

CIS 160: Introduction to East Asian Studies
Fall 2003 M,W,F 9:30—10:20, Chambers 305

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Lecture Notes, 10 September 2003

Mahayana Buddhism

Basic Buddhist Principles: The Four Noble Truths

1. *Dukkha*: "suffering"; imperfection, impermanence, emptiness, insubstantiality
 - Dukkha as ordinary suffering
 - Dukkha as produced by change
 - Dukkha as conditioned states (see Rahula p. 19)
2. *Samudaya*: "the arising of dukkha"; from "thirst," human desire
3. *Nirodha*: "the cessation of dukkha"; eliminate the desire by recognizing the impermanence of reality
4. *Magga*: "the middle path," or the "eight-fold path":
 - Right understanding
 - Right thought
 - Right speech
 - Right action
 - Right livelihood
 - Right effort
 - Right mindfulness
 - Right concentration
 - Nirvana (*nibbana* in Pali): "extinction, blowing out" -- Ultimate Reality, Absolute Truth

Major Strands of Buddhism

Therevada
-- way of the elders: in South,
Southeast Asia,
-- stress on Buddha as
pathfinder
-- individual spirit of monk,
arhant

Mahayana
-- Great Vehicle, more
inclusive (ie., Zen)
-- broad path
-- stress on divine image of
Buddha
-- three Buddha body theory
-- **avatara**; in Buddhist
tradition, descending of
Buddha time after time

Vajrayana
-- Tibet, Tantric
-- esoteric symbols
-- mandala use
-- meditational path (more
visualization)
-- based on perception of
non-dual samsara and
nirvana; then using samsara
as a vehicle of realization

Sinification of Buddhism, the Buddhification of China (Japan, and Korea)

- separation of sangha and state? resolving the tension between Confucian ideology/imperial bureaucracy and the sangha; classic essay on “why a monk should not bow down to the ruler” (see Robinson discussion pg. 177); tension with importance of imperial patronage, ideas of the “son of heaven” (emperor) as the link between heaven and people, etc.
- importance of the bodhisattva, celestial Buddhas, in Mahayana Buddhism that spread through East Asia; example of Avalokitesvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, is portrayed in Indian iconography as male, sexless; transformed into Guan Yin, clearly female, where compassion is seen as a feminine trait (wisdom, male); one of Guan Yin’s purposes is to help women bear a son, to continue the line; most popular “deity” in Chinese/East Asian popular Buddhism
- ancestor worship, the lineage, and the idea of the celibate monk/nun; making Buddhism fit with the Chinese family and Confucian emphasis on continuing the line; example of Mulian (see Robinson, pg. 215), runs counter to Theravadan Buddhist ideas
- translating terms: use of traditional Chinese idea of the *dao* for Indian Buddhist terms such as dharma, marga, etc.; use of Daoist terms in translating Buddhist concepts, similarities and differences between Daoism and Buddhism resulted in sharp conflict and competition (especially for patronage)
- Many Mahayana schools that developed in China have no Indian counterpart; through the development of Mahayana Buddhist thought (emphasizing such things as *tathagatagarbha*, a kernel or potentiality of true nature that is in every sentient being) that give more “value” to the world; Weberian distinction of this-worldly versus other-worldly religions applicable here, where Buddhism was made more this-worldly to accommodate Chinese religious sensibilities
- Tian-tai, Hua-yan, etc. – these schools of thought developed in China, and spread to Korea and Japan; for example, “Zen” Buddhism developed in the Tang Dynasty (Chan, in Chinese) as an extension of Hua-yan Buddhism based on buddhist scriptures such as the Avatamsaka Sutra (there is an Indian version), and the “Awakening of Faith in Mahayana” sutra (there is no evidence of an Indian version).
- Pure Land Buddhism – “Buddhism for the masses,” – reciting the name of the Buddha will lead to deliverance into the Western Paradise