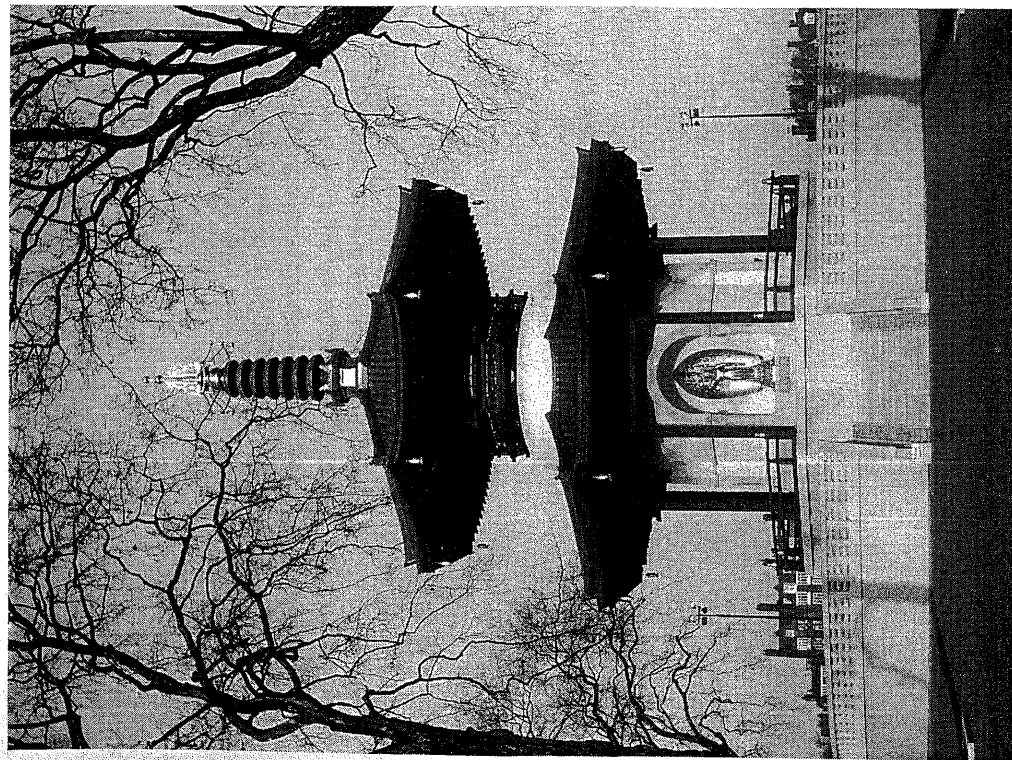




The 'Peace Pagoda' in Battersea Park, London.

AN INTRODUCTION TO
BUDDHISM

Teachings, history and practices

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 CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

1990

reborn in the first of the five 'pure abodes', the most refined heavens in the pure form world, where only Non-returners can be reborn. In these he matures his insight till he becomes a long-lived *Arahat*-god. The final two Holy persons are the one practising for the realization of *Arahatness*, and the *Arahat* himself. The *Arahat* destroys all the five remaining fetters: attachment to the pure form or formless worlds, the 'I am' conceit, perhaps now in the form of lingering spiritual pride, restlessness, and spiritual ignorance. These are destroyed by the Tenfold Path, which brings *dukkha* and all rebirths to an end in the blissful experience of *Nibbāna*.

4

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS IN BUDDHISM

THE EARLY SANGHA

The *Sangha*, in the sense of the 'Community' of monks and nuns with the Buddha as its teacher, originated as one of the groups of *Samanas*. These suspended their wandering existence during the three months of the rainy season, and for the Buddhist *Samanas* this 'rains' (*Vassa*) period became a time of intensified religious practice, with greater contact with the public at large. They also tended to return to the same places at *Vassa*, such as parks donated by wealthy lay patrons, and these locations then became the basis for a more settled communal way of life. In this way, the Buddhists invented monastic life, which was a middle way between the life of the solitary Jain renouncers, and that of the Brahmin householders.

The monastic discipline (*Vinaya*) developed by the Buddha was designed to shape the *Sangha* as an ideal community, with the optimum conditions for spiritual growth. Its sustaining power is shown by the fact that no other human institution has had such a long-lasting continuous existence, along with such a wide diffusion, as the Buddhist *Sangha*. The Buddha advocated frequent meetings of each local *Sangha*, with the aim of reaching a unanimous consensus in matters of common concern (*D.11.76-7*). If necessary, there was also provision for voting and majority rule (*Vin.11.84*).

Just after the Buddha's passing away (c. 400 BC), a 'communal recitation' (council) of *Arahats* was held at Rājagaha (*Vin.11.284-7*) to agree the contents of the *Dhamma* and *Vinaya* which the Buddha had left as 'teacher'. Ānanda, the Buddha's faithful attendant monk, recited the *Suttas*, such that each begins: 'Thus have I heard'. The monk Upāli recited the *Vinaya*. The claim that the whole of the present *Vinaya*

and *Sutta* sections of scripture were recited then is probably an exaggeration.

Perhaps seventy years after the first 'communal recitation', a second was held at Vesālī (*Vin.* II.294-307), this being to censure certain monks whose conduct was seen as lax on ten points, such as their accepting money. If these points were not already against the formal *Vinaya*, they were made so then. Sixteen or more years later, perhaps at a further council, at Pāṭaliputta, the first schism in the previously unified *Saṅgha* occurred; other such schisms followed. The causes of these were generally disagreements over monastic discipline, though the points of *Vinaya* which separated the early monastic fraternities (*nīkāya*'s) often arose from variant developments in geographically separated communities, rather than from actual disagreements. Discussion of points of doctrine also led to the development of different interpretative schools of thought (*vāda*'s). Originally, these could not be a cause of schism, as the only *opinion* a monk could be condemned for was the persistent claim that there is nothing wrong with sensual pleasure (*Vin.* IV.134-5). Early on, it seems that adherents of a particular school of thought could be found among members of various monastic fraternities, but perhaps by the second century BC monastic fraternities started to become known for the specific doctrinal interpretations common among their members. By around 100 AD at least, schisms could occur over points of doctrine, and the distinction between a 'fraternity' and a 'school' faded. While members of different monastic fraternities could not take part in official *Saṅgha* business together, they often shared the same monasteries, and studied each other's doctrines. The laity was probably not very concerned about the differences between the schools.

The cause of the first schism is not agreed. The Theravāda tradition says that the schism was caused by the defeated party at the council of Vesālī. It cannot have been over the ten lax practices, however, as both of the fraternities which emerged from the schism agreed in condemning these. Other traditions say that the cause was doctrinal, concerning five points put forward by the monk Mahādeva. This dispute was probably a later one, however, and became projected back as the cause of the first schism. Recent scholarship shows that the probable cause of the schism was an attempt to slightly expand the number of monastic rules. Concern for monastic rigour and unity may have caused one section of the *Saṅgha* to incorporate some new rules in the section of the *Vinaya*

on deportment, dress, and behaviour in public of the monks. This may have been to turn previous *de facto* practices into *de jure* rules, so as to properly train new members of the *Saṅgha*. As the reformists seem to have been based in western regions of India, where Buddhism was spreading, this would have been important to them. The reformist section could not win over the more conservative majority, so that agreement could not be reached, and a schism ensued. The reformists called themselves the *Sthavira-vāda*, the 'Ancient/primordial Teaching' fraternity. The majority called themselves the *Mahāsāṅghika*, or those 'Belonging to the Universal *Saṅgha*'.

EMPEROR ASOKA AND BUDDHISM

During the reign of the emperor Asoka (c. 268-239 BC), Buddhism spread more widely, reaching most of the Indian sub-continent, and also beyond, thus becoming a 'world religion'. The Magadhan empire which Asoka inherited included most of modern India except the far south: the largest in the sub-continent until its conquest by the British. Asoka adopted the social ethic of Buddhism as the guiding principle of his rule, and has been seen by Buddhists as the model of a compassionate Buddhist ruler. The most important sources for our knowledge of him are his numerous edicts, as promulgated on rocks and stone pillars in a variety of languages.

The Buddha seems to have had a liking for the semi-democratic republics of his day, but he was aware of the rising power of kingdoms. His ideals of kingship came from (i) his view that the first king in human society was elected by his people so as to preserve social harmony (p. 37), and (ii) his ideas on compassionate *Cakkavatti* rulers of the past, who ruled with great concern for *Dhamma*, in the sense of morality and social justice (e.g. *D.* III.58-9). At the start of his reign, Asoka seems to have been content to carry on the policy of his forebears, which saw it as the duty of a ruler to expand his realm by force, according to a 'might is right' philosophy. While Asoka had already become a nominal Buddhist in around 260 BC, the full implications of his new faith do not seem to have hit home till after his bloody conquest of the Kalinga region, in the following year. In an edict after this episode, he evinced great remorse at the carnage he had caused, and expressed the desire to govern, please and protect his subjects

according to *Dhamma*. He now felt that it was his duty to improve the quality of his subjects' lives, so as to provide a sound framework for their following a moral and religious way of life, Buddhist or otherwise. He inaugurated public works, such as wells and rest-houses for travellers, supported medical aid for humans and animals, and gave aid for the fostering of such measures in regions beyond his empire. *Dhamma*-officials were appointed to encourage virtue, look after old people and orphans, and ensure equal judicial standards throughout the empire. While Asoka retained some judicial beatings, he abolished torture and, perhaps, the death penalty. Released prisoners were given some short-term financial help, and encouraged to make 'merit' for their future lives.

Asoka's concern for the moral improvement of his people was partly expressed in legislation, but more often in attempts to persuade people to live a better life. A prime value encouraged in his edicts was *ahiṃsā*, or 'non-injury': a key emphasis of both Buddhism and other Indian traditions. While he kept his army as a deterrent to invasion, Asoka gave up conquest. Hunting trips, the sport of kings, were replaced by pilgrimages to sites associated with the Buddha. In time, the large royal household became completely vegetarian. Brahmanical animal sacrifice was banned in the capital, and a wide range of non-food animals, birds and fishes were protected. Generosity towards *Samaṇas*, Brahmins and the aged was urged. Respect for these and parents, good behaviour towards friends and relatives, and good treatment of servants was praised. Mercy, truthfulness, sexual purity, gentleness, and contentment were recommended. The lay-orientation of Asoka's values is shown by the fact that the edicts refer to a harmonious society and heavenly rebirth as the goal of a good life lived according to *Dhamma*, making no mention of *Nibbāna*.

Asoka gave Buddhism a central place in his empire, just as the Roman emperor Constantine did for Christianity. Nevertheless, he supported not only Buddhist monks and nuns, but also Brahmins, Jain wanderers, and Ājīvaka ascetics, in accordance with a pattern that later Buddhist and Hindu rulers also followed. At a time when different religions were in competition for converts, he urged mutual respect and tolerance. He saw all religious traditions as contributing in some way to spiritual development, and his twelfth rock edict holds that a common basis for religions is that praising one's own tradition and criticizing others

should be held in check: for religious wrangling brings harm both to one's own and others' religions, while mutual respect strengthens both. Though the Theravāda and Sarvāstivāda schools both claim a special association with Asoka, he was probably not partial to any one Buddhist school, and he discouraged schism. He was, however, interested in the purity of the *Saṅgha*, and may have assisted in the purging of lax monks.

In his pilgrimages to Buddhist sites, Asoka erected shrines and memorial pillars. According to later legendary accounts, he also opened up the original ten *Stūpas* and distributed their relics in many new ones throughout India, thus helping to popularize the cult of devotion at *Stūpas*. During his reign, Buddhist missionary activity was considerable. Theravādin sources record that the monk Tissa Moggaliputta sent out parties of monks to a number of 'border areas'. Asokan edicts also record that the emperor sent out embassies to a number of foreign lands; for he wished to spread the ideals he followed: a 'conquest by *Dhamma*' rather than a military conquest. To the north-west, embassies were sent as far as Syria, Egypt and Macedonia, though there is no record of their having arrived there. To the east, they went to 'Suvannā-bhūmi', probably the Mon country of lower Burma or central Thailand. To the south, they went to south Indian kingdoms and also to the island of Ceylon (now known, as a country, as Sri Lanka). The relationship between the missions and the embassies is not clear, but monks could well have accompanied the embassies, and there was clearly co-operation in the case of Sri Lanka. Here, in around 250 BC, a mission headed by Asoka's own son, the *Arahat* monk Mahinda, was very successful in implanting what was to become known as the Theravāda form of Buddhism.

DEVOTION AND SYMBOLISM IN EARLY BUDDHISM

Asoka's espousal of Buddhism helped it to develop as a popular religion. Prior to the popularization of the *Stūpa*-cult, it is probable that the main focus of devotion was the tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment, and others grown from its cuttings or seeds. These became known as *Bodhi*, or 'Enlightenment' trees, and were greatly revered both as reminders of the Buddha's enlightenment, and as tangible links with his great spiritual powers. Building on pre-

Buddhist tree-worship, devotion at such a tree was expressed by making offerings such as flowers at an altar at its base, by tying pennants to it, and watering it. Clockwise circumambulation was also performed, an act which signified that what was walked around symbolized something ideally at the centre of a person's life.

The Buddhist *Stūpa* probably developed from pre-Buddhist burial mounds for kings, heroes and saints, which go back into pre-history in many cultures. They became important in Buddhism due to the holy relics they contained, their symbolizing the Buddha and his *parinibbāna*, and in some cases their location at significant sites. Relics placed in *Stūpas* are said to have been those of Gotama, *Arahats*, and even of past Buddhas. Having been part of the body of an enlightened being, they were considered to have been infused with something of the power-for-goodness of an enlightened mind, and to bring blessings to those who expressed devotion in their vicinity. Where funerary relics could not be found, hair or possessions of holy beings, copies of bodily relics or possessions, or Buddhist texts came to be used in their place.

The best-preserved ancient Buddhist *Stūpa*, dating from the first century AD in its present form, is at Sāncī in central India. It was built over one dating from the third century BC, which may have been built or embellished by Asoka. The four gateways, or *torāṇa*'s place the *Stūpa* symbolically at a cross-roads, as the Buddha had specified, perhaps to indicate the openness and universality of the *Dhamma*. Carved reliefs on the gateways depict stories ascribed in *Jātaka* tales to previous lives of Gotama, along with symbolic indications of previous Buddhas and events in Gotama's final life. The circular *vedikā*, or railing, marks off the site dedicated to the *Stūpa*, and encloses the first of two paths for circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā-patha*'s). The *Stūpa* dome, referred to in early texts as the *kumbha* or 'pot', is the outermost container of the relics. It is associated with an Indian symbol known as the 'vase of plenty', and symbolically acts as a reminder of an enlightened being as 'full' of uplifting *Dhamma*.

On top of the Sāncī *Stūpa* is a pole and discs, which represent ceremonial parasols. As parasols were used as insignia of royalty in India, their inclusion on *Stūpas* can be seen as a way of symbolizing the spiritual sovereignty of the Buddha. The kingly connection probably derives from the ancient custom of rulers sitting under a sacred tree at

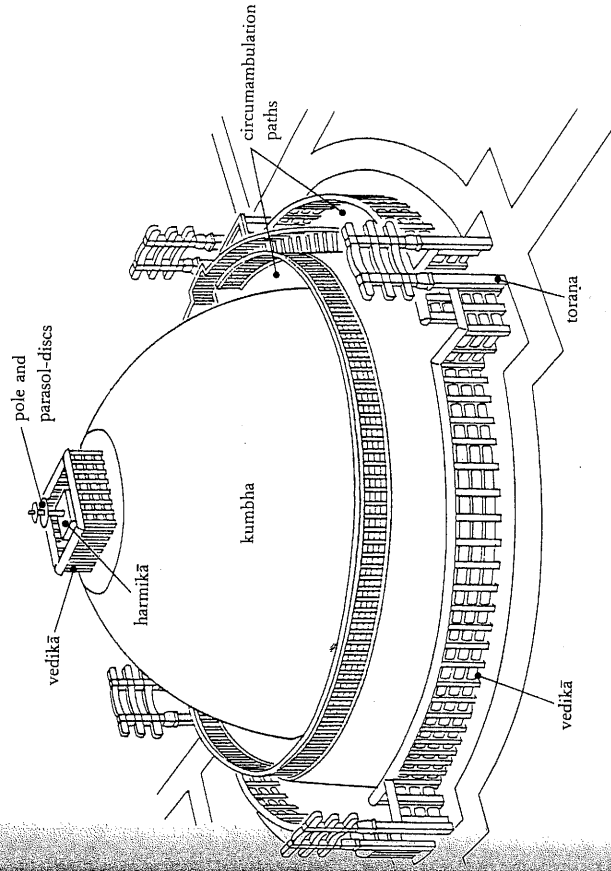


Figure 1 Sāncī *Stūpa*.

the centre of a community to administer justice, with mobile parasols later replacing such shading trees. The parasol-structure on *Stūpas* also seems to have symbolized the Buddhist sacred tree, which in turn symbolized enlightenment. This is suggested by a second century BC stone relief of a *Stūpa* which shows it surmounted by a tree with parasol-shaped leaves. The structure at the base of the pole and discs has also been found, on a number of *Stūpas*, to have resembled the design of *Bodhi*-tree enclosures.

In later *Stūpas*, the top part fused into a spire, and several platforms were often added under the dome to elevate it in an honorific way. It then became possible to see each layer of the structure as symbolizing a particular set of spiritual qualities, such as the 'four right efforts' (see pp. 69ff.), with the spire symbolizing the powers and knowledge of a Buddha. *Stūpas* are now often known by the term 'Pagoda', probably a corruption of *Dagaba* ('relic-container'), the term used in Sri Lanka.

A notable feature of early representations of Gotama, even before his enlightenment, is that he is only shown by symbols. This must have

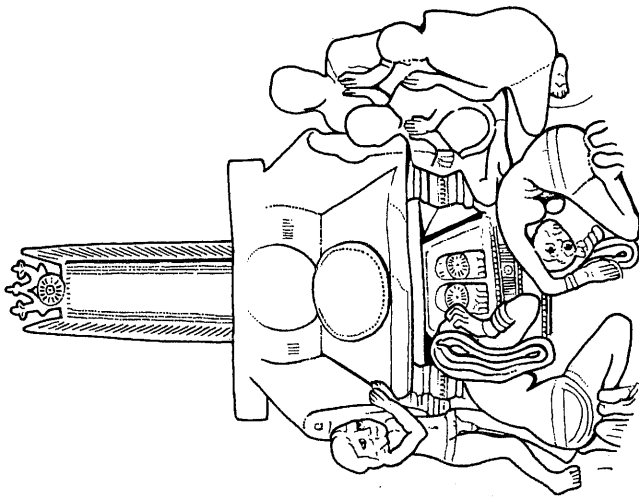


Figure 2 Gotama's former wife presenting his son to him, from a second century AD carved relief.

been due to the feeling that the profound nature of one nearing or attained to Buddhahood could not be adequately represented by a human form. Even contemporary Brahmanism only portrayed minor gods in non-symbolic ways. In Figure 2, the Buddha is indicated by footprints and a throne with *Dhamma*-wheel embellishments (see p. 23). The uncluttered space at the centre of the scene suggests the calm and stillness of the Buddha's mind, and the nature of *Nibbāna*, said to be as indescribable as empty space.

In time, the absence of the long-dead Buddha was keenly felt, and there arose a need for a representation of him in human form to act as a more personalized focus of devotion. The development of Buddha-images, in the second century AD, was probably preceded by the practice of visualizing the Buddha's form in the mind's eye. The period was also one in which a change in mood was affecting all Indian religions, leading

to the portrayal of the founder of Jainism, and of major Hindu gods, as focuses of *bhakti*, or warm 'loving devotion'. In Buddhism, this change had also led to the compositions of more thorough sacred biographies of the Buddha, and contributed to the origin of the Mahayāna.

The craftsmen who made the first Buddha-images drew on the tradition that Gotama had been born with the 'thirty-two characteristics of a Great Man', which indicated that he would become either a Buddha or a *Cakkavatti*. These bodily features are described as karmic results of specific spiritual perfections built up in past lives (*D.m.142-78*). The most obvious one shown on Buddha-images is Gotama's 'turbaned-head', meaning that he had a head shaped like a royal turban, or that one with spiritual vision could see a royal turban on his head. However interpreted, artistic portrayals first hid it under a top-knot of hair, and then showed it as a protuberance on the top of the head. The *Suttas* see it as a result of previous moral and spiritual prominence; later texts see it as a kind of 'wisdom bump' to accommodate a Buddha's supreme wisdom. A feature of Buddha-images not among the 'characteristics' is the elongated ear-lobes. These signify Gotama's royal upbringing, when he wore heavy gold ear-rings, and thus his renunciation of the option of political greatness. They may also be seen as a common symbol for nobility of character, or indicative of the Buddha's 'divine ear', a meditation-based psychic ability.

Buddha-images seem to have been first produced within the empire of Kanīṣka I, which was in the region of modern Afghanistan, Pakistan and north-west India. This occurred at about the same time in Gandhāra, a western region in which the images were influenced by Hellenistic Greek art, and in the Indian city of Mathurā. While the early images were somewhat faltering as spiritual statements, in time the craftsmen were able to express many spiritual qualities in stone. A fine example of the classical Buddha-image which developed during the Gupta period (AD 320-540) is shown in Plate 2. It has life, vigour and grace, and its features suggest joy, compassion, wisdom, serenity and meditative concentration. It expresses qualities attained by someone at the goal of Buddhism, and was intended to help stimulate the growth of such qualities in one who contemplated it.

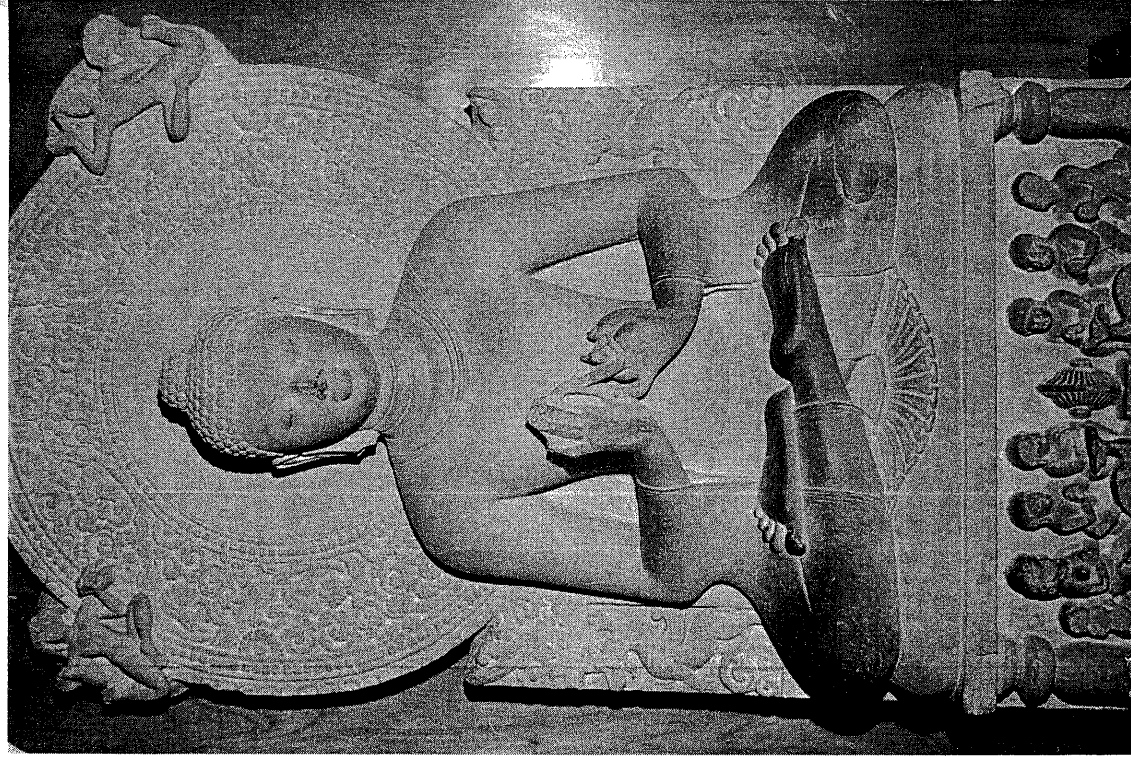


Plate 2 An image from Sarnath, showing the Buddha making the gesture of 'Setting in motion of the *Dhamma*-wheel', symbolizing his first sermon (fifth or sixth century AD).

THE ABHIDHAMMA

The faith-orientated developments described above were a complement to the wisdom-orientation expressed in the works of *Abhidhamma* (Skt *Abhidharma*). In the third century BC, a few schools added these to their canons of teachings, developing them from *Māhikā's*, or tabulated summaries of topics, which may have originated with the Buddha. The *Abhidhammas* of the different schools differed appreciably in details, but all aimed to present the teachings of the *Suttas* systematically, along with interpretations which drew out their implications. Other schools in time expressed their views in extra-canonical treatises. The *Abhidhamma* literature sought to avoid some of the inexactitudes of colloquial conventional language, as is sometimes found in the *Suttas*, and state everything in psycho-philosophically exact language, expressing 'ultimate' (*paramattha*) teachings. The *Abhidhamma* performs two main tasks. On the one hand, it refines the *khandha* analysis so as to give a fine-grained enumeration and characterization of all the *dhamma's* (Skt *dharma's*), basic patterns or basic processes, which are experienced as making up the flow of mental and physical phenomena. Among these are included various sets of spiritual qualities. On the other hand, it refines the doctrine of Conditioned Arising by showing how the basic patterns condition each other in a web of complex ways. The first task is carried out in, for example, the first three books of the Theravādin *Abhidhamma*, the *Dhamma-saṅgāhī* ('Enumeration of *Dhammas*'), the *Vibhanga* ('(Book of) Analysis') and *Dhātū-kathā* ('Discourse on Elements'). The second is carried out in its seventh, and probably latest book, the six-volume *Paṭṭhāna* ('Conditional Relations'), which goes into great detail on how particular *dhammas* are interrelated by one or more of twenty-four kinds of conditional relationships. The fourth book, the *Puggala-paṇṇatti* ('Concept of Persons'), discusses various character-types and levels of spiritual development. While this literature has sometimes been seen as dry and scholastic, it is a spiritual psychology with a very practical purpose. It gives a detailed knowledge of the working of the mind, and thus can guide a person in meditative development, and it facilitates the proper understanding of personality as an interaction of impermanent, unsatisfactory, ownerless and insubstantial events.

The *Abhidhamma*, except in discussing character-types, analyses.

'persons' and 'things' down into a number of *dhammas* that, as viewed in the light of the Buddha's teaching, or *Dhamma*, are basic facts of experience: interdependent basic patterns within the overall Basic Pattern (*Dhamma*) of the nature of reality. Each *dhamma* (other than *Nibbāna*, which is beyond change) is seen as a patterned process consisting of a stream of momentary events of a particular kind. The term '*dhamma*' is used both for such a process and the events it comprises. By the early centuries AD, existence came to be seen as consisting of the interaction of a limited number of such basic patterned processes: seventy-two according to the Theravāda school, and seventy-five in the Sarvāstivāda. Some attention is given to the types of physical processes: the four basic elements (see p. 49) and matter such as the sensitive part of sense-organs or the visible aspect of objects. However, most attention is focussed on the mind. In the Theravādin *Abhidhamma*, this is said to consist, at any micro-moment, of some form of the *dhamma* 'consciousness' or 'mind' (*citta*) along with various 'mental states' (*cetasikā*'s), these being some form of feeling and cognition, and some of fifty constructing activities. *Citta* is of many types according to whether it is, for example, ethically skilful, unskilful, or the result of previous ethically active states. The precise cluster of 'mental states' accompanying a moment of *citta* determines (and is determined by) its nature. At each instant in time, another cluster of *citta*-with-*cetasikā*s arises, thus accounting for the subtle moment-to-moment changes in a person's experience. The *Paṭiṭhāna*, along with the *Milindapañha* (p. 299-390), also develops the idea of *bhavanga*, a type of *citta* which is seen as the resting state of consciousness, as exists in dreamless sleep. Equivalent to the 'brightly shining mind' (see p. 56), this level of mental functioning is seen as being constantly flicked in and out of during waking consciousness. Following a few moments of *bhavanga*, other types of *citta* follow, which turn towards some sense object, such as a visual shape, come to know it, and then give some skilful or unskilful response. The mind then flicks back into the *bhavanga* level before turning towards the same or another sense object, such as a sound. Thus one does not see and hear strictly simultaneously, but the mind rapidly dances between *bhavanga* and the senses and mind-organ, building up a picture of the world like that built up by the moving dot on a television screen.

THE EARLY SCHOOLS AND THEIR DOCTRINES

Within the monastic fraternities originating from the Sthaviravāda of the first schism, three systematic schools of thought (*vādas*) developed during the third century BC: the Puggalavāda (Skt Pudgalavāda), Sarvāstivāda (Pali Sabbatthivāda), and Vibhajjavāda (Skt Vibhajjavāda). The fraternities originating from the Mahāsāṅghikas were more doctrinally open, and so drew on ideas from these *vādas*, and later took to Mahāyāna ideas more readily.

The Puggalavādins, or 'Personalists', were dissatisfied with the doctrinal non-acceptance of any kind of substantial self. While other schools saw *Sutta* references to the 'person' as merely a conventional way of referring to the collection of *khandhas*, they saw the 'person' as being just as real as the *khandhas*: a kind of subtle self which, being an organic whole which included them, was neither the same as nor distinct from them. Over time, it was neither identical nor different, neither eternal nor non-eternal. Though criticized by all other Buddhist schools, the Puggalavādins were quite successful, and in the seventh century AD, under the patronage of the emperor Harṣa, a quarter of Indian monks belonged to their school. Other than in critiques by their opponents, however, their views have only survived in the Chinese translations of three short texts and the *Sanṃmūṭṭya-nikāya-sāstra*, a treatise (*Sāstra*) of one of their offshoots.

The Sarvāstivādins, or 'Pan-realists', became the dominant non-Mahāyāna school in north India, especially in the north-west under the patronage of Kanīṣka I, who ruled in the late first or early second century AD. From here, they became influential in Central Asia, on the route to China. Their canonical *Abhidharma* survives in Chinese translation. They became known for their view that not only present *dhammas* exist, but also past and future ones. They argued that knowledge of past and future must have objects which exist as realities, and that the past must exist in order to explain how past karma affects the present. Their opponents argued that only the present exists, and that the effect-producing impetus of past karma continues in the present. The Sarvāstivādin also reified *dhammas*, seeing them as the indivisible constituents of reality. Each was seen as having an 'own-nature' (Skt *svabhāva*), a unique inherent nature, and they were seen as bound together in a 'person' by a *dharma* known as *prāpti*, or 'possession'.

Dissenters from the Sarvāstivādin view split off to form the Sautrāntika school. This looked to the *Suttas* as alone authoritative, and argued that many of the *dhammas* of the Sarvāstivādins were not separate ultimate realities. Its adherents developed theories of their own, but regarded these as provisional explanatory devices, rather than as descriptions of the ultimate nature of things. One such notion was that, while there was no ultimate reality, 'possession', the fact that individuals had or lacked certain dispositions could be explained by saying that their body-mind complex contained certain 'seeds', or tendencies.

Due to different interpretations of *Abhidharma* points, a Sarvāstivādin council was held in around AD 100, under Kaniṣka I. This later resulted in the production of the *Mahā-vibhāṣā* which, in the form of a commentary on the first book of their *Abhidharma*, the *Jñāna-prasthāna*, discussed different interpretations. In general, it supported the views of Vasumitra, who held that conditioned *dhammas* simply move from a 'future' state, to a momentary manifestation in the 'present', when they are active, to a 'past' state. In all this, their inner nature does not change. The orthodox Sarvāstivādins took their stand on the *Mahā-vibhāṣā*, and so were often known as *Vaibhāṣika*'s. In the fourth century, a masterly survey of their thought was elaborated by Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharma-kośa*. He then produced a commentary on this, the *Abhidharma-kośa-bhāṣya*, which offered an incisive critique of it from a largely Sautrāntika viewpoint. His initial work, however, remained the classic statement of *Abhidharma* in north India. Included in it were certain speculations on the meaning of a Buddha's 'Dharma-body' (see p. 28), seeing it as a term for both the powers, abilities and perfections developed by a Buddha, and his purified inner nature.

While the Sarvāstivādins were not much represented in south India, this was an area where the Vibhajjavādins, or 'Distinctionists', were strong. The fraternity which became established in Sri Lanka, which called itself the Theravāda (Pali equivalent of Sanskrit *Sthaviravāda*) followed this school of thought. Theravāda survived in the south till the seventeenth century, and then withdrew to its stronghold in Sri Lanka. All other pre-Mahāyāna schools of thought eventually died out in India, though certain ones were studied by some of the Mahāyānists of Northern and Eastern Buddhism. In Japan, the small *Kusha* school still exists, based on study of the *Abhidharma-kośa*.

The Theravāda tradition holds that a council was held at Asoka's capital Pāṭliputta in around 250 BC, at the end of which Tissa Moggaliputta composed the *Kathāvatthu*, a 'Book of Discourses' arguing against the views of other schools. This work, the fifth book of the Vibhajjavāda/Theravāda *Abhidharma*, was probably added to in the subsequent two centuries. The Vibhajjavādins distinguished between the existence of present *dhammas*, and past or future ones, and largely resisted the tendency to reify *dhammas*, retaining the older, more experiential understanding of their nature. They insisted on the uniqueness of *Nibbāna* as the sole unconditioned *dhamma*. The Sarvāstivādins also included space in this category, and somewhat devalued *Nibbāna* by making it simply one among many metaphysical realities. The Vibhajjavādin view (e.g. at *Kvu*.VI.1-6, XIX.3-5) is that, as the unconditioned is beyond space and time, it cannot have any divisions within it. Another of their characteristic doctrines is that, at stream-entry, insight into the Four Holy Truths does not come gradually, in a series of separate thought-moments (as the Sarvāstivādins held), but simultaneously, in one thought moment (*Kvu*.II.9, *Pai*.II.105-6). As the first Truth is *dukkha*, and the third is the stopping of *dukkha*, or *Nibbāna*, this view seems to imply that the conditioned world of *dukkha* is not ultimately different from unconditioned *Nibbāna*. As unconditioned, *Nibbāna* can have no spatial or temporal relationship to *anything*, even by negation: no place or time can be nearer to or further from it. It is not separate from the conditioned world, but is, as it were, always available to be experienced. As it is also the stopping of conditioned *dhammas*, this seems to imply that, ultimately, these are not real. The notion of 'own-nature' does occur in the Theravāda as well as Sarvāstivāda tradition, but in a different sense than there. Buddhaghosa, the fifth century AD commentator, explains *dhammas* thus: 'They are *dhammas* because they uphold their own own-nature. They are *dhammas* because they are upheld by conditions or they are upheld according to their own-nature' (*Asl*.39). Here 'own-nature' would appear to mean a characteristic nature, which is not something inherent in a *dhamma* as a separate ultimate reality, but arises due to the supporting conditions both of other *dhammas* and previous occurrences of that *dhamma*. This is of significance as it makes the Mahāyāna critique of the Sarvāstivādin's notion of own-nature largely irrelevant to the Theravāda.

The Vibhajjavādins argued against the view, held by the Sarvāstivādins and Puggalavādins, that some *Arahats* could regress from their state after temporarily attaining it (*Kvu.1.2*). For the Vibhajjavādins, such a person was not yet a true *Arahat*. They also argued against related points which became known as the 'five points of Mahādeva', the earliest reference to which is in their *Kathāvatthu* (II.1-5). The first point is that, even though all *Arahats* are free of sensual desire, a Māra god can cause the bodies of some *Arahats* to emit semen; those with full mastery of meditative accomplishments are immune from this. The second point is that, as an *Arahat* may be ignorant of matters such as a person's name, he may lack a certain kind of *ñāṇa*, or insight. In their original form, in which the present fifth point was probably replaced by the idea that some *Arahats* could regress, the 'five points' were probably *Abhidhamma* debating points, used to sharpen up people's understanding of certain issues and distinctions. They may well originally have been propounded by the Sarvāstivāda school.

The monastic traditions of all surviving forms of Buddhism go back to the Sthaviravāda fraternities, which means that much less is known of the Mahāsāṅghika ones. The doctrines ascribed to them by others are described in relatively late texts, of the early centuries AD. These broadly differentiate a northern and southern branch, the Ekavyavahārika and Caitya fraternities (which perhaps divided in the second century BC). Whoever originated the 'five points of Mahādeva'; they became associated with the 'Mahāsāṅghikas', or more specifically with the Caitya branch. This may have been originated by the monk Mahādeva, who seems to have propounded a new formulation of the points. Some scholars have held that Mahādeva's points imply a 'downgrading' of an *Arahat* relative to a perfect Buddha. This seems to be incorrect, however. Only a slight 'downgrading' is implied, and this applies to one kind of *Arahat* relative to another. The first has only a limited attainment of the meditative state of *jhāna*, and lacks the higher knowledges which can be developed using these as a basis. The second has these higher knowledges, and can use them so as to be 'skilled in the states of others': he knows the inner states and needs of others, and can use this knowledge in compassionately helping them. Mahādeva's points are thus associated with an increased emphasis on altruistic action.

As regards actual Mahāsāṅghika texts, some of their *Sutta* collection

and all of their *Vinaya* survive in Chinese translation. In a language approximating to Sanskrit, there survives a text known as the *Mahāvastu*, which also purports to be a *Vinaya* work. It describes itself as a work of the Lokottaravāda, or 'Transcendentalist' school, which is probably the same as the Ekavyavahārikas or 'One-utterancers'. The latter held that *all* the utterances of the Buddha were concerned with what was transcendent. The *Mahāvastu* grew over a number of centuries, perhaps beginning in the late second century BC. While its outlook has often been seen as foreshadowing certain Mahāyāna ideas, it has itself been shown to incorporate whole passages from early Mahāyāna scriptures, and may have been influenced by Mahāyāna concepts up to as late as the fifth century AD. It sees Gotama as 'transcendental' even before his Buddhahood. He leaves the Tusita heaven in a mind-created body to bestow his blessings on the world (see p. 16), and though highly spiritually developed, he pretends to start from the beginning, making 'mistakes' such as asceticism (*Mvs.1.169-70*). As a Buddha, he is an omniscient being who is ever in meditation. No dust sticks to his feet, and he is never tired. He eats out of mere conformity with the world, and so as to give others a chance to make much 'merit' by giving him alms food. For such a world-transcending being, it was felt that all incidents in his life must have occurred for a special reason. The *Mahāvastu* thus gives much attention to the Buddha's biography, and also includes many *Jātaka* tales. In examining his development to Buddhahood, a series of ten stages of the *Bodhisattva* (Pali *Bodhisatta*) career were outlined. This idea was also important in the Mahāyāna, though the details are different. Unlike the Mahāyāna, the Transcendentalists still saw the goal for most people as Arhatship, the way of the *Bodhisattva* being for extraordinary individuals.

THE RISE OF THE MAHĀYĀNA

The movement which became known as the Mahāyāna arose some time between 150 BC and AD 100, as the culmination of various earlier developments. Its origin is not associated with any named individual, nor was it uniquely linked to any early school or fraternity. It may well have arisen at around the same time in the south, north-west and east. It had three main ingredients. Firstly, a wholehearted adoption of the *Bodhisattva*-path, which various early schools had outlined. Secondly,

a new cosmology arising from visualization practices devoutly directed at the Buddha as a glorified, transcendent being. Thirdly, a new perspective on *Abhidharma*, which derived from meditative insight into the deep 'emptiness' of phenomena (see p. 50), and led to a new philosophical outlook. There developed a new orientation to traditional Buddhist teachings and an upsurge of novel interpretations, whose gradual systematization established the Mahāyāna as a movement with an identity of its own.

The Mahāyāna emerges into history as a loose confederation of groups, each associated with one or more of a number of new *Sūtras* (Pali *Suttas*). These attained a written form, in Middle Indian dialects, very soon after they were composed. Scribal amendments then gradually transformed them into 'Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit', which approximated to classical Sanskrit, the prestige language of India. Anyone accepting the new literature as genuine *Sūtras* – authoritative teachings of the Buddha – thereby belonged to the new movement. This did not necessitate monks and nuns abandoning their old fraternities, as they continued to follow the monastic discipline of the fraternities in which they had been ordained. The Mahāyānists remained a minority among Indian Buddhists for some time; though, in the seventh century, perhaps half of the 200,000 or more monks counted by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang were Mahāyānist.

Traditionalists denied that the new literature was 'the word of the Buddha' (*Buddha-vacana*), like the early *Suttas*. This early material did include teachings and inspired utterances of the Buddha's major disciples, but these were accepted as 'the word of the Buddha' as he had agreed with the teachings, or because of his general praise for such disciples. Even after these were all dead, some remembered material was added to the *Suttas* if it harmonized well with the existing corpus in style and content. The new *Sūtras* were very different in style and tone, but were defended as 'the word of the Buddha' through various devices. Firstly, they were seen as inspired utterances coming from the still-existing Buddha, through meditative visions and vivid dreams. Secondly, they were seen as the products of the same kind of perfect wisdom which was the basis of the Buddha's own teaching of *Dharma* (Pali *Dhamma*) (*Asta*. 4). Thirdly, in later Mahāyāna, they were seen as teachings hidden by the Buddha in the world of serpent-deities (*nāga*'s), till there were humans capable of seeing the deeper implications

of his message, who would recover the teachings by means of meditative powers. Each explanation saw the *Sūtras* as arising from meditative experiences. Nevertheless, they take the form of dialogues between the 'historical' Buddha and his disciples and gods.

The new *Sūtras* were regarded as the second 'turning of the *Dharma-wheel*' (see p. 23), a deeper level of teaching than the early *Suttas*, with the Buddha's *Bodhisattva* disciples portrayed as wiser than his *Arhat* (Pali *Arahat*) disciples. Because of the liberating truth the *Sūtras* were seen to contain, there was said to be a huge amount of 'merit' in copying them out, and disseminating, reciting, expounding, understanding, practising, and even ritually venerating them. Such claims suggest defensiveness on the part of a new, small movement trying to establish itself. The Mahāyāna *Sūtras* were probably produced by the new breed of charismatic *Dharma*-preachers who championed them. These monks, and some lay-people, directed their preaching both within and beyond the existing Buddhist community, to win converts. This they did by extolling the virtues of perfect Buddhahood, so as to elicit a conversion experience of profound psychological effect. This was the 'arising of the thought of enlightenment (*bodhi-citta*)', the heart-felt aspiration to strive for full Buddhahood, by means of the *Bodhisattva*-path.

The new perspective on scriptural legitimacy led to the Mahāyāna having an open, ongoing 'revelation', which produced a huge outpouring of new *Sūtras* in India in the period up to around AD 650. These were composed anonymously, often by a number of authors elaborating a basic text, to produce works frequently running to hundreds of pages in length. In contrast, the early *Suttas* are ninety-five printed pages long at most, and often only run to a page or two. In certain early *Suttas* such as the *Mahā-samaya* (*D.ii.253-62*), the Buddha is a glorious spiritual being surrounded by countless gods and hundreds of disciples. The Mahāyāna *Sūtras* developed this style. In them, the Buddha uses hyperbolic language and paradox, and makes known many heavenly Buddhas and high-level heavenly *Bodhisattvas*, existing in many regions of the universe. A number of these saviour beings, Buddhas and in time *Bodhisattvas*, became objects of devotion and prayer, and greatly added to the appeal and missionary success of the Mahāyāna.

The nature of the Mahāyāna and its attitude to earlier schools

At first, the new movement was called the *Bodhisattva-yāna*, or '(spiritual) vehicle of the *Bodhisattva*'. This was in contradistinction to the 'vehicle of the Disciple' (*Śrāvaka-yāna*), followed by disciples of the Buddha's earlier teachings, who sought Arhatship rather than perfect Buddhahood. It was also contrasted to the 'vehicle of the solitary Buddha' (*Pratyeka-buddha-yāna*), a term used to cover the practice of certain solitary ascetics, mainly of a past age, who were seen to have attained Buddhahood, but who were unable to teach others as a perfect Buddha did. As the new movement responded to criticisms from those who did not accept the new *Sūtras*, it increasingly stressed the superiority of the *Bodhisattva-yāna*, and referred to it as the 'Great vehicle', the *Mahā-yāna*. The other 'vehicles' were disparaged as being the 'Inferior vehicle', or *Hīna-yāna*. The 'greatness' of the new vehicle was seen to lie in three areas: its compassionate motivation, directed at the salvation of countless beings; the profundity of the wisdom it cultivated; and its superior goal, omniscient Buddhahood.

Around AD 200, the *Sūtra* known as the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka*, or 'Lotus of the True *Dharma*' ('Lotus' for short) developed a perspective which, while hostile to the 'Hīnayāna', sought to portray it as incorporated in and completed by the Mahāyāna. Chapter 2 of the *Sūtra* achieves this accommodation by what was to become a central Mahāyāna concept, that of skilful (*kauśalya*) means (*upāya*). This built on the old idea that the Buddha had adapted the particular contents of his teaching to the temperament and level of understanding of his audience. This was by simply selecting his specific teaching from a harmonious body of teachings. Now he was seen as having given different levels of teaching which might actually appear as conflicting, for the 'higher' level required the undoing of certain over-simplified lessons of the 'lower' level. While the Buddha's ultimate message was that *all* can become omniscient Buddhas, this would have been too unbelievable and confusing to give as a preliminary teaching. For the 'ignorant with low dispositions', he therefore began by teaching the Four Holy Truths, setting out the goal as attaining *Nirvāṇa* by becoming an *Arhat*. The *Arhat* was seen as still having a subtle pride, and as lacking in compassion in his hope of escaping the round of rebirths, thus leaving unenlightened beings to fend for themselves. For

those who were prepared to listen further, the Buddha then taught that the true *Nirvāṇa* was attained at Buddhahood, and that all could attain this, even the *Arhats*, who currently thought that they had already reached the goal. The Buddha has just 'one vehicle' (*eka-yāna*), the all-inclusive Buddha-vehicle, but he uses his 'skilful means' to show this by means of three: the vehicles of the Disciple, solitary Buddha, and *Bodhisattva*. He holds out to people whichever of them corresponds to their inclinations and aspirations, but once he has got them to develop spiritually, he gives them all the supreme Buddha-vehicle. As the *Bodhisattva*-path leads to Buddhahood, it seems hard to differentiate the *Bodhisattva* and Buddha-vehicles. Not all Mahāyāna texts follow this 'one vehicle' perspective; for some follow a 'three vehicle' one in which *Arhats* cannot develop further, but have attained a *Nirvāṇa* which is inferior to Buddhahood.

According to the standards of Arhatship preserved by schools such as the Theravāda, the charge that the *Arhat* is proud and selfish is absurd. By definition, he or she is one who has finally destroyed the 'I am' conceit, the root of all egoism and selfishness. He is also described as imbued with lovingkindness and as compassionately teaching others. The Theravāda still acknowledges that the long path to Buddhahood, over many many lives, is the loftiest practice, as it aims at the salvation of countless beings (*Vism.* 13). Nevertheless, while this *Bodhisattva*-path has been and is practised by a few Theravādins (often laypeople), it is seen as a way for the heroic few only. Most have gratefully made use of Gotama Buddha's teachings so as to move towards Arhatship, whether this be attained in the present life or a future one.

The peculiarity of the Mahāyāna was that it urged all 'sons and daughters of good family' to tread the *Bodhisattva*-path. Even so, the stereotype of the Mahāyāna as being more open to lay aspirations does not seem straightforwardly applicable to the early Mahāyāna. In early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna texts, the lay *Bodhisattva* is expected to live a life free of attachment to family, and to aim to ordain as soon as possible. In much of this, he is akin to the ideal devout lay disciple in the Pali *Suttas* (e.g. *A.IV.208-21*). He might reach an advanced spiritual stage, but so might a layperson in the Theravāda tradition, say. Nevertheless, lay practitioners do play a prominent part in several important Mahāyāna *Sūtras*, such as the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa*. The call to the *Bodhisattva*-path was inspired by the vision that the huge universe,

will always be in need of perfect Buddhas. The person entering this path aspired to be a compassionate, self-sacrificing hero. His path would be long, as he would need to build up moral and spiritual perfections not only for his own exalted state of Buddhahood, but also so as to be able altruistically to aid others by teaching, good deeds, 'merit' transference, and offering response to prayers. While compassion had always been an important part of the Buddhist path (see p. 69), it was now more strongly emphasized, as the motivating factor for the whole *Bodhisattva*-path.

Over the centuries, many monks studied and practised according to both the Śrāvakayāna and Mahāyāna; not infrequently, both were present in the same monastery. The Chinese, in fact, did not come to clearly differentiate the Mahāyāna as a separate movement till late in the fourth century. Moreover, in Eastern and Northern Buddhism, the term 'Hīnayāna' came to be mostly used to refer to the lower level of spiritual motivation and practice which prepared for the Mahāyāna level. In fact, it is a mistake to equate the 'Hīnayāna' with the Theravāda school, both because the term is a disparaging one not accepted by the school, and also because it was used to refer to all schools which did not accept the Mahāyāna *Sūtras* as authoritative. Moreover, these schools also included a *Bodhisattva*-path, so it is incorrect to see them as purely Śrāvakayāna in nature.

5

MAHĀYĀNA PHILOSOPHY

The Mahāyāna perspective is expressed both in *Sūtras* and a number of *Sāstras*, 'treatises' written by named authors. These systematically present the outlook of particular Mahāyāna schools, based on the *Sūtras*, logic, and meditational experience. Each school is associated with a particular group of *Sūtras*, whose meaning it sees as fully explicit; other *Sūtras* may be regarded as in need of interpretation. In India, the Mahāyāna developed two main philosophical schools: the Madhyamaka, and later the Yogācāra. Both have had a major influence on Northern and Eastern Buddhism.

THE PERFECTION OF WISDOM LITERATURE AND THE
MADHYAMAKA SCHOOL

Sources and writers

The Madhyamaka school was also known as the Sūnyatā-vāda, the 'Emptiness Teaching', for its key concept is that of 'emptiness', also central to the *Prajñā-pāramitā*, or 'Perfection of Wisdom' *Sūtras*. Among these is the oldest extant Mahāyāna text, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, or '8,000 Lines' Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra*. Originating in the first centuries BC and AD, its contents were expanded, in the period to AD 300, to form works of varying sizes up to 100,000 lines. In the following century, two short versions were composed, the *Vajracchedikā*, or 'Diamond-cutter', and the one-page *Hṛdaya*, or 'Heart', Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*.

The Madhyamaka school, an adherent of which is known as a Mādhyamika, was founded by Nāgārjuna (c. AD 150-250), a south Indian monk, philosopher and mystic. The school's foundation,

document is his (*Mūla*)-*madhyamaka-kārikā*, 'Verses on the (Fundamentals of) the Middle Way'. This argues for what Nāgārjuna sees as the true 'Middle Way' of the Buddha (see p. 69), seeking to convince those who did not accept the Mahāyāna *Sūtras* that a proper understanding of the early scriptures leads inevitably to seeing everything as 'empty'. Many other works are attributed to Nāgārjuna, though several were probably by later writers of the same name. Among the more reliable attributions is the *Vigraha-vyāvartanī*, 'Averting the Arguments', which seeks to overcome objections to his ideas. While his outlook seems close to that of the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*, he does not in fact quote from these, or even refer to the 'Mahāyāna' or '*Bodhisattva*' in the *Madhyamaka-kārikā*. It was left to his other works, if authentic, or his key disciples, Āryadeva and Nāga, to make such explicit connections.

In the fifth century, Buddhapālita and then Bhāvaviveka built up the popularity of the school. The latter improved its logical methods and, around AD 500, developed a new interpretation of Nāgārjuna's ideas, thus forming the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school. Its interpretation was then disputed by Candrakīrti (late sixth century), who built on the work of Buddhapālita to found the Prāsangika-Madhyamaka school as a definitive statement of Madhyamaka. Candrakīrti's ideas are expressed in such works as his commentary on the *Madhyamaka-kārikā*, the *Prasannapadā*, or 'Clear-worded'. In the eighth century, Śāntarakṣita and his pupil Kamalaśīla added some Yogācāra ideas to those of the Svātantrika-Madhyamaka, thus forming the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka school.

The Śūnyatāvādin orientation

The Perfection of Wisdom literature extols the wisdom (*prajñā*) which is *pāramitā*, literally 'gone beyond' (to *Nirvāṇa*), and also the other 'perfections' involved in the *Bodhisattva*-path. While it and Nāgārjuna's works were clearly for intellectuals, they re-emphasized the Buddha's rejection of all speculative 'views', claiming that *Abhidharma* analytical thinking could lead to a subtle form of intellectual grasping: the idea that one had 'grasped' the true nature of reality in a neat set of concepts. In later Zen, such an endeavour was seen as like trying to catch a slippery catfish in a equally slippery gourd. The new literature also saw the *Abhidharma*'s contrasting *Nirvāṇa* with the conditioned *dharma*s

making up a 'person', as the basis of a subtle form of spiritual self-seeking: the desire to 'attain' *Nirvāṇa* for oneself, to *get* something one did not already have. The new texts sought to re-emphasize that the goal was to be attained by totally 'letting go', so as to produce a thought transcending any sensory or mental object as support (*Vc.* sec. 10c; cf. p. 63).

Empty *dharma*s and Conditioned Arising

A key Perfection of Wisdom criticism of *Abhidharma* thought – primarily Sarvāstivādin – was that it did not go far enough in understanding that everything is not-self (Skt *anātman*), or 'empty' (*śūnya*) of self. It understood the 'non-selfness of persons' (*pudgala-nairātmya*), the absence of a permanent substantial self in a person. Nevertheless, it analysed 'persons' down into *dharma*s, each with an inherent 'own-nature', so it was seen not to have understood the 'non-selfness of *dharma*s' (*dharma-nairātmya*). That is, seeing a *dharma* as an ultimate building-block of reality, with an inherent nature of its 'own', is to hold that it can be identified without reference to other *dharma*s on which it depends. This implies that it can *exist* independently, making it a virtual self. Thus *dharma*-analysis, developed as a means to undercut self-centred attachment, was seen as having fallen short of its mark.

Nāgārjuna's critique of the notion of own-nature (*Mk.* ch. 15) argues that anything which arises according to conditions, as all phenomena do, can have no inherent nature, for what it is depends on what conditions it. Moreover, if there is nothing with own-nature, there can be nothing with 'other-nature' (*para-bhāva*), i.e. something which is dependent for its existence and nature on something *else* which has own-nature. Furthermore, if there is neither own-nature nor other-nature, there cannot be anything with a true, substantially existent nature (*bhāva*). If there is no true existent, then there can be no non-existent (*abhāva*); for Nāgārjuna takes this as simply a correlative term denoting that a true existent has gone out of existence. Like Nāgārjuna, the Perfection of Wisdom literature therefore regards all *dharma*s as like a dream or magical illusion (*māyā*). There is something there in experience, and one can describe it well in terms of *dharma*s, so it is wrong to deny these exist; yet they don't have substantial existence either. What we experience does not exist in an absolute sense, but only

in a relative way, as a passing phenomenon. The nature of *dharma*s lies in between absolute 'non-existence' and substantial 'existence', in accordance with an early *Sutta* passage quoted by Nāgārjuna (S.II.16-17; see p. 69). This is what Nāgārjuna means by the 'Middle Way'.

The Madhyamaka interpretation of Conditioned Arising sees it as meaning that phenomena are not only mutually dependent for their 'arising' in time, but are so in their very nature. Thus they cannot really be spoken of as separate entities which interact. By 'itself', a thing is nothing. It is what it is only in relation to other things, and they are what they are in relation to it and yet other things. In his examination of the process of seeing (*Mk.* ch. 3), Nāgārjuna argues that there is no activity of vision which is presently not seeing. Therefore, one cannot say that there is something, 'vision', which may then go on to perform the separate action 'seeing': 'vision' and 'seeing' are mutually dependent, and cannot be separately identified. As the Perfection of Wisdom literature would paradoxically put it, vision is 'empty of' vision. There is, then, no real activity 'vision' which 'sees'. But if vision does not see, then non-vision certainly does not see, so how can one identify a 'seer' who is characterized by his 'seeing'? Without a seer, how can there be anything seen? All such concepts, and the more general ones of subject and object, are meaningful only in relationship to each other. Similarly, what is short depends on what is long; for long and short are correlative concepts. Light is light in relation to darkness; for it is its absence. By such reasoning, Nāgārjuna even says that the 'unconditioned' (traditionally a term for *Nirvāṇa* and, in Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma*, space) is conceptually dependent on the conditioned, its opposite (*Mk.* ch. 7, v. 33).

Conventional truth and language

The Madhyamaka school holds that confusion over the nature of phenomena arises because people do not understand how the Buddha taught according to two levels of truth: 'conventional truth' (*samvṛti-satya*) and profound 'ultimate truth' (*paramārtha-satya*) (*Mk.* ch. 24, vv. 8-9). The concept of two levels of truth already existed in *Abhidharma*. There, 'conventional truths' were those expressed using terms such as 'person' and 'thing'; 'ultimate truth' referred to more

exact statements, expressed in terms of *dharma*s. For the Mādhyamika writers, however, talk of *dharma*s is just another kind of provisional, conventional truth, which ultimate truth transcends.

For the Mādhyamikas, true statements at the conventional level are 'true' because humans agree to use concepts in certain ways; because of linguistic conventions. 'Ice is cold' is true because 'ice' is a term used to describe a form of 'water' which is experienced as 'cold'. The terms of language arise because, from the continuous flux of experience, discriminating conceptualization (*prapañca*) abstracts various segments and takes them to be separate entities or qualities, with fixed natures. These then become 'focuses of attachment'. The language-constructs (*prajñapti*) which are labels for them are inter-related in many ways. They gain their meaning from how they are used, in relationship to other concepts, not by referring to objective referents existing outside language. Yet while language determines how we experience the world, it does not bring things into existence; it too is a dependent, empty phenomenon. A particular 'thing' enters the human world by being discriminated through a name or concept, but this exists in relation to a 'something' to which it is applied: both exist in relationship to each other (*Mk.* ch. 5).

Emptiness

In the Sūnyatāvādin perspective, each phenomenon lacks an inherent nature, and so all are said to share an empty 'non-nature' as their 'nature'. Thus one *dharma* cannot ultimately be distinguished from another: the notion of the 'sameness' of *dharma*s. Their shared 'nature' is 'emptiness' (*śūnyatā*). As the Heart *Sūtra* says, 'whatsoever is material shape, that is emptiness, and whatsoever is emptiness, that is material shape' (and similarly for the other four factors of personality). 'Emptiness', though, is not some ultimate basis and substance of the world, like the *Brahman* of the *Upaniṣads*. It implies that no such self-existent substance exists: the world is a web of fluxing, inter-dependent, baseless phenomena. Nāgārjuna, in fact, equates emptiness with the principle of Conditioned Arising; for this logically leads to it (*Mk.* ch. 24, v. 18). Emptiness, then, is an adjectival quality of '*dharma*s', not a substance which composes them. It is neither a thing nor is it nothingness; rather it refers to reality as incapable of ultimately being pinned down in concepts.

Some physicists have seen modern physics as containing parallels to this perspective. When the 'solid' objects of common-sense reality were first analysed, they were seen to consist of empty space and protons, neutrons and electrons. Classical physics saw these as hard, indivisible particles, the ultimate building blocks of matter; but further analysis showed them to consist of a whole range of odd particles such as 'quarks', whose nature is bound up with the forces through which they interact. Matter turns out to be a mysterious field of interaction, with 'particles' not being real separate entities, but provisional conceptual designations.

Critics from the early schools saw the emptiness-teaching as implying that the Four Holy Truths were themselves empty, thus subverting the Buddha's teaching. In reply, Nāgārjuna argued that it is the notion of *dharma*s-with-inherent-nature which subverts the Four Truths (*Mk.* ch. 24). If suffering had own-nature, it would be causeless and eternal, and could never be brought to an end. If the Path had own-nature, it could never be gradually developed in a person; for he or she would either have it or not have it. In a world of entities with own-nature, all change and activity would be impossible; everything would be static and eternal. It is because everything is empty that there can be activity, including spiritual development. An analogy, here, is that the decimal number system would collapse without the quantity zero (a concept which derives from India).

Skilful means and the transcending of views

Nāgārjuna emphasizes that ultimate truth, indicated by talk of emptiness, completes rather than subverts conventional truth. Indeed, it can be understood only if the conventional Four Holy Truths have been understood (*Mk.* ch. 24, v. 10). This relates to the concept of 'skilful means', which in the Śūnyatāvādin perspective is developed to mean that *all* Buddhist teachings – including Śūnyatāvādin ones – should be regarded as provisional devices. The teachings, especially on Conditioned Arising, are simply to induce people into a skilful frame of mind: one in which there can be insight into inexpressible ultimate truth, transcending all such teachings.

Nāgārjuna's method in the *Mādhyamaka-kārikā* is to criticize all views and theories about ultimate entities or principles. This he does by showing that their necessary consequences (*prasaṅga*'s) contradict

either the views themselves, which are thus reduced to absurdity, or experience. Moreover, he seeks to show that *all* logically possible views on specific topics are untenable. In this, he uses his method of 'four-cornered' (*catuskoti*) negation', the device of examining and refuting all the four logically possible alternatives on a topic: *x* is *y*, *x* is non-*y*, *x* is both *y* and non-*y*, *x* is neither *y* nor non-*y*.

In chapter 1, he examines theories on causality. The first logical possibility is 'self-production': that an effect arises from a cause ultimately identical with itself, part of the same underlying substance (as in the Hindu Sāṃkhya school). This would lead to pointless self-duplication, however, and if a thing reproduced itself, there would be nothing to stop it continuing to do so for ever. The world is not observed to be like this. If the same substance is said to manifest itself differently only when conditions are appropriate, 'self-production' has already been given up.

The second possibility, 'other-production', is that, ultimately, an effect arises from a cause that is inherently 'other' than it, with a different 'own-nature'. Here, Nāgārjuna argues that, if really distinct entities existed, all would be equally 'different', so anything could 'cause' anything. To say that a cause and its (different) effect always occur together is to *explain* nothing about how causality works. What is inherently 'other' than something cannot be its cause. A 'cause' is not a 'cause' in itself, then, but only in relation to its 'effect' (v. 5).

The third theory is that causality involves both 'self-production' and 'other-production'. If this means that parts of the cause and effect are the same, and part different, the problems of the first two views apply. If it means that all of the cause is both the same as and different from all of the effect, this is impossible. The final possibility is that things originate by neither 'self-production' nor 'other-production': spontaneously, without a cause. But if this were true, everything would be an unpredictable chaos, which it is not. This final view, note, is not that of Nāgārjuna. His 'position' seems to be that at the conventional, phenomenal level, causality can be observed, with 'one' thing causing 'another' to originate; yet none of the logically possible theories of causality can explain how it 'works'. This is because, at the ultimate level, no real 'things' can be found which 'originate'. Nāgārjuna also analyses such concepts as motion and time (chs. 2 and 19), and purports to show that our notions of them are inherently self-contradictory.

The Mādhyamikas' talk of emptiness, then, is intended as the antidote

to all theories: 'Emptiness is proclaimed by the victorious ones (Buddhas) as the refutation of all views; but those who hold "emptiness" as a view are called incurable' (*Mk.* ch. 13, v. 8). Nāgārjuna examines the views of others as a form of spiritual therapy, to help liberate them from all constricting viewpoints. In doing this, he claims not to have any presuppositions of his own, but to work with those of his opponents, and conventional logic, performing a kind of logical judo. The insights which this produces are also to be deepened by meditative contemplation of phenomena.

The Svātantrika-Madhyamaka school held that logic itself is not empty, but has an autonomous existence (*svatantra*), such that valid positive statements can be made from a Madhyamaka perspective. The inferences made at the conventional level are a real bridge to at least some aspects of ultimate truth. The Prāsangika school, on the other hand, emphasized that the Madhyamaka contained only a negative dialectic, to disprove the views of others, and that ultimate truth completely transcends all logic, words and concepts. This seems to accord with the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*, which certainly sought to avoid setting up any views, or indeed to 'say' anything: 'There is nothing at all to understand. For nothing in particular has been indicated, nothing in particular has been explained' (*Asta.* 38).

Ultimate truth and thusness

At the ultimate level, even talk of 'emptiness' is to be finally given up: as the things which are said to be empty do not ultimately exist, one cannot even say that 'they' are 'empty' (*Mk.* ch. 22, v. 11): 'the emptiness of all *dharmas* is empty of that emptiness' (*Panca.* 196). The ultimate truth, then, is that reality is inconceivable and inexpressible: 'When the domain of thought ceases, that which can be stated ceases' (*Mk.* ch. 18, v. 7). The Perfection of Wisdom literature contains an elusive series of subtle allusions to that which lies beyond words. An indicator which it uses for this is the notion of *tathatā*: 'thusness' or 'suchness'. The thusness of something, equivalent to its emptiness, is its very as-it-is-ness, what it is such as it is, without conceptually adding anything to it or taking anything away from it: it is simply 'thus'. Thusness is 'immutable and unchangeable, undiscriminated, undifferentiated', it belongs to nowhere, is neither past, present nor future, and

the same thusness is found in all *dharmas* (*Asta.* 307). 'True reality' (*tattva*) is 'not conditioned by something else, peaceful, not elaborated by conceptual proliferation (*prapañca*)' (*Mk.* ch. 18, v. 9). Ultimate truth is known when spiritual ignorance is transcended and the limitations of language are totally seen-through, with no further generation of, or attachment to, dream-like linguistic constructs, just perfect evenmindedness. Empty, conditioned phenomena are seen as worthless and are thus no longer constructed, so that insight into ultimate truth is attaining the bliss of *Nirvāṇa* (*Mk.* ch. 24, vv. 10 and 24).

Nirvāṇa and *saṃsāra*

In Sūnyatāvādin thought, the *Nirvāṇa* which is thus attained is not seen as a *dharma* different from conditioned *dharmas* of *saṃsāra*, 'there is not the slightest bit of difference between the two' (*Mk.* ch. 25, v. 20). How can this be? The very fact of the 'unconditioned' *Nirvāṇa* being contrasted, at the conventional level, to *saṃsāra*, makes it exist only in *relationship* to it, and thus empty. *Nirvāṇa*, indeed, was held to be emptiness (Pali *suññatā*) even by the early schools of Buddhism; for it was seen as empty of defilements and beyond conceptualization in any positive terms. The conditioned and the unconditioned cannot, then, be differentiated because 'both' are found to 'be' emptiness. What is more, while *Nirvāṇa* is seen by all schools of Buddhism as 'unborn', 'deathless' and not impermanent, in the Sūnyatāvādin perspective, conditioned *dharmas* can be similarly described. This is because, if they lack own-nature, and do not exist as such, they cannot be said to be 'originate' or 'cease'. Consequently, they cannot be said to be impermanent (not that they are permanent): they remain 'unoriginated' (the Heart *Sūtra*), 'unborn', and without differentiation from *Nirvāṇa*. Thus *Nirvāṇa* is not attained by the eradication of anything real, namely defilements, but by the non-construction of the conditioned world of *saṃsāra*: for 'all *dharmas* are nirvanic from the very beginning'. *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are not two separate realities, but the field of emptiness, seen by either spiritual ignorance or true knowledge.

The idea that *Nirvāṇa* and *saṃsāra* are non-different plays a central role in the Perfection of Wisdom perspective. Once 'established', there followed other conclusions with consequences for the whole of Mahāyāna thought. Most importantly, the *Bodhisattva* need not seek to

escape *saṃsāra* to attain *Nirvāṇa*. He can tirelessly work to aid 'suffering beings', sustained by the idea that *Nirvāṇa* is something already present in *saṃsāra*. As an advanced *Bodhisattva*, he directly experiences this non-duality of *saṃsāra* and *Nirvāṇa*, this realization being fully matured when Buddhahood – *Nirvāṇa* in the highest sense – is reached. The nature of Buddhahood, 'Buddhaness' (*buddhatā*), is of course emptiness, as is the nature of everything. Because of this, all beings are seen to have a nature which is non-different from Buddhahood. Without this, how could ordinary frail beings eventually become omniscient Buddhas? The task of beings, then, is not to 'attain' something that they do not already possess, but to *uncover* and know their Buddhahood. The task of the *Bodhisattva* is to skilfully help them in this.

THE YOGĀCĀRA SCHOOL

Sources and writers

The Yogācāra school is rooted in the ideas of certain *Sūtras* which began to appear in the third century AD. The most important is the *Samādhiśūtramocana* ('Freeing the Underlying Meaning'), which sees itself as a 'third turning of the *Dharma*-wheel', surpassing the first two 'turnings': the teachings on the Four Holy Truths, and the Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtras*. The *Mahāyāna-abhidharma Sūtra* is another. The influential *Lankāvatāra* ('Descent into Lankā') *Sūtra*, which gradually developed from around AD 300, also contains many Yogācāra ideas in its unsystematic summary of Mahāyāna teachings. The Yogācāra was founded as a separate school by Asaṅga (fourth or fifth century), seen by tradition as a monk ordained in the Śthaviravādin Mahīśāsaka fraternity. His 'teacher' was one Maitreyanātha, or Maitreya, who may have been a human teacher, or the heavenly *Bodhisattva* Maitreya. In time, Asaṅga converted his half-brother Vasubandhu to the Mahāyāna. The scholarly debate as to whether the brother was the same 'Vasubandhu' who composed the Sarvāstivādin *Abhidharma-kośa* is as yet unresolved.

Asaṅga's works include the *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* ('Compendium of the Mahāyāna'), the *Abhidharma-samuccaya* ('Collection of *Abhidharma*'), this being a Yogācāra version of the *Abhidharma*, and a commentary on the *Samādhiśūtramocana Sūtra*. Several other works

associated with Asaṅga are attributed by either Chinese or Tibetan tradition to 'Maitreya', in the sense that this *Bodhisattva* inspired Asaṅga to write them. The most philosophically important of these is the *Madhyānta-vibhāga* ('Discrimination between the Middle and Extremes'). Vasubandhu's most important works are: the *Triṃśatikā-kārikā* ('Thirty Verses'); the *Viṃśatikā-kārikā* ('Twenty Verses') and his commentary on this, the *Viṃśatikā-vṛtti*; the *Tri-śvabhāva-nirdeśa* ('Exposition of the Three Natures'), and his commentary on the *Madhyānta-vibhāga*, the *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā-bhāṣya*.

The Yogācāra orientation

Asaṅga and Vasubandhu not only developed the characteristic ideas of the Yogācāra school, but also sought to systematize and synthesize all the strands of the Mahāyāna, and some Śrāvakayāna ideas. While Vasubandhu was primarily a theoretician, and gave the school its classical form, Asaṅga's writings were deeply rooted in the practice *dhyaṇa* (Pali *jhāna*), or meditative trance. Accordingly, 'Yogācāra' means the 'Practice of Yoga', referring to the *Bodhisattva's* path of meditative development. While the Mādhyamikas and Yogācārins had their philosophical differences, they both had Buddhahood as their goal, and can be seen as being complementary in their approaches. The Mādhyamikas had an analytical, dialectic approach to reality, emphasizing *prajñā* (wisdom); the Yogācārins emphasized *saṃādhi* (meditative concentration) and the withdrawal of the mind from sensory phenomena. Just as the early Buddhists sought to transcend limiting attachment by seeing phenomena as impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-self, so the Mādhyamikas sought this by seeing them as 'empty', and the Yogācārins sought it by seeing perceived phenomena as mental constructions.

The Mādhyamikas regarded the normal experience of the world as a product of conceptual constructions, but had not concerned themselves with the psychological details of this process. The Yogācārins addressed this question and related ones. For example, how are memories and the effects of past karma transmitted over time, if a being is composed of a stream of momentary events, as described in the *Abhidharma*? Here, the Yogācārin answer built on those of earlier schools, such as the Sautrāntikas, who had posited a series of momentary karmic 'seeds'.

reproducing themselves over time, and the Vibhajjavādins, who had posited *bhavaṅga* consciousness, which gave continuity to personality even through dreamless sleep. In continuing to wrestle with such questions, the Yogācāra developed a new *Abhidharma* literature set within a Mahāyāna framework.

Central to the Yogācāra is an emphasis on consciousness; indeed an alternative later name for the school was Vijñāna-vāda, the 'Consciousness Teaching'. In early Buddhism (see ch. 3), the flux of consciousness is seen as the crucial link between rebirths, and a transformed state of consciousness is associated with *Nibbāna*. The perceiving mind is also that which interprets experience so as to construct a 'world', and can be the basis for experiencing the world-transcending *Nibbāna*. In the Yogācāra, the role of the mind in constructing the world is so emphasized that all concepts of an external physical reality are rejected: the perceived world is seen as 'representation-only' (*viññapti-mātra*) or 'thought-only' (*citta-mātra*). In this, the Yogācāra went one step beyond the Sautrāntikas' theory, in which objects were seen as real, but were only known by inference from the representations that they caused in the mind.

The Yogācāra and the Madhyamaka

Both the Mādhyamikas and the Yogācāra saw themselves as preserving the Buddhist Middle Way between the extremes of nihilism (everything is unreal) and substantialism (substantial entities exist). The Yogācāra criticized the Mādhyamikas for tending towards nihilism, while the Mādhyamikas criticized the Yogācāra for tending towards substantialism, setting up mind as an ultimate entity when all was equally 'empty'. The Madhyamaka assessment is reflected in a fifth century schema, later used in Tibet, which grades the key schools according to their grasp of the truth: (i) Vaiśiṣṭika Sarvāstivāda, (ii) Sautrāntika, (iii) Citta-mātra (Yogācāra), (iv) Madhyamaka. To reach the Madhyamaka level, however, the other schools had to be progressively studied. Moreover, the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka later developed as a powerful syncretistic school. The 'substantialism' of the Yogācāra is in fact more apparent than real, as their theories on mind are essentially tentative devices, 'skilful means' to be used in conjunction with a series of meditations in leading the practitioner beyond all mental constructions, including all theories, to a direct experience of ultimate reality.

For them, one who cannot get beyond words and theories is like someone who mistakes a finger-tip for the thing that it is pointing at (*Lanka*. 196).

The Yogācāra view of the role and nature of consciousness

In early Buddhism, the personality factor of consciousness (Pali *viññāṇa*, Skt *viññāna*) was referred to equally as *viññāṇa*, *citta* (thought) or *mano* (mind-organ; Skt *manas*), and was seen to be of six types: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-consciousness, each related to a particular sense-organ. In the Yogācāra, however, two more types of consciousness or *citta* are added, making a total of eight. As in earlier *Abhidharma*, each *citta* is seen as consisting of a series of momentary events, accompanied by an appropriate collection of 'mental states' (*Trims*. v. 3–8).

The first addition is made by treating *manas* as a separate type of consciousness, a process of subliminal thought. This organizes data from the six consciousnesses into the experience of a meaningful world, according to set categories. It contains the basis both for correct judgements and misperception of reality, and for both skilful and unskilful karma, which are generated by volitions accompanying the six consciousnesses (*Trims*. vv. 6–8).

Manas and the six consciousnesses represent only the surface of the mind, which is active and oriented towards 'objects'. There is, though, an eighth form of consciousness, which is the *āśraya*, or 'basis' of the rest; it is their fundamental root. Devoid of purposive activity and unaware of objects, it is an underlying unconscious level of mind known as *ālaya-viññāṇa*, the 'storehouse consciousness'. Asanga equates it with what the *Mahāyāna-abhidharma Sūtra* calls the 'Realm (*dhātu*) without beginning in time, which is the common basis of all *dharma*s' (*Ms*. ch. 2).

When a person performs actions, or karmas, traces are left on his unconscious: 'seeds' of future karmic effects sink into the *ālaya*, a receptacle which actively stores them. The *ālaya* consists of a series of *cittas*, accompanied by both karmic 'seeds' and the 'seeds' of potential defilements and memories. These all reproduce themselves over time, thus accounting for the continuity of personality through death and periods of unconsciousness, when the seven active consciousnesses are absent (*Trims*. v. 16).