



China Perspectives

CHINESE BUDDHISM AND TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Fang Litian



Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture

Since the first century, when Buddhism entered China, this foreign religion has influenced and been influenced in turn by traditional Chinese culture, and eventually became an important part of it. That is one of the great historical themes not only for China but also for East Asia.

This book explores the elements of Buddhism, including its classics, doctrines, system, and rituals, to reveal the basic connotation of Buddhism as a cultural entity. Regarding the development of Buddhism in China, it traces the spread in chronological order, from the introduction in the Han Dynasties (202 BC–220 AD), to the prosperity in the Sixteen Kingdoms (ca. 304–439 AD), and then to the decline since the Five Dynasties (907–ca. 960 AD). It is noteworthy that the Buddhist schools in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589 AD) and the Buddhist sects in the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581–907 AD) contributed to the sinicization of Buddhism. This book also deals with the interesting question of the similarities and differences between Chinese Buddhism and Indian Buddhism, to examine the specific characteristics of the former in terms of thought and culture. In the last chapter, the external influence of Chinese Buddhism in East Asia is studied.

Scholars and students in Buddhism and Chinese culture studies, especially those in Buddhist countries, will benefit from the book. Also, it will appeal to readers interested in religion, Chinese culture, and ancient Chinese history.

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1 The creation, evolution, and dissemination of Indian Buddhism

Among the earliest religions in the world, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are known as the world's three major religions. Having been popular in Asia for a long time, Buddhism was introduced to Europe, America, Africa, and Oceania at the end of the nineteenth century. Now it has approximately 330 million followers.

Shakyamuni's creation of Buddhism and its early development

1 The historical background of Shakyamuni's creation of Buddhism

It was said that from about the sixth century BC to the fifth century BC, Shakyamuni, the son of King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu (now southern Nepal) in ancient northern India, founded Buddhism. The era in which Shakyamuni lived and created Buddhism was characterized by social turbulence, sharp ethnic conflicts, and class contradictions. It was also an era when society was in turmoil, old and new ideas collided, and religious life prevailed.

From 2000 BC to 1000 BC, ancient Aryans primarily living in Central Asia settled in the Ganges Valley in India from the east. They oppressed and exploited the indigenous inhabitants, the majority of whom became slaves. From the sixth century BC to the fifth century BC, the slavery economy of India grew rapidly. As a result, the handicraft industry was separated from agriculture, the commodity economy was developed, and big cities, such as Rajagriha, Varanasi, and Sravasti, came into being. According to the records of Buddhist scriptures, 16 city-centered powers were established along the upstream to downstream of the Ganges Valley (in areas of central India). The most powerful states were Magadha, located on the southern bank of the Ganges Valley, and Kosala, on the northwest bank. Kapilavastu was a small aristocratic republic in the northeast and was seized by Virudhaka, king of Kosala, due to frequent attacks and annexation between countries in Shakyamuni's later years.

At that time, the caste system dominated in the states of India. The word "caste", also referred to as "clan name", is used to translate the Sanskrit word "Varna". Its original meaning was "color" or "skin". Because "Aryans" are white-skinned

people while aboriginals are black-skinned people, this system was used by Aryans to distinguish themselves ethnically from the conquered indigenous people according to two Varnas (castes): Arya and Dassa. In social and political life, Arya, as a dominant caste, ruled the Dassa. As two opposite classes, each caste had its own hereditary occupations and members of these classes were not permitted to intermarry. Subsequently, for class division and the development of labor division, Arya developed three castes: Brahman, Kshatriya, and Vaisya. With the addition of Dassa – the fourth caste, Sudra – there are four castes, which means the four social levels: the highest class, the most noble and prominent one, was Brahman, which was a class of priests who considered themselves representatives of “Brahma” (God) and administered religious rites. At that time, decisions of state affairs and even family life were made by holding certain religious ceremonies, which were presided over by Brahmans. Otherwise, these decisions were illegal. Therefore, Brahmans made up the theocracy, presided over sacrifices, and were the rulers of people’s spiritual life. The next caste was Ksatriyas – namely, warriors – who administered political and military affairs. They seized political and military power, and were secular rulers of ancient India. Monks and priests were the flamen nobilities and warriors were military nobilities. These two classes were noble slave-owner classes. The third caste was Vaisyas, composed of farmers, herdsmen, artisans, and merchants. The majority of them belonged to the exploited class, having to pay taxes and do *corvée*. And the fourth caste was Sudras, composed of slaves, laborers, and servants. They were obligated to farm the land and graze livestock for their owners, without any rights, and they were severely oppressed and exploited. The four castes were separated by a clear line of distinction and differed greatly in social status, rights, obligations, duties, and lifestyles, and customs were passed from generation to generation.

In the era when Sakyamuni lived, with the strengthening of the state apparatus, Ksatriyas became more and more powerful politically and militarily. Increasingly dissatisfied with the privileges of Brahmans, they asked for expansion of their rights and supported various non-Brahman ideas. Thanks to the development of handicrafts, booming commerce, and accumulation of wealth, business owners desired to improve their social status and made a strong demand for political power. Meanwhile, the slaves fought against the slave owners by fleeing, destroying water conservancy projects, and murdering slave owners. The emergence and growth of these social powers weakened Brahmans’ control over politics, culture, religion, and ideology. Reflected in the ideological domain, the complicated political struggle also promoted ideas representing various interests of all classes. Problems with society and human beings produced 100 schools of thought. According to Buddhist scriptures, there were 96 kinds of ideologies or religious sects in addition to Buddhism. Generally speaking, there were two major ideological trends: one was the school of orthodox Brahmanist thought, and the other was the innovative thought of Sramanas (oblates).

As the dominant religion then, Brahmanism enshrined Vedas as a book from heaven and worshiped Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as three major gods respectively symbolizing the “creation”, “protection”, and “destruction” of the universe.

Brahmanism also held three guiding principles: God-inspired Vedas, almighty sacrificial ritual, and Supreme Brahman. It also advocated that the whole universe was a unity in which the subjective and objective, the self and the world, the souls of the individuals and the universe were integrated. It noted that the world people knew had no inherent entity that belonged to the “divined self” – Brahma, the eternal existence, and the human soul were just one part of such existence. Brahmanism claimed that the four castes were all borne by Brahma: Brahmans derived from his mouth, Ksatriyas from his shoulders, Vaisyas from his navel, and Sudras from his feet. Thus, the social standing of the four castes, noble or humble, was decided according to this. Besides, Brahmanism boasted of superstitious ideas, such as the chain of cause and effect, the eternal cycle of birth and death, the immortality of the soul, and the form of reincarnation depending on whether one acted in accordance with the teachings of Brahmanism. Therefore, a devoted practitioner of Brahmanism would be reincarnated to heaven after death; otherwise, he or she would be turned into a beast and go to hell. It also stressed that only the first three castes were entitled to believe in religion, to hold the rites to offer sacrifices to ghosts and God, and to be reincarnated to heaven after death. Sudras were deprived of the right to conduct a religious ceremony, let alone ascend to God after death. In other words, Sudras could find no way out socially or religiously.

Among the anti-Brahmanic schools, the well-known school of Jainism believed in the relations of cause and effect, soul liberation, asceticism, and ethics about purity and contamination. According to this sect, people’s present life was determined by “karma” (thought, speech, and behavior) in the previous life. Therefore, only by religious practice could the soul be liberated. Equal to its attached body, the soul was an omnipresent, semi-physical entity growing as the volume grows. People must purify themselves morally for the liberation of their soul. As stains on morality were caused by impure fine materials entering into the soul, it was necessary to block their entry to obtain moral purity and enable the soul to enter Nirvana and thus get liberated. To this end, Jainism, while opposing offering sacrifice, claimed strictly observation of disciplines and advocated the five precepts: refraining from killing, cheating, stealing, committing adultery, and accumulating private property. In addition, it encouraged going hungry, lying on a bed of nails, exposing oneself to the sun and fire, throwing oneself into rocks, pulling one’s hair, smoking their nose, and other ascetic practices regarded as ways to realize liberation. For another example, Lokayatika, a famous materialistic school, denied the existence of Brahma. Instead, it believed that both humankind and the world were composed of four major elements: earth, water, fire, and wind, which would decompose and vanish after death, thereby denying the existence of an afterlife where happiness could be pursued. It was in favor of carnal desires and caste equality while condemning reincarnation, metempsychosis, sacrificial rites, and asceticism. This theory was the most fierce criticism and opposition against Brahmanism. An “intuitionism school” considered everything from the perspective of relativism without making a decisive conclusion. For instance, they thought that there might or might not be an afterlife and retribution. That’s why the intuitionism school was described as being as intangible as the loach. However, it advocated

concentration practices to obtain true wisdom. In addition, there were three similar theories. The first was the theory of “the Seven Elements”, which held that the human body was composed of seven elements: earth, water, fire, wind, bitterness, joy, and soul (life). Once they dispersed, people died. These elements were not created by something else nor did they create anything else. Elements are eternal. The second was fatalism, which held that everything in life was determined by fate and could not be decided by individual will. Besides, it insisted that ethics made no sense, religious practice did not work, and retribution simply didn’t exist. The last was fortuitism. According to this theory, everything in the world emerged and developed by accident. Therefore, it encouraged indulgence, which in essence was the theory of ethical skepticism and religious negativism. To sum up, by differing in viewpoints, these theories were consistent in objecting to the political and ideological domination of Brahmanism.

The foregoing is the social, political, ideological, and religious background and environment under which Shakyamuni founded Buddhism.

2 *Shakyamuni’s creation of Buddhism and its early development*

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, had his given name, Siddharta, and his family name, Gotama. As he belonged to the Sakya clan, he was also called Shakyamuni. “Muni” means jewel in Sanskrit and is often compared to a saint. Therefore, Shakyamuni is a title of respect, meaning a sage of the Sakya clan. Having attained enlightenment, Shakyamuni is also called “Fo” in Chinese. “Fo” is the abbreviation for “Fotuo”, which is used to translate the word “Buddha”. Buddha means an enlightened person. The term “Buddha” has existed in India since the earliest times, but Buddhism attributes the three additional connotations to the term. They are as follows: (1) enlightenment; (2) perfect enlightenment; (3) supreme or paramount enlightenment. That means Buddha’s wisdom and achievement have reached the highest and the most perfect sphere in enlightening both oneself and others, and the behavior of enlightening both oneself and others has reached an incomparable degree.

We cannot figure out the exact date of Shakyamuni’s birth and death and there are different records in various Buddhist classics. It is generally accepted that he lived during 565 BC–486 BC, and was a contemporary of Confucius in the Spring and Autumn Period of China. As mentioned before, Shakyamuni was the son of King Suddhodana of Kapilavastu. It was said that after seven days of his birth, his mother, Queen Mahamaya, passed away, and his aunt Pajapati became the new queen and brought up the little prince. Decent and intelligent as Shakyamuni was, his father, Suddhodana, had great expectations of him. At that time, confronted with two great powers of Magadha and Kosala and threatened severely by the latter, Kapilavastu was in a tough and dangerous situation. Therefore, King Suddhodana hoped that his son would succeed to the throne and free Kapilavastu from the invasion of the neighboring states. So he cultivated his son strictly in a comprehensive way, expecting him to become the well-renowned Wheel-Turning King – namely,

a universal ruler who can unify the whole world. Thanks to his father's care, Shakyamuni not only learned literature and arithmetic from Brahman scholars but also studied war and martial arts with warriors, becoming a man with broad knowledge and profound thought. So he was elected as the "prince". However, contrary to his father's expectation (being the "Wheel-Turning King"), Shakyamuni was devoted to academic achievements instead of becoming a political ruler. Eventually, after he renounced the family for study and practice, he created Buddhism by pioneering a unique system of doctrine.

The reason Shakyamuni chose to become a monk was also explained in Buddhist scriptures. It was said that at the age of 14, while going out, Shakyamuni observed that an exhausted farmer, though sweating and panting, was ploughing under the scorching sun. The cattle, with ropes around their necks, were being flogged and wounded and were bleeding. Insects from the field were pecked by the flying birds. However, the farmer did not take into account of the value of the animals' lives. Suddenly, Shakyamuni awakened to the cruelty of the world and the misery of life. Later, he witnessed weak and ugly old people, the moaning and suffering sick, and the stiff bodies of the dead. Being unhappy, disgusted, and fearful, he felt the pain and misery suffered by human beings, as well as the transience and impermanence of life. All these things made him ponder such problems as what causes the pain of life? How can the world be delivered from suffering? The knowledge he had acquired could not solve these problems. Then the prince was deeply anxious and sad. Afterwards, he met a monk from whom he learned that one could be freed from illness and death by renouncing the world and practicing according to a religious doctrine. Then the idea of becoming a monk came to his mind, which was rejected by his father. To stop his son, when Shakyamuni was only 16 years old, his father arranged for him to marry his cousin, Princess Yaasodhara, from a neighboring state. She bore him a son named Rahula. The king also built him three magnificent palaces, named for cold, hot, and warm seasons, surrounding him with worldly pleasures. What's more, he often tried to persuade his son not to renounce the family. But all his efforts were in vain. At the age of 29 after tonsure, Shakyamuni resolutely relinquished his throne and said farewell to his wife and son. He went on into the remote mountains and wilderness to visit famous scholars and learned from them with the aim of freeing himself from the sufferings of life.

After renouncing the family, Shakyamuni looked for masters in Magadha, where he learned from the religious mentors Alara Kalama and Uddaka Rampaputta about general concepts of faith and practice, such as meditating and living by religious discipline ("Vinaya"). However, what they taught couldn't satisfy his quest, and he left to wander about. Then he made up his mind to concentrate on practicing the most rigorous austerity. In other words, he sought to get enlightened and free his life from pain by self-restraint. Thus he began to use a variety of terrible methods, such as gradually reducing to eating only one grain of wheat per day or just one meal in seven days. He ate seeds, grass, and sometimes even feces for survival. He wore clothes woven with coarse wool or made of deerskin or bark, which stimulated his skin. He removed his hair and stood still and lay on thorns,

deer manure, and cow dung. Without bathing, he looked like a withered tree. Moreover, he often went to a cemetery and slept beside the decaying corpses. Shakyamuni went through suffering and pain for six years, resulting only in fragility and weakness, but did not achieve enlightenment or unravel the mysteries of the world. Since it proved fruitless, he began to understand that austerity led to no avail: he had reached the extremes of self-restraint but it was in vain. Then he thought about another way to gain knowledge and eliminate pain. Looking back upon his youth, he remembered that once while sitting under a tree, he entered into so-called meditation, getting both physical and mental pleasure. He found that it was a way to become enlightened. He further realized that sitting meditation required a strong body, so he had to eat. Having changed his ideas, he went to take a bath in the Falgu River to clean off all the dirt from over the past six years. Then, after accepting the deer's milk offered by a herdsman, his strength was restored afresh. He then went to a nearby pipplā tree (later called the bodhi tree). Sitting down with his legs crossed and facing the east, he made great vows: "Now if I fail to attain supreme enlightenment, I would rather have my body decompose than rise from this seat". After contemplating in such a manner for seven days and seven nights (also said to be 49 days), he was improved greatly in spirit, surpassing his own sight and hearing limits beyond time and space. Calm and smooth as a mirror, he felt all his worries had disappeared and all his doubts had been clarified. All of a sudden, he awakened to the true nature of the universe and life – a system of karmic retribution and reincarnation. At the age of 35, Sakyamuni grasped truth and achieved complete enlightenment and thus was liberated. Afterward, people called him Buddha and honored him as a truly enlightened sage and wise man. Later, he was also revered by his followers as "the World's most Venerable", which means that he had enough merit and virtue to benefit the world and was unique in the world.

After Sakyamuni attained Buddhahood, he spread his theory. He vowed to awaken and save sentient beings from darkness. In the next 45 years, being constantly seeking, he never stopped preaching his doctrine. Centering on the states of Magadha, Kosala, and Vatsa, he left his footprints on both sides of the Ganges Valley. He spent 25 years living in Jata Grove Monastery in Savatthi, the capital of Kosala. From time to time, he also resided in Bamboo Grove Monastery in Rajagaha, the capital of Magadha. Traveling from east to west, from Campa to Mathura, he preached widely. Wherever he went, he seldom participated in political and worldly life. Instead, he was committed to preaching and teaching his disciples. He was good at choosing metaphors from animal husbandry, labor, production, and daily life to clarify his teachings. In addition, he attached great importance to the organization of sanghas and the building of monasteries. At the age of 80, he passed away (Nirvana in Sanskrit) in Balau trees outside the city of Kusinara in the state of Malla. After the Buddha's death, his body was cremated and the remains (Buddhist relics) were said to be partitioned by eight states and then enshrined and worshiped.

Sakyamuni's efforts to create Buddhism can be summed up in two aspects: creating and preaching his doctrine, and establishing the system of sangha life.

The gist of Sakyamuni's doctrine was to explicate the suffering of life, the cause and nirvana of suffering, and the method for nirvana of suffering, the key points of which included the following:

(I) Theory of suffering

The basic starting point of Sakyamuni's doctrine was to conclude that life was "painful". Birth, old age, sickness, and death were painful, having to be with the hated was painful, having to be separated from the loved was painful, not being able to get satisfied materially and mentally was painful, and so forth. He believed that the essence of life was "suffering", and the world in which people lived was "painful". Why was there "suffering"? Because there was "birth". Birth was the beginning of suffering, and the entity of suffering. Why was there "life"? This was determined by "karma". People had three karmas: body, mouth, and meaning, and their acts, words, and thought determined the result in the future. People cycled in the "Six Realms of Samsara" (Deva, Manusya, Asura, Tiryagyonis, Presta, and Naraka) according to the different natures of their karmas. Why did all living beings have "karma"? It was because of "avijja", which meant ignorance – ignorance of Buddhist doctrine. Why were all living beings "avijja"? Because there was greed and a desire to pursue pleasure. Therefore, to eliminate "suffering" required "anuppanna" ("ajati"); "anuppanna" required no "karma"; to eliminate "karma", people had to eradicate "avijja", and believe in Buddhist doctrine; to eradicate "avijja", people had to root out "greed" and "love". Only when people rooted out "greed", "love", and other desires could they believe in Buddhism and eliminate "avijja", then stop "karma" and "anuppanna", and finally eliminate "suffering" and get "relief".

Sakyamuni's doctrine involved the origin of humans and the world. He opposed the Brahman argument that God created humans and the world, inherited the theory of "samsara" created by the Kshatriya king and the theory of "karma" created by Brahmins, and further established Pratitya-samutpada. "Pratitya" refers to conditions and causality. He preached that "whenever there is A, there is B; whenever A rises, B rises". Everything and every phenomenon in the world interacted as conditions, cause, and effect. The phenomenon of life was a cycle interacting as both cause and effect, consisting of a series of different links from "avijja", "act" (bulesis), and even "birth", "jara-marana", and so on. Therefore, to eliminate the consequence, we must eradicate the cause. To eliminate the suffering of life, we cannot rely on sacrifice or worship of God, or blind torture of ourselves. Only when we take methods such as circumcising and abiding by moral norms to eliminate the causes that lead to suffering, such as "greed", "love", and "avijja", can we achieve our goals.

(II) Theory of relief

Eliminating the suffering of life is to achieve the goal of relief. Brahmanism believed that the ultimate goal of relief was to unify the "ego" of the individual soul

and “Brahman”, which dominated the universe – namely, the realm of “Brahma-atma-aikya”. Sakyamuni objected to this claim, and he believed that a human was made up of material and spiritual factors. Without spiritual domination and soul, human had “anatta”. He learned Jainism’s doctrine of cleanliness and stain, abandoned Jainism’s theory of the causes of stain and the proof of cleanliness, and advocated “nirvana” as the goal of relief. Nirvana was translated from Sanskrit. The original meaning of Nirvana was “extinguishment of fire”. Nirvana as discussed by Sakyamuni was to extinguish the cycle of life and death to achieve the goal of relief through practice, which was the highest ideal of Buddhism. Specifically, Nirvana meant the spiritual realm where greed, avijja, and trouble were exterminated forever, which was the relieved realm beyond life and death. According to legend, during the *sambodhi* of Sakyamuni, he claimed that he had obtained real knowledge: life and death had been broken, and a higher life had been obtained; avijja had been broken, and knowledge had arisen; darkness had been broken, and brightness had risen. His mind went beyond the world, and was relieved.

(III) *Theory of madhyamapratipad*

As for the way to achieve Nirvana, Sakyamuni clearly pointed out according to his practical experience in his first sermon that “enjoyment” and “ascetic practice” were two kinds of excessive behaviors, which were not desirable and people should not learn, but only “abandon the two sides and take the middle way”. It meant that only following the impartial madhyamapratipad was the reasonable and correct practice. He stressed that self-indulgence and self-abuse were two extremes: blind pursuit of carnal desire was despicable, self-abstinence and self-mutilation were crazy, and both were useless actions, not a normal religious life. Normal religious life should be correct meditation, learning, and action. Sakyamuni’s theory of madhyamapratipad was different from both the theory of Lokayata, which advocated enjoyment, and Jainism, which promoted ascetic practice, and was established essentially based on choosing from these two factions and combining his own experience, and would certainly carry a strong reconciling and neutral color. The dialectics of history showed that it was precisely because Sakyamuni’s theory of madhyamapratipad avoided extremes that it was adaptable and soon widely spread.

Sakyamuni was also engaged in the creation of the sangha system with great enthusiasm and energy. A sangha – namely, a Buddhist group – was a form of organization for monachal Buddhists. At that time, Brahmanism had not organized religious life, but Jainism was organized, and Buddhism also carried out organized practicing life. In addition to sanghas, there were also Buddhist believers who practiced at home, called “lay Buddhists”. At first, Sakyamuni allowed only men to be monks; later he allowed women and even prostitutes to become monks. People who followed Sakyamuni to become monks were mostly Brahmins, and there were also businessmen, hunters, barbers, robbers, murderers, and so forth, while slaves were rejected. The fact that Sudras joined Buddhist sanghas was not

mentioned in the biographies of Sakyamuni; in fact, it was also difficult for them to break the rules of slave owners and become monks. According to legend, Sakyamuni had 500 disciples, and it was also said that there were 1,250 people, among whom the famous ones were ten “chief disciples”, such as Sariputra and Maudgalyayana (Meren) from the Brahman caste, who assisted Sakyamuni in leading the disciples, with great effort. The chief disciple Kasyapa (Mahakasyapa) also belonged to the Brahman caste, and according to legend, he later became the host of the first Buddhist council. For another example, the Sakyan Ananda was Sakyamuni’s beloved follower, to whom Sakyamuni entrusted his last teaching before death. The barber of Sakyan, Upali, and Sakyamuni’s own son Rahula were also chief disciples; Subhuti, Purana, Katyayana, and Aniruddha were also the main disciples of Sakyamuni.

At first, Sakyamuni did not develop any system for sanghas. The precepts of the sangha were formed on the basis of what happened. In the event of an incident and difficulty, the monks asked Sakyamuni to rule, so his decision was considered to be the “Dharma” of the matter – namely, the precept. The precept developed by Sakyamuni involved a series of taboos on personal conduct and covered various aspects of lifestyle, including clothing, food, and residence, constituting the religious practice of believers, and was also a powerful lever to maintain the organization and order of sanghas. Among these precepts, the most important ones were the five precepts, which had to be observed by believers who practiced at home or monachal ones: abstain from killing, stealing, debauchery (abstain from prostitution), lying, and drinking. The precepts for monks and nuns included a wide range of items that were very harsh. Once the important precept was enacted, it would not change. However, Sakyamuni did not force others to abide by them, nor did he ask people to swear or make intellectual sacrifices.

Sakyamuni also developed systems for the sanghas regarding wandering and mendicity, settlement in rainy seasons, confession, and so on. It was said that at first the disciples of Sakyamuni wandered outside all year round. They walked every day to human habitations to collect alms. They held a bowl, kept their eyes down and silent, and accepted any food put by other people into the bowl, including meat. Sometimes they also accepted the invitation of certain pious people to eat in their home, and ate when the owner put the prepared food into their bowl. In the afternoon, they carefully sat in meditation and did not eat any more. But soon after, Sakyamuni ordered his disciples to abide by the established practice of the monks, that they shall wander outside most of the year, and rest for three months in rainy seasons. The rainy season in India was from May to August, during which going outside was prohibited so as to avoid hurting grass and insects, and the disciples had to sit in meditation and practice in the temple, accepting support. This period was called the “settling period”. When the settling period was about to end, and before the disciples were to travel to all parts of the country and wander for mendicity, a two-day confession rally would be held, known as “pravarana”. They asked others to expose their own faults and mistakes, and they themselves reflected and confessed; at the same time, they also, with the will of others, reported others’ faults and mistakes, so as to help correct and improve.

With the increase in the quantity of monks, rallies needed a certain location, especially for settling in the rainy season every year, and temples were established. When Sakyamuni was alive, with his growing prestige, his believers also gradually formed a custom, and specifically built houses for him to rest, live, sit in meditation, and give sermons. These buildings had the scale of temples. According to legend, there was a wealthy businessman in Savatthi, Kosala, called Anathapindika (Sudatta). After he converted to Sakyamuni, he wanted to invite Sakya to live in Savatthi for the settling period. He chose the garden of Prince Jeta, and bought it with money that could pave all over the garden after many negotiations. Prince Jeta sold the ground of the garden, and presented the trees in the garden to Sayka. So the garden was named after these two people, known as Jetavana Anathapindada-arama. Anathapindika built a living room, lounge, storage room, warehouse, hall, bathroom, pool, and so forth in the garden for Sakya to use. Jetavana Anathapindada-arama and Venuvana-vihara in Rajagraha were jointly known as the earliest two sublime abodes. Sakyamuni lived and preached there for 25 years.

Sakyamuni founded the Buddhist doctrine, and after 45 years of travel around the country, he widely preached, absorbed believers, and organized sanghas, which made Buddhism gradually accepted by the Indians. Sakyamuni was regarded as the leader by his disciples, and his osseous remains were regarded as sacred objects after he died, which were worshiped by his believers. The important places of his practice in his life also became sacred places for believers to worship, such as Kapilavastu, his birthplace, Bodh Gaya, the place where he became the Buddha, Deer Reserve, the place where he preached for the first time, and Kushinagar, the place of his Nirvana. While Sakyamuni was alive, he dictated his doctrine to his disciples. According to legend, in the year he died, his chief disciple Kasyapa convened a large number of monks in Rajagraha to recite the Buddhist scriptures – namely, the so-called first samgiti – in which the chief disciples Ananda and Upali respectively chanted Sutras and Vinaya. And later it was handed down and developed into the *Agama Sutra*. This sutra was the collection of basic Buddhist classics in early times. In the 100 years after Sakyamuni created Buddhism and died, Buddhism spread mainly in the middle reaches of the ancient Ganges River, and Buddhist sanghas were unified, all pursuing the doctrine of Sakya, and monks observed the precepts strictly, basically making a living by mendicancy. In history this period is known as the period of “early Buddhism”, or “initial Buddhism”.

The creation of Buddhism by Sakyamuni was a major event in the history of eastern civilization. It affected not only various divisions of Indian religions and thoughts but also the development of Indian history later on, and because of its outward spread, it also affected changes and development of religion, ethics, philosophy, literature, art, and folklore in many Asian countries.

It should be certain that the last role of Buddhism is as a panacea for alleviating human suffering and overcoming social crises. The way of relief guided by it for the people can only lead them to blindly concentrate on personal practice, so as to achieve spiritual balance and pleasure, and thus separate from real social life and fiery struggle, ignoring the transformation of society. History shows that Buddhism tended to die out in its birthplace of India in the thirteenth century, and went

downhill in China after the Tang Dynasty. But the emergence of Buddhism, after all, was a tortuous reflection of people's wishes and demands, and therefore there was a certain historical significance. As for the cultural development brought about by Buddhism, some of the results should be fully affirmed.

Sakyamuni founded Buddhism in an attempt to transform the world in accordance with Buddhist doctrine, to free the people from suffering, and get spiritual relief. But the sufferings of the working people and the exploiting classes were fundamentally different. The suffering of the majority of the people came mainly from oppression and exploitation by the exploiting classes, which were caused by the underdevelopment of science and technology. The correct way to get rid of suffering should be to eradicate the class roots that produced oppression and exploitation, raise the level of science and technology, develop the economy, and continuously improve people's lives. Sakyamuni stressed that the way to relieve suffering and achieve the ideal state was to become a monk, cut off desire and hope for the afterlife. This could lead people only to negative obedience and humiliation, and make them content with the status quo, give in to fate, obey, grin and bear it, and comfort and benumb themselves. Not only could this not alleviate and relieve the suffering of people but also it was conducive to the exploiting classes, acting as a tool for them to maintain dominance, thus further deepening the suffering of people.

From the social support of Sakyamuni's creation of Buddhism, Buddhism represented the interests of Kshatriyas and wealthy businessmen. When Buddhism was born, it was greatly supported by rulers like King Bimbisara (King Yingjian) of Magadha and his son, King Ajatasatru, King Prasenajit (King Shengjun) of Kosala and his wife, King Maha-naman of Sakya Tribe, and King Mathura of Avanti. For example, King Bimbisara supported Sakya and gave him a promotional place – Venuvana-vihara. In addition, the aforementioned wealthy businessmen, such as Sudatta, were the most powerful donors to Sakya. According to Buddhist records, when Sakyamuni had just become Buddha, he stood up under the bodhi tree, and two businessmen gave him food first. Among the disciples recruited by Sakya, at first there were five monks, followed by the merchant Yasa, who brought 60 people to be converted to Sakyamuni at one time. Listing "abstaining from stealing" among the "five precepts" of Buddhism played the role of protecting private property, which was very conducive to the promotion of business development at the time. Businessmen were also afraid of war, and listing "abstaining from killing" among the "five precepts" was also much supported by businessmen. Buddhists and businessmen belonged to the Sramana ideology system that advocated changes, and they were both unorthodox heresies and discriminated against by Brahmanism. The common points of economic interests, doctrine, and social psychology united the early Buddhism and businessmen. Therefore, Buddhism represented the interests of the wealthy class in the castes of Kshatriya and Vaisya, rather than the interests of the laborers. Although Buddhism did not directly represent the interests of the laborers, the mutual dependence and support between it, Kshatriyas, and businessmen were required by the development of social productive forces at that time, which was indirectly conducive to laborers.

The progressive significance of Sakyamuni creating Buddhism was mainly manifested in the opposition to Brahmanism. Brahmanism advocated that Brahmanic gods created the world, and advocated killing animals for sacrifice and implementing the unequal system of four castes. Buddhism opposed the statement that God created the world, and claimed that it did not recognize Brahmanism's theocracy or worship idols. Sakyamuni was also opposed to killing animals for sacrifice. Brahmins made worshiping a career, and sacrifice was held on a large scale, took a long time, and required a large number of cattle to be killed. Brahmins held an "abhisheca ceremony" for the king, and asked for a remuneration worth 100,000 or even 200,000 cattle. Buddhism not only condemned killing animals for sacrifice but also had the precept of "abstaining killing", which was beneficial to the protection of cattle and the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, and also met the interests of farmers. Buddhism also expressed strong dissatisfaction with the caste system, and opposed Brahmins' opinion that the four castes were immutable and "Brahman was first". Sakyamuni advocated "equality of four castes". First of all, it was the equality of karma, that was, regardless of caste, class origin, and occupation level, metempsychosis was decided according to karma. Brahmanism advocated that only people of high-ranking castes contained Brahman elements to eventually combine and unite with Brahman, and acquire advanced "regeneration". Buddhism characterized people's religious dignity on the basis of their individuality and conduct, rather than as subordinate to the special status of a certain caste, and emphasized that every believer could expect to attain salvation by hard work. Buddhism broke the theory of racial superiority, emphasized the education of personality and self-improvement, and believed that people of low-ranking castes could also be born in wealthy families in the afterlife by doing good works and having good merits and virtues, while people of high-ranking castes may also be born in degrading families for doing evil and committing crimes. Next was the equality of practice of monks and the implementation of equality among sanghas. Buddhism disseminated that all people had the right to become monks, learn, and join sanghas, regardless of their class origin and caste. In the sangha of Sakya, the barber Upali was from a low-ranking caste. Inside the sangha, regardless of the original caste level, everyone was equal. Sakyamuni's concept of "equality of four castes" and equality of everyone in the field of religion embodied a certain democratic tendency, with the historical significance of progress. However, Sakyamuni's proposition of "equality of four castes" was not thorough, for he was not fundamentally opposed to the caste system of the whole society, but to Brahmanism, whose purpose was to improve the social status of Kshatriyas and wealthy businessmen, and especially to improve the political status of Kshatriyas. For the production of caste, Buddhism did not agree with Brahmanism's opinion that it was created by God, but put forward a new saying that it was produced by the social division of labor, and in the ranking of castes, it always put Kshatriya in the first place. It can be seen that it did not advocate the fundamental abolition of the caste system, but just wanted to belittle and deny the Brahman caste, and even accommodated the caste system and recognized social inequality. At the same time, it should be noted that Sakyamuni's

theory of “equality of four castes” also objectively concealed the antagonism and struggle of classes, which in turn was conducive to the exploiting classes.

In addition, the Pratityasamutpada doctrine of Buddhism elaborated the theory of causality, and put forward the opinion that all things were composed of a variety of reasons and conditions and they were in the eternal change, which were all reasonable dialectic thoughts. Sakyamuni opposed sacrifice and did not worship idols, and he also attached importance to the self-cultivation of individual precepts and emphasized the self-improvement of the subjective personality, which was also the reasonable and positive side, although the religious life, way of practice, and target of relief that he designed were wrong and not desirable on the whole essentially. Sakyamuni also opposed theocracy and refused to recognize that God created the world. But he also recognized the existence of God; he did not recognize the immortality of soul, but advocated samsara and reincarnation, and therefore fell into a profound theoretical contradiction, which he was unable to solve.

Sectarian Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism

The Buddhism founded by Sakyamuni experienced its early stage in India, and then successively experienced three stages of Buddhism: Sectarian Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Esoteric Buddhism, and descended in India at the beginning of the thirteenth century.

1 Sectarian Buddhism

During 400 years after 100 years from the death of Sakyamuni – namely, about the fourth century BC to the first century BC – it was the period of Sectarian Buddhism of Indian Buddhism. During this period, economically, slavery reached its peak and began to turn decadent. Politically and militarily, in 327 BC, Alexander’s Greek troops invaded the northwest of the subcontinent, and occupied the area near the Indus Valley. Inferior officer Chandragupta of the Nanda Dynasty overthrew the dynasty, expelled the Greek invading army, merged the middle, western, and northern regions of India, and established the Maurya Dynasty. The grandson of Chandragupta, Asoka (ca. 273 BC–232 BC) further extended the territory to the southeastern region of India, and established an unprecedented large unified empire in Indian history. According to Buddhist records, Ashoka himself converted to Buddhism, and declared Buddhism as the national religion. Buddhism extended from the Indus and Ganges River Valleys to the subcontinent, and spread to a number of countries around it. About 180 BC, the Maurya Dynasty was destroyed, replaced by the Shaka Dynasty, which supported Brahmanism, and Buddhism was heavily hit. At this time, the northwest region had been invaded by the Greeks, Serbs, and Parthians, where they established new countries. The southeastern regions were also split into many small countries. India once again fell apart like before the Maurya Dynasty. With the growing spread of Buddhism, it had to adapt

to these different regions, countries, ethnic cultures, religions, and ideological traditions, and accordingly it was necessary to make significant changes.

The early Buddhist doctrines were abstract, their myths were not developed, and their religious rituals were relatively monotonous and poor, which limited their spread and influence among the masses. In order to strive for its own survival and expand its own forces, Buddhism had to adapt to the masses' psychological need for rich mythological figures and passionate religious rituals, but this would cause its own changes. Early Buddhist doctrines and precepts were orally spread according to the custom at that time, passed on based on memory, and wrong memories were inevitable, incorrectly relaying erroneous information. In this way, later the monks' understanding of the original doctrine and precepts would be different. Because of these reasons, early Buddhism was gradually divided, and formed Sectarian Buddhism.

Sectarian Buddhism was the general term of the various factions divided from early Buddhism. At first, Buddhism was divided into two factions of Sthaviravada and Mahasanghika, known as the "fundamental split" of Buddhism in history. The original meaning of "faction" was "saying". Sthaviravada was the idea of some of the Venerable, belonging to the orthodox tradition. Mahasanghika was the idea of many monks, which was a faction that emphasized development. These two factions later continued to divide, and formed more factions. According to the record of *Samayabhedo paracanacakra sastra* of Northern Buddhism, written by Shi You and translated by Tang Xuanzang, firstly Mahasanghika divided into eight factions, and then Sthaviravada divided into ten factions, for a total of 18 factions. Mahasanghika successively differentiated into Ekavyavaharika, Lokottaravada, Kaukutika, Bahusrutiya, Prajnaptivada, Caityavada, Aparasaila, and Uttarasaila. Sthaviravada differentiated into Sarvastivada and Haimavata (the former Sthaviravada). Sarvastivada differentiated into Vatsiputriya, which then differentiated into Dharmottariyah, Bhadranyaniyah, Sammatiya, and Sannagarikah. Sarvastivada also differentiated into Mahisasaka, which then differentiated into Dharmagnpta. Sarvastivada also differentiated into Kasyapiya and Sautrantika. There were 20 factions total, including the foregoing ones and Sthaviravada and Mahasanghika, and a simple list is shown in Figure 1.1. According to the records of *Mahavamsa* and *Dipavamsa* of Southern Buddhism, a missionary history or "island history", Sectarian Buddhism includes a total of 18 factions, excluding Aparasaila and Uttarasaila in the record of Northern Buddhism. In addition, the faction names and inheritance relations were different, and a simple list is shown in Figure 1.2.

The distinction between Sectarian Buddhism and early Buddhism and the differences within Buddhism were manifested in various aspects, such as religious practice, religious ideals, and philosophical theories.

In terms of religious practice, because of some believers' defiance of part of the precepts, Buddhism held several times of sangiti for this purpose, specifically discussing whether the orthodox disciplines shall be relaxed. For example, with the expansion of donation scope, people donated more and more items to the temple. It was originally stipulated that monks were not allowed to accept charity gold, silver, and property, but Mahasanghika thought that they could accept, while

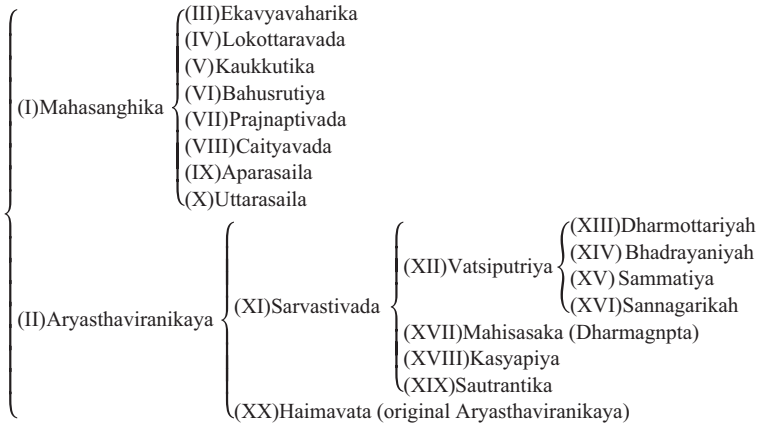


Figure 1.1 Sectarian Buddhism (Form 1)

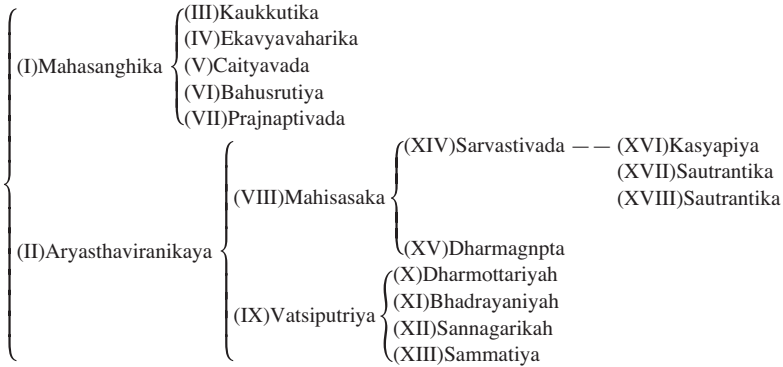


Figure 1.2 Sectarian Buddhism (Form 2)

Sthaviravada opposed the change, and Mahasanghika refused to obey and was then expelled and dismissed, thus forming a relatively independent faction.

In terms of religious ideals, Sthaviravada believed that Sakyamuni was a historical figure, and was great mainly for his noble ideals, correct thinking, superb wisdom, and pure spirit. The highest achievement for normal people who practice and learn Buddhism was not to become Buddha; they could only be Arahan close to Buddha, able to cut off all trouble, free from metempsychosis. Mahasanghika was different and tended to raise the image and personality of Sakyamuni, put forward the opinions of “superworld Buddha” or “supernatural Buddha”, and regarded Sakyamuni as an extraordinary, supernatural existence, a real “god”, free from feeling and desire with supernatural power. They absorbed and strengthened

the creation of mythology to contrast the sacredness of Sakyamuni and created new rituals to worship Sakyamuni. They also belittled Arhat and stressed that they had many deficiencies. The claims of Mahasanghika were later inherited by Mahayana Buddhism and were further developed.

In terms of philosophical theory, Sectarian Buddhism had been extended from early Buddhism, which focused on life philosophy, to the field of cosmology. Because early Buddhism failed to expound Pratityasamutpada and the theory of the soul clearly and completely, a serious confrontation came into being inside Sectarian Buddhism on the subject matter of metempsychosis circulation and karma continuation, and the virtual or real existence of the universe.

Generally speaking, the factions of Sthaviravada were inclined to the “real” – namely, that spiritual and material phenomena were real. For example, “Sarvastivada” recognized the existence of the spirit and the material, and recognized all existence. From the concept of time, it was to admit that everything in the past, present, and future was ubiquitous. Abhidharmamahavibhasasastra of Sarvastivada insisted that since people had the notion that things existed in the past, present, and future, it proved that things actually existed, because if things did not exist, people did not have the object of thought. Moreover, according to Pratityasamutpada, past thought and behavior produced results. The cause led to the result, and results could be generated from emptiness. Since the cause could produce a result, it meant that the past cause was real and would always exist. Sarvastivada admitted that everything would always exist, which was contrary to the concept of “impermanence” of early Buddhism, thus making it a new philosophical theory.

Vatsiputriya, separating from Sarvastivada, divided every thing and phenomenon in the world into “past”, “present”, “future”, “asamskrta”, and “nirabhilapya”, thinking that they all actually existed. It also emphasized that “Pudgala” (i.e., “I”)¹ was “unsayable” and real. “Pudgala” and the human body were neither too familiar nor too distant. This was essentially a hazy, semi-real human, a physical soul, a carrier of metempsychosis. Vatsiputriya recognized “the existence of me”, which was also a new saying contrary to the theory of “Anatman” of early Buddhism.

Sautrantika, separating from Sarvastivada, turned to confirm Sakyamuni’s theory of impermanence, denied the argument of Sarvastivada that all things always existed, and stressed that everything existed only in the present. That is, it opposed the argument that everything would always exist, and advocated the theory of moment. Sautrantika believed that the so-called real existence or existence of things was in terms of playing a role of the thing, that things were real only if they played a role. Things could occupy only a specific time and space, and play their specific role. And the so-called playing a role meant producing a result. In other words, the real existence of things was true only when it produced a specific result. And the so-called specific result produced by things was to transform into the next mode of existence. In other words, anything was real only when it transformed into its next mode of existence, but did not exist forever. Sautrantika therefore drew this conclusion: the real existence or existence of things was momentary; things existed momentarily, but not forever. Sautrantika also denied the opinion that Nirvana was an eternal and happy realm, and believed that everything was

impermanent and Nirvana was only the realm to stop suffering and metempsychosis. This is a tendency to say that things are empty. These were all arguments that tended to believe that things were empty. The argument of Sautrantika was opposed by Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣaśāstra, reproved as a theory with nihilism.

Factions of Mahasanghika tended to talk about “dharma-sunyata”, or recognize the real existence only at present, and believed that there was no entity in the past and the future. In connection with this, in terms of nature and its mokṣa, although both Mahasanghika and Sthaviravāda claimed the “purity of nature”, the meanings of the two factions’ “purity of nature” were very different. Sthaviravāda held that nature was originally clean, while Mahasanghika held that nature may be clean in the future, and the purity of nature was a realm that may be achieved in the future. In fact, it held that original nature was not clean, and had been stained, so it stressed that stained nature could be freed. It can be seen that the views of the two factions are antagonistic.

From the perspective of religious practice and religious ideals, Mahasanghika had a profound effect on the later Mahayana Buddhism. From the perspective of philosophical thought, the theory of Mahasanghika had more relations with Madhyamaka of Mahayana, and Sautrantika, separating from Sthaviravāda, later further developed into Yogacara based on the impact of Madhyamaka of Mahayana.

2 *Mahayana Buddhism*

Mahayana Buddhism rose in around the first century AD, and it was the so-called Southern and Northern Dynasties Period in the history of the continent – namely, the time when the Kushan Dynasty and Andhra Dynasty separately existed. When the Kushan Dynasty was handed down to Kanishka (r. ca. AD 129–152), he united northern India, continued to expand it, and vigorously respected and spread Buddhism. The Andhra Dynasty was the most powerful country in southern India, which advocated Brahmanism, resisting Buddhism. The Kushan Dynasty began to split in the third century AD, and perished in the fifth century. The Andhra Dynasty perished in 225 AD, and then resumed a situation of local separatism. In about 320 AD, Chandragupta I established the Gupta Dynasty. When it was handed down to Chandragupta II (r. ca. AD 380–415), it occupied most territory of India. At this time, the economy was prosperous, and the culture was developed, which was called the golden age of India by historians. As slavery in India tended to disintegrate, the feudal system began to form in the Kushan Dynasty, which was completed when it came to the Gupta Dynasty. Accordingly, the caste system also developed into the surname class system – namely, the original castes were divided into thousands of surnames according to different occupations, which was hereditary. Inter-marriage between different surname classes was not allowed. This surname class system was similar to the system of hereditary aristocracy in Chinese history. The Gupta Dynasty worshiped Brahmanism, but did not reject Buddhism. Later, with the decline of national power, it began to attach importance to Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism was produced in the context in which slavery

in India transformed into feudalism, class relations were recombined, and new class contradictions gradually arose and sharpened.

After the rise of Mahayana Buddhism, in order to compete for the orthodox status of Buddhism, it belittled early Buddhism and Sectarian Buddhism as Hinayana. Yana meant carrying (e.g., carriage and ship) and road. “Maha” meant big. “Hina” meant small. It seemed to Mahayana Buddhism that Hinayana was “small road”, the doctrine of Sakyamuni for people with small *indriya* (root device). Mahayana Buddhism declared that it could carry the infinite beings from this shore of Life River to the *parimam tiram* (other shore) of Bodhi Nirvana, and achieve Buddha-fruit. During the formation and evolution of Mahayana, there were mainly two factions of Madhyamika and Yogacara.

(I) *Madhyamika*

Madhyamika advocated not missing any side when observing problems (e.g., sunyata and existence were on one side, law and anitya were on one side) – namely, integrating two sides, in line with *majjhima patipad* (the Middle Path), which was how it got its name. It was founded by Nagarjuna (ca. 150–250) and his student Deva (ca. 170–270). Nagarjuna was from southern India and belonged to the caste of Brahman. He had read Brahman books since childhood, and became a famous Brahman teacher in his youth; besides, he also mastered astronomy and geography, mapping and hoard (hidden treasure), and all kinds of Taoism. Later Nagarjuna converted to Buddhism, mastered Tripitaka, moved to the snow-capped mountains in northern India, and lived in a pagoda temple. He met an old monk who taught him classic Mahayana, and then he traveled around the country to spread the Mahayana doctrine. Later he returned to the southern India for indoctrination, causing Madhyamika of Mahayana to sweep the whole of India. Nagarjuna wrote many works, enjoying the title “Author of a Thousand Works”. His disciple Deva was also from southern India and belonged to the caste of Brahman, and later followed Nagarjuna to become a monk, developing Nagarjuna’s theory of Madhyamika. Later Nagarjuna committed suicide and died, and Deva was killed by a Brahman, which indicated that the ideological struggle at that time was very intense. The successor of Deva was Rahula, who handed his leadership down to Bhavaviveka and Buddhapalita, and then split into different factions. The important descendants of Bhavaviveka included Santaraksita, Kamalasila, and Haribhadra, and the important descendants of Buddhapalita included Candrakirti, who was succeeded by Dharmapala and Gayadeva. Santideva succeeded Gayadeva, who was then succeeded by Mitra.

Madhyamika regarded the *Pancavimsatisa-hasrika-prajnaparamita* as the main classic. *Madhyamika-sastra*, *Dvadashanikaya-Shastra*, and *Mahaprajna-paramita-sastra*, written by Nagarjuna, and *Sata-sastra*, written by Deva, were the basic theoretical works of this faction. Madhyamika opposed the opinion of some factions of Sectarian Buddhism that everything really existed, and believed the suffering of life lay in that people did not have a real understanding of everything in the world, and produced useless theory that confused right and wrong. To relieve