Chapter 5
THE FORMATION OF MAHĀYĀNA LITERATURE

5.1. Significance of the Formation of Mahāyāna Literature

Divergent views on the origin of the formation of Mahāyāna literature have caused controversies among scholars for a long time. Even today still there are some confusions and suspicions of the Buddha’s teachings in Mahāyāna literature. The non-Mahāyāna traditions hold that Mahāyāna sūtras were not the words of the Buddha, but rather the work of poets.\textsuperscript{480} Whereas, most of the Mahāyānists consider that Mahāyāna sūtras were preached by Śākyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, because these sūtras always start with Ananda’s statement: “Thus have I heard.” However, this source is not accepted by the modern scholars. The others hold that, Mahāyāna Sūtras such as the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra, the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra, the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra and several other Sūtras are actual sermons which were preached by the Buddha. But at that time, the listener could not comprehend them, so they (these Sūtras) were hidden, until several centuries later they were revealed by some mythological routes. This viewpoint is not acceptable too. I would like to agree with Donald S. Lopez and Andrew Skilton who hold the new opinion that, the Sūtras of Mahāyāna were composed over the course of

\textsuperscript{480} Paul, Williams, \textit{op. cit.}, 1989, p. 29.
centuries in a wide array of languages by Mahāyāna thinkers but all considered *Buddhavacana*.

As it has been mentioned in chapter two, after the second Buddhist Council at Vaisālī, the Buddhist *Sangha* was divided into two distinct tendencies in preservation of the Buddha’s teachings, one conservative and the other one progressive. The conservative tendency holds that the teachings which were kept alive in the form of oral transmission are the words of the Buddha himself, so they thought that nobody had any right to make any change in these teachings. The progressive tendency upheld that, in order to preach and spread the Buddhist thought, it was necessary to interpret the Buddha’s teachings according to the context and situation. On this point of debate, Buddhism was first split into two schools, namely, Sthaviravāda and Mahāsaṅghika.

In order to preserve the Buddha’s teachings, his disciples recited them by oral transmission. Three centuries later, in the time of king Ashoka, in the third Buddhist Council, the Buddha’s teachings were written down on palm leaves in the Pāli language, called Pāli canon, and were separated into three baskets (*piṭakas*), namely, the *Vinaya-piṭaka* (the basket of the rules of monastic or homeless life), the *Sūtra-piṭaka* (the basket of the Buddha’s teachings), and the *Abhidharma-piṭaka* (the basket of the systematic explanation or treatise on the Buddha’s teachings). Then, the Theravādins (conservative) placed the Pāli canon at the central position. They believed that the teachings as recorded in the Pāli canon were the original words of

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482 All of these baskets were conducted merely by oral transmission in former times. They in substance probably existed before the date of the Third Buddhist Council at *Pātaliputra* in about 250 BCE, the growth of them, therefore, is ascribed to a period ranging between 5th and 3rd centuries BCE, and at the time of the Four Buddhist Council held in approximately 100 CE at Jalandhara under the patronage of King Kaniṣaka, the Pāli *Tipiṭaka* was already completed in a written form. See Petzold, Bruno, *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 465.
the Buddha. Consequently, they were not interested to make any changes in the Pāli canon.

However, the Mahāyānists (progressive) considered the teachings recorded in the Pāli canon as the thought of the Śrāvakayāna and regarded the Theravādins as the Śrāvakas. They criticized the Śrāvakas as well as the thought of the Śrāvakayāna on the following grounds:

1. The Śrāvakayāna is the way of the Śrāvakas and not of those who comprehend it. It is the way of those who cling to difference as ultimate, and this amounts to imagining separateness as absolute. Although the capability of putting an end to ignorance and passion is inhered in the Śrāvakas, their wayfaring is conditioned by fear of birth and death and not inspired by the ideal of Bodhisattva.

2. Because the Śrāvakas cling to separateness as ultimate, they do not understand the emptiness of the basic elements (dharmāḥ) and so they do not see these as determinate expressions of the unconditioned. They fall short of comprehending the truly ultimate, the undivided being.

3. There is certain self-absorbedness in the Śrāvakas. They seek to realize the ultimate good. They fare on the way in order to put an end to passion and gain freedom. But they lack the deep fellow-feeling, the unbounded compassion, which inspires the farers on Mahāyāna from the very beginning.

They not only criticized the Śrāvakas, but also stood against the conservative thought of Early Buddhism. They argued that the preservation of the Pāli canon is a deviation from the spirit of the original teachings of the Buddha, because they were written down after three centuries of oral

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And thus they wrote fresh ones with intent to conserve more for the spirit than for the letter of the scriptures. They believe that the movement of this new literature would develop more fruitful ideas of the Buddha’s teachings. Keeping this ideal in mind, the Mahāyānists interpreted the Buddhist thought and practice according to context. Thus, they have put forward principles of the development of Mahāyāna literature. These are:⁴⁸⁵

1. To care more for the spirit than for the letter of the scriptures;
2. To care more highly emotional and devotional in attitude;
3. To care more positive in concept of the Faith;
4. To give increased importance to a dedicated household life; and
5. To develop the altruistic aspect of Buddhism.

However, it is reliable that the Mahāyānists wrote fresh ones, but all are based on the Buddha’s teachings in the Pāli canon of Early Buddhism, without employing their minds. In other words, they composed their canons with intent to develop and propagate the Buddha’s teachings suitable to situations and capability of everyone. Therefore, Mahāyānists assert that all their canons have been taught directly by the Buddha or have at least been inspired by him.

In this regard, the Mahāyānists had made the separate teachings of the Buddha for the five Vehicles (pañcayāna) as follows:⁴⁸⁶

1. The Vehicle of the lay believers (manuṣayāna), i.e., the teaching prepared for those who rightly receive and keep the five precepts for laity in order to be reborn in the heavens as the celestial beings.

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⁴⁸⁴ K.R. Norman considers that the Buddhist tradition was oral “for perhaps the first three centuries”; R. Gombrich, T. W. Rhys Davids and Oldenberg suggest “about three to four centuries” (Mark Allon 1997, p. 3).
⁴⁸⁶ See the Diamond Hermit’s Treatise (Chinese Chin-kang- hsien-lu), T. 25, No.1512: 805a.
(2) The Vehicle of the celestial beings (*devayāna*), i.e., the teaching prepared for those who rightly practice the ten good deeds in order to be reborn in the higher heavens.

(3) The Vehicle of the Śrāvakas (*śrāvakayāna*), i.e., the teaching prepared for those who rightly understand the Four Noble Truths and through diligent practice to become the Arhats.

(4) The Vehicle of the Pratyekabuddhas (*Pratyekabuddhayāna*), i.e., the teaching prepared for those who are able to attain Buddhahood through independent practice without teacher but with right understanding of the principle of *Pratītya-samutpāda*.

(5) The Vehicle of the Bodhisattvas (*Bodhisattvayāna*), i.e., the teaching prepared for those who are capable of attaining Buddhahood whereby the practice of six perfections (*ṣaṭ-pāramitā*).

Then, the Mahāyānists advocated only the *Bodhisattvayāna* and avoided the others. They held that the *Bodhisattvayāna* was supreme, because it consisted of the doctrines of other Vehicles on the one hand, and through the *Bodhisattvayāna*, the Bodhisattvas could attain the same enlightenment as the Buddha had attained. Consequently, they advocate only *Ekayāna* (One Vehicle), i.e., all yānas in one.

It can be said here that the hallmark of the Mahāyāna movement is the doctrine of *Ekayāna*. The Diamond Hermit’s Treatise (Chinese *Chin-kang-hsien-lu*) has elaborated four distinctive characteristics of this doctrine, whereby it has been named Mahāyāna. These characteristics are as follows:487

(1) The great essence: it holds that Mahāyāna embraces all merits, avoids the lesser destinies of the five Vehicles (*pañcayāna*).

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(2) The means of Great men: it holds that through the Mahāyāna the great Bodhisattvas can attain the same enlightenment as the Buddha has attained.

(3) The realization of Great men: it means only the Buddhas can ultimately comprehend the Mahāyāna doctrine.

(4) The ability for realization of the many: it means the Buddhas exist eternally in order to teach and to bring salvation to all living beings.

According to Andrew Skilton, several factors may be adduced in explanation of the appearance of Mahāyāna sūtras: Firstly, there is the possibility that the Mahāyāna sūtras may well record genuine teachings of the historical Buddha but they were not collected in the Tripitaka, and they only began to become prominent several centuries after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. Secondly, several Mahāyāna sūtras are connected with profound meditational experience, in which one will see one or many Buddhas, hear their teachings, and after which one will be able to communicate that teachings to others. Thirdly, the principle upon which something might be regarded as an expression of the Dharma is far and broader in Mahāyāna. 488

Moreover, according to historical records, in the fourth Buddhist Council that was held at Kashmir in 100 CE, the king Kaniṣka made a compilation by Sankrit language as the medium of Buddhist canon. And this council is usually associated with the formal rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism. 489 Thus, it was certain that several sūtras of Mahāyāna were present before that. Some scholars are of the view that, some Mahāyāna sūtras arose in South-India about the 1st century BCE. 490 Paul Williams also said: “from about the 1st century BCE the changes within Buddhism seem to have issued in a new literature that claim to be the word of the Buddha himself. This literature is

not the product of an organized or unitary movement, but appears to have been produced by the well-known monks within Buddhist traditions."491 Consequently, historically, most Buddhist scholars unanimously date the composition of the Mahāyāna’s major scriptures between 100 BCE and 200 CE.

Consequently, the Mahāyāna movement probably began around the 2nd and the 1st centuries BCE. And the formation of its literature is characterized by two stages. The first stage is known as the new spiritual and religious movement. At this stage, the doctrine of Mahāyāna was advocated. By the end of the 1st century BCE, the movement had produced the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras like the Prajñā-pāramitās, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka, Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa, Avatāmsaka, Lankāvatāra, Gaṇḍavyūha, and so on.492 These texts deal with philosophical theories, religious components, and ethical issues of Mahāyāna Buddhism.493 The second stage is known as the doctrinal development of Mahāyāna. At this stage, the arguments were made against conservative spirit of Theravāda Buddhism. It was formulated during the period from the 2nd CE to the 6th century CE. During this period, the renowned philosophers, such as, Aśvaghoṣa, Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Sthiramāti, Dharmapāla, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, and so on, made great contributions towards the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Buddhist logic.

Thus, the formation of Mahāyāna literature lasted for more than eight centuries (the 2nd century BCE – the 6th century CE).494 Most of the scholars generally think that the earliest Mahāyāna sūtras were mainly composed in the South-India in the 1st century BCE. Afterwards, the writing of additional scriptures continued in the North in the 2nd century CE.495 Consequently, the emergence of the treatises followed. It is remarkable that the Mahāyānits

491 Paul, Williams, op. cit., 1989, p. 32.
492 See Akira, Hirakawa, op. cit., 1993, pp. 252-3.
takes the basic teachings of the Buddha recorded in the Pāli canon as the starting point of their teachings, such as, the concept of Karma and Rebirth, No-self, Emptiness, Dependent Origination, the Four Noble Truths, and so on. In addition, it adopted an inclusive attitude and openness to any teachings which were effective for its communication, i.e., a new doctrine of upāya (skillful-means). And it may say as well that the Mahāyāna movement had a significant role in the history of Indian Buddhism. In order to reveal the significance of Mahāyāna literature, an attempt is made to get into the essence and bring out the importance of the main sūtras and Śāstras of Mahāyāna literature.

5.2. The main Sūtras of Mahāyāna Literature

5.2.1. The Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra

Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra (Perfection of Wisdom) is an earliest work of Mahāyāna scriptures. It emerged in the 1st century BCE in Southern India. However, some scholars hold that this Sūtra began to be written in the 1st century CE and it was a great success in the north-west during the Kuśāna period (the first century CE). The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra is an enormous collection of sūtras that stands for the Perfection of Wisdom. They are often esoteric texts which were discoursed by the Buddha toward the assembly of Bodhisattvas. The work begins with the verses mentioned on six-pāramitās, especially prajñā-pāramitā. This wisdom is the highest and the most important wisdom for a practitioner, and is the primary way to nirvāṇa. The content of this wisdom is the realization of the illusory nature

499 Six-pāramitās: giving (dāna), morality (śīla), patience (kṣānti), effort (vīrya), meditative concentration (dhyāna) and wisdom (prajñā).
of all phenomena, not only of this world (as in Earlier Buddhism), but also of transcendental realms as well. It is the knowledge of emptiness of all dharmas (things). In other words, the wisdom of pāramitā is wisdom which goes beyond the wisdom of the world; it calms all discursive thoughts; and eliminates imagined forms conceptually and brings true peace.

Initially, the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra texts were not so massive, but in the course of time they became overlaid with mythic prolixity. Moreover, it is due to amalgamation of various texts into one, so their size has become massive and unmanageable. Edward Conze has distinguished four phases in the development of the Prajñāpāramitā literature (stretching over more than a thousand years) as follows:

1. From about 100 BCE to 100 CE, we have the elaboration of a basic text; it is the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra or “Perfection of Wisdom in 8000 Lines.” It is one of the earliest Mahāyāna Sūtras.

2. During the following 200 years (between 100-300 CE.) this basic text was expanded into large versions in 18,000, 25,000 and 100,000 lines, collectively known as the Large Perfection of Wisdom (Mahaprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).

3. From 300 to 500 CE these large versions proved to be unwieldy, so they were summarized into shorter versions. The shorter versions include the Heart Sūtra (Prajñāpāramitāḥṛdaya-sūtra) and the Diamond Sūtra (Prajñāpāramitāvajracchedikā-sūtra) or Perfection of Wisdom in 300 Lines (Triśatikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra).

4. During the final period, from 600 to 1200 CE, Tantric influences make themselves felt and we find evidence of magical elements in the sūtras and their use. It is the Adhyardhaśatikāprajñāpāramitā-sūtra or “Perfection of Wisdom in 150 Lines.”

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Edward Conze’s four phases are widely accepted by scholars, and their broad outline, particularly the expansion of a basic text and its subsequent contraction. But the earliest *śūtra* and the most basic text still is “*Prajñāpāramitā*-śūtra in 8000 lines” in 32 chapters. This text is available in its original Sanskrit version and has been translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema about 179 CE.\(^5\) It was the first Buddhist philosophical text to cross the border. The most remarkable is the two shorter texts, the Heart *Śūtra* and the Diamond *Śūtra*, are two versions which are perhaps the most prominent representative of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature as well as Mahāyāna *Śūtra*. They have been widely popular and have had a great influence on the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the *Prajñāpāramitā* teachings are the highest teachings. These teachings were taught for Bodhisattvas, and superior in eliminating conceptually imagined form. The practice and understanding about *Prajñāpāramitā* are taken to be indispensable elements of the Bodhisattva path. Edward Conze explains that the purpose of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is to present the practitioner with contradictory facts which are meant to enhance a Bodhisattva’s progress toward the final goal. The *Prajñāpāramitā*-śūtras suggest that: All dharmas (things) including oneself, appear as thought forms (conceptual constructs), but do not have the true self.\(^5\) The dharmas’ existence is only the combination of many elements together; there is nothing which can be viable independently or inherent existence. Therefore, the principal ontological message of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is an extension of the Buddhist teachings of No-self to be equal to no essence.\(^5\) Conze states that: “The *Prajñāpāramitā* texts are elusive to our understanding, because they are full of hidden hints, allusions,

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and indirect references to the pre-existing body of scriptures and traditions circulating in the memory of the Buddhist community at the time.”

Moreover, the *Prajñāpāramitā* is a general name for a class of literature that largely concerns toward Mahāyāna philosophical thought. From *Prajñāpāramitā* literature, the Mahāyāna gave the rise of doctrines such as Śūnyatā (Emptiness), Pratītya-samutpāda (principle of Dependent Origination), Atnam (No-self), Buddha nature, Bodhisattva, and Bodhicitta (mind of enlightenment) etc. Each of this doctrine is an independent work, and encompasses the whole range of philosophical thought of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Therefore, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* is a very important work in the history of Buddhist thought, in general and Mahāyāna Buddhism, in particular.

One the basis of references mentioned above, it is widely held that the origin of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* and Mahāyāna *Sūtras* are closely connected. According to the following passage from the *Tao-hsing pan-jo ching* (T. 224), *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* first arose in South India. “After the Buddha’s death, the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* spread in the south. From the south it spread to the west and from the west to the north” (T. 8: 446a-b). These passages do not provide conclusive evidences in order that the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature came from the south; but other evidences do suggest that Mahāyāna Buddhism flourished in South India at an early date. And possibly the Mahāyāna itself originated in Central or Southern India and the earliest Mahāyāna *sūtra* are probably *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*.  

5.2.2. The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*

*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*, (*Sūtra* of the teachings of the Layman Vimalakīrti) is one of the principle *sūtras* of Mahāyāna Buddhism. This *sūtra* was

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composed in the 1st century CE in India. The first translation of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* into Chinese was made in 188 CE by the Kuśāṇa monk, Lokakṣema, who came to China from the kingdom of Gandhāra, but this version was lost over time. After that, this *sūtra* was translated six more times at later dates, with the most popular edition being Kumārajīva’s translation from 406 CE with title “*Vimalakīrti-sūtra*.” Sometimes it was used in the title “*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*,” with the word *nirdeśa* means “instruction or advice.”

The content of this *sūtra* tells stories of Vimalakīrti, a wealthy Buddhist layman living in Vaisāli. He was a paragon of Buddhist virtue, who was regarded as a lay Bodhisattva. His wisdom was so profound that it surpassed not only the insight of the *Arhants* but also even of the Great Bodhisattvas. The story says that, the Buddha, together with 8000 monks and 32000 Bodhisattvas, convened at Vaisāli in order to discuss the *Dharma*, but Vimalakīrti was absent as he feigned illness. When the ruler of the region, various officials and others visited him, he took the opportunity to expound *Dharma* teachings. To know of Vimalakīrti’s condition, the Buddha wanted to send a disciple to visit him, but his disciples declined to do that due to Vimalakīrti’s superior position. Finally, Mañjuśrī, the Bodhisattva of wisdom, agreed to go. The discussion between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī was very ebullient due to the demonstrations of their supernatural powers. When asked about his illness, Vimalakīrti offered a brimful response with Mahāyāna thoughts. He attributed, “because sentient beings were sick, so he was sick; he would get well only when other sentient beings got well.” He had a feeling of compassion for all sentient beings.

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508 Sanskrit Dictionary.
This is what is desired of a Bodhisattva. What follows is a long discussion on various aspects of Mahāyāna philosophy, i.e. doctrine of Emptiness. When Mañjuśrī asked him why his room was empty, Vimalakīrti told him that “all Buddha-lands were empty.” When Mañjuśrī asked why? Vimalakīrti answered that “emptiness is empty because there is no discrimination in emptiness. Discrimination is emptiness too, and emptiness can be found in the 62 heresies.” Asked where these can be found, he says: “In the emancipation of all Buddhas.” When Mañjuśrī asked him where this occurred? Vimalakīrti replied: “In the volitions and actions of all sentient beings.” Eventually, Vimalakīrti poses the question of the highlights importance of the sūtra: How a Bodhisattva can enter the Dharma-door of non-duality? Thirty-one replies follow; each is very insightful and sophisticated for ordinary human to understand.

Thus, in this sūtra, doctrinally, it propounds a wisdom teaching very similar to that of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra. It seems to be the doctrine of Emptiness. In the words of this sūtra, emptiness is the ‘baseless-base’ of all discriminated things. This emptiness or baseless-base of existence is hidden from view by the ‘dualities’ of the discriminating mind. By dualities we mean the perceived differences between self and other; between the sense organs and the sense objects; between purity and defilement; between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. When asked what the non-duality of life is, Vimalakīrti kept silent without saying a word, because words can not describe it. True understanding of this non-dual reality of emptiness must be realized in the direct experience of full awakening.

An important aspect of this sūtra is that it contains a report of a teaching addressed to both Arhants and Bodhisattvas by the layman Vimalakīrti. At the same time, it shows that, the Bodhisattvas may appear in

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511 Ibid., p. 109.
many forms, they can be angry, lazy, greedy, etc., but they are really free from these afflictions. When one sees that everything that has arisen by dependent origination is empty, without a self, then there is no difference between a Bodhisattva and a non-Bodhisattva. There is no duality even between being bound and being free, so there will be no joy in nirvāṇa or fear of samsāra.\footnote{S. Prebish, Charles (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, 1995, p. 111.}

The \textit{sūtra} also discusses the purification of \textit{Buddha-kṣetra}, the Buddha-field, or field of influence of an individual Buddha, and so has some connection with Pure Land teachings. Moreover, it has inclusiveness and respect of non-clergy, as well as stating the equal role of Buddhist women. Therefore, it is not only important in Mahāyāna Buddhism, but also has been influential and widely propagated in East-South Asian Buddhism where it was thought more compatible with the ethics of social duty and filial piety.

\textbf{5.2.3. The \textit{Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra}}

The \textit{Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra} (Lotus \textit{Sūtra}) is an extremely important text in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This \textit{sūtra} was compiled between 100 BCE and 100 CE\footnote{Skilton, Andrew, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000, p. 102.} and was translated into Chinese in 286 CE by Dharmarakṣa (T. 263). The history shows that, the text of the \textit{Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra} was translated into Chinese seventeen times. At present, however, only three versions are extant, i.e., the version by Dharmarakṣa (286 CE), Kumārajīva (406 CE) and Dharmagupta (601 CE). Of these the version of Kumārajīva is most revered and accepted by the Chinese Buddhist. Although Kumārajīva has been criticized for not being enough of a scholar, yet the Chinese consider his translation have to most successfully penetrate the essence of the text.\footnote{See M. L., Pandit, \textit{op. cit.}, 2005, pp. 132-7.}

The Lotus \textit{Sūtra} is a composite text which consists of seven chapters. It reflects the growing conflict between the Mahāyānists and Hīnayānists.
The important themes in this sūtra are compassion and upāya (skilful-means) which are the two of the most important concepts in Mahāyāna Buddhism. By means of various parables, the Lotus Sūtra tells us that, out of compassion the Buddhas appear and pass away on earth while in fact they are eternal and supramundane. Thus, the historical Buddha Śhākyamuni was just an apparition created by the heavenly transcendental Buddhas for purpose of enlightening of all sentient beings.

Therefore, the sūtra is divided into two sections, the first relating to upāya and ekayāna; the later to the life-span of the Buddha. Upāya or skilful is the central teaching of the sūtra, and describes the way in which the Buddha adapts his teaching to suit to the capacity of listeners. This doctrine became the prime means to account for the varied teachings of the sūtra. The teaching of ekayāna (one way), maintains that, there is only one Yāna for the complete enlightenment (it is Buddha-yāna), but not three. But due to there are different capacities and wisdoms of people in various states of openness to Buddha-yāna, the Buddhas use different skillful-means to preach them. Therefore, there are three yānas i.e.: Śrāvaka-yāna, Pratyekabuddha-yāna and Bodhisattva-yāna. The previous yānas were just upāya, accommodations made by the Buddha to the various abilities and levels of spiritual development of different people. The later yāna (Bodhisattva-yāna) is the way to practice leading to Buddhahood. Whoever follows this way will eventually attain supreme awakening and become a Buddha. This central idea is demonstrated through a series of parables, the most important of which are ‘Three Vehicles,’ ‘Burning House,’ ‘Prodigal Son’ and so on to illustrate upāya and ekayāna.

516 The Śrāvaka-yāna (the vehicle of the hearers or disciples. This is the vehicle of those who must follow authoritative teaching in order to reach nirvāṇa); The Pratyekabuddha-yāna (the vehicle of the private Buddha. This is the course of those who are their own teachers and who seek nirvāṇa only for themselves); The Bodhisattva-yāna (the vehicle of those who seek the salvation of all sentient beings).
Therefore, the content of the Lotus Sūtra emphasizes the Bodhisattva path with the practice of the Six-pāramitās to leading to Buddhahood. The Buddha asserts: “By means of one sole vehicle, to wit, the Buddha-vehicle, Śāriputra, do I teach creatures the law; there is no second vehicle, nor a third.”518 This Buddha-vehicle or Buddha-yāna is characterized by a teaching which is beyond reasoning, a knowledge which is omniscient. It was customary to understand the variations of the religion according to a threefold division: Śrāvaka-yāna, Pratyekabuddha-yāna and Bodhisattva-yāna. However, it was only an expedient, a concession to the short-sightedness of man. In reality, there are no divisions.

In the second Sermon at Sarnath-Varanasi, the Buddha says that the world comprising the Five Aggregates is ‘burning’ with ‘a whole mass of dukkha’ – a burning about which humankind is ordinarily unaware. In the Lotus Sūtra, it is said that, a Buddha who is outside and free from the world, use skillful-means to bring people out of this condition by offering different ideals of Arhant, Pratyekabuddha and Bodhisattva. But in the end, all of them escape this condition through one doorway and find one end that is Buddhahood which is more wonderful than anyone could imagine.519

The Lotus Sūtra upholds the ontological notion of Buddhahood as the essential nature of all sentient beings. The text also speaks of various capacities of people and thereby affirms that no two individuals are similar with regard to their diverse dispositions. People are of various dispositions or understandings. As a consequence, they conceive of their world and their spiritual attainments in limited terms. Their limited conception is due to various degrees of ignorance. To overcome this ignorance and to ensure the enlightenment of people with various dispositions, the Buddha proclaims different teachings at different times. The skill in this context refers to the Buddha’s ability to know the dispositions of all beings, and to employ his

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own perfections and powers toward their salvation. Hence, any seeming contradictions which might appear in the teachings are not due to the paradoxical character of the religion; rather they are due to the deliberate efforts of the Buddha to accommodate him to varieties of men.

Besides, the Lotus Sūtra shows that, even Śākyamuni Buddha’s nirvāṇa was only an upāya. In reality his life-span is inconceivably long, as a result of his immense accumulation of merit over innumerable past lives. In this respect, the Lotus Sūtra could be seen as developed teachings of Lokottaravāda, one sub-sector of Mahāsanghika School. The new understanding of the life of the Buddha offered in this sūtra, combined with the possibility of visionary experience expounded in other Mahāyāna sūtras, accounts for the growth of numerous archetypal Buddhas in addition to the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni. In their turn, these Buddhas became the focus for devotional cults. This practice was present from the earliest period of Mahāyāna, and is witnessed and exemplified by those sūtras dedicated to the exposition of the Pure Land of Amitabha (see below).520

Today, the Lotus Sūtra has become one of the most popular Mahāyāna sūtras in China, Japan and Vietnam. It serves as the basis of the Tientai sect of Chinese Buddhism and Nichiren sect of Japanese Buddhism. Both these sects entirely depend on this text for their religious piety. Many Buddhists view the text as the last esoteric discourses of the Buddha. With the passing of time, this sūtra became the centre of devotional disciple, the essence of popular Mahāyāna teachings, and is the final manifestation of Buddhism.

5.2.4. The Avataṃśaka-sūtra

The Avataṃśaka-sūtra, the full name in Sanskrit is the Buddhāvataṃśaka-mahāvaipulya-sūtra, is also one of the most important Mahāyāna sūtras. It is

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520 Skilton, Andrew, op. cit., 2000, p. 103.
included as a category in both the ninefold and twelvefold divisions of the Mahāyāna scriptures. Its compilation was probably completed in 350 CE and was translated into Chinese by Buddhabhadra in 421 CE (T. 278). However, there are some scholars maintain that the text had already been in existence by the time of Nāgārjuna in the 2nd century CE was its sections having been translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in the latter half of the 2nd century CE.

The *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* is a huge work which consists of many chapters circulated as separate sūtras. Originally, it was not as lengthy a text as it is today, but it contains two various sūtras which were circulated independently, and have survived in their original Sanskrit. Those are the *Daśabhūmika-sūtra*, which teach the ‘Ten bhūmis,’ or the ‘Ten Stages of the Bodhisattva path’; and the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, which describes the realm of the Buddha’s enlightenment, the practices and vows of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra. The subjects in the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra* are related through the story about the search of the Dharma of youth Sūdhana that comprises more than a quarter of the whole *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*. And it is considered as a literary masterpiece to be the most imposing monument erected by the Indian mind to the spiritual life of all mankind. These two texts (*Daśabhūmika-sūtra* and *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*) are available now and have gained such an importance in Japanese Buddhism, one Buddhist sect which called itself as the *Avataṃsaka*. The massiveness of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* may be compared to the depth of an ocean. It is not a philosophical sūtra, although there are sections which are philosophically stimulating. Luis

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Gomez has referred to the teaching of its climax, the *Gaṇḍavyūha-sūtra*, as one of the “speculative mysticisms.”

The beginning of the *Avatāmaṇḍaka-sūtra* is a description about the enlightenment-realm of the Buddha. This is the world of the Vairocana Buddha (the Buddha of Pervasive Light) with full light and jewels. It is not intended as a mere play of the imagination, but is an attempt to convey, through a series of images for contemplation, an insight into the ‘unthinkable’ nature of reality. The Buddha preached this *sūtra* while he is in the ocean-seal concentration in which everything is clearly manifested in his mind. In the very meditative absorption, thereby keeping silence, the Buddha explained the nature of his mysticism and enlightenment. Even though being silent and passive, the Buddha is shown as not being completely passive. Even in the state of passivity, he controlled and preached directly the evangelicalisms for *Bodhisattvas*. This controlling power denotes the omnipotence of the Buddha. The Buddha being a transcendent reality is seen as the basis of existence through his activity, speech, and thought. (The teachings in the *Avatāmaṇḍaka-sūtra* are very difficult for ordinary people to understand).

The *Avatāmaṇḍaka-sūtra* described that, the Śākyamuni Buddha has attained unlimited virtues, paid homage to all the Buddhas, taught myriads of sentient beings, and realized supreme enlightenment. He is a majestic Buddha who opens the Buddhist path to sentient beings. His wisdom is compared to the ocean (mind), which reflects light (objects) everywhere without limit. Consequently, the Buddha’s enlightenment must be explained by describing its causes, that is the practices the Bodhisattva path leading to Buddhahood. The *Avatāmaṇḍaka-sūtra* thus consists of a description of the austerities of the Bodhisattva as he strives to realize enlightenment. The

stages on the path to enlightenment and the wisdom realized in various stages are systematically discussed. Among the stages described are the ten abodes, the ten practices to benefit others, the ten stages at which the practitioner’s merits are given to other sentient beings, and the ten grounds (Daśabhūmi). The ten grounds explained in detail in the section of the Avatamsaka-sūtra with entitle ‘Daśabhūmika,’ were particularly important in demonstrating the unique qualities of the Bodhisattva’s practices.\(^{529}\)

The last of the sūtra mentions the six perfections (six-pāramitā). The perfection of wisdom was expanded by adding four new aspects to it: skill in means, vows, strength, and knowledge making a new total of ten perfections. By practising the ten perfections going through ten stages, a person can realize supreme enlightenment.\(^{530}\) The Avatamsaka-sūtra asserts that, all sentient beings have the nature of a Buddha, and are capable to become a Buddha. Therefore, according to the Avatamsaka-sūtra “the mind, the Buddha, and sentient beings-these three are not different” (T. 9: 465c). The teaching that the original nature of the mind is pure constitutes one of the major traditions in Mahāyāna thought. It is found in the Prajñāpāramitā literature as well as in major sūtras of Mahāyāna Buddhism. If the original nature of the mind is pure, then everyone has the potential to realize Buddhahood. The importance of developing the aspiration to enlightenment is emphasized in the Avatamsaka-sūtra.\(^{531}\)

As an encyclopedic compendium of Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Avatamsaka-sūtra not only describes the various strands of Buddhist spirituality, but also explains through newer images and stories of the importance of spiritual practices. These specific practices are contained in the ten vows of Bodhisattva Südhana as the universal nature of Mahāyāna spirituality.

\(^{529}\) Ibid., pp. 280-1.
\(^{530}\) Ibid., p. 281.
\(^{531}\) Ibid., pp. 281-2.
We may say that the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* is a synthetic teaching of the doctrines of Mahāyāna Buddhism. And today it is highly influential in Chinese, Japanese and Korean Buddhism, i.e., forming the basis of the Huayen sect. Peter Harvey also asserts that the Chinese Hua-yen masters utilized certain Yogācāra notions, such as the three-natures, and the centrality of mind, in systematizing the *sūtra*’s message. The Dharma-realm is seen as emptiness, the *Tathāgatagarbha*, and the mind-only of reality, pure, perfect and bright.\(^{532}\)

5.2.5. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*

Another important text of Mahāyāna *sūtra* is the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* which was compiled in the 300 CE. This *sūtra* was translated into Chinese by Dharmaraksā between 412-413 CE but this version is not available now. The earliest translation of the text which is available is that of Guṇabhadra in 433 CE.\(^{533}\) The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* is the *sūtra* which summarizes the major doctrines of the Mahāyāna Buddhism. Some of the important theories were expounded in this *sūtra* are: The doctrine of Mind-Only, the nature of Śūnyatā, the Bodhisattva’s ideal, Buddha nature, the meaning of the *Trikāya* of the Buddha and the nature of *Tathāgatagarbha*, etc. The occasion for the recital of the *sūtra* is the descent of the Blessed One to the mythical mountain of Lankā, hence the name *Lankāvatāra*.\(^{534}\)

The *sūtra* is structured into nine chapters in mostly prose, with the conclusion chapter in verse. Its content is beyond all previous teachings and practices. It singles the philosophers out for special castigation since they have been disposed to freeze reality into a categorical permanency and to discriminate between subject and object. The *sūtra* represents a stage in the development of Yogācāra School. The text opens with the central theme of

\(^{532}\) Peter, Harvey, *op. cit.*, 2005, p. 120.


\(^{534}\) S. Prebish, Charles (ed.), *op. cit.*, 1995, p. 112.
Yogācāra that the objective world is a manifestation of mind and continues with a description about the theory of eight-consciousness peculiar to the Yogācārins,\textsuperscript{535} five dharmas, (five stages of knowledge)\textsuperscript{536} and the doctrine of Tathāgatagarbha. These matters were expressed through a discourse on Lankā in which the Buddha responds to a series of questions that were posed by a Bodhisattva named Mahāmati.

The most important doctrine issued from the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra is that of the primacy of consciousness (vijñāna) and the teaching of consciousness as the only reality. In the sūtra, the Buddha asserts that all the objects of the world, and the names and forms of experience, are merely manifestations of the mind: “On the contrary my teaching is based upon the recognition that the objective world, like a vision, is a manifestation of the mind itself; it teaches the cessation of ignorance, desire, deed and causality; it teaches the cessation of suffering that arises from the discrimination of the triple world.”\textsuperscript{537}

Because the world is seen as being “mind-only” or “consciousness-only,” all phenomena are void, empty of self (atman) and illusory. The Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra suggests that, all sentient beings have Buddha nature. It means that, the nature of a Buddha potential resides latently within the existence of each being,\textsuperscript{538} which was called Tathāgatagarbha. Therefore Buddhahood is readily available to all living beings. In other words, the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra explores the way that the mind creates a false dualistic speculation based on self and world, and the way that the mind can escape from such speculation in order to attain awakening or Buddhahood. It repeats the basic idealistic idea which found diffusely in the Avataṃsaka-sūtra such that the reality is the only-mind. While the Yogācāra treats the

\textsuperscript{535} Theory of eight consciousnesses: Eye vijñāna, Ear vijñāna, Nose vijñāna, Tongue vijñāna, Body vijñāna, Mental vijñāna, Manas vijñāna, and Ālaya vijñāna.

\textsuperscript{536} Nāma, Nimitta, Saṃkalpa, Samyagjñāna and Tathatā.

\textsuperscript{537} The Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra, chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{538} Peter, Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, 2005, p. 114.
mind as the basis of our subjectivity, the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra depicts it as being trans-subjective, viz., beyond the categories of thought.

The twofold theme of the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra may be summarized thus:

1. The objective world is nothing more than the manifestation of one’s own intentions.
2. To understand this fully one must understand thoroughly the eight consciousnesses, the five dharmas, and the three svabhāvas.

The sūtra is a compendium of sermons predicated upon Mahāyāna doctrine, in general and a theory of depth-consciousness, in particular. The sermons formed no connected argument nor attempt a systematic defense of the religion. They merely answer specific questions concerning the Dharma and reiterate the general theme that all is cittamātra.\(^539\)

The Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra may also be considered as a manual on spirituality. It speaks of spiritual regeneration in terms of what it calls the total “turn-about” (parāvytti). It explains in classical terms the concept of death and suggests that one is reborn in the realm of the supernatural by dying to the natural. The death to the natural also means that it transcends the human condition in terms of inner transformation. It is upon completing the process of inner transformation that Buddhahood is realized. Moreover, the Tathāgatagarbha doctrine has been interpreted as an expression of the doctrines of Pratītya-samutpāda (Dependent Origination) and Śūnyatā (Emptiness). The Japanese scholar, Yamaguchi Susumu also said that, the most important point in the Tathāgatagarbha literature is the Pratītya-samutpāda. Likewise, Ichijo Ogawa argues that Tathāgatagarbha is basically equivalent to Śūnyatā and the nature of the mind which allows it to understand Śūnyatā. This interpretation is to the statement “all sentient beings are possessed of the Tathāgatagarbha.” This is the practical way

leading to goal of Buddhism, in general and Mahāyāna Buddhism, in particular.

Thus, the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra has foreshadowed all those idealistic ideas that would be the basis of the Yogācāra, subjective idealism. The inner essence of the mind is pure, luminous and nirvāṇa nature that is beyond the dualistic discrimination of its ordinary mental functioning. With this inner realization, the embryo of Buddhahood begins to develop. In the light of the wisdom, one experiences that all forms in emptiness display this luminous essence of the consciousness that produces them like an ocean producing waves. This understanding of consciousness is developed in the Indian Yogācāra School of Buddhist philosophy, which, in turn, influences many in Mahāyāna Buddhism in East Asia. Scholars have generally located the sūtra at a point between Mādhyamika ritualism and the fully developed philosophies of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu (the authors of consciousness only, the fourth to fifth century CE). Both the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra and the Mādhyamika-śāstra are accepting everything as emptiness (śūnyatā). However, it proceeds beyond the Mādhyamika-śāstra in its effort to establish some continuity between perceptions.

In short, the Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra or Discourse on the Descent into Laṅkā (hereafter abbreviated as the Lankā) has an important significance in Mahāyāna Buddhism. This sūtra especially emphasises on inner awakening through which the dualistic discriminations are terminated. At the same time, the practitioner attains to the indiscriminate mind. This mind, called Tathāgatagarbha, exists in all living beings. In the East Asian Buddhist tradition, this sūtra figured prominently in the development of Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism and especially it became the most sacred text of the Tsao-tung Ch’an school, being introduced into China by Bodhidharma, the first patriarch of the Ch’an tradition.

5.2.6. The Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtras

Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtras or Pure Land Sūtras are also the important sūtras of Mahāyāna Buddhism. They consist of many Sūtras, but there are three basic Sūtras, namely: Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra, Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra, and Amitāyurduḥhyāna-sūtra. Although they were described as the “Triple Sūtras of Pure Land,” they were not compiled at the same time in India, and did not constitute a cohesive and systematic trilogy. Some scholars agree that, the Larger and the Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha-Sūtra originated in India. And the Amitāyurduḥhyāna-Sūtra appeared much later in some cross-roads of cultures in Central Asia, colored by considerable Chinese influence.\(^{541}\)

Modern scholars believe that these sūtras were composed in either China or Central Asia in about the 2nd century CE because they were translated into Chinese in 223 CE. However, the story of the king Ajātaśatru and his mother, Vaidehi, (Background of the Amitāyurduḥhyāna-Sūtra) appears in early sources in the Buddha’s time; and meditations on a special land where a person may be reborn through pure actions has its roots in early Buddhist traditions in India.\(^{542}\) Therefore, though the sūtras may not have been composed in India, their contents reflect Indian views and the existence of a popular Buddhism developing in India.\(^{543}\)

Among the three sūtras, the most important is the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha-Sūtra which has seven recensions extents: one Sanskrit text, one Tibetan translation, and five Chinese translations. According to one of the Chinese translations, the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha-Sūtra describes the practice, merit and great vows of Amitābha Buddha in his past life. The


\(^{542}\) Historically, the roots of Pure Land go back to Ancient India, albeit the tradition was not emphasized there: Although a cult dedicated to Amitabha Buddha worship did arise in India, piety toward this Buddha seems to have been merely one of many practices of early Mahāyāna Buddhism. (*See: Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, in Joji Okazaki, Pure Land Buddhist Painting, p. 14.*)

Śākyamuni Buddha told that: In the past life, Amitābha was a Bodhisattva named Dharmākara, who made forty-eight great vows on account of compassion towards all living beings. After five eons of practice, his vows were fulfilled and he attained the Buddhahood with named Amitābha Buddha, and he established the Western Paradise. He welcomes all who wish to be reborn in his Pure Land and thereby saves them.⁵⁴⁴ At the same time, in this sūtra, the Śākyamuni Buddha also mentions merits, superwisdom, and solemn figure of saintly community as well as wonderful characteristics of the Pure Land for human beings who have a desire to return in there.⁵⁴⁵

The Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha-Sūtra describes and explains the Pure Land realm of Amitābha Buddha and his name, praises Amitābha’s achievements by the Buddhas of the six directions, and shows methods how one can be reborn there. This sphere is located in the western region of the universe. It is the pure and happy sphere, where all environmental elements were created by Amitābha’s vows. People live there include innumerable of Bodhisattvas, Arhants and Saintly disciples, but not literal people. They never experience suffering; they have multitude of happiness. It is the land of Ultimate Bliss, and is an ideal environment for sentient beings to achieve enlightenment. Therefore, every devotee should desire to be born there.⁵⁴⁶ However, in order to be reborn in that land, we cannot rely merely on the roots of goodness acquired through spiritual practices or the effects of virtuous merit. The most important thing is that we must have bodhi mind (mind of enlightenment); must have a deep faith (śraddhā) in Amitābha’s primordial vows; must think of him continuously and recite his name (nāmadheya) with pure and illuminable mind; must visualize his Pure Land

with a vow to be reborn there. Moreover, all sentient beings born in this land will never veer from the Buddhist path on their way to enlightenment. In that splendid environment and in the excellent company of advanced Bodhisattvas, one will attain Buddhahood with Amitābha Buddha’s training and support. This is a path of easy practice in Buddhist tradition, in general, and in Mahāyāna tradition, in particular.

Generally speaking, the content of the Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra is simpler than that of the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha, but it is tied to the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha. The Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha is considered as the main sūtra of the Pure Land because it is the most comprehensive one. However, the devotees of Pure Land School regularly recite the Smaller Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra which is like a summary and an introduction to the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha.

The third important sūtra of Pure Land sūtras is the Amitāyurduḥḥā-sūtra. This sūtra was preached at Sravasti in the king Bimbisāra’s court by Śākyamuni Buddha. Due to extreme suffering, the Queen Vaidehī calls upon the Buddha to show her a place free from trouble, sorrow, imprisonment, etc. Among all the Buddhas Lands, she chooses the Sukhāvatī sphere of Amitābha Buddha as the realm for her new reborn. The Śākyamuni Buddha according to her wishes and the wishes of all living beings, show methods of meditation and concentration that are foundation for the wish to be reborn in the Sukhāvatī sphere. Therefore, the main content of the Amitāyurduḥḥā-sūtra is a series of sixteen meditations, that is from concentration upon and thinking about Amitābha Buddha; the excellent company of Bodhisattvas; and the splendid environment of Pure Land. At

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548 Ibid., pp. 25-7.
549 Ibid., p. 5.
551 Ibid., p. 121.
the same time the Śākyamuni Buddha also mentions different types of rebirth in Pure Land. It consists of three levels and nine different classes.

Thus, Pure Land Sūtras provides the very best conditions for spiritual practice, and it is suitable to many different capabilities of practitioners. Its special emphasis shifts from concentration to faith, and thus the Enlightenment is assured. Therefore, the devotees of the Pure Land School with their immediate goal strive to be reborn in Sukhāvatī, the Land of Ultimate Bliss. To them, rebirth in the Pure Land is not only the easy path towards Buddhahood, but the emergency flight out of this impure world. Therefore, the Pure Land thought is one of the specific thoughts of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Like all Mahāyāna schools, Pure Land requires, first and foremost, the development of the bodhi mind; the aspiration to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. From this starting point, the main tenets of the school can be understood at two main levels, the popular and advanced – depending on the background and the capacities of the cultivator:

1. In its popular form, i.e., for ordinary practitioners, in this spiritually degenerate age (twenty-six centuries after the nirvāṇa of the historical Buddha), Pure Land method involves the seeking to rebirth in the Land of Amitābha Buddha. It could be achieved within one lifetime through the practice of sincere faith, with recitation of his name and a vow to be reborn in his Land. In that convenient environment, no creation of new negative karmas, and all existing ones would evaporate, nirvāṇa would appear. Therefore, at the popular level, the Pure Land of Amitābha Buddha is an ideal training ground, an ideal environment where the practitioner to be reborn by both his own efforts and the Amitābha Buddha’s power. No longer being subject to retrogression, having left birth and death behind forever, the practitioner can now
focus through all his efforts on the ultimate aim of Buddhahood. This aspect of Pure Land school is the most popular form.

(2) At the advanced level, i.e., for the practitioners with higher spiritual capacity, the Pure Land method, like other methods, reverts the ordinary, deluded mind to the self (nature true mind). In the process, wisdom and Buddhahood are eventually attained. This is exemplified by the following advice of the eminent Zen master Chu Hung (one of the three “Dragon-Elephants” of the 16th and the 17th century China), “Right now, you simply must recite the Buddha’s name with purity and illumination.” Purity means reciting the Buddha’s name without any other thoughts. Illumination means reflecting back as you recite the Buddha’s name. Purity is *sammata*, “stopping.” Illumination is *vipasyana*, “observing.” Unify your mindfulness of the Buddha through Buddha’s name recitation, and stopping and observing are both present.

In short, Buddhist scriptures concerning Amitābha Buddha seem to have composed by people different from those who compiled the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Belief in Amitābha Buddha was widespread among Mahāyāna adherents. References to Amitābha and his Pure Land (*Sukhāvati*) are found in many Mahāyāna scriptures, and rebirth in Pure Land is recommended as goal in many of these works. According to Japanese scholar Fujita Kōtatsu, Amitābha Buddha is referred to in more than thirteen of the translations of Mahāyāna scriptures in the China. Besides, there are also several other figures should be mentioned in connection with Pure Land thought, such as, Akṣobhya Buddha and his Pure Land; Abhirati, who are described in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras*. However, belief in Akṣobhya was never as popular as faith in Amitābha. It may be said that, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, in general, and in Asia East Buddhism, in

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particular, the Pure Land sūtras (*Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtras*) serve as manuals for those who wish to become no-returners (*anāgāmins*) to this world.\(^{553}\)

### 5.3. The Main Śāstras of Mahāyāna Literature

#### 5.3.1. The *Mādhyamika-śāstra*

*Mādhyamika-śāstra* (Treatise of the Middle Way), full name: *Mūlamādhyāmika-kārikā* (The Root Verses on the Middle Way) is the most important treatise of Mahāyāna literature. It came into being at the time when Indian Buddhist schools were confusing of thought. In order to demolish the mistaken interpretations of both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna in renovated process of Buddhism, and to unify the Buddha’s teachings on Mahāyāna thought, Nāgārjuna, South-Indian monk (150 – 250 CE),\(^ {554} \) compiled this śāstra. The śāstra is the fundamental verses on the Middle Way which Nāgārjuna developed from the theory of Śūnyatā (Emptiness) in the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. In other words, based on the thought of Śūnyatā in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, Nāgārjuna compiled *Mādhyamika-śāstra* to develop the Middle Way thought.\(^ {555} \)

There are many versions of *Mādhyamika-śāstra*, but that by Kumārajīva (with Chinese language) in the 5th century CE is regarded as the most popular and exact version. This version was continuously translated into other languages (such as, Japanese, Tibetan in the 6th and the 7th century CE) in the propagation and development of Mahāyāna Buddhism, in general, and Chinese Zen School, in particular.\(^ {556} \) According to the version by Kumārajīva, the śāstra consists of four volumes, and is divided into twenty-seven short chapters including a total of about 446 verses. Its philosophical

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\(^{555}\) Peter, Harvey, *op. cit.*, 2005, pp. 96-100.

\(^{556}\) Cf. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, (Redirected from *Mūlamadhyāmikakārikā*)
thought is divided into two sections: first twenty-five chapters demolish the mistaken interpretations of Mahāyāna; two last chapters demolish those of Hīnayāna. Each chapter of them has separate contents, but its aim is to explain and clarify the Buddha’s thought, i.e., “Everything (dharmas) comes into existence due to dependent origination. They do not have true-nature or their nature is emptiness.”

Therefore, the major contents of the Mādhyamika-śāstra emphasize the emptiness of all components of reality (dharmas). At the same time it expounds the great details of genuine meaning of Pratītya-samutpāda (Dependent Origination), the Middle Way and the Two Truths. The whole treatise is very vast. Here I will deal only with Nāgārjuna’s basic philosophical approach in order to we understand his position among the various luminaries that dotted the history of the Buddhist tradition.

In the first chapter of the śāstra, Nāgārjuna touched upon the idea of the Middle Way and explained how our understanding of ourselves, the nature of the world, and reality normally falls into the extremity of either externalism or nihilism. As externalists we believe that there is a permanent, unchanging, immutable self existing behind or beyond our bodies and our usual experiences of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and memories. In nihilism we think that there is no such thing as self, that there is no mind even, and that only the material world is real. In this materialist view any concept of self or mind is reduced to brain processes or functions.\textsuperscript{557} Therefore Nāgārjuna said that there is neither reality nor non-reality but only relativity.

Other philosophies and religions also posit the notion of an unchanging reality or ‘Absolute.’ Some people understand this in a personal and theistic manner, while others understand it more in an impersonal and metaphysical way. But in both cases there is a belief in an unchanging,

\textsuperscript{557} Kyabgon, Traleg, \textit{op. cit.}, 2004, p. 71.
permanent, absolute reality that is substantial and inherently existing. Also, physical phenomena such as tables, chairs, mountains, houses, and people are seen as having an inherent existence and an enduring essence or substance. But, according to Mahāyāna Buddhism, this belief is founded on ignorance, and the notion of an enduring existence creates suffering. The Buddhist scholar Dignaga says: “When there is a self, one becomes conscious of the other. From ‘I’ and ‘other’ arises the belief in independent existence, and out of antagonism resulting from the union of these two, all evil comes about.”\(^{558}\)

The central axiom of the Mādhyamika-śāstra is that all elements (dharmas) are impermanent and have no independent existence in themselves. They may be broken down into parts, the parts into sub-parts and so on infinitely. Therefore, their nature is emptiness, is not the truth. Nāgārjuna argued that: “Nothing at all had svabhāva (own-nature, self-nature or substance), nothing existed independently without having external conditions. Neither from itself nor from another, nor from both, nor without a cause, does anything whatever, anywhere arise.”\(^{559}\) This means that things do not come into being because of a self-existing cause giving rise to a self-existing effect. If a thing came into being out of itself, completely independently of everything else, it should be able to give rise to certain effects continuously, but that does not happen. If things arise from themselves than other things, there would be no causal relationship between themselves and the other. There has to be some kind of homogeneous relationship between cause and effect, which is unobtainable if we think of the thing itself and something else that gives rise to it as both being self-existing and totally independent of each other. If a thing comes into being through something other than itself, the whole idea of causality is put into

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\(^{558}\) Ibid., pp. 71-2.

\(^{559}\) Nāgārjuna, Mūlamādhyāmikakārikā, I, p. 1.
jeopardy and everything becomes random; anything is able to give rise to anything else. As Nāgārjuna said, this would lead to a complete breakdown of the whole idea of causality. Lastly, things do not come into being without any cause. It is important to understand that Nāgārjuna did not regard this teaching as being nihilistic. Instead he demonstrated that it represented the Middle Way between externalism and nihilism, since it acknowledged the conventional existence of objects that arise within the continuous flux of Pratītya-samutpāda. He maintained that, while nothing has svabhāva and therefore nothing has ultimate existence, the world in which we live does exist as the product of passing conditions. He attacked the idea of inherent existence, not conventional existence. The conventional world is real, not illusory, but is radically impermanent (i.e. lacking svabhāva), and can only be described as conventionally true. The acknowledgement of the two truths, i.e. the paramārtha-satya, or ultimate truth of the universal absence of svabhāva, and the samvṛti-satya, or relative truth of the conventional world, constitutes a ‘Middle Way’ between externalism and nihilism. This position is reflected in the very title of this treatise, Mūlāmadhyamika-kārikā (The Root Verses on the Middle Way) and also in the name Mādhyamika, which literally means ‘Middling’.

Viewed in this light, Nāgārjuna was simply reasserting the original doctrine of Pratītya-samutpāda. His analysis demonstrates the absence of inherent existence that is applied to Pratītya-samutpāda itself and even to the Buddha and nirvāṇa too. He says that, everything lacks svabhāva or inherent existence, but does not mean they do not exist. The Mādhyamika-śāstra’s first verse says “There do not exist, anywhere at all, any existents whatsoever, arisen either from themselves or from something else, either

560 Kyabgon, Traleg, op. cit., 2004, p. 73.
562 Ibid., p. 117.
from both or altogether without cause. Therefore, the emptiness in Mādhyamika philosophy does not mean that things do not exist. Mountains, rivers, tables, chairs, houses, people, cars, etc., all exist, but they do not have inherent existence. This is confirmed by the fact that at no point in the Mādhyamika-śāstra does he draw upon a Mahāyāna sūtra as a scriptural authority, but instead refers repeatedly to identifiable sūtras from the Āgamas of the non-Mahāyāna school.

Nāgārjuna seems to have realized that the problem of svabhāva is the problem of explaining causality and change. These were two basic themes in the Buddha’s explanation of existence. Therefore, before proceeding to establish the non-substantiality of all elements (dharma-nairātmya), Nāgārjuna developed two chapters to the clarification of these two issues. He had no objection to the Abhidharma formulation of causal relations as long as the relation are not regarded as having a unique nature or substance in terms of which they are to be related. Similarly, if a causal relation can be established without positing a unique substance, and if this causal relation can account for the experienced identity (which is not absolute), then there is no need to postulate absolute difference or otherness either. In other words, this is a rejection of the relationalist solution to the problem of causality. How that rationalistic explanation leads to a paradox has already been pointed out. Yet a total renunciation of the rational content of knowledge would not leave the empirical sound and secure. Hence, Nāgārjuna turns to the pragmatic definition of an event as artha (fruit), arguing against the rationalist that the fruit is dependently arisen, neither pre-existing as a substance nor something absolutely different, without at the

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566 Loc.cit.
same time arguing for an essentialist explanation that the fruit itself is a unique event.\textsuperscript{567}

Nāgārjuna was accused of destroying the \textit{dharma} by such reasoning, but he denied that. On the level of \textit{paramārtha-satya}, ultimate truth, the everyday world does not exist, i.e. it lacks \textit{svabhāva}. Conventionally it does exist, and it is on the conventional level of existence that the teachings of Buddhism are relevant and effective. Indeed, if enlightenment is to be possible, then the ordinary world must be lacking in \textit{svabhāva}, or else it would be fixed and unchanging – for what has \textit{svabhāva} must by definition remain unchanged. As soon as anything is said to have a permanent unchanging essence, radical change becomes impossible. To avoid confusion, it is important to understand that, for Nāgārjuna and the Indian Mādhyamika in itself is only an abstraction. It is an epistemological ultimate. It is not a thing, still less a thing which in itself is supposed to have \textit{svabhāva}, or ultimate existence. It has no ontological status. Hence emptiness itself is described as being empty.\textsuperscript{568}

Buddhism, in general, assumed that the world is a cosmic flux of momentary interconnected events (\textit{dharmas}), however the reality of these events might be viewed. Nāgārjuna sought to demonstrate that the flux itself could not be held to be real, nor one could perceive it by consciousness, as it is part of this flux. If this world of constant change is not real, neither can the serial transmigration (\textit{saṃsāra}) be real, nor its opposite, \textit{nirvāṇa}. The \textit{saṃsāra} and \textit{nirvāṇa} being equally unreal, they are one and the same. According to the text, Nāgārjuna says: “Nothing distinguishes \textit{saṃsāra} from \textit{nirvāṇa}; and nothing distinguishes \textit{nirvāṇa} from \textit{saṃsāra}. Between even the extremities of \textit{saṃsāra} and \textit{nirvāṇa}, one cannot find even a subtle

\textsuperscript{567} J. Kalupahana, David, \textit{op. cit.}, 1994, p. 162.
\textsuperscript{568} Skilton, Andrew, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000, pp. 117-8.
difference.” In short, there are not two realities *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. There is only the ‘field’ of emptiness that is experienced through ignorance and unwholesome mental formations as *samsāra* or through wisdom as *nirvāṇa*. When one’s experience of the world is conditioned by *prapañca*, it is known as *samsāra*, full of *duḥkha*; but when by wisdom, the ultimate truth of this world is empty of own-being, and then one finds *nirvāṇa* and freedom. In that freedom, one is attached neither to the worldly things nor to the state of *nirvāṇa*, which is itself arising in the field of emptiness. With wisdom’s penetration into the ultimate truth of emptiness, one is detached from both the world and *nirvāṇa*, so that one can freely turn with compassion to address the needs of all living beings. Therefore, Nāgārjuna’s Middle Way is summarized in his famous statement that *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are the same.

An example of Nāgārjuna’s thinking can be seen in his analysis of *duḥkha*, the dissatisfaction of life. In the few verses of chapter 12 of his *Mādhyamika-śāstra*, he say that ordinarily *duḥkha* is assumed to be either caused by itself, caused by another, or both by itself and another, or not caused at all. Nāgārjuna goes on to show that since each of these views assumes a substantial causal agent (either oneself or another) behind the arising of *duḥkha*. So if the arising of *duḥkha*, or any other element of existence, cannot be explained by the use of concepts that assume a substantial causal agent, how can it arise according to Nāgārjuna? In chapter 26 of this śāstra, Nāgārjuna analyzes the dependent arising of the “mass of *duḥkha*. In other words, for Nāgārjuna *duḥkha*, like all factors and processes of life, arise dependently. Being dependently arisen, all phenomena are “empty of own-being.” This is what Nāgārjuna means when

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570 Ibid., p. 135.
he says, “We declare that whatever is dependent arising is emptiness.”

Nāgārjuna sees this truth of emptiness, that all phenomena are dependently arisen. With this insight into emptiness, one escapes *duḥkha*: “The ignorant person creates mental formations which are the source of *saṃsāra*. While the ignorant person does so, the wise person does not because of his or her seeing the truth.”

According to Tibetan Buddhist literature, Mādhyamika represents the definitive expression of Buddhist doctrine. It developed in the form of commentaries on Nāgārjuna’s works. This style of development is characteristic of the basically scholastic character of the Indian philosophical tradition. The commentaries elaborated not only varying interpretations of Nāgārjuna’s philosophy but also different understandings of the philosophical tools that are appropriate to its advancement. Although perhaps most frequently characterized by modern interpreters as a Buddhist version of scepticism, Mādhyamika arguably develops metaphysical concerns. The logically elusive character of Mādhyamika arguments has fascinated and perplexed generations of scholars. This is appropriate with regard to a school whose principal term of art “emptiness” that reflects developments in Buddhist thought from the high scholasticism of Tibet to the enigmatic discourse of East Asian Zen.

In short, on the basis of the foregoing references, we can say that: according to the *Mādhyamika-śāstra*, nothing is absolute, everything is relative, nothing exists on its own, and everything is interdependent. The *Mādhyamika-śāstra* was established as the basic text of Mādhyamika School, the important school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. The treatise is qualitatively high; it systematically explains the basic aspects of Mahāyāna doctrine (such as: Śūnyatā, *Pratītya-samutpāda*, Middle Way, Two Truths,

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etc.), and in addition to that, it satisfies the requirement of philosophical thought in the evolution of Buddhism. Moreover, it is an essentially polemic treatise which refutes the philosophical positions of both other Buddhist schools (Sarvāstivādin and Sautrāntika) and non-Buddhist schools. Some scholars assert that: “Nāgārjuna based on the thought of the Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra in order to compose the Mādhyamika-śāstra, brings out the doctrine of Middle Way, a new thought that disorder traditional doctrines of contemporary Indian religion, and until today, the scholars and western philosophers also admire and praise Nāgārjuna’s method and explanation.” In other words, Nāgārjuna understood clearly Śūnyatā thought in Prajñāpāramitā literature and on the basis of that he elaborated his Middle Way theory. This theory serves as a foundation in order to systematise the whole Mahāyāna sūtras and make Mahāyāna Buddhism flourish and develop till today. Therefore, Nāgārjuna is he who can be regarded as the first philosopher in the renovation and propagation of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Additionally, it can also be said that Nāgārjuna arrived at his positions from a desire to achieve a consistent exegesis of the Buddha’s doctrine as recorded in the canon. In his eyes the Buddha was not merely a forerunner, but the very founder of the Mādhyamika system. Because the Buddha himself used to assert his practical way is the ‘Middle Way.’ In his first sermon, the Buddha mentioned the Middle Way between two extremities of hedonistic pleasure and extreme asceticism. But he may also have referred to the Middle Way between the competing philosophies of externalism and annihilationism (the belief that the soul exists forever and the soul is not annihilated at death), or between materialism and nihilism. This proves that, Mahāyāna thought arose in the Buddha’s time and unaffectedly developed until the Nāgārjuna’s time.

5.3.2. The Vijñānavāda-śāstra

Vijñānavāda-śāstra or Vijñaptimātra-śāstra (Treatise of the Consciousness Only), full name: Vijñānaptimātratā-kārikā is the second important treatise of Mahāyāna literature. This śāstra came into being in the 4th century CE in the North-west of India (during the period of transition from Kushan to Gupta dynasty). According to historical record, about 100 years after Nāgārjuna, there were two brothers Asaṅga (310-390 CE.) and Vasubandhu (320-400 CE.), who had begun as scholars in the Hīnayāna schools.\(^{577}\) Asaṅga, the elder brother, was an eminent monk in the Mahīśāsaka School. In his meditation, he received teachings through a vision directly from the Maitreya Bodhisattva (the future Buddha) in the Tuṣita Heaven, who dictated him five Yogācāra works that were collected under the name of Maitreyanātha. These works include the Abhisamayālankāra-śāstra, the Mahāyānasūtralankāra-śāstra, the Madhyāntavibhāga-śāstra, the Ratnagotra-vibhāga and the Dharmadharmatāvibhāga-śāstra.\(^{578}\) Asaṅga converted to Mahāyāna as a result of this interaction. He then began to compose several other works to develop further of the Vijñānavāda-śāstra, such as:\(^{579}\) the Mahāyānasamgraha-śāstra, the Abhidharmasamuccaya-śāstra, the Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra,\(^{580}\) commentary on the Sandhinirmocana-sūtra, the Bodhisattvabhūmi, and then establish the Yogācāra School, one of major schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

After Asaṅga became the scholar of the Yogācāra School, he converted his brother, Vasubandhu, to Mahāyāna (originally, Vasubandhu was an eminent teacher of the Sarvāstivādin School of Hīnayāna Buddhism). Vasubandhu subsequently composed prodigious amounts of treatises to

\(^{577}\) See: Skilton, Andrew, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 121.


\(^{580}\) Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra is the major treatise of Vijñānavāda School, or a massive encyclopedic work that was considered as the definitive statement of Vijñānavāda. But most scholars believe it was compiled a century later, in the 5th century, while its components reflect various stages in the development of Vijñānavāda thought. And perhaps according to the title of this text, Vijñānavāda School has other name, Yogācāra School.
systematize the Vijñānavāda thought, and at the same time bring out new notion in order to deny Hīnayānic notion in Abhidharmakosa-bhāsa that he formerly composed. His commentaries on the works of Maitreyanātha and Asaṅga includes: The Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa, the Vyākhya-yukti, the Mahāyānaśatadharma-vidyādvara, the Daśabhūmika-śāstra, the Trisvabhāvanirdeśa (Exposition of the Three Natures) etc., and two most important works: The Viṃśika-vijñānaptimātratā-kārikā (Twenty Verses) and the Trīṃśatikā-vijñānaptimātratā-kārikā (Thirty Verses).\(^{581}\) These two works, afterward, were considered to be the carrier of the Vijñānavāda. Therefore, Vasubandhu is considered to be the primary figure in the systematization and development of the Vijñānavāda. Peter Harvey asserts that, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu not only developed the characteristic ideas of the Vijñānavāda, but also sought to systematize and synthesize all the strands of the Mahāyāna, and some Srāvakayāna ideas.\(^{582}\)

After Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, the two followers of them, Sthiramati (the 6\(^{th}\) century) and Dharmapāla (530 – 591) continously tried to preserve the Yogācāra in India. Besides, there were Dignāga (Vasubandhu’s disciple) and Dharmakīrti (Dignāga’s disciple) who based on Vasubandhu’s standpoint to bring out Hetuvidyā, a doctrine of logic. After that, Hsuan-tsang (596 – 664) abridged the commentaries of ten great authors and composed them into Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi (ten volumes) in Chinese language. This version is available even today. Thus, the Vijñānavāda held a prominent position in Indian Buddhism for centuries after the time of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Teachings and derivations of this school have influenced and become well-established in the East-south Asian Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism.

The Mādhyamika emphasizes the notion of emptiness, whereas the Vijñānavāda emphasizes the notion of consciousness or mind. The

\(^{582}\) Peter, Harvey, op. cit., 2005, p. 105.
Vijñānavāda says that all elements (dharmas) are derived from the consciousness, how our perception of the external world is dependent upon our mind. Therefore, it attempts to make explicit the structure of mind or consciousness and to sketch the dynamic progression toward conversion and awakening. Really, the maxim “All three worlds are mind only, all dharmas are consciousness only” expresses the principal doctrinal essence of this school as a teaching which examines mainly just the problems of mind and consciousness. But not all the representations of this school used the term “vijñānavāda” for itself denomination, it is also true regard to other denominations by three Sanskrit phrases as follows:

1. Originally, it has the name of Yogācāra (the practice of Yogā). It means to promote the practice of Yogā and concentration on meditation in order to improve on Bodhisattva’s vows. This tendency led Asaṅga to explain the Yogācāra theory, further he suggested in the two treatises Yogācārabhūmi and Bodhisattvabhūmi that he perceived from Maitreya. Typically, the works of Yogācāra-practice introduce the practitioner to mindfulness, meditation upon body, feelings, thoughts and dharmas, both in oneself and in others. Through this, insight into the non-difference between self and other arises. Further meditations help one get successively more subtle levels, the mental activity which gives rise to the perception of duality, and the practitioner thereby passes on, with the aid of śamatha meditations, through the remaining Paths and Bodhisattva bhūmis.

2. Cittamātra (Mind-only), meaning everything is mind only, “all three worlds are mind-only.” It does not mean that everything is made by mind, but that the totality of our experience is dependent upon our mind. In other words, we can only know or experience things with our mind; even sense experienced is also cognized by the mind.

585 Ibid., p. 126.
Therefore, the things that we know, every element of our cognition, are essentially part of a mental process. Nothing can be cognized radically or fundamentally different from that mind. If they were fundamentally different from each other, they would be cognitively inaccessible to each other.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^6\) In the *Sandhinirmocana-sūtra*, the Buddha states that both the images perceived in meditation and externally perceived objects are *vijñāptimātra*, merely ideation.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^7\) ‘Ideation’ means the ‘product of ideas’ or ‘activity of the mind,’ so the Buddha say that ideas or mental objects perceived during meditation, and the objects of the ordinary world, are the product of the activity of the mind.\(^5\)\(^8\)\(^8\) Therefore *Cittamātra* can be qualified as psychological idealism.

(3) *Vijñānavāda* or *Vijñaptimātra* (Consciousness-only), the doctrine holds that, everything is consciousness only. It means, everything arises or all *dharmas* that we see and know are due to our consciousness. This doctrine claims that consciousness is the causal force behind such dependent arising. As the *Lankāvatāra-Sūtra* says “consciousness is like water forming itself into waves.” Vasubandhu analyses of the consciousness into eight types: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-*vijñāna*, each related to a particular sense-organ as in Early Buddhism; and two more types of consciousness are, *manas-vijñāna*, and *ālaya-vijñāna*, making a total of eight. The analysis of the *ālaya-vijñāna* is central to this doctrine. Since the doctrine can be understood as theories of consciousness (*vijñāna*), therefore it is, sometimes, called *Vijñānavāda*.

Initially, these three names were used alternately. However, afterward, the treatises of consciousness (*Vijñānavāda*) by Vasubandhu became more diffuse, so it was regarded as name for doctrine of this school.

\(^{5\text{86}}\) Ibid., p. 123.


\(^{5\text{88}}\) Skilton, Andrew, *op. cit.*, 2000, p. 123.
While the *Cittamātra* almost does not mention, and the *Yogācāra* is used to insert into the *Vijñānavāda* as synonymous.

In the *Vijñānavāda-śāstra*, the first addition is *manas-vijñāna* or seventh form of consciousness. It is a separate type of consciousness, a process of subliminal thought which functions by receiving and disposing of data from the other six consciousnesses. This organizes data from the six consciousnesses into the experience of a meaningful world, according to set categories. It contains the basis both for correct judgements and misperception of reality, and for both skilful and unskilful *karmas*, which are generated by volitions accompanying the six consciousnesses.\(^{589}\) *Manas* and the six consciousnesses represent only the surface of the mind, which is active and oriented towards ‘objects.’ The second addition is *ālaya-vijñāna*, eighth form and final level of consciousness also. It is an unconscious level that underlies the mind of every sentient being, is the basis of the rest or the absence of purposive and unaware activities. It is as a storehouse, where the seeds of the future ideas and the traces of past deeds are stored up. In other words, *ālaya-vijñāna* is a kind of collective unconscious in which seeds of all potential phenomena are stored and from which they occasionally pour into manifestation. However, it is not the ‘Absolute.’ It belongs to the phenomenal part of existence because all the results of *karma* are there stored up.\(^{590}\) Therefore, it is called the “storehouse consciousness” and sometimes it is referred to as the *Tathāgatagarbha* or the “Womb of the *Tathāgata*.”\(^{591}\) Asaṅga equates it with what the *Mahāyānaabhidharma-sūtra* calls the “Realm (*dhātu*) without beginning in time, which is the common basis of all *dharmas*.”

When a person performs actions (*karmas*), traces are left on his unconscious mind. These traces become ‘seeds’ of future karmic effects

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\(^{589}\) *Trimśati-kārikā* (of Vasubandhu), pp. 6-8.


that sink into the ālaya-vijñāna. These seeds will reproduce themselves over time when they meet suitable condition. Thus, the continuity of personality is explained through death and periods of unconsciousness when the seven active consciousnesses are absent. Therefore, the Vijñānavāda-śāstra teaches that one can change the karmic condition of the “storehouse consciousness” by the practice of the Six-Perfections in order to plant and cultivate ‘good seeds’ within the depths of the “storehouse consciousness” itself.

The ālaya is also said to contain some intrinsically pure ‘seeds,’ the source of the beginning of good karmas. They arise from the profound depths of the ālaya. In the She-lun school, the earliest Chinese version of the Yogācāra, this is designated as a ninth, ‘taintless,’ consciousness. This depth-aspect of ālaya is seen to be beyond the dualisms of subject and object, existence and non-existence, and is known as the Dharma-dhātu, the ‘Dharma-realm,’ equivalent to emptiness and nirvāṇa. It is a level of ālaya which goes beyond the individual unconscious, and can be seen as a universal reality which lies within all beings. The Lankāvatāra-Sūtra (pp. 46-7, 38-9) sees the seven active consciousnesses as related to the ālaya as waves are related to the ocean; they are not really separate from it, but are simply perturbations in it. These perturbations do not affect the ever-still depths of the ocean-like ālaya, though.

The ālaya acts as the basis of the active consciousness by actually projecting it out of itself. The Yogācāra regards a person’s perception of the world as a product of the unconscious mind. This notion is related to the observation that, in any situation, we only really notice what our mind is attuned to perceive, something that interests us, threatens us, excites us, or disgusts us. We only get ‘edited highlights’ of the possible field of perception. What we perceive is clearly related to our nature, which is the

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592 Trīṃśatikā-kārikā (of Vasubandhu), p. 16.
593 Peter, Harvey, op. cit., 2005, p. 108.
product, among other things, of our previous actions. The Yogācārins emphasized this to such an extent that perception is regarded as essentially a process of imagining, in which the mind generates mental constructions that are perceived as a world.\(^{594}\)

The Vijñānavāda-śāstra also describes the process by which the dependent nature comes and is seen as the imagined nature, i.e., how the ālaya-vijñāna as the fundamental level of consciousnesses, through a process known as ‘trisvabhāva’ (three patterns or natures of consciousness’s function: parikalpita-laksana, paratantra-laksana and parinispanna-laksana). In doing this it freely incorporated the Abhidharma’s analysis of the perceived world, adapted from the non-Mahāyāna schools. Developing the concept of the ālaya-vijñāna and the teaching about ‘trisvabhāva,’ Vasubandhu tells nothing about any Absolute, or the Only Mind, he reserves himself from discussion about the essence, or nature of consciousness examining only its phenomena (laksana). Nevertheless, his disciples, Sthiramati and Dharmapala transcended the limitations of the pure empiricism and phenomena of Vasubandhu and distinctively proclaim the idea of the non-existence of the world outside consciousness. This opinion, afterwards, was accepted by the Chinese Yogacarins Xuan-zang and Kuai-ji (Xuan-zang was a pupil of Dharmapala’s disciples).

In Early Buddhism, the flux of consciousness is seen as the crucial link between rebirths and a transformed state of consciousness is associated with Nibbāna. The perceiving mind is also that which interprets experience so as to construct a ‘world,’ and can be the basis for experiencing the world-transcending Nibbāna. In the Yogācāra, the role of the mind in constructing the world is so emphasized that all concepts of an external physical reality are rejected: the perceived world is seen as ‘representation-only’ (Vijñaptimātra) or ‘thought-only’ (Cittamātra).\(^{595}\)

\(^{594}\) Ibid., p. 108.
\(^{595}\) Ibid., p. 106.
For the brief definition of this theory, it can be said that Asaṅga’s teaching contains in itself the tendency to ontological and metaphysical examination of the problem of Mind. It confirms the existence of not only the “storehouse consciousness” of alaya-vijñāna but also the source of all empirical forms of consciousness and its contents as well supports the idea of ‘Only Mind’ which is the same as the Dharmakāya of the Buddha. This Absolute Consciousness sometimes was even called “Great Self,” “Highest Self,” or “Pure Self” (mahātman; paramātman; suddhātman). This tendency led Asaṅga to the positions of Tathāgatagarbha theory that formerly represented the treatises Ratnagotravibhāga and Mahāyānasūtralankāra-śāstra. According to Tibetan tradition, the position of these works of Asaṅga had played an important role in the process of integration of the Yogācāra ideas into the theory of the Tathāgatagarbha. This integration has found its most perfect expression in the famous work of Asvaghosa, the Mahāyānasraddhotpada-śāstra, i.e. the acceptance about the theory of the ālaya-vijñāna as a stage in the evolution of ‘tathatā’ in which consciousness is awakened (this work exists only in Chinese). This position of Asaṅga supplied the reality of the psychical phenomenon and was quite in accordence with the teaching of main doctrine in the Lankāvatāra-Sūtra.

The Vijñānavāda-śāstra asserts that things do not exist independently, but they are related and interdependent. One in all, all in one; because this one appears, so that one appears; this one arises, so that one arises; this one destroys, so that one destroys. They are Pratītya-samutpāda (Dependent Origination), paratantra-lakṣaṇa (dependent on the other one to exist). This dependent pattern has both defiled and pure aspects because as it is the pivotal structure of mind accounting for both illusion and awakening.

External reality can not possibly exist if it could not possibly be known. And it is absurd to assert the existence of something of which is certain that we

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596 Tibetan tradition call these texts belong to group of Maiteya-Asaṅga works.
can have no knowledge. We must recognize that our appearance in the world is a result of mind construction; a perception involves an apparent datum, but all that is known as essentially the network of mind construction which is imposed on this datum.\(^{599}\) Asaṅga and Vasubandhu negate not only objective reality, but also the reality of a subjective world: the duality of subject and external object is declared to be entirely illusory and inexistent.

Actually, the theory of ‘Consciousness Only’ is latent in the Buddha’s teachings. Asaṅga and Vasubandhu followed the same theory to write their treatises. Their aim was to help people who were ignorant, correctly understand about duality of ‘self’ and ‘dharma’ in order to end grasp-self and grasp-dharma. The special function of consciousness is to realize the external world and internal nature of people. Because this realization, all dharma\(^{6}\)s (everything) appear in many shapes, the human beings do not understand (ignorant) things in their right perspectives, so they are delusive, and thus, they are suffering. Therefore, the doctrine of Yogācāra brought out a message to awake people. Let us control and penetrate our mind to cultivate, change and correct it. If we clearly understand no-self and no-dharma, our ignorance will go away and we will get out of suffering and attain enlightenment.

In short, Asaṅga and Vasubandhu believed that everything existed in the world is due to mind or consciousness. The things which we think of as physical things are just projections of our mind; they are delusions or hallucinations, so to say. To get out of these delusions, we must practice meditation as mentioned in the Yogācāra in order to create pure consciousness which is devoid of all contents. In that way, we leave our deluded individual minds and finally join with the universal mind, or Buddha-mind or Perfect Wisdom. We need to remember that, the Yogācāra does not expound any special method of meditation, but it is a ‘skilful

\(^{599}\) A. Berriedale, Keith, _Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon_, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharial, 1979, p. 244.
means’ to control practitioner’s mind while doing any sort of act. Its aim is to transfer consciousness into wisdom. Therefore, the emergence of Yogācāra does not to give prominence to a doctrine, it only brings out a new perception of enlightenment through the understanding process of mind by theory of ‘trisvabhāva.’ Hence, to establish the practice of Bodhisattva, bring Mahāyāna thought to perfection.

Actually, both the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra saw themselves as preserving the Buddhist Middle-Way between the two extremes of the nihilism (everything is unreal) and the substantialism (substantial entities existing). The Yogācāra criticized the Mādhyamika for tending towards nihilism, while the Mādhyamika criticized the Yogācāra for tending towards substantialism.\textsuperscript{600} The bridge between these two doctrines is the Middle-Way theory of the Buddha. The emergence of both these schools was regarded as the development of Mahāyāna thought to the highest point that its origin was traced from tradition of Early Buddhism. In the Dhammapāda, the Buddha taught that: “Mind is major, mind is the leader, mind creat all dharmas.”\textsuperscript{601} Therefore, theory of mind or consciousness played an important role even from Early Buddhism to Indian and Chinese Buddhist Schools later on. In other words, all Buddhist teachings mention questions that relate to ‘mind’ or ‘consciousness,’ due to mind is the basic to attain enlightenment, and the enlightenment is the final goal of a Buddhist practitioner.

\textsuperscript{600} Peter, Harvey, \textit{op. cit.}, 2005, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{601} The \textit{Dhammapāda-sūtra},