIAO, or system of classified teachings, which categorize the teachings of the Buddha by the periods in his life in which he preached them: The AVATAMSAKA SŪTRA; “HĪNAYĀNA” teachings; elementary MAHĀYĀNA teachings; the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS; and finally, the SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA (“Lotus”) and *Mahāparinirvāṇa* sutras. The school’s de facto “founder,” ZHIYI, further proposed a doctrine of “three truths,” (1) that all DHARMAS are empty of self-nature; (2) that all things are causally produced and thus have at least a provisional reality; and (3) the “truth of the mean,” that all things, considered in the ultimate sense, are neither existent nor nonexistent; they simply *are*. For the discerning mind, the entire world is contained in a single moment of thought.

Technical Terms

[“Ch.” Indicates a Chinese term.]

ABHIDHARMA: “highest dharma.” That part of the Buddhist canon devoted to technical exegesis of concepts introduced in the SŪTRAS. By extension then, the term is also used to refer to the range of topics treated in these texts and the methods of philosophical argumentation used to discuss them. The Abhidharma literature of the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools, in particular, are well preserved and provide almost encyclopedic coverage of the entire range of Buddhist philosophy, psychology, cosmology, epistemology, and soteriology.

ANĀTMAN: “no-Self.” One of the central teachings of Buddhism, holding that human personality is “compounded” (*saṃskṛta*) or “conditioned,” a causally produced composite (see SKANDHA) devoid of any permanent Self (ĀTMAN). Attachment to the notion of Self inevitably entails the desire (*tṛṣṇā*) to possess and retain things that are “mine” or are agreeable to “me” and to reject things we perceive as disagreeable or harmful. This desire, fundamentally, the desire to *continue*, is the root cause of all suffering (DUḤKHA) and is the snare that captures us in a ceaseless round of birth and death. Freeing oneself of what is essentially a mistaken belief, albeit an almost genetic one, in Self is the core of enlightenment. See NIRVĀṆA.

ARHAT: “Worthy One.” In MAINSTREAM Buddhism, the highest stage of insight, enlightenment. Through their meditative practice, *arhats* have completely destroyed the causes of future

rebirth and, upon death, will enter “final *nirvāṇa*” (*parinirvāṇa*), never to be reborn. Thus, they hold, the enlightenment of the *arhat* is essentially the same as that of the Buddha; it is only the path to enlightenment and the special role chosen by the Buddha to work for the enlightenment of others that is different. MAHĀYĀNA Buddhism, by contrast, holds that arhatship is a selfish and inferior goal; the pursuit of which removes the practitioner from the world once he or she has attained their goal and thus deprives them of the opportunity to help others. See also THREE VEHICLES.

ĀTMAN: “Self.” In classical brahmanic (Hindu) thought, the *ātman* is the permanent core element of human personality, the pure, unchanging foundation—passing from lifetime to lifetime—upon which the transient elements of body and mind rest, and which thus constitutes the essential person or Self. Roughly equivalent to the “soul” in Western thought. Buddhism distinguishes itself from the brahmanic traditions by denying the existence of such an element. See ANĀTMAN.

AVIDYĀ: “ignorance.” It is ignorance of the true nature of things that chains sentient beings to SAṂSĀRA. This ignorance is manifested first and foremost in a belief in the perduring Self (ĀTMAN), which in turn leads to the desire or craving (*tṛṣṇā*) to possess and retain things that are “mine” or are agreeable to “me” and to reject things we perceive as disagreeable or harmful. It causes us mistake the painful for the pleasurable and the impermanent for the permanent; thus it is the root cause of all suffering (See DUḤKHA, FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS) and the snare that captures us in a ceaseless round of birth and death. Freeing oneself of what is essentially a mistaken belief, albeit an almost genetic one, in Self is the core of enlightenment. See also ANĀTMAN, THREE MARKS.

BODHISATTVA: “enlightenment being.” A being destined for Buddhahood. In early Buddhism, the term denotes the historical Buddha in his previous lives, prior to becoming a buddha, and is also used in reference to MAITREYA, the next in a line of twenty-five “historical” buddhas destined to appear in this world cycle. In Mahāyāna Buddhism the term is expanded to encompass *all* beings who have resolved to become a BUDDHA. Their religious path is thus called the *bodhisattvayāna* or “bodhisattva vehicle.” The path of the *bodhisattva*, like that of ŚĀKYAMUNI, begins with the generation of *bodhicitta*, literally, the thought or aspiration of enlightenment, and with a vow taken out of compassion for others to achieve complete and perfect enlightenment (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*) in order to liberate them from the cycle of birth and death. Through an incalculably long period of time, the *bodhisattva* perfects himself in the ten (sometimes six) perfections (generosity, morality, endurance, effort, wisdom, patience, truthfulness, resolve, loving kindness, and equanimity) until finally achieving enlightenment. In the Mahāyāna tradition, numberless *bodhisattvas* tirelessly go about their salvific mission, transferring to others the vast merit they have accumulated through their practice and thus aiding them to draw nearer enlightenment. Some of these figures, very advanced in their practice, have achieved vast, even magical, powers to help others. On a popular level especially, they are regarded as savior figures and their blessings

invoked by those in distress. AVALOKITEŚVARA and Mañjuśrī, skilled in compassion and wisdom respectively, are especially popular in East Asia. See also BUDDHA.

BUDDHA: “the enlightened one.” The historical Buddha, ŚĀKYAMUNI, is but one in a long line of buddhas who have appeared or who are destined to appear in the world and, in the MAHĀYĀNA tradition, appear as well in “worlds of the ten directions.” Buddhas are compassionate teachers who, by their long spiritual career over myriad previous lives, have cast aside ignorance and the defiling passions and now work for the enlightenment of others. The path to Buddhahood follows a set pattern. It begins with a vow to achieve enlightenment and work for the liberation of others, following which the *bodhisattva* (a “Buddha-to-be”) passes through numberless lifetimes, cultivating the ten (sometimes six) perfections until finally achieving enlightenment. (See BODHISATTVA) Tales of some 547 of GAUTAMA’S previous lives are recounted in the Pāli *Jātaka Tales*. The MAHĀYĀNA tradition holds that there are numberless buddhas in numberless world systems, each simultaneously present in their own BUDDHAKṢETRAS, working for the enlightenment of suffering sentient beings. Mahāyāna Buddhists vow that—unlike their HĪNAYĀNA brethren, who (they claim) pursue only the ultimately selfish path of the ARHAT—they too will take up the arduous path toward Buddhahood and enter the long career of the *bodhisattva*. See also THREE VEHICLES.

BUDDHAKṢETRA: “Buddha field.” In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the religious merit a buddha has accumulated in attaining enlightenment generates around him a purified “Buddha field” (*buddhakṣetra*) wherein beings can be reborn (or visit in meditation), hear its buddha preach the DHARMA, and be led to enlightenment. See also SUKHĀVATĪ.

DHARMA: [1] (*usually capitalized*) The truth discovered by the BUDDHA as to the cause of suffering and rebirth and how to become liberated from it. The Buddha is not a god, nor is he the Creator, and the truth he has discovered is independent of his existence: “Whether a buddha arises in the world or not, this is the unchangeable nature of Dharma.” And inasmuch as the Dharma is independent of the Buddha, it can be discovered by others. It is “independent of time, verifiable, fruitful, capable of being personally discovered by the wise.” [2] The term *Dharma* is therefore also used to refer to what the Buddha *taught* and, by extension, the doctrines and practices of Buddhism. [3] Separately, *dharma*s (*lower case*) are the constituent components of phenomenal existence, conceived of in Buddhism as composing a stream of transient physical and mental *events* that, acting in concert, we call a person. They are, in a sense, the “building blocks” out of which our minds construct phenomenal existence. This includes physical objects apprehended and interpreted by our sensory faculties (e.g., the visual faculty and the things seen by it) and also the components of our mental life, the entire range of emotions, judgements, wholesome and unwholesome qualities, and “forces” or “dispositions” (*saṃskāra*) that accompany our construction of experience. Dharmas are classes or categories of events; they represent the types of psychophysical events into which all experience can be analyzed. In the ABHIDHARMA

literature of the Sarvāstivāda tradition, which informed much of East Asian and Tibetan Buddhism, phenomenal existence is analyzed into seventy-five *dharmas*.

DHĀTU: “element” (of sensory experience). Buddhism characterizes sensory experience as the product of eighteen separate elements: the six sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) coming into contact with the six types of sense objects (visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and mental phenomena) supported by six corresponding consciousnesses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental) that arise when the organ makes contact with its object. The analysis of sensory experience as the product of these eighteen elements probably predates the further elaboration of phenomenal existence into seventy-five (in the Sarvāstivāda) or eighty-two (in the Theravāda) *dharmas*. (See *DHARMA*-3).

DHYĀNA: meditative absorption during which the mind is completely focused on an interior object of meditation rather than the external world.

DUḤKHA: “suffering,” “dis-ease,” the existential condition of unenlightened sentient beings. The first of the Four Noble Truths reads:

“This, monks, is the Noble Truth of suffering (*duḥkha*): Birth is suffering, old age is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; grief, lamentation, pain, affliction, and despair are suffering. To be united with what is unloved, to be separated from what is loved is suffering; not to obtain what is longed for is suffering. In short, the Five Groups of Grasping (the *SKANDHAS*) are suffering.”

Buddhism defines three types of *duḥkha*. The first is suffering in its literal sense: the physical pain one gets when touching a hot fire or the mental pain of witnessing the death of a loved one. The second is the suffering (sadness, unhappiness) that comes from understanding that all things must pass, that even the most pleasant of circumstances will last only awhile. The third is the most “philosophical”; it is the existential *unsatisfactoriness* (for want of a better word) that is intrinsic to the conditionality of unenlightened existence, the fact that we are composites of the five *skandhas* and subject to the vicissitudes of the karmic process, both pleasant and painful. In sum, *duḥkha* means that despite whatever temporary pleasures we experience (and we do), our lives are inherently flawed, subject to death, on account of our craving (*trṣṇā*)—for pleasure, for existence, and for nonexistence. See also *FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS*, *AVIDYĀ*.

FIVE AGGREGATES, alternatively, the Five Heaps of Grasping: See *SKANDHA*.

FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS: In his first sermon, the Buddha described his teachings as a “middle way,” avoiding both the pursuit of sensuality and lust on the one hand and extreme asceticism and self-mortification on the other. Fundamental to this middle way are what he terms the Four Noble Truths: *DUḤKHA*, *samudaya*, *nirodha*, *mārga*. Employing what is essentially a medical

metaphor—that of diagnosis and cure—he declared that our unenlightened existence, the cycle of birth and death, is “suffering” (*duḥkha*), the origin (*samudaya*) or cause of which is craving (*tṛṣṇā*)—craving for pleasure, for existence, and for nonexistence. The cessation (*nirodha*) of craving brings about the cessation of suffering and puts a stop to the cycle of birth and death. The cessation of craving is brought about by following the NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH, the path (*mārga*) of religious practice leading to NIRVĀṆA,.

GONG’AN [Ch.]: “public case.” Better known by its Japanese pronunciation, *kōan*, a *gong’an* is, in its late, developed form, a question or a meditative topic given by a Chan master to a disciple for the purpose of judging his or her degree of spiritual insight. The question is often deliberately paradoxical or even nonsensical, requiring the disciple to respond in a manner demonstrating (hence “public”) his understanding of the teaching.

HĪNAYĀNA: “the Lesser Vehicle.” A pejorative term used in Mahāyāna Buddhism to describe the “earlier” (i.e., pre-Mahāyāna) teachings of the Buddha, focusing on a path of individual emancipation as opposed to the Mahāyāna program of universal salvation. See MAINSTREAM BUDDHIST SCHOOLS.

KARMA: “action.” At its simplest, the doctrine of karma expands upon a commonly understood notion: all actions have consequences. Everything is caused. In Buddhism, it is *intentional* acts, acts of body, speech, and mind, that generate consequences—moral consequences, often referred to as the “fruits” of actions—which are manifested both physically and mentally in an unbroken chain of cause and effect that can span multiple lifetimes, just as a tiny match can set ablaze a forest fire that extends for miles. Indeed, it is actions (specifically, intentions) themselves that are responsible for the process of rebirth, which can be understood as the continuous coming to fruition of prior acts, as described in the chain of dependent origination (PRATĪTYASAMUTPĀDA). The goal of religious practice is to cut the chain of cause and effect that is set in motion by ignorance, specifically by attachment to the mistaken belief in a permanent Self (ĀTMAN). Having removed this attachment by the generation of transcendental insight, the endless cycle of birth, death, rebirth, and redeath is brought to an end.

MADHYAMAKA: “Middle Way.” In its specific sense, the term denotes a school of Buddhist thought based primarily on the works of the philosopher Nāgārjuna (2d c. CE?). His *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* developed in rigorous detail the fundamental Mahāyāna insight of the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS that all phenomena are “empty” (*śūnya*) of “self-nature” (*svabhāva*); that is, they do not exist in-and-of-themselves but arise only in dependence on other factors. In China, Nagarjuna’s *Kārikā* and two works by his disciple Āryadeva formed the basis of the “Three Treatise School” (Sanlunzong), systematized during the late sixth and early seventh centuries. See also ŚŪNYATĀ.

MAHĀYĀNA: “the Great Vehicle.” A general movement within Buddhism that arose some four hundred years after the death of the historical BUDDHA. The movement was based on newly

revealed (sic) texts purporting to be the sermons of ŚĀKYAMUNI (and other buddhas), but, unlike the sermons of the earlier period—which the Mahāyānists now described as preaching a “Lesser Vehicle” (HĪNAYĀNA) to salvation—preached new and expanded ways to emancipation, particularly through the cultivation of the “perfection of wisdom” (PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ). The self-defined goal of the Mahāyānists was not the NIRVĀṆA of the ARHAT but rather Buddhahood itself, which entails the resolve to work for the liberation of others. Mahāyāna is the dominant form of Buddhism in East Asia and Tibet. See BUDDHA and BODHISATTVA.

MAINSTREAM BUDDHIST SCHOOLS. A neologism used to refer to the so-called eighteen schools of non-Mahāyāna Buddhism. The Mainstream schools are all the result of the fragmentation of the Buddhist community in the early centuries following the death of the Buddha. Each had its own (but closely related) version of the scriptures, monastic regulations, and scholastic literature. Among these schools, the THERAVĀDA and SARVĀSTIVĀDA are the most significant. MAHĀYĀNA Buddhists pejoratively characterize the Mainstream schools as constituting a HĪNAYĀNA, or “Lesser,” path to salvation, and this use of the term to denominate the Mainstream schools has unfortunately been adopted in some Western sources by those unfamiliar with its history.

MOFA [Ch.] If all conditioned things are impermanent, then so too are the worldly institutions of Buddhism (*sāsana*), that is, the teachings as they exist in history—in language and texts, as the communities of monks and nuns, as ritual behavior, and so forth. Like all things that exist in history, these will decay and finally pass out of existence until the arrival of the next buddha. In China, this notion became part of a threefold division of history subsequent to the appearance of ŚĀKYAMUNI: (1) an era of the “True Dharma” (*zhengfa*), usually considered to last about five-hundred years; (2) the period of the “Semblance of the Dharma” (*xiangfa*), another five-hundred years; and (3) the “Final [Days of the] Dharma” (*mofa*). Many who adopted this framework came to believe that as the time since the *parinirvāṇa* (i.e., death) of the Buddha increases, peoples’ spiritual capacities—their ability to comprehend and practice the Buddha’s original teachings—degenerates until, in the *mofa*, the only efficacious means to liberation for most beings is the intercession of a buddha such as the future buddha Maitreya or Amitābha. See AMITĀBHA, SUKHĀVATĪVYŪHA SŪTRAS, and PURE LAND school.

NIRVĀṆA: “extinction,” from the Sanskrit root *vā* meaning “to blow,” prefaced by the prefix *nir* meaning “out,” thus: “to blow out,” “as when a flame is blown out by the wind.” *Nirvāṇa* represents the goal of Buddhist religious life, the extinction of the “three poisons”—greed/sensuality, hatred/aversion, and delusion/ignorance—that bind one to the cycle of birth and death and of the suffering (DUḤKHA) that characterizes unenlightened existence. *Nirvāṇa* is thus the opposite of SAṂSĀRA. In a world where everything is conditioned—contingent, we might say—*nirvāṇa* is the “unconditioned” (*asaṃskṛta*). It is “signless,” “wishless,” “the unborn.” MAINSTREAM Buddhism typically regards *nirvāṇa* as coextensive

with the enlightenment experience of the Buddha and thus, essentially, the complete “absence” of the factors of unenlightened existence. Following NĀGĀRJUNA, many MAHĀYĀNA thinkers, by contrast, portrayed *nirvāṇa* and SAṂSĀRA as, ultimately, one and the same thing, distinguished only by our inability to see them as both as “empty” of own-being.

NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH: The fourth of the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS, the eightfold path describes the path (*mārga*) to liberation (NIRVĀṆA) as described by the Buddha in his first sermon. The elements of the path are (1) right views, (2) right intentions, (3) right speech, (4) right conduct, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. When juxtaposed against the “three trainings” that categorize the elements of the path, views and intentions are training in higher wisdom; speech, conduct, and livelihood correspond to training in higher morality; and effort, mindfulness, and concentration are training in higher concentration.

PANJIAO [Ch.] “classified teachings.” A hermeneutical device proposed by some schools of Chinese Buddhism that ranked the Buddhist scriptures in order of their relative profundity, with the favored scriptures of a given school accorded the status of “highest,” “final,” “first,” or “most central” teaching. The practice was a natural outgrowth of the fact that the teachings of Buddhist scriptures, all of which declared themselves to be the words of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*), often differed from each other in significant ways, and since the Chinese had only limited understanding of the origin, relative sequence, or doctrinal affiliations of these texts in India, Chinese Buddhist thinkers created their own textual affiliations in order to explain the differences. That the teachings would differ at all was held to be explained by the established Buddhist principle that, like all good teachers, the Buddha matched his teachings to the spiritual level of his audiences, using “expedients” or “skill in means” (*upāyakaśāla*). Thus he offered relatively “elementary” teachings to those not prepared to understand the highest truth and reserved the fullest exposition of the Dharma only for those ready to hear it. The *panjiao* of the HUAYAN school, by way of example, divided Buddhist scripture into five levels: Hīnayāna, elementary Mahāyāna (e.g., Yogācāra and Madhyamaka scriptures), advanced Mahāyāna (the *Lotus Sūtra*), sudden teachings (Chan), and perfect teachings, referring to the *Avataṃsaka sūtra*, from which the school took its name. The Tiantai school, in contrast, regarded the *Lotus Sūtra* as the highest expression of the Buddha’s teachings. See UPĀYA.

PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ: “wisdom that has gone beyond,” “perfection of wisdom.” In the MAHĀYĀNA tradition, the perfection of wisdom is a transcendental insight into the true nature of things, an awareness devoid of either subject or object. Ultimately, it is characterized by the complete cognition of ŚŪNYATĀ, “emptiness,” as the lack of Self or “own-being” (*svabhāva*) in DHARMAS as well as in the empirical person. *Prajñāpāramitā* is often equated with the wisdom developed by the Buddha himself in his enlightenment. The perfection of wisdom is the central teaching of the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS.

PRATĪTYASAMUTPĀDA: “dependent origination.” A central teaching of the Buddhist tradition is that all things, *including the self*, arise merely in the presence of interdependent causal factors, in the absence of any one of which, the thing ceases to exist. “When this is present, that comes to be. / From the arising of this, that arises. / When this is absent, that does not come to be. / From the cessation of this, that ceases.” In short, all existence is conditioned, lacking in permanence. When interpolated onto the stages of birth and rebirth, the concept is elaborated as a series of twelve interconnected links, often referred to as “twelvefold chain” or depicted as the “wheel of life.” See TWELVEFOLD CHAIN OF CAUSATION.

SAMGHA: The community of Buddhist monks and nuns.

SAMSĀRA: The ceaseless round of birth, death, rebirth, and redeath that characterizes unenlightened existence.

SARVĀSTIVĀDA: The Sarvāstivāda, or “Teaching that All Exists,” is one of the so-called eighteen schools of pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, pejoratively (by Mahāyānists) described as a HĪNAYĀNA, or “Lesser Vehicle (Tradition)” form of Buddhist practice. The Sarvāstivāda school was one of the most geographically distributed of the eighteen schools, and because of its penetration of India’s northwest and then along the Silk Road, became the most widely studied of the MAINSTREAM BUDDHIST SCHOOLS in China and the philosophical base against which several of the most important Chinese Buddhist schools reacted. The school takes its name from its central doctrine, that the elements of existence, the DHARMAS, exist in all three times, past, present, and future.

SKANDHA: literally “heaps.” Buddhism describes human personality as being a combination of five constituents (heaps, aggregates)—form (i.e., the physical body), sensations, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—which arise in codependence upon one another and which, by definition, are DUḤKHA, associated with suffering. Implicit in this formulation is the notion that there is no separate and distinct element that is the self (ĀTMAN). Rather, the constant arising of the SKANDHAS constitutes a “stream” that defines a nominal or empirical personality. Because in our ignorance we mistakenly attribute the permanence of “Self” to the *skandhas*, and thus engender attachment and clinging to things that are “mine,” they are often referred to as the “Five Groups of Grasping.”

SUKHĀVATĪ: “land of bliss.” The name of the BUDDHAKṢETRA associated with the Buddha AMITĀBHA. Often referred to as the “Pure Land.”

ŚŪNYATĀ: “emptiness.” Early or “MAINSTREAM” Buddhism had described the self as an aggregate of the five SKANDHAS, among which there exists no independent, eternal, and perdurable “soul” (ĀTMAN.) But the ABHIDHARMA literature of the Sarvāstivāda school did admit a substantial existence to the discrete psycho-physical elements, the DHARMAS, that account for phenomenal existence. These, they held, *are* possessed of a “self-nature” (*svabhāva*); they are real. Against this view, the MAHĀYĀNA, particularly as developed first in the

PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS and later more systematically by NĀGĀRJUNA and others in the MADHYAMAKA tradition, extended the notion of the “emptiness” of the self to the *dharma*s as well. Of course, they admit, there is a contingent reality to our selves and the world (see TWO TRUTHS), but these things exist as *constructs*; nothing exists in and of itself or arises from “self-cause.” Everything, even *nirvāṇa*, is dependently arisen and causally conditioned. The so-called Heart Sutra (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra*) says:

All dharmas are empty in character;
Neither arising nor ceasing,
Neither impure nor pure, neither increasing nor decreasing.
Therefore, in emptiness there is no form;
There is no feeling, no perception, no volition, no consciousness¹ . . .
No ignorance or ending of ignorance . . .
No aging and death or ending of aging and death.²
There is no suffering, no cause, no extinction, no path.³
There is no wisdom and no attainment.
There is nothing to be attained.

SŪTRA: literally, “thread.” A discourse or sermon purporting to be the words of the Buddha. By extension, that part of the Buddhist canon containing the sermons preached by the Buddha. Mahāyāna Buddhism also recognizes scripture spoken by buddhas other than ŚĀKYAMUNI.

TATHĀGATA: The “Thus-gone [One]”. An epithet of the buddhas, referring to their having passed beyond the cycle of life and death. Perhaps another way to think of it is as a (rough) equivalent of “I am that I am,” indicating here the inadequacy of any words that might be used to describe his enlightenment. In his enlightenment experience, a buddha becomes indefinable.

TATHĀGATAGARBHA: “womb/embryo/seed/matrix of the TATHĀGATA,” “containing a Tathāgata.” Beginning in the second century of the common era, certain MAHĀYĀNA scriptures, notably the *Tathāgatagarbha sūtra*, taught that all sentient beings contain within them the capacity to become enlightened, i.e., become a BUDDHA. This capacity is often referred to as the “Buddha nature.” The concept became of central importance to Chinese Buddhist thinkers, who variously accepted, refined, or rejected its central message of universal salvation. In some works, most notably the *Dasheng qixin lun* (“The Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna”), the term is defined as the “Mind” of the Buddha, concealed in unenlightened beings by defilements of desire, hatred, ignorance (the THREE POISONS) and awaiting only a transformation of consciousness for us to realize that we are innately enlightened. This

¹ Referring to the five SKHANDAS

² I.e., PRATĪTYASAMUTPĀDA.

³ I.e., the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS.

reading of the term supported the concept that enlightenment occurs suddenly, in a flash, a central tenet of some CHAN sects. See DASHENG QIXIN LUN.

THERAVĀDA: The Theravāda, or “School of the Elders,” is one of the MAINSTREAM BUDDHIST SCHOOLS. The school persists to this day on Sri Lanka, and because it is the sole remaining active tradition among the Mainstream schools, its name is often used synechdochically (if inaccurately) to refer to the entirety of the eighteen non-Mahāyāna schools. The Theravāda canon, written in the Pāli language, survives in its entirety and has been translated into English.

THREE MARKS (*trilakṣaṇa*): The three characteristics of all conditioned things: impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), and lack of Self (*anātman*). Mistaking the impermanent for the permanent, the pleasurable for the painful, and the lack of self for a Self is caused by a fundamental ignorance (*avidyā*) of the true nature of reality and is the hallmark of unenlightened existence. Overcoming this ignorance and recognizing the true nature of things as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and lacking Self is the core of enlightenment.

THREE POISONS (*trivisa*): Three “defilements” or “afflictions” (*kleśa*) that beset the mind and prevent us from attaining enlightenment: desire/greed (*rāga*), hatred/aversion (*dveṣa*), and ignorance/delusion (*moha*).

THREE VEHICLES (*triyāna*): Buddhism proposes three paths or “vehicles” (*yāna*) to enlightenment. (1) The *Śrāvaka-yāna* is the path of the “listener” or disciple who, hearing the DHARMA, begins a regimen of practice culminating in arhatship. (See ARHAT) (2) The *pratyekabuddha-yāna* is the path of a solitary practitioner who achieves enlightenment through his or her own efforts, without benefit of hearing the Dharma, but who therefore is unable to teach it to others. (The term recognizes the potential for enlightenment of beings other than those who practice Buddhism.) (3) Finally, the *bodhisattva-yāna* is the career of an “enlightenment being,” whose practice culminates in the very special state of Buddhahood. (See BODHISATTVA) In MAINSTREAM BUDDHISM the “content” of the enlightenment achieved by each of these three types is notionally the same. It is only the *path* to that state and the role of the one who achieves it that differ. MAHĀYĀNA Buddhists have a very different view. For them, the enlightenment of the *arhat* is essentially a selfish one. At death, the *arhat* will pass from SAṂSĀRA into “final NIRVĀṆA” (*parinirvāṇa*) and no longer be available to help others. The enlightenment of the *arhat* is thus self-centered and narrow. The path of the *pratyekabuddha* is the same. The result of solitary practice, it too culminates in the enlightenment of the *arhat*. These two paths the Mahāyāna characterizes as “HĪNA-YĀNA,” “lesser vehicles.” *Bodhisattvas*, on the other hand, reject the arhat’s “easy way out” (sic) and, like ŚĀKYAMUNI, deliberately elect a much longer path in which, out of his or her boundless compassion, they remain engaged in the world so as to be available to help others. In the Mahāyāna, Buddhahood thus represents an exalted state—“complete and perfect enlightenment” (*anuttarasamyakṣambodhi*)—that is vastly superior to the limited

enlightenment of the *arhat*. Some Mahāyāna scriptures, notably the *Lotus Sūtra* (See SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA SŪTRA) go further. They teach that the notion of the three vehicles is no more than an “expedient device” (See UPĀYA) designed to lure beings of differing spiritual capacities to enlightenment. Ultimately, there are not three separate vehicles. There is only the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*), that of Buddhahood, to which all beings are destined.

TRIPITAKA: “three baskets.” General term for the Buddhist canon. The canon is divided into three parts: VINAYA, SŪTRA, and ABHIDHARMA.

TWELVEFOLD CHAIN OF CAUSATION, *pratītyasamutpāda*: A fundamental Buddhist teaching is that all things are conditioned, that is, the result of causes. None has an independent existence of its own. Among the Buddha’s very first insights was his analysis of the chain of causality as it pertains to the coming to be and the passing away of our lives. The chain comprises twelve links, each the *precondition* for the next. Thus, with (1) **ignorance** as a precondition (2) **volitional action** arises; with volitional action as a precondition (3) **consciousness** arises; with consciousness as a precondition (4) **name and form** (i.e., the psychophysical person) arises; as a precondition of which (5) **the six internal sense bases** arise; as a precondition of which (6) **sensory contact** arises; as a precondition of which (7) **sensation** or feeling arises; as a precondition of which (8) **attachment** arises; as a precondition of which (9) **grasping** arises; as a precondition of which (10) the process of **becoming** (*bhava*) arises; as a precondition of which (11) **birth** arises; as a precondition of which (12) **old age and death** arise. The chain can also be understood as delineating a path to liberation through the progressive *elimination* of each step as a precondition of the next. Accordingly, from the elimination of ignorance, volitional actions no longer arise, etc. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is a way to describe the continuity of experience (as cause and its effect), and thus the action of KARMA, without positing a permanent “experiencer,” i.e., an ĀTMAN. See PRATĪTYASAMUTPĀDA.

TWO TRUTHS: Although in reality (i.e., the “ultimate truth,” *paramārthasatya*) all things are “empty” of self-nature, they do have a provisional reality (“conventional truth,” *saṃvṛtisatya*), the world of everyday things as they appear to unenlightened consciousness. Relying on his “skill in means” (*upāyakauśala*), a BUDDHA will sometimes employ conventional truths to lead beings toward enlightenment. See also UPĀYA.

UPĀYA: “method,” “[pedagogical] device.” Recognizing the difficulty of the path to enlightenment and the wide disparity in the abilities of sentient beings to practice it, the Buddha employs “skill in means” (*upāyakauśala*) to tailor his message to fit the audience. His preaching to different audiences will often yield teachings that are seemingly at odds with one another, but these are simply “devices” used to instruct beings of varying spiritual capacities. Associated with this notion is the division of the teachings into “provisional” (*neyārtha*) and “definitive” (*nītārtha*) doctrines. The Chinese classification systems that rank scriptures according to the different levels of spiritual maturity needed to understand them, the so-called *panjiao*, are rooted in this notion. See PANJIAO.

VINAYA: that portion of the Buddhist canon devoted to the rules of monastic discipline.

XUANXUE [Ch.] “dark learning.” A Chinese philosophical movement of the third to the sixth centuries that served as an early, if imperfect, source for the Chinese understanding of Buddhist concepts being introduced into China during the same period. The movement focused on three texts in particular, the *Yijing* (*Book of Changes*), Laozi’s *Daodejing*, and the *Zhuangzi*, and using these texts explored the relationship between “being” (*you*) and nonbeing (*wu*), the role of the sage, and the principles (*li*) that underlie the production of the phenomenal world. The Chinese found in these speculations fertile analogues to Buddhist notions such as ŚŪNYATĀ (“emptiness”) or NIRVĀṆA.

YOGĀCĀRA: A school of thought that constitutes one of the two core philosophical traditions of the Mahāyāna (Madhyamaka being the second). Its major doctrines were formulated in India by a pair of scholastics, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, writing in the fourth to fifth centuries of the Common Era. The Yogācāra tradition holds that it is mind, *citta*, alone that is responsible for the creation of objects that we (falsely) believe to be external and independent of ourselves. The world, they hold, is merely a “representation” or “projection” of consciousness (*viññaptimātratā*). In China, Yogācāra developed into an important school of thought and practice following XUANZANG’s composition of the *Cheng weishi lun* (“Discourse on the Establishment of Consciousness Only”).

Eminent Monks

ĀNANDA: The most beloved of the Buddha’s original disciples and, paradoxically, the last of them to become enlightened. At an assembly held to codify the scriptures following the death of the Buddha, it was Ānanda who recited (from memory) the teachings he had heard preached by the Buddha, and thus it is Ānanda who is the ‘I’ in “Thus have I heard,” the words that open all Buddhist SŪTRAS.

BODHIDHARMA: Arriving in China from India in the late fifth century, the semi-legendary Bodhidharma is esteemed as the nominal first patriarch of the CHAN lineage in China. The famous GONG’AN “What is the meaning of Bodhidharma’s coming from the West?” enshrines the legend of his arrival and his place in the history of the transmission of Chan teachings.

FAZANG: 643–712, the de facto founder of the Huayan school in China. Although revered as the third in a series of Huayan patriarchs, it was Fazang who was responsible for the highly detailed systematization of Huayan thought, occupying much the same position in his tradition as had his earlier coreligionist, Zhiyi, in Tiantai. See HUAYAN.

HUINENG: 683–713, the sixth patriarch (retrospectively) of the CHAN school of Chinese Buddhism and the “author” of the “Platform Sūtra of the Sixth Patriarch.” A proponent of the so-called “sudden teachings” (*dunjiao*) characteristic of so much of later Chan practice, Huineng is widely revered as a pivotal figure in the development of Chinese and Japanese Chan/Zen.

KUMĀRAJĪVA: 344–413, with Xuanzang, the greatest of all translators of Indian Buddhist texts. Born in the Central Asian kingdom of Kucha, Kumārajīva studied both SARVĀSTIVĀDA and MAHĀYĀNA philosophy as a young man. In 383 he was brought to China as a hostage of war, but treated with reverence for the depth of his learning. In 402 he was invited to create a state-supported translation bureau in Chang’an, from which over seventy major Buddhist texts were published. Kumārajīva’s understanding of Buddhism and fluency in Chinese (supplemented, no doubt, by the expertise of his Chinese colleagues at the bureau) yielded translations of exceptional clarity, and where he translated works that had already appeared in Chinese, his translations often became the standard editions of the texts, still read today.

NĀGĀRJUNA: 2d century CE? The first great philosopher and systematizer of Mahāyāna Buddhism and the founder of the MADHYAMAKA school. With VASUBANDHU, Nāgārjuna is revered as one of the greatest of all Mahāyāna thinkers.

ŚĀRIPUTRA: An early disciple of the Buddha, known especially for his wisdom and knowledge of Dharma. In Mahāyāna scriptures, particularly the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ SŪTRAS, he is sometimes the foil for criticism of MAINSTREAM Buddhist views. In these instances, his role as a master of Mainstream teachings, juxtaposed against his unfamiliarity with those of the Mahāyāna, serves as a subtle indictment of Mainstream, particularly Abhidharma, positions.

SUBHŪTI: Foremost in loving kindness among the early disciples of the Buddha, Subhūti is a frequent interlocutor of the Buddha in Mahāyāna scripture such as the PRAJÑĀPĀRAMITĀ and SADDHARMAPUṆḌARĪKA sūtras.

VASUBANDHU: 4th or 5th centuries CE. Perhaps the foremost of the Buddhist scholiasts, the Gandhāra (contemporary Pakistan)-born Vasubandhu was first ordained as a SARVĀSTIVĀDA monk, out of which training he wrote his enormously influential *Abhidharmakośa* and its autocommentary, the *Bhāṣya*, together a massive compendium of Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika (a school closely related to the Sarvāstivāda) thought. The work stands as a *summa* of the Abhidharma tradition of that school and is still widely studied in Tibetan and East Asian Buddhism. Later in life Vasubandhu was converted to MAHĀYĀNA Buddhism, allegedly by his half-brother Asaṅga, and became a devotee of the YOGĀCĀRA tradition, out of which he wrote, among others, two major treatises setting forth the teachings of that school, the *Viṃśatikā* (“Twenty Verses”) and the *Trimśikā* (“Thirty Verses”).

XUANZANG: 602–664, with Kumārajīva, the greatest of all translators of Indian Buddhist texts. In 627 he began an eighteen-year pilgrimage to India via the Silk Road, seeking both scripture and instruction in YOGĀCĀRA thought. After visiting the major centers of Buddhist learning and pilgrimage there, and spending fifteen months in intensive study with the Yogācāra master Śīlabhadra, he returned to Chang’an in 645 with some 657 manuscripts, of which seventy-six of them he translated into Chinese. Xuanzang’s journey is celebrated in Chinese literature, first through his travelogue, *A Record of Western Regions (Xiyuji)* compiled in 646,

and more popularly in the sixteenth-century vernacular novel, *Journey to the West* (*Xiyouji*), in which a fictionalized Xuanzang is accompanied by his companion and protector, Monkey.

ZHIYI: 538–597. The de facto founder of the Tiantai school in China. Although revered as the third in a series of Tiantai patriarchs, it was Zhiyi who was responsible for the comprehensive, systematized set of doctrines and practices associated with the tradition.