

Mahāyāna Buddhism

The doctrinal foundations

Paul Williams

*Lecturer in Indo-Tibetan Studies
University of Bristol*

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missionary propagation, and definite social benefits. According to Nikkyō Niwano, to bring a person into the (Buddhist) Way is to raise up humanity, and is perhaps the only way to create a 'truly ideal society' (Niwano 1981: 42). Since mind and matter are connected, so changing the mind through Buddhism inevitably affects the material surroundings and thence prosperity:

there is nothing odd about a person who has through faith undergone a change of heart, a change in his or her way of thinking, having the blessings of money or other material things come his or her way. ... improvement and change for the better are natural consequences.

(*ibid.*, 125–6)

Eventually all will arrive at the one teaching, and all will live according to the doctrine of the Buddha. This will be, in a sense, the Pure Land (*ibid.*, 135–6). Or, as it is put in the Soka Gakkai:

To become Buddha means to live everywhere a joyous pleasant life, from the moment you get up in the morning to the time you go to sleep in the evening. To call a life happy and pleasant, when it is without clothing or money, with sickness in the home and debt collectors at the door – that is of no use.

(Quoted by Dumoulin 1976: 263)

Such a teaching obviously harmonizes with the pressing needs of Japan's postwar reconstruction and economic growth. How easily it harmonizes with Buddhism as it has existed in history, and particularly as it existed in India, is, however, a moot point!

On the bodies of the Buddha

PROLEGOMENON TO THE MAHĀYĀNA

There is a Zen saying that if one meets the Buddha on the road one should kill him. It is tempting to see this as another Japanese exhortation to holy violence, but the lesson is inspired, perhaps, by yet another *sūtra*, contained in the *Ratnakūṭa* collection. In this *sūtra* a group of virtuous Bodhisattvas are depressed at the thought that no matter how moral they are in this life their spiritual progress will be hindered by the immoral deeds they did during their infinite past lives, 'killing their fathers, mothers or Arhats; destroying Buddhist temples or stūpas; or disrupting the Saṃgha'. As a skilful means in order to help these Bodhisattvas let go of the conception of Self which is at the root of their spiritual anguish, Mañjuśrī, the Bodhisattva particularly associated with wisdom, took up a sharp sword and lunged towards the Buddha with the intention of killing him. The sword is Mañjuśrī's sword of wisdom, his principal iconographic feature in Buddhist art. The Buddha deflected this apparently murderous intent. The point of the lesson was, it seems, two-fold. First, the Buddha who appears before the assembly is empty of inherent existence, and he is thus 'killed' when he is seen this way. Second, since all things lack inherent existence if the Bodhisattvas can gain an insight into emptiness, their past wicked deeds can be understood as ultimately illusory and no real barrier to spiritual progress. Recognizing the moral dangers of this teaching, the *sūtra* adds that those

in the assembly whose spiritual progress was mediocre, through the Buddha's power, failed to see Mañjuśrī with his sword and hear the Buddha's teaching on the subject.¹

Supposing one meets the Buddha on the road (and restrains one's homicidal tendencies), who or what exactly would one meet? Certainly the Buddha would appear as a physical human being clad in a monk's robe. And yet he would not be simply another monk. He would have a special impact by virtue of what he had attained, by virtue of his not being just another human being but rather a Buddha:

His peaceful countenance was neither happy nor sad. He seemed to be smiling gently inwardly. With a secret smile, not unlike that of a healthy child, he walked along, peacefully, quietly. He wore his gown and walked along exactly like the other monks, but his face and his step, his peaceful downward glance, his peaceful downward-hanging hand, and every finger of his hand spoke of peace, spoke of completeness, sought nothing, imitated nothing, reflected a continuous quiet, an unfading light, an invulnerable peace.

(Hesse 1951: 22)

In two ways, it seems to me, the Buddha as a *Buddha* extends beyond the physical human being. On the one hand he is not an isolated individual in history (now long dead) but rather exemplifies in his own person the Truth which he has discovered. There is a saying often repeated in Buddhist texts that whether a Buddha appears or does not appear, the true nature of things remains for ever. There is a sense in which the Buddha as a physical human being exemplifies this true nature of things – not in the sense that he created it, or it only exists in him, but rather in the sense that it exists *as realized* in him, and therefore is transmitted as realization through him to others. Second, in the Indian context, or in the context of meditative attainment and therefore magical intervention, the physical Buddha met on the road through his attainments can render all about him, and himself, other than they appear to be. He is a being of power, a master of magical transformations. Thus the Buddha we meet has three dimensions – his physical presence as a saffron-robed monk, his exemplification of the true nature of things which entails that he is truly free, an enlightened being, and his compassionate ability and desire to engage in magical interventions for the benefit of others, his occupation of the fluid quick-silver world of magic which we saw when examining the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. These three dimensions indicate the incarnation of perfect wisdom (knowing the true nature of things) and compassion

(magical intervention), the two definitive constituents of Buddhahood, in a physical body of the monk whom we have been fortunate enough to meet. However, we become enlightened not through our encounter as such but through following his teachings until we embody them in our own physical presence. The Buddha's body (and his magical interventions) are tools subservient to the cognition by others of the Truth. Thus with our sharp sword of wisdom we 'kill' the physical Buddha, we go beyond the physical to the true nature which he incarnates and exemplifies. Viewed in this perspective, of course, the actual physical death of the Buddha, the Enlightened One, was no insurmountable tragedy.

There seems no reason to doubt that Śākyamuni Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama, was a being who lived and died in India at a particular time in history. His influence on his followers was presumably deep and life transforming, although his wider influence during his lifetime on the areas of North India where he lived and preached was perhaps slight. It is tempting to think that over a period of centuries, following the death of the Master, Śākyamuni's grieving followers, losing sight of the historical individual, gradually deified the Buddha until he took his place alongside the teeming myriads of India's other gods and goddesses. This process by which a historical individual is deified is one of exaggeration and exaggerated reverence. It is essentially a process of falsification, the creation of a massive delusion.

Such a model is, I think, misleading. The Buddha was never simply a human being, and is not seen this way by any Buddhist tradition. He always embodies our three dimensions – physical, 'spiritual' (for want of a better word; exemplifying the true nature of things), and magical. If after the Buddha's death interest shifts from the physical to the spiritual and magical (eventually embracing also the Buddha seen in meditative absorption) this is only natural and embodies a change of emphasis rather than growing falsification. Moreover, the image of deification is apt to convey for Western readers a radical de-(or super-) humanization which is misleading in the Indian context. Divinization, investing a being with divine attributes, was common in Ancient India, and by no means carried with it the dramatic implications which we assume in a monotheistic culture – that the being divinized enters a radically different order from common humanity. As A. L. Basham has put it, 'Divinity was cheap in ancient India' (Basham 1967: 88). The king, Brahmins, holy ascetics, and cows were referred to as gods (or goddesses). According to certain of the law books, gold and clarified butter were also gods. Trees could be gods,

and a god dwelt in the hearth of every home as Agni, the Fire. It was natural to refer to the Buddha in terms also used of gods. Such indicated little more than an attitude of deep respect and humility on the part of his followers. In a world which lacks the rigid dichotomy of sacred from profane, God from Creation, where the borders between divine and human are fluid, so there was never any question of anyone referring to Siddhārtha Gautama, once he had become the Buddha, the Enlightened One, as merely another human being. Nevertheless, the Buddha has discovered truths unknown to the Brahmin priests and their gods. In a Buddhist cosmos where human beings through virtuous deeds can become gods, and gods through the exhaustion of their merit fall to the deepest hells, the Buddha had gone beyond the cycle of transmigration, beyond gods and humans. No matter whether he is referred to out of respect as having certain divine attributes, as a Buddha, an enlightened being, he is set over and against both gods and men. Even in the Theravāda tradition, where the human aspects of the Buddha are most prominent, the Lord denies that he is a man or a god. Rather, he is a Buddha, as were all the Buddhas before him, and those who will come after.

The word *kāya*, usually translated as 'body', is a systematically ambiguous word in Pāli and Sanskrit. This ambiguity is an important part of its range of uses in the Buddhist treatment of the Buddha himself. In the fifth century CE the Theravāda commentator Buddhaghosa explained that the word could be used to refer in particular to a body, or to any group.² Thus the word *kāya* when used of the Buddha can refer to his actual body, primarily the physical body, and also to any group or collection of elements which make up or in some sense pertain to the Buddha.

Throughout the Buddhist world the minimum for becoming a Buddhist is to 'take refuge' from the depth of one's heart in the Buddha, his Doctrine, and the Community. But what exactly is one taking refuge in when one takes refuge in the Buddha? This question was posed in particular by one of the non-Mahāyāna traditions of Buddhism, the Vaibhāṣika (Sarvāstivāda). A person should not take refuge in the physical body of the Buddha, it was argued, since the physical body is impure (oozing and smelly, a common Indian observation with extensive cultural implications). Moreover, the physical body of the Buddha, although endowed with the eighty minor marks, such as copper-coloured, glossy and prominent nails, and the thirty-two major marks, e.g. soft skin, wheel marks on the soles of the feet, white hair between the eyebrows,

is still not the characterizing feature of a Buddha.³ The Vaibhāṣika tradition holds that the Buddha through his magic power, his magical transformations, can manifest created or fictitious bodies as and where he pleases, but one could scarcely see these as the object of the Buddha Refuge. Rather, when we take refuge in the Buddha so we take refuge in his Dharma-body, his *dharmakāya*. The word '*dharma*' in *dharmakāya* refers here to *dharmas*, the ultimates which form the subject matter of the Abhidharma. The *dharmakāya* is that which characterizes the Buddha as Buddha, that is, the collection (*kāya*) of pure elements (*dharmas*) possessed in the fullest degree by the Buddha – various kinds of knowledges and understandings, together with the Buddha's five pure psycho-physical constituents: pure physical matter, sensations, concepts, further mental contents such as volitions and so on, and consciousness. They are said to be pure because they are without any admixture of moral and cognitive taints. One takes refuge in the Buddha's *dharmakāya* in the same way that one might respect a monk, not because he is a physical being as such but because he possesses the qualities of a monk.⁴ The Buddha's Dharma-body is thus the flow of Buddha-qualities, and in taking refuge in the Buddha one takes refuge in just this *dharmakāya*, those qualities which the Buddha's doctrine sets forth and teaches. The *dharmakāya* is here set over and against the mere physical body of the Buddha. It is that which the Buddha is setting forth for his followers. The Mahāyāna stress on the *dharmakāya* is in its origins not a radical metaphysical departure, or a deification, but a continuation of this trend. The Mahāyāna treatment of the Buddha's physical body, on the other hand, in terms of our tripartite schema stresses more and more the magical dimension of the Buddha's being, a response to the apparent physical death of Siddhārtha Gautama on the one hand, and an encounter with the Buddhas of spiritual experience on the other. Physical becomes magical transformation – an unsurprising development given the philosophy of both Madhyamaka and Cittamātra. The impetus for this treatment of the Buddha lay no doubt with the supramundane teachings of the Mahāsaṃghikas, which we examined in the first chapter.

THE BODIES OF THE BUDDHA AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF EMPTINESS

The extant Sanskrit text of the *Aṣṭaśāstrakā* (8,000 verse) *Perfection of Wisdom* makes a clear distinction between the physical body of the

Buddha (*rūpakāya*) and his *dharmakāya*. Those who represent the Buddha through his physical attributes are described as foolish, 'For a Tathagata cannot be seen from his form-body [physical body]. The Dharma-bodies are the Tathagatas ...' (Trans. in Conze 1973b: 291). The contrast of the Buddha's physical form with his *dharmakāya*, to the disparagement of the former, was a practical, we might say institutional, as well as a doctrinal move. Those who would oppose the 'innovations' of the Mahāyāna, the introduction of teachings not taught by the 'historical' Buddha, were thereby accused of adhering with unjustifiable rigidity to the physical Buddha rather than to the *dharmakāya* which all agreed the Buddha himself said would lead the Community after his death. Moreover, it is argued in a recent article by Yuichi Kajiyama that a particular concern of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* was the criticism of *stūpa* worship. Reverence of the physical body of the Buddha in the centuries after the death of the Lord was equivalent to worshipping the *stūpas* containing the Buddha's relics. Disparagement and devaluation of the Buddha's physical body was criticism of *stūpa* worship; praising the Buddha's Dharma-body was replacing *stūpa* worship with a new cult based on the worship of the *Perfection of Wisdom* itself (Kajiyama 1985 12 ff.). We know, of course, that many early Mahāyāna *sūtras* such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and the *Lotus Sūtra* did indeed advocate the importance of elevating the *sūtra* and its worship. What Kajiyama highlights is the practical basis of the *sūtra*'s praise of the *dharmakāya* and the *Perfection of Wisdom*, and its disparagement of the physical body enshrined in a *stūpa*. It also follows that the first dimension of the meaning of *dharmakāya* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is *Perfection of Wisdom*, precisely the *sūtra* itself, the *dharmakāya* as Dharma, as the Doctrine.⁵ This harmonizes with Lewis Lancaster's study of the oldest versions of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* preserved in very early Chinese translations (Lancaster 1975). Lancaster has found that most of the references to the *dharmakāya* in the Sanskrit text are later interpolations (including the quotation above). That is, the *sūtra* grew over a number of centuries, and one direction of growth was in elaborating its treatment of the *dharmakāya*. In the earliest version of the text the Buddha's actual body is an excellent but conditioned physical body, while the expression *dharmakāya* refers simply to the collection of the Buddha's *sūtras*. If we follow Kajiyama then the specific reference is to the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* themselves.

As Kajiyama points out, however, the term *prajñāpāramitā* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* has a range of meanings, including the true nature of things (*dharmatā=śūnyatā*) and its cognition. Thus while the expression

dharmakāya in the oldest *Perfection of Wisdom* literature was used to equal the Buddha's teaching, inasmuch as the Buddha's spiritual body, his teaching, is his body because, like him, it exemplifies the true nature of things, that true nature of things itself is that which is to be realized. Just as in the Vaibhāṣika tradition *dharma* in *dharmakāya* was taken to equal the essential ultimates (*dharmas*) which, possessed to a full degree, make up the Buddha's realization, in the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature the *dharmakāya* comes to refer not only to the Doctrine which sets forth the true nature of things, but also to the realization and the true nature of things itself. The *dharmakāya* is the body, or collection, of ultimate truths (*śūnyatā*: emptinesses); or, it is the mental *dharmas* cognizing the ultimate truth (= *prajñā*). The Buddha has died, but there remains the truth which he indicated, and its realization is still possible. Those whose concern is with historical issues of authenticity, or relics, when the important thing is realization, are indeed foolish.

There are thus at least three interconnected dimensions to the *dharmakāya* in *Prajñāpāramitā* texts. First, the *dharmakāya* is the collection of teachings, particularly the *Prajñāpāramitā* itself. Second, it is the collection of pure *dharmas* possessed by the Buddha, specifically pure mental *dharmas* cognizing emptiness. And third, it is emptiness itself, the true nature of things. The *dharmakāya* in all these senses is contrasted with the Buddha's physical body, that which lived and died and is preserved in *stūpas*. The appeal to the spiritual body (*dharmakāya*) rather than the form-body (*rūpakāya*) was an appeal to the spirit rather than to the form!

The familiar, later, three body schema is not found in the early *Perfection of Wisdom* texts. Nor is it found in the writings of Nāgārjuna. In conformity with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, Nāgārjuna speaks of a physical body and a *dharmakāya*. The Buddha's physical body is the result of his collection of merit, his compassionate deeds performed throughout infinite past lives. It is the incarnation of his compassion – a physical body of a Buddha exists for others. The Buddha's *dharmakāya*, on the other hand, arises from his collection of wisdom, from the Buddha's insight into emptiness. These two collections, Nāgārjuna explains, are the causes of Buddhahood (*Ratnavālī* 3:10–13). Accumulating merit and wisdom is the essence of the Mahāyāna path, the path to full Buddhahood. Nāgārjuna's attitude to the Buddha is further illustrated by the *Catuḥstava*, a collection of four hymns attributed with reasonable reliability to the Master. In the *Niravaparyastava* – the *Hymn to the Incomparable One* – Nāgārjuna describes in poetic, almost devotional, terms the wonders of

the Buddha and his understanding of emptiness. And then Nāgārjuna raises his praises to a new and higher level: 'Even if you are not seen in a physical sense, it is said that you are seen. For by seeing the Dharma you are indeed well seen. (And yet) there is no seeing the true nature of things (*dharmatā*).'⁶ The true nature of things cannot be seen with the physical eyes, as was the physical body of the Buddha. Yet the Buddha manifests in accordance with the needs of others, teaching, for example, three vehicles although in reality there is only one (vv. 18–21). And: 'Your body is permanent, stable, primevally tranquil. It is of the nature of the Dharma ...'⁷ Nevertheless the Buddha demonstrates an apparent death (*parinirvāṇa*), although those who have faith in the Buddha can indeed see him in the innumerable realms of the cosmos (vv. 22–3). There is no clear distinction in Nāgārjuna's hymn between the Buddha as an actual being who is in some sense transcendent (*lokottara*) but who manifests worldly activity out of skilful means, remaining after his apparent death in order to inspire his followers (cf. *Lotus Sūtra*), and the true body of the Buddha, which is his Dharma, or that which is indicated by his teachings, the true nature of things (*dharmatā*), emptiness. Rather, Nāgārjuna plays with both of these notions, contrasting them with the Buddha's physical appearance. A clear distinction between these two eventually gives rise to the three-body schema. Nāgārjuna's failure to make the distinction is doctrinally confusing, perhaps, but poetically rather pleasing.

In another of Nāgārjuna's hymns, the *Paramārthastava – Hymn to the Ultimate* – Nāgārjuna speaks of the Buddha in his ultimate aspect, to all intents and purposes the ultimate, true way of things itself. Almost the entire hymn is composed of negatives – the Buddha is neither non-being nor being, neither annihilation nor permanence, not non-eternal, not eternal. He falls into no category of duality (Tucci 1932: 322, v.4). He has no colour, no size, no spatial location and so on (vv. 5–7). He cannot therefore be praised (vv. 9–10). And Nāgārjuna ends with another of his gentle jokes: 'I have praised the Well-gone [Sugata – an epithet of the Buddha] who is neither gone nor come, and who is devoid of any going' (v.11, Tucci's trans.).

The *Ta-chib-tu lun* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*), attributed to Nāgārjuna by Chinese tradition, on the other hand, while making a marked distinction between the Buddha's physical body and his *dharmakāya*, appears to mean by the *dharmakāya* not emptiness but rather the supramundane qualities of the Buddha.⁸ This is not really surprising, since there is evidence that the enormous *Ta-chib-tu lun* originated among

Vaiṣṇikas, probably from Kashmir, who had adopted the Mahāyāna. This interpretation of the *dharmakāya* is fundamentally that of the Vaiṣṇika but it suggests that such an interpretation of the Buddha's highest body was possibly current among certain Mādhyamikas at the time of the translator Kumārajīva in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. By way of contrast, however, the Svātantrika Mādhyamika Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–70) speaks of the *dharmakāya* as beyond language and conception, neither existent nor nonexistent and so on. It is tranquil, the calming of all verbal differentiations.⁹ We know from elsewhere in the same text that this is an exact characterization of the true state of things (reality: *tattva*), that is to say, emptiness.¹⁰ For the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas also, Prajñākaramati (tenth century) writes of the *dharmakāya* as having the nature of the ultimate reality.¹¹ Clearly, therefore, from the contrast of physical body and *dharmakāya* in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* and Nāgārjuna we find a fairly consistent pattern among later Mādhyamika theorists in using the term *dharmakāya* as an equivalent for emptiness, the ultimate truth. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the *dharmakāya* is referred to within the context of Buddhism, so the *dharmakāya* is, I think, not so much a personification of emptiness as that which is set forth or exemplified in the Buddha's very being. It is his true nature, the lesson of which he embodies. Since the *dharmakāya* is the true being of others as well (all are empty of inherent existence) so all, through having the *dharmakāya* within, as it were, can embody the *dharmakāya* – that is, all can become fully enlightened Buddhas.

CITTAMĀTRA – THE SYSTEM DEVELOPS

Cittamātra texts frequently refer to the bodies of the Buddha. Particularly important as sources for their schema, however, are the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* (*M.sūtrāl.*) and its commentary, and Asaṅga's *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (*M. Saṃg.*).

The Cittamātra tradition generally speaks of the Buddha possessing three bodies. The first is referred to as either the *dharmakāya* or the *vābhāvikakāya* – the Essence or Essential Body. These are two ways of referring to the same thing, although from different angles. The same body is said to be the *dharmakāya*, because it is the support of *dharmas*, and the Essence Body because it is self-contained and does not contain anything contingent or adventitious.¹² This *vābhāvikakāya* is the essence of the Buddhas, the ultimate, the purified Thusness or Suchness

(*M.sūtr.al.* comm. on 21:60–1). Or, as a commentary to the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* puts it, the Essence Body is the true nature of things taken as a body (on 10:1). Recalling our discussion in Chapter 4, it is clear that the Citramātra Essence Body, the Buddha's 'highest body', is in fact his non-dual purified flow of consciousness, the essence of being a Buddha.¹³ Put into the complex technical terminology of the Citramātra tradition, the Essence Body, the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* informs us, is the dependent aspect as pure, immaculate, and it is characterized by a 'revolution of the basis' inasmuch as the dependent aspect as tainted has been destroyed and the dependent aspect as pure revealed.¹⁴ This *dharmakāya* is permanent (non-dual consciousness is in reality always the case), and it is the support for other *dharmas* inasmuch as consciousness forms the basis for phenomenal illusion. More significantly, in the context of Buddhology, the *dharmakāya* is the basis for the other two bodies of the Buddha inasmuch as these further bodies represent the Buddha's compassion. They are not ultimately true, but just as the phenomenal illusion of the unenlightened is constructed on the basis of consciousness, so the further bodies of the Buddha are constructed out of compassion on the basis of non-dual pure consciousness (*M.sūtr.al.* 9: 60).

To the extent to which the *svābhāvīkākāya/dharmakāya* is the Buddha's consciousness, it is possible to say from the conventional, phenomenal point of view that the *dharmakāya* is the collection of good mental qualities which characterize being a Buddha. Citramātra texts are thus able to harmonize their teaching with those works which speak, as we have seen, of the Buddha's *dharmakāya* as his collection of pure elements.¹⁵ The *dharmakāya* is also said to be the same as the Dharmarealm, the *dharmadhātu* (see above, Chapter 6, p. 123; *M.Saṃg.* comm. on 10:31). The *dharmadhātu* is really the cosmos, the totality, seen in the light of its essential or fundamental aspect, what it really is. To speak of the *dharmadhātu* and the *dharmakāya* as one is to say that what the Buddha exemplifies, the essence of the Buddha, his true nature, is no different from the essence or true nature of all things – all things thus in a sense exemplify the Buddha. Put another way, the essential body of the Buddha is the essential or fundamental dimension of the cosmos – a point of religious and spiritual significance particularly developed, as we have seen, in East Asian Buddhism.

Our texts pose the serious question as to whether there can be only one Buddha, or whether there are many.¹⁶ The answer is neither – or both! If we refer simply to the level of the true nature of things then there is no way of distinguishing one Buddha from another. On this level they have

no real physical bodies to differentiate them. Moreover, since their true nature is the same, each Buddha as basis (= *dharmakāya* as the basis for other bodies) is the same. Furthermore, their intentions to act for the benefit of others are the same, and their activities – manifesting enlightenment out of compassion for others, and so on – are the same. On the other hand one cannot say that all Buddhas are literally and in all respects the same, or there would be only one Buddha. If that were true then when one being became a fully enlightened Buddha so all beings would become enlightened. Alternatively, if there were only one Buddha then it would be pointless for other unenlightened beings to strive to become enlightened. A further interesting point made in this context by the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* commentary is that there could not be just one primeval Buddha (a view suggested in some other Buddhist traditions), an *ādi-buddha*, always enlightened, since there can be no Buddha without the twin accumulations of merit and wisdom, and there can be no such accumulations without a previous Buddha. It is absurd to have a Buddha without any beginning (on 9:77). If there is just one primeval Buddha, say Śākyamuni understood in his transcendend aspect, then no other being could become enlightened. If, on the other hand, unenlightened beings can become enlightened after all by accumulating merit and wisdom, they require a previous Buddha in order to indicate the way. Thus there would not be one primeval Buddha.

The second body of the Buddha is known as the *Saṃbhogikākāya* – the Body of Complete Enjoyment. It is a physical body (*rūpakāya*), although not perhaps a body of gross material form. It manifests in different ways and at different places according to the needs of sentient beings (*M.Saṃg.* 10:35). No matter how excellent, the Enjoyment Body is an impermanent body.¹⁷ It is in fact the glorified body of the Buddha, adorned with the thirty-two and the eighty marks, which appears seated on a lotus throne in a Pure Land preaching the Mahāyāna to the assembly. The traditional view in Mahāyāna countries is that the Enjoyment Body preaches only to those Bodhisattvas advanced enough to attain a Pure Land, and the Mahāyāna *sūtras* are actually the result of the Enjoyment Body's preaching rather than that of the so-called historical Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama, who appeared not in a Pure Land but in Ancient India. Historically, however, there are problems with this traditional account. The early Mahāyāna *sūtras* frequently speak as though they are being taught in India, and enumerate Hearers and Arhats as well as Bodhisattvas among their listeners. Of course, it is possible to explain this – the Hearers and Arhats were really Bodhisattvas, like

Śāriputra in the *Lotus Sūtra*, who had forgotten their mission. Nevertheless one suspects that in reality the view that all the Mahāyāna *sūtras* were the preaching of the Enjoyment Body in a Pure Land took some centuries to develop, and may indeed represent the final response of the Mahāyāna to the question of textual authenticity.

The Enjoyment Body is in many respects the most important body of the Buddha (Nagao 1973: esp. 35 ff). It is the actual Buddha in his supramundane form, normally said to be the Buddha of Buddhist devotion, a transcendent being animated through pure compassion. It is as an Enjoyment Body that a being actually attains Buddhahood – as we shall see, the third body of the Buddha, his Transformation Body, the corporeal 'human' Buddha Siddhārtha Gautama, was a mere image manifesting becoming enlightened for the benefit of beings. Certain texts, most notably the Cittamātra tradition represented by Hsüan-tsang's *Ch'eng-wei-shih lun*, speak of two aspects to the Enjoyment Body – the Enjoyment Body in its private sense, as experienced and enjoyed by the Buddhas themselves, and the Enjoyment Body for others, which is the Buddha appearing with his various marks for the benefit and enjoyment of the Bodhisattvas.¹⁸ This would appear to be a later development possibly connected with the wish to find a place for the old *dharmakāya*, the Buddha's pure attributes, various knowledges, and so on, which would not taint the purity of the Cittamātra *svābhāvikakāya*/*dharmakāya* as non-dual consciousness, unqualified and beyond all language.

Little needs to be said of the Buddha's Transformation Bodies (*nair-māṇikakāya*). The Buddha whom the non-Mahāyāna tradition lauds as *the* Buddha, the constant reference point for all doctrine and attempts at innovation, turns out to be simply a manifestation out of compassion, an 'eject', a conjuring trick, as it were, from the Enjoyment Body for the benefit of those whose attainments are so weak that they are unable to reach a Pure Land, or who are not yet capable of appreciating the Mahāyāna. The Transformation Body Buddhas manifest in whatever way is necessary for others.¹⁹ Such manifestations may teach any teaching, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, out of compassionate skilful means. Often Transformation Bodies show the birth, renunciation, enlightenment, and death associated with the life of Siddhārtha Gautama, but not necessarily. A Transformation Body can manifest in any suitable way, even as an animal (see the Jataka tales), in order to teach a particular point. Buddhists have no objection to seeing the historical Jesus Christ as a Transformation Body Buddha – a manifestation from an Enjoyment Body out of compassion in a form suitable to his particular time and place.

Moreover a Buddha can, of course, manifest infinite Transformation Bodies of different types at any one time. Thus through the two physical bodies of the Buddha the Cittamātra schema encompasses the Mahāyāna doctrine of the immense status and acts of the Buddha, Mahāyāna devotion to the all-compassionate Lord, and also such aspects of religious doctrine and practice as the correct way to relate to other religions and to adapt doctrinally and institutionally to changing circumstances.

A NOTE ON THE dGe LUGS SCHEMA OF THE BUDDHA'S BODIES

Before leaving the topic of the bodies of the Buddha it seems worthwhile to look briefly at the schema (non-Tantric; the dGe lugs Tantric schema is slightly different) found in the dGe lugs tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. This is for a number of reasons. First, in philosophy the dGe lugs tries to follow very closely its understanding of Candrakīrti's Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, and yet in its treatment of the Buddha bodies the dGe lugs provides a schema which synthesizes in certain respects both Madhyamaka and Cittamātra treatments. The origins of the dGe lugs schema are as yet obscure, but it almost certainly originates from the Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka tradition of Haribhadra's commentaries on the *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*. In the Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka we find precisely an attempt to bring together Madhyamaka and Cittamātra.

Second, in looking at the dGe lugs treatment we can see the complex way in which later Buddhist scholasticism elaborated and developed its inheritance in terms of further distinctions and subdivisions. Moreover, the dGe lugs view is still very much alive among Tibetans today, and as Tibetan Buddhism becomes popular in the West many people have become interested in the dGe lugs teachings. These are generally the teachings of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for example, himself a dGe lugs hierarch.

In the dGe lugs the *dharmakāya* has two aspects, known as the Essence Body (*svābhāvikakāya*) and the Wisdom Body, or Body of Gnosis (*jñānakāya*). The Essence Body also has two aspects. First, it is the absence of inherent existence (emptiness – *śūnyatā*) as it pertains to the Buddha's omniscient and non-dual stream of consciousness. This aspect of the Essence Body has always been the case. Even before the Buddha became enlightened his mind stream lacked inherent existence, and it was this lack which enabled it to change into an enlightened mind stream. One can

therefore say that in a sense the Essence Body of the Buddha is always there, even in unenlightened beings. It is that seed of the Buddha within each one which enables him or her to become fully enlightened. It is this, therefore, which is referred to by the dGe lugs tradition as the *tabāgtagarbbu*. The other aspect of the Essence Body is also an absence, this time the absence of all cognitive and moral obscurations in the Buddha's mind. This absence has not always been present, of course, but happened automatically or spontaneously when a being became a Buddha. In both respects the Essence Body for the dGe lugs is an emptiness (empty of inherent existence or empty of cognitive and moral obscurations), and since the dGe lugs is rigorously Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka so the Essence Body alone is an ultimate truth. The other bodies, no matter how exalted, are conventional truths.

The Wisdom Body or Body of Gnosis is the Buddha's omniscient non-dual consciousness itself. This is the Cittamātra *svabhāvikakāya* or *dharmakāya*. The *dharmakāya* for the dGe lugs, therefore, is in substance the non-dual mind stream of the Buddha, understood as empty of inherent existence and all obscurations, and therefore perfect and capable of infinite flexibility in order to help sentient beings. The Buddha's omniscient consciousness constantly perceives emptiness in all things, and the things themselves, in the very same mental act. Each of the Buddha's senses is omniscient, each sense can therefore do the work of each other sense. His consciousness, his Wisdom Body, is omnipresent inasmuch as the Buddha is non-dualistically aware of all things.²⁰

All Bodhisattvas become fully enlightened not on this earth but in one of the highest realms.²¹ A Buddha then immediately manifests his Enjoyment Body, ornamented with the various marks, surrounded by a Pure Land and a retinue of advanced Bodhisattvas, teaching the Mahāyāna. The Enjoyment Body and Pure Land are made of his own omniscient wisdom consciousness, and not gross matter. Moreover all that the Enjoyment Body sees are seen as not being separate phenomena from his own mind. He occupies, therefore, the strange magical world of the *dharmadhātu* familiar from the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. At the same time the Buddha spontaneously manifests myriads of Transformation Bodies according to the needs of sentient beings. There is no need for a Buddha to ponder which is the best way to help sentient beings.²² The Enjoyment Body Buddha remains until there are no suffering sentient beings left unenlightened. The *dharmakāya*, the Buddha's omniscient mind stream and its attendant emptinesses, remains for ever – there can be no end to a continuum of consciousness, for what could cause it to cease?

The dGe lugs distinguishes various types of Transformation Bodies. There are those which manifest like Siddhārtha Gautama, and perform the different deeds (twelve in the standard list) of a human Buddha. Others can be artisans or craftsmen. There is a story in which a proud god-musician was humbled by the Buddha appearing as a better musician. Each played on fewer and fewer strings. The god played excellently on only one string, but the Buddha continued playing sweetly with no strings at all (Dhargvey 1976: 208)! Sometimes the Buddha can appear as an animal, or even an apparently inanimate object such as a tree; or a bridge to save those caught on the wrong side of a ravine. The Buddha can also appear in a heavenly realm, as in the case of Maitreya, who all Buddhist traditions hold will be the next Buddha on this earth. He is at present residing in the Tūṣita heaven awaiting the opportune time for his descent to earth. Of course, no one is actually enlightened on our polluted planet! From this perspective Maitreya is already really a Buddha, or is an emanation, a Transformation Body, of one who has long been a Buddha.²³

The whole dGe lugs schema can best be summed up in a diagram as in Figure 1.

A FINAL NOTE: THE 'NON-ABIDING NIRVĀNA' AND THE LIFESPAN OF THE BUDDHA

In the second chapter, while discussing the meanings of *nirvāna* in the Mahāyāna, I mentioned the supreme and compassionate 'non-abiding' (*apratīṭhita*) *nirvāna* of the Buddha and contrasted it with the *nirvāṇas* attained by the Arhats and Pratyekabuddhas. I also mentioned a further point concerning whether the Buddha in the Mahāyāna ever eventually, at some point in the unimaginable future, will attain *parinirvāna* and go completely beyond recall or reference by suffering sentient beings. The expression 'non-abiding *nirvāna*' was probably introduced as a term, although not necessarily as a concept, by the Cītramātra tradition. It is best understood initially from the side not of a Buddha but of a Bodhisattva, an aspirant on the path to Buddhahood. It is crucial in his or her practice that the Bodhisattva renounces *saṃsāra*, the round of misapprehension and false behaviour, and also any conception of *nirvāna* as not just the negation of greed, hatred and delusion but also a transcendence of the institutions and persons of *saṃsāra*. That is, the Bodhisattva in going beyond duality, abandons greed, hatred, and delusion

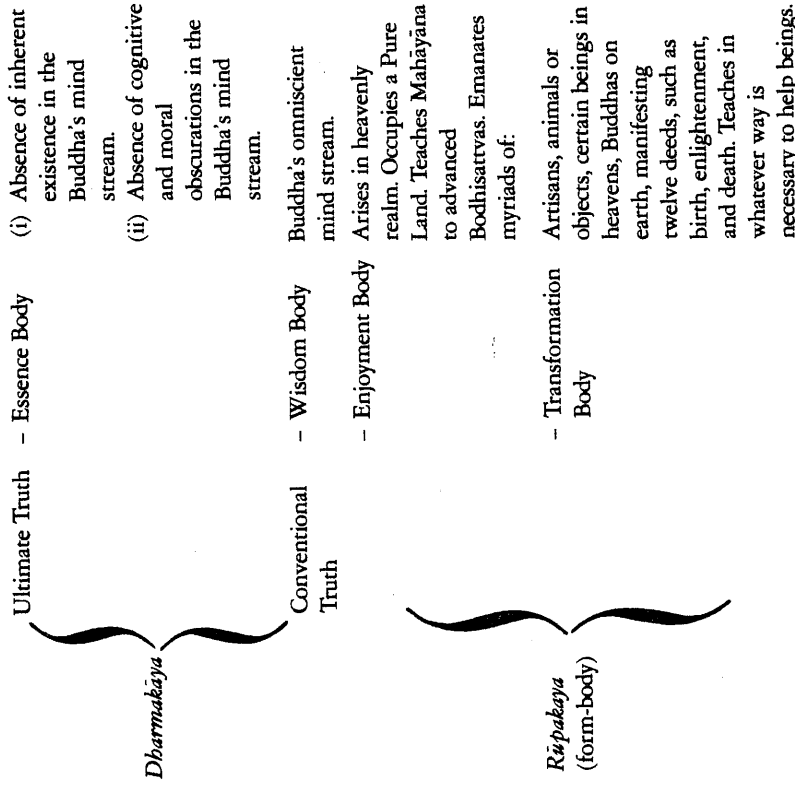


FIGURE 1 The dGe lugs schema of the Buddha's bodies

but does not abandon sentient beings; he or she attains wisdom but preserves compassion. If *nirvāṇa* is understood as not just abandoning greed, hatred, and delusion but also abandoning in this life the institutions and persons of 'the world', and after death returning no more to help those institutions and persons (i.e. Arhatship), then the Bodhisattva renounces also *nirvāṇa*. Thus the *nirvāṇa* that is attained by the Bodhisattva when he or she attains Buddhahood is not that type of *nirvāṇa*. Rather, it is a non-abiding *nirvāṇa*, which is to say that it is a *nirvāṇa* which embodies two dimensions – the upward movement away from *saṃsāra*, away from greed, hatred, and delusion, and a downward movement returning to the maelstrom of *saṃsāric* institutions and persons out of compassion (see Nagao 1981: 61 ff.). The Buddha abides neither in *saṃsāra*, for he is a Buddha, nor in *nirvāṇa* in the sense that he

has abandoned suffering sentient beings. In a sense he has a foot (or a lotus) in both camps, while in another sense he is in neither. He has gone beyond all duality and all clinging – he clings neither to the world nor to transcendence.

Will the fully enlightened Buddha ever attain to *parinirvāṇa*? Clearly, this problem concerns pre-eminently the Enjoyment Body. There is no question of the *dharmakāya* attaining *parinirvāṇa*, for the *dharmakāya* does not attain anything at all. It is permanent, remaining for ever in its own nature. Things are always empty of inherent existence; the continuum of pure radiant consciousness never ceases. The Buddha's Transformation Bodies, on the other hand, in one sense can be said to attain *parinirvāṇa*, but in another sense do not. The Transformation Body is a manifestation for the benefit of beings, and among the deeds of Transformation Bodies is the manifestation of *parinirvāṇa*. Thus the Transformation Body can attain *parinirvāṇa*. Nevertheless, since the manifestation is unreal, just a show, the *parinirvāṇa* is also unreal, just a show.

If we look at the Enjoyment Body, the transcendent glorified Buddha, then we can detect two theories on the eternality of the Buddha (Poussin 1928/48: 3, 803 ff). According to such texts as the *Ta-chih-tu lun*, the *Lotus Sūtra* (text, rather than its East Asian interpretation) and the *Suvarṇabhāṣottama Sūtra*, after an enormously long period of time the Buddha will eventually enter *parinirvāṇa*, although according to the first of these the Buddha's Transformation Bodies will continue in order to help sentient beings.²⁴ These texts clearly operate with the (older?) notion that the length of a Buddha's life, as with all beings, is the result of his merit gained in the past. Since the Buddha's merit, while immense, cannot be literally infinite (as it is the result of finite acts), the Buddha's lifespan must in reality be finite (cf. *Suvarṇabhāṣottama Sūtra* 1970: 5–8). In other texts, however, apparently later in date, such as the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra*, the Buddhas never enter *parinirvāṇa*. Part of the problem is that some texts view beings as infinite, and other (Cittamātra) texts maintain that there are some beings who as a matter of fact will never attain enlightenment. The Buddhas remain, therefore, either to continue to save infinite sentient beings, or to try and provide more pleasant rebirths for those who will never put an end to the round of *saṃsāra* (Poussin 1928/48: 3, 806–9). Here we find the extreme point of the Mahāyāna emphasis on compassion: the love of the Buddhas is so great that they are resolved never to enter the final *nirvāṇa* of complete quiescence and peace, but rather to remain and help other beings. Of

course, inasmuch as the Buddhas see things correctly, so, as the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* state, no beings are really saved, and there is no *nirvāṇa* to attain. What more do fully enlightened Buddhas have to gain by entering any further state called *parinirvāṇa*? They act tirelessly for the sake of sentient beings, for in Buddhas there are no negative experiences such as tiredness. And from the side of suffering sentient beings themselves the Enjoyment Body Buddhas remain exerting their infinite compassionate deeds so long as a single being remains unenlightened.

The path of the Bodhisattva

TIBET AND TANTRA

The Buddhism which came to Tibet from the seventh century onwards came from two directions. On the one hand there were Chinese influences, particularly forms associated with Ch'an (Zen). On the other, and growing progressively in importance until all but eclipsing the Chinese influences, there were the developed forms of Buddhism found in India at the time. It is the Tibetan boast that it alone, of all the countries to which Buddhism spread, received and practises the complete range of teachings found in Indian Buddhism. This includes in pride of place the Tantric forms which mark late Buddhism in India. An extensive discussion of Tantra would take us beyond the scope of this book. It is possible to indicate in a few words, however, the nature of Tantric Buddhism, particularly as it is found in the Highest Yoga class (*anuttarayoga*) given principal place in the Tibetan traditions.

The concern of Tantric Buddhism is largely with ritual and meditative practices. In terms of the Mahāyāna dichotomy of wisdom and means, therefore, the Tantras are primarily concerned with means, that is, the means of becoming fully enlightened and the manifold expression of the Buddha's compassionate ability to help others. Since, as we have seen, the realm of compassion/means is for the Mahāyāna a realm of magical intervention and transformation, so Tantric practices, as practices particularly concerned with means, are seen in Tibetan Buddhism as in