CHPTER IV

BUDDHISM TAKEN TO PEOPLE

As it began Buddhism came in as a powerful reformatory process of making reparations to the maladies of the orthodoxy of the then existing Hindu dharma. When knowledge of Sanskrit language got confined and limited to some select few, who became custodians of dharma, vast majority of Indians actually became alienated from the treasures of Vedic civilization. The dynamism of Hindu society had always been such that whenever the society faces crisis there always come reformers to correct and reestablish dharma. The Bhagavad Gita says, precisely the principle.

“Paritranaya sadhoonam vinasaya cha dushkritham
Dharmasamsthapanarthaya Sambhavami Yuge Yuge” ¹

Whenever the Dharma faces Glani there comes the avatharas who would distroy the evil and re-establish dharma. Similar reference is also find in Ramachanta manas a text which influenced Gandhiji the most. Ramacharitamanas speaks about different kinds of ‘Yuga dharam’ for different yugas. The rise and fall of good and evil is intimately connected with the Yuga dharma. ‘Ramachantra Manas’ says that

Nitayuga dharma hohim sab kere
hrudy Ram maya ke prere. ²
Because of “Ram maya” in every one’s mind changes according to Yuga dharma takes place.

These social reformers and correctors are who are known as avatars In Indian tradition. Basically there are two types of avatars. The purna avatars (full incarnations) and the ‘amsa avatars’ (put incarnations). Ten avatars of Vishnu are examples of full incarnations or Purna avatars, in past, in present and also for the future. Vedanta, the Upanishads gives the theory that in reality the true nature of man is “one with that ultimate reality.” (Tat tvam asi). But we do not know this because of ignorance or avidya. Since this being the case, the manifestation of the divinity within different individuals shall vary differently. In people where this manifestation of divinity is present, it shall start emitting light, are called part incarnations or amsavatras. Mahatma Gandhi was indeed an amsavatara, and also all those positive personalities. We see in our history many ‘amsavatras’ of varying levels.

In case of the Buddha, Indian tradition recognizes him as a ‘Purnavataa’ itself, as Buddha became accepted as one among the dasavatras.

The Buddhism which thus began as a reformatory process slowly became a group of ascetics. This is a normal phenomenon in Indian tradition where people form groups with common interests and common philosophies. There were some specialties with the Buddha group; they were out to reform our social maladies. They had to reject all those forces which were used to alienate common
people and they rejected the authority of the Vedas and became heterodox groups as against the orthodoxy.

There comes the sangha which had become the name of this group. The sanghe held the principles as their three Ratnas and they are Buddham, Dharma and Sangham. Buddham was the desideration, Dharma was the method to it, and Sangham was the physical group that can fulfill it. The sangha was a very strict group where only monks or ascetics could be members. On the one hand though the principles of the Buddha was essentially meant for all common people, now it was becoming limited to the restricted group of ascetics and on the other hand rigidity was setting within the sanghas totally against the principles for which the Buddha stood for. Here again we experience the dynamism of Indian culture as another reformatory process begin with the sangha which itself came in as the process of reformation. The first out come of this reformation was the formation of mahayanaprasthana. The term Mahayana means bigger vehicle which in turn mean a vehicle which can carry large number of people. The Mahayana was the first real step towards an attempt of taking Buddhism down to the people and re-inventing what the Buddha himself stood for.

During 200 years after the nirvana of Buddha there arose seventeen heretical sects of Buddhism in India, besides the orthodox priesthood of the Theras. In the course of time some of these sects disapperared and some new one grew up. During the time of Kanishka, about 78 AD, there were eighteen sects of Buddhism. They were broadly divided into Vaibhashika school of
Philosophy and in the Sautrantika School of philosophy. Group I and II are the Vaibhashikas group III and IV are the Soutratika

**Vaibhashikas**

**Group I Sarvabi vada group**

(1) Moda sarvsti vada  
(2) Kasyapiya  
(3) Mahisasaka  
(4) Dharmaguptiya  
(5) Bahusrtiya  
(6) Tamarasatiya  
(7) Vibhajya vadin

**Group II Sammitiya group**

(8) Kurukullaka  
(9) Avantika  
(10) Vatsiputriya

**Soutrantikas**

**Group III Mahasamghika group**

(11) Purvasaila  
(12) Aparasaila
It is interesting to note that all these sects originally belonged to the hinayanas but slowly they all joined Mahayana. This becoming Mahayana is an excellent example of liberalization and an effort to reaching out to the people.

There was broad polarization of the vaibhashikas and soutrantikas. Kanishka’s Mahayana established two more schools such as the Madhyamikas and Yogacharas. As a result, the former two schools of Hinayana and the latter schools if Mahayana came into existence.

Vaibhaskika School was a later modification of Sarvasthivada (Vide Takkusu’s tsing, P. XXI. Vakaspati Misra in his Nyayavartika tatpaya tika, 3: 1:1 quots the opinions of the Vaibhikas who were called Vatsiputras). As their names implies, they admits the reality of the world. They say that cognition of external objects is real as well as the objects are also real. Their principal text is
Abhidharmajnanaprastanasstra written by Katyayaniputra. Kanishka comply the next text of the sect called Abhidharma maha vibhasha sastra. This is also simply called as vibhasha. It was from this name of vibhasha that the term Vaibhashika was derived. Vibhasha means commentary. It seems that the vaibhashikas make their philosophy out of the commentaries rather than the soriginal teachings of Buddha. At about 489 AD an important vaibhashika text was written by Sanghhbhadra under the title Nyayanu Sara sastra. It is also called Kosakarika sastra.

The Soutrantikas accept cognition and therefore also admit the existence of external object. The name Soutrantikas is derived from Sutranta meaning original text. Sautrantikas are called Sautrntikas because they depend more on the original teachings of Buddha than commentaries. Their text was based on the stavira sect called in Pali as theras who held a mighty Buddhist Council in 490 BC. Perhaps the Mahasamghikas are also influencing Staviras who were the first followers in 390 BC. Later during Kanishka’s time (78 AD) Dharmottara or Uttaradharma\(^5\) composes the philosophical principles of the school in Kashmira\(^6\) However Hwen Thsang who visited India in 7\(^{th}\) century AD believes that Professor of the University of Takshasila called Kumaralabdha was the founder of Sautrantika school.\(^7\) Kumaralabdha was the contemporary of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva and Asvaghosha who lived about 300 AD. Another famous teacher Srilabdha\(^8\) wrote Vibhasha sastra. Hwen Thsang saw Srilabdha in person in Ayodhya in the ruins of a Sangharama where Srilabdha was living.
For the Yogacharas the world is unreal. But they do not deny the reality of cognition. The term Yogachara is a combination of Yoga (meditation) and achara (practice). They emphasized the practise of meditation of attaining bhumis or the listed in it is alaya vijnana, which is basis of conscious state or ego or soul. We do not know who founded Yogachara School. But from the Tibetan and Chinese sources, it is believed that Bodhisatvacharya nirdesa and Saptadasa bhumisastra Yogacharya are the important texts. The early teachers were Maitreya Natha and Asanka. It must have originated about 300 A.D.

The Madhyamikas held the view that both our cognition and external objects are neither totally real nor totally unreal. They follow the middle path avoiding both extremities and hence the name Madhyamikas. They say that it is not the case that world is totally unreal and at the same time not totally real. Nagarjuna is believed to be the founder of Madhyamika School (250-320 AD).

Nagarjuna’s Madhyamika karika; Buddha palita’s Moola Madhyama Vritti; Arya deva’s Hasthapale; Bhavya’s Madhyana hrudayakarika; Krishna’s Madhyamaprdittyta samud pada; Chandrakirti’s Madhyamika Vritti; Jayanta’s Madhyamika Vatara tika are the important texts of Madhyamika school.
The Spread of Buddhism to Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Kampuchea, Indonesia, North Western Springboard, China, Japan, Tibet, Mongolia, Russia, Himalayan Region, Nepal and Bhutan

Fortunately, the fire and fury of the Muslim invasions which by the 13th century had all but expunged Buddhism from the land of its origin did not totally obliterate the religion from the face of the earth, for by that time it was already firmly implanted in the soil of other countries.

Two thousand years ago, Indian influences spread throughout south and south-east Asia, and these included all forms of Buddhism as well as aspects of Hinduism. Today we find three southern Asian countries, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand, which may still be called Buddhist countries in the full sense of the term. What is locally regarded as a pure form of Theravada has established itself strongly in all of them on a firm monastic basis, with Pali as the canonical and liturgical language. In Indonesia, however, rather different developments have taken place.10

Different groups lived in this general area 2000 years ago and their distribution did not conform to the national boundary lines on any modern map. Later they were supplanted by other racial groups and gradually, over the centuries, a more settled picture more closely resembling the present-day one began to evolve. Of course,
being an island, the first country we will look at is an exception to this general rule.

**Sri Lanka**

Around 240 BC, the Emperor Ashoka dispatched his bhikkhu son, Mahinda, to the beautiful tropical island of Sri Lanka (or Ceylon), which lies in the Indian Ocean just off the southern tip of India. Mahinda was very well received by King Devanampiyatissa and entertained at the royal capital of Anuradhapura. Crowds flocked to hear him preach the Dhamma and it was early on predicted that, ‘These bhikkhus will be lords upon this island’. And so indeed it proved to be. Devanampiyatissa donated a tract of land outside Anuradhapura, the former Mahamegha Park, to them, and here a great vihara, the Mahavihara, was founded, which in time became the headquarters of Buddhism upon the island.

Seeing the enthusiastic reception that Mahinda evoked everywhere, King Devanampiyatissa asked him whether Buddhism had yet truly taken root upon the island.

‘Not yet, Your Majesty’, Mahinda is reputed to have replied. ‘It has certainly sprung roots but they have not yet grown deep into the soil. Only when a stupa has been established and when a son born in Sri Lanka of Sri Lankan parents becomes a monk in Sri Lanka, only then will it be true to say that the roots of the Dhamma are deeply embedded here.’
Those conditions were fulfilled soon afterwards.

Mahinda’s nun sister, Sanghamitta, was also brought over from India to establish an order of nuns. With her came a branch of the Bodhi Tree, which was duly planted in the grounds of the Mahavihara; later saplings were transplanted to other sites on the island. These living connections with the basic origins of Buddhism are still to be seen.

It was in Sri Lanka during the reign of King Vattagamani (89-77 BC) that the Pali scriptures were first committed to writing on prepared palm leaves at the Aloka Vihara. Another scholarly achievement in Sri Lanka was the translation into Pali of the old Sinhalese commentaries in the 5th century AD. One of the scholars involved, Buddhaghosa, also produced an important work called the *Visuddhimagga* (‘Path of Purification’), of which Conze has written:

The book is a compendium of the Tipitaka and one of the great masterpieces of Buddhist literature which describes authoritatively, lucidly and in great detail the principal meditational practices of the Buddhist Yigin.\textsuperscript{11}

Sri Lanka did not escape schism during the following centuries, and some of its dissenting schools were influenced by Mahayana and tantric developments. A major controversy broke out which resulted in a secession from the Mahavihara and the establishment of the Abhayagirivihara, the monks of the latter
taking a more progressive line than the orthodox Sthaviravadins. Thereafter royal patronage flowed now to one side, now to the other, but in the long run the more conservative disposition triumphed. A council held at Anuradhapura in 1160 finally settled the matter by suppressing all non-Theravada schools.

The progress and well-being of Buddhism on the island was inevitably affected by political upheavals, including invasion from South India and, later, European colonialism. From the 16th century onwards the Sinhalese suffered the intrusions firstly of the Portuguese, then of the Dutch and finally of the British. Efforts at conversion to Christianity were made and Buddhism was often persecuted to the extent that its very survival on the island was at times jeopardized. Bhikkhus had even to be imported from other Theravadin countries, notably Thailand and Burma, to ensure continuity.

The revival of Buddhism got fully under way in Sri Lanka towards the end of the last century. Ven. Sri Sumangala and Ven. Dharmananda established two Buddhist monastic colleges, the Vidyodaya and the Vidyolankara Pirivenas (monastic colleges), in 1873 and 1875 respectively. Here traditional education in Buddhism, Pali, Sanskrit, Sinhalese history and related subjects could be obtained. At about the same time a brilliant young monk named Ven. Mohottivatte Gunananda challenged the Christians to open religious debate. The Christians took up the challenge, most notably at Pandura in 1873, when they bandied arguments rather unsuccessfully with Ven. Gunananda in public for about a week.
Reports of these debates got into the foreign newspapers and so reached the attention of the distinguished pioneer Theosophist, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, in the USA. He came to Sri Lanka with the leader of the Theosophical Society, Madame H.P. Blavatsky, and both of them ‘took Pansil’ (i.e. the Five Precepts) at Galle in 1880. Thereafter the Theosophists worked alongside native Buddhist idealists like Ven. Sri Sumangala and Anagarika Dharmapala (David Hewavitarne, 1864-1933), to regenerate Sinhalese Buddhism. The movement was very successful. In 1887, after 12 years of effort, there were 46 schools on the island providing Buddhist education whereas formerly there had been only Christian schools. By 1903 Schools, there were 174 Buddhist schools existed.\textsuperscript{12}

**Burma**

It seems that Buddhism did not strongly establish itself here until the 5th or 6th centuries BC. Afterwards there is evidence or both Hinayana and Mahayana activity. Tantricism also filtered down from the north and one particularly scandalous sect known as the Aris (after *arya* - ‘noble’) is known to have existed.

An important event for the Theravada cause was the conversion of King Anawrahta of Pagan (1044-77) by a certain Shin Arahan, who was a Monk. Anawrahta attempted to suppress the Aris and then petitioned Manuka, the Mon King of Thatoh, for scriptures. When he received an unenthusiastic response, Anawrahta reacted in a somewhat non Buddhist fashion by sending in his troops to simply appropriate what he wanted by force.
Manuka was led back to Pagan in chains, and 32 elephants carried away his wealth, Buddhist relics, images and scriptures. His monks, artists and craftsmen were appropriated as we himself. Anawrahta’s dynasty was to hold sway for two centuries and during that time a great Buddhist culture blossomed at Pagan. Literally thousands of temples (including the famous Ananda Temple) and pagodas were built in a relatively small area, which has caused descriptive images like ‘a forest of stone’ to be coined. Unfortunately, Pagan was attacked by Mongol invaders in 1287.

A turbulent period ensued when Burma was dismembered into warring states. Buddhism of both the Hinayana and Mahayana varieties persisted, however, and great temples and pagodas continued to be built. The most famous Burmese pagoda is the gilded Shwedagon in Rangoon, 326 feet high, started in the 14th century as a monumental reliquary for some of the Buddha’s hair.

During this period there was dissension within the ranks of the Theravada fraternity. One party, which traced its lineage back to a Singhalese monk named Capata (12th century), disputed the validity of ordinations dispensed by other lineages. The matter was resolved towards the end of the 15th century when King Dhammaceti of Pegu (1472-92) introduced a ‘canonically valid monastic succession’ from Sri Lanka. Since then Sri Lankan Theravada has predominated, though a folk religious tradition venerating popular deities known as nats continues to exert a hold over the ordinary Burmese.
Burma was united as a single country in the 18th century and during the reign of King Mindon (1853-78) Buddhism once more enjoyed royal patronage. Between 1868 and 1871, a Council was held at Mandalay, King Mindon’s capital, when the text of the Tipitaka was revised prior to being formally inscribed on some 729 marble slabs. These were erected in the precincts of the Kuthodaw Pagoda.

**Thailand**

Buddhism is traditionally said to have first appeared among the Mon people, the original inhabitants, in the 3rd century BC, brought by missionaries sent from India by the Emperor Ashoka. What exactly took place historically is unclear, though a fine Buddhist art evolved in Dvaravati, a Mon kingdom that flourished from about the 6th century AD. A few centuries later, however, the land fell under the sway of the Khmers of Kampuchea and its religious life was influenced accordingly. There are traces of both Mahayana and Hindu influences from this time.

The Thai people, though not themselves racially Chinese, originated in southern China and it is therefore highly likely that their first encounter with Buddhism was with one of its Chinese forms. By the 14th century, however, having ousted the hitherto dominant Khmers and established themselves both as masters of parts of present day Thailand as well as of neighbouring Laos, they promoted the Sri Lankan brand of Theravada Buddhism. About 1361 BC, Bhikkus including one Mahasmi Sangharaja were brought over from Sri Lanka to ‘purify’ local Buddhism, and Pali was
established as the religious language. The Thais were able to return the compliment when in the mid 18th century they sent monks to Sri Lanka to revivify the ailing Sinhalese Sangha. This strong Theravada tradition has survived in Thailand down to the present time.

Buddhism is highly organized in modern Thailand and subject to a degree of state control. There is a Supreme Patriarch, appointed by the King, who is therefore nominally head of the Buddhist order; below ranges a pyramid of religions hierarchy radiating outwards into the regions. As a result of King Mongkut's reforms, there is also a basic division of the Buddhist order into the Mahanikaya and Dham-mayuttika Nikaya 'denominations’, though the differences between them are very minor today.

In recent years, in common with other south-east Asian countries, Thailand has been launched through an accelerating pattern of disturbing change that has thrown up many complex social and political problems. The role of Buddhist monks within these changing patterns is obviously subject to different interpretations. The conservative Sangha has in fact come in for some criticism for its opposition to change and reform. Meanwhile, more radical elements in the Sangha have argued for a more activist stance.

**Kampuchea**

Kampuchea, formerly Cambodia, is situated in the Mekong valley between Thailand and Vietnam, though unlike Laos it enjoys access to the sea. The Khmer people are the dominant group there.
During its early history, which is poorly documented, the area fell, like Burma and Thailand, under Indian cultural and religious influences. Both Brahminism and Mahayana Buddhism certainly enjoyed favour, and the Sanskrit language was used.

Then, around the 9th century, a great civilization blossomed. It centred on the Angkor region and over the following centuries the Khmer kings glorified themselves by building numbers of marvellous temples, each an intricately carved stone Mount Meru surrounded by walls and terraces and moats; some of the larger ones even have palaces and offices within their precincts. The most famous is Angkor Wat itself. Here syncretistic Mahayana-Brahminical rituals were performed with elaborate ceremonies; there were also facilities for scholarship. But the cost of building and maintenance bore heavily on the backs of the people and both the inevitable internal unrest and attack from outside weakened the dynasty. Finally, Angkor was abandoned to the ministrations of the jungle in the 15th century.\textsuperscript{15}

It is thought that Theravada Buddhism had meanwhile come into ascendancy around the 13th century, possibly as the result of Thai influence. It established itself strongly, however, but was totally destroyed during the depradations of the Communist Khmer Rouge, who took over the country in 1975, intent upon creating a new order by literally exterminating all representatives of the old, which unfortunately included the Buddhist Sangha. The Vietnamese invasion of 1979 ousted the Khmer Rouge and religious life was
sanctioned again to a limited degree. The present situation is uncertain.

**Indonesia**

That Buddhism penetrated the Indonesian archipelago long ago and thrived there is palpably borne out by the fact that Borobodur, the largest Buddhist monument in southern Asia, is situated on the island of Java. Borobodur, which dates from the mid-19th century AD, is a massive stone replica of the cosmic mandala. Firstly there is a series of five terraces, the area of the base terrace being some 403 square feet. Above there are three ascending rings of stupas, with a tall stupa, symbol of Mount Meru, in the very centre; its tip touches a height of 108 feet. The whole edifice is prodigally decorated with some 27,000 square feet of carvings and over 500 stone Buddhas.

Buddhism probably came to the archipelago along with other Indian influences around the 5th century AD. The Theravada may have been favoured by the King of Srivijaya, a kingdom on Sumatra. Tantra, however, was later to become very popular on the large island of Java, where it enjoyed the patronage of the Shailendra dynasty. Borobodur is one of its artistic products. Later a cult evolved that combined Buddhist and Shaivite tantrism and this persists in Bali and elsewhere to the present time, though on account of the dominance of the Hindu components the Buddhist contribution is often overlooked. That this survived the coming of
Islam to the islands from the 15th century onwards bears evidence of its vigour and the favourableness of local conditions.

In recent years, Buddhism has begun to re-emerge as a separate religion in Indonesia. This process has been stimulated by Chinese immigrants, by missions sent from Thailand and Sri Lanka, and by the energy of monks like Ven. Jinarakkhita Thera, who was at one time a pupil of Mahasi Sayadaw. Both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions are therefore now again represented in this part of the world.16

**The North-Western Springboard**

There is an area that played a vital role in the transmission of Buddhism to China and other parts of East Asia. This lay to the north-west of the Indian heartland and encompassed parts of Kashmir and the Punjab, extensive portions of the modern state of Pakistan and neighbouring Afghanistan, and even extended through into eastern Iran and the southernmost part of what today is Soviet Central Asia (formerly Russian Turkestan). At its heart lay Gandhara, a district of profoundly evocative associations for Buddhists which once lay in eastern Afghanistan/western Pakistan, centering on Purushapura, which in its modern manifestation as Peshawar is the first major township that the weary overland traveller to India encounters once he has crossed the Khyber Pass.

This general area lies at what was once one of the world’s great crossroads. Here east met west: rich and powerful influences from India converged and mingled with others coming from Iran,
western Asia and the Greco-Roman world, from central and northern Asia, from China and the Far East. No wonder then that this was to become one of the breeding grounds of the Mahayana as well as the springboard from which Buddhism was launched on its northward and eastward journeys.

Buddhist missionaries are reputed to have been sent to Gandhara not long after the Parinirv’ana of the Buddha, but the religion did not take firm root in the north-west until the time of the Emperor Ashoka, whose grandfather, Chandragupta Maurya, had extended imperial power in this direction. Ashoka himself had in his youth served as Viceroy in Taxila, a great centre of learning and trade that once flourished near Gandhara, and when he came to power he placed great importance upon Buddhist missionary efforts in this corner of his great empire.

After the decline of the Maurya dynasty in the 2nd century BC, the Greco-Bactrians reasserted their power and pushed their conquests as far as the Punjab. They were Greeks who had settled in Bactria, a fertile region lying between the Oxus River and the Hindu Kush mountains in northern Afghanistan. During this period Buddhism was favourably regarded by one Greek king, Menandros, who apparently was afflicted by some dire spiritual crisis for which he could find no relief until he met a certain Buddhist monk named Nagasena. Menandros’s discussions with Nagasena are recorded in the Milinda-panha, an important non-canonical Pali text. They revolved around the problem of how the Buddha could have believed in rebirth without at the same time believing in a
reincarnating soul. Nagasena was able to masterfully resolve the king’s difficulties and as a result Buddhism gained a powerful patron; indeed, Menandros is reputed to have died a member of the Sangha.

Later the Greeks were supplanted by other people, including the Scythians and the Parthians. Afterwards came the Kushans, a nomadic people who had originated in China (where they were known as the *Yueh-chih*), and thence migrated by a roundabout route through Central Asia that took them to Bactria, the Oxus and the Kabul valleys, and eventually on to the plains of India. The Kushans (who are also sometimes called the Indo-Scythians) established a great empire which extended across northern India, up into parts of Chinese Turkestan, westwards into Afghanistan and on almost as far as the Sea of Aral in present-day Soviet Russia. Though they began by-attacking Buddhism, they later became dedicated patrons of the religion and enthusiastic builders of monasteries and stupas. Thus between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD, Buddhism blossomed in this vital part of the world. Its greatest patron was Kanishka (c. 78-101 AD). Bharat Singh Upadhyaya has written:

Kanishka’s reign marked a turning point in the history of Buddhism and Buddhist literature. It witnessed the rise of Mahayana Buddhism and the magnificent literary activity started by Parsva, Asvagosa, Vasumitra, and others. It was in this age that Pali gave place to Sanskrit. In the field of art, Gandhara sculptures developed and the figures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas began to appear. It was during Kaniska’s reign and largely through his efforts
that Buddhism was successfully introduced into central and eastern Asia. There was ceaseless literary activity throughout his vast empire. ... A truly integrated Asian culture came into existence at this time, based as it was on the highest purposes of life for which Buddhism stood.\(^\text{17}\)

Apparently Kanishka started out as a bellicose young potentate of the usual sort but later underwent an Ashoka-like conversion to Buddhism after witnessing the appalling slaughter caused by his campaigns in Kashgar, Yarkand and Khotan (modern Chinese Sinkiang). He is reputed to have convened a Fourth Buddhist Council, when the scriptures and commentaries of the Sarvastivadin School were compiled and committed to writing under the presidency of Vasumitra; this, however, is dismissed as a pure myth by many scholars. He is also credited with building numerous monasteries and stupas.\(^\text{18}\)

The Kushana dynasty was ousted by the Sassanids, who came from Iran and professed the fire-worshipping creed of Zarathushtra. They, and the rulers of the petty kingdoms that supplanted the Kushana Empire, seem to have been generally tolerant towards Buddhism, however, and the religion continued to flourish between the 3rd and 5th centuries. It was during this period that the cave monasteries at Bamiyan in northern Afghanistan were dug out. Bamiyan also boasts the largest stone statue in the world: standing Buddha 177 feet high, which unfortunately is now destroyed by the Taliban.
China

Around the turn of the Common Era, Buddhism simply began to filter into China from Central Asia. It was brought down the Silk Road by merchants, envoys, monks and other travellers, and nurtured in the expatriate communities in Loyang and a few other northern cities. Down to the end of the Han period, during which China enjoyed a fairly stable centralized government, its progress among the native Chinese themselves was probably fairly slow because a number of important factors stood in the way of its acceptance. There was the deep-seated xenophobia of the Chinese themselves. Self-consciously regarding themselves as citizens of a great empire - the centre of the world, no less - with a long and glorious history, a sublime culture and noble traditions, what use then could they have for an alien cult? Buddhism was also in many ways enimical to the prevailing ideology, which derived from the sayings of the sage Confucius (551-479 BC). This upheld the ideal of a stable, harmonious social order in which every human unit, from the Emperor or Empress down to the humblest peasant, played their part according to hallowed custom. Confucianism is very much a this-worldly creed and as such its devotees could only look with disfavour on any religion that seemed to encourage the abandonment of all worldly ties in favour of the pursuit of a remote and vague spiritual ideal. Also the fact that the Buddhist Sangha did not work but looked to other people to support them cut totally against established Chinese values.19
Gradually, however, the barriers began to break down - and this process was probably aided by one particular factor: the presence in China of a homegrown mystical tradition called Taoism. This was traditionally said to derive from the teachings of the mythical Yellow Emperor, Huang Ti (2698-2597 BC), but it was revived by the great sage Lao Tzu, author of the classic TaoTe Ching. The Taoists were very un-Confucian in their dislike of the social world, which they thought artificial and corrupt. They advocated a return to simplicity and harmony with nature, and their ideal was wuwei, a kind of uncontrived mode of being that flowed with all the effortless suppleness of water out of the darkness of the ultimate unknowable mystery and adapted itself to whatever it encountered. The Chinese seem to have found certain points of similarity between the teachings and practices of the Taoists and those of the Buddhists, and this opened up an avenue whereby Buddhism was able to penetrate into their culture. In Arthur Waley’s words, they could regard Buddhism as ‘a sort of foreign Taoism’.

The existence of a serious Buddhist community in Loyang emerges into the light of history in 148 AD, when a Parthian missionary named An Shih-kao made his appearance. Other foreigners from Central Asia and India followed in the succeeding years, notably a Kushan named Lokaksena. These are credited with bringing the Mahayana teachings. That they imparted them not only to members of expatriate communities but to local Chinese is borne
out by the fact that the task of translating the Buddhist scriptures into Chinese was now begun with some energy.

As a Shih-kao and his colleagues were not fluent in Chinese, they used ‘translation teams’ that included not only people conversant with the various relevant languages but also with the subtleties of Chinese literary style. A text would probably have been recited from memory, roughly translated and then subjected to a process of progressive refinement. Furthermore, a new vocabulary had to be evolved to provide correlation for specialist Buddhist terms, and through at first crude Taoist equivalents were employed, precise Chinese neologisms were later coined. For convenience, brief texts were chosen in the pioneering stages and often paraphrases were made of longer works. The early appearance of ‘meditation handbooks’ proves that from the earliest times there was deep interest in this form of practice. Subsequently, the official Confucianism lost prestige and credibility, and in particular the intellectual and aristocratic elite began to look elsewhere for spiritual inspiration. Taoism and a new mystical metaphysic called the Dark Learning engaged their interest, but Buddhism with its profound teachings on suffering and impermanence had something particularly pertinent to offer amidst the prevailing chaos. The sophistication of its schools of thought probably also attracted many cultured people, as did the notion of withdrawing from the world to the seclusion of a remote temple (preferably set in idyllic pastoral surroundings) in order to quietly contemplate the deepest spiritual mysteries.
Thus was born the gentlemanly scholar-devotee that is so characteristic of Chinese Buddhism. Many of these fled from the north as it was overrun by foreign invaders and found sanctuary in the Yangtse basin and in the south, thus opening up those parts of the country. Gradually distinctive northern and southern types of Chinese Buddhism began to emerge from the resulting cleavage.

Sui and T’ang Dynasties (581-907)

Though Buddhism advanced enormously in China during the Period of Disunity, it is generally thought to have enjoyed its golden age during the T’ang dynasty (618-907), which followed the Sui dynasty (581-618), when the great empire was once again united under a single imperial regime. Having reached it apogee by the 9th century, Chinese Buddhism then began the slow, 1000-year decline that has continued to the present.

During the preceding periods, the ground-work had been thoroughly laid; conditions were therefore ripe for a fully-realized Chinese Buddhism to burgeon. In particular, a number of highly developed schools emerged, nearly all of them Indian in origin but to a greater or lesser degree modified and taken on to new heights of development by the Chinese genius. These schools were subsequently transmitted to Korea and Japan, where they underwent further development. Some of them are now being transmitted yet again, this time to the West.
The following are the principal Chinese schools of Buddhism:

**The Vinaya School (Lii-tsung)**

Principal text: The Vinaya in Four Parts, translated by Buddhayashas and Chu Fo-nien.

The Vinaya School is mainly concerned with the Vinaya (monastic code of discipline) and the strict observance of both its positive and negative aspects (do’s and don’ts), this school played a useful part in raising monastic standards in China. Its foundation is credited to Tao-hsiian (596-667)

**The Realistic School (Chu-she)**

Principal text: The Abhidharma-kosha of Vasubandhu

This derived its inspiration from an early text written by Vasubandhu (c 316-396), the brother of Asanga and a native of Purushapura (Peshawar) who, before his conversion to the Mahayana, was an ordained member of the Sarvastivada (or ‘All-things-exist’) school, one of the Eighteen Schools of the Hinayana, the teachings of which he studied in Kashmir. The Abdhidhartna-kosha, which represents a critical outline of the Abdhidharma system of the Vaibashika, a group of Sarvastivada philosophers, was translated into Chinese firstly by Paramartha (563-567), Vasubandhu’s biographer, and later by Hsian-tsang. The school that arose in China eventually became an appendage of the Idealist School (Fa-hsiang - see below).
The Three Treatises School (San-lun)

Principal Texts. The Madhyamika-shastra and the Dv’adasha-dv’ara ('Twelve Gates') of Nagarjuna; also the Shata Shastra ('One Hundred Verse Treaties') of Aryadeva.

This was based on the Madhyamika or ‘Middle Way’ teachings of Nagarjuna and his followers (see pp 105-6), who sought to advance the perfect wisdom of absolute Emptiness by the use of a ‘transcendental dialect’ negating all views. Introduced by Kumarajiva, these teachings were refined by Chih-tsang (549-623), the master of Chia-hsiang monastery and a prolific writer of commentaries. In his ‘Essay on the Double Truth’ (Erh-ti Chang), Chih-tsang argues that the transcendental can only be discussed in antithetical language, but this does not result in mere negation; in fact, as the dialectic is pushed forward, our usual notions of being and non-being are gradually refined and an increasingly inclusive, totalistic vision begins to unfold. The school declined after the rise of the Idealist School (Fa-hsiang), but was later revived by Suryaprabhasa, an Indian monk who arrived in China in 679.

The Idealist School (ba-hsiang)

Principal texts: The Vimsatika-karika or ‘Twenty Stanzas’ and other texts by Vasubandhu and his followers.

This is the Chinese development of the Indian Yogacara school founded by Vasubandhu and his brother Asanga (see pp. 106), which propounded the doctrine of citta-matra or ‘mind only’.
Its great champion in China was Hsiian-tsang (596-664), a kind of saintly innocent of heroic stature who emerges as arguably the most engaging figure in the history of Buddhism in the great empire. His interesting life-story warrants a digression.

Remarkable from an early age for his purity, Hsiian-tsang ordained as a monk and applied himself to assiduous study. He eventually decided to travel to India himself. He slipped out of China without official permission, and journeyed overland via the Silk Road. That his travels were rich in the stuff of high romance is demonstrated by the fact that they formed the basis for the novel Monkey by Wu Ch’ên-en, which exists in a classic English translation by Arthur Waley. Waley also summarized Hsiian-tsang’s life in The Real Tripitaka, a book which incidentally gives us a vivid portrait of Buddhism in both China and India during the 7th century.

At the very start of his monumental pilgrimage, the ‘Great Traveller’, as he became called, nearly came to grief at the hands of a spurious guide; then in the great deserts he was harrassed by spectral horsemen. In both these and other tight corners he was saved by divine intercession. Then at Turfan the local king was loth to let one of his prowess slip through his fingers and was prepared to forcibly detain him to enjoy the benefits of his edifying company. Men of wisdom were in those days revered and accorded the kind of celebrity currently reserved for TV soap-opera and sports stars. By threatening to go on hunger strike, Hsuan-tsang was able to recover his liberty. He then crossed the T’ien Shan Mountains, visited Samarkand, looped south into what today is Iran, proceeded on to
Afghanistan and eventually descended onto the plains of India in the vicinity of Gandhara.

In India Hsuan-tsang visited most of the major Buddhist centres and pilgrimage-places, studying both widely and deeply as he went. He stayed twice at Nalanda and on the first occasion was able to study Yogacara philosophy under an ancient master named Silabhadra, who was reputed to have mastered all the books in the world. He also studied logic, which stood him in good stead in a great public debate in which he triumphantly championed the Mahayana against all-comers. The patron on that occasion was Harsha, then Emperor of India, who had jealously snatched Hsiian-tsang from the court of Assam, where he had gone in the hope of reforming the errant king. The favour that he enjoyed with Harsha and the largesse that was heaped on his head were, however, something of a mixed blessing for they delayed Hsiian-tsang’s return to China.

Eventually, feted and acclaimed, Hsiian-tsang re-entered Ch’ang-an in 645. He had been away for 16 years and had brought back numerous Buddha relics and images; also some 657 texts. Famous by now, he enjoyed the favour of the emperor, who earnestly wished him to surrender the robe and enter public service. Hsiian-tsang tactfully declined, however, for he wished to devote himself to the translation of his collection of texts.

It was Arthur Waley’s considered opinion that, while Hsiian-tsang’s translations affected a revolution in method and managed
closeness to their originals that earlier translations had failed to achieve, they were nevertheless marred by mistakes, misleading interpolations and other flaws. They also lacked the literary qualities that had graced Kumarajiva’s renderings.

**The Mantra or Tantric School (Mi-tsung or Chen-yen)**

Principal text: The Mahavairocana (‘Great Brilliance’) Sutra.

This is the Chinese manifestation of Tantra with all its esoteric paraphernalia of yogas, mantras, mandalas, mudr’as, dharanis, initiations and secret doctrines. It was introduced from India during the T’ang dynasty by Subhakarasimha (637-735), who arrived in the Middle Kingdom in 716 and translated the Mahavairocana Sutra nine years later. In 720, another Indian, Vajrabodhi (670-741), arrived and began to expound the teachings and initiate neophytes into practice. Special sanctuaries had to be built for the performance of the necessary rituals, which involved the use of complex mandala. A third Indian, Amoghavajra (705-774), reinterpreted the tantric teachings in terms of the Chinese classics; he was also active at the imperial court and is credited with initiating three T’ang emperors. Tantric rites were thought to give magical protection to the empire against catastrophe; they could also influence developments in the after-death state and confer other occult benefits. The School flourished for less than a century and was eventually supplanted by Lamaism. It was taken to Japan by Kukai, where it became known as Shingon.
The Avatamsaka or ‘Flower Adornment’ School (Hua-yen)

Principal text: The Avatamsaka Sutra.

Although the Avatamsaka Sutra originated in India, a fully fledged system developed from its teachings emerged in China and was later transmitted to Japan, where it became known as Kegon.

The plethora of translated texts and commentaries that had become available in China, all collectively propounding an apparent cacophony of differing views, begged for some kind of system of classification that would lend them some measure of coherence. The Hua-yen was one of the schools that responded to this need. It put forward the notion that immediately after his Enlightenment the Buddha had preached the Avatamsaka teachings but had met with only blank incomprehension from his listeners. Seeing them standing as if ‘deaf and dumb’, he realized that he would have to compromise and so evolved the simpler Hinayana teachings. In time, as the level of understanding among his followers progressed, he was able to give out increasingly advanced teachings, but the Avatamsaka remained the summation and apogee of his system. Dr. D.T. Suzuki was echoing this to his classes in New York as late as 1951: ‘Kegon is believed to have been the expression given by the Buddha in his Enlightenment,’ he maintained. ‘All other teachings were given by the Buddha to his disciples after he had come out of the Enlightenment. In Kegon he made no accommodation to his hearers.'
Hua-yen is a creation of cosmic vision on the grandest scale. It evokes a Universe where everything freely interpenetrates everything else, where Totality may be contemplated and Ultimate Truth realized in even the tiniest speck of dust. It reinforces its imaginative philosophical arguments with rich poetic images like that of the Jewel Net of Indra: a vast web or network of gems, each of which reflects every other - and also the reflections in every other - and so on ad infinitum.

Edward Conze described Hua-yen as a link between Yogacara and Tantra. While providing a ‘cosmic interpretation to the ontological ideas of the Yogacarins’ it shared with Tantra a fascination with the play of cosmic forces. Unlike Tantra, however, Hua-yen was not concerned with the attainment of liberation by means of the magical manipulation of those forces; its practical bias was rather towards contemplation and aesthetic appreciation of them. By doing this, the devotee would eventually be led to repose in ultimate quiescence.

The T’ien-tai or White Lotus School (Fa-hua)

Principal text: The Saddharma-pundafika Sutra.

Although sometimes called the ‘Lotus’ school because of its veneration of the Saddharma-pundarika or ‘White Lotus of the True Law Sutra’ this school derives its principal name from the fact that its true founder and fourth patriarch, Chih-i (538-597), lived on Mount T’ien-t’ai in Chekiang. It too was a genuinely Chinese development.
Although accepting the myth that, following his failure to put across his advanced teachings, the Buddha had compromised and expounded simpler teachings, the T’ien-t’ai School differed from the Hua-yen in providing alternative classifications of Buddhist scriptures and teachings. These demonstrated, it was claimed, that the Saddharma-pundarika was the real ‘king of s’utras’ for it alone was fully ‘round’ in the sense that it included the essence of all the other teachings. It was therefore the perfect packet that could ferry all men across the ocean of Samsara to the far shore of Enlightenment, regardless of their level of understanding. Allied to this was the notion of a single vehicle (ekayana) in which all other doctrines were united.

The T’ien-t’ai also put forward lofty philosophical doctrines, which owed a lot to those of the Hua-yen and Idealist Schools. Arguably most important was that of the Three Levels of Truth, which bears traces of the influence of Nagarjuna. The three levels are; (1) Void or Emptiness; (2) Temporariness; and (3) Mean. The first signifies that no dharma can exist by itself alone but is causally generated and maintained in dependence. However, though dharmas are essentially void or empty, they do enjoy temporary existence as perceived by the senses; this constitutes the second level. The third level arises from the fact that emptiness and temporariness are two sides of a dualism that generates a higher third: a mean or middle. This should not be taken as lying between the other two, however; rather, as J. Takakusu puts it: ‘It is over and above the two: nay, it is
identical with the two, because the true state means that the middle is the very state of being void and temporary'.

Because they are perpetually united and harmonious, the Three Levels of Truth must therefore not be treated separately but always as ‘all in one and one in all’. By the same token, phenomena are so interpenetrated by the numenal that the whole cosmos can be contained in a single instant of thought or in a follicle of hair. This confers a degree of spiritual stature on the ordinary and the everyday that had been largely absent from Buddhism hitherto: the apparently mundane is the spiritual; they are not two.

In terms of practice, this school advocated ‘concentration and insight’ (chih and kuan) as methods of obtaining Enlightenment. Concentration puts an end to erroneous thinking by making it clear that all dharmas are devoid of self-nature and hence exist without really existing. Insight, on the other hand, means to fully penetrate the phantasmagoric character of all dharmas and to become grounded in Absolute Mind. Incidentally, this Absolute Mind - or ‘Womb of the Tathagata’, ‘True and Genuine Suchness’, etc., etc. - is the repository of all potentialities, both pure and impure, and in its synthetic totality is fully present in all things, whether sentient or insentient. Thus Buddha-nature and the possibility of Enlightenment are utterly unexclusive.

**The Pure Land School (Ching t’u)**

Principal text: The Smaller and Larger Sukhavat-gyuha Sutras.
The devotees of this school venerated Amitabha (the Buddha of Infinite Light) and sought not outright Nirvana, but rebirth in the Western Paradise or ‘Pure Land’ of Amitabha, also called Sukhavat. In that idyllic environment, no new negative karmic accumulations would be created and all existing ones would evaporate; Nirvana would be therefore just a short step away.

At root, the school harked back to the notion expounded in early Buddhist cosmology that within a few hundred years of the Buddha’s death a degenerate period would set in when Enlightenment would no longer be attainable by one’s own efforts or ‘self-power’ (in Japanese: jinks) alone. One would therefore have to depend on external grace: in this case, the benign intercession of Amitabha. This represented the opposite of ‘self-power’, namely ‘other-power’ (tariki). It was also felt that there was in any case an element of egoism in the very idea of ‘self-power’: that one could win Enlightenment by one’s own efforts alone. As that was basically the Hinayana outlook, Pure Land Buddhism reflected the Mahayana accommodation to devotional forms of practice. The mantric repetition of the name of Amitabha - ‘O-mi-tb-fo’ (in Japanese: ‘Namu-Amida-butsu’) - was the central practice developed here.

The Dhyana School (Ch’an; Jap-Zen)

Principal texts: Ostensibly nil; actually the Lankavatara, Heart, Vimalakirti-nirdesa and Vajracchedika Sutras.

Chan represents the finest achievement of Chinese Buddhism: an original and highly creative re-expression of the essence of the
Buddha’s teaching in terms that are distinctively Chinese. As such it may also be regarded, alongside Abhidharma, Mahayana and Tantra, as one of the major creations of Buddhism as a whole. It was transmitted to Korea (where it became known as Son), to Vietnam, and to Japan (where it became known as Zen); also in more recent times to the West.

Ch’an is often described as a product of the down-to-earth, practical slant of the Chinese character. Indians, on the other hand, are said to be by nature more airy and metaphysical - and indeed the Chinese were quite fascinated with the marvellous intellectual creations of India for a long time. After the centuries of importation and absorption, however, their own native genius asserted itself resulting in the emergence of Ch’an, which is often described as the complete ‘sinicization’ of Buddhism.

Ch’an is about a return to essentials. All the teachings, texts, practices, codes of morality and behaviour, etc., etc., that sprang up around the basically simple teaching of the Buddha were intended as aids to progress beyond: to Enlightenment. But as the years went by, the diligent practitioner might become attached and trapped in them. Just as the bodhisattva Manjushri wields his Sword of Wisdom to summarily slice through the net of delusions, so the impulse behind Ch’an was to sweep all the training paraphernalia of Buddhism aside and to zero in on the heart of the matter: the direct insight that transformed Siddhartha Gautama into the Buddha beneath the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya.
The general thrust of Ch’an is typified by its rejection of book-learning and verbalization. Ch’an, it was claimed, was ‘a special transmission outside the scriptures’; it placed ‘no reliance on words and letters’. What was transmitted was Buddhahood, Enlightenment itself, no less, which consisted in a ‘direct pointing to the heart of man’, in a ‘seeing into one’s own nature’. This was handed on from master to disciple, heart to heart. To authenticate their tradition, the followers of Ch’an traced lines of transmission which showed how, by a process similar to apostolic succession, the teachings had been handed down without interruption.

**Vietnam**

Vietnam, a long thin sliver of territory lying along the extreme eastern edge of the Indo-Chinese peninsula, has indelibly impressed itself on modern consciousness as the quintessential war-torn south-east Asian country. Though now under a Communist regime, it was a place where Buddhism flourished - and indeed one of the unforgettable images of recent times is of Vietnamese Buddhist monks publicly burning themselves as a protest against the corruption of the Roman Catholic elite left behind by the colonial French after their withdrawal.

In ancient times the northern region, Annam, was for many centuries a province of the Chinese empire. To the south lay the Indianized states of Funan and Champa, which then overflowed beyond the present-day frontiers. The Vietnamese themselves originated in the north and in time came to dominate the whole
land. Independence from China was gained in the 10th century, but Chinese influences continued to exert a powerful effect and in the long run this meant that the standard brand of Sri Lankan Theravada that triumphed elsewhere in south-east Asia did not do so here; instead Chinese forms of Mahayana Buddhism, notably a successful amalgam of Ch’an and Pure Land, prevailed until the country fell to the Communists in 1975. Since then Buddhism has declined enormously and from time to time we hear reports of active persecution.20

Many Vietnamese Buddhists now live as refugees in the West. One monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, who currently resides at Plum Village in France, has achieved international fame as a proponent of ‘Engaged Buddhism’. In the early 1960s Nhat Hanh was recalled from his studies at Columbia University in, the United States to help with the so-called Third Way of Reconciliation: a brave attempt to provide a viable alternative to the corruption of Saigon and the Communism of Hanoi, then bloodily battling for supremacy. He established Van Hanh University and set up the School of Youth for Social Service, which sent people out into the rural areas where the fighting was taking place to help the peasantry who were caught in the crossfire. Nhat Hanh coined the phrase ‘Engaged Buddhism’ in his book, Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire.

Korea

The Korean peninsula is a curving thrust of land reaching down from the north-east corner of China towards the southern tip
of Japan. Though its people have staunchly fought for independence over the centuries, they have inevitably come strongly under the influence of the massive neighbouring presence of China. The positioning of their small country, moreover, has naturally made it a kind of bridge whereby Chinese influences have been transmitted to Japan. At times too the traffic has flowed in the opposite direction.

It appears that Buddhism was introduced into Korea from China around the 4th century AD. The transmission continued subsequently and many of the principal Chinese schools were introduced. In terms of development, Korean Buddhism tended broadly to follow the Chinese pattern - with one important difference. Being a small and politically vulnerable nation, the Koreans could not tolerate the same diversity of schools that proliferated in China. Various attempts, none entirely successful, were therefore made to syncretize and harmonize the teachings of the Buddhist schools, though in time the local form of Ch’an/Zen, called Son in Korea, was to prevail and has persisted to the present time despite the general rush towards Western-type modernization that has produced a concomitant explosion of Chrkrianirv

The Early Period (538-1184)

Tradition has it that a political delegation arrived in Japan from Korea in the year 538. Among the gifts it brought for the Emperor were a bronze Buddha image, some sutras, a few religious objects and a letter warmly praising the most excellent Dharma. Despite some initial reluctance, these gifts were accepted and a
temple was duly built to house the image and accord it the appropriate respects. However, an epidemic of disease ravaged the land shortly afterwards, and this was interpreted as a sign that the indigenous deities (kami) were displeased at the veneration of a foreign deity. To appease them and secure remission of the plague, the Emperor ordered the new temple to be committed to the flames; the Buddharupa was meanwhile tossed into a canal.

But Buddhism was an unstoppable force. How could it be otherwise when the Buddha himself, so it was mooted, had predicted that it would ‘spread to the East’? Despite the unpromising start, more scriptures and Sangha did reach Japan and, though some resistance still came from some of the conservative followers of Shinto, the native religious tradition, Buddhism began to take hold. Its success was mainly due to the fact that it won favour at court, where it was thought to possess occult powers capable, among other things, of protecting the state against disease and promoting social harmony. It was also flexible enough to be able to coexist with Shinto, eventually even to merge with it, and it moreover accorded the old kami an honourable place and purpose within its own pantheon.

Around the turn of the 7th century, steps began to be taken by the dominant clan towards organizing the country into a centralized state. The great empire of China provided a useful model, and Chinese culture and institutions began to be imported wholesale into Japan at this time. Chinese literary, artistic, architectural and technical forms were adopted, for example, and a governmental
bureaucracy was set up on the lines of the Chinese pattern. The projected centralized state also needed a philosophical sub-structure to underpin it, and here Confucianism and Taoism had obvious advantages to offer. But most of all, Buddhism, which had been taken to a superlatively high pitch of development in T’ang dynasty China, enjoyed special favour at court. The Empress Suiko (reigned 592-628) was such a committed Buddhist that she retired to a nunnery shortly after her accession, and her nephew, the crown prince, Shotoku (547-622), himself an enthusiastic Buddhist too, reigned as regent for more than 30 years, during which time the Buddhist cause was advanced considerably in the land.

The initial Korean connection having been largely superceded, increasing numbers of Japanese monastics and scholars now began to go to China to raid (in the nicest sense) its Buddhist riches. Initially six of the great Chinese schools were transplanted to Japanese soil in this early period and given Japanese names:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese name</th>
<th>Chinese name</th>
<th>Indian name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sanron</td>
<td>San-lun</td>
<td>Madhyamika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jojitsu</td>
<td>Ch’eng-shih</td>
<td>Satyasiddhi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hosso</td>
<td>Fa-hsiang</td>
<td>Yogacara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusha</td>
<td>Chii-she</td>
<td>Abhidharmakosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kegon</td>
<td>Hua-yen</td>
<td>Avatamsaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ritsu</td>
<td>Lu</td>
<td>Vinaya 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Ritsu School, which was imported into Japan in 754 by the Chinese monk Chien-chen, set procedures for the ordination of monks and nuns on a proper formal footing.

Buddhism tended to remain an elitist persuasion, however, and to be closely bound up with the official state. The Emperor Shomu (724-49), for instance, ordered state temples to be set up in every province and prayers for the peace and prosperity of the nation were to be offered in them. His capital of Nara meanwhile burgeoned into a splendid Buddhist capital replete with exquisite temples, sculpture and artefacts, created mainly at public expense and owing much Chinese styles in art and architecture. The political power of the Sangha, many of whom were of the scholar-gentleman type, was considerable in Nara. Non-official and popular manifestations of Buddhism, on the other hand, tended to be frowned upon and were sometimes punished. Nevertheless so-called ‘people’s priests’ did appear in the hinterland; they lived wandering and sometimes hermitical lives, dispensing popular religious services; a few of them won reputations for miraculous powers.

Tibet

Although fertile valleys watered by great rivers do occur in Tibet, the country is largely arid, barren and sparsely populated, nevertheless, travellers are almost unanimously agreed in finding the primaeval landscape compellingly beautiful, especially as the rarefied atmosphere allows colours to reach these
with primary intensity and distant objects appear close. In such a setting, all kinds of strange, mystical and magical things - the stuff of Tibetan Buddhism itself - become believable.

The First Transmission (c. 640-838): It seems that originally the Tibetans were a primitive, largely nomadic and pugnacious people whose warlike activities caused more than a few headaches for their neighbours. As their power and organization grew, they were able, for instance, to launch campaigns in China itself and on one occasion captured the capital, Sian. Spiritually they inclined to animism and other primitive magical beliefs and practices. A species of priest existed among them called bon-po, who is usually described as shamans through more specifically the name implies that they recited mantras which could be used for exorcism, invoking powerful spirits and so forth. The bon-po may also have been concerned with the death rituals of the early kings. In time, as we shall see, Bon was to emerge as an independent religious cult in its own right, deeply influenced by Buddhism yet emphatically separate from it.

By the time of Padmasambhava, Buddhism had of course been flourishing in India for over a millennium. It had also been transmitted throughout south-east Asia and northwards, bypassing Tibet, to China, Korea and Japan. It is indeed strange that Tibet remained outside the Buddhist fold for so long, though the reasons for this are not hard to find. Once it did take root, however, those roots were to run exceedingly deep and to transform every aspect of Tibetan life. Commentators have often reflected upon the curious
enigma that, once adopted -and then against all the apparent odds - Buddhism became for the Tibetan people the one pearl of great price for which they were ready to sacrifice almost anything.

The flow of Buddhist wisdom, tangibly represented by a two-way traffic of monks and masters passing between Tibet and India, continued as the period progressed. Meanwhile, the work of translating Indian texts went on apace - and indeed the Tibetans are credited with having achieved great clarity and exactness in their renderings. Teams including both Tibetan and Indian scholars were employed and a very precise system of equivalents for Sanskrit technical terms was worked out. During the reign of Ralpachen, the last of the Great Religious Kings, the translations hitherto made were revised and reworked.

Important in Tibetan Buddhism is the figure of the lama. Basically the term is a Tibetan equivalent of the Indian guru: a spiritual teacher. As such, contrary to popular misconceptions, a lama does not necessarily have to be a celibate monk. But his guidance is essential if the disciple (chela) is to successfully negotiate the difficulties and dangers of the spiritual path - and especially those of its dizzy tantric heights. So importantly is this figure regarded in this context that, while classic Indian Buddhism speaks of Three Jewels, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, Tibetan Buddhism sometimes speaks of Four Jewels, the additional one being the lama. In some cases, the lama should be more highly regarded than Shakyamuni Buddha; indeed he is Ultimate Enlightenment itself.
Naturally all this places a great deal of responsibility on the shoulders of any lama and requires that he behave impeccably. Consequently the conducts of certain lamas who have come to the West and fallen prey to the temptations abundant in this quarter have given cause for concern.

In 1984, His Holiness the Dalai Lama asked about Buddhist teachers who regularly broke certain precepts, replied unequivocally that it was a teacher’s duty to completely practise what he taught to others and thus be a spiritual example. Therefore, if a teacher enjoined one course on his students and pursued another himself, ‘this means that the spiritual guide does not have the proper qualifications.’ So it was very important for a student to know the requirements of a teacher and to thoroughly check him out before establishing a dharmic or guru-chela connection; likewise a teacher should also check out a prospective student. According to the Mantra (Tantra) System, however, the situation was slightly different. A teacher could engage in activities usually prohibited - but only if he’had achieved stability; i.e. had the capacity to behave in that way without jarring the faith of others.

**Mongolia**

Although the Mongols came in contact with Chinese Buddhism as early as the 4th century, it was the Tibetan variety that captured their imagination and long-term allegiance. As in Tibet, Buddhism here had to confront powerful local religious traditions of great antiquity, notably the native shamanism.
Mongolian Buddhism always remained spiritually and theologically dependent on Tibet and, aside from the incorporation of indigenous elements, no truly local development took place. This does not mean, however, that it is without historical significance. The Mongol Yuan dynasty established Lamaism in China, a fact to which the Lamaist Temple in Beijing remains a monument. As we have also seen, Mongol khans wielded great power in Tibet itself at various times and advanced the worldly fortunes of, firstly, the Sakya School, and later the Gelug School. After the 16th century, the Mongols remained devoted and enthusiastic Gelugpas, building thousands of monasteries and ordaining a high proportion of their male population as monks. Various tulkus appeared among them, the greatest being the so-called Hutuktu (= tulku) or ‘Grand Lama of Urga’ (modern Ulan Bator).

Nowadays Mongolia is split. Inner Mongolia comes under the aegis of China and Buddhism there has suffered much the same fate as in China itself and in Tibet. Outer Mongolia, on the other hand, established itself as an independent People’s Republic with Russian help in the 1920s. Despite initial repression, the Marxist regime did not manage to expunge Buddhism from the hearts and minds of the people, however, and it has survived as a living presence into the more tolerant climate of recent years.

Currently, the chief monastery is Gandenthekchenling in Ulan Bator, seat of the Khambo Lama KH. Gaadan, the President of the Asian Buddhists Conference for Peace. This worthy organization regularly dispatches its journal, Buddhists for Peace to the West. This
is a prestigious publication for an impecunious nation, but its complexion is a distinctly fellow-travelling one, suggesting that the Buddhists of Outer Mongolia, in common with, for instance, their Orthodox Christian counterparts in Russia, have to at least appear to acquiesce in the prevailing political order in order to survive. His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Mongolia in 1982 and performed the Yamantaka Initiation for 140 lamas at Gandenthekchenling. A crowd of 20,000 people is said to have gathered outside.23

Russia

Tibetan Buddhism was spread to other northern Asian nomadic peoples by the enthusiastic and energetic Mongols. One result of this is that today there are three residual pockets of Lamaist Buddhists living in Soviet territory.

One is to be found in the Soviet Republic of Buryatia, which lies in the Lake Baikal region of eastern Siberia. Forty miles from the capital, Ulan Ude, there is a large monastery, the Ivolginsky, ‘The Buddhist Centre of the USSR’ (TASS). This and its fellow, the Aginsky (not strictly speaking in Buryatia but in the-neighbouring Chita region of Russian Siberia), are the only monasteries now remaining in the region. The chief lama of Buryatia and official head of the Buddhists in the USSR is the Bandido-Khambo Lama. Empassioned pleas for world peace also tend to emanate from this quarter; unfortunately, less congenial emanations filter through to the outside world as well. In the 1970s, groups monitoring the
Another Tibetan Buddhist group living in the USSR is the Kalmuks, who originated in Asia but migrated to Europe and was resettled in the lower Volga region around 1630. They remained there until World War II, when they were expelled for collaborating with the Germans; some have since been allowed to return. Geshe Wangyal, a much-travelled Kalmuk lama of the Gelug School, latterly, from about 1955 until his death in 1983, ministered to a group of his fellow expatriates who had immigrated to the USA after World War II and established an exile community in Freewood Acres, New Jersey.

Geshe Wangyal’s root guru was none other than the famous and much-maligned lama, Khampo Agvan Lobsang Dorjiev (1853-1938), whose journeys between Lhasa and Russia precipitated the Younghusband Expedition (1904), when British troops marched to Lhasa. Later Dorjiev returned to his native land and in the optimistic early phases of the Revolution, when such things seemed possible, actively pursued a vision of reconciling Buddhism and Communism. Sadly Dorjiev’s hopes were not realized in the long term and he met his end in 1938, during the dark days of Stalinist repression.

The third Buddhist enclave is in the Tuva Autonomous region, a buffer between China and Russia lying east of the Altai
Mountains. There are now no temples here, just two or three prayer houses and a very small number of tantric lamas.

Russia has also produced some fine Buddhist scholars, notably Theodore Stcherbatsky, author of Buddhist Logic and the Central Conception of Buddhism. In 1923 the first centre for Buddhist Studies in Europe was established in St. Petersburg/Leningrad; it ceased to exist in 1938.

The first community of Western Buddhists also appeared in Russia in the 1890s under the inspiration of Karlis Alexis Tennisons (1873-1962), a Latvian who was declared a Buddhist Arch Bishop of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia by HH the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.

Finally, in 1907, with the permission of Tsar Nicholas II and the blessings of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, the foundation stone of a Buddhist temple was laid in St. Petersburg. It was probably intended for use by visiting diplomats from Buddhist Countries like Siam (Thailand) and Japan. The construction was supervised by Tennisons, and the temple was finally opened in 1915. It still exists, but has latterly been used as a scientific laboratory. Latest reports suggest that it is to be turned into an ‘anti-religious museum’, specializing in Islam and Buddhism. Rough estimates reckon that there are currently about half a million Buddhists in the USSR.24

Himalayan Region

That magnificent arc of hills and soaring mountains that dominates the northern edge of the sultry plains of India also
contains pockets of Tibetan Buddhism. Small communities of Tibetan refugees live in the region too, notably at Dharamsala in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, where His Holiness the Dalai Lama conducts his government-in-exile.

To the west, Ladakh, once an independent Tibetan kingdom isolated in its mountainous domain, is now an integral part of India. The Gelug and Drugpa Kagyu Schools are dominant here; but while traditional monastic life goes on in great gompa (monasteries) like Hemis and Tikse, the ancient local Buddhist traditions are to a degree under threat, not from Marxist ideology as in Tibet itself, but from that equally insidious factor, modern development, which includes tourism of course. There is also a vigorous local Muslim population against which the local Buddhists are not always able to hold their own. Nearby Zanskar and Spiti are also Tibetan enclaves.

In the east, on the other hand, lies Sikkim, once an independent kingdom but annexed by India in 1975. In the 17th century, Tibetan migrants from Kham entered Sikkim and had little difficulty in subjugating the gentle indigenous animists, the Lepchas. They also established Tibetan Buddhism, so Sikkim became a natural haven for Tibetans fleeing from Chinese oppression during the 1950s, and the Karmapa, the supreme head of the Karma Kagyu sub-school, established his headquarters there at Rumtek.25

Finally, further to the east there are many Buddhists in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.
Nepal

Nepal can claim the supreme Buddhists accolade of being technically the Buddha’s birthplace. Lumbini, which lies just inside its southern frontiers, is one of the four great pilgrimage-places for Buddhists. A millennium and a half after the Buddha’s birth, when the Muslims overran northern India, this Himalayan kingdom became a sanctuary for fleeing Indian Buddhists and Hindus, who brought texts, relics and sacred artefacts with them and established a Sangha in the Kathmandu Valley, which is still today dominated by the burnished Buddhist pinnacles of Swayambhunath, the famous Monkey Temple.

However, this Sangha did not hold its own very well in the local spiritual climate and in a comparatively short time its monks forsook the monastic Vinaya to marry and become a separate caste on their own. Though a Buddhist scholarly tradition centred on four schools of philosophy (Svabhavika, Ashvarika, Karmika and Yatrika) did survive down to recent times, Buddhism and Hinduism have so blurred into each other in the colourful religious melting-pot of the Central Valley of Nepal that today it is often hard to distentangle the two.

In the second half of the present century, however, connections were established with Sri Lanka and attempts initiated to establish a sound Theravada Sangha on Nepalese soil. Ven. Amritananda Thera, who was trained in Sri Lanka and who has a
centre at Svayambhunath, has worked energetically to this end. He has, for one thing, translated numerous Pali suttas into Nepalese.26

Nepal’s Buddhist connections with Tibet go back a long way too - at least to the 7th century when, according to tradition, a local king sent his daughter as a wife for King Songtsen Gampo. During the following centuries much Buddhist traffic passed through Nepal, for it was a major avenue whereby the religion was transmitted from India to Tibet. Newari craftsmen from the Kathmandu region also worked on many of the religious buildings on the great plateau and their influence on Tibetan art was considerable.

There have also been reverse movements when Tibetan Buddhism has spilled back over the Great Himalaya into Nepal. The Sherpa people of north-east Nepal are in fact a Tibetan people. They have built numerous modest gompa and chortens in their mountainous domain and kept their Tibetan Buddhist traditions alive there. Then, in the 1950s, the Chinese invasion of Tibet brought over a new wave of refugees. Meanwhile, in the North West, Dolpo and Mustang are two ancient Tibetan kingdoms that, like Zanskar and Ladakh, have until very recently managed to almost totally avoid the intrusions of modernity and progress.

Bhutan

In the 17th century Shabdung Ngawang Namgyal of the Drugpa Kagyu sub-school of Tibetan Buddhism established a buddhocracy in this eastern Himalayan kingdom. Numerous imposing dzongs (forts) were built which served as both monastic
and administrative centres. Succession passed from one Shabdung (or D harma Raja) to the next by means of the tulku system, though as few incumbents survived to their majority, the reins of power were usually in the hands of a succession of Regents, known as Deb Rajas. Earlier this century, these institutions were replaced by a monarchy.27

Having observed the disastrous consequences of thoughtless development elsewhere, and appreciating the very real benefits that their spiritually rich traditions confer upon their citizens in terms of intangibles like psychological well-being, the modern political leaders of Bhutan have been very concerned to restrict material ‘progress’ and other modernizing trends at a level consistent with the preservation of their traditional Buddhist culture.

Thus Buddhism had traveled through both space and time and developed into very different and moral ones, taking care of time, region and local culture.
REFERENCES

01. Bhagavad Gita. IV:8

02. Ramcharita Manas 7:10:1


04. Beal. Buddhist Records at the Western World; Vol. I. PP 121-129

05. Wassilief Buddhism P. 223

06. The Journal of the Buddhist Texts Society of Calcutta Vol. I. Part II.PP.18, 19


08. ibid Vol. I. pp. 225, 226

09. Max Muller and Wenzel. Dharma Sangraha LXIV and LXV


13. ibid. p. 129


15. ibid. p. 146


18. ibid. P. 202


22. The Middle Way. Vol. 60. p.67


25. P.V. Bapat. op. cit. p.204
