Chapter Three:

THE CONCEPT OF ANĀTMAN IN LATER BUDDHISM

A few hundred years after the Buddha's passing away, there arose eighteen different schools or sects all of which claimed to represent the original teachings of the Buddha. Over a period of time, these schools gradually merged into two main schools: Theravāda and Mahāyāna. Today, a majority of the followers of Buddhism are divided into these two schools. In this case, we might learn that it is the same Anāman doctrine of the Buddha that was introduced in the Mādhyamikaschool of Buddhism as Śūnyatāor void nests. Although this concept was elaborated by a great Madhyāmikascholar, Nagarjuna, by giving various interpretations, there is no extraordinary concept in Śūnyatāfar different from the Buddha's original doctrine of Anāman; even so an attempt would be made to discuss and explain that how the latter scholars denote the Anātmantheory far from the former.

The Anātmanor No-Soul is the natural result of, or corollary to, the analysis of the five aggregates and the teaching of Dependent Origination (Paṭicca-samuppāda). Before going into the question of Anātmanproper, it is useful to have a brief idea of the Dependent Origination. The point of this doctrine is given in a short formula of four lines:

When this, that is, (Imasmiṃ sati idaṃhoti);

This arising, that arises (Imassaupāda idaṃ uppajjati);

When this is not, that is not (Imasmiṃ asati idaṃna hoti);

This ceasing, that ceases (Imassa nirodha idaṃ nirujjhati).

On this principle of conditionality, relativity and interdependence, the whole existence and continuity of life and its cessation of karma are explained in a detailed formula which is called Paṭicca-Samuppāda (Dependent Origination). With showing all these fundamental teachings related to each other. It's learnt
that from *Avijjā* (ignorance) brings into karmameans action or deed from *karma* arises attachment (Upadana), from attachment brings into becoming (Bhava). It consists in coming to perceive non-selfhood (*Anātman*), emptiness (*Śūnyatā*), so that the self is done away with. So by putting an end to ignorance with the understanding no-self or no-soul from the Buddha's method called the Noble Eightfold Path.

*Anātman* is a basic concept in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism although in an altered form. The *Mahāyāna* tradition extends the analysis of an individual No Self applying it to all things (dharmas). This led to the *Mahāyāna* teaching of *Śūnyatā* or empties. According to the Buddhist understanding of *Anātman*, the true self can be understood as the sever-changing configuration of five elements know of five elements karma as the five Skandhas. Rather than possessing an eternal and unchanging Soul, the individual is actually an ongoing process of transformation. The classical text explaining the concept of *Anātman* is the question of king Milinda. In the text, Nāgasena, the Buddhist monk, user the image of a chariot made from a configuration of interdependent parts to express this concept.

In most schools of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism, Bhikhu applies to any male who has received full ordination, usually based on the Vinaya, the same code used in the tradition Buddhism.

The historical Buddha attained Bodhi while meditating under the Bodhi tree, in the *Theravāda* tradition; practitioners strive to emulate that experience by following the Eightfold Path. *Theravāda* Buddhism describes Bodhi as the point at which one has cut off all afflicting and illusory misconceptions realizing the Four Noble Truths. The *Mahāyāna* tradition describes the Bodhisattva path as the way to attain Bodhi while the various schools of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism describe the content of Bodhi wisdom in various ways. One of the most common is to identify it as the realization of emptiness which leads recognition of the unity of *Samśāra* and *Nirvāṇa*.
In *Mahāyāna* Buddhism acquiring Bodhichitta is crucial first step on the Bodhisattva path. It in voles a twofold reside: the desire to attain Enlightenment oneself and the desire to assist all other sentient beings in escaping the suffering of *Saṃsāra*.

The *Bodhisattva* became the *Mahāyāna* ideal for the Buddhist practitioner. A Bodhisattva’s goal is twofold to become a Buddha and to lead all sentient beings to Buddha hood. According to tradition, the Bodhisattva may be capable of attaining Nirvāṇa, but will refuse to leave the realm of *Saṃsāra* the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in order to help other, *Mahāyāna* proposes this view of the Bodhisattva in sharp contrast to its rendering of the *Theravāda* ideal of the Arhat *Mahāyāna* Buddhism generally portrays *Theravāda* Arhats as selfish being single mindedly seeking their own Enlightenment without a trace of concern for other sentient beings.

Although the *Mahāyāna* version of the Arhat is unfair, it serves to highlight the guiding principle for the Bodhisattva’s practice of Buddhism compassion for the suffering of other sentient beings.

According to *Mahāyāna* teaching, the Bodhisattva path is accessible to all, including lay believers. Again, this is said to differ sharply from the way of the Arhat which is accessible only to monks and nuns who devote their live to the monastic life. Bodhisattvas build merit through their compassionate activities, which they share with other. The bodhisattva does not selfishly retain the benefits of good karma but transfers the benefits to all other beings. Thus, beginners on the Bodhisattva path can rely on more advanced practitioners for assistance.

3.1.1 **Brief Survey Of The Origin Of Mahāyāna Buddhism.**

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism emerged and grew between 150 BCE and 100 CE. With the rise of this sect, new Sutras emerged. The most significant ones are the Lotus Sūtra, the Diamond Sūtra and the Heart Sūtra.
Tantra

The period between third and seventh century CE saw the establishment of a new form of Buddhism, which emerged out of the Mahāyāna sect. This form came to be known as Tantra, Mantrayāna and Vajrayāna. Tantras emphasized on the Bodhisattva ideal and empathy for all beings. At the same time, it also laid stress on drawing of Mandalas or magic circles, symbolic hand gestures known as Mudras, the recitation of phrases known as mantras and visualizations. It was also believed that one needs an experienced teacher or guru to learn the teachings of Lord Buddha.

Decline of Buddhism in India

From the seventh century C E, Buddhism went on a downward spiral in India, because of growth of Hinduism, decline of Buddhist Universities and Muslim Turk invasions of northwest India.

Spread of Buddhism in China

Buddhism started gaining entry into China around 1st century CE

Spread of Buddhism in Japan

Fourth century CE saw Buddhism gaining ground in Korea and from there, religion spread to Japan in 538 CE. By the end of the century, Buddhism had become the state religion of the country. In 8th century CE, the religion further spread under the patronage of Emperor Shomu. Six schools of Chinese Buddhism, namely Sanron, Jojitsu, Hosso, Kusha, Kegon and Ritsu, were also introduced during this period. Later, Tendai and Shingon schools developed in Japan.

Spread of Zen Buddhism

Zen Buddhism, based on Chinese Ch’an Buddhism, started evolving in Japan around the 12th century. Founded by Esai Zenji, it came to be known as
Rinzai School in the country. Soto School of Zen also developed there in the 13th century, with its base in Chinese Ts'ao-Tung School.

**Spread of Buddhism in the West**

The efforts towards spread of Buddhism in the western countries were made in the 19th and early 20th century. T W Rhys Davids laid the foundation of the Pāli Text Society there, towards the end of the 19th century. Other names worth mentioning in this context are those of Edward Arnold, a poet; Christmas Humphreys, an English barrister; Alan Watts and Dennis Lockwood; founder of the Friends of Western Buddhism Order (FWBO). Buddhism started spreading amongst the native population of America in the 1950s. Presently, one can find all schools of Buddhism in the USA.

**Current Status of Buddhism**

Today, Buddhism has spread to almost all the countries of the world, with the population of Buddhists estimated to be around 350 million. Out of these, almost half the number practice *Mahāyāna* tradition. The largest population of Buddhist is in China, while, Thailand, Cambodia and Myanmar have the highest proportion of Buddhists in their population. The religion is also becoming quite widespread in America, Australia and United Kingdom.

The change from the early Buddhist phase, mainly characterized by the elaboration of the *Abhidharma*, to the later phase called *Mahāyāna* has two aspects, a religious and a philosophical, which should not be confounded. Its religious aspect is characterized by the gradual change in the conception of the nature of the Buddha. Buddha at first was a noble but merely human sage, but in *Mahāyāna* he loses more and more of his human aspects and assumes divine ones, like omniscience and omnipotence. At the same time the idea of the Buddha become disconnected from that of Sākyamuni, the particular person at a particular time that the historical Buddha was. In the second place the religious change is characterized by the cult of the Bodhisattvas. For the early community the Buddha was unique personality. He was the one who found by his own effort
the access to the redeeming knowledge, which he communicated to other not able to find on their own. This, from the outset, created a difference between the master and the followers. To find the liberating knowledge the disciples were dependent on the teaching of the Buddha. Only through the latter’s compassion they could find the calm and peace, the state of being disconnected from this world, that is *Nirvāṇa*. And although this state of calm was of the same nature as that of the master, the liberate followers remained different from him in the extent of the penetration of their insight and of their powers. That’s why they were called Arhats and not Buddha’s’. In the early community a Buddha was considered to be a rare figure, appearing only once in an epoch. And just as there could be only one universal ruler in a certain time to wield political power over the whole world, so there could also be only one Buddha in a period to wield spiritual power over the realm of mind. *Mahāyāna*, now, tries to bridge the gap between the epochal figures of the Buddha and the community of Arhats dependent on him. Every being carries deep in itself the Buddha-nature, and is, because of that destined once to become a Buddha itself. From the moment that someone has taken the firm resolve to become a Buddha, and has made the vow to free all beings from suffering, he becomes a so-called Bodhisattva, a being striving after ‘Bodhi’ or ‘illumination’. His destiny is now not merely to acquire the perfect calm that is equivalent to the state of liberation. But to penetrate the universe by power and insight, i.e. to became a Buddha himself, these Bodhisattvas a cult-object in *Mahāyāna*. Many stories circulated about the Bodhisattva-stages of Buddha’s from past epochs. These are similar in nature to the *Jātaka*-stories about the past lives the Buddha Sākyamuni found in the Tripitaka, the canonical works of early Buddhism, but less attention paid to the former lives of the historical preacher, and much more space is reserved for all kinds of Bodhisattva lives of imagined Buddha’s of the far past. There also developed the messianic cult of the Bodhisattva Maitreya, the future Buddha. Probably this idea of the savior, who in the last of days will gather the forces of light to beat that darkness, was derived from Zoroastrianism.
Mahāyāna, in this light, can be conceived as the outcome of a strong missionary movement, going even beyond the borders of the Indian continent, probably following the period of the great migrations of people on the Central Asian continent, staring from a few centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. In such process foreign elements were adapted to the original Buddhist lore. LaMotte, for example, sees in the Mahāyāna figure of the Buddha Amitābha an echo of an Iranian solar god, and the also finds notable analogies between the Bodhisattvas of Mahāyāna and the Ameshapenta of Zoroastrianism.

Early Buddhism denied the reality of composite and permanent things. It denied the existence of a permanent entity like the soul, and also the substantiability of all enduring things of experience. But it did not deny the existence of the Dharmas, of which it distinguished the eternal one, Nirvāṇa, and the momentary one’s, of which there five types, the irreducible phenomena from feeling, apprehension, volition, and mind. All these phenomena were constituted by evanescent flashing ordered series giving the suggestion of permanent entities. One flashing does not influence another one, i.e., it does not interfere with its nature, but it does condition it, i.e. no dharma will be present if not certain others also are given. The conclusion of all this was, that although most things as we conceive them do not really exist, there are some phenomena that we must consider as real, viz, forms, feelings, apprehensions, volitions, perceptions, and liberation. These constitute the real base of all existence out of which all apparent entities are composed.

It had been already noticed, that nevertheless some questions about the reality of this elementary dharma may be asked. If they are entities existing in themselves, how can it be that are not permanent? For the Sarvāstivāda this question led to the acceptance of a distinction between the appearance and the nature of a dharma. Evidently an appearance cannot exist in itself. It needs two, an object of which it is the appearance and a subject to which it appears. The

227 Alfred Scheepers, A Survey of Buddhist Thought, Delhi, 2008, p 110.
idea of a plurality of independent momentary can exist only in relativity, and that because of that it does not something exist in itself. But may it then be said that it exists at all.

These entire problems could arise before the ontological reflections of the Sarvāstivāda. For the Buddha and his early community such problem did not exist, because of the absence of such ontological reflection. Their problem was the suffering of mankind and how this was to be overcome, this being the only thing important. But the Mahāyāna starts to take the ontological reflections of the Sarvāstivāda seriously, and connect with it some radical conclusions. Since they do not want to accept a plurality of eternal essences, their first conclusion is, that not only there is no permanent entity like a soul, and no substantiality in composite things, but that that dharma’s themselves are without self, being like a mirage, or being just a projection of the imagination. By coming to this conclusion, whatever may have been realistic in Buddhism came to an end. The ultimate constituents being no longer ultimate, Buddhism now had become baseless, and was in need of a new ultimate. In the quest for this new absolute, the speculations of the Sarvāstivāda about the eternal nature of the dharma probably formed a starting point. This nature had been described as something deep and inexpressible. The Mahāyāna accepted something of that kind, but they could not accept a plurality of eternal essences. Since all plurality is relative and momentary, the ultimate principle should be found in the unbreakable tie that prevents anything particular to escape from relativity. This tie is not the particularity of things or dharma’s, or even their particular nature, but the nature of their being a dharma itself, their dharma hood, also called Tathatā (truth). This also can be identified with the whole of all Dharma’s, the dharma body. This absolute is, accordingly, not something different from the beings of the universe. It fills all space, and it is the basis of all that can be given. It cannot appear in its own nature or unfold itself. It is without any finite form or finite mind. It is the unity beyond which there can be nothing else; it is the only reality, everything else being only mirage, magical illusion, or dream. It even transcends the individual Buddha; these all have but one Dharmakāya as their base; and all live
out of one Truth. This truth is unknowable, but can be met with in oneself. That’s why it is also called Svabhāvikakāya, the body of one’s own nature. It is the essence of all things, and this ultimate essence is in all things the same, and at the same time it comprises all; all things are in it.\textsuperscript{228}

Although the terms used are different, this ultimate has much of the characteristics of the Vedāntic absolute. It is the ultimate Truth at the base of all appearances, the sameness in all things as e.g. the Bhāgavad Gītā of the Vaisnavas teaches. That there is an influence here becomes clear, when we compare the Lord of the Gītā with the Buddha conception of Mahāyāna. In the Gītā Kṛṣṇa teaches the essential sameness of all things, which coincides with his own nature. The diversity of the world is explained by his creative power, his dynamic nature or Māyā, the power of creating illusions. Now, in Mahāyāna the diversity of the world is explained in a similar manner. There is a penultimate form of the Dharmakāya. It is really a body, but of a very subtle material. It is the refulgent body, which the Buddha adopts on the highest plain of existence, and which is different from epoch to epoch. By reason of such a body, Buddha can also be called Viṣṇu, Īśvara, Pradhāna etc. All names one would expect in connection with Vaisnavism. From this body emanates all phenomenal existence, from the highest plain of being to the lowest. This body, in fact the highest form of illusion, is called be different names; sometime it is simple called Dharmakāya, sometimes Svasambhogakāya, but it is also called Prakṛtyāmabhāva, and thus it can be put on one line with the creative nature of the Gītā. The world has one ultimate nature, and a penultimate one to account for the existence of the illusory appearance that constitutes this manifold world. Here we meet with a theory of emanation that is proper to the Gītā or to the later theistic Upaniṣad.\textsuperscript{229}

It is often believed, that Mahāyāna had its origin in the territory south of the Vindhya Range. The Sūtras themselves suggest the idea that they were first known in the south, and spread afterwards to other parts of India. Especially the

\textsuperscript{228} Alfred Scheepers, \textit{A Survey of Buddhist Thought}, Delhi 2008, pp. 110-111.
\textsuperscript{229} N. Dutt, \textit{Mahāyāna Buddhism}, Delhi, Motilal 1997, pp. 158-161-162.
later Sūtras like Laṅkāvatāra and the Gaṇḍayūha are located in the south. By many Mahāyāna thinkers the Mahāsāṁghikas were considered as forerunners. In the first centuries A.D., when Mahāyāna became prominent, the most active sect of the Mahāsāṁghikas, those of the Caitikas was strong in Andhra Pradesh. Some verses of the Tripitaka of the Pūrvaśila are quoted by Candrakīrti as authoritative, and endorsing the selflessness of the dharma’s. But not denying the influence of the Mahāsāṁghikas, and the southern origin of many Mahāyāna scriptures, we cannot be blind to the fact, that also in Sarvāstivāda circles many typical Mahāyāna ideas were known, and that these circles produced scriptures being on the borderline of Mahāyāna thinking, of which the Lalitavistara is an outstanding example. Besides, Mahāyāna criticism against Lesser Vehicle conceptions is mainly directed against the Sarvāstivāda, which indicates, that early Mahāyāna stood in close contact with this school. This, of course, does not deny, that important ideas and scriptures came from the south may be even the Sarvāstivādins themselves adopted ideas from the south, but it may well be that Mahāyāna ideas already in an early period spread much wider than only in the south. Anyhow the spread of Mahāyāna to Central Asia went through the north. And if Lamotte is right in assuming Persian influence, then there must have been Mahāyāna centers in the north. If we are right in seeing Mahāyāna as the outcome of a missionary zeal, then we may expect adaptations to local creeds in which there may have occurred incorporation of Bodhisattvas from Iranian religion or of elements of Śaivism in the north, and also adoption of the divine characteristics of the Buddha from the Vaiṣṇavism of the Andhra-territory. Later all these elements may have been mixed up to form a universal religion.230

The concept of Mahāyāna came about because of the churning of ideas within the Buddhist community at the beginning of the Christian era. A large section of the community strongly felt there was a need for a more emotional, warmer, personal religion adequately disposed to evolution and development. The general tradition connects this evolution to the initiatives of King Kaniska (c

120 A. D) and scholars of the time such as Ashvaghosa (c 120 A. D) and Nagarjuna (c 150 A. D).

Though the concept of *Mahāyāna* was launched, officially, at the fourth religious council held at Kashmir in first century A.D, the germ idea was in circulation even a hundred years earlier to that, more as a matter of speculation and argument than as a precise statement.

The evolution of the *Mahāyāna* concept came about as a gradual unfolding rather than as a sudden development.

At the time when the *Mahāyāna* doctrine came up for debate in the fourth religious council, nearly years 500 after the historical Buddha attained *Nirvāṇa*, Buddhism had well taken roots in India. It was popular among the masses. It also enjoyed the patronage of Kings and Emperors.231

*Mahāyāna* means the great way of path. What is the great way? It is the way to help infinite sentient beings cross the ocean of birth and death to the shore of liberation. Led by vowing Bodhisattvas, every potential mind would be encouraged to be free from suffering. The concept of *Mahāyāna* first originated from different attitudes toward Buddhism in all aspects. If we discuss Buddhism, most of us surely thinks of the three Jewels-Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These three jewels had been reinterpreted (or redefined) throughout history and brought about conflicts. Conflicts expanded when time passed by. The process of reinterpretation was not merely change, but like a conceptual revolution.

*Mahāyāna* Buddhism originated over 2000 years ago in India and it was during the first century CE that this school of Buddhism arose as a departure from the orthodox monastic life and meditation-dominant philosophy of Theravāda Buddhism. This school of Buddhism was known as *Mahāyāna* or “Greater Vehicle”, since it offered the Buddhist philosophy and faith for a larger number of people and hence, greater acceptance. The *Mahāyāna* claimed that their philosophy derived from a different understanding of the Buddha’s word,

based on scriptures that were given by the Buddha but had been discovered earlier.

Firstly, conflicts occurred on the level of “Sangha”. Since the time of the Lord Buddha’s passing away, the community of monks was divided into two groups. The first Group consisted of friends and followers of Venerated monks. They convened the first Buddha Council. The concern of these Buddhist disciples was mainly to purification of the doctrine and discipline. In order to keep the discipline acceptable and universal, having the same standards at all times and all places, monks should not add, delete or adjust any part of the discipline regardless of major or minor ones. They believed this was the only way to sustain Buddhism for longer time. Hence, they close to be conservative rather than flexible. The other group wanted the discipline to be flexible due to their concern for the safety and welfare of monks. As we know, some places of ancient India were lands of calamity. There were either human-based or natural disasters around the year famine, drought, flood, war and so on. With a view that monks might survive in these lands, they should be able to pass, delete or adjust some parts discipline especially those included in the minor section. They insisted that the Lord made allowances before them to adjust minor parts of the disciple to suit various circumstances and situation. Buddhism could not be broadly propagated and sustained if the monk’s order was too strict on minor parts of the discipline.

The case of Vajjian monks is the best example to show the conflict between these two groups. Since those monks had added ten minor precepts\textsuperscript{232} for their group, i.e., monks could keep salt to eat with food in another meal, monks could drink mild alcoholic beverages, or monks could get, keep and use money. In the Second Council they were called “Pāpa Bhikkhus” (the sinful monks). Their behavior was unacceptable from the view of the tradition Buddhist adherents. Thus, the movement called for an entire dissolution of the

\textsuperscript{232} Cullavagga Sattasatika-Khandhaka.
monk’s order. They established their own tradition and called themselves “Mahāsanghikas” (The great Assemble).

The conflict on discipline paved a way for schism. From the very minor points of disagreement, Buddhist disciples evoked a sense of hostility against each other. Without taking into consideration the concern of both sides, they adhered to their own beliefs. While a group paid attention only to the purification of the doctrine and the discipline, the other concerned of self too much on the welfare of monks. There was no need to be enemies if they understood that both the doctrine and the monk’s order were equally important to the establishment of Buddhism. Since the lord was so benevolent, he did not assign anyone to have full power over the monks order. No one could arbitrarily claim to be the supreme leader, but his hospitality caused weakness on the other hand. In Buddhism we had no authoritative person to justify what was right of wrong. We had no human leader to make a final conclusion in times of conflict, so the disciples relied on views of their teachers as final. Teachers became leaders with full power and authority. The situation worsened deplorably at the wider range.

Next, the conflict occurred on the level of “Dharma”. Before the Lord’s passing away, he once declared before the assembly that monks (also including lay disciples) would have the doctrine and the discipline as their leaders in the future. But the conflict on account of the discipline turned out to be fractured. It seemed that no one wanted to compromise. Some Buddhist disciples, mostly monks of the great Assembly, found themselves having no shelter left except the doctrine. So they went on searching for the true Dharma. Amazingly, the statement of the Lord found somewhere else states that “who sees Dharma, that one sees me, that one sees Dharma” also supported their struggle. If we use logical implications to judge this sentence, we would find an interesting argument. The argument could be pitched through these questions. What should be the true doctrine so that when we saw it, we might b able to see the Lord?

233 Mahāparinibbānasutta, Dīghanikāya.
How should we see the doctrine so that we could also see the Lord? Or what should be the best interpretation of Dharma so as to make it valid and approachable to the Lord? For some Buddhist scholars, Dharma had no longer been the teaching messages of the Buddha. It contained more latent meaning of which we did not realize. Dharma in their comprehension was something more and wider than the speech of the Lord. The speech was merely a part of him, not the totality. These disciples had shifted the ethical facet of Buddhism to a metaphysical focus. And what they had done was to seek out the truest doctrine, the true doctrine which also revealed the status of the Lord after death. Simultaneously, the assumption that the Lord still existed pervaded and caught the disciple faithful minds. Unenlightened disciples made an effort to see the lord through the right understanding of the doctrine; so many interpretations were given to this word.

As many Buddhist scholars give priority to the metaphysical rather than moral achievement. By having the Lord as the final goal, they strived to reach the destination through the doctrine. Dharma turned to be a means to reach (the state of) Buddha hood. And this was a new trend within the Buddhist community. It was a conceptual revolution that Dharma was no longer the message, but something real in itself. And its truth was, in fact, the truth of the Buddha. Moreover, this word was widely used in the history of Buddhism. It was not only equally significant and pointed to the Buddha. But it also pointed to every available entity. Entity herein implied the existence of radical elements either transient of permanent. Dharma meant things when examined fundamentally; had their existence in the form of flowing energy.

Thus what is apparent from the foregoing discussion is that the most probable forerunners of Mahāyāna were the Mahāsanghikas (Followers of the Great Assembly), a liberal branch of the Buddhist community that broke away from the more conservative mainstream some time before the reign of Indian King Asoka in the 3rd century BC. Mahāyāna thinkers of later periods categorized the Mahāsanghikas as one of the 18 schools of Hinayana Buddhism,
but when *Mahāyāna* first emerged, it resembled *Mahāsanghika* in several areas of doctrinal interpretation. The most significant *Mahāyāna* innovation was the view of the Buddha as a supernatural being who assumed a transformation body (nirvāṇa-kaya) to be born as the historical Buddha.

Precisely when and where *Mahāyāna* arose in India is unclear, but its origin can be traced to between the 2nd century BC and the 1st century AD. The early growth of *Mahāyāna* was promoted by India philosopher *Nāgārjuna*, who founded the *Mādhyamika* School. His influential writing provides some of the most persuasive early formulations of *Mahāyāna*. The Māhayamika School proliferated into a number of sects, and was carried to China in the early 5th century by Buddhist missionary *Kumārajīva*, who translated *Nāgārjuna’s* work into Chinese. By 625 *Mādhyamika* had reached Japan by way of Korea, though everywhere it remained more influential among the scholarly elite than the common people.

The origins of *Mahāyāna* are still not completely understood. The earliest views of *Mahāyāna* Buddhism in the West assumed that it existed as a separate school in competition with the so called “Hīnayāna” school. Due to the veneration of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, *Mahāyāna* was often interpreted as a more devotional; lay inspired from of Buddhism, with supposed origins in Stūpa veneration, or by making parallels with the history of the European Protestant Reformation. These views have been largely dismissed in modern times in light of a much broader range of early texts that are now available. These earliest *Mahāyāna* texts often depict strict adherence to the path of a Bodhisattava, and engagement in the ascetic ideal of a monastic life in the wilderness, akin to the ideals expressed in the Rhinoceros Sūtra. The old views of *Mahāyāna* as a

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236 E.g. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*.
237 As scholars have moved away from this limited corpus, and have begun to explore a wider range of *Mahāyāna* Sūtras, they have stumbled on, and have started to open up, a literature that is often stridently ascetic and heavily engaged in reinventing the forest ideal, an individualistic, antisocial, ascetic ideal that is encapsulated in the apparently resurrected image of “wandering alone like a rhinoceros”. Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism, 2004, p. 494.
separate lay-inspired and devotional sect are now largely dismissed as misguided and wrong on all counts.  

The earliest textual evidence of "Mahāyāna" comes from Sūtras originating around the beginning of the Common Era. Jan Nattier has noted that in some of the earliest Mahāyāna texts such as the Ugraparipṛccha Sūtra use the term "Mahāyāna", yet there is no doctrinal difference between Mahāyāna in this context and the early schools, and that "Mahāyāna" referred rather to the rigorous emulation of Gautama Buddha in the path of a Bodhisattva seeking to become a fully Enlightened Buddha.

There is also no evidence that Mahāyāna ever referred to a separate formal school or sect of Buddhism, but rather that it existed as a certain set of ideals, and later doctrines, for Bodhisattvas. Paul Williams has also noted that the Mahāyāna never had nor ever attempted to have a separate Vinaya or ordination lineage from the early schools of Buddhism, and therefore each Bhikṣu or Bhikṣunī adhering to the Mahāyāna formally belonged to an early school. This continues today with the Dharma ordination lineage in East Asia, and the Mūlasarvāstivāda ordination lineage in Tibetan Buddhism. Therefore Mahāyāna was never a separate rival sect of the early schools.

The Chinese Monk Yijing who visited India in the 7th century CE, distinguishes Mahāyāna from Hīnayāna as follows:

Both adopt one and the same Vinaya, and they have in common the prohibitions of the five offences, and also the practice of the Four Noble Truths. Those who venerate the Bodhisattvas and read the Mahāyāna Sūtras are called

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238 One of the most frequent assertions about the Mahayana...is that it was a lay-inspired and dominated, movement that arose in response to the increasingly closed, cold, and scholastic character of monastic Buddhism. This, however, now appears to be wrong on all counts.” Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism, 2004, p. 494.


242 Ibid, p. 5.
the Mahāyānists, while those who do not perform these are called the Hinayānists.

Much of the early extant evidence for the origins of Mahāyāna comes from early Chinese translations of Mahāyāna texts. These Mahāyāna teachings were first propagated into China by Lokakṣema, the first translator of Mahāyāna Sūtras into Chinese during the 2nd century CE.243

Some scholars have traditionally considered the earliest Mahāyāna Sūtras to include the very first versions of the Prajñāpāramitā series, along with texts concerning Akṣobhya Buddha, which were probably composed in the 1st century BCE in the south of India.244 Some early Mahāyāna Sūtras were translated by the Kuṣāṇa monk Lokakṣema, who came to China from the kingdom of Gandhāra. His first translations to Chinese were made in the Chinese capital of Luoyang between 178 and 189 CE.245 Some Mahāyāna Sūtras translated during the 2nd century CE include the following:246

1. Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra (kinh bat nha)
2. Vimalakīrti Nirdesa Sūtra
3. Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra
4. Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha Sūtra
5. Ugraparipṛcchā Sūtra
6. Mañjuśrīparipṛcchā Sūtra
7. Druma kinnararājaparipṛcchā Sūtra
8. Śūraṅgama Samādhi Sūtra

243 The most important evidence in fact the only evidence for situating the emergence of the Mahāyāna around the beginning of the Common Era was not Indian evidence at all, but came from China. Already by the last quarter of the 2nd century CE, there was a small, seemingly idiosyncratic collection of substantial Mahayana sutras translated into what Erik Zürcher calls 'broken Chinese' by an Indoscythian, whose Indian name has been reconstructed as Lokakṣema.” Macmillan Encyclopedia of Buddhism, 2004, p. 492.


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9. **Bhadrapāla Sūtra**

10. **Ajātaśatrūkṛtyavinodana Sūtra**

11. **Kāśyapaparivarta Sūtra**

12. **Lokānuvartana Sūtra**

13. **An early Sūtra connected to the Avatāṃsaka Sūtra**

Some of these were probably composed in the north of India in the 1st century CE. Thus scholars generally think that the earliest *Mahāyāna Sūtras* were mainly composed in the south of India, and later the activity of writing additional scriptures was continued in the north. However, the assumption that the presence of an evolving body of *Mahāyāna* scriptures implies the contemporaneous existence of distinct religious movement called "Mahāyāna", may be a serious misstep.

The fundamental principles of *Mahāyāna* doctrine were based on the possibility of universal liberation from suffering for all beings (hence the "Great Vehicle") and the existence of Buddha and Bodhisattvas embodying Buddha Nature. Some *Mahāyāna* schools simplify the expression of faith by allowing salvation to be alternatively obtained through the grace of the *Amitābha Buddha* by having faith and devoting oneself to mindfulness of the Buddha. This devotional lifestyle of Buddhism is most strongly emphasized by the Pure Land schools and has greatly contributed to the success of *Mahāyāna* in East Asia, where spiritual elements traditionally relied upon mindfulness of the Buddha, *Mantras* and *Dhāraṇīs*, and reading of *Mahāyāna Sūtras*. In Chinese Buddhism, most monks, let alone lay people, practice Pure Land, some combining it with Chán (Zen).

Most *Mahāyāna* schools believe in supernatural Bodhisattvas who devote themselves to the perfections, ultimate knowledge, and the liberation of all sentient beings. In *Mahāyāna*, the Buddha is seen as the ultimate, highest

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248 "The sudden appearance of large numbers of (Mahāyāna) teachers and texts (in North India in the second century AD) would seem to require some previous preparation and development, and this we can look for in the South." Warder, A.K. (3rd ed. 1999) Indian Buddhism: p. 335.
being, present in all times, in all beings, and in all places, and the Bodhisattvas come to represent the universal ideal of altruistic excellence.

According to some scholars, the Buddha nature discussed in some Mahāyāna Sūtras does not represent a substantial self (Ātman); rather, it is a positive language and expression of emptiness (Śūnyatā) and represents the potentiality to realize Buddha hood through Buddhist practices. It is the "true self" in representing the innate aspect of the individual that makes actualizing the ultimate personality possible.

The actual "seeing and knowing" of this Buddha essence is said to usher in Nirvāṇa liberation. This Buddha essence or "Buddha nature" is stated to be found in every single person, ghost, god and sentient being. In the Buddha nature Sūtras, the Buddha is portrayed as describing the Buddha essence as uncreated, deathless and ultimately beyond rational grasping or conceptualization. Yet, it is this already real and present, hidden internal element of awareness that, according to the Buddha nature Sūtras, prompts beings to seek liberation from worldly suffering, and lets them attain the spotless bliss that lies at the heart of their being. Once the veils of negative thoughts, feelings, and unwholesome behavior are eliminated from the mind and character, the indwelling Buddha principle can shine forth unimpeded and transform the seer into a Buddha.

Prior to the period of these Sūtras, Mahāyāna metaphysics was dominated by teachings on emptiness, in the form of Mādhyamaka philosophy. The language used by this approach is primarily negative, and the Buddha nature genre of Sūtras can be seen as an attempt to state orthodox Buddhist teachings of Dependent Origination and on the mysterious reality of Nirvāṇa using positive language instead, to prevent people from being turned away from Buddhism by a false impression of nihilism. In these Sūtras the perfection of the wisdom of not-self is stated to be the true self; the ultimate goal of the path is then characterized using a range of positive language that had been used in Indian philosophy previously by essentialist philosophers, but was now transmuted into a new

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251 Heng-Ching Shih, The Significance of "Tathagatagarbha" A Positive Expression of "Sunyata".

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Buddhist vocabulary that described as being who has successfully completed the Buddhist path.\textsuperscript{252}

An exegetical treatise on Buddha nature is the \textit{Uttaratantra}, which sees Buddha nature not as caused and conditioned, but as eternal, uncaused, unconditioned, and incapable of being destroyed, although temporarily concealed within worldly beings by adventitious defilements.\textsuperscript{253} According to Buddhist scholar Dr. C. D. Sebastian, the \textit{Uttaratantra}'s reference to a transcendental self (Ātma-Pāramitā) should be understood as "the unique essence of the universe,"\textsuperscript{254} thus the universal and immanent essence of Buddha nature is the same throughout time and space.\textsuperscript{255}

The philosophical teachings of the \textit{Mahāyāna} are adumbrated in a new body of literature known as the \textit{Prajñā-pāramitā Sūtras} or ‘Perfection of Insight’ texts. Here the doctrine of emptiness (Śūnyatā) comes to prominence, and the Buddha is seen in a new light as a supernatural being who is worthy of loving devotion. This new conception of his nature is later formalized in the doctrine of the Trikāya (three bodies). In due course new teachings and schools arose under the umbrella of the \textit{Mahāyāna} such as the Mādhyamaka, the Yogācāra, the Pure Land tradition, and the Vajrayāna. The \textit{Mahāyāna} form of Buddhism is predominant in north Asia. It spread from India to Nepal, Tibet, and central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan. Under the influence of these cultures it has taken many forms: the Buddhism of Nepal and Tibet has been influenced by tantric practices and the shamanism of central Asia, while in China the influence of Taoism and Confucianism have left their mark. The interaction between Buddhism and Taoism gave rise to the Chan School of contemplative quietism which developed into Japanese Zen.

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\textsuperscript{252} King, Sallie B. \textit{The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature is Impeccably Buddhist}. pp. 1-6.
\textsuperscript{253} Sebastian, Professor C. D, \textit{Metaphysics and Mysticism in Mahayana Buddhism}, Delhi, Sri Satguru, Pub, 2005, p. 268.
\textsuperscript{254} Ibid, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, p. 278.
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3.1.2 Early Yogācāra And Its Relationship With The
Mādhyamika School.

Most Buddhism scholars are often too ready to make a sharp distinction
between the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, talking the one as exclusively
advocating the theory of emptiness (Śūnyatā) while the other is bent single
mindedly on an idealistic interpretation of the universe. They thus further
assume that the ideal of emptiness is not all traceable in the Yogācāra and that
idealism is absent in the Mādhyamika. This is not exact as a historical fact.256

The Mādhyamika School gave a wholly new twist to dependent
arising, stating that, if mutually conditioned, elements and events cannot be real.
Things are thus nor explained by ceasing and arising, but are characterized as
none ceasing and none arising. Seen this way, one could almost call Nagarjuna’s
theory “non dependent none is arising”. The fast that the normal casual order is
reversed in this pair further foreshadows the conversionary method so peculiar to
Mādhyamika.

As the second important philosophical to development in India
Mahāyāna Buddhism, the Yogācāra School seems to have developed the
distinctive features of its philosophy from a comprehensive analysis of
meditative experience (hence the name Yogācāra the practice of Yoga). In
discussing the philosophical perspective of the Asaṅga Vasubandhu school of
thought, preference will be given to the doctrinally neutral term Yogācāra in
opposition to the epithets Vijñānavāda, which are frequently used to designate
this school. This reflects the winder denotation of Yogācāra and its relative
independence from certain specific theoretical positions. This is particularly
important when dealing with the early stages of a school’s philosophical
development. It should noted, however, that the term Vijñaptimātratā (cognitive
Representation Only) is preferable to Vijñānavāda (the doctrine that
consciousness alone exist, when referring to the literature of the early Yogācāra,

since the former term (unlike *Vijñānavāda*) is at least used by *Maitreyānātha, Asaṅga*, and *Vasubandhu*. In fact, since the early *Yogācāra* did not accept the ultimate reality of subjective consciousness (*vijñāna*), the term *Vijaptimātratā* is particularly inaccurate. This epithet, nevertheless, may be applicable to the later doctrinal position of the Dharmapālan lineage of the *Yogācāra*, which, according to Yoshifumi Ueda, upheld the view that the external world was merely a transformation of an ultimately teal subjective consciousness.\(^{257}\) As we shall see, however, even the term *Vijaptimātratā* may prove Asanga *Vasubandhu* school of thought inappropriate as a final designation of the.

The wide scope of the term *Yogācāra* is clear from the fact that it was originally used in India as a general term for the practice of Yoga (*yoga-cāra*). Thus, the colophon to the four hundred Verses (Cattuhsataka) of the *Mādhyamikā Āryadeva* describes the text as Bodhisattva *Yogācāra* Asanga’s major work.

State in the path of Yoga (*Yogācārabhūmi*), this work, however, far from being a sectarian exposition of *Yogācāra* ideal, is a large scale compendium of the stages of the Buddhist path, of which only a small part is devoted to the specific interests of the *Yogācāra* school. This is a feature of much of Asanga’s literally output, the other great example being his compendium of the *Mahāyāna*. Although the works of Asanga and *Vasubandhu* do show a marked development of ideal in the delineation and analysis of the yogic path when compared to their *Mahāyamika* predecessors, this should not necessarily be seen as characteristic of an antithetical attitude toward the earlier exposition of *Mahāyāna* philosophy. The specific attribution of the term *Yogācāra, Vijaptimātratā* to the thought of Asanga and *Vasubandhu* should always be used with extreme caution, lest one read back the scholastic controversies of later times into the early stages of *Yogācāra* thought.

\(^{257}\) Ueda 1967, pp. 155-165
It is often stated that the first evidence of Yogācāra ideal can be found in the Samdhinirmocana Sūtra. This text is of great historical interest, not only because it is a crystallization of a particularly early phase in the development of the Yogācāra, but also because of its description of the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. Thus the Sūtra declares that

By the first turning of the Wheel of doctrine, Buddha taught the doctrine of the Āryasatya and on its basis the Astivāda of the Abhidhama has been developed. This Astivāda was negated by the Prajñāpāramitā and there has been established the Śūnyavāda of the Mahāyāna. The amalgamation of both sati and Śūnyavāda is now done in the Samdhinirmocana, and it is the last and the highest turning of the Wheel of Doctrine... The ultimate doctrine of the Mahāyāna is, no doubt, taught in the Prajñāpāramitā, but its way of exposition is with an esoteric meaning or with a hidden intention.258

The Samdhinirmocana Sūtra, then, does not see itself in terms of the establishment of a rival school to the “Śūnyavādins”; rather it sees itself as the text which explicates the true meaning of emptiness. Thus, declares that the Sūtra’s purpose is to establish the doctrine of the three own being in terms of their lack of own nature.259 This was understood to be a development from rather than a reaction to the philosophy of emptiness propounded in the Prajñāpāramita.

The Samdhinirmocana Sūtrais also the first Mahāyāna text to utilize the notion of a consciousness made up of the seeds of past karmic fruition. This seed consciousness soon became one of the distinctive features of the Yogācāra School as the concept of Ālayavijñāna, the “store” or “repository consciousness” underlying the individual’s experience of Samsāra.260 In the literature of the various Abhidhama schools there was already an exhaustive analysis of the five sense consciousnesses the mental consciousness that provide an awareness of sense objects. This was a development of the scheme of the eighteen Dhātu

260 Asanga evidently thought that the Alayavijnana was so important that he devoted the introductory Mahayanasamgraha to an examination of its meaning.
outlined innumerable times in the Sūtra Piṭaka. Thus, we find Asaṅga arguing that “the Ālayavijñāna is mentioned in the Vehicle of the hearers through various synonyms.” Thus, as far as Asaṅga was concerned, the seed consciousness is little more than the application of a nomenclature to an already existent in Buddhism from its inception. Asaṅga maintains that is not recognized as the store consciousness in the Srāvaka-Yāna because “it is a subtle cognizable.” Asaṅga’s statement is particularly interesting since it suggests an exclusivist attitude toward the Srāvaka-yāna. Bearing this in mind, one suspect that Asaṅga’s attitude to the Mādhamika School is likely to be even more conciliatory. Reading back later Mādhayamika-Yogācāra polemics into the works of Asaṅga is only likely to misrepresent the continuity between the two scholastic traditions at this early stage in their interaction.

The comprehensive explication of the notion of ‘emptiness’, as found in the philosophical literature of the Mādhyamika school, provides a doctrinal key to unlock the abstruse meaning of the PrajñāpāramitāYogācāra As a Mahāyāna school, the Yogācāra developed as a response to the insights to those same sutras. Under such circumstances, it would have been difficult indeed to have ignored the centrality of the notion of Śūnyatā to these texts. In fact, the ideal that the early classical Yogācāra of Asanga and Vasubandhu found any difficulty whatsoever in embracing the basic insights of the Mādhayamaka school disregards both the historical and textual evidence, which, on the contrary, displays a spirit of underlying continuity and acceptance.

Both the Mādhyamika and Yogācāra schools accept the validity of the notions of Pratītyasamutpāda, Pudgala-nairātmya, and Dharma-nairātmya, the four Āryasayas, the Bodhisattva ideal, and Śūnyatā, among many others. With such a level of doctrinal unanimity, the two schools can hardly be said to be in great conflict with one another. Admittedly both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu criticize those who “adhere to non-existence”. But this is only in their attempts

261 Mahayanasamgraha I.p.11.
262 Ibid., I. p. 10
to delineate the true nature of emptiness as the Middle Path between extremes. Nevertheless, one must accept that there appears to have been a significant development in the hermeneutics of the emptiness doctrine in the Yogācāra School. This, as I shall argue in section III of this essay, stems from a fear that the traditional Mādhyamika exposition of nihilism.

One of the most important features of the Yogācāra reformulation of the Middle Path is a marked movement away from the negativistic interpretation of emptiness found in the Mādhyamika School. For Asanga there are two types of extreme and erroneous view: (1) that one which clings to affirming the existence of what are nonexistent individual characteristics, having essential nature only through verbal designation for a given thing and also (2) that one which, with respect to a given thing, denies the foundation for the sign of verbal designation, which exists in an ultimate sense owing to its inexpressible essence saying absolutely everything is nonexistent.264

Thus, for Asaṅga, universal denial of the bare given thing is a view which strays from the Buddhist path.265

Neither reality nor designation would be known when the bare given thing of form and so forth, is denied. Both these vies are inappropriate.266

An important point to note is that Asanga here explicitly criticizes the view that denied that there exists a “bare given thing” as the basis for the Rūpa-Skandha.267 Indeed, the Yogācāra School seems to have accepted the traditional Sarvāstivāda division of dharma’s into five categories: mind, mental concomitants, compounded factors independent of mind, and the uncompounded factors.268 This seems to be at variance with the “naive idealism” usually

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264 Ibid, p. 106.
265 Wogihara’s. 1930-1936, p. 45.
266 Willis 1979, p. 109, and Wogihara 1930-1936, pp. 45-46.
267 Willis 1979, p. 21
268 Compare this with the statement made by Yasomitra in his Abhid harmakosabha.Syavyakhya 1.16: Upalabdhiavastumatragrahamanam vedanadayastucaitasa visesagraha narupa apprehend, grasping only the given thing. However, it is the mental concomitants of sensation that, grasping, specify the form. Williams (1980), p.15, says that “the distinction between Vijnana and Samjnakandhas largely marks the difference between apprehending a composite thing and becoming consciously aware of the state
attributed to Yogācāra thought. It should be made clear from the outset then that the Yogācāra School is far more complex in its understanding of the nature of experience than is usually acknowledged.

It must be realized, however, that the Abhidharmic taxonomy of the Yogācāra School is only provisional. Such conceptual categories are existent only in a purely conventional sense. In his Abhidharmasamuccaya, for instance, Asaṅga criticizes the ideal that matter is a substantial and independent existent. Thus, it is said that a mass of matter is composed of atoms. Here the atom should be understood to be without a physical body. The atom is determined in the final analysis by the intellect, in view of the abandonment of the notion of an aggregate, and in view of the penetration into the relativity of matter as a substance. This argument was extended further by Asaṅga brother Vasubandhu in his Vimsatikā with an attack upon the realist notion of matter as a substance existing independently of the experiencing subject. Whether this is a case of idealism depends to a large extent upon one’s understanding of the term. Certainly, much of Asaṅga’s work presupposes a distinction between material and immaterial, and external and internal. Indeed, in the Abhidharmasamuccaya, Asaṅga describes the grasping subject of perceptions as the material sense organ, the mind and the mental factors. The inclusion of a gross sense faculty in the analysis of the subject is hardly what one would expect from an idealistic analysis. Again, in the same work, Asaṅgas makes a distinction between internal and external sensations. Internal sensation is “that which is produced from one’s own body”, while its external counterpart is “that produced by an external body”. However, in Mahāyānasamgraha, the notion of

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of affairs marked by that thing. Compare this also to the nineteenth century British idealism of Francis H. Bradley, where reality is experience or pure apprehension.

269 Rahula 1971, pp. 66.
270 Aparimispati literally not absolute or not fulfilled, Rahula translates it as non reality.
271 Thus, Vimsatika, vv. 11-14, criticized atomic realism on the grounds that the ideal that the sense objects that one apprehends are made up of atoms in not demonstrable on purely experiential grounds. Simply speaking, it contradicts the given nests of perception. The concept of a unique and indivisible atom is also rejected; such an entity would have no facets with which to connect to other atoms. Thus v. 12 states that “one atom simultaneously conjoined with six other atoms must have six facets. Yet, if they are said to occupy the same space, then their aggregate would be no more than a single atom.
272 Ibid., p. 118
273 Rahula 1971, p. 32
an external seed is said to be purely conventional while that of an internal seed is said to be ultimate.\textsuperscript{274} Whether \textit{Asaṅga} is an idealist or not internal or subjective states are given more validity than those based upon external stimuli.

Attempts to delineate the thoughts of one school of India thought from another in a rigid and clear fashion are, however, fraught with difficult. In the sixth century C.E., subsequent to the classical formulations of \textit{Nāgārjuna}, \textit{Asaṅga}, and \textit{Vasubandhu}, academic controversy did occur between the \textit{Mādhyamika} and \textit{Yogāca} schools of \textit{Mahāyāna} Buddhism, but, as Stefan Anacker has noted, these are really the disagreements of sixth-century followers of \textit{Nāgārjuna} and \textit{Vasubandhu}. They belong to a time when Buddhism had become an academic subject at place such as the University of Nālandā. They may have disagreed because they were academics fighting for posts and recognition.\textsuperscript{275}

Much of this controversy surrounded the statures of the \textit{Paratantra Svabhāva} in the \textit{Yogācāra} School. The main figures in this debate were \textit{Bhāvaviveka}, \textit{Dharmapāla} and \textit{Sthiramati}.\textsuperscript{276} From the \textit{Mādhyamika} point of view, those \textit{Yogācāra} texts that asserted the existence of the \textit{Paratantra Svabhāva} were guilty of reification, thus straying into the extreme of \textit{Verbalism}. It remains a moot point as to what the \textit{Yogācāra} School actually meant by terms such as \textit{Paratantrāstitā}. Does the term imply the independent existence of a realm of mutual dependency, or is it a descriptive term referring to the interdependent nature of existence. On the former interpretation, the \textit{Yogācāra} does indeed seem to be guilty of reifying the dependency realm itself. On the other hand, the term may simply be an alternative to the \textit{Mādhyamika} conception of \textit{Pratityasamutpāda}. One suspects that the ambiguity of the phrase is a reflection of the ambivalence of the \textit{Yogācāra} School itself. Different answers may be given by different members of the school.

\textsuperscript{275} Anacker, 1984, p.3
It is interesting in this respect to note that various modern schools have drawn attention to the fact that Dharmapāla has given a peculiarly idealistic tone to the Yogācāra message, and that to this extent he has strayed from the original import of Vasubandhu’s ideal. Thus Janice Willis notes:

Assessments which claim to characterize the whole of Yogācāra thought as being uniformly idealistic take little notice of the fact that historically and according to the texts themselves there existed at least two varying streams Yogācāra thought, viz., (1) what may be called an original thread propounded by Maitreya, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and Sthiramati; and (2) a later thread, which found expression notably through such doctors as Dharmapāla, and Hsuan-Tsang. Both streams were introduced into China the earlier by Paramartha and the later Hsuan-Tsang and afterwards transmitted also to Japan. Moreover, while there is clear evidence that the later stream of thought, as expounded by Dharmapāla and others is idealistic in character, the same cannot and should not be assumed for the earlier thread though, in fact, this has generally been the case.

It was this idealistic tendency that was the primary focus of Bhāvāviveka’s attack upon the Vijñanavadins’. Many contemporary schools have cast doubt upon the interpretation of the AsaṅgaVasubandhu phase of Yogācārā as a form of idealism. Needless to say, it would be rather presumptuous to assume that the differences between Bhāvāviveka and Dharmapāla in the sixth century C.E. represent irreconcilable differences between the classical Madhyamika and Yogācāra positions as represented by Nāgārjuna on the one hand and Asanga and Vasubandhu on the other. In the eighth and ninth centuries of the Common Era we do in fact find a successful synthesis of Madhyamika and Yogācārā ideals in the work of Jñāgarbha and Sāntarakṣita. One should note, however,

277 See Ueda, 1967, pp. 15-156, for a brief but definitive examination of the differences between Paramartha and Dharmapala in their exegesis of Vasubandhu’s works. See also Walpole Rahula 1972, pp. 324-330.
278 Willis 1979, p. 21
that the two positions are accepted are on an unequal footing. This might be taken to suggest that the two schools are to some degree incommensurable. Yet again the possibility remains that later developments and interpretations of the two schools differ from the early formulations of the “founding father” of each school. Let us turn, therefore, to the early Yogācāra conception of Śūnyatā in order to discern if it is appreciably different from its earlier Mādhyamika counterpart.

The classical Yogācāra explication of emptiness is found at the very beginning of the Mādhyāntavibhāga:

There exists the imagination of the unreal, there is no duality, but there is emptiness, even in this there is that.

Vasubandhu explains in his commentary that the imagination of the unreal is the discrimination between the duality of grasped and grasper. Emptiness is explained as “the imagination of the unreal that is lacking in form of being grasppable or grasper.” Thus, for the Yogācāra, Śūnyatā is primarily the emptiness of grasper end grasped. Since our entire range of experiences is characterized by a dichotomy between subject and with the possible exception of some higher states of Samādhi, this amounts to a universal application of emptiness (Śūnyatā). However, the Yogācārin stresses that the range of fictive perceptions that does occur, although not corresponding to an independently existing world of subjects and object, nevertheless does occur. This particular emphasis in the use of the notion of emptiness is a specific feature of the Yogācāra explanation of the term, since even in emptiness there is an existent, which nevertheless as such.

In this respect it might be argued that the Yogācāra explication of Śūnyatā is more in line with the commonsense usage of empty. Garma Chang states:

It is believed that Śūnyatā was originally derived from the root save, “to swell”, and Śūnyatā implies “relating to the swollen. “As the proverb says a
swollen head is an empty head,” so something which looks swollen or inflated outside is usually hollow or empty inside. Śūnyatā suggests therefore that although things in the phenomenal world appear to be real and substantial outside, they are actually tenuous and empty within.  

It is interesting, however, to note that prima facie there is nothing in this brief description of emptiness that would greatly trouble an Mādhyamika Buddhist. One could argue that in defining emptiness in this way, the Yogācāra are actually tidying up the earlier work of the Mādhyamika School. This view is not an unattractive one, and one suspects that throughout its long and varied history many Buddhists have understood the Yogācāra analysis as such. It is also a view that appears to be gaining increasing support from modern western scholarship.

However, the rather knotty problem of the status of the emptied ‘entity’ is one that has caused some controversy in Mahāyāna scholastic circles. The Yogācāra continually maintained that there was something actually given in experience, namely a nonobjective perception, while the Mādhyanikas responded by denying that existence could be predicated of such an imaginary ‘entity’. Whether this amounts to little more than a quibble over the appropriate use of linguistic conventions is a moot point that perhaps needs further consideration.

For the Yogācāra the interdependent flow of dharma is such that they are empty in the same way that a container is said to be empty. There is no wine in an empty glass, but there is nevertheless still a glass. There may be no substantiality to our perceptions but they are nevertheless still there. Kochumottom’s translation of Vasubandhu’s commentary on Mādhyānta Vibhāga draws our attention to what might be called the container conception of emptiness:

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280 Chang, 1971, p. 60.
Thus, when something is absent then one, seeing that as devoid of that thing, perceives that as it is, and recognizes that, which is left over, as it is, namely as something truly existing there.\textsuperscript{282}

Again, if we examine Asaṅga explication of Śūnyatā, we find a similar understanding of its appropriateness:

Emptiness is logical when one thing is devoted of another because of that absence and because of the presence of the empty thing itself.\textsuperscript{283}

Asaṅga continues, wherever and in whatever place something is not, one rightly observes that to be void of that. Moreover, whatever remains in that place one knows as it really is, that “here there is an existent.” This is said to be engagement with emptiness as it really is and without way wardens… without that wayward view, he neither affirms nor denies the given thing… Not otherwise would he rid himself of the object of consciousness and dwell with equanimity.\textsuperscript{284}

All other interpretations are described by Asaṅga as “emptiness wrongly grasped”. Interestingly this is the same term that Nāgārjuna uses in his Mādhyamika-kārikā when criticizing those who take Śūnyatā to be a view.\textsuperscript{285}

Thus, forAsanga the designation empty (Śūnyatā) is only predicable of an existent thing, sinceemptiness is only logical if something exists.\textsuperscript{286} Again we find Madhyā-Vibhāga declaring that. The nonexistence of duality is indeed the existence of nonexistence; this is the definition of emptiness. It is neither existence, nor nonexistence, neither different nor identical.\textsuperscript{287}

The existence of nonexistence turns out to be the specific definition of Śūnyatā found throughout the early Yoācāra literature. In the Abhidharmasamuccaya, Asaṅgastates that emptiness is “the non-existence of the

\textsuperscript{282} Kochmottom 1982, p. 236.  
\textsuperscript{283} Willis, 1979, p. 114.  
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid, pp. 117-121.  
\textsuperscript{285} Mādhayamika Karika.24. P.11  
\textsuperscript{286} Wogihara, 1930-1936, p. 47.  
\textsuperscript{287} Mādhayamika-vibhaga 1.p. 13
self” and the existence of the no-self”. In fact, within the text Asaṅga espouses a conception of the Middle Path based upon the Mahāyāna notion of the other dependent nature of all dharma:

The real meaning of Pratītyasamutpāda is the fact that there is no creator, the fact of causality, the fact that there is no being, the fact of dependent the fact that all there is no mover, the fact that there is an uninterrupted continuity of cause and effect, the fact that there is no conformity between cause and effect, the fact of the variety of causes and effects, and the fact of the regularity of cause and effect.

Moreover, Dependent Origination is momentary, but one can also find stability within it. Dependent origination consists of nonmoving conditions, but these conditions are also functional Dependent Origination does not admit of a being, but it can also be understood in terms of a being. Dependent Origination does not admit of a creator, but there is an uninterrupted flow of actions and their results. It does not arise from itself, or from another, or from both. It is produced neither from its own action nor from the action of another, nor is it without cause.

Pratītyasamutpada is to be understood in terms of a realm of causally efficient but existentially dependent occurrences. For an explanation of the causal process in terms of the Paratantra laksana, we need look no further than Sangha own Mahāyānasamgrāha.

If the dependent nature is representation only, the support of the manifestation of objects, why is it dependent and why is it so called? Because it arises from its own trace seeds, it is dependent upon conditions. Because, after its birth, it is incapable of subsisting by itself for a single instant, it is called the dependent.

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289 Ibid, p. 44.
In this work we see a new gloss put upon the traditional Mādhyamika explanation of the dependent arisen as that which arises dependent upon trace seeds. Nevertheless, there is still a characteristically Mādhyamika refusal to use the dualistic language of existence and nonexistence. No Dharma has an independent self, being dependent upon all other Dharma for its existence. Thus, a Dharma exists only insofar as it participates in the causal network of interdependent Dharma. As the Abhidharma had pointed out, no Dharma has independent existence, since it occurs as the result of a long and complex chain of interdependent factors (dharma), which they are produced in dependent upon other conditions. Thus, a Dharma is empty of itself but not of another. Dharma, then, are in one sense existent, but not in the everyday sense of being a definable and independent entity or object.

Dharmas are not existent in the everyday sense of the term, since they are not distinguishable and separate entities; they have no independent self in their constructed nature. Nevertheless, Dharmas are not totally nonexistent, either, since they are by definition factors of experience; that is, they are cognizable. Nevertheless, dharma’s are not as they appear to unenlightened minds. They are not object in that they do not possess the existential substantiality required in order to be existent (viz. that they are persistent and independent entities distinguishable from one another and definable in terms of a name or designation, prajnapti). Thus, we find in the Yogācāra, as in the Mādhyamika School, a pointed refusal to become involved in an ontological debate.

It is interesting that this type of analysis is something of a bridge building exercise between what might be seen as an undue emphasis upon negative language (via negative) in the exposition of emptiness by Mādhyamikas on the one hand, and the overarching realism of the Abhidharma school on the other hand. As such the Yogācāra movement can be seen as a “re-forming” of the Middle Path. This is not to say they such a reformation is necessarily out of step with the understand of Śūnyatā as systematized in the Sūtras of
Nagārjuna (who is clearly neither a nihilist nor a realist in the accepted sense of the terms), but merely that, in its emphasis upon the given of meditative and so called normative perception, the Yogācāra aim is to establish the appropriate parameters of linguistic usage and a rigorous logic for the establishment of the Mahāyāna position on experientially verifiable grounds.

Another predominant feature of the early Yogācāra exposition of the Middle Path is the explanation of the selflessness of dharma’s in terms of an “ineffable intrinsic nature”. All of these technical phrases are attempts to establish concise definition of emptiness that would clearly distinguish it from an extreme and nihilistic interpretation. It is here that we encounter the major problem in explicating Śūnyatā, one which I believe was an important factor in the early Yogācāra attempts to explain this fundamental Mahāyāna concept.

The nihilistic interpretation of emptiness is the view that if all is empty then it does not really exist. Avoiding this conclusion without at the same time reifying what one declares to be empty of intrinsic nature has proved to be the major preoccupation of Mādhyamika scholiasts. The problem, however, may prove to be insurmountable within the realms of conventional language. The nihilistic interpretation of emptiness can only be avoided by emphasizing the redeemed status of the given in perception it is clear that such an endeavor is bound to lead the careless thinker toward the opposing extreme of externalism. The Māhāyāna Middle Path is indeed a thin tightrope on which to balance. Let us consider this problem more fully in an attempt to clarify the relationship between the Mādhyamika and the early Yogācāra.

As we have seen, the early formulations of classical Yogācāra as found in the works of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, place a specific emphasis upon what might be called ‘the container conception of emptiness’. This is the declaration that for to be empty, must exist in some form or other. This is a clear attempt to secure the Mahāyāna of Śūnyatā firmly on the rails of the Middle Path, and resist the entrapments of an encroaching nihilism. Such a tendency is also found in the renewed efforts to establish some form of quasi-substantial basis to the
appearance of the world. Thus, *MahāyānaSamgrahasa* says that the *Paratantra-Laksana* is the locus for the manifestation of nonexistent and illusory objects. *Ālayavijnāna* is described as the locus of the knowable.291

The appeal to a substratum ushers in a movement away from mainstream India *Mādhyamika*, which explained the origination of the world in terms of a dynamic process of fluctuating and interdependently arisen Dharma; both the *Abhidharma* and *Mādhyamika* perspectives are based upon the deconstruction of conventionally postulated entities such as tables, chairs, and persons into momentary events. The *Abhidharma* schools developed a highly complex understanding of the causal process; no single entity of Dharma was the product of a single cause but rather was the end result of a multiplicity of causal factors contributing to its manifestation on a number of different levels.

Of course, the various schools of India Buddhism had widely differing conceptions of the nature of causality raining from the commentaries theories of the *Sarvāstivādins* to then denial of substance causality as found in the *Mādhyamika*. All the schools, however, were unanimous in focusing upon the notion of dependent co-origination as the central conception for explaining the phenomenon of change. The fact that all dharmas arise interdependently was subsequently turned on its head by the *Mādhyamika* school, which declared that Dependent Origination was no origination at all. This is because a conditioned and evanescent entity could not be said to exist absolutely. Thus, if there is no entity that originates, then the concept of origination itself becomes devoid of meaning. Nevertheless, all schools agreed upon the centrality of *Pratityasamutpāda* even if they did not agree upon its precise implications. The importance of the Dependent Origination scheme lies in the fact that it does not require the existence of some ultimate support, over and above that which arises interdependently, to account for that origination itself. The appeal to a substratum shows dissatisfaction in the early *Yogācāra* literature with the efficacy of the *Mādhyamika* explanation of the origination of the world. The

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291 Ibid. p. 89
problem, of course, was brought about by the Mādhyamika’s insistence that dependent origination is no origination at all. What the Mādhyamika means by this, of course, is not do deny the origination of entities, which remains within the scope of conventional existence, but merely to point out the inappropriateness of such conceptions as origination of inherently existing entities on an ultimate level. In fact, for the Mādhyamika school the conventional arising and cessation of entities is only possible because they are essentially empty. For emptiness everything goes, for no emptiness nothing is possible.\(^{292}\)

The attempt to differentiate the Mādhyamika conception of Śūnyatā from nihilism is liable to mislead insofar as it comes dangerously close to reifying the empty entity by making such statements as “the entity remains as such.” This statement is necessary, however, for the Mādhyamika to make the point that his is not a blanket denial of everything. Thus, in attempting to differentiate emptiness (Śūnyatā from nihilism), one is inevitably forced to refer to that entity; having already denied its own self existence, by declaring that it is empty. The very explication of emptiness in conventional language, therefore leads to apparent contradiction.

The self contradictoriness of Śūnyatā is a frequent criticism of the Mādhyamika School that is upheld, in the main, by the various non-Buddhist school of philosophy. Sankara’s attitude to the Mādhyamaka School seems to have amounted to no mere than a contemptuous dismissal.\(^{293}\)

The second interpretation of the Mādhyamika position, that it is a form of nihilism, is frequent cry of later Yogācāra.\(^{294}\) The Mādhyamika is likely to seem peculiarly at odds with itself for as long as the Mādhyamika’s central premise is not accepted that premise being that the emptiness of own being is neither a denial of the object nor an assertion of its existence.

Buddhism has always been primarily interested in the attainment of salvation and freedom from suffering, and one of the main problems of the post Mādhyamika thinkers was that of explaining and arguing for the existence of suffering given that everything was empty. It would appear from the ideals and arguments of the developing Yoācāra School that the Mādhyamaka understanding of emptiness was seen by some to subvert the possibility of suffering. Nāgārjuna argues that it is only because things are empty that change, impermanence, and suffering can occur. Consequently, without emptiness not only could the word of change never have occurred but there could also have been no way out of it.295

However, it would appear that many Yogācāra believed that an unqualified and universal declaration of emptiness subverted the reality of suffering in Samsāra and so was danger of subverting of emptiness subverted the reality of suffering in Samsāra so was in danger of subverting the very basis of the Buddhist tradition, namely the Four Noble Truths. This concern clearly predates the Yogācāra and is expressed by Nāgārjuna himself at the being of the chapter on the Four Noble Truths in his Mādhyamika-kārikā. Nāgārjuna’s response, however, does not appear to have been sufficient for the early Yogācāra, since a concerted effort is made to further distinguish emptiness from the extreme of nihilism. According to the Yogācāra formulation of the Middle Path, Dharma are empty of the Prapanca bases constructions of discursive thought, but are not empty insofar as they do exist in some form. The Mādhyamika of course did not deny that Dharma exist in some form; it merely rejected their true or ultimate status as inherently existing entities.

However, outside the Mādhyamika School this explanation seems either to have been misunderstood or, at best, was felt to be inadequate. The movement toward a more subscribe model of reality can be seen in new ways of formulating the meaning of emptiness in the literature of the early Yogācāra School. For instance, in commenting on the Mādhyanta Vibhaga’s statement that

295Mādhyamika Kārikā, 24,pp.18-28.
defilements are adventitious, *Vasubandhu* makes the following points: by shaking off the adventitious defilements. However, this is not a change in own nature.\footnote{Mādhyanta Vibhaga Bhasya I, p. 23.}

The remarkable fact about the early formulations of classical *Yogācāra*, as established in the text of *Asaṅga* and *Vasubandhu*, is their hermeneutical open tenderness. It is possible to understand these works as attempts to express and reformulate the *Mādhyamika* message. Alternatively, they may be seen as reactions to the nihilism of the Mādhyamika School. In the former case the ineffable own nature of dharma is an attempt to explain that their emptiness transcends the categories of being and nonbeing. As such, their own nature is merely their common quality of lacking an own nature, however, ineffability may also refer to the fact that there is some positive sense in which own can be found in Dharma. In this case we have a quasi substantiality position, Dharma being real in some ultimate sense if not in any linguistically expressible sense, if the later were the correct interpretation, then we would have pinpointed a clear difference of opinion between *Asaṅga* and *Vasubandhu* on the one hand the Mādhyamikas on the other. Whatever the allegiance of the earliest *Yoācāra* as the school developed, it did eventually develop its own distinctive understanding of emptiness pace *Mādhyamika*. The appeal to a substratum is a clear example of the *Yogācāra* attempt to distinguish the Mahāyāna ideal of emptiness from a nihilistic interpretation.

In the light of the problem of explicating the notion of emptiness, we are now in a position to reevaluate the import of the *Yogācāra*’s particular formulation of the doctrine. The attempt to quality the emptiness of an entity as following for the pure given nests of that entity clearly constitutes an attempt by the early Yogācāra to differentiate emptiness from nihilism, the question of the relationship between the *Mādhyamika* and the early classical formulations of *Asaṅga* and *Vasubandhu*, however, remain a moot point. It could be argued that *Asaṅga* conceived of emptiness along broadly *Mādhyamika* lines, and that his...
own formulations of the doctrine are merely developing the Mādhyamika position by emphasizing what I have called the experiential facility of objects. This provides a characteristically Yogācāra emphasis on experience without necessitating a break with the Mādhyamika tradition on this issue.

Attempts to differentiate emptiness from nihilism, however, inevitably lead to the assertion of the reality of the emptied thing and such can lead to the reification of that empty. The extent to which Asaṅga took his own formulation of Śūnyatā to be fundamentally different from those of his predecessors largely depends on the extent to which he takes his own use of language seriously. Thus, on the one hand, Asaṅga may be defending Mādhyamika from a nihilistic interpretation by attempting to distinguish it from a blanket denial of everything, while on the other hand he may have been attacking the Mādhyamika for their encroaching nihilism, if the later is in fact the case, then Asaṅga took his own statements concerning the given nests of the entity at face, and from the Mādhyamika point of view was indeed guilty of reification. From this it would be clear that there is a different conception of emptiness at work in the treatises of the early Yogācāra. Both interpretation of Asaṅga’s position are positional. Determining which of these is correct may prove particularly problematic since the very paradoxically of explaining emptiness on language points to its inexpressibility.

Any defense of emptiness against the change of nihilism is always likely to result in the possibility of reification insofar as reference to the given nests of the entity is taken literally, that is, not purged of its ontological implications. This is an unfortunate consequence of the problems inherent in the self referential nature of language. Thus, on the one hand Asaṅga may be rescuing the Mādhyamika position from fallacious nihilistic interpretations, or alternatively he may be criticizing the Mādhyamika School. This hermeneutical problem is complex, and any resolution of it would necessitate not only an examination of Asaṅga’s own conception of emptiness, but also consideration of his attitudes toward his Mādhyamika predecessors.
If the early Yogācāra movement was formulated as a reaction to rather than a reform of mainstream Mādhyamika, Asanga and his successors have some difficulties in overcoming the Mādhyamika critique of their positions. For how can the other dependent realm be said to exist in some form without risking ontological attribution, as Nāgārjuna argues, if there is no independent “self” there can be no “other” to be dependent upon since “other nature” is the “self nature” of an “other”. Bhavaviveka pick up on this argument in his disputations with the Vijnanavadin, pointing to the absurdity of asserting that an illusion exists.\(^{297}\)

The Vijnāvāda difficult stems from reference to an entity at the same as maintaining its ineffability, and reflects a failure to transcend the Mādhyamika progression from conditional occurrence to Nirvāṇa and thence to no occurrence at all. Nevertheless, the fact that the Mādhyamika position seems paradoxical cannot be doubted, the interesting point being that for the Mādhyamika the Vijnāvāda position was paradoxical and vice versa. Mutual incomprehensibility and paradoxically due to shifting structural presuppositions was common to India philosophy.\(^{298}\)

One suspects that the developing Yogācāra School felt uneasy about the Mādhyamika equation of Pratiyasamutpāda with Anutpāda. Nevertheless, in the early Yogācāra literature one can even find references to the renunciation of Vijnaptimātratā, usually taken to be the definitive concept of the Yogācāra School. In the Mahāyānasamgraha, for instance, Asaṅga explicitly states that representation only is to be relinquished once one transcended dichotomizing consciousness and the duality of subject and object.

Thus, upon investigating the mental chapter which appears as an object, the Bodhisattva enters the imagined nature. Upon entering representation only, he enters the dependent nature. How then does he enter the perfected nature? He enters it upon rejecting altogether the notion of representation only. Thus, for the

\(^{297}\) Madhyamaka Vatara. VI, p. 45.
\(^{298}\) Williams. 1980, p. 12
One who has destroyed the notion of an object, the mental chatter resulting from the impression of the heard Dharma does not have the capability to arise with the appearance of an object and, consequently, does not arise anymore as representation only. When the Bodhisattva resides in the name without concept with regard to all objects when he resides through yogic perception in the Dharmadhatu, then he possesses Nirvikalpajnana, in which the objective support and the supported consciousness are totally identified. It is then that the Bodhisattva has entered the perfected nature.  

This superabundance knowledge corresponds to final stage of Enlightenment outlined by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu where even the notion of representation is relinquished. For how can you talk of representation in the absence of an object that is being represented! Thus, Vasubandhu declares in Trisvabhā Nirdesa 36 that through the perception that there is mind only there arises the no perception of knowledge things, through the no perception of knowledge, there arises the non perception of mind also.

Taken at face value, these statements suggest that there remains considerable room for debate as to the precise relationship between the doctrinal positions of the early Yogācāra philosophy is straightforwardly idealistic since there appears to be the acknowledgment at times that the highest levels of attainment both Citta and VinaptiMātra are to be transcended. One suspected that the early Yogācāra of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, as laid down in such texts as the Bodhisattva-Bhumı and the Trisvabhāvanirdesa, represent a philosophical school in transition.
3.1.3 The Concept Of The Anātman In Mahāyāna Buddhism

Recent discussions in the field of epistemology seem to forgo the arguments of the skeptic because it is assumed that skepticism has been proven false or simply cannot be true. Analogously, the not-self theory of personal identity seems to fall victim to the identical fate of thoroughgoing skepticism: both skepticism and not-self seem to entail harsh consequences and seem inconsistent with a commonsense understanding of our world. For these reasons, skepticism and not-self suffer from a lack of scholarly debate and apathy by many within the field. The modern debate within the philosophical field of personal identity tends to hinge not upon whether the self exists but upon what exactly constitutes the self. Of the many different concepts which permeate this debate, the Buddhist belief in not-self is considered to be incorrect and largely forgotten. While skepticism is not appropriate for our purposes, one of the goals of this thesis is to raise the level of discussion between scholars on the theory of not-self with particular emphasis on the Buddhist understanding of the doctrine.

In this thesis, I will argue for the comprehensive and consistent view embraced by the Buddhist concerning the doctrine of Anātman (not-self) and reveal how the doctrine of Philosophical Relativity is crucial in gaining a richer understanding of Anātman. It is important then to first offer a broad summation of the concept within western philosophy, and to explain how the concept of not-self has evolved within the arguments offered on its behalf. While this will demonstrate contemporary western thinking on the doctrine, any presentation on the Buddhist doctrine of Anātman without strict interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha would be incomplete. Thus, chapter one will further discuss my conclusions concerning the teachings of the Buddha and reveal canon that will aid in my later development of a comprehensive understanding of the Buddhist doctrine. My second chapter will begin with critiques meant to reveal the opposing side of the debate, but more than that these critiques will provide a basis for doubt within Buddhism as I call into question the internal consistency of core doctrines. I will further provide what I consider to be an intelligent and powerful critique of the no-self doctrine, one that is not easily answered or
brushed aside. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of the reductionism/non-reductionism debate as it seek to reveal the inherent reasons to doubt the no-self doctrine that is central to all Buddhist teachings. Finally, chapter three will bring chapters one and two into sharper focus by arguing two important conclusions I wish to advance: the doctrine of Philosophical Relativity is correct concerning the doctrine of Anātman and the Buddha would not only agree with my conclusion but in fact that this interpretation raises a middle ground the Buddha would endorse. My overall goal for this thesis is to present a middle ground for Buddhist thought that reconciles many of the problems the doctrine itself faces, while further arguing for the interpretations inherent to an adoption of the doctrine of Philosophical Relativity.

From this distinction, controversy arises today regarding the true intentions of the Buddha and his doctrine of Anātman. The question is quite simple: did the Buddha mean to provide a metaphysical proof against the self or was it only a prescription to end life’s suffering? The four noble truths are crucial to the foundation of Buddhism, and one of these tenets is that life is suffering. To end this suffering, one must free themselves from the attachments of this world so that Nirvāṇa can be attained. On one hand, those who argue that the Buddha did not argue against a metaphysical self embrace the notion that the self is an attachment which must be broken free of on the path to enlightenment. It is not important then to answer the question of a person’s existence, it is only important to take a practical and pragmatic approach to the question of the self. By freeing yourself of this attachment, the Buddhist practitioner is taking a further step towards achieving the ultimate goal. On the other hand, those who maintain that the Buddha really did intend to argue against the notion of the self point to the many arguments which pervade the Tipitaka in favor of the doctrine of Anātman. Although we will save my answer to this controversy until later, it is important to understand that the question of the self is a question that would have been divided into one of the four categories above by the Buddha. Thus, the real answer to this question lies in the answer to this: in which category did the Buddha place the question of the self? If he placed the question into the category
that maintains the question should be ignored, those who argue against the Buddha’s defiance of the self will hold much stronger logical ground. If the question falls into the category that maintains the question should be answered categorically, those who argue for the Buddha’s defiance of the self will hold the upper ground.

Of those who contend that the Buddha merely presented a practical strategy, Thanissaro is one of the most vocal proponents. He argues:

So, instead of answering “no” to the question of whether or not there is a self interconnected or separate, eternal or not the Buddha felt that the question was misguided to begin with. Why? No matter how you define the line between “self” and “other,” the notion of self involves an element of self-identification and clinging, and thus suffering and stress.\(^\text{302}\)

As a pragmatic strategy for seeking Enlightenment, the doctrine of \textit{Anātman} works to curb the attachments of the Buddhist practitioner and relieve the stress inherent to the true nature of life. The Ananda Sūtra is employed here to bolster the argument of Bhikkhu because of the method the Buddha employs to teach the monk Ananda. The Sūtra begins with the arrival of Vacchagotta as he seeks knowledge of the true path. The wanderer arrives with a single, seemingly harmless, question for the Buddha, “now then, Venerable Gotama, is there a self?”\(^\text{303}\)

Much to his surprise, Vacchagotta receives only silence as an answer and is puzzled by the reaction of the Buddha. After asking another question and being met with silence for a second time, the wanderer Vacchagotta respectfully turns and leaves. Even more puzzled, the monk Ananda turns to the Buddha and inquires as to why the Buddha did not answer the question posed to him. The Buddha responds:

Ananda, if I, being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self, were to answer that there is a self that would be conforming to those priests and


\(^{303}\) Samyutta Nikāya XLIV.10.
contemplatives who are exponents of externalism. If I, being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self, were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those priests and contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationist. And if I, being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is no self, were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: ‘Does the self I used to have now not exist?’

Many of the arguments volleyed against the no-self doctrine involve calling into question the consistency of this doctrine with other doctrines pivotal to the foundations of Buddhism. Inherently, these arguments maintain that the Buddhist cannot hold doctrines such as Karma and Anātman within the same logical system because these beliefs are inconsistent together. To counter these arguments, the Buddhist must do one of two things: the Buddhist must show her interlocutor to be incorrect or she must abandon one of the doctrines as false in order to avoid the charge of inconsistency. However, our aim here is not to answer the questions but to simply provide counterpoint, and thus our aim is tied into calling the doctrines of Buddhism into question.

A perennial problem for Buddhists has always been the question of how to articulate the relationship that obtains between the absolute and the relative orders of reality, i.e. Between Nirvāṇa and Samsāra, although conceptions of Nirvāṇa within the Buddhist tradition have changed over the centuries, it is safe to say that some of its features have remained constant throughout the doctrinal permutations of its different schools. Indeed some modern scholars of Buddhism in the West have even questioned whether it is meaningful to speak of an Absolute in Buddhism at all claiming that such a notion is an illegitimate transposition of certain 'substantial’s' notions relating to the highest reality as found in its parent tradition, Hinduism. This paper will attempt to address the question of whether one can meaningfully speak of an Absolute in Buddhism, in what such a reality consists and what its implications are for understanding the

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304 Saṅyutta Nikāya XLIV.10
highest goal of the Buddhist path. In doing this, I will be focusing chiefly on the Mahāyāna tradition and, in particular, on one of its principal metaphysical texts. The Awakening of Faith - in which we arguably find one of the most comprehensive treatments of the Ultimate Reality in the history of Buddhism. The paper will then address some of the implications of this discussion for understanding the Pure Land way and its consummation in the perspective of Shinran.

In one of his early seminal works on Buddhism. Edward Conze in discussing the question of whether early Buddhism can be considered atheistic, summaries the earlier, Hinayāna view of Nirvāṇa as follows:

We are told that Nirvāṇa is permanent, stable, imperishable, immovable, ageless, deathless, unborn, and unbecoming, that it is power, bliss and happiness, the secure refuge, the shelter, and the place of unassailable safety; that it is the real Truth and the supreme Reality; that it is the Good, the supreme goal and the one and only consummation of our life, the eternal, hidden and incomprehensible Peace.

Which is to be contrasted to this world i.e. everything conditioned and impermanent, which is emphatically regarded as wholly ill, as wholly pervaded with suffering, as something to be rejected totally, abandoned totally for the one goal of Nirvāṇa. In this sense, early Buddhism was radically dualistic in how it perceived these two realms there was simply no connection between them. In other words, the individual can only attain Nirvāna through the dissolution of this very individuality hence the doctrine of Anātman or 'not-self'. Furthermore, there was also the tendency to view Nirvāna as more of a state of realization than any kind of 'being' given the apophasis reticence of early Buddhism to commit itself to any definitive declarations regarding this ineffable reality and to some extent at least, its conscious desire to demarcate itself from the metaphysics of the Upaniṣad. However, to what extent the polemics between

these two camps was simply an outcome of a mutual misunderstanding over the meaning and implications of the concept of Ātman is a moot point that warrants an entire treatise in itself.

With the arising of the Mahāyāna as a discrete vehicle of the Dharma in its own right, one witnesses a growing tendency to universalize the concept of Buddha hood as a spiritual principle transcending the human personality of Sākyamuni and embodying a higher and permanent reality. Hence the concept of the 'eternal' Buddha which we see promulgated in such central scriptures as the Lotus Sūtra and in such fundamental doctrines as that of the Trikāya or the Three Bodies of the Buddha with the Dharma (Body of Dharma) effectively becoming tantamount to the Buddhist Absolute. Other currents of thought within the Mahāyāna developed this notion further preferring to view Buddha or Nirvāṇa as an all-pervasive reality embracing all things including the totality of Saṃsāra. In time, this growing pendency of attenuating the distinction between the two realms led eventually, especially in the Mādhyamika school, to a full-blown identification which we find explicitly formulated in the famous dictum, 'Saṃsāra is Nirvāṇa'. From the fairly unqualified dualism of the Hinayana we now find a radical non-dualism at the apex of Mahāyāna thinking - and all this under the umbrella of ‘Buddhism’! Such a revolution in thinking appears to have no other precedent in religious history which clearly serves to demonstrate the complexity and controversy inherent in the tradition's struggle to understand the reality of Enlightenment. However, to what extent we actually consider this development to be an innovative one largely depends on whether we believe that the origins of the Mahāyāna can be traced to the person of Sākyamuni himself. If, as has been suggested, the fundamental Mahāyāna tenets had already been adumbrated by the Buddha following his Enlightenment and then subsequently disseminated by certain disciples through an oral tradition until such time as it was considered necessary to explain them in discursive mode through the written scriptures centuries later, then perhaps the Mahāyānistic ontology can no longer be considered as radical as originally suggested but rather should be seen as a natural unfolding, over time, of what was taught by Sākyamuni from the
beginning. This is doubtless a question which, although still subject to much controversy and obscurity, nevertheless offers much stimulating food for thought.

Having very briefly charted the rudimentary outlines of the transition from the early Buddhist view of *Nirvāṇa* to the more developed and comprehensive conception of the *Dharmakāya* developed by the *Mahāyānist*, let us now delve a little deeper into the nature of this Absolute. In one of his earliest works, D.T. Suzuki quotes the following passage on the *Dharmakāya* from the great Avatamsaka Sutra: 307

The *Dharmakāya*, though manifesting itself in the triple world, is free from impurities and desires. It unfolds itself here, there and everywhere responding to the call of *Karma*. It is not an individual reality, it is not a false existence, but is universal and pure. It comes from nowhere, it goes to nowhere; it does not assert itself, nor is it subject to annihilation. It is forever serene and eternal. It is the One, devoid of all determinations. This body of Dharma has no boundary, no quarters, but is embodied in all bodies. Its freedom or spontaneity is incomprehensible; its spiritual presence in things corporeal is incomprehensible. All forms of corporeality are involved therein; it is able to create all things. Assuming any concrete material body as required by the nature and condition of karma, it illuminates all creations. Though it is the treasure of intelligence, it is void of particularity. There is no place in the universe where this Body does not prevail. The universe becomes but this Body forever remains. It is free from all opposites and contraries, yet it is working in all things to lead them to *Nirvāṇa*

In many respects, the culmination of this catechetic conception of the Absolute is to be found in a very short yet profoundly influential treatise known as the Awakening of Faith in the *Mahāyāna* traditionally attributed to *Asvaghosa* although only extant in Chinese. This work, which is often considered as a synthesis of the *Mādhyamika*, *Yogācāra* and *Tathāgata-*

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Garbhatraditions, has exercised its influence on the founders of all the major schools of the Mahāyāna who have venerated the text as an unimpeachable authority on the questions with which it deals. In that respect, it serves as a very useful and reliable compendium of Mahāyāna metaphysics containing, as it does in a small but terse compass, a range of sophisticated and subtle teaching which one would only come across elsewhere by consulting numerous other sutras and satraps where the same points are often made only obliquely.

The fundamental standpoint of the Awakening of Faith is its belief in the absolute which it calls 'Suchness' (tathata). As we have already seen, this reality has been called by many other names according to the perspective by which it is envisaged, viz. Dharmakāya, Nirvāṇa, Buddha, Śūnyatā, Bodhi, etc. Now Suchness, the supreme reality according to this text, is both transcendent and immanent. In other words, it is completely beyond anything that we can imagine or conceive in our world of relativity and delusion with all its manifold limitations and yet, at the same time, it constitutes the very core of everything the deepest centre and 'Ultimate Source'308 of Samsāra itself. A corollary of this is to say that the Absolute, which is formless, manifests itself through forms which, although finite and limited, are none other than the Absolute of which they are its reflections. This is one way of understanding the meaning of 'Samsāra is Nirvāṇa'. It is not, of course, to say that they are identical but rather that they are ultimately non-dual. In this way, the world around us is then seen as an admixture of the conditioned and the unconditioned. The most illustrious master of the Hua-Yen school, Fa-Tsang, was a great devotee of the Awakening of Faith on which he has written the most authoritative commentary. His own thought was deeply influenced by this text as is evidenced by the following passage from Francis Cook's book on Hua-yen Buddhism which I cite for the

purpose of clarifying what was said earlier about the relationship between ‘Saṃsāra is Nirvāṇa’.

The very basis of Hua-yen thought seems to be a view of an Absolute which existed prior in time to a concrete world of things which it became. There it was said that any phenomenal object is a mixture of the True and the false, or the Unconditioned and conditioned (of course, the sum total of all things is this same mixture). Taking up the absolute side of things first, Fa-tsang says that it itself has two aspects. First, he says, it is immutable. This is not surprising because all religions claim immutability as the nature of the absolute. What kind of absolute would it be which changed like the ordinary things of the world? Being immutable, the absolute is forever unmoved, pure, eternal, still and serene. This is, in fact, a common description of the absolute in all Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. However, Fa-Tsang next says something which not only seems to contradict this statement but which also is very unusual in Buddhism; he says that moved by certain conditions, this pure, unmoved eternal Reality changes and appears as the universe of phenomenal objects. However, like the gold which has become the ring, the immutable absolute remains the immutable absolute. Here the picture is apparently one of the emanations of the concrete universe from an immutable absolute with the result that things are a mixture of the absolute and the phenomenal.

Another distinctive feature of this text is its stress on the absolute being both Śūnyatā (empty) and a Śūnya ('not empty'). Firstly, 'suchness is empty because from the very beginning it has never been related to any defiled states of existence, it is free from all marks of individual distinction of things and it has nothing to do with thoughts conceived by a deluded mind. Considered in this way, 'emptiness' should not be considered as 'non-existent' but simply 'devoid of a distinct, absolute, independent, permanent, individual entity or being as an irreducible component in a pluralistic world...However, this negation does not

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310 Hakeda, p. 34.
exclude the possibility of sickness being seen from a different viewpoint or order with which one is not accustomed. Hence, there is room to present sickness, if it is done symbolically, as replete with attributes. Asvaghosa, after pointing out that sickness was not brought into existence in the beginning nor will it cease to be the end of time; it is eternal through and through goes on to say:

From the beginning, *Sickness* in its nature is fully provided with all excellent qualities; namely, it is endowed with the light of great wisdom, the qualities of illuminating the entire universe, of true cognition and mind pure in its self-nature; of eternity, bliss, self and purity; of refreshing coolness, immutability and freedom....these qualities are not independent from the essence of suchness and are supranational attributes of Buddhahood. Since it is endowed completely with all these and is not lacking anything, it is called the *Tathāgāta-Garbha* (when latent) and also the *Dharmakāya* of the *Tathagāta*. Though it has, in reality, all these excellent qualities, it does not have any characteristics of differentiation; it retains its identity and is of one flavor; suchness is solely one it is one without a second.

These are critical passages in helping us to understand the nature and function of *suchness*. What we see is a concept of the Absolute as not only the fountainhead of all the happiness, joy and beauty of which we only experience the pale shadows in this world but the source of Enlightenment and saving activity of all Buddha and Bodhisattava directed towards suffering sentient beings in *Saṃsāra*. It is therefore crucial to a proper understanding of suchness not to view it under its other synonym, namely Emptiness or the Void, to mean a mere nullity or non-existence - this would be to fall prey to the pitfalls of nihilism gains which the great *Mahāyāna* masters always warned us. To be sure, suchness is not the kind of existence which can be considered analogous to the realities with which we are familiar in this fleeting world of ephemeral but rather is far more 'real' than anything within the purview of our limited empirical

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311 Ibid, p. 36
312 Ibid, p. 65.
existence. There is a great danger, especially when one reads certain modern studies of Buddhism in the West, in failing to recognize that the notion of 'emptiness' about which one hears so much is not an emptiness or lack of reality as is sometimes curiously supposed but an emptiness of limitations, relativity and delusion. In this respect, emptiness serves as an Upāya to help rid people of misguided and blinkered views of the highest reality rather than being some kind of comprehensive statement regarding it. One is inclined to consider the punishing dialectics of Nagārjuna and his Mādhyamika system as simply a form of intellectual therapy designed to remove the obstacles to a clearer understanding of suchness breaking through the ratiocinative and conventional ways in which we artificially construct what we believe to be reality and to promote a more direct and intuitive mode of awareness through Prajñāor 'transcendental' wisdom. But such an exercise only stops half-way; otherwise the history of Buddhism would not have witnessed the rise of subsequent schools which endeavored to fill the gaps, so to speak, left by the purely negative and apophasis approach of the Śūnyatā perspective. There was a growing need for a more positive conception of the ultimate reality, a conception that addressed the fundamental needs of both the intelligence and the will in response to which arose, firstly, the Yogācāra followed by the Tathāgata-Garbha schools of thought with their emphasis on the catechetic dimension of the Absolute. Tantric Buddhism can also be considered a response to some of the perceived limitations with the early Mādhyamika perspective. In any event, we now find a richer and complex ontology which sought to integrate existence in its entirety, and at all its levels, with suchness. No Dharma or element of existence was considered to be outside its embrace or influence such that all reality was suffused with the presence of the Buddha a notion unthinkable to the Hīnayāna which was in no real position to reconcile this world of suffering and delusion with the realm which delivered one from all such sorrow. Nevertheless, despite the paradoxical nature of the Mahāyāna's preferred way of viewing the Absolute, it felt that its more difficult perspective was thoroughly justified in view of what it considered
to be a deeper awareness of the omnipresent activity of suchness in our everyday world of Saṃsāra existence.

The rise of the Pure Land school of Mahāyāna Buddhism was largely contemporaneous with the flowering of the Mahāyāna itself and constituted one of its earliest manifestations. In one sense, it can be argued that the Pure Land way represented the most explicit example of the attempt to render the Buddhist Absolute as accessible as possible to ordinary people through the use of a wealth of rich and positive symbolism designed to heighten the aspiration for Enlightenment. In this way, the Pure Land path can also be viewed as the best example of the a Śūnya view of absolute reality, i.e. in contrast to the Mādhyamikan view of suchness as empty (Śūnya) or the 'Void', it is seen in its fullness and plenitude as the inexhaustible font of all merits, virtues, wisdom and compassion an archetypal realm of perfection and beatitude. Hence the traditional descriptions of the Pure Land as being replete with the attributes of Enlightenment through the evocative symbolism of jewels, music, colors, fragrances etc. By employing ostensibly sensual imagery, the sutras are attempting to convey, in terms that could be readily understood, a sense of the blissfulness of Nirvāṇa in contrast, no doubt, to the imperfection that afflicted the ordinary world-view of the average devotee. The Pure Land patriarch, T'an-luan, claimed that what distinguished Pure Land Buddhism from other schools is that the 'Dharmakāya of Dharma-nature' takes the initiative in relation to deluded and suffering beings manifesting itself as 'Dharmakāya of Expediency' in the form of various Buddha, Bodhisattvas and Pure Lands. This is the ultimate act of compassion for without this initiative, ordinary beings would remain stranded in Saṃsāra with no hope of deliverance seeing as the clutches of ignorance and delusion in the Decadent Age of the Dharma were considered too strong to allow for individual effort and initiative to suffice for the attainment of enlightenment.

Although the Pure Land School claims the dynamic and compassionate nature of sickness as a major advance in Mahāyāna thinking, it is possible to
find the seeds of this conception in the Awakening of Faith itself in its doctrine of 'permeation'. Hence we find:

The essence of sickness is, from the beginning less beginning, endowed with the perfect state of purity. It is provided with supranatural functions and the nature of manifesting itself. Because of these two reasons, it permeates perpetually into ignorance. Through the force of this permeation, it induces a man to loathe the suffering of Saṃsāra, to seek bliss in Nirvāṇa and, believing that he has the principle of Sickness within him, to make up his mind to exert himself.....The Buddha and Bodhisattvas all desire to liberate all men, spontaneously permeating them with their spiritual influences and never forsaking them. Through the power of the wisdom which is one with Sickness, they manifest activities in response to the needs of men as they see and hear them.

Shinran, while not explicitly repudiating this traditional view, chooses rather to universalize what he may have considered the mythological symbolism behind the Dharmakāra story by grounding it in fundamental Mahāyāna principles - partly in order to address strong criticisms by other sects which considered the Pure Land way non-Buddhist and partly, no doubt, because he had a profound awareness of a higher reality which he saw as working in all things and manifesting itself through innumerable compassionate guises such as Amitābha's Vows and his Pure Land. For Shinran, Jinen signifies that which is beyond form and time and beyond the domain of human intellect and will. It is the Dharma-body as Sickness which 'fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all being.' In one of his famous letters, Shinran makes the following observation:

The Supreme Buddha is formless and because of being formless is called 'Jinen'. When this Buddha is shown as being with form, it is not called the

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313 Hakeda, pp. 59-63.
supreme Nirvāṇa (Buddha). In order to make us realize that the true Buddha is formless, it is expressly called Amida Buddha; so I have been taught. Amida Buddha is the medium through which we are made to realize 'Jinen'.

This passage was written towards the end of Shinran's life and signals a radical attitude in thinking about the Buddha within the Pure Land tradition. It is as if Shinran has stripped the complex and rich edifice of Pure Land spirituality down to its bare principles. This, however, is not reductionism on Shinran's part but an attempt to rehabilitate the 'wisdom' aspect of the Mahāyāna which was in danger of possibly being overlooked by the rich Upayas offered by the great message of compassion which, in many ways, formed the centerpiece of the Pure Land message. One also finds in Shinran, and to a far greater extent than his own illustrious teacher Honen, a deep appreciation of the multifaceted nature of Nirvāṇa and its activity:316

Nirvāṇa has innumerable names. It is impossible to give them in detail; I will list only a few. Nirvāṇa is called extinction of passions, the uncreated, peaceful happiness, eternal bliss, true reality, Dharmakāya, Dharma-nature, sickness, oneness and Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature is none other than Tathāgata. This Tathāgata pervades the countless worlds; it fills the hearts and minds of the ocean of all beings. Thus, plants, trees and land all attain Buddhahood. Since it is with these hearts and minds of all sentient beings that they entrust themselves to the Vow of the Dharma-body as compassionate means, this Shinjin is none other than Buddha-nature. This Buddha-nature is Dharma-nature. Dharma-nature is the Dharmakāya.

So that the foundational teachings of all Buddhism. According to this doctrine, there is no "self" in the sense of a permanent, integral, autonomous being within an individual existence.

316 The collected Works: Volume, p. 373.
The Theravāda school interprets Anātman to mean that an individual's ego or personality is a fetter and delusion. Once freed of this delusion, the individual may enjoy the bliss of Nirvāṇa.

Mahāyāna teaches that beings and phenomena have no intrinsic existence of their own and take identity only in relation to other beings and phenomena. Śūnyāta also is an absolute reality that is all things and beings.

In Mahāyāna tradition, when one wakes up one realizes that the wholeworld is emptiness, that emptiness is not just the self but all things, and form and emptiness is the same thing, indistinguishable from one another. Or as stated in the Heart Sutra: “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” It is hard to grasp this conceptually. The best way is to practice meditation and experience it for you.

Buddhism analyzes human existence as made up of five aggregates or "bundles" (skandhas): the material body, feelings, perceptions, predispositions or karma tendencies, and consciousness. A person is only a temporary combination of these aggregates, which are subject to continual change. No one remains the same for any two consecutive moments. Buddhists deny that the aggregates individually or in combination may be considered a permanent, independently existing self or soul (ātman). Indeed, they regard it as a mistake to conceive of any lasting unity behind the elements that constitute an individual. The Buddha held that belief in such a self results in egoism, craving, and hence in suffering. Thus he taught the doctrine of Anātman, or the denial of a permanent soul. He felt that all existence is characterized by the three marks of Anātman (no soul), Anitya (impermanence), and Dukkha (suffering). The doctrine of Anātman made it necessary for the Buddha to reinterpret the Indian idea of repeated rebirth in the cycle of phenomenal existence known as Saṃsāra. To this end he taught the doctrine of Pratityasamutpada, or Dependent Origination. This 12 linked chain of causation shows how ignorance in a previous life creates the tendency for a combination of aggregates to develop. These in turn cause the mind and senses.
to operate. Sensations result, which lead to craving and a clinging to existence. This condition triggers the process of becoming once again, producing a renewed cycle of birth, old age, and death. Through this causal chain a connection is made between one life and the next. What is posited is a stream of renewed existences, rather than a permanent being that moves from life to life in effect a belief in rebirth without transmigration.