

Comparative Conceptions of the Self

Evan Thompson

Lecture 6

Siddhartha Gautama (The Buddha), c. 500–400 BCE

Sutta Pitaka (discourses)

Vinaya Pitaka (code of discipline)

Abhidhamma Pitaka ('higher teachings')

EIGHTEEN ABHIDHARMA 'SCHOOLS'

- Staviravādins
 - Vibhajjivādins ('distinctionalists')
 - Theravādins ('Elders')
 - Vaibhāsikas (follow the *Vaibhāsa*)
 - Pudgalavādins ('personalists')
 - Mahīśāsikas
 - Sarvāstivādins (Pan-realists: past, present, future *dharma*s exist)
- Mahāsaṅgikas

Prajñāpāramitā ('perfection of wisdom') literature

The Mahāyāna ('greater vehicle')

Nāgārjuna, 1st–2nd c., *Madhyamaka Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*

Aryadeva, 2nd c., 400 Verses *Catūṣṭaka*

Asaṅga, 4th c., *Yogācāra (Yogācārabhūmi)*

Vasubandhu, 4th c., *Abhidharmakośa*, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, Twenty Verses; Thirty Verses; On the Three Natures

Buddhapaṭita, 4th–5th c.

Bhāviveka, 5th c., *Madhyamakahrdaya*

Śāntideva, 7th–8th c., *Bodhicāryāvatāra*

Prasannapadā (on MMK) *Madhyamakāvatāra*

Candrakīrti, 6th c.

Dharmakīrti, 6th/7th c., epistemology *Pramāṇavārttika*

Dinnāga, 4th–5th c., epistemology, logic *Pramāṇasamuccaya*

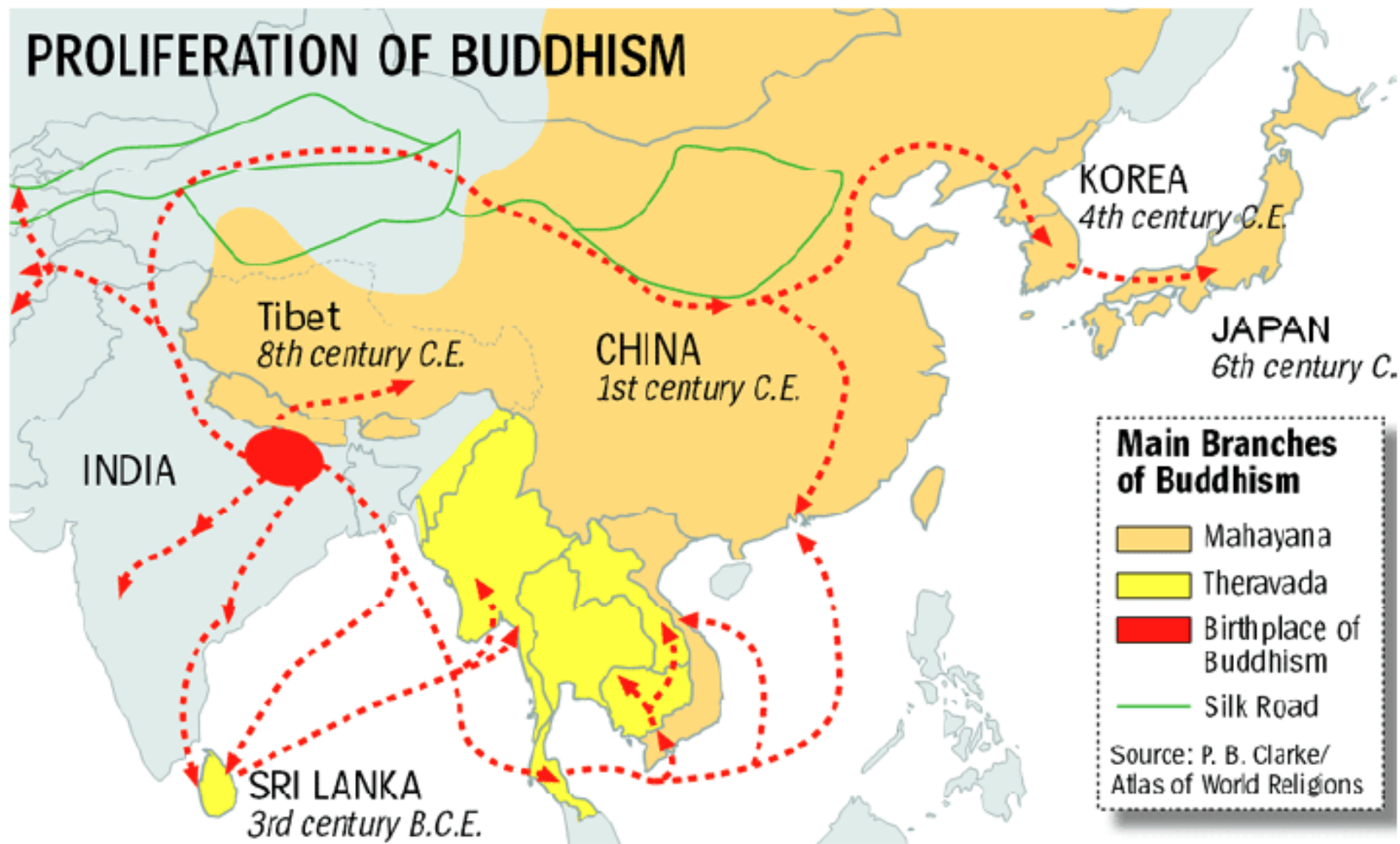
Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, 8th–9th c., syncretists

Buddhagaṇa, 5th c., Theravādin commentator *Visuddhimagga*

Saṅghabhadra

Sautrāntikas ('sūtra followers')

PROLIFERATION OF BUDDHISM



Mahāyāna Buddhism

Around the first century BCE, a new kind of Buddhist sūtra starts to appear:

- Sometimes it's Gautama Buddha who is represented as speaking; sometimes it's another Buddha who abides in a heavenly paradise (e.g., the “celestial Buddha,” Amitābha); sometimes it's a bodhisattva.
- The setting is sometimes India, sometimes another world.
- The teachings differ from those of the earlier sūtras in certain distinctive ways.

Some Mahāyāna sūtras

Prajñapāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom)

- Emphasizes transcendent wisdom

Lotus sūtra

- One vehicle, many teachings; Buddha didn't pass into final nirvāṇa but is still active in the world.

Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament)

- Emphasizes interpenetration of all things

Laṅkāvatāra (Entry to Laṅkā)

- Teaches “mind only” doctrine, says words aren't important for transmission of the dharma

Vimalakīrti sūtra

- Emphasizes nonduality

Some distinctive ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism

Bodhisattva

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*)

Buddha-nature (buddhadhātu/fó-xìng (佛性))

Bodhisattva

Śrāvakayāna

Arhat/arahant (the accomplished person)

- Practices the Noble Eightfold Path
- Attains awakening in this life as a result of hearing/practicing the Buddha's teachings
- No longer sets in motion anything that will cause the personal factors of existence (5 aggregates) to arise in the future (nirvāṇa without remainder)
- Upon death attains nirvāṇa without remainder

Mahāyāna

Bodhisattva (awakened being)

- Someone who will become a Buddha but vows to be reborn until all other beings are liberated, and undertakes to help them attain liberation (the Bodhisattva vow)
- Understands the Noble Eightfold Path as also including the practice of the Six Perfections: generosity, self-restraint, patience, energy, concentration, and insight.

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*)

All dharmas are empty of *svabhāva* (own-being, intrinsic being, intrinsic nature, essence).

The lack or absence of intrinsic nature in any and all phenomena, the final nature of things (*dharmatā*), and the ultimate truth.

Because all phenomena are dependently arisen, they are empty of an intrinsic nature.

Prajñapāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom)

A level of understanding beyond that of ordinary wisdom.

The knowledge of emptiness.

A genre of Mahāyāna sūtras, first appearing c. 100 BCE-100 CE.

Prajñapāramitā sūtras

The shortest is called “The Heart Sūtra” (for the heart of the perfection of wisdom).

Probably a Chinese work abstracted from a Chinese translation of a much larger Prajñapāramitā text, then introduced into India (probably by the 7th century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang) and translated into Sanskrit.

Lapis Lazuli Texts

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Shorter Prajñāpāramitā Hṛdaya Sūtra

Translated from Taishō Tripiṭaka volume 8, number 251

When Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva was practicing the profound Prajñāpāramitā, he illuminated the Five Skandhas and saw that they were all empty, and crossed over all suffering and affliction.

“Śāriputra, form is not different from emptiness, and emptiness is not different from form. Form itself is emptiness, and emptiness itself is form. Sensation, conception, synthesis, and discrimination are also such as this. Śāriputra, all dharmas are empty — they are neither created nor destroyed, neither defiled nor pure, and they neither increase nor diminish. This is because in emptiness there is no form, sensation, conception, synthesis, or discrimination. There are no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or thoughts. There are no forms, sounds, scents, tastes, sensations, or dharmas. There is no field of vision and there is no realm of thoughts. There is no ignorance nor elimination of ignorance, even up to and including no old age and death, nor elimination of old age and death. There is no suffering, its accumulation, its elimination, or a path. There is no understanding and no attaining.

“Because there is no attainment, bodhisattvas rely on Prajñāpāramitā, and their minds have no obstructions. Since there are no obstructions, they have no fears. Because they are detached from backwards dream-thinking, their final result is Nirvāṇa. Because all buddhas of the past, present, and future rely on Prajñāpāramitā, they attain Anuttarā Samyaksaṃbodhi. Therefore, know that Prajñāpāramitā is a great spiritual mantra, a great brilliant mantra, an unsurpassed mantra, and an unequalled mantra. The Prajñāpāramitā Mantra is spoken because it can truly remove all afflictions. The mantra is spoken thusly:

gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā

Some distinctive ideas of Mahāyāna Buddhism

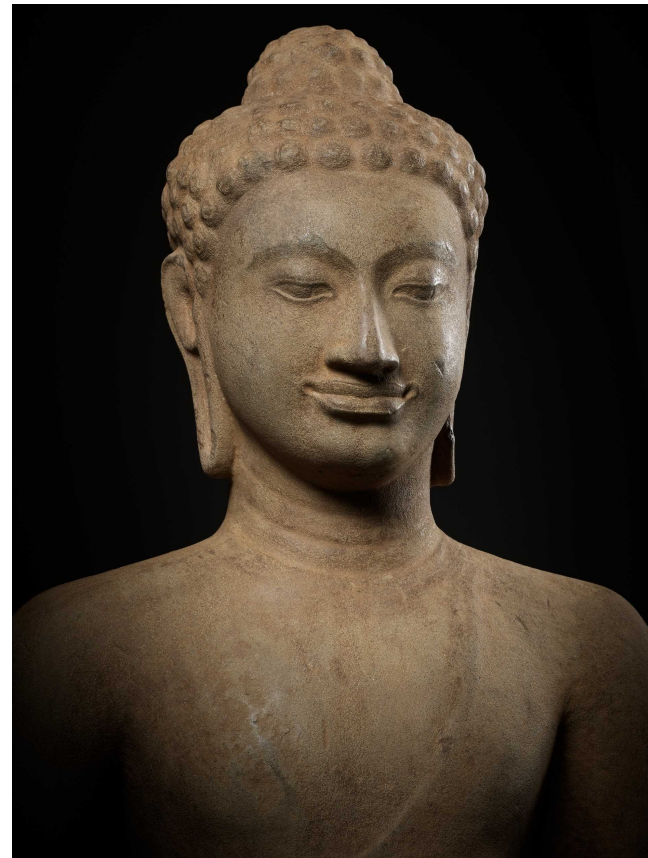
Bodhisattva

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*)

Buddha-nature (buddhadhātu/fó-xìng (佛性))

Buddha-nature

The inherent potential of all sentient beings to attain buddhahood.



Buddha-nature

First appears in the *Mahāpariṇirvāṇa sūtra* (great parinirvāṇa sūtra) (now available only in Chinese).

Set around the time of the Buddha's passing (parinirvāṇa), it asserts that:

all beings have an intrinsic pure nature of which they will become fully aware once what it obscures it has been removed;

all possess a seed or potential for buddhahood;

the Mahāyāna path to buddhahood is open to all.

Buddha-nature

- Can be traced back to one of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, the Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñapāramitā Sūtra (Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines).
- There it is said that the mind is fundamentally **luminous**.
- This in turn has an antecedent in the Pāli (Aṅguttara Nikāya 1.51-52) statement, “The mind, O monks, is luminous but defiled by adventitious defilements.”

AṄGUTTARA NIKĀYA

BOOK OF THE ONES

1.51–52. LUMINOUS

“Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is defiled by incoming defilements. The uninstructed run-of-the-mill person doesn’t discern that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the uninstructed run-of-the-mill person—there is no development of the mind.”

“Luminous, monks, is the mind. And it is freed from incoming defilements. The well-instructed disciple of the noble ones discerns that as it actually is present, which is why I tell you that—for the well-instructed disciple of the noble ones—there is development of the mind.”

https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/AN/AN1_50.html

Buddha-nature

Leads to the development of related doctrines:

“Womb of the Tathāgatas” (tathagatagarbha)

“Immaculate consciousness” (amalavijñāna)

Womb of the Tathāgatas

A concept equivalent to buddha-nature.

The subject of extensive discussion and debate, especially because some descriptions make it seem similar to ātman.

Immaculate consciousness

The consciousness of a buddha.

The inherent purity of the mind.

Relevance to Chan/Zen

All these ideas—the bodhisattva, emptiness, buddha-nature, the luminous mind, the womb of the tathāgatas, and the immaculate consciousness—are crucial in the development of Chan/Zen, particularly when it telescopes the arduous path of the bodhisattva into a single moment of sudden awakening to buddha-nature.