

The Founding of Mahayana Buddhism

The Three Councils

The Buddhist texts, the three Pitaka or main body of texts in Buddhism (Tam Tạng /baskets-in ancient India writing was done on a broad leaf and a whole book was held in a basket) were compiled together in three council meetings by the disciples of Buddha.

After the passing of the historical Buddha (Siddhattha Gotama) in 483 B.C. the canon in Pali were first compiled and edited. The first council, comprising of the finest disciples of the Buddha got together in Rajagaha, recited his sermon and put them together to form a canon. The Suttapitaka (Kinh Tạng) was said to be recited by Ananda, the former personal attendant and cousin of the Buddha. The Vinayapitaka (Luật Tạng) was recited by the expert monk in monastic procedure, who was also the former barber of the Sakiyas called Upali. The original canon's exact wording was not known, for in Ancient India instructions were passed on orally.

The second council meeting in Vesali, around 383 B.C., was responsible for inclusion of sermons and poems by monks and nuns into the canon. The utterances of the Buddha were harmonized into fine verses of literature. Although there were some changes in the wording and presentation of the canon, the second council committed to keep the orthodox view in seeing the Buddha's teaching as being in complete and final form. However, soon after the meeting of the second council, the first major split in Buddhism began with the emergence of different schools of thoughts.

The third council meeting took place around 225 B.C. in Pataliputta. This was the final major revision of the Buddhist texts. The third council also included scholastic works into mainstream Buddhist texts as the new and third basket of wisdom in Buddhism, the Abhidhammapitaka. The Abhidhammapitaka was comprised of seven individual books. It contained analysis of all central terms into many subterms in the form of lists and charts. The Abhidhammapitaka was comprised of "scientific" and "psychological" language, which differ from the two former Pitaka, which is comprised of conventional language. The Abhidhammapitaka speaks not of "things" but elements, same as we called H₂O instead of water.

The compilation of Buddha's teachings into the the three Pitaka or baskets of wisdom was a major development in Buddhism. Buddhist texts were passed on from generation to generation with surpassing unity in form and ideas were the results of these council meetings. Arising from the council meetings were debates and discussions by influential scholars which later gave rise to the major divisions in Buddhism.

The Mahayana Schools

In the first century B.C. the first division in major Buddhism thoughts appeared with the new conception of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism consisted of six different schools of thoughts that shared a centralized view of the Buddha as a projection of the absolute.

Major School and Country of Origin	Founder and Language of Oldest Original Sources	Still exist in	Method for achieving Deliverance	Interim Goal	Ultimate Goal
Wisdom School (Cổ Phái Trí Tuệ) 1st century A.D. in India	Sanskrit	Tibet, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, China, Vietnam	Realization of emptiness of the impirical person and all things by means of Wisdom, that is emptiness is the Absolute and liberation.		1)Pre-mortal Nirvana 2)Post-mortal Nirvana
Madhayamaka (Tân Phái Trí Tuệ) 2nd century A.D. in India	Narajuna (2nd century A.D.) Sanskrit	As above	As above		1)Pre-mortal Nirvana 2)Post-mortal Nirvana
Bodhisattva 1st century A.D. in India	Sanskrit	As Above	Relief from unwholesome Karman through assistance of Bodhisattvas	Out of gratitude of help from Bodhisattvas, one becomes a Bodhisattva oneself in order to help others.	1)Active Nirvana 2)Passive Nirvana
Buddhism of	In Japan:	As	Through faithful	Rebirth in	Nirvana

Faith or Pureland (Tịnh Độ Tông) 1st century A.D. in Japan	Honen-Shonin (1133-1212A.D.), Shinran-Shonin (1173-1265A.D.) Sanskrit	Above	confidence in Transcendence Buddha(especially Amitabha or Amita Buddha) one obtain rebirth in Buddha's paradise.	Buddha's paradise(especially Sukhavati)where the faithful matures towards Nirvana.	
Yogacara (Duy Thức Tông) 3rd century A.D. in India	Maitreyanatha (3rd/4th century A.D.) Asanga (4th/5th century A.D.) Sanskrit	Tibet, Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, China, Japan. (also found it Vietnam , but rare)	Realizing that everything is in the "mind only" and returns to the pure mind(=liberation)		Nirvana
Zen (Thiền Tông) 6th century A.D. in China	Bodhidharma (Bồ Đề Đạt Ma) (6th century A.D.) Chinese	China, Vietnam , Korea, Japan.	Realization by means of meditation that everything is "mind only" and return to the Pure Mind (=Buddha nature =Heart =liberation)		1)Pre-mortal Nirvana 2)Post-mortal Nirvana

The major Mahayana Buddhism Schools were mostly founded upon new interpretations of the original texts in Sanskrit (translated from Pali) after the first century A.D. excluding Zen Buddhism. Zen Buddhism was founded in China by a missionary monks who was said to hold the direct succession place of Supreme Teacher of Buddhism passed down from Siddhattha Gotama Buddha. Some people sees Zen Buddhism as a deviation of Buddhism which does not practice and take into account the common interpretation of main stream Buddhism. However, further into the discussion of Zen Buddhism, you will find that it proves itself to be just as much Buddhism as most of the other schools of Buddhism.

Foundations of Mahayana Buddhism



These are the basic teachings in which all Buddhist Schools have in Common:

- The individual existence is sorrowful, and consequently require deliverance.
- The belief in rebirth.
- The assumption of a moral natural law which rules the process of *Karman* and rebirth and is neither created by a deity nor supervised by him.
- The view the phenomenon world is without substance and is in a state of constant flux.
- The empirical person is considered without self, but as a combination of complex soulless factors, in which
- The goal of extinction of sorrowful personality is logically connected.
- Liberation is only achieved through extirpation of greed, hatred, and delusion, therefore gaining wisdom (enlightenment).
- The Buddha is regarded as a human teacher who had gained enlightenment, a transcendental being who had once been mortal.

The Basic Difference Between Hinayana and Mahayana

The unique beliefs and characteristics of Mahayana Buddhism(Dai Thua Phat Giao) is that it is essentially very different from the old teachings and literature of Theravada or Hinayana Buddhism. The differences between Hinayana Buddhism (Tieu Thua Phat Giao) and Mahayana Buddhism is such that:

- Hinayana holds psychological realism, Mahayana idealism. Hinayana sees suffering as real while Mahayana sees it as an illusion.

- Hinayana denies a "true being" behind a phenomena and avoid making metaphysical statements, the Mahayana teaches an Eternal Absolute under many names. Beings in all forms of rebirth are said to be identical in their cores with the absolute.
 - The Historical Gautama is seeing as the projection of the absolute. In essence Gautama holds the core of being absolute but possesses a frail mortal frame of illusion. Hinayana regards the Gautama as a natural teacher, and at most a superman.
 - Hinayana sees that liberation can only be achieved through one's own effort, while Mahayana considers assistance from outside as possible. Deliverance through other's power.
 - The followers of Hinayana see the immediate goal as in achieving nirvana. Those who follow Mahayana see the immediate goal as in following the ways of the Bodhisattva in leading all beings to liberation.
 - Nirvana, to Hinayana is the final exit from the world, while it to Mahayana considered becoming conscious of one's own absoluteness and gaining a state of mental aloofness from all. Hinayana has to create nirvana while Mahayana sees all beings as holding liberation from very beginning but not aware of its existence.
 - The attitudes of Mahayana are such that a person should lend a hand to help the world and educate its followers to be selfless. The Hinayana attitude is to defeat the world by analysing its elements and using that knowledge for individual conduct. It is pragmatic in its approach.
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Buddhology

The Buddha Gautama (Thi'ch Ca) is regarded by Mahayana Schools as the universal saviour and bestower of deliverance. He is master over space and time. Gautama's early life and his nirvana are illusions projected onto the world in order to lead mankind to knowledge and virtuous conduct. In fact he was already enlightened before he took the form of the historical Gautama. It is the Mahayana's conviction that there are also many other Buddhas aside from Gautama. There are as many Buddha as grains of sand on the bank of the Ganges (Song Hang). Buddhas appear in all region of the world taking many forms to shows beings the Buddha Vehicle.

• **The Three Bodies Doctrine. (Ba Thân Phật)**

Buddha was regarded as human, super-human, and a heavenly being. From the earlier separation of view of the Buddha of the earlier Buddhists, the Mahayanans adopted the doctrines of three bodies of the Buddha. The Dharmakaya, Sambhogakaya, and Nirmanakaya.

- **The Dharmakaya** (Dharma-body/Pha'p tha^n) is the inner nature of the Buddha. In all the innumerable earthly Buddhas and the countless transcendent Buddhas, there is only one Dharmakaya. It is the absolute reality, besides which there is no other

reality. Dharma is the partial manifestation of natural laws, namely "facts". Dharma is the technical term for "factors of existence". The Dharmakaya thus is the base-consciousness of existence.

- **Sambhogakaya** (Body of bliss/Ba'u Tha^n) is the transcendental Buddhas, that cannot be interpreted or perceived by the senses, but only experience spiritually. Sambhogakaya-Buddhas are seen as mental creations, the idea of the Bodhisattva. It is the manifestation of the absolute. Transcendental Sambhogakaya Buddhas are regarded as objectively existing, supramundane and subtle beings. The most popular transcendental Buddha is the Amida Buddha (A Di Da Phat). The transcendental Buddhas are said to possess paradises, in which believers are reborn there. They are teachers of the Bodhisattvas and the spiritual fathers of the Earthly Buddhas. They project their compassions for all beings into the world by their meditation (dhyana/Thie^n di.nh).
- **Nirmanakaya** (Physical Body/Ho'a Tha^n) belongs to those Buddhas like historical Gautama Buddha, appearing in the world in physical shape. They are called Nirmana or "manifest beings". They are subject to misery and aging, illness and death, because they are persons of flesh and blood. They are distinguished by thirty-two bodily characteristics (32 ve~ de.p) and some supernatural abilities (lu.c tho^ng). The function of the Earthly Buddha or Nirmanakaya Buddha is to teach and spread Dharma, the formulate truth into the world.

- **The Bodhisattva (Bo^ Ta't)**

The Bodhisattva is the name ascribed to those beings who strive to systematically for enlightenment, or who have already obtained it but postpone their own Static post-mortal nirvana until all beings are liberated. Bodhisattva live exclusively for others. They have mercifulness and compassion, wishing, without self interest, only for the happiness of others. The Bodhisattva encompasses wisdom to give, compassion to help others in any way to bring others closer to enlightenment. The Bodhisattva is willing to take sufferings onto his shoulders to help others, sacrificing all to bring other beings closer to enlightenment. The Bodhisattva has wisdom to see what is necessary for him to do to help others. There are 2 types of Bodhisattva, the Earthly ones and the Transcendental ones. The Earthly Bodhisattva are said to be those who follow a way of life striving for enlightenment while helping others also to seek happiness in enlightenment like them. Everyone can be a Earthly Bodhisattva, from any walk of life in any situation if they follow the Bodhisattva way of life and vows. The Transcendental Bodhisattva are those who through realizing perfection and wisdom (prajnaparamita /Tri' Tue^ Ba't Nha~) and thus sainthood and liberation, have refuse to enter static nirvana to stay in active nirvana in a state of deliverance in which they can work for the benefit of the world. They can assume any form, playing the illusory reality to help those caught in it seek the truth and

absolute. Of the famous and important of the Transcendental Bodhisattva is Avalokites'vara (Quan The'^ A^m)(The one who graciously looks down). In the far east, the Bodhisattva Avalokites'vara is sculptured as a woman who resembles the Virgin Mary in the west and symbolic of a compassionate mother to all.

All is suffering!

"All existence is suffering!" is the main doctrine of Buddhism. Mahayana too regards existence as sorrowful. In all forms of being there are grief and pain, longing and disappointment. Life for a time may appear to be happy, and things one has grown fond of seem lasting, but what is loved has to perish as well as the person loving it. Parting and suffering are the inevitable course anyone must take.

There are 8 different types of suffering that Buddhism defined:

- **Suffering of birth** - No one comes into life smiling, we all come with tears. Through growing up, we experience the pain of growing new teeth, puberty, and the pain of finding our own identity in life. Life is full of sorrows and happiness seemed not to last a long time.
- **Suffering of old age** - We all grow old, it is the inevitable course of life. With old age, we grow frail and weak. Unable to help ourselves and bear the pain of growing old.
- **Suffering of illness** - Even the strongest man becomes ill. With illness we experience pain, whether psychological or physical. No one can claim that they have never been sick. The suffering of illness is a part of life.
- **Suffering of death** - Everyone must die. With death, we experience the pain of the body. We twitch and turn, as our last breath is released. Even the most powerful, successful, or rich person must die leaving their loved ones behind to feel the pain of their departure. Death is the unavoidable consequence of life.
- **Suffering of unfulfilled desires** - We all want something in life, whether for ourselves or others. When our desires are unfulfilled, we suffer pain. The pain of not having what we want is great. To a child, the pain of not being able to have a toy is just as great as an adult not being able to have wealth, or a successful career, or love.
- **Suffering of being in the company of disliked ones** - We all like to spend time with the ones we love. But that is not true many times. When we are in

the company of those we fear, those we hate, it is like having a needle to our eyes. This is another part of living.

- **Suffering of separation from those we love** - We all like to be with those we love. But separation is a part of life. When we lose those we love to death, to war, to life's circumstances, we all suffer pains. It is an unavoidable part of life.
- **Suffering of health** - Many would ask: "Why would being healthy is also suffering?". It is that when we are healthy, we dwell in running our lives with envy, lust, greed, passion and waste our time not knowing that death is just a breath away. We are like those who play in a house of fire not knowing that it is burning around us. Many healthy people cause their own suffering with drugs, alcohol, and other addictions when they regard themselves as immortal, not knowing that death is near.

We all see and hear suffering around us, even to ourselves. But does not understand the reality of it. Ignorance in our views cause us to look for illusory happiness that does not last forever. Even the happiest person would suffer death. The healthiest person will also suffer illness, and the least wanting person the suffering of loss. The Buddha's teachings of suffering is to lead all to see that life is but a illusory existence. We should not drown in depressing conceit in light of life's suffering, but take bold actions to end it and find the eternal happiness in our existence. We must seek the absolute truth to find our eternal self again. For our existence are that of illusions which is not as immutable as we think, but very mutable. Everything changes as the world turns. No matter how we try, no one can hinder death, or life. As the words of a famous Romantic poets "Pershy Bysshe Shelley" puts it:

Mutability

We are as clouds that veil the midnight moon;
How restlessly they speed; and gleam and quiver.
Streaking the darkness radiantly!-Yet soon!
Night closes round and they are lost forever:
Or like forgotten lyres whose dissonance strings,
Give various response to each varying blast,
To whose frail frame no second motion brings,

One mood or modulation like the last.
We rest - a dream has power to poison sleep;
We rise - one wandering thought pollutes the day;
We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep
Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away:
It is the same ! - for, be it joy or sorrow,
The path of its departure still is free;
Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow
Nought may endure but mutability.

Percy Byshe Shelley

The Way of Self Discipline



The way of Mahayana's deliverance through self-discipline corresponds with the "Eightfold Path" of the Hinayana. The eightfold way is effective for liberation by its use of the law of Karman (Wheel of Rebirth). But the Mahayana goes further as to see liberation as the removal of all ignorance and by the realization of the absolute in which the Eightfold Path helps to attain. To reach deliverance is not possible by mere ethical actions of which the karmic effects is confined. The Hinayana way sees that if one rise high and above in the Karmic circle to be reborn in a higher status and realm, it is easier to attain enlightenment there.

So what is the Eightfold Path? It is clearly as listed that if one possess all of the characteristics below, he is on the eightfold path:

- **Right View** is gaining insight into the Dharmakaya of the Enlightened One;
- **Right Resolve** is the pacification of all imaginations;
- **Right Speech** is the realization that language confronted with the Dharmas falls silent; to speak the truth that does not consist lies, gossip, abuse and idle talk.
- **Right Conduct** is abstinence from any actions aiming at Karmic merit;
- **Right Livelihood** consists of the insight that all Dharmas are without origination and destruction, harmless breadwinning which would not cause suffering to anyone.
- **Right Effort** means relinquishing Energy and Method to obtain deliverance in the knowledge that Dharmas(the state of deliverance) rise out of action.

- **Right Awareness** means to stop brooding over being and non-being. Being mindfulness of the body, sensations, mind and mental objects. A person overwhelmed with rage would more easily rid of it once he is aware of his own rage and its destructiveness to himself and others.
- **Right Meditation** is freedom of opinion by non-grasping Dharmas. To be able to seek the ways and understand fully the methods of meditations as prescribed by the Buddha. One must choose one of many ways of meditation to go on the way of enlightenment. No one has ever attained Nirvana without meditation!

To the Mahayanan, the Eightfold Path serve as a vehicle to help one seek the Absolute. It is not the only way, but the fundamental way as the Buddha has taught.

The Way of Wisdom



The Mahayana understands the teachings of the Hinayana, and it is use as basic a basic core. The core of these teachings are the denial of Self (Atman/vo[^] nga~) in the Five Groups (skandha/ngu~ ua[^]?n) which constitutes the impirical person, and the theory of rebirth according to the quality of Karman. The consciousness of a dying being occasions in a mother's womb the origination of a new impirical person without entering into this person. The propelling force causing the consciousness to do this is ignorance and craving. Their annihilation leads to Nirvana.

There are two types of Dharma(Pha'p), the Unconditioned Dharma (asamskrta)and the Conditioned Dharma(samskrta). The Unconditioned Dharma are not dependent on anything, not influenced by devoid or impermanence. It constitute Nirvana(Nie[^]t Ba`n), the seed of Buddha nature. The Conditioned Dharmas are combinations of which that compose the impirical person, originating from previous Dharmas formed by an individual's Karman(Nghie[^].p Ba'o), moving from the previous body to the next in rebirth. Through out a life time, Conditioned Dharmas are in a continual process of disintergration, renewal, and rearrangement. Of all the shortest being the thought. They barely exist for a split second before they yield to new Dharmas(or new thoughts).

Man is comparable to a melody, made up of various chords and sounds. The continuous successions of chords produces the phenomenon of melody. The dissonance in the melody does not mean the end of music. Like death does not

mean the end of the chain of Conditioned Dharmas. Death itself is a Dharma of the chain as dissonance is an element of the melody. We are enchanted by the melody as long as we perceive it as an ensouled pattern of sounds. The moment we are aware of the separate tones, the enchantment collapses. In a way when we see the world as something essential, and when we see it as a phenomena produced by Conditioned Dharmas, as illusory as a melody with its chords and sounds components, we found wisdom. It is from this realization that Nirvana is recognized.

Knowledge is a matter of the mere intellect which can only grasp fragments of reality; wisdom on the other hand is intuitive identification of the reality of all existence and being - an experience which is made with the whole of the personality after all rational limitations, views and doctrines have been discarded. It is defined as "omniscience" and in the Mahayana is synonymous with "enlightenment".

What is wisdom? Wisdom as taught in the *Prajnaparamitas* (Ba't Nha~ Kinh) is the realization of non-selfness, or "emptiness" (Kho^ng). That the Conditioned Dharmas (Pha'p) are empty in nature, such that it is made of a unison of others factors. Once all the factors made up the Condition are free, the Condition ceased to exist. Just as a chair robed of its shape, wooden nature, and nails would ceased to be a chair.

But be aware that "emptiness" too is empty. For without a thing to be empty of, there wouldn't be emptiness.

But wisdom is first born by the realization of emptiness. By developing wisdom, it destroy craving and ignorance, the two causes of suffering. Craving feeds through contact of the senses and the illusory perception of a "self". This self is created through ignorance of the true nature of Contioned Dharmas, its destruction will lead to end of craving and ignorance. By seing that the world is illusory, and the Dharma-Phenomenon is like a melody, ignorance vanishes leaving emptiness as the Asolute. Therefore suffering through attachment is uprooted. He who has rooted both causes of suffering is no longer threatened by rebirth.

The Bodhisattva Way

The way of Self-discipline and of Wisdom presuppose in a follower self-restraint, intelligence and concentration power - abilities which, in the experience of Buddhism, are possessed by only a small portion of mankind. For the many who are untalented in these ways, the Mahayana therefore teaches three more methods of liberation: The Bodhisattva Way, the Way of Faith, and the Cultic Way. Let us first observe the Bodhisattva Way.

On the Bodhisattva Way, the seeker relies of Great Compassion (tu*` bi) of the Bodhisattvas. To obtain Nirvana, the followers of the Bodhisattva way themselves take the vows of the Bodhisattva to practise self-lessness in helping others and seek for guidance from the Transcendental Bodhisattva to help remove unwholesome karmic seed and replace it with wholesome karmic merit assisting to speedier emancipation. There are ten stages of which the Earthly Bodhisattva follows to speed up his/her emancipation.

The Ten Stages (Tha^p Dia)

1. **The joyful (pramundita)** - The believer takes the Bodhisattva vow to dedicate himself completely to the liberation of others and to postpone his own total extinction until all beings are free from suffering. Full of joy about his being on the way to help others, the young Bodhisattva cultivates in particular virtue-perfection of openhandedness. Without egoistic ulterior motives, he gives his possessions away to those in need.
2. **The Immaculate (vimala)** - He perfects his self disciplines in the way the Buddha had taught.
3. **The Radiating (prabhakari)** - The Bodhisattva gains insight into the transient nature of the world and develops the virtue of patience(ksanti). Patience here means willing endurance of adversities and perseverance in efforts for the deliverance of the world.
4. **The Blazing (arcismati)** - As with flames, the Bodhisattva burns the remnant of false ideas. He cultivates will-power (virya) which he needs to be victorious in his struggle for the liberation of all beings.
5. **The Extremely Difficult to Conquer (sudurajya)** - He perfects himself through meditation in order to grasp intuitively the true nature of existence.
6. **The Stage of Facing Wisdom (abhimukhi)** -The Bodhisattva gains insights into Conditioned Origination which is the cause of sorrowful individual existence. His wisdom becomes perfect as he relies on the

Emptiness of all beings and things and cognises it as the Absolute. On this stage he had realized Nirvana, but refuse to enter Static Nirvana in order to help those who still sees suffering as real.

7. **The Far-going (durangama)** - ♦ The Bodhisattva changes over to a new mode of being, he becomes the Transcendent Bodhisattva, no longer tied to a physical body. He in his free will can assume any conceivable appearance for the deliverance of others.
8. **The Immovable (acala)** - He gains the power to transfer his karmic merit to unliberated beings. Their well being in his vows.
9. **The Good Thought (sadhumati)** - With strength he devotes himself to the task of executing his vow to guide all beings to deliverance. The Bodhisattva on this ninth stage is the Avalokitesvara (Quan The'^ A^m).
10. **The Clouds of Doctrine (Dharmamegha)** - The Bodhisattva realizes his own knowledge. His body begins to radiate and to illuminate the universe. Amidst the Bodhisattvas of the ten direction, he sits on the lotus in the Tsusita (Tro*i Dao Lo*.i) heaven. One more chance of existence, and he will attain Buddhahood. Maitreya (Bo^ Ta't Di La(.c) is the Bodhisattva on this tenth floor of perfection.
11. Accompanying are the six virtues of the Bodhisattva which play a role in his career. These virtues are also called the Six Perfections or Six Paramitas.

- i. Generosity – open-handedness (dana)
- ii. Discipline ('sila)
- iii. Patience (ksanti)
- iv. Perseverance (virya)
- v. Meditation (dyana)
- vi. Wisdom (prajna)

12. These six perfections are said to be true friends of the Bodhisattva and the cause of his omniscience. The other four which determine his path are:

1. Right Method (upaya)
2. Vow (pranidhana)
3. Strength (bala)
4. Knowledge (jnana)

13. The Bodhisattva Way is the most prominent teachings of Mahayana Buddhism that differs from the older Hinayana Buddhism Schools. Mahayana Buddhism regard the Hinayana Buddhism as only taking the Monks and Nuns to The Wisdom Stage, where Nirvana is realized. There the person would stay in the Static Nirvana and be contented with his/her own deliverance and not help others to attain it also. The Bodhisattva Way also allow not only the Monks and nuns to follow but also the laymen and women to follow as well. It is a way that increases the compassionate nature of the world and help to better it as one awaits salvation from rebirth through True Wisdom.

**This document is excerpt from the book "Buddhism" by Professor Hans Shuman.*