

A DISCUSSION OF THE ORIGIN OF MAHAYANA BUDDHISM¹

There are two great divisions in Buddhism, the Hinayana (Small Vehicle) found in Burma, Siam, and Ceylon; the Mahayana (Great Vehicle) found in China, Thibet, and Japan. The difference between these two forms of doctrine is very great. Hinayana Buddhism is practical, ethical, and traditional. The Mahayana is progressive, idealistic, mystical and metaphysical. The Buddha of the former section is an historical person who lived and died as a man: the Buddha of the latter is an ideal explained as having three bodies in one, resembling the triad of Brahmanism, or the Trinity in Christianity. He is the absolute being, resembling the Universal Brahma. In Hinayana doctrine, existence is real, but in a constant state of flux governed by the twelve-linked chain of Causation. This world system resembles that of Heraclitus, the "Weeping Philosopher of Greece." In Mahayana, things and changes are mere appearances, while reality resembles the idealism of Parmenides, Plato, or in its more modern form of presentation passes for Hegelian or Neo-Hegelian Idealism.

Dr Murakami points out in his great work on the *Unity of Buddhism* (佛教統一論, Vol. II), that Śakyamuni differed from the Sankhyā recluse Arāda Kālāma in denying the reality and existence of both kinds of self, the Universal or God-self, and the personal, individual self of living beings, because to admit the self was to make possible attachment to existence which would increase and drag men into the net of trans-

¹ The writer presents this article merely as a study. He is well aware of the difficulty of reaching a conclusion on this subject on which differences of opinions are not unnatural. (There are some points in this "Study", including its general conclusions, which the Editor of *The Eastern Buddhist* wishes to discuss fully. He expects to write an independent article on the subject as soon as practicable. D. S. T.)

migration and illusion. On the other hand, Mahayana Buddhists have not only added two other faculties to the six sense faculties of Hinayana, one of which is the *Alaya Vijnāna*, a mental quality, which is practically a reassertion of the self, but they have gone so far as to assert a Universal Buddha-self with a decidedly theistic significance.

For Hinayana, the object of religious austerities is Nirvana, described as the state of "an extinguished flame." It is the quiet of Individual Annihilation. For Mahayana, Nirvana is identical with Absolute Reality, Enlightenment and Buddhahood and described as possessing "permanence, happiness, selfhood and purity." But between this suffering world and Nirvana lies Paradise, and the various Bodhisattvas like Amida, exert themselves in the interest of saving suffering men.

The question has very often been asked, how could Buddhist doctrine as taught by Śākyamuni account for these two opposing schools? That they teach opposite doctrines cannot well be questioned. They are so opposed that if it is admitted that Mahayana came from Śākyamuni, it becomes logically necessary to explain away the four fundamental truths, the three seals, and the twelve-linked chain of Causation of original Buddhism. If to the pessimistic world background of Southern Buddhism are added the easy, optimistic methods of the Pure Land sects, based on Amida's vow, the most logical way to escape from suffering existence is to enter the paradise of Amida at once by suicide. In the stormy days of the Genji and Heike wars, instances of this logical conclusion became historical fact.

This apparent opposition between the doctrines of Southern and Northern Buddhism is the chief reason for doubting their common origin in the teaching of Śākyamuni. The Japanese attitude is well expressed in the *Chūgai Nippo* of July, 1919, by Professor Bunzaburo Matsumoto when he said, "Although Mahayana Buddhists have acted contrary to the

real ideal of Buddha, the present existence of Buddhism in the world must be attributed totally to the merit of Mahayana Buddhists."

In the appendix to his *Historical Discussion of Mahayana Buddhism*,¹ Dr. Eun Maeda discusses the origin of Mahayana doctrine in a very fair, sincere manner, even expressing a willingness to admit that Mahayana is not the teaching of Śākyamuni. He points out that Chūki Tominaga in the Genroku age first denied the Buddhist origin, and that similar views were also held by Tenyu Hattori, Hirata Atsutane, and by Jesuit scholars in China.² He gives many arguments for and against such a position, but is conservative in his conclusion.

Early disciples gathered the master's teaching together, and they are preserved in Pali. The Mahayana doctrines were not presented until centuries later, and when they were, they were written in Sanskrit. It is consequently clear that none of the Arhats of the Southern school knew the Mahayana doctrine. Even the most distinguished disciples of Śākyamuni remained in the humble grade of hearers, while the supposed founders of Northern Buddhism, Āśvaghoṣa, Nāgarjuna, and others, were exalted to Bodhisattvas or Saints of the highest type. To say that men like Ānanda could not really appreciate the doctrine if presented by Śākyamuni, is to cast a reflection not only upon the disciple, but to suggest that the personal influence of the teacher which was exercised directly and personally upon his disciples for years, was lacking in either spiritual or intellectual power. It is significant that archaeologists bear testimony to the fact that images found in India for five or six centuries after Śākyamuni's death are those of Hinayana Buddhism only, and that no images of the great Bodhisattvas of Mahayana Buddhism appear till much

¹ *Daijō Bukkyō Shiron* (大乘佛教史論) by Dr Eun Maeda, Meiji, 36th year.

² See also *Daijō Bussetsu Ron Hihan*, (大乘佛說論批判), Chapter III, Dr S. Murakami, Meiji, 36th year.

later. Some argue that it stands to reason that Mahayana doctrine is too broad and includes too many different ideas to be the work of one man. These facts point to a later origin for Mahayana doctrine.

Many arguments are given to show that Mahayana doctrine originated with Śākyamuni. Conservative scholars claim that Mahayana doctrine passed secretly from mind to mind as if by telepathy for all these centuries. Although not transmitted by word of mouth, it successfully passed several centuries until Aśvaghosha first brought it to light. In addition to the objection based on the hundreds of years which elapsed before the doctrine was known, it is almost impossible to imagine how a great teacher like Śākyamuni could oppose the ideas in Brahmanism which he was secretly transmitting to his disciples. Equally unattractive is the conservative argument that Śākyamuni taught the doctrine but that it died out in Southern India, but was fortunately preserved in Northern India. If so, how do we account for the fact that the Hinayana Sūtras were collected and preserved while Mahayana Sūtras are not known to have existed at least before the time of Aśvaghosha and possibly not for a much later period.

Another conservative argument is that Mahayana doctrine relies upon truth and teaches ideas which are true for all time, respecting truth even more than the facts of Śākyamuni's life and his relation to their doctrine. Consequently, the origin of Mahayana doctrine is of little vital importance. This compromise is rather against the Śākyamuni origin of Mahayana. From the standpoint of the religious influence and power of Buddhism, it is of vital importance whether Mahayana doctrines are the product of one great central personality or are to be regarded as mere abstractions, the origin of which is not Buddhist.

One of Dr Maeda's interesting arguments¹ used to combat

¹ Ibid., Appendix.

the idea that Mahayana did not originate with Śākyamuni is based on an analogy between the development of Buddhist doctrine and the growth of the fruit tree. The teachings of Śākyamuni are the seeds, those of Hinayana are the branches and leaves, those of Mahayana are the blossoms and fruit. Long after the seeds were hidden away, when the time was ripe, the fruit appeared. This analogy, though very attractive, proves nothing: it merely states his position very cleverly. Dr S. Murakami in his *Critical Discussion of the Buddha Origin of Mahayana* gives a brief outline of the arguments of various Japanese scholars. It is sufficient for our purpose to mention two of them, that of the late Dr Enryo Inouye and that of Dr M. Anezaki.

Dr Enryo Inouye first summed up the arguments for and against the Buddha origin and draws his conclusion in effect as follows. "From the standpoint of philosophy, it does not matter whether Śākyamuni was the founder of Mahayana Buddhism or not. It is not to be regarded as superior because Śākyamuni taught it. It is excellent because it is truth regardless of its origin. Religiously speaking, it does make a difference. Externally Hinayana and Mahayana appear to be different but in reality they are essentially one and the same. If Śākyamuni taught the former, it contains the possibility of the latter doctrine, no matter what may have been its origin, and both are to be regarded as Buddhism. For example, Tendai, Kegon, and Shingon may not have been taught in India, but they are nevertheless Buddhism." From the standpoint of fact, he thinks that both doctrines came from Śākyamuni, the Hinayana passing from mouth to mouth, the Mahayana from heart to heart. From the standpoint of time, Hinayana suited Śākyamuni's time, but in the days of Asvaghosha and Nāgārjuna, it could not compete with Brahmanism, so the Mahayana doctrine became prosperous. From the standpoint of place, the Hinayana was suited to the busy, hot Southern districts, and the Mahayana

soon died out, but was preserved in the Northern parts till discovered by Nāgārjuna.

He briefly reviews the ideas which Dr Anezaki has presented in his *Historical Discussion of Buddhist Sutras*. Dr Anezaki agrees with Chūki Tominaga that Mahayana cannot be historically related to Śākyamuni. He says that his discussion of this problem is modern and scientific, pointing out the unscientific and unhistorical nature of Indian thought and methods, including those of Buddhism.

Dr Murakami's discussions of Buddhist principles in the second volume of his great work on the *Unity of Buddhism* is a most interesting and helpful discussion. He makes it living and vital. In the *Critical Discussion of the Buddhist Origin of Mahayana Doctrine*, he says, "That Mahayana is the teaching of Śākyamuni is fixed by doctrine and not by history. Doctrine is not a time distinction. It cannot be fixed by history and some would go so far as to hold that even if it were proved historically, such a proof must be rejected. In the early days of Meiji, men feared that Buddhism would fall with the old 'Sumerian' explanation of the Universe, but it did not. So even if Mahayana Doctrine cannot be proved to be historically related to Śākyamuni, it is without doubt doctrinally related to him," and he proceeds to show how the problem arose in the controversy after the death of Śākyamuni.

Dr Murakami's conclusion is idealistic and metaphysical. Mahayana is above explanation. It was the teaching of Buddha, but with the exception of Zen, it is not to be traced historically to Śākyamuni. Nevertheless, it is doctrinally related to Buddha. The method of receiving Mahayana canon is not known. Even when men say it is handed down secretly, that is a guess. The teaching is Buddhistic, but not that of the historical Buddha.

Dr Bunyiu Nanjo is not critical.¹ He represents the

¹ *A Short History of the Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects.*

life of Śākyamuni after the manner of the Tendai sect. Immediately after his enlightenment, the first teaching of the great teacher was the *Avatamsaka Sutra* (*Kegon sutra*). Then followed all the teaching of Hinayana, Quasi-Mahayana and Mahayana according to the Tendai idea of the five periods. Like Dr Maeda and Dr Murakami, he traces the historical changes after the death of Śākyamuni down to the days when, to use his own words, "The doctrine of Mahayana became flourishing owing to the influence of the two teachers, Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu. Therefore every succeeding generation has looked up to them with deep reverence."

A striking presentation of the relation of Śākyamuni to Mahayana doctrine is given by Dr Teitaro Suzuki,¹ but it fails to convince because of the lack of historical criticism of the sutras. He argues that "the intensely human interest of Northern Buddhists centered in the personality of their master. Whatever his teachings, they were vital only so far as they were considered in connection with the master himself. —They wished to warm up the Buddhist teaching with the fire of his personality. This does not mean that they rejected the logic of the Fourfold-Noble-Truth, and the thought of the impermanence of all things, but that objective truth . . . had to be interpreted according to subjective truth which now imperatively demanded recognition in the hearts of Buddhists . . . They were simply impelled to go their way which was illumined by their inner spiritual light. The light . . . told them that the Buddha and the Dharma (scripture) were one and the same thing, and could not be comprehended apart from the Buddha, and that the Dharma was in fact the Buddha himself . . . The growth of Mahayana Buddhism was thus an inevitable event. If the Buddhism of the Hinayanists is the literal translation of Buddha's teaching in their logical and objective form, the Buddhism of the Mahayanists must

¹ *The Eastern Buddhist*, July 1921.

be said to be the spiritual interpretation of the same in vital relation to the Buddhahood of the master himself."

Dr Suzuki assumed that "it was not in their (Mahayanists) character to remain so impersonal, so logical, so scientific, and so calmly rational." But as a matter of fact, is there anything in religious literature more impersonal than a description of the Buddhist Absolute in the writings of Nāgārjuna? Dr Suzuki, however, finds a parallelism in Christianity; "There are two main currents of thought in Christianity; one is Johannine, and the other is Pauline, and we can say that most Christians are followers of the Pauline, for it was Paul who succeeded in deifying Christ, in religiously interpreting the crucifixion, and in promulgating the theory of salvation by faith. Paul concentrated his attention on Christ himself rather than on his teaching independently." This argument of Dr Suzuki makes a strong appeal. Without doubt the Law-Body was deified, but that was a natural reaction toward the three-body doctrine of later Hinduism, and does not require any deep spiritual meaning to explain it. The similarity to Pauline doctrine is perhaps not so close as to Johannine doctrine, which under its Greek form of expression bears a much more striking resemblance to that of Modern Buddhism.

Dr Murakami, Dr Maeda, Dr Nanjo, and others agree that after Śākyamuni's death, there was development in Buddhist doctrine. For one hundred years during the period of the five great patriarchs of whom Kāśyapa and Ānanda were first, the followers of Buddhism commanded great respect, and were at peace with themselves and apparently with Brahmanism. This is in harmony with a report of conditions in India in the fourth century received from Megasthenes, who, according to Monier Williams,¹ was the official representative of Slenkos Niketor, the successor of Alexander the Great, at the Indian Court at Magadha. He describes Bud-

¹ *Hinduism*, p. 4, 73.

dhism and Brahmanism existing side by side without any special controversy or opposition. This probably throws light on the Japanese account that when the Buddhist Elders met at Magadha to hear the teachings of Śākyamuni, a great assembly who were not recognised as Buddhists met outside and were disappointed not to be admitted. One hundred years later, at Vaisali, the great controversy which is so well described by Dr Rhys Davids,¹ took place between orthodox followers of Śākyamuni and the liberal group who seem to have represented a reaction toward Brahmanism were in the majority under an able leader, Mahā-Deva. The controversy, which at first favoured orthodoxy, was decided by King Aśoka in favour of the pure liberal Brahmanist interpretation of reality, and the orthodox priests returned to Kashmir defeated and the liberal school became the state religion of Magadha. These two groups known as the Great Council,² and the Elders³ were broken up into nine and eleven schools, respectively. According to Chinese and Thibetan records, there were only eighteen. The former emphasised the problem of reality as opposed to common sense, while the latter were orthodox followers of Śākyamuni, basing their doctrines on the four truths and the law of Causation. During the centuries which followed, the two types intermingled and no doubt prepared the way for Mahayana doctrine. This may be made clear by the following table (p. 36) which only partially represents the various influences at work.

These facts make it fairly clear that a reaction towards Brahmanism had set in and account for the idealistic and metaphysical elements which crept into Hinayana Sutras, which were first recited and later written. This method made it not only possible but natural that ideas from Brahmanism should be scattered through the recognised Hinayana scrip-

¹ *Buddhism*, Chap. IX.

² Mahāsaṃghikas in Sanskrit, Daishubu in Japanese.

³ Sthāviras in Sanskrit, Jozabu in Japanese.

ŚĀKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Problem of Reality vs common sense.

Problem of Suffering

The Great Assembly
(Mahā-Saṃghika)
The past and future have
no reality "Everything
is as vain as a dream."

The Second Synod, 443 B.C.

The Elders
(Sthavira)

The world of things gov-
erned by Causation of
work is real and fleet-
ing. The self is not
real, etc.

After the Third Synod, 246 B.C.

Many sects of which two are
interesting to Japan

Many sects of which is
interesting to Japan,
Sarvāstivāda (Sābataḥ)

Ekanyāharika (Issetsu)
Past, present, both death
and Nirvāṇa are mere names.

Lokottaravādinā
(Setsushusebu)
All things including law
itself are unreal. They
distinguished between the
temporary and the reality
of the supramundane.

All things
are real, the
self is not.

About 100 B.C., attempts at Reconciliation.
An Age of Great Intermingling of Ideas.

Sautrāntika (Kyōryōbu)
Atomic Theory. Mind seeds,
which remain after death.

Mahāsāsaka (Shuchibu)
Vedas added to Buddhist
Sūtras. Nine divisions
of Mind. (Asaṃga)

An Age of Great Spiritual Enlightenment
Revival of Yoga Mysticism.

Abhidharma-Kosa-
Sāstra Sect known as
The Kusha sect in Japan.
The Sāstra first composed by
Vasubandhu, who lived not
earlier than 2nd Century and
probably much later.

Satyā-Siddhi-Sāstra Sect
(Jōjitsu Sect)
Founder-Harivarman, 3rd century A.D.
"Emptiness of Self and things,"
Freedom of Various forms of
Meditation.

Hosso Sect
Based on Sāstras which belonged
to Yoga Mysticism and expounded
by Asaṃga and his brother. Carried
to China by Genjo (Hsüan-Chuang)
in seventh century.

San-Ron Sect,
Based on three Sāstras. Two of which
are ascribed to Nāgārjuna who is de-
scribed as a Saint of Yoga. Introduced
to China first in the 4th century by
Kumārajīva.

tures, thus preparing the way for point of contact with Mahayana doctrine on the one hand, but destroying the value of Hinayana sutras as proof of the origin of Mahayana. This fact was recognised by Dr Murakami when he said "Agamas which are regarded as the texts of Hinayana were not compiled into a written form until some centuries passed after the death of Śākyamuni, and naturally there are in them some elements which cannot be considered primitive."¹

In attempting to gather together the results of this study, we will distinguish between conclusions and impressions. In the first place, there is little doubt that most Japanese Buddhists, though they may differ in their opinions as to the Śākyamuni origin of Mahayana, agree in general that the teaching came from the Iron Tower, the Dragon's Palace, the Tushita Heaven, or some other similar place in Northern India, and that the four great patriarchs of the teaching were Aśvaghosha, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu. We may also conclude that the historical connection between these men and Buddhism in China is not very clear until the seventh century, when famous Chinese travellers like Hsüan-Chuang (Genjo Daishi), became the life of Buddhism in China.

It is open to doubt whether Aśvaghosha or Nāgārjuna ever were directly connected with Mahayana Buddhism in India. True, Dr Nanjo says, "Six centuries after Buddha Aśvaghosha composed *The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*."² If so, it was the first book of Mahayana doctrine, and Dr Maeda was justified in concluding on this assumption that Mahayana sutras existed before Aśvaghosha.³ But if it was the first, why was it one of the later books to be translated into Chinese? If it were translated into Chinese as late as the beginning of the eighth century, where is the original? There is a vague tradition that it existed in the

¹ See *The Eastern Buddhist*, July 1921.

² *Mahāyāna-Sādhhotpada-Sāstra*. Japanese, *Daigo Kishinron*.

³ See Appendix to *Daigo Bukkyo Shiron*.

ninth century, but as the book was produced in China in eighth and ascribed to Aśvaghosha in order to give it prestige, it is not an unnatural conclusion that it was not the work of Aśvaghosha. In the connection, Dr Murakami writes:¹—"I have strong grounds to believe that *The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*, which is traditionally ascribed to Aśvaghosha, and which is the only book of his expounding his philosophical view of Mahayana Buddhism, is not his, but a Chinese product, presumably trying to systematise the two Mahayana schools of Nāgārjuna and Asaṃga. The work is most ingeniously executed, being one of the best Mahayana treatises ever written in China...and it profoundly influenced the course of historical development of Buddhism in the Far East."

The impression that Nāgārjuna's relation to Mahayana is posthumous is based upon two facts: first, his teaching belongs to the Yoga system and has not only no connection with Hinayana Buddhism, but his writings are rather antagonistic to it. In the second place, no historical reliability can be given to the loose records of transmission from India to China. For example, Dr Nanjo says,² Nāgārjuna saw Vajrasattva in the Iron Tower in South India, and received the secret doctrine from him...Nāgārjuna transmitted it to his disciple Nāgābodhi, who transmitted it to Vajrabodhi. In 720 A.D. Vajrabodhi, bringing his disciple Amoghavajra, arrived in the capital of China, etc. This illustrates the method of transmission from the second or third century at best to the eighth century. It is not much wonder that some modern scholars in Japan should think there must be two Nāgārjunas. Similar doubts are connected with Asaṃga.

He³ was probably a Buddhist of the Hinayana school at

¹ See *Eastern Buddhist*, 1921.

² See *A Short History of the Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects*, p. 29.

³ See Eitel's *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*, p. 18; Dr Nanjo's *History*, Chapter IV.

one time but later became a disciple of Nāgārjuna, and founded what is known as the Yogācāra School. His leading work, *Yogācāra-Bhūmī-Śāstra* (*Yugashijiron*), he claimed to have received from Maitreya in the Tushita Heaven. As founder of the Yogācāra sect, and a convert from original Buddhism, he regarded his new system as the Great Vehicle as compared with his former doctrine. The Great Vehicle for him was great because it was so all-inclusive. Dr Rhys Davids makes this clear when he says of him and his work,¹ "As in India before the rise of Buddhism, the degrading worship of Siva and his dusky bride had been incorporated into Brahmanism from the wild and savage devil-worship of the dark non-Aryan tribes; so as pure Buddhism died away in the north, the Tantra system, a mixture of magic and witchcraft and Siva-worship, was incorporated into the corrupted Buddhism. The founder of this system seems to have been Asaṅga, an influential monk who lived and wrote the first text-book of the creed, the *Yogācāra-Bhūmī-Śāstra*, during the fifth century of our era He managed with great dexterity to reconcile the two opposing systems by placing a number of Saivite gods or devils, both male and female, in the inferior heavens of the then prevalent Buddhism; . . . He thus made it possible for the half-converted and rude tribes to remain Buddhists while they brought offerings and even bloody offerings, to these more congenial shrines; and while their practical belief had no relation at all to the Truths or the Noble Eightfold Path, but busied itself almost wholly with obtaining magic powers (*Siddhi*), by means of magic phrases (*Dhāraṇi*) and magic circles (*Maṇḍala*). Asaṅga's happy idea bore but too ample fruit. In his own country and Nepal, the new wine, sweet and luscious to the taste of savages, completely disqualified them from enjoying any purer drink, and now in both countries

¹ *Buddhism* by Dr. T. H. Rhys Davids, 208.

Saivism is supreme, and Buddhism is even nominally extinct, except in some outlying districts of Nepal." Equally unpromising is the criticism of Burnouf who found the system of Asaṅga to be both absurd and immoral. He said:¹— "The pen refuses to transcribe doctrines as miserable in respect of form, as they are odious and degrading in respect of meaning." In the light of such authority, our amateur impressions begin to take on the form of conclusions.

The facts about Vasubandhu are not so clear. He was the younger brother of Asaṅga. Dr Maeda² represents him as an earnest Buddhist, at first opposed to the Great Vehicle, which he denied was Buddhism. It was probably at this time that he wrote the *Abhidharma-Kośa-Śāstra* (*Kusha Ron*), which is one of the most orthodox of Hinayana works introduced to Japan. Later he wrote many Mahayana books, among them a commentary on the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka*, thus indicating his conversion to the ideas of Asaṅga. These facts make it clear that the "Great Vehicle" for those men was the Yogācāra system. We are now in a position to suggest a reason why Nāgārjuna is made the centre of Mahayana Buddhism, although there is reason to doubt whether he was a Buddhist at all or not. He is so regarded because Asaṅga was his disciple.³ It becomes more and more evident that the dominant element in the "Great Vehicle" was thus derived through these men from the Yoga System. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that in India it was the Yogācāra system.

Many reasons tend to strengthen this opinion. The *Avatamsaka-Sūtra* (*Kegonkyo*)⁴ was received by Nāgārjuna from the Dragon's Palace. It is described as having various

¹ Quoted by Dr. Rhys Davids. Ibid. 208.

² *Daijo Bukkyo Shiron*, p. 220.

³ Eitel's *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*, p. 195.

⁴ *A Short History of the Twelve Japanese Buddhist Sects*, Chapt. VI.

texts of which the "Constant text" and the "Great Text" were "kept by the power of the Dharani or 'holding' of the Great Bodhisattvas and not written down upon palm leaves." Such mystical language belongs to the Yoga system. A close study of Kern's translation of the *Saddharma-Puṇḍarīka* (*Hokke*) gives much internal evidence of the influence of Yoga upon this central sutra.

That the "Great Vehicle" was preserved not only in the Dragon's Palace, but in the Iron Pagoda, or the Tushita Heaven, is the language of the ecstatic imagination of Yoga mysticism. They were probably not intended as a description of fact, and we are under the necessity of explaining such symbolism by the spiritual state of the writer's mind. Vajrasattva, from whom Nāgārjuna, another believer in Yoga, received the secret teachings of the Shingon sect in the Iron Tower, was a mystic saint of the Yogācāra school. One of them was ordered by the Chinese emperor to translate the "Law of Reading and Reciting the Yoga Doctrine." That Nāgārjuna is thus related to it is based upon the identity of this teaching of his disciples with the so-called Mahayana doctrine, and not because he himself was actually conscious of being a Buddhist.

Kobo Daishi, the founder of the Shingon sect in Japan, received these doctrines from a believer in the Yogācāra school named Keikwa, who said,¹ "The Blessed One gave the secret key of truth to Vajrasattva who transmitted it to Nāgārjuna, and so on down to myself. Now because you are a man worthy to receive the doctrine, I pass it on to you. Propagate it in your country." In China, the Shingon sect was known as a Yoga school, but when Kobo Daishi introduced it to Japan, he absorbed it in somewhat the same way as he tried to absorb Shinto.

The text-book of Asaṅga, known as the *Yogācāra-Bhūmi*

¹ Ibid., Chapter VIII.

was introduced by Hsüan-Chuang into China where it greatly influenced Buddhist circles. Fugen, Samanta-Bhadra,¹ another prominent Mahayana saint, was also one of the four great teachers of the Yogācāra school. All of this indicates that this school was one of the most dominant influences in the reconstruction of Northern Buddhism.

The Yoga practise of casting off the gross earthly body, and by will-power forcing the ethical body through the pores of the skin in order to free it for a time from its bondage to matter, would explain the mystical reference as to the origin of Mahayana doctrine. The Tushita Heaven and all other references to heaven can be very reasonably explained as ecstatic states in which, lost in mystic meditation, these men were transported in thought, and inspired by the mystical doctrine of the Yoga system. These are just so many ways of describing in allegorical language, mystical places of ecstatic contemplation in which these men built their "castles in the air." This is made clear by the close relation which exists between the four Brahman² heavens and the various states of mystical liberation which are largely liberations of thought. Eitel describes these heavens as moral freedom from vice, mental liberation through several intellectual acts in which man recognises knowledge to be unlimited, and absolute non-existence to be real; or a man enters a state of mind which is neither conscious nor unconscious, and realises the possibility of obtaining final extinction of both sensation and consciousness. These mental conditions correspond to several heavens or states of mystic being. It was even thought that mind, by mystic liberation, was able to dwell in different localities corresponding to various intellectual operations.

This identification of the Yoga heaven with an intellectual state describes the Yoga meditation by which the founders of Mahayana Buddhism who were saints in either Yoga or the

¹ Eitel, p. 141.

² See Eitel's *Handbook*, 201-174. Kern's *Saddharma-Pundarika*, p. 182, 81.

Yogācāra sect, were able to rise into a state of mind which they described as heaven, so that when Mahayana doctrine is described as coming from heaven, the Dragon Palace or the Iron Tower, as a result of an ecstatic condition of thought, it is just Yoga doctrine, and probably was at first so recognised.

Other resemblances between Yoga philosophy and Mahayana doctrine may be noted. Both alike aimed at assisting the human soul into direct union with the universal soul. The methods of meditation which aim at this union by clearing the mind of all obstacles and passions, and by adopting certain mechanical practices of breathing and sitting, are similar. For example, Eshin Sodzu, the Dante of Japan, was in the habit of entering a form of "water meditation" until the room seemed filled with clear water. This was a sort of transcendent, ecstatic condition, and seemed to imply an ethereal condition resembling the idea of the "Ka" in Egyptian mythology.

The mystical character of the sacred word "Om" used in the Shingon sect, is identical with the same character in the Yoga school of Hindu philosophy where it was quite customary to have "seed words," mystical words or letters which stand for some reality or person. The "Om" was originally an abbreviation of "A-U-M," which are three letters descriptive of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva. In Yoga, as in Mahayana, the repetition of "Om" carries with it a peculiar merit for the believer. In Shingon it is also customary to speak of the unborn Sanskrit letter "A." In Hinduism, the letter "A" stands for the unborn Brahma. Japanese scholars explained it as the first sound. In Japan it is applied to Absolute Reality, the unborn Buddha; the reality described is the same for both Brahmanism and Mahayana doctrine. This is another evidence of the influence of Yoga mysticism on Mahayana doctrine. All of these facts point to the conclusion that in India the so-called "Great

Vehicle" was either identical with Yoga mysticism or dominated by the Yogācāra movement.

The facts brought out in *The Unity of Buddhism* by Dr Murakami cannot be overlooked. Dr Murakami has discussed this question on a very scholarly manner and from his facts it is evident that there is a golden thread of connection between Mahayana and the men of The Great Assembly. But before the birth of Mahayana doctrine proper, there seems to have been a very strong reaction toward Brahmanism and such an intermingling of liberal ideas that the purer teaching of Hinayana had difficulty in maintaining its identity. It was at such a period that Nāgārjuna became the "Buddha without his characteristic Marks" and influenced the whole future of Buddhist development. He appears to have been a wonderful critic, who, in two of the three Śāstras on which the San Ron Sect is based, spares neither the Mahayana nor the Hinayana. The Hosso Sect, which is called "The Sect, or School that studies the nature of Dharma or things, i. e. the Yoga School"¹ was greatly influenced by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, two brothers who were also disciples of Nāgārjuna.

If these facts are true it is not strange that Buddhism as a separate force practically died out in India. No doubt many of the terms used by Buddhists such as "Buddha," the Enlightened, and "Nirvana" would persist especially in the mystical school of Yoga. Whatever the actual historical order may have been, the purer metaphysical ideas of Nāgārjuna, the Yoga mystic, influenced many other scholars and from time to time his writings were introduced into China. But from the beginning of the sixth century, China produced some great priests who are really responsible for assimilating these Yoga ideas and incorporating them into the Buddhism of China. This is especially true from the seventh century

¹ See Dr Nanjo's *Short History of the twelve Buddhist Sects*.

when Hsüan Chuaug (Genjo Daishi) after several years in India (629-645) returned bringing many of their better writings which he immediately began to pour into the Buddhism of China. The result of his and other similar influences was to establish the Avatamsaka (Kegon) sect and the Dharma-Lakshana sect (Hosso); the Mantra (Shingon) teachings were introduced and Mahayana Buddhism had its Golden Age in both China and Japan during the three centuries which followed.

Unfortunately, for Buddhism in China, the so-called "Great Vehicle" was too great in the sense in which Asaṅga apparently thought of it. It was the broad way that introduced the whole "Tantra system" to China. In the ninth century this led to a reaction against it and an awakening of the more ethical way of Confucius which became the centre of the scholarship of the Sung and Ming eras. It was during the early years of this period that the *Awakening of Faith in Mahayana* was probably produced. In this work, the "Great Vehicle" is metaphysical not unlike Indian and Greek philosophy.

Buddhism has had a similar history in Japan. By the end of the tenth century its practices were such that it is difficult to say what might have occurred had not Honen Shonin, Shinran Shonin, and especially Nichiren, arisen. But these reformers were unable to work any permanent ethical reform. As in China, Buddhism was rejected in favour of the Sung and Ming scholarship, which Zen priests had first introduced to Japan. The vital power of the system gradually degenerated till the opening of the Meiji era.

If this historical review, including Dr Rhys Davids' accounts of Asaṅga and the Tantra system in Northern India be true, then Mahayana in the higher sense in which it is interpreted in Japan is of comparatively modern origin. Without doubt, it has received a modern stimulus and is attempting the laudable task of purifying Buddhism from

many of its most objectionable superstitions and practices.

The rather striking similarity between the Shingon sect of Japan and Gnosticism was pointed out by the late Professor Arthur Lloyd.¹ This resemblance is not unnatural in view of the striking similarity between Indian and Greek philosophy. Whether it is possible to trace any historical connection between them, many of their metaphysical ideas are essentially the same. It is possible that Greek philosophy and culture did influence India at one time. The fact that the Kushu Kings who overran Northern India during the first three centuries of the Christian era, used the Greek alphabet to express Indian royal titles, and Greek forms to represent Buddhist traditions in the Gandara sculpture suggests the possibility that the age when Mahayana doctrine was supposed to have been born was very greatly influenced by Greek culture. Tradition says that Aśvaghosha visited Persia, and if so, as a scholarly Indian missionary he would no doubt be interested in all the scholarship of his day, and would probably be greatly influenced by the ideals of Greek and Persian scholars. There is considerable similarity between the doctrine of Śakyamuni and Heraclitus, the doctrine of the Hosso sect and Parmenides, and between Mahayana philosophy and that of Plato. It presents an absolute as a supramundane ideal world of which the present world of nature is a shadow, a product of darkness. It is nevertheless created by the ideal world which cannot but be active. Matter is unreal and evil, and yet it is opposed to ideal reality. The emanations from the ideal Buddha intended to save the world, resemble the Gnostic heresies and Neo-Platonism. Allowing for the difference in language, the resemblance between Zen learning and Neo-Platonism is so great that it is no exaggeration to say they are essentially the same. This identity may be accounted for by tracing an earlier connection between

¹ Ibid., page 61.

Brahmanism and the pre-Socratics. But it is also true that when Mahayana Buddhism originated, Greek culture and philosophy were moving eastward, influencing the thought life of the whole world. This movement of thought from the west made it possible for Greek culture to make some contribution to the development of Indian thought. It also accounts for the striking similarities between Mediaeval Christian and Buddhist forms, and for the fact that Śākyamuni, the sage of India, was placed in the calendar of Christian saints at St. Josaphat (Rhys Davids, 196).

What then is the origin of the Pure-Land sects and the Bodhisattva of Buddhism! A comparative study of Yoga mysticism, Gnostic heresies, Greek philosophy, Persian dualism, reveals a remarkable identity of thought even though their historical connection cannot be directly traced. All of them took a dualistic attitude toward reality; the Absolute or God was set over against this evil world of gross matter from which all men strove for emancipation and obtained it by mystical enlightenment and direct mystical union with a mediator between the Absolute and gross existence. In India and Europe the idea was the same, even though their historical connection is unknown. The idea of the Bodhisattva Amida thus resembles the Gnostic Eons. This idea probably arose from the worship of the setting sun, because Amida, "the Buddha of Measureless Life and Light," is identified with the Being who dwells in the Western Pure Land. The same idea was held by the Greeks when they spoke of the Isles of the Blest, "far out in the glorious west." You remember Tennyson made Ulysses at the end of life say,

"For my purpose hold,
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew."

ROBERT CORNELL ARMSTRONG