



Foundations of Indian Buddhism

Siddhārtha at the Bodhi Tree, Gandhāra, c. 100–200 CE, Schist. Image courtesy of Cleveland Museum of Art.)

Foundations of Indian Buddhism

A series of four lectures introducing the fundamentals of the Buddhist tradition in the land of its origin.

Lectures are held at the Redding Heritage Center from 11:00 to 12:15 on 30 September and 7, 14, and 21 October.

Lecture Topics

- “Core” teachings:
 - Suffering and its origin; emancipation and the path
 - Karma and the causal chain of birth and death
- The practice of meditation
- Buddhist psychology: Abhidharma
- The rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism
- Paths to emancipation
- The Perfection of Wisdom literature
- Madhyamaka: the “Middle Way”
- “The Imagination of the Unreal”: Yogācāra Buddhism
- The Tathāgatagarbha (Buddha Nature)
- Tantric Buddhism

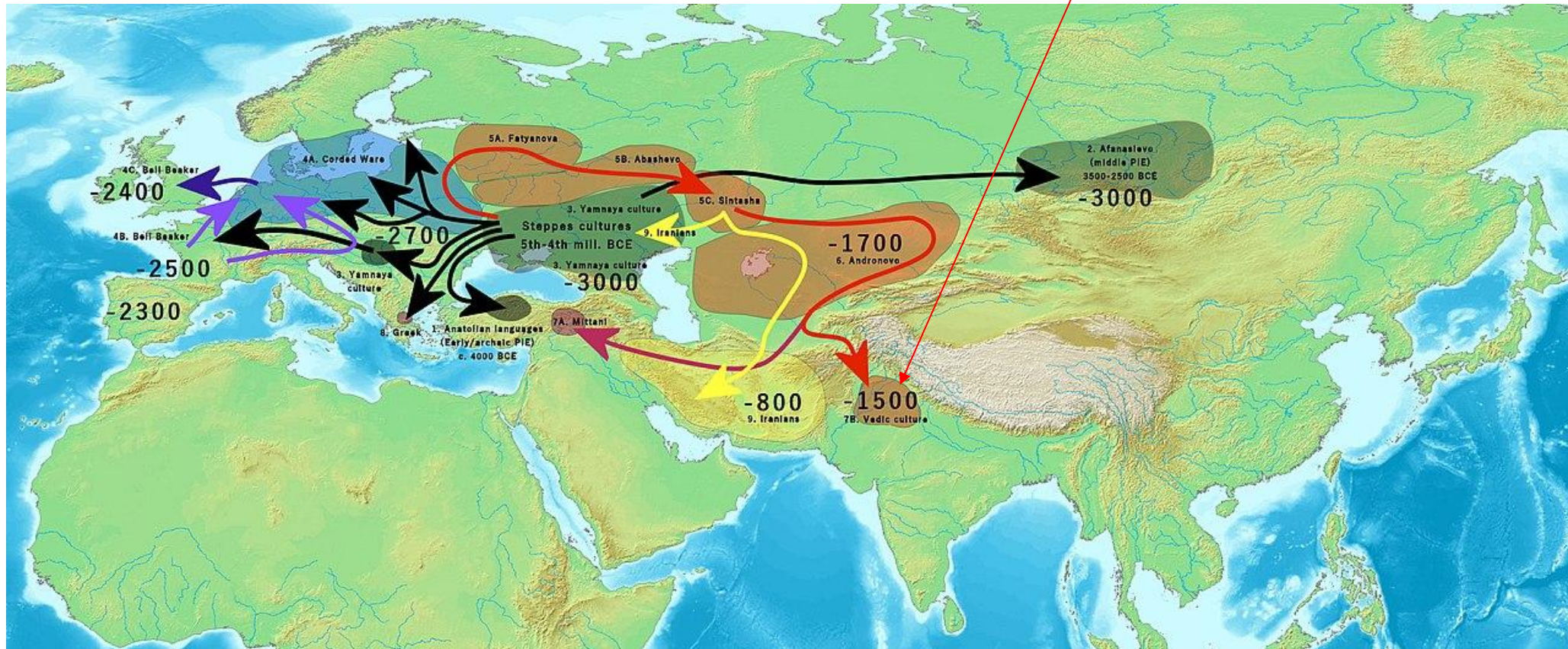
Course Materials

Although there are no “assignments” for these lectures, readings are available in support of key topics discussed. These can be accessed in the repository created for this course at <https://github.com/mcummingsny/Indian-Buddhism>

Also included in the repository are an extensive **Glossary**, which includes definitions of technical terms and lists of *buddhas*, *bodhisattvas*, and important scriptures, and a brief **bibliography** of introductory-level books.

Indo-European Migrations, 4000-800 BCE

Indo-Europeans enter India ca. 1500 BCE



ये धर्मा हेतुप्रभवा हेतुं तेषां तथागतो ह्यवदत् ।
तेषां च यो निरोध एवंवादी महाश्रमणः ॥

*Ye dharmā hetuprabhavā
hetum teṣāṃ tathāgataḥ hyavadat
teṣāṃ ca yo nirodha
evam vādī mahāśramaṇaḥ*

Of those things that arise from a cause,
The Tathāgata has explained the cause,
And also its cessation.
This is the doctrine of the Great Renunciant.

Mahāvagga, I.23.5

The great stūpa at Sāñcī



Built in 3^d c. BCE under the direction of Aśoka Maurya

“And as they treat the remains of a *cakravartin* king, so, Ānanda, should they treat the remains of the Tathāgata. At the four crossroads a *stūpa* should be erected to the Tathāgata. And whosoever shall there place garlands or perfumes or paint, or make salutation there, or become in its presence calm in heart—it will be to his well-being and happiness for a long time.”

Mahāparinibbānasuttanta V.26

Pratītya-samutpāda

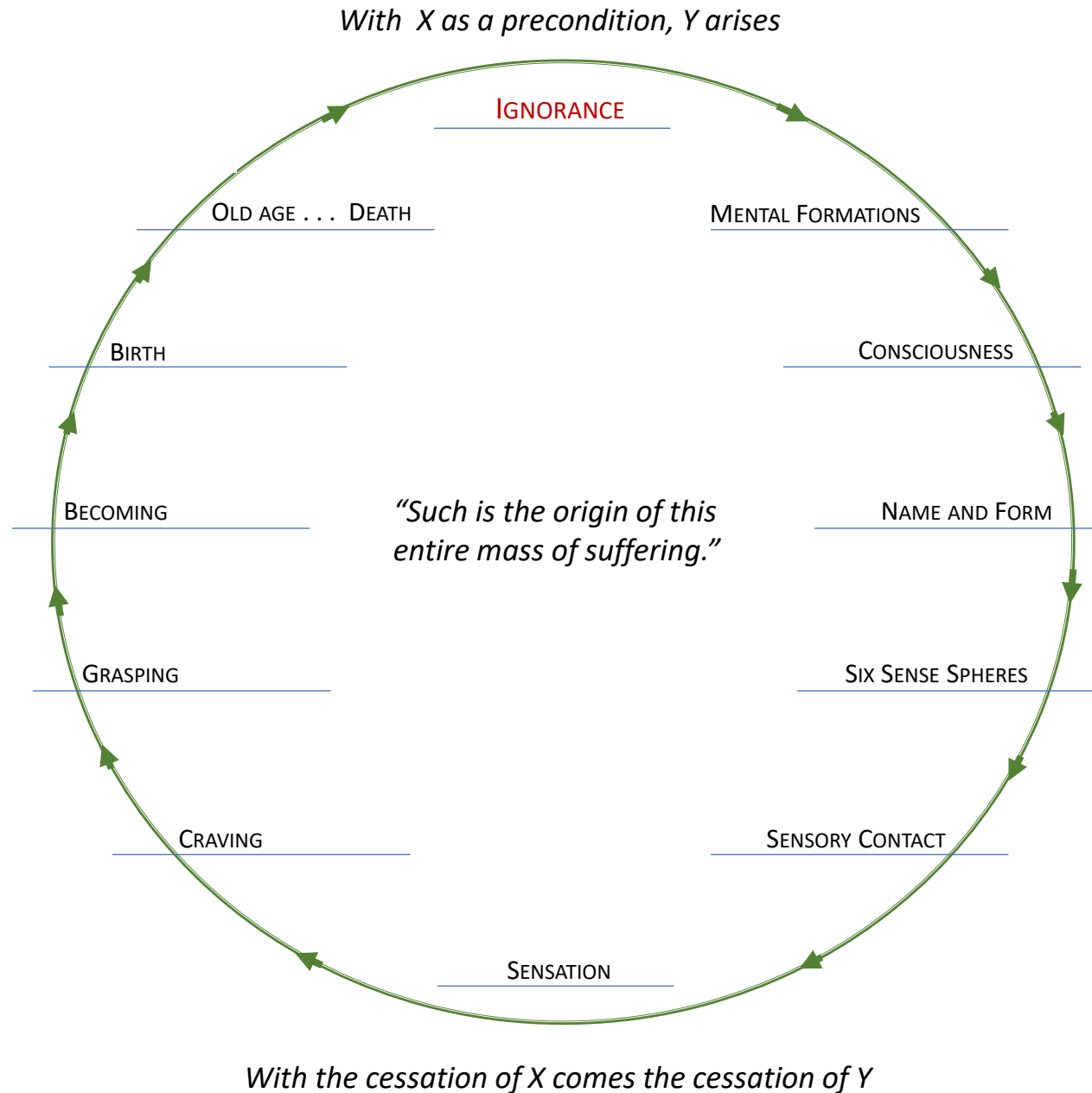
“Dependent Origination”

“When this is present, that comes to be.

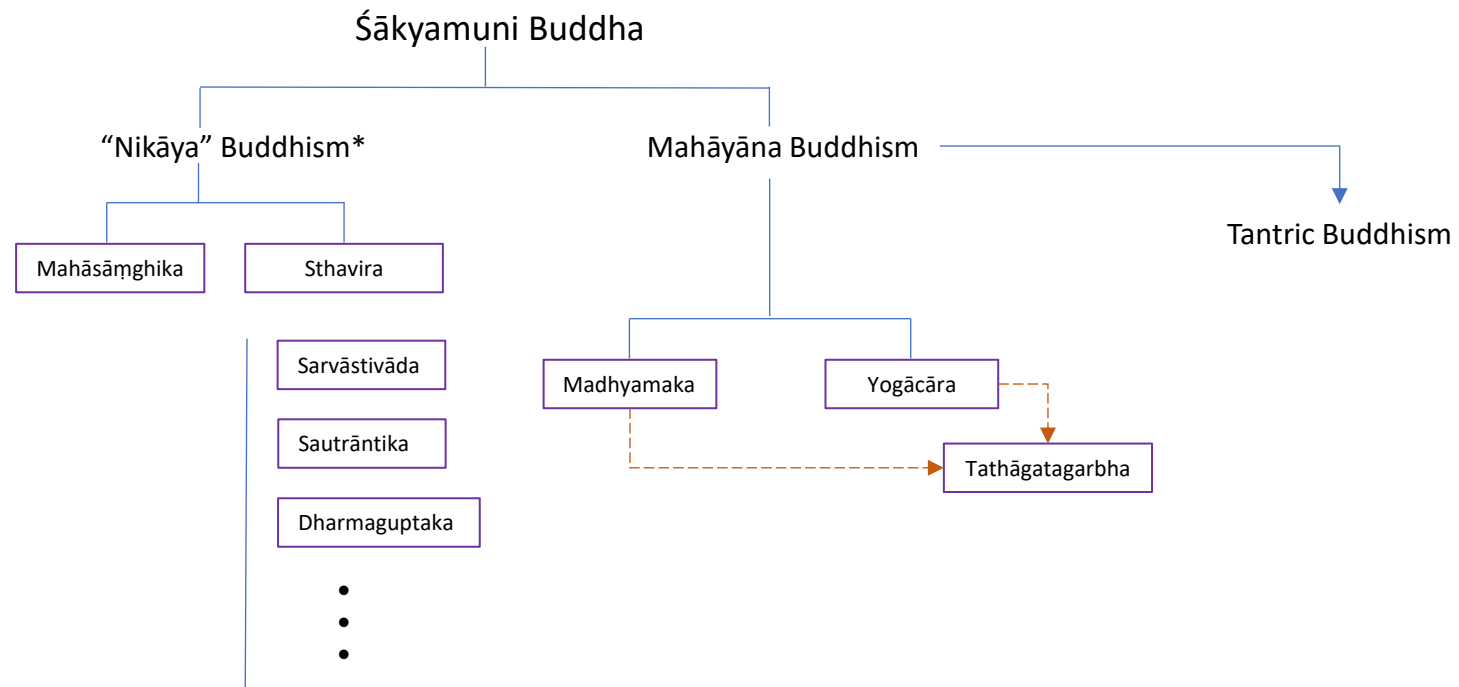
From the arising of this, that arises.

When this is absent, that does not come to be.

From the cessation of this, that ceases.”



Filiation of Major Buddhist Traditions



* The "Eighteen Schools"

Three Dharma Taxonomies

Three Ways of Describing the Elements of Phenomenal Existence

FIVE *SKANDHAS* (AGGREGATES)

Form/Matter
Sensation
Perception
Volition/disposition
Consciousness

EIGHTEEN *DHĀTUS* (ELEMENTS)

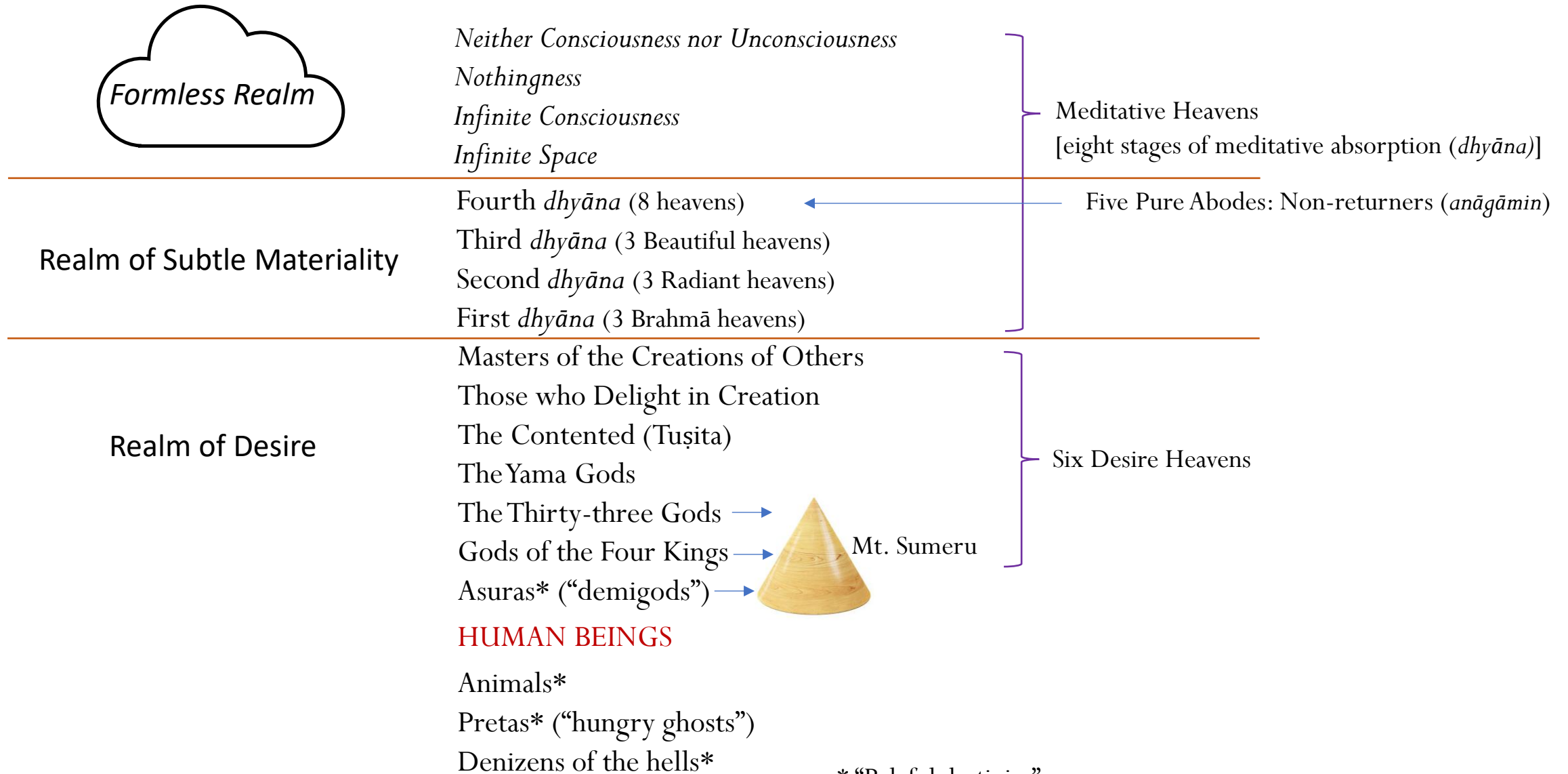
Twelve <i>āyatana</i> s (bases of cognition)		
Sense Base	Sense Object	Consciousness
Eye	Forms	Visual
Ear	Sounds	Auditory
Nose	Odors	Olfactory
Tongue	Flavors	Gustatory
Body	Tangibles	Tactile
Mind	Mental Objects	Mental
<i>Indriya</i>	<i>Ālambana</i>	<i>Vijñāna</i>

SEVENTY-FIVE *DHARMAS**

Material factors	11
Mind	1
Mental Concomitants	46
Omnipresent Mental Factors	10
Omnipresent Wholesome Factors	10
Omnipresent Afflicted Factors	6
Major Omnipresent Unwholesome Factors	2
Minor Afflicted Factors of Wide Extent	10
Indeterminate Mental Factors	8
Conditioned Forces Dissociated from Thought	14
Uncompounded Factors	3

* As defined in the Abhidharma literature of the Sarvāstivāda school

The Geography of Saṃsāra: Buddhist Cosmology



* “Baleful destinies”

The Geographical Diffusion of Buddhism

“Go, now, monks, and wander, for the good of the many, for the benefit of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the profit, for the good, and for the welfare of gods and men. Let not two of you go the same way. Expound, you monks, the Dharma, which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious at the end.”

[*Mahāvagga* I.11]

The Conquests of Alexander ca. 326 BCE



The Beas River, the easternmost extent of Alexander's conquests

By 326 BCE Alexander had extended his empire of client states as far as the Punjab region of India, but at that point his army refused to go further. Reluctantly, Alexander withdrew from the region to begin the long march home, but he died *en route* in Babylon in 323. In the years following his death, one of his generals, Seleucus I Nicator, assumed control over the eastern portion of Alexander's conquests, consolidating his holdings into the Seleucid Empire in 312.

Maximum Extent of the Seleucid Empire ca. 312 BCE



The massive Seleucid Empire, the legacy of Alexander's conquests on the Anatolian plateau, Mesopotamia, Persia, and modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, was a center of Hellenized culture and facilitated contact between India, western Asia, and the Mediterranean world.

The Mauryan Empire in the Time of Aśoka (r. 268–232 BCE)

In 303 BCE Chandragupta Maurya waged war against the Seleucids and annexed lands west of the Indus River, expanding his Mauryan Empire into what is now Pakistan and Afghanistan.

His grandson Aśoka's war with the Kalingas, ca. 261 BCE, brought most of the rest of what is now India under Mauryan control. Afterward, appalled by the carnage of his campaign, Aśoka converted to Buddhism.

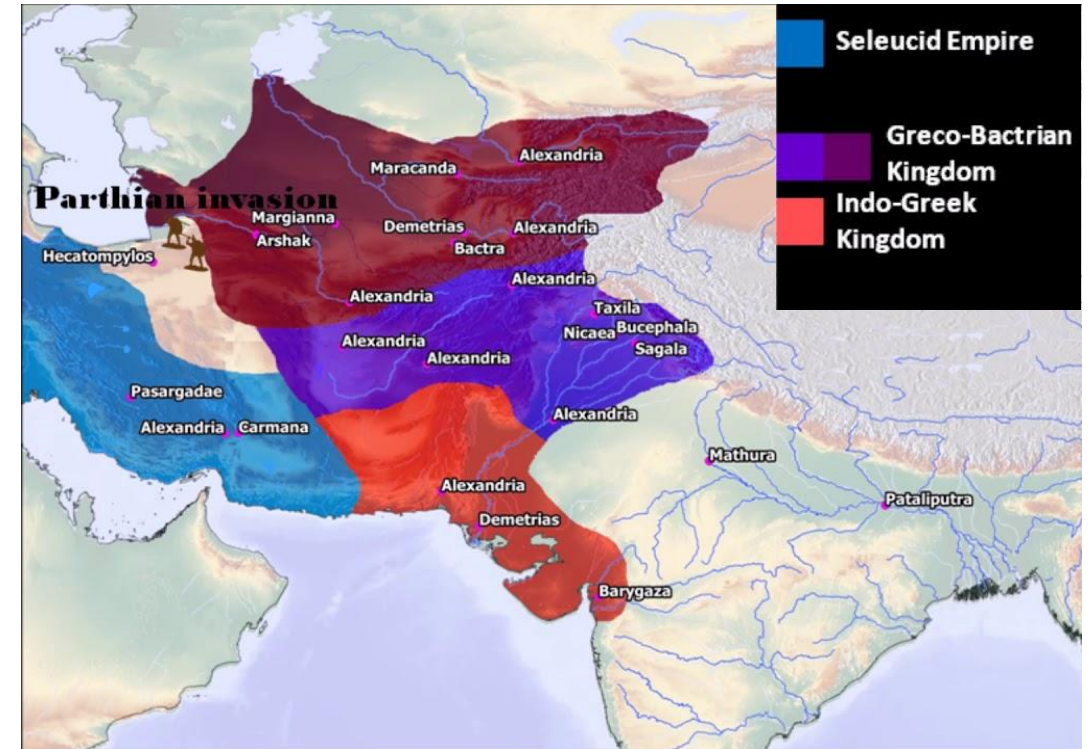
Following his conversion, Aśoka erected a series of pillars and rock inscriptions (*red dots on map*) throughout the empire proclaiming a generalized, nonsectarian Dharma loosely based on Buddhist morality.





The Greco-Bactrian Kingdom ca. 180 BCE

Established as a break-away kingdom from the Seleucids around 250 BCE



Indo-Greek Kingdom ca. 168 BCE

Following the Greco-Bactrian invasion of India around 200 BCE, the areas in northwest India were ruled by a succession of Hellenized kings as the Yavana Kingdom

The Kushan Empire in the time of Kaniška I (r. 127–150 CE)

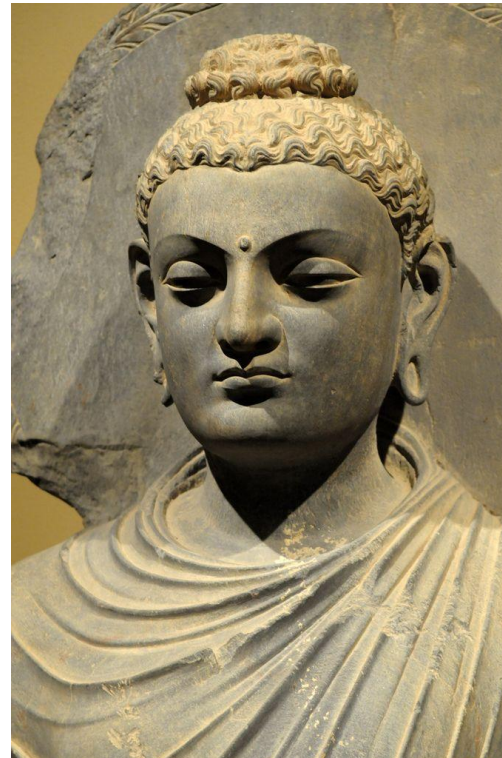
Around 120 BCE the Kushans (Kuṣāṇa), a Yuezhi people, migrated south to Bactria and Gandhara from what is now the Chinese province of Xinjiang and supplanted the Greco-Bactrians. The Kushan Empire adopted the Greek alphabet and was an agent of Hellenic culture.

Later, the Kushan emperor Kaniška's patronage of Buddhism supported the spread of the religion along the Silk Road to the city-states of Central Asia, and from there to China.



Images of the Buddha in Gandhāran (Greco-Buddhist) Art, 1st-2^d c CE

Kushan contact with the Roman Empire introduced elements of “classical” Western art into Buddhist iconography in the Gandhāran region, as can be seen in these images of the Buddha from around the time of Kaniška.

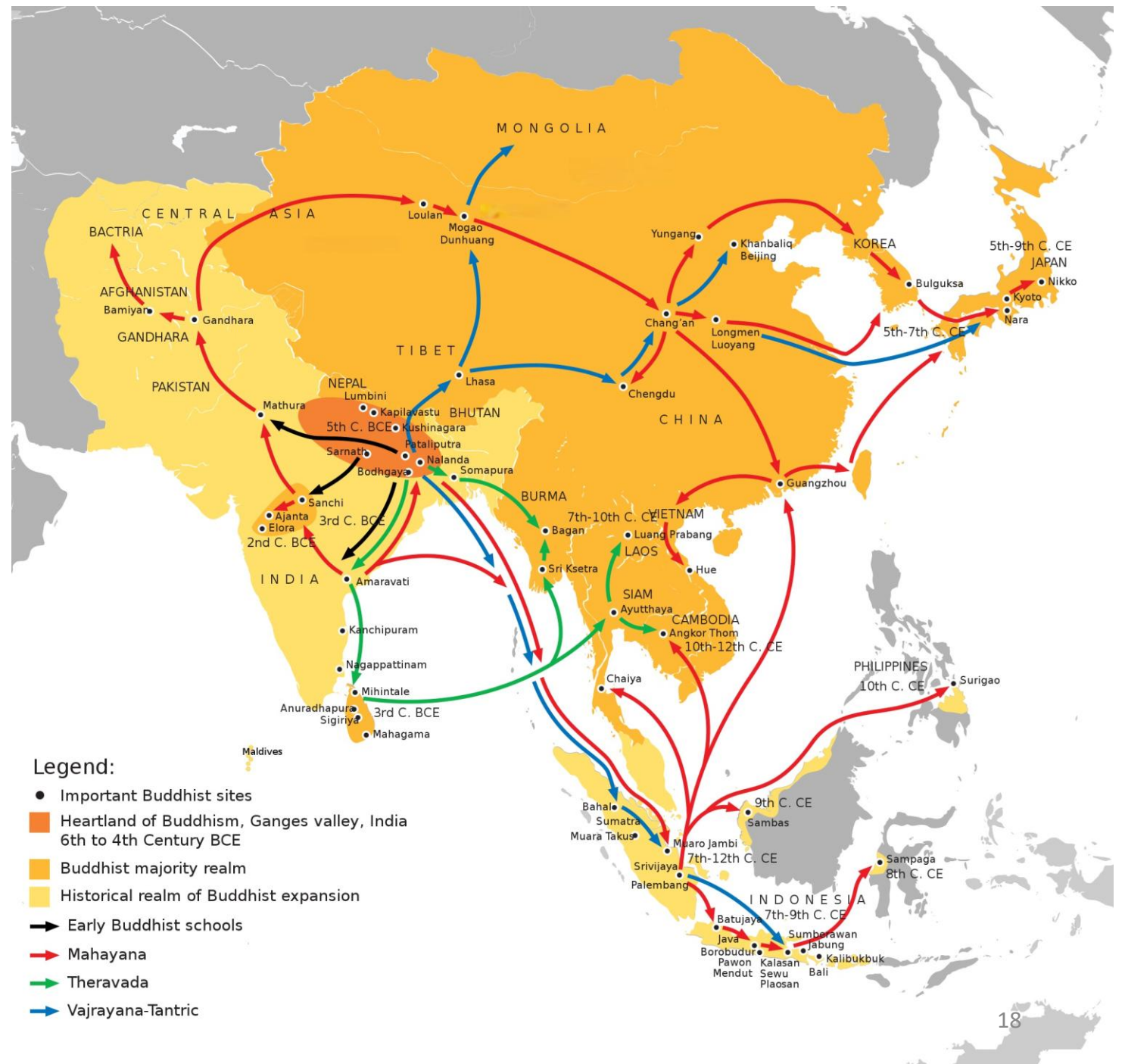


The “Silk Road” ca. 300 BCE—100 CE



City-states such as Kucha, Khotan, Turfan, and Dunhuang along the Silk Road were important centers of Buddhist monasticism. Monks from these areas were among the earliest transmitters of Buddhist scripture and teachings to China. Other early missionaries, from Parthia (Persia), Sogdia, Scythia, India, and further west, likewise arrived in China via the Silk Road.

The Diffusion of Buddhism in Asia



The *Heart Sūtra* : A Précis of the Perfection of Wisdom Literature

Five skandhas

The *bodhisattva* Avalokiteśvara,
While deeply immersed in *prajñāpāramitā*,
Clearly perceived the empty nature of the five *skandhas*,
And transcended all suffering.

Form is not different from emptiness;
Emptiness is not different from form.
Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.
So it is with feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness.

All *dharma*s 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, perception, volition, or consciousness;
No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind;
No form, sound, smell, taste, touch, or *dharma*s;
No realm of vision, and so forth . . . *up to* no realm of mind-consciousness;

Eighteen dhātus (all phenomenal existence)

No ignorance or ending of ignorance, and so forth . . . *up to* no aging and death or ending of aging and death.

Pratītyasamutpāda
("dependent origination")

Four Noble Truths → There is no suffering, no cause, no extinction, no path. There is no wisdom and no attainment.

There is nothing to be attained.

By way of *prajñāpāramitā*, the *bodhisattva*'s mind is free from hindrances.

With no hindrances, there is no fear;
Freed from all distortion and delusion, ultimate *nirvāṇa* is reached.

For the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras*, the practice of "perfection of wisdom" reveals that any statements or concepts one might form about the nature of reality—even the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism itself (!)-- simply become objects that are "grasped" and thus agents of our ensnarement in *samsāra*.

"Emptiness" (*śūnyatā*) is not a "quality" of things.