ESCHATOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS OF DEVOTIONALISM

IN

BUDDHIST CHINA

by

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Date October 11, 1978.
Eschatology and devotionalism are dominant threads in the rich fabric of Chinese Buddhist history. Yet as in countless other areas of modern Buddhist studies, the investigation has barely begun. This paper analyses the dynamic interplay between eschatology and devotionalism in religious history by focussing on Northern China during the fourth to the eighth centuries A.D. when the intensely popular worship of Maitreya Buddha was overtaken by the worship of Amitābha Buddha.

The wider implications of this shift include not only the change from an Abhidharma world-view to a Mahāyāna world-view but from a state of eschatological disappointment or despair to its resolution by salvation through faith. Thus the greatest and most enduring form of Buddhist devotionalism -- the Pure Land movement -- is rooted in an age permeated with the ethos of the eschaton.

This phenomenon in China is set within the context of the overall development of devotionalism and eschatology from their origins in India to their continuity in present-day Japan and South East Asia. While specific textual, biographical, historical and archaeological data is utilized in supporting the main thesis, the various symbols of Buddhist eschatology and devotionalism are presented as variations on the universal themes of cosmic renewal and faith with mythic counterparts in all religious traditions.
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Certainly, the unity of the human species is accepted *de facto* in other disciplines.... But the historian of religious has the privilege of grasping this unity at the highest levels — or the deepest — and such an experience is susceptible of enriching and changing him.

Mircea Eliade
The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion, p.69.
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<td>AA</td>
<td>Acta Asiatica</td>
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<td>BEFEO</td>
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| TP          | T'oungPao.
INTRODUCTION

Under every methodology lies the question of hermeneutics. What is the writer's interest in interpreting the documents and the questions that led him to approach the texts? What kind of pre-understanding about the nature of life in its political, social, psychological, aesthetic and religious aspects can he, as an individual bring to bear on the subject? This thesis on the relationship between eschatology and devotionalism in Chinese Buddhism was initiated by an interest in eschatology as a basic component in religion -- that all religious traditions include some reference to a "future gold age", a "return", or a "paradise" at "the end of time".

This interest was further stimulated by the observation that since the eighteenth century, all major world religious have departed from their traditional interpretations of the eschaton. In Christianity, for example, post-war Western scholars have documented the progressive demythologization of Christian belief; including the anticipation of parousia. Except for those active in nineteenth century messianism, Christian intellectuals have found it increasingly difficult to look to the future for the fulfilment of prophecy; but as in "realized eschatology" or in "existential eschatology", looked either to the past or to the present. Now in what may be called the "post-eschatological age", the Christian world is poised between two camps: consisting of liberal theologians for whom there is no future point for fulfilment on one side and fundamentalist believers for whom the final resurrection is imminent on the other.

Twentieth century Buddhism is in a comparable position. Adherents
who follow higher meditational or philosophical paths, rarely view Maitreya as a Buddha who will preach in the world as Śākyamuni did, but as incarnate in a living master, as a inner spiritual principle or as a bodhisattva among many others. Yet in Japan and South East Asia millions still wait for the future Buddha Maitreya\(^4\) and his golden age. In China, Buddhist inspired ideologies for cosmic renewal constituted an important thread in the revolutions of the nineteenth century -- revolutions which finally enabled the ancient culture to throw off the burden of several hundred years stagnation. Predictably, in the fifties and sixties, Maitreya's Utopia and Amita's Pure Land were equated with the realization of the Communist state.\(^5\) Thus, between the first shock of eighteenth century European colonial influences to the latest invasions of science and technology in the twentieth, Buddhist Asia has stirred with sporadic bursts of millennarian activity and religious revival.

With thoughts such as these, I first approached my search for earlier, orthodox expressions of eschatology in Chinese history. I was immediately struck by the widespread influence of eschatological ideas in the period following the collapse of the Han, continuing throughout the Period of Disunion and into the T'ang. The discovery that this growth and eventual decline of eschatological belief coincided with the formative period of Pure Land Buddhism\(^6\) -- the most powerful expression of devotionalism in Chinese and Japanese Buddhism -- raised many questions. What was the nature of the relationship between the worship of Maitreya and the worship of Amita; between the center of eschatological hope and that of devotional fervor? How did latter day
and devotional beliefs affect the Buddhist view of history and salvation? Did a phenomenon similar to that of "eschatological disappointment" in Christianity occur in Buddhism? What were the differing positions and effects of lay versus monastic belief? What other symbols and themes were associated with latter day and Pure Land movements? And essential for this thesis, was there — insofar as we can speak of causal relationships in history — a causal relationship between the decline in Maitreya worship and the rise in Amita worship?

In order to explore these questions from the viewpoint of the History of Religions certain steps were taken. First, a working definition was formulated for the terms "eschatology" and "devotionalism". Although a bibliographical search uncovered no definitive treatment of either term it was noted that scholars working within Western religious traditions, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have given much greater attention to devotionalism and the eschaton than those working with Hindu or Buddhist materials. Even the Japanese with their massive corpus of Buddhist scholarship, including the monumental contributions of Pure Land scholars, have only recently begun to use critical methods in looking at the origins of Mahāyāna for fear that it would disturb a living faith. For China, aside from Michel Strickmann's recent work on eschatology in Chinese sovereignty, the most significant research now being carried out is in the area of messianism and Folk Buddhism in late medieval and modern Chinese history by scholars such as D. Overmyer and M. Topley.

The second step was to gain an understanding of the historical forces which shaped Buddhism from its beginnings in India to its Central Asian and Chinese forms. Eschatology and devotionalism were seen as two important
movements evolving within the broader changes that accompanied the emergence of Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna. Furthermore, in trying to understand the interaction between Buddhism and Chinese culture I have been influenced by the "cultural amalgam" model where Chinese Buddhism is understood not simply as "Indian Buddhism in China but rather as a cultural amalgam, a synthesis of Indian thought and Sinic concepts and ideals". Thus Chinese eschatological and devotional ideas are seen as the fruit of a synthesis which took place where there was a combination of natural affinity and accommodation between certain Indian and Chinese concepts.

The third step was to look closely at eschatology and devotionalism as they were expressed between the fall of the Han and the early T'ang. To this end four different types of sources were used:

1) Canonical texts associated with Maitreya and Amita as well as commentaries by well known monks;

2) biographical works on prominent monks or sovereigns;

3) secondary historical materials as well as some of the dynastic chronicles in translation such as the Wei Shu; and

4) archeological data.

In utilizing these materials, I have attempted to apply an "analytic" rather than a "synthetic" approach. Briefly, an "analytic approach" is one which uses the information gathered about a phenomenon as ground for making inferences about its external and internal relationships whereas a "synthetic approach" simply develops causal theories based on psychological and sociological factors. An important inference is that eschatological and devotional notions have an inner logic of their own and are not necessarily
dependent upon social conditions.  

The rise of a religion of devotion can be attributed simply to the succession of brilliant Chinese Pure Land patriarchs who established solid new doctrinal bases for their belief or to the increasing influence of the laity who preferred the language of faith. This thesis, however, attempts to expand this view by establishing three additional points. First, that the crisis-ridden age of the Northern and Southern Dynasties was widely interpreted, both historically and spiritually, in terms of Buddhist eschatology. Second, that eschatological expectation centered in the worship of Maitreya Buddha was subsequently overshadowed by devotion to Amitābha Buddha. And finally, that the flowering of Chinese devotionalism lies in the religious response of Sangha and laity to the quest for salvation in an age when salvation was considered urgent but nearly impossible to attain.
Footnotes to Introduction


4. See bibliography below for some of the numerous recent studies on millenarianism in S. E. Asia and Japan.

5. Holmes Welch, "The Reinterpretation of Buddhism," The China Quarterly

6. Although other devotional figures, notably Avalokiteśvara, also rose in importance at this time, I have limited my discussion of devotionalism to Amitabha not only because this Buddha is the center of Pure Land devotionalism but because of the controversies which developed between the adherents Amitabha and Maitreya in Chinese Buddhism.

7. See Chapter II below.


Chapter I

MAITREYA AND AMITĀBHA

I  Introduction

For the diverse cultures and races of Asia, the life story of the Buddha has functioned as the sacred archetype of one who perceived the basic problem of human existence, solved that problem, and made its solution accessible to the rest of humanity. This solution is called the Dharma.

The Buddha's life is not an ordinary tale of "local hero achieves success". Comprised of ordinary physical surroundings, social events and human longings, it stands as a supreme metaphor for the struggle against suffering and the realization of Truth. The Buddha's birth, childhood, marriage, renunciation, search, enlightenment, teaching career and death are stages indelibly imprinted on the mind of every Buddhist. They recount the steps of a holy life and point the way to freedom. Thus the Buddha's life story related "sacred history".

The elaborate visions which constitute the myths of Maitreya and Amitābha are structurally based on the biography of the Buddha; and as such, preserve and transmit that "sacred history". Despite numerous symbols, themes and descriptive details shared by the two myths, certain basic distinctions are evident. Maitreya is a future savior, prophesied by Śākyamuni, whose coming is preceded by the transformation of a morally and physically corrupt world into an earthly paradise. Amitābha
is an eternal savior, creator of a transcendent, superlative paradise, whose vows ensure the salvation of every being now and throughout all time.

These myths were not static conceptions. Their evolution was fashioned by a number of forces both within and without Buddhism. Both myths developed in an area where Indian bhakti and Persian cosmological influences were very strong. The Maitreya and Amitābha cults competed with other paradise cults devoted to Āryamuni, Akṣobhya, Avalokiteśvara and the numerous other Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the Mahāyāna pantheon. Maitreya and Amitābha were integrated into complex meditational systems such as the visualization schools in Kashmir and later, the Tantric schools. Perhaps most important, these mythic visions were viewed differently by lay and monastic believers.

The Future Savior and the Eternal Savior found their staunchest support in the ranks of the laity. From the beginnings of Buddhist history, the laity has played a vital role in the life of the Sangha. Concomitant with the expansion of Buddhism after Aśoka and the progressive splintering off of new Hinayāna schools, the voice and the needs of the laity increased. Thus while the verity of the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold Path constituted a satisfying religious solution for the core of the Saṅgha and a few exceptional laymen, for the majority of the newly converted, spiritual aspirations were directed towards the worship of relics, stupas, buddhas, and the desire to be reborn in heaven.

Eventually, it was the cross-fertilization between "lay mind" and "monk mind" which led to the development of myths centered on
figures such as Maitreya and Amitābha, and to the writing of new sūtras devoted to them. Maitreya is described in the Pāli canon as well as in the Sanskrit literature. Amitābha appears only in the Sanskrit literature composed from about the second century B.C. onwards. Consistent with the nature of religious literature, the sūtras about Amitābha and Maitreya stood as metaphorical statements for spiritual reality; and as such, were open to increasing numbers of interpretations.

From the second-third centuries A.D., distinct interpretive shifts occurred among the Maitreya and Amitābha cults within the Mahāyāna fold. Maitreya, considered by the Theravādins as the sole bodhisattva other than Śākyamuni, became more and more identified as only one of the galaxy of Mahāyāna buddhas and bodhisattvas. Later, under the pressure of competing paradise cults, the new Maitreya sūtras emphasized, not the advent of a future golden age but the advantages of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven where the Future Buddha awaits his last rebirth. By comparison, Amitābha interpretations were more complex, depending even more upon whether the believer was a layman or a monk. For the layman, he was primarily a savior figure and a center of devotion. For the monk, who was increasingly called upon to find or to create textual validity for lay enthusiasm, Amitābha and his paradise were interpreted on the basis of the Yogācāra and Mādhyamika philosophical systems.
The Mythic Vision: Maitreya

'The Hero that shall follow you,
The Buddha - of what sort will he be?
I want to hear of him in full.
Let the Visioned One describe him.'

When he had heard the Elder's speech
The Lord spoke thus:
'I will tell you, Sariputta,
Listen to my speech.

'In this auspicious aeon
Three leaders have there been;
Kakusandha, Konagamana
And the leader Kassapa too.

I am now the perfect Buddha;
And there will be Metteya too
Before this same auspicious aeon
Runs to the end of its years.

The perfect Buddha, Metteya
By name, supreme of men.'

When Maitreya, the Future Buddha arrives, this world will be a place of perfect tranquillity and happiness. The earth will be as flat as a mirror and clothed in lush, sparkling fauna. Human beings, excellent in virtue, will live to be 84,000 years old. The site of Maitreya's rebirth, Ketumati, is a city dazzling with heaps of gems and gold dust and webs of pearls. Natural wonders abound there: waters with the eight miraculous qualities, sweet-singing birds, melodious bells, and myriad coloured lotuses delight the senses. A mighty dragon-king dwells in his watery palace and a righteous wheel-turning king, possessor of the seven precious objects, reigns supreme. On the very day of his setting forth, Maitreya attains enlightenment under the dragon-flower
tree. The Noble One with the thirty-two major marks and eighty minor marks of the Superman is manifest; a transcendent Buddha light streams forth to all regions. When Maitreya commences to preach the Dharma to the three great assemblages, troops of devotees, 84,000 strong, each led by an illustrious personage, are instantaneously converted. In keeping with prophecy, Maitreya visits Vulture's Peak to meet Mahākāśyapa who is to guard the Dharma until the enlightenment of the Future Buddha. He subdues Māra, the Evil One and proclaims the Dharma anew for 60,000 years. After his death his Dharma will persist for another 60,000 years.

*  *  *

In this popular version of the vision of future salvation known by Chinese Maitreya devotees during the Six Dynasties, the basic elements of Future Buddha, earthly paradise and cakravartin are smoothly interwoven into one rich epiphany. Although Maitreya's primary role was that of aeon-ender, by this time his name had also become associated with a perplexing number of other roles and themes. Thus Maitreya has been associated with the future cakravartin, a disciple of the Buddha, the epithet "Ajita", and various historical personages.

The word cakravartin in pre-Buddhist Brahmanical India already had two distinct meanings: 1) a powerful king or chief; and 2) a king who had conquered territories by performing the horse sacrifice and whose cakra-wheel met no obstacles as it flew through the air. Later, in the age of the Purāpas, even more spectacular attributes such as the seven precious treasures become part of cakravartin symbolism. The Vāyu-purāpa gives a popular conception of the cakravartin as those who are "born in each age as the essence of Vishnu"; who have come in the past and will continue
to do so in the future. They enjoy superhuman attributes and achieve superhuman deeds.

In Buddhism, the temporal and spiritual functions of the cakravartin are usually separate. Anacakka or the "wheel of power" was held in contradistinction to the dhammacakka or the "wheel of righteousness". The Buddha claims that he is not a king of a political domain but rather "...an incomparable king of dharma". Kings from the time of Asoka have modelled themselves after the universal monarch or have tried to convince their subjects that they represent such an ideal. At times the two identities of world-conqueror and world-renouncer merged. The Chinese sovereigns who were particularly fond of claiming cakravartin status, and on occasion, proclaimed themselves to be Maitreya.

There is a some intermingling between the image of Maitreya as king and Maitreya as disciple. Matsumoto Bunzaburō proposes that Maitreya was originally only a disciple of the Buddha and later developed into an object of belief. Lamotte follows this same line of reasoning through his classification of texts dealing with Ajita and Maitreya.

The eponym "ajita" meaning "invincible" or "unbeatable" is often associated with Maitreya. Ajita, along with Maitreya, was a disciple of the ascetic Bāvari who achieved arhatship under Gautama Buddha. Ajita is again a co-disciple with Maitreya, this time to Śākyamuni, when Mahāprajāpatī donates a golden tunic to the Sangha. Śākyamuni then presents the tunic to Maitreya in honor of his Future Buddhahood and mentions that Ajita would be the cakravartin at that time. Finally, Ajita is used as the personal name (nāman) for Maitreya in Mahāyāna sutras.

In both the Mahāyāna and Hinayāna traditions it is not unusual to
Ascribe the title of the Future Buddha to a historical figure. Possibly the best known example of this is the fourth century monk Asaṅga, traditional sources including the work of Chinese translators and peregrinators such as Buddhahadra and Fa-hsien credit Asaṅga with writing the *Yogācārabhūmi* and other famous Viśṇunāvāda works after visiting Maitreya in Tuṣita ("blissful" or "satisfied") Heaven. Until recently, scholars held the view that this tradition was invented in order to give greater credibility to the new Mahāyāna works that were coming out during the time of Asaṅga. However it is now generally accepted that Maitreya was a historical personage, Asaṅga's instructor, who was later confused with the Future Buddha. In the *Mahāvamsa*, the famous fifth century systematizer of Buddhist doctrine, Buddhaghosa is acclaimed as the Maitreya Buddha. During the period of the *Mahāvamsa*'s composition in Sri Lanka, it was apparently not uncommon to bestow the title of the Maitreya Buddha upon famous masters.

A simplistic model of the evolution of the Maitreya vision would begin with the seminal ideal of the Buddha of the Future in Indian Buddhism which was then interwoven with the colours of numerous other philosophical and religious interpretations. Basing his view on the Ajita-Maitreya developments Péri writes that what was originally distinct in Hīnayāna became confused in the Mahāyāna and that with the rise of Mahāyāna, the Maitreya myth evolved independently in the North and the South. A multitude of identities notwithstanding, the Maitreya Buddha remains unequivocally the Future Savior figure, the inaugurator of a golden age. The success of his cult, "as spectacular as it has been unexpected" persists to the present in the monastaries and lay groups of S.E. Asia and Japan.
The Mythic Vision: Amitābha

OM. Adoration to the Three Treasures! OM. Adoration to all the glorious Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Āryas, śrāvakas, Pratyekabuddhas, past, present, and to come, who dwell in the unlimited and endless Lokadhātus of the ten quarters! Adoration to Amitābha! Adoration to him whose soul is endowed with incomprehensible virtues! Adoration to Amitābha, to the Gīna, to thee, O I go to Sukhāvatī through thy compassion also; To Sukhāvatī, with its groves, resplendent with gold, The delightful, adorned with the sons of Sugata, -- I go to it, which is full of many jewels and measures; and the refuge of thee, the famous and wise.28

The Paradise of Amitābha29, Sukhāvatī30, is unexcelled among all the paradises in blessedness and splendor.31 Glittering palaces upon palaces and bejewelled gardens upon gardens are filled with harmony-sweet sounds, exotic fragrances, golden-silver trees and magical waters. Every feature of this land is immeasurable, innumerable and infinite. The lotus flowers are not only made of gems but may be as much as ten yojanas32 in circumference, each one emitting 3600 thousand kotis33 of light rays and from each ray of light may be seen 3600 kotis of Buddhas teaching the Dharma to immeasurable, innumerable beings in the ten directions. For those who abide their existence is supremely comfortable: one can bathe in pools where the waters turn warm or cool by a mere wish; survey the mirror-flat earth which poses no hinderances; or fly through the air with the greatest ease. Entry into Sukhāvatī is tranquil and pure; lotus buds embrace the true believer and release him when it is time to be born. No women are found there; women desiring rebirth into Amitābha's Pure Land are magically transformed into men, the bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta, Amitābha's chief attendants, act as his ambassadors to the countless Buddhalands, and upon the death of a
devout believer, guide him to the blessed land. This miraculous paradise in which the excellences of all the other Buddha-lands were combined was the fruit of the bodhisattva labours of the Bhikṣu Dharmākara, who at one time practiced under the Buddha Lokeśvararāja many aeons ago. At that time Dharmākara made a series of 48 vows, predicating his own final nirvāṇa upon the salvation of all beings. After innumerable kalpas Dharmākara, now Amitābha, resides in this Paradise of paradises fulfilling his vows so that all beings, even those who may have directed only "one thought" towards Sukhāvatī may be reborn there. Rebirth in Sukhāvatī assures the devotee that he is but this one last lifetime, removed from nirvāṇa.

* * *

From the beginning, Amitābha represented a savior figure; a focal point of devotion for laity. Worship of the Buddha, Stupa and Holy Relics were already a part of Hīnayāna devotionalism when the new Mahāyāna Buddhas and bodhisattvas emerged. Aksobhya\textsuperscript{34} ("Imperturbable" or "Immovable") is considered the earliest of the "non-historical celestial Buddhas". Aksobhya and Amitābha are the two earliest Mahāyāna Buddhas the cult of Amitābha is thought to have been established under the influence of Aksobhya. The new bodhisattvas and buddhas are thought to have been created as personifications of Śākyamuni's personality.\textsuperscript{35} Thus Avalokiteśvara\textsuperscript{36} was a personification of his compassion, Manjusrī, of his wisdom, Bhaïṣajyaguru, of his healing and so on. Amitābha, along with the other savior figures performed four major functions: 1) he promoted the acquisition of virtues and protected the believer from those who might try to interfere with his spiritual progress; 2) he bestowed material blessings and averted disasters; 3) he served as an
object of devotion; and 4) he provided a paradise or a special environment favourable for enlightenment. 37

Conze traces the beginnings of the concept of the mythical Buddhas to within a century of the Buddha's nirvana. 38 These Buddhas were designated specific paradises and upheld doctrinally within the fold of the Mahāsaṃghika school. One of the distinctive features of the Mahāsaṃghikas was their sympathy to the expression of popular belief.

The Amitābha cults are thought to have been active in N.W. India by second B.C. among the Uttarapathakas who accepted the Mahāsaṃghika doctrines. 39 By the beginning of the Christian era the new buddhology was gaining widespread support. And by the time of Nāgārjuna in the second century A.D. Worship of the Buddhas of the Ten directions was an undisputed and well-regarded aspect of Mahayana belief.

This is not to say that the philosophical doctors themselves perceived Amitābha as a savior figure in the same way that the lay devotees in the cults did. While the laity offered their flowers, incense and prayers to Amitābha and the other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, another process had been taking place within the Sangha. Also from about the first century after the Buddha's death, all the known schools are thought to have accepted the distinction between two levels of language in Buddhist writings. The first is samvṛti ("concealing") which is everyday popular language and the second, paramārtha ("ultimate") which is philosophical language. 40 The latter type was considered to stand as clear and definitive statements and the former, to require restatement in terms compatible with the philosophical standpoint of paramārtha-satya or ultimate truth. 41 Thus while the laity prayed to be
reborn in the marvel-filled paradise of Amitābha, the descriptions of Sukhāvatī were totally at variance with almost all of the rest of the Mahāyāna sūtras. Since these new sūtras were expositions of the concept of śūnyatā, the Pure Land sutras could only be valid as samvṛtisatya. Furthermore, during the early centuries of the Christian era, Mahāyana schools were developing a means of dealing with the new buddhology which would eventually be known as the tri-kāya doctrine. This development, on one hand, provided the "much needed justification" for the new Mahāyāna texts, and on the other, a powerful doctrinal tool with which to re-interpret popular belief. Those opposed to the lay or "orthodox" Pure Land beliefs tended to give one of the two following interpretations: to consider Amitabha and his Paradise as nirmāṇa and therefore inferior; or 2) to regard Amitabha as being of sambhoga-kāya and therefore not within the reach of common man.

IIIa Texts: Maitreya

There are ample references to Maitreya throughout the Buddhist Tripitaka. Hinayāna and Mahāyāna sources in Pāli, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese make specific references to a Bodhisattva called Maitreya who will be reborn as the Future Buddha. The texts reveal that depending upon the author and the time of composition, the messianic ideal was seen in different ways. Sometimes the texts will contain no more than a simple prophecy of Maitreya's future rebirth. At other times, the text describes a Super-Buddha who will proclaim the Dharma to a world transformed to an earthly paradise. In the latest versions, the believer hopes to be born in Tusita Heaven where Maitreya awaits his
last rebirth.

1) Pāli

The following two groups of texts are good examples of the kind of suttas that are often referred to as containing the "germs" of the Maitreya myth. The first group is found in the Dīgha-nikāya and consists of the Mahāpadāna Suttanta, the Mahāsudassana Suttanta, the Aggaṇṇa Suttanta and the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta. The theme of the Mahāpadāna Suttanta is the belief in a succession of Buddhas. It lists and describes the lives of the six previous Buddhas: Vipassi, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Konāgamana and Kassapa. Sakyaṃuni is the seventh. This Suttanta also alludes to the complementary roles of Buddha rule and kingly rule. The Mahāsudassana Suttanta describes a righteous king and his splendid city. The magical details of this kingdom, with its successions of 84,000 gems, elephants, palaces, etc. closely resemble the lavishness of the world in the developed Maitreya myth. In the Aggaṇṇa Suttanta, the Buddhist version of the world's cycle of degeneration and recovery is presented by a description of a fascinating sequence of events combining biological evolution and moral decline. Even though none of these texts mention Maitreya, they are often cited as germinal to the Maitreya myth because they contain certain major elements: the succession of Buddhas, the description of a marvellous world and the cycle of degeneration and recovery.

The Pāli text including all of these elements as well as a prophetic statement concerning Maitreya is the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta. According to this text, the world falls from periods of golden prosperity to those of
tarnished decline. After human beings have fallen into a wretched state of mutual hatred and slaughter, a change takes place, enabling them to live in peace again. Gradually, conditions improve until people live to be 80,000 years old and evince great virtues. Towns and villages are so closely situated that a cock can fly from one to the next. At that time Sankha, a wheel-turning King and Metteya, the Future Buddha are born. Sākyamuni prophesizes that Metteya

"will teach the Law of Righteousness in spirit and in letter, lovely in its beginning, lovely in its middle, lovely in its end, and he will live the pure life of celibacy in all its completeness, just as I do now. But he will have thousands of months as his followers, where I have only hundreds."

The second group of Pāli suttas often cited as the origins of the Maitreya myth is found in the Khuddaka-nikāya. The three suttas are the Vatthugātha, the Ajitamāpavapucchā and the Tissametteyyamānavapucchā. The first of these three very short and early documents is the story of the ascetic Bāvari and his two disciples, Ajita and Tissametteya. In the second and third suttas, Buddha instructs Ajita and Metteya respectively on attaining the desireless state. None of the suttas make any reference to the future or to a Buddha-to-come. However, in the Theravāda tradition, Ajita has been traced from his role as Bāvari's disciple to the Aṅguttara Commentary, the Theragāthā Commentary and the Apadāna where he is finally prophesied as the world-ruler. In the Mahāyāna tradition, Ajita is the name of one of the thousand Buddhas who will arise during this auspicious cycle (Bhadra kalpa) and an epithet for Maitreya. Thus it would seem reasonable to assume that Ajita and Metteya as found in the three above suttas from the Khuddaka-nikāya relate to the Maitreya myth only in so far as the names are the same. The Theravāda-Mahāyāna
divergence in the use of the name Ajita ("invincible"), is simply
due to subsequent developments which took place within each tradition.

Later Theravāda compositions are more precise in their
references to Maitreya as future Buddha. The Buddhavamsa ("Lineage
of the Buddhas") gives the lives of the Buddhas before Sakyamuni and
Maitreya. In Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga, Maitreya is a fundamental
part of the doctrine. The most important and elaborate of these
later compositions is the Anāgatavamsa ("History of the Future One").
Although its date is uncertain Maitreya's prophecy roughly similar to the
Maitreya sutras translated into Chinese from fourth century A.D. onward.

2) Sanskrit

During the centuries around the turn of the millennium when the
use of Pāli was being supplemented by Sanskrit for the composition of
new Buddhist works, references to Maitreya increased. The monumental
Sarvāstivāda biography, Lalitavistara relates how Sākyamuni was
succeeded by Maitreya even in Tulita Heaven. Mahāvastu, the Vinaya
of the Mahāsaṅghikas and perhaps the first full biography of the Buddha
includes the following statement:

"Exalted Buddhas do not pass away until they have
anointed an heir to the throne. He will become a
Buddha in the world immediately after me. As I now
proclaim of Maitreya, he will become the Buddha next
after me."61

The translations of the Agamas and Sarvāstivāda works such as the
Aśoka Avadāna continue to reiterate old eschatological themes as
well as to introduce a few new ones. Maitreya is mentioned in many of
the Mahāyāna Vaipulya sūtras along with hosts of other buddhas and
bodhisattvas. By this time reference to "All Buddhas of the past, present and future..." had become a stock phrase in Mahāyāna works. Finally, texts devoted solely to the Maitreya vyākaraṇa were composed in Tibetan and Central Asian languages as well as in Sanskrit.

3) Chinese

In China, six Sutras on Maitreya were singled out as a special group constituting the basis of Maitreya belief.

1) **Mi-lo-lai-shih ching** (弥勒來時經)
   The Sutra of Maitreya's Coming
   translator unknown.

2) **Mi-lo-hsia-sheng ching** (弥勒下生經)
   The Sutra of Maitreya's Rebirth
   translated by Chu-fa-hu in 303 A.D.

3) **Mi-lo-hsia-sheng-cheng-Fo ching** (弥勒下生成佛經)
   The Sutra of Maitreya's Rebirth and Attainment of Buddhahood
   translated by Kumarajiva in 402 A.D.

4) **Mi-lo-ta-cheng-Fo ching** (弥勒大成佛經)
   The Sutra of Maitreya's Great Attainment of Buddhahood
   translated by Kumarajiva in 402 A.D.

5) **Mi-lo-hsia-sheng-ching-Fo ching** (弥勒下生成佛經)
   Sutra of Maitreya's Rebirth and Attainment of Buddhahood
   translated by I-ching in 701 A.D.

6) **Kuan Mi-lo-p'u-sa-shang-sheng-Tu-shi-t'ien ching** (觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經)
   Sutra of Meditation on Maitreya's Rebirth on High in the Tushita Heaven
   translated by Chu Ch'u Ching Sheng in 455 A.D.

All of these Maitreya Sutras were translated in Northern China. **Mi-lo-lai-shih ching** is thought to be the earliest but since the translator is unknown, Dharmarakṣa's translation is usually cited as the first to be rendered into Chinese. This early fourth century translation is significant
because Dharmarakṣa's choice of texts to translate, including the *Lotus* and *Vimalakīrti* sutras reflects the religious needs of the Chinese of his time. Sūtras (1) to (5) give essentially the same account as outlined earlier in this Chapter under Maitreya's "mythic vision". They are also very similar to the *Anāgatavamsa*, the *Maitreya-samiti*, and other *Vyākaraṇa* literature well known in China. The *Kuan* Sutra (6) however, is different from the rest. It is thought to have been composed later and thus translated into Chinese later than the other Maitreya Sutras. New features namely, the promise of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven and the cancellation of sin upon calling Maitreya's name are introduced. The inclusion of the term *Kuan* is a little misleading because it does not offer any special visualization technique even though it may have been used by dhyāna masters along with oral instructions. It is interesting that it is considered to be an earlier composition than another *Kuan*-type sutra pertinent to this thesis, the *Kuan-wu-liang-shou-Fo ching*. The feature which most distinguishes the Maitreya *Kuan* Sutra from the other five Maitreya Sutras is that the believer himself desires to be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven (出生) rather than waiting for Maitreya to be reborn on earth (下生).

Scholars have put forth several reasons for the composition of this "ascent" (出生) type of sutra. Some feel that the author of the *Kuan-Mi-lo-p'u-sa-shang-sheng-Tu-shi-t'ien ching* was under the influence of Amitābha ideas. Others assert that competition between various paradise cults and specifically between the Maitreya and Amitābha cults stimulated the Maitreya believers to make new claims for the benefits of rebirth in Tuṣita Heaven. The *Kuan* school of meditation in Kashmir where Sarvāstivādin
schools were prominent probably also exerted an important influence on the new form. Perhaps the most provoking explanation is that dissatisfaction with the kind of future salvation found in the "descent" (下生) type Sūtras resulted in the growth and popularity of the "ascent" (上生) type.73

In conclusion, it is reasonable to presume that Theravāda and Mahāyāna Sūtras on Maitreya drew from the same core of Maitreya myth whether as oral tradition or in the earliest written forms now extant in the Pāli Canon. Péri postulates that the Maitreyan idea existed soon after the Buddha's time; before the divisions which led to the Hīnayāna-Mahāyāna split.74 Determining exactly what this core consists of and dating the sequence of its accretions is almost an impossible task and certainly not within the limits of this thesis. Generally, the Pāli works are considered "earlier" and the Sanskrit, "later". However, the fact that the Theravāda Canon itself continued to evolve makes this a somewhat unreliable distinction. For example, later Pāli compositions such as the Anāgatavamsa show a marked similarity to the Mahāyāna sūtras translated into Chinese and works such as the Mahā-sudassana Suttanta may have been affected by the increased Mahāyāna influences into Theravāda during the third to the fifth centuries A.D. Thus scholars such as Matsumoto Bunzaburō submits that the Maitreyan ideal developed much later; three to four centuries after the death of the Buddha, within the Mahayana fold. Nevertheless the major differences between works such as the Cakkavatti-Sīhanāda Suttanta and the Māhayāna Maitreya sūtras seem to be mainly differences in degree and elaboration. Furthermore, as Péri also mentions, it seems unlikely that the Hīnayāna schools, which
considered the Māhāyāna literature heterodox, would adopt in its entirety, a well developed Mahāyāna idea. His theory that the Theravāda schools managed to maintain the earlier tradition in spite of all the developments within and the influences without would support the view that the expectation centered on a Future Buddha was part of pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism.

IIIb Texts: Amitābha

More sūtras and śāstras have been devoted to Amitābha than any other figure in the Mahāyāna pantheon. There are no direct references to this Buddha in Pāli literature but the references in Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese are voluminous. The earlier Sanskrit works at times refer to Amitābha as one of the innumerable Buddhas of the Ten Quarters and at other times as an outstanding Savior figure, a focal point for the faithful. Without even considering the numerous translations and commentaries in Tibetan and Japanese, the Chinese Tripiṭaka alone includes at least 254 sūtras and śāstras on Amitābha.

1) Pāli

Some scholars maintain that the roots for Amitābha myth exist in the Pāli Canon. One example is those who claim that the splendor of King Sudassana's palace and environs described in the Mahāsudassana Suttanta bears a close resemblance to Amitābha's Pure Land. A similar section in the Mahāparinibbāna sutta is also cited as a prototype for Sukhāvatī. Despite these descriptive similarities, the doctrinal differences are clear. The monarch's domain represents an ideal of earthy extravagance while Amitābha's Sukhāvatī is a celestial sphere transcending human
pleasures. The King's happiness is founded on the karmic effects of his own personal stock of good deeds whereas the believer's salvation is realized not only by directing his good deeds towards rebirth in Sukhāvatī but also by fulfilling meditational and ritual practices that call upon the power Amitābha's vows.

Another example of Hīnayāna roots in Amitābha belief lies in the expressions of devotionalism found in Pāli literature. Dutt calls this literature "the response of the inner repercussions of the faith on the emotional side of the lives of monks and nuns". He traces the beginnings of devotionalism to the poetical manuals in the Khuddaka-nikaya: Thera-gāthā ("Verses of the Elders"), Therī-gāthā ("Verses of the Elderesses"), Apadāna ("Stories of the Saints"), Peta-vatthu ("Tales of ghosts"), and Vimāna-vatthu ("Tales of Heavenly Mansions"). Spontaneous and lacking in artifice, these writings are full of passages extolling the virtues of worshipping Buddha, Stupa, and Dhatu. The Jātaka and Buddhavamsa provided the basis for Buddha worship. Thus, although Amitābha is not directly mentioned in the Pāli Canon, kingly paradises and early Buddhist devotionalism can be regarded as indirect precursors of Sukhāvatī and devotion to Amitābha.

2) Sanskrit

Specific references to Amitābha appeared with the beginnings of Mahāyāna literature. Buddhist biographies such as the Lalitavistara and Mahāvamsa make no mention of this Buddha. The primary Pure Land texts originally composed in Sanskrit will be described in the section on Chinese Amitābha texts, the following Sanskrit compositions on Akṣobhya Buddha and the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters were vital to the
development of the Amitābha myth.

In the Akṣobhya-buddhagṛeta-tathāgatha-svayuha sūtra Akṣobhya ("Imperturbable") takes a vow under a Buddha in the East. His multiple vows (prapīṭhāna) were a model for Amitābha's vows. Other early Mahāyāna works such as the Aṣṭasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā and the Pratyutpanna-buddha-sammu-khāvasthita-samādhi sūtra mention both Akṣobhya and Amitābha. Although devotion to Akṣobhya is not specifically advocated in these sūtras, rebirth in Abhirati, his paradise, was sought by some through the performance of moral acts and by hearing his name. The Pratyutpanna-samādhisūtra is also significant because it is perhaps the earliest text indicating the existence of Amitābha cults and because its translation into Chinese in the second century A.D. stimulated many conversions to Amita worship.

There are numerous Mahāyāna sūtras and śāstras in which Amitābha is found among the incalculable Buddhas of the Six Directions or the Ten Directions. In the Buddhavatamsaka-sūtra, Amita's Pure Land is regarded as the most inferior of the Paradises closest to the mundane world. Vaipulya sūtras such as the Lotus simply include Amitābha in a great list of Buddhas in the West. Vimalakīrti and the SmallPrajñāpāramitā relate instances where the assembled devotees are enabled to see Abhirati through magical means. Nagarjuna's Daśabhūmi-vibhāga-sāstra is usually cited by Pure Land adherents as proof of Nāgārjuna's belief in Amitābha. Chapter Five ("On the Vows") and Chapter Nine ("On Easy Practice") explain the nature of the Pure Land and the practices conducive to rebirth there. Vasubandhu's short commentary on the Sukhāvatī-vyūha Sūtra, Amitāyus-sūtra-Ūpadeśa is traditionally referred to as the basis of
Vasubandhu's place as one of the patriarchs of the Pure Land School. In this text, bodhisattva practice consists of cultivation of five methods of \textit{anusmṛti} (mindfulness): worship, praise, resolution (to be born in the Pure Land), visualization and transfer of merit. This cursive sampling of Mahāyāna works indicates the tremendous diversity of meditational and philosophical interpretations inspired by the figure of Amitābha.

3) Chinese

In China, with the development of Pure Land thought three major sutras (淨土三部經) were accepted as the core of authoritative literature on Amitābha.

1) \textit{A-mi-t'o-ching} (阿彌陀經)
\textit{Sutra on Amita} (Smaller Sukhavatī-vyūha sutra) translated by Kumārajīva in 402-5 A.D.

2) \textit{Wu-liang-shou ching} (無量壽經)
\textit{Sutra on Amitāyus} or Larger Sukhavatī-Vyūha sutra translated by Saṅghavarman in 252 A.D.

3) \textit{Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching} (觀無量壽經)
\textit{Contemplation on the Buddha of Infinite Life Sutra} translated by Kālayaśas between 424-453 A.D.

The translations listed above are the ones that eventually won the greatest approval in China. Notable variations in detail exist not only between the Sanskrit and Chinese versions but between the Chinese translations themselves.

Kumārajīva's \textit{A-mi-t'o-ching} is the earliest of three translations of this sūtra into Chinese. In the sūtra, Amitāyus is praised by all the Buddhas in the Ten Quarters. His paradise is reminiscent of the jewelled splendor of Maitreya's future world; sumptuous and peaceful,
Sukhāvatī is only one among the innumerable Buddhalands, "equal in number to the sands of the river Gaṅgā". A unique feature of this sūtra is its stress upon the recitation or continuous meditation of Amitāyus' name. Having heard the name, those whose minds are constantly occupied with it will see "Amitāyus...surrounded by an assembly of disciples and followed by a host of Bodhisattvas ...at their hour of death and they will depart this life with tranquil minds".

The Wu-liang-shou ching (Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra) is by far longer and were elaborate than the A-mi-t'o ching. The only sūtra to be translated into Chinese more than ten times, its translations span 900 years from the second to the eleventh centuries A.D. Generally, the myth is more coherent in the later versions: the legends of Amita's past lives as well as of other Buddhas such as Aksobhya are described in greater detail. One of the most important differences is in the number of Dharmākara's vows. The Lokakṣema (latter Han) and Chih Chien (Wu) translations list only 24 vows while the other three by Saṅghāvarman (Wei), Bodhiruci (T'ang) and Fa-hsien (Sung) list 48 vows.

According to this sutra, many aeons ago, Dharmākara bodhisattva vowed to create the best of all possible Buddhalands and to save all sentient beings. Having achieved his goal, this same Dharmākara, now Amitābha Buddha abides in the Western Paradise of Sukhāvatī. As the narrative unfolds, various aspects of the Pure Land mode of salvation are revealed. On one hand, Dharmākara's vows, his bodhisattva practice and his creation of Sukhāvatī make up the history of his commitment to the enlightenment of all beings. On the other hand, the believer's meditation on Amita, his vow to be reborn in Sukhāvatī and the application of his
own stock of merit to that goal make up the requisites to enlightenment.

In the Sanskrit versions of this sutra there is no clear distinction between Amitābha's saving power and the individual's own efforts; between grace and works. However, the Chinese version has two extra vows (numbers 18 and 21). One of these vows (number 18) was to become known as the "King of the Prāṇidhānas" in mature Pure Land doctrine. It was the interpretations of these and other vows, which led to new emphases in Amitābha worship not clearly articulated in the sutras themselves and consequently to Amitābha's immense popularity in China.

Because it advocates a carefully systematized method of meditation, the Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching is considered the most sophisticated of the three Pure Land sutras. This work belongs to that unique category of sutras called Kuan sutras composed in Kashmir or Central Asia by monks specializing the visualization techniques. The tradition is thought to have originated with a form of worship to the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters practiced by certain Hinayāna and Mahāyāna schools. It is possible that at an earlier stage the believers thought that they could gain access to the Pure Lands of the Buddhas by creating them mentally. The Pan-chou-san-mei-ching (Pratyupanna-buddha-sammu-khavasthita-samādhi-sūtra) is an example of this stage. Later, when iconographic representations and the practice of orally invoking the Buddhas become universal, the Kuan group was composed. The Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching is the most organized of the group and is therefore thought to be the latest (ca.IV A.D.). In contrast, the Kuan-mi-lo-pu-sa-shang-sheng-tu-shi-t'ien ching is considered one of the very earliest of the group.
The Kuan-wu-liang-chou ching can be described as a meditational guide for the practitioner who desires a personal transcendental vision of Sukhāvatī. The stages of meditation are incorporated into a narrative in which Queen Vaidehī, imprisoned by her son Ajātaśatru, calls upon the Buddha to reveal a place for her that is free from suffering. After choosing Sukhāvatī as the plane of her next rebirth she is given directions for attaining her goal. She is to focus on a series of sixteen meditational objects consisting of "External Splendors" such as the setting sun, water, trees, and lakes and "Internal Splendors" such as the various buddhas and bodhisattvas, including Amitāyus himself. The account is evocative: "the hyperboles, the phantastic numbers and the imagery used, reflect the visions of the meditator, who, once back to his senses, was unable to describe his transcendental 'flights' in a clear and consistent way". While the sūtra's emphasis on meditation does not abrogate goodness, moral and vitual observances and the cultivation of the believer is able to transcend the present in his perception of the Western Paradise and to achieve the status of a non-returner.

Although the three basic Amitābha sutras are clearly the work of the Mahāyāna genius, these sūtras are often seen as an anomaly within the tradition. No mention is made of śūnyatā or prajñā; instead, an extravagance of imagery seems to support the devotional emphases of the early Amitā cults in India. The Shorter Sukhāvatī Sūtra (A-mi-t'ou ching) and the Longer Sukhāvatī Sūtra (wu-liang-chou ching), composed in the last few centuries before the Common Era may have been influenced by Pāli works such as the Mahāsudassana suttanta and the devotional manuals in
the Khaddaka-nikāya. The eschatological motif found at the end of the two Sukhāvatī sutras may have resulted from contact with Maitreya groups or the influence of the general messianic mood of the times. After the second century A.D., with the systemization of Mahāyāna thought under the great Indian ācāryas, Buddhas such as Maitreya, Aksobhya and Amitābha were often referred to as part of the system of the Buddhas of the Six Directions or the Ten Directions. They also became important focal points for visualization-mediation as in the Kuan group of sutras and in the increasing numbers of tantric texts. Therefore, apart from their numerical significance, the Amitābha texts demonstrate a tremendous diversity of philosophical and religious perspectives. What the written sources do not reveal, however, is the continuity of Amita worship both at the monastic and lay levels. We can surmise that most of the lay groups devoted to Amita worship in medieval India and China, like the 20th century lay groups in China and Japan, tended to equate Amita's Pure Land with a place to go to upon one's death and his vows with promises calling forth one's devotion. The fact that such beliefs conflict with the fundamental tenets of Mahāyāna philosophy does not negate the fact that they in large measure, account for Amitābha's spectacular popularity among the Chinese masses.
Footnotes to Chapter I

1. I have taken the term "sacred history" from Mircea Eliade's work and used it in its broadest sense; applying it to the Judaeo-Christian as well as the Buddhist and other traditions.

2. These terms were coined by Sukumar Dutt in *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India* (London: George Allen and Ohwin, 1962), p.183.


5. The following summary is based on the Maitreya sutra, *Mi-lo-hsia-sheng-cheng-Fo ching* (T.XIV.454)

6. Zoroastrian and Judaic sources also refer to the eschaton as a time when the earth will be level.


10. This type of cakravartin symbolism is particularly evident in the Bhagavata Purāṇa.

11. H. Jacobin in "Cakavartin" p.336 notes that in the Bṛhatkathā Purāṇa, King Narvāhavadatta has seven ratnas ("treasures") including the elephant, the sword, the moonlight, the wife, the destroying charm, the lake, and the sandalwood tree. King Saśabindu in the Bhagavata Purāṇa has fourteen treasures.


13. Cakkavatti-sīhanāda suttta (D.N.26); Lakkhana-suttanta (D.N.13); Mahāpādana-suttanta (D.N.14) etc.

15. See Chapter IV below.


19. The story of Bāvari and Ajita is found in the Pārāyana of the Sutta-nipāta.

20. The story Maitreya and the golden tunic is found the Dakkhināvibhangha Sutta (M.N.III) etc.; see Lamotte, Histoire, p.779.


22. For a detailed discussion of this matter see H. Ui "Maitreya as a Historical Personage" in Indian Studies in Honor of C.R. Lanman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), pp.95-100; and G. Tucci, Doctrines of Maitreyanātha and Āsaṅga (Calutta: 1930).


28. While the appellation Amitābha ("Limitless Light") and another, Amitāyus were used interchangeably, the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra shows a preference for Amitābha. Amitāyus is used in the Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra and the Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra. Saṃghavarman used Amitāyus (Wu-liang-shou) in his Chinese translation and this appellation, perhaps because of its special appeal for the Chinese was very popular throughout the Six Dynasties. Later, Amitābha
became the standard because of the importance of the Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha and the nineteen or so other names of this Buddha which included the word "light". The Chinese transliteration "O-mi-t'o" (Ja. Amida) was used in reference to both Wu-liang-shou and Wu-liang-kuang by Kumārajīva in his translation of the Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra.


31. The following summary is based on Max Müller's translation of the "Longer Sukhavati Sutra".


33. A koti is ten million in number.

34. For a closer description of Akṣobhya Buddha see E. Lamotte; L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Louvain: Université de Louvain, 1962), pp.360-362 n.9.


41. Later, some schools disagreed on which of the two levels a text should belong to. Warder asserts that the new Mahāyāna schools especially, "sought to discredit the more authentic parts of the Tripitaka as mere 'concealing' discourses whose meaning required to be drawn out; only their special texts were set out in definite philosophical terms..." Warder, Indian Buddhism, p.152.

42. Conze, Thirty Years, p.71.

43. The evolution of the various stages of a bodhisattva's career also shows the impact of the new buddhology. The early seven stage (bhūmi) scheme was increased to ten in order to accommodate the celestial buddhas.
44. Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary", p.301.

45. Matsumoto's Miroku Jōdōron (Chapter V) gives an extensive bibliography of Maitreya sources from the Chinese Tripiṭaka and Lamotte's Histoire (pp.775-788) lists Pāli and Sanskrit sources pertaining to Maitreya.


50. Rhys Davids suggests that this suttanta is a further development of the same story first described in the Mahāparinibbāna. The Mahāsudassana Jātaka is also a further development.


52. This reference is made in Péri, "Review", p.440 and Lamotte, Histoire, pp.775-7.

53. All three suttas are found in the Parāyanavagga of the Sutta Nipāta translated in Rhys Davids, SBE, vol. 10, pp.184-192.


57. Buddhaghosa, Path of Purity, p.3.

58. H. Winternitz suggests that the Anāgatavamsa may belong to an earlier period whereas others consider it late and spurious; see his A History of Indian Literature (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1933), p.220. Portions of the work have been translated by Edward Conze, Buddhist Texts in Translation (Oxford: Bruno Cassier, 1954; Harper Torch book, 1964), pp.46-50 and by H.C. Warren, Buddhism in Translation (Cambridge:
59. "And so the sons of the gods reborn in the heaven of the Tuṣitas fell at the feet of the Bodhisattva weeping and said, 'In truth, Wise Man, how will the sphere of the Tuṣitas retain its brilliance once deprived of you?' And the Bodhisattva said to this great and divine gathering, 'The Bodhisattva Maitreya will teach you the Law.' And the Bodhisattva, having removed his crown, placed it on the head of Maitreya, saying, 'You, Wise Man, will be the first after me to obtain supreme and perfect enlightenment.' Lalitavistara (Chapter V), quoted in A. Foucher, The Life of the Buddha (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), p.23.


62. For example: Madhyāgama 13, Ekottarāgama 44, Dirghāgama 1, Sāmyuktāgama 15 etc.


64. The word vyakāraṇa ("prophecy", "record") has a number of different meanings. In the Āgamas it could refer to the record of a dead person's rebirth, to one's own enlightenment or to the enlightenment of a Buddha. References to the latter meaning, involving the prophecy of a bodhisattva's future buddhahood are numerous and became an important device in Mahāyāna sūtras. For example, in the Lotus, Sākyamuni foretells the Buddhahood of various śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas by citing their names, their Buddha-fields, their kalpas and the duration of their Dharma. For further information on this matter see Étienne Lamotte trans, L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Paris: Publications Universitaires, 1962), pp.189-192 n.89.


66. Although fifteen other Maitreya sūtras were translated during the Six Dynasties the Six Sutras listed above are all found in T. vol. 14: 1) 457; 2) 453; 3) 454; 4) 456; 5) 455; and 6) 452. Hayami Tasuku gives a brief summary of their contents based on Matsumoto Bunzaburō's Miroku Jōdōron in his Miroku Shinkō mō Hitotsu no Jōdō Shinkō, vol. 12:


73. Hayami, Miroku Shinkō, pp.23-23, 135-145.


77. An abbreviated list of these works may be found in Buddhist Encyclopedia, s.v. "Amita" by Ikemoto Jūshin.

78. Generally, the images of paradise in both the Maitreya and the Amita myths are traced back to this same Pāli source.

79. For further references on this see Nakamura Hajime's "A Critical Survey of Mahāyāna and Esoteric Buddhism chiefly based upon Japanese Sources...continued," AA 7 (1964): 42 n.7.

80. Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries, p.288.


85. The three best known Chinese translations listed here are found in T. vol. 12: 1) 366; 2) 360; 3) 365. For a discussion on the problem of dating the Sanskrit recensions of the texts see Pas, "Shan-tao's commentary," p.62, 194.


89. Ibid., p.73.

90. The six extant sutras in this group are described in Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary," pp. 109-118.


CHAPTER II

ESCHATOLOGY AND DEVOTIONALISM

I. Introduction

Eschatology is "the doctrine of 'last things' or more accurately, of occurrences with which our known world comes to its end."1 Devotionalism is "...a mysticism of exaggerated emotion where the 'I' and the 'Thou' flow together in a unity of intoxicated feeling".2 As distinct as these two terms appear, the first, denoting a cosmology of final time and the second, a mysticism of ecstatic unity, their outer religious expressions and of inner intention are very similar. In the development of eschatology and devotionalism, this similarity has resulted in a gradual merging of symbols, rituals and even doctrines, cross-culturally and within Buddhism.

By extension, eschatology includes the anticipation of a future savior and a future golden age. Similarly, devotionalism includes the adoration of an eternal savior and the desire to attain bliss. In all religious traditions, the future saviors, whether Kalkin, Maitreya, the Messiah, or the hidden Imam, have been ardently invoked in the language of faith. The chief characteristic of the long-awaited kingdom or the golden age has been its ineffable, eternal joy. Because of the intense yearning aroused in the believer, eschatological beliefs naturally became associated with devotional modes of worship. In Buddhism, waiting for Maitreya also meant worshipping Maitreya. Since the worship of a deity, especially at the popular level was expressed by culturally determined ritual and meditational practices, outwardly, the worship of Maitreya often became indistin-
guishable from the worship of Amitābha.

As well as external similarities in religious expression, eschatology and devotionalism can both be seen as internally oriented towards the solution of a universal problem: Time. According to Eliade, the 'terror of time' can only be endured by the ordering of events into supra-temporal models. These models may be based on the view that time is either cyclic or linear. Cyclic or "primordial time" is endlessly reversible. Linear or "eschatological time" presupposes a progressive unfolding of historical events and a clearly defined end to history. Implicit in the analysis is a third view: that time can be transcended through mysticism. Of the three ways of dealing with Time, the latter two correspond to eschatology and devotionalism as defined in this thesis. Buddhist eschatology, contrary to Brahmanic cosmology, includes theories concerning the nature and the end of history. Buddhist devotionalism is a form of mysticism which utilized both systematic meditation and spontaneous bhakti.

In sum, the similarity in outer religious expression and inner intent between Buddhist eschatology and devotionalism has fundamentally affected their development. Eschatological and devotional symbols merged in such a way that increasingly, the luminosity of Maitreya was confused with the limitless light of Amitābha and the wonders of Tugita became almost indistinguishable from the perfections of the western Paradise. Similarly, the fervor of eschatological anticipation was expressed in the rituals of devotion and the spontaneous devotion of mysticism was intensified by the knowledge that the degenerate age had arrived. The interaction between the concepts of "end time" and bhakti not only within
Buddhism, but between Buddhism and the other religions of India, Iran and the Mediterranean from the third century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. produced a rich and complex tradition. It was from this tradition that the Buddhists of Medieval China drew their own unique picture of the nature of the end of the Dharma and its transcendence in Faith.

IIa. Origins of the Eschaton: Future Buddha

1) Indian Influences

"For whenever of the right
   A languishing appears, son of Bharata,
   A rising up of unright,
   Then I send Myself forth.

   For protection of the good,
   And for destruction of evil-doers,
   To make a firm footing for the right,
   I come into being in age after age."^4

The idea of the avatar^5, an incarnation of Vishnu manifesting himself at times of declining religious belief represents a clear parallel with the coming of the future Buddha at the end of the Dharma. Mahāyāna doctrine as presented in the Lotus clearly points to a notion of the repeated appearance and disappearance of the Tathāgatā who's "emergence in the world is a thing difficult to encounter."^6 But through expedient devices the eternal Buddha appears at different times and places in order to teach the way to enlightenment.

O good men! The scriptural canon preached by the Thus Come One is all for the purpose of conveying living beings to deliverance. At times he speaks of his own body, at times of another's body; at times he shows his own body, at times another's body, at times his own affairs, at times another's affairs. Everything he says is Reality, not vanity. ... Yet even now, though in reality I am not to pass into extinction, yet I proclaim that I am about to accept extinction.
By resort to expedient devices the Thus Come One teaches and converts the beings.

It is references such as these that led scholars to surmise that although the metaphysical foundations of Buddhism developed independently from that of Hinduism, beliefs such as the coming of a future Buddha were in fact to be considered instances where popular Buddhist beliefs had conformed to contemporary Hindu beliefs.

Too little is known about the Vaiśṇava - Buddhist relationships during the period between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. to warrant a conclusive statement on who influenced whom. This period in India was characterized by a remarkable upsurge in industry with the development of new arts and crafts and the impact of foreign influences through increased trade; all of which brought about a fundamental restructuring of the old Brahmanic order. Buddhism was gaining immense popularity. Devotional and cultic activity centred on Buddha and Stūpa worship were flourishing. Concurrently the Brāhmaṇaś were refurbishing their religion by appropriating from the popular cults new ideas such as ahimsā.

During this same period, after perhaps millennia of development, the Epics and subsequently the Purāṇas, were being formulated. Most of the Purāṇas were set down towards the latter part of this period. (Probably between the third and the fourth centuries). It is significant that this period was also an intensely creative one for the composition of new Mahāyāna Sūtras, including those about Maitreya and Amitābha.

Eschatological themes and references to the various avatāraś are prominent in the Viṣṇu Purāṇa, the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, the Kalkī Purāṇa and the Mahābhārata. Worship of the avatār has been traced back to
various portions of later Vedic literature such as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and even the *Ṛg Veda*. Later, during the Guptas, avatār worship became a central feature of Bhāgavata devotionalism. However, the developed form of the doctrine as found in Vaisnavite incarnation beliefs is not found until about the time of the *Mahābhārata*. Then, it was as late as the eighth century when the standard lists of ten avatars including: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Dwarf, Rāma, Bhārgava, Rāma Dāśarathī, Rāma Haladhara, Buddha and Kalkin appeared.

Influenced by the theory that such references are dated well after the composition of the Pāli canon, scholars such as Jaiwal have stated that contrary to the theory that that the Buddhist doctrine of the succession of Buddhas was a result of Hindu influence, the concept of the lineage of avatārs "...seems...considerably influenced by the Buddhist concept of the former Buddhas..." and more specifically, that Kalkin—the future avatār, may have been inspired by Maitreya Buddha.

The question of how the Buddha, the leader of a heterodox school, was finally incorporated into the list of Hindu avatārs is an interesting one. As might be anticipated, orthodox writers such as Kumārila refused to recognize the Buddha as a legitimate incarnation. Since medieval Vaiṣṇavism and early Buddhism developed in the same environment it is possible that the devotees who worshipped at many different altars, confused the Buddha with Nārāyana. Thus, "...the identification of Buddha with Nārāyana was not the result of clever machination on the part of the Brāhmaṇas to absorb Buddhism" but the result of popular Buddhist devotionalism.

The entire question of Brahmanic influence on the concept of the
Maitreya Buddha is at the same time obvious and elusive. That both the avatar and future Buddha myths developed within the same milieu and mutually influenced one another is indisputable. One of the many questions that still remain unanswered, however, is whether the Maitreya Buddha could represent a fresh inspiration of avatar belief present in a Pre-Buddhist strata of Indian belief much as the advent of the Second Coming in Christianity echoes the image of the Old Testament Messiah.

2) Foreign Influences

As Buddhism spread and flourished in the North West frontier and throughout Central Asia en route to China, it came under strong influences from non-Indian sources. Numerous elements in Buddhist eschatology and devotionalism have been traced to Middle Eastern and Mediterranean sources. Har Dayal suggests that "Zoroastrianism, the religion of ancient Persia, may have contributed to the rise of the bodhisattva doctrine in India since its fravashis and amesaspentas show similarities and the bodhisattvas." In the case of Maitreya, Lamotte states that the messianic movement in India transformed two obscure pupils of Śākyamuni, Maitreya and Ajita, into the future Buddha. The theory that the Maitreya Buddha owes much to the Zoroastrian Messiah, Saoshyant, is stressed by numerous other Western scholars including E. J. Thomas, P. Pelliot, J. Pryzylski, L. de la Vallee Poussin, A. Foucher and E. A. Abegg and thus carries much weight. The parallels drawn between Maitreya and Saoshyant cover not only the generality of the promise of fulfillment but details in the imagery used. For example, at the time
of the final Resurrection in Zoroastrian prophecy the Greater Bundahishn records:

This too is said, that this earth will become flat, with neither hills nor dales. There will be neither mountains nor ridges nor pits, neither high ground nor low.  

In the same way according to the Maitreya-vyākarana the cakravartin will traverse the earth with ease as it will be smooth, flat, and free from all obstacles.

Such early influences in the north west frontier came about through a two hundred year annexation of the Indus Valley by Darius I in the sixth century B.C. The powerful influence of the Persian culture is evidenced by examples such as the Aśokan pillar at Sarnath and the Pataliputra palaces of the Mauryan court. However, Gautama himself is not regarded as having been influenced by Zoroastrian thought; although Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna thought is. Later influences on Buddhism in Central Asia were also predominantly Persian although there was a complete mélange of religious views and practices. By the second and third centuries, flourishing trade connections established between India and the Mediterranean brought Syrian Christians, Persian Zoroastrians and Indian Buddhists into the same Central Asian arena. The Zoroastrian offshoot, Mithraism, is seen as an important influence on the Maitreya cult because of a similarity between the future Buddha's epithet, "ajita" and that for Mithra, "invictus". Manichaeism exerted some influence from the third century onwards and eventually merged the figures of Mithras Invictus, Ajita Maitreya and Jesus Christ into "one composite savior figure".

In spite of the overwhelming weight of historical and doctrinal
evidence against Maitreya as a figure intrinsic to early Buddhism, Robinson still claims that the idea of a future Savior" was probably not due to Iranian influences"; adding somewhat teasingly that "Persia is not the only place where the sun shines"! Although I have thus far not seen a thorough treatment of Maitreya belief prior to non-Indian influences, this promises to be an interesting area for future research. A necessary step in discounting the importance of Persian influences is asking the way in which the Maitreya myth is distinct from the other messianic movements current in north west India and Central Asia? For instance, Maitreya is unlike the Zoroastrian or Christian saviors in that there is no indication of the role of judge or conqueror associated with him, nor does a period of catastrophic terror precede his coming. Maitreya cults were extremely popular throughout Afghanistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Gandhāra, Mathurā, Central Asia and as far west as Iran. Maitreya, together with Sākyamuni as a bodhisattva, is the bodhisattva most frequently found in the Greco-Buddhist sculpture at Gandhāra. And in Central Asia numerous paintings, statues and texts treating Maitreya themes have been found. That the Maitreya figure was able to gain such immense popularity in the face of numerous other competing savior figures may indicate that the future Buddha was distinguished much more clearly in the minds of the devotees than thought thus far. Above all, that Maitreya is "the earliest cult bodhisattva" described in the Pāli texts, and attained as much if not greater importance in the traditions of Sri Lanka and South-East Asia as in Central Asia and the Far East strongly argue against the theory that the concept of future savior in Buddhism is solely the result of foreign influences.
3) Internal Developments

When we ask the question of whether or not the idea of a future Buddha is intrinsic to the Buddhist teachings, two lines of argument emerge: 1) that the idea was taught by the Buddha himself; and 2) that the idea simply arose in conjunction with the doctrine of the Buddhas of the Past. There are strong advocates for the latter point of view. Matsumoto Bunzaburō tries to establish that belief in a future Buddha did not exist during the lifetime of the Buddha himself nor during the period immediately following his death. Abegg believes that the future Buddha came about as a part of the doctrine of the succession of Buddhas. Warder concurs and adds that the biographies of the Buddha in which his past lives were elaborated upon and in which Maitreya is often mentioned is representative only of popular Buddhism and not part of the doctrine preserved and handed down by the disciples.

Although there is no direct textual evidence to support the idea that there were Buddhas before Gautama, other traditions support the possibility. Jain belief in twenty-three predecessors to Mahāvīra predates the Buddhist belief. And the numerous Buddhas named in the later Pāli texts are often cited as sources for considering Maitreya to be the last of a series of Buddhas.

Probably the most interesting observation about the numerous Buddhas of the Past is way in which the numbers of Buddhas increased as time went on. Some consider the earliest series to consist of the three predecessors to Śākyamuni; making Maitreya, the fifth Buddha. Others see the oldest Pāli tradition as stressing a lineage of six Buddhas, with Śākyamuni as the seventh and Maitreya, the eight. Artistically, we know that belief
in the past Buddhas was well-established by the time of Aśoka because of the stūpas dedicated to them. And by the 1st century B.C. to the 1st century A.D. iconographic representations of the Seven Buddhas as the seven trees of enlightenment symbolize Maitreya as a champaka flower among the foliage. Such symbols are used on sites such as the Barhut railings and the Sāñcī Gateway. By the Kushan period, reliefs in Gandhāra and Mathurā show a row of seven Buddhas usually followed by another representing Maitreya.

As time went on the tradition gradually added even more Buddhas so that in the Buddhavamsa the standard Seven Buddhas from Vipassī to Gautama are augmented by eighteen other predecessors. Some of the later books of the Pāli Pitaka name twenty-seven with Śākyamuni as the twenty-fourth and three future Buddhas. References were also made to the fifty-three Buddhas of the Past, to the thousand Buddhas of the bhadra kalpa and to kotis (10 millions) of Buddhas. Finally, the numbers became such that the Buddhas were considered to be as infinite in number as the sands on the banks of the Ganges.

Various theories have been offered for the origin of these groups of Buddhas. Soper suggests that the original number of three predecessors to Gautama was later expanded to seven under the influence of Persian or Mesopotamian ideas after the conquest of Alexander the Great. While Har Dayal traces the Seven Buddhas to the emphasis in ancient belief on the existence of seven planets (sun, moon, mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn) and that these Seven Buddhas in fact correspond to the Seven Rṣis, from the Indian tradition who also represent celestial bodies. The kotis of Buddhas, aside from being attributed to the imaginative genius
of the Indian mind, are thought to have been influenced by the star-filled tropical sky where each star was imagined to be a separate world governed by its own Buddha.

Thus the origin of the Maitreya Buddha within Buddhism itself would seem to have sprung from a logical extension of the belief that since there were Buddhas in the past, there must also be a Buddha for the future.

For those who would submit that the notion of a future Buddha was taught by the historical Buddha himself, little concrete textual evidence can be presented; given the unknowable nature of the first five hundred years of oral tradition and the uncertain dating of the earliest texts. However, certain arguments have been presented. Soper considers the Maitreya myth unique and "unlike all other Buddhist projections across space and time...not merely a duplication or an equivalent of something else."\(^{42}\) He supports this view by pointing out that during the time that Sakyamuni was considered the seventh Buddha in the series, Maitreya was the only figure projected for the future. Not only was a symmetry in the succession ignored, such as having seven in the past balanced by seven more in the future, but the future Buddha and his future golden age offered a complete escape from the imperfection of the world during the time of Sakyamuni.\(^{43}\)

Besides the uniqueness of the future Buddha in contrast to the repetitive pattern of the past Buddhas another argument contributing to the theory that the concept of future Buddha constituted a part of the historical Buddha's teachings is stated by Péri who adduces that since the doctrine of the Buddhas of the Past was known at least during
or shortly after the time of Gautama, Maitreya must have been known from that time also. Both Péri and Nakamura also agree that the tradition is very early and offer archeological evidence showing that it was already well established by the time of Asoka. In the final analysis none of these theories are satisfying; mainly because the evidence is so scanty and unreliable. Thus questions such as the extent to which this basic concept of the future Buddha, if it was indeed a component of earliest Buddhist belief, was influenced by Mediterranean and Persian Messianism comprise some of the innumerable questions on eschatology that still await future research in both Indian and Central Asian Buddhist Studies.

IIb. Origins of Devotionalism: Paradise

Perhaps the single most compelling feature of Amita devotionalism is the description of the paradise of Sukhāvatī. Whereas the origin of the figure of Amitābha himself has been considered one of the most obscure problems the history of the Mahāyāna tradition, the visions of paradise in Brahmanism, Zoroastrian and in Hinayāna Buddhism all contributed towards the development of Amita's Pure Land. When the Mahāyāna ācāryas and Pure Land Masters brought the fruit of their philosophical and meditational endeavors to the concept of paradise the vision was again augmented. Thus paradise in mature Mahāyāna thought became an extremely complex one, embracing the extremes of a simple piety that longs for a "heaven" to go to after death to the ultimate experience of the enlightened state.
1) **Indian Influences**

It is generally accepted that the Buddhists simply adopted Brahmanic cosmology and made it its own. Concepts such as the cyclic revolution of the *yugas* or the ages of the world; the saucer-like world with Mount Meru in the center; the blissful heavens above and searing hells below; all recall the pre-Buddhist cosmos.\(^{47}\) Amita's paradise shows many striking similarities the paradises of the Brahmanic gods.

For example, the paradise of Varuṇa\(^{48}\) is situated in the West and is called Mukhya ("the chief") or Sukhā ("happy"). Brahma's abode is called Aparājita ("unconquerable") and his throne Amitaujas ("limitless splendor" or "limitless power") and its nature, Prāna ("limitless life").\(^{49}\) According to Hīnayāna texts, Indra resides in a celestial paradise consisting of a series of seven enclosures, one within the other.\(^{50}\)

In descriptive detail, it is the Northern continent of Uttarakuru (Abode of the Blest) which is most often cited as resembling Sukhāvatī. The earth is flat and covered with precious jewels and golden soil; there are no dangers, no discomfort; and the water has the eight good qualities. This archetypal model found in texts as early as the *Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa* and reiterated in the *Ramāyana* and the *Mahābhārata*\(^{51}\) became part of the common lore of both Hindus and Buddhists. Thus not only do Buddhist texts also describe Uttarakuru\(^{52}\) but the Buddhists paradises of Abhirati, Tuṣita, Trayāstrīṃśa all follow the same schema: a central deity, surrounded by other deities, dwelling in a palace with magical gardens, waters and birds.

However upon closer examination important differences between the Hindu and the Buddhist paradises emerge. "...Uttarakuru is a projection
in the space of that golden age at the beginning of time when man enjoyed happiness before gradual corruption." In contrast Sukhāvatī is described as a paradise created through the power of the bodhisattva Dharmākara's vow. In addition, with rebirth in the Western Paradise, the believer himself is qualitatively changed. The sensual pleasures, an important part of the Hindu paradises disappear so that in Amita's paradise, women are reborn as men and all earthy desires are banished. The physically blemished are born whole and in later Mahāyāna, even the icchantika could be reborn into Amita's Sukhāvatī. Most important of all, unlike the Hindu heavens, the Pure Land did not merely represent an enjoyable respite from the struggle of spiritual advancement but a place or state of the final rebirth before nirvāṇa. Therefore Sukhāvatī can be seen as a variation on the models found in Brahmanic and Hindu literature but with a new soteriological orientation that is distinctly Buddhist.

2) Foreign Influences

The foreign prototypes for the Western Paradise most often mentioned are Greek and Persian. The seven walls, a common element in Buddhist paradises is found in Hellenistic religion and is thought to have been introduced into India through Iran. Tucci adds that the basis for the scheme in India lay in the seven planets described in Hellenistic and Iranian astrological texts. Another common characteristic is their western orientation: the Persian "Var", the Greek "Islands of the Blessed" and the Gardens of Hesperīdae also lie in the West.

Eliot points out that the highest of the four paradises in the
Avesta is called the "land of endless light" and that in his opinion all the main features of Amitābha's paradise are Persian except for its creation through the bodhisattva's vow. He also denies the significance of any similarities between Sukhāvatī and any of the earlier Buddhist paradises such as Abhirati or Tuṣita, stating that it "appears suddenly in the history of Buddhism as something exotic grafted adroitly on the parent trunk but sometimes outgrowing it." 58

Pas suggests that this graft was perhaps not so sudden as preconceived. He suggests that the author(s) of these sutras may have purposely incorporated Hindu, Greek and Persian elements into the composition of the Pure Land Sutras in order to make the philosophical notions more palatable to lay believers. 59 The ability of the composers of these sutras to demonstrate the superiority of Amitābha's Pure Land to all of the other Pure Lands may have contributed to the dramatic success of this cult over the other Buddhas of the Ten Directions.

Thus whether by accident or by design, Amitabha's Pure Land represents an eclectic vision of a paradise of paradises.

3) Internal Developments

In the Pali Canon, the Mahā-sudassana suttanta stands as a clear prototype for the imagery found in the Pure Land Sutras. Although the description of Sukhāvatī is by far more elaborate and other-worldly, several expressions found in the Smaller-sukhāvatī sutra are identical to passages in the Mahā-sudassana suttanta. 60 The later Apadāna also contains a description of a buddha-khetta which is also sometimes identified as of the Paradise of Amita. 61
With the multiplication of Buddhas characterizing the new Mahāsaṅghika buddhology and emerging Mahāyāna ideals, the concept of buddha-kṣetra took on new importance. Each Buddha had his own Buddha-field "which he guides and "ripens" in spirituality. Each kṣetra was made up of many worlds and universes with their own heavens and hells and varieties of sentient beings. Akṣobhya ("Imperturbable") Buddha and his Eastern Pure Land, Abhirati is perhaps the oldest of these creations. Śākyamuni and Vimalakīrti enable the assembled believers to see this paradise in the Aṅgāśāhariśa-prajñāpāramitā and the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa respectively. Rebirth into Abhirati could be attained by moral acts or by hearing Akṣobhya's name. Amitābha's Pure Land, produced by not one, but twenty-four and later, by forty-eight vows and by concentrating on all the excellences of countless Buddha-lands soon gained popularity over Abhirati and the Pure Realms of all the other Buddhas.

Ketumati, the city of Maitreya's descent as described in the developed Maitreya sutras and the Western Paradise of Amitābha as described in the Sukhaśāvatī-vyūha sūtras seem to be variations on the same theme. In fact, the description of paradises in the texts became so "standardized in the course of time that nobody dared to alter its scheme..." Because of clear precedent for Sukhavati found in the buddha-kṣetra, Sukhāvatī is considered by some scholars to be a Buddhist creation.

From the second century A.D. onwards, with the formulation of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra thought, Amitābha's Pure Land began to be interpreted according to entirely new metaphysical premises. Although this new interpretation was not embraced by the laity, it is important to mention it here because it eventually provided much of the inspiration
for the Pure Land meditation masters and dogmatists in China. The revolutionary development in the conception of Buddhist salvation already brought about in Amitabha belief by neutralizing the effects of karma, was given new philosophical renderings based on the Madyamika concept of śūnyatā and the Yogacara doctrine of the Trikāya. The Pure Land of Amitābha as śūnyatā is described as "neither a mythological reality nor a metaphysical reality; nor ... a negative nothingness". For the Yogācārins, Amita in his Pure Land is perceived by the bodhisattvas in his sambhoga-kāya ("enjoyment-body") while to those in this world he appears in his nirmāna-kāya ("apparition-body"). Eventually for modern Chinese and Japanese Buddhists, the Pure Land becomes synonymous the state of enlightenment.

IIIa. Central Concepts: Latter Days

"The times are come
When flooded by the rising tide or ignorance
Buddha's religion seems to breathe its last."72

In the fourth century when Vasubandhu wrote the above verse he was expressing what was for him and for innumerable Buddhists before and after him, a statement of fact. Buddhist eschatology describes eras of the measured decline and disappearance of religion. Predictions concerning the disappearance of the Dharma are not only among the most ancient and oft-repeated themes in Buddhism, but have exercised a decided influence upon the religious history. Their influence has been such that Conze states: "the whole of later Buddhism proceeds under the shadow of this sense of decline."73 Even a brief look at the Buddhist eschatological tradition in India shows that it is conceptually and historically both universal
Despite the enormous significance of this "sense of decline" in Buddhism, Buddhist eschatological notions are often seen by modern scholars as nothing more than the embarrassing remnants of the Buddhist adoption of Brahmanic cosmology; as another version of the Kali Yuga and the Kalkin avātar. In a general sense, this is true. However, it is also true that the Buddhist world-view represents a distinct shift from the Vedic world-view. In contrast to the reversible Golden Age of the Vedas, the Buddhist coming of Maitreya offer a "terminus beyond which the ordinary imagination...had no power to penetrate, an end of change, a blissful stoppage of time." Karma, which had served as a "source of consolation to the pre-Buddhistic Indian consciousness..." becomes a mechanism to be transcended. History and quasi-history were much more important to Buddhism than to Brahmanism. Thus the Buddhist view of the cosmic cycle is an existential and historical one whereas the Brahmanic view is archaic and anthropological.

The existential and historical cosmic view in Buddhism gives rise to the possibility of the Dharma of the continent world as opposed to the immutable, eternal Dharma. It is the former Dharma, associated specifically with the teachings of Gautama that undergoes decline. A possible nucleus for the idea of this decline in Buddhism may be found in a Pali account relating the ordination of the Sangha's first nun, Pajāpati. Towards the end of this account, the Buddha states that if women had not been allowed into the Order, this holy religion would have endured for a thousand years. But now that they have been admitted, the period of the True Law would only last for five hundred years.

While this source is often cited as the basis of the conviction that the True Law would perish after five hundred years, the full life-
span of the Dharma was not yet exhausted. Pāli sources as well as many of the texts composed between the second century B.C. and the first century A.D. prophesy the decline of the Law in three stages. Each stage was characterized by a different kind of Dharma: 1) the True Dharma (Saddharma); 2) the Counterfeit Dharma (Pratirūpaka dharma), and 3) the Degenerate Dharma (Paścimadharma). During the first stage, the religion bears fruit and enlightenment is possible. During the second stage, the religion lacks substance and enlightenment is rare. During the final stage, the religion decays and enlightenment is impossible.

Even though three stage-eschatology was the most popular theory and the one which the Chinese later adopted, five and ten stage eschatologies are found in other sources. Since its adoption by Buddhaghosa in the fifth century, five stage eschatology has been particularly associated with the Theravāda tradition. The Anāgayatavamsa describes the process as the "Five Disappearances" that are to take place following the Buddha's death: 1) the disappearance of Attainment (Nirvāṇa); 2) the disappearance of method (precepts); 3) the disappearance of learning (tripitaka); 4) the disappearance of symbols (robes and bowls); and 5) the disappearance of relics. A Mahāyāna sutra, Mahāsamnipata sūtra also describes the five stages as those in which the monks will excell in 1) enlightenment, 2) meditation, 3) erudition, 4) founding monastaries and 5) disputing about the Dharma as it disappears.

Diverse chronologies were affixed to the various stages of decline; usually utilizing multiples of five hundred years. The duration of the true Dharma was usually set at five hundred years or a millenium. In some Mahāyāna sutras, the words "...during the last five hundred year age,
when the True Dharma is in ruins" became a stereotype phrase. Predictions concerning the onset of the Latter Days climb from 1,000 years to 1,500, 2,000, 3,000, 5,000 and 12,000 years in the future.\textsuperscript{89} Other sources cite dates as far as 30,000 and 5,670,000,000 years hence.\textsuperscript{90} The general rule is: the later the account, the longer the life of the Dharma. An early instance of how the duration of the Dharma was progressively lengthened comes from the greatest period of messianic expectation in India.

The period between the arrival Alexander the Great and the conquest of King Kanishka (ca. III B.C. - 1 A.D.) was marked by incessant invasions from the north. Consequently, the monks in North West India were reduced to either staying and rebuilding ruined stupas and monasteries during the peaceful intervals or retreating to calmer regions in the South. The decline of religion is frequently attributed to an event recounted in the \textit{Kosambakavastu}\textsuperscript{91} of the Vinaya.

In Kauśāmbi, where the lavishly supported monks had already scandalized the retreating monks from the North by their moral laxity, a horrifying event takes place. At an \textit{uposatha} day assemblage of all the monks in the city, Sudhara, the only \textit{arhat} left in India is killed by a disciple of the Tripitaka Master. The \textit{arhat}'s death is avenged by the death of the Tripitaka master, thus depriving both those who strove in the path of doctrine (\textit{bahusṛutas}) and those who strove in the path of the precepts (\textit{sīlas}) of their leaders. The ensuing disintegration of the communities is said to have led to the extinction of the Law.

The reign of King Kanishka and the stability of the Kushana Dynasty introduced a new period of history and thus a fresh interpretation of the Buddhist eschaton. Since the Dharma had survived the turmoil of the previous
age it seemed natural to assume that it would continue for at least another five hundred years. New sūtras such as the Maitreya sutra of the Ekottarāgama (one of the six Chinese Maitreya sūtras) were composed. The Sarvāstivādins emerged as a dominant force at this time and those who were active in the propagation of Buddhism in China were particularly interested in the development of messianic ideas. After the fifth century, Indian Buddhism began its slow decline and by the thirteenth century had disappeared from the country of its birth.

Meanwhile, Buddhism was being successfully propagated to other countries in southeast Asia and the Far East. The end was delayed and new interpretations of the eschaton were necessary. The story of the Buddha's Bowl, illustrating subsequent attitudes to the end of the Law, likens the Buddha's Dharma to his begging bowl. After the Buddha's bowl was broken into pieces by the evil King Mihirakula, it flew towards the North. There, the people reverently showered it with offerings and because of the efficacy of the Buddha it became whole again. The Buddha's bowl "once more became by itself such as it had been previously, without any difference."\(^\text{92}\)

The bowl then continued its journey to the countries of Gāndhara, Persia, China, Ceylon, and returned to Madhyadeśa. Finally, it ascended to Tuṣita Heaven and descended to Sugara's palace at the bottom of the ocean and there awaits the advent of Maitreya.\(^\text{93}\)

IIb. Central Concepts: Devotion

It is a common practice for historians to introduce the endlessly variagated landscape of the Buddhist teachings by delineating two broad
parallel lines of development: devotionalism and speculative philosophy. The devotional approach, dominated by the intensity of human longing, is epitomized by the attainment of salvation though belief in a pure life, the accumulation of merit through worship and in the efficacy of the Buddha's name, his vow and his Pure Land. In contrast, the philosophical approach is epitomized by the attainment of nirvana through a celibate life, the mastery of vast epistemological and ontological systems and the cultivation of insight through meditation. It is both assumed and stated that the devotional approach is inferior to the philosophical. Devotion is the consequence of the layman's ignorance whereas philosophy is the product of the monk's wisdom. Upon closer examination however, such broad distinctions become inadequate and the parallel lines of development are more correctly drawn as lines of dynamic interaction. That devotional practices were favoured by the laity and that the infiltration of these practices into the Sangha required legitimation cannot be denied. Nevertheless, devotional elements in ritual worship (pujā) of the Buddha, Stūpa, and Dhātu is found early in the life of the Saṅgha. Doubtless, even without any particular pressure from lay devotees, monks soon discovered the efficacy of the devotional principle in the course of their own meditational and spiritual exercises. Thus the devotional and the philosophical were closely interrelated from the early days of Buddhism and there was probably not as much contradiction in the minds of the early Buddhists themselves as we, from a twentieth century perspective may wish to project upon them.

The acknowledged superiority of the philosophical approach has also led numerous scholars to ascribe the presence of devotionalism in Buddhism to the influence of other Indian religions, Bhakti, a complex
term connoting a "passionate, self-oblivious devotion to a deity who in turn bestows his grace (prasāda or anugraha), on the devotee, is incompatible with the reasoned calm of philosophical Buddhism. Thus scholars have variously pointed to the influence of pre-Brahmanic authochthonous religious of Indra and Varuṇa to the metaphysical speculations of the Upanishads and the influence of Bhāgavata and Krishna worship. To say that bhakti, an intensely personal and universal way of being religious comes from an authochthonous source is meaningless because the expression of profound and loving feelings are a basic component of being human; whether mysteriously primitive or not. Again, too little is known about the relationships between the early bhakti cults that evolved from the sixth century B.C. onwards (including the Pāñcavātra, the Bhāgavata, the Pāṣupata and later, the various Saivite and Vaiṣṇavite cults) to assign a definite flow of influence in any direction. In fact, evidence seems to indicate that bhakti in Buddhism and in the Brahmanic-Hindu traditions arose concurrently. By 1 B.C. - 1 A.D. both traditions were similarly rejecting what had become formulae for salvation, whether they were the ineffective rituals of Vedic sacrifices or the increasingly rigid prescriptions of the old wisdom school. Eliot observes that this "craving for a gentler and more emotional worship" occurred in many countries at that time.

In a moment of speculative musing permitted only to the proven scholastic, Conze asks:

"How can we account for the observation that Buddhism, just at the time when Christianity itself arose, underwent a radical reform of its basic tenets which made it much more similar to Christianity than it had been before?"

Further research on the cross-cultural implications of the surge of
devotionalism that took place at the beginning of the Common Era would be a valuable contribution to the study of devotionalism in the History of Religions.

A more radical approach, taken by Har Dayal, is that the Buddhist innovations in bhakti influenced the Hindu bhaktas. The earliest sources for bhakti in Buddhism revolve around terms śraddhā (faith) and bhatti (devotion). Broadly speaking, śraddhā is defined as the broader category with bhakti as a specific concept within it. Saddhā is an older (Vedic) and more developed term, implying a "firm faith and conviction that the way of the Dhamma (the Magga) must lead one assuredly to the goal of Nibbāna." In the Majjima-nikāya saddhā was clearly defined as being of two kinds: ākāravati saddhā or "rational faith" and amūlika saddhā or "baseless faith". Practically speaking, "rational faith" is attained by passing through the stages of first, accepting the teachings on a provisional level, then exerting the effort to follow them, and finally, directly experiencing the truth for oneself. Saddhā is likened to a seed, a chariot of salvation, the best treasure of man and that which opens the gateway of immortality. Its counterfeit version, "baseless faith", was considered a pitiful state; mere unexamined and irrational acceptance. This discrimination between the two types of śraddhā may be the origin of the traditional denigration of bhakti in Buddhism.

Despite the fact that the term bhatti appears rarely in the Buddhist scriptures and fails to carry the full meaning of the word bhakti in the Mahāyāna sense, it does appear early in Pāli works. The early bhakti poetry in the Apadāna, the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā consists of joyous passages lauding (vandana), praying (stuti) and worshipping
(puja) the Buddha. They reveal the emotional rather than the intellectual life of these individuals who have embarked successfully on the path and are grateful to the one without whom the path, would not have been taught. Thus bhatti, is the expression of faith in one of the Three Treasures — the Buddha.

The rituals of devotionalism began during the lifetime of the Buddha: bearing offerings, lay believers eagerly sought him out as a granter of boons and a remover of afflictions; monks, after receiving their instructions, circumambulated his person before taking their leave; and eventually Ananda, his closest disciple became the symbol of personal devotion towards the Buddha. The process of the deification of the Buddha began soon after the Buddha's death and devotion to him was demonstrated successively by reverence to his relics, symbols, stupas and finally by the first century, to his image, the objects which at first simply served as reminders of his life became representations of his divinity.

The bhakti movement in Buddhism which had been gathering strength since the fifth century B.C. took an unprecedented leap in the post-Aśokan period. Bhakti cults organized around the worship of Indian Buddhas and bodhisattvas emerged. Concurrently, the search for new answers that had occupied the Sangha as early as the third century was resulting in schisms and the emergence of influential new sects; the most important for devotionalism were the Mahāsaṅghikas who explored new interpretations on the eternal and the historical aspects of the Buddha and emphasized the needs of the laity. These forces, impelling rapid and fundamental changes were greatly stimulated by a new urgency born of eschatological ideas.
From the third century B.C. to the first century A.D. Buddhism was subject to the thoroughgoing social, economical and political upheavals afflicting north west India. Specifically, the Buddhists feared that the true religion was being challenged and absorbed by the Brāhmans, Bhāgavatas, Saivites and innumerable other groups; suffered from the loss of royal patronage with the fall of the Mauryans, and worst of all, brooded over the stagnation that was settling into the monastic order. Furthermore, they interpreted the dislocations of the age in eschatological terms. Arhatship was no longer viable and bodhisattvahood became the goal. In the degenerate age the doctrines of compassion and transfer of merit replaced the rigors of self-effort and karmic retribution. Gautama was gone but the Buddha was eternal -- and there were infinite numbers of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and their Pure Lands to worship. By the first century A.D. the organic fusion between the new doctrines of the bodhisattva path and the spontaneous ecstasy of the bhakti movement had taken place, producing the "Buddhism of Devotion".116
Footnotes to Chapter II


3. This idea is developed in Mircea Eliade's Myth of the Eternal Return (New York: Pantheon Books, 1954).


5. For more details on this concept see J. Gonda, Aspects of Early Viṣṇuism (Utrecht: 1954), pp.124-163.


7. Ibid., p.239.


9. For the various lists of avatārs which vary in name and number see: Majumdar, The History and Culture of the Indian People, 3:415-416.


11. Majumdar, History and Culture of the Indian People, 3:216.


13. Ibid., 132.


15. Jaiswal cities sections from the Lalitavistara where the Buddha is called nārāyapa-sthāmavān and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa where he is described as an incarnation of Nārāyana. Viṣṇavism, p.131.

16. For further references on this subject see Har Dayal: The Bodhisattva Doctrine, p.39.


20. Research on this area has been relatively slow largely because the materials are scattered over diverse languages and cultures (Sanskrit, Prakrit, Greek, Chinese, Persian etc.).


24. Ibid., p.218.


35. Ibid., p.199.


38. The *Bhadralkapi-sūtra* lists 1,000 Buddhas who will appear in this "good cycle".

39. These enormous numbers are found only in Sanskrit works such as the *Lalitavistara*, *Lotus*, *Mahāvastu* etc.

40. For specific references see: Har Dayal, *Bodhisattva Doctrine*, p.25.

41. Ibid., p.24.


43. Observing the Theravāda Attitude to Maitreya, E. Sarkisyantz writes: "Not only renovation but also fulfillment of Buddhism was expected of Metteya: universal compassion is to become through him a cosmic reality. Universal love (Metta) is to be fulfilled throughout the world through Maitreya, as his name indicates". *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1965), p.44.


45. Both Nakamura and Peri use the same example: the *Nigali-Sagar* Edict where Asoka is said to have enlarged the stupa of Konakamana twice. Nakamura, *Ways*, p. 609 n.8; Peri, "Review," p.451.

46. Pas applied these same general categories of Hindu, foreign and internal Buddhist developments and so I will not repeat the exercise; instead I will explore the idea of "paradise" as an inspiration to devotionalism. However, a short description of theories on the various types of influences on Amitābha may be appropriate here. Hindu antecedents are general and unilluminating: vague references are to Brahma or Indra as possible prototypes for Amitābha. Persian influences, on the other hand are convincing; particularly the similarities between Amitabha and a Zoroastrian deity whose name, when invoked is said to lead to a paradise of light. Amitāyus, has a counterpart in the Iranian Zurvan Akanarak (Unlimited Time) and the trinity of Amitāyus, Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta has many Persian parallels. Because of the strong evidence for Persian influence and because Amitābha is unknown in the Pāli texts Japanese scholars have attempted to establish a non-foreign origin for the Buddha by regarding him as the natural extension of Śākyamuni. The *trikāya* theory was then applied historically to show how Amitābha developed internally within the Mahāyāna fold. For further details see Hōbōgirin, 1929, s.v. "Amida" by P. Demiéville.

47. For more details on the subject of Buddhist cosmology see: Lamotte, *Histoire*, pp.34-36; Louis de la Vallée Poussin, trans., *l'Abhidharmakōśa*

48. M. Müller, "Larger Sukhāvatī-vyuha", p.xii. According to Conze these paradises made an "exceptionally strong impact on the imagination of the Buddhists, in accordance with a so far unexplained propensity of the archaic mythological imagination which in many cultures has placed the 'Islands of the Blessed' into the West." Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, p.205.


51. Ibid., pp.196-197.

52. The Vimāna-vatthu and Petavatthu of the Pāli Canon and the Abhidharmakośa of Vasubandhu describe the construction of the Universe, its heavens, hells and classes of beings.


54. Tucci cites a counterpart in the Harivamsa where seven mountains must be crossed, "after which a marvellous light is seen which is nothing but Kṛṣṇa himself". "Avalokiteśvara", p.204 n.1.


57. Nakamura also mentions other parallels such as the Egyptian "Fields of Reed" and the Paradise of Osiris. Ways, p.385.


60. R. Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha, 3:198.


62. For the backgrounds of buddhakṣetra see Etienne Lamotte: L'Enseignement de Vimalakirti (Louvain:

63. Har Dayal, Bodhisattva Doctrine, p.25.

64. Conze, Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, p.147.
65. Aksobya is also mentioned in the Lotus, the Suvarnaprabhāsa, the Karuṇāpundarīka, the Mahāparinirvāṇa and the Sukhāvati-vyuha sūtras but underwent the greatest development in the Tantric systems as one of the five Jinas.


70. To continue with the quotation: "Nāgārjuna defines the Pure Land as the realm of purity or purification (vyāvadāna), meaning that the Pure Land is precisely śūnyatā, represented in terms of the realm which stores inexhaustible merits or possibilities of operating, instructing and purifying people...". Yamaguchi Susumu, "The Concept of the Pure Land in Nāgārjuna's Doctrine", Eastern Buddhist (September 1966):46.


72. Abhidharmakośa, Chapter 9, quoted in Conze, Thirty Years, p.79. For more details on the end of the kalpa see de la Valée Poussin, L'Abhidharmakośa, 2:207-9; Lamotte, L'Enseignement de Vimalakīrti, p.296-7 n.37.


74. Conze, Buddhism: Its Essence and Development, p.115

75. For a discussion of this matter see IIb., 1 above.

76. Soper, Literary Evidences, p.212.

77. Eliade, Myth of the Eternal Return, p.117.


79. Eliade, Myth of the Eternal Return, p.117.

81. Lamotte also gives other canonical and post-canonical sources where this story is recounted in his *Histoire*, p.211.

82. These texts are listed in Lamotte, *Histoire*, pp.211-217.

83. Three stage eschatology is common in Iranian and Mediterranean eschatologies. See Przyluski, *Legend of Emperor Aśoka*, pp.184-5; Eliade; *Myth of the Eternal Return*, pp. 118-130.

84. This stage has been variously translated as "the decline", "the end", "the decay", "the latter days", and "the latter period of the law".

85. Some of these sources may be found in Lamotte, *Histoire*, p. 212-217.


93. This story, told by Fa-hsien in his travel accounts seems to have been prevalent in contemporary Ceylon.


95. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, p.182.


97. For a brief etymological and historical account of bhakti in India see Jaiswal, *Vaishnavism*, pp.110-112.

99. In the Rg Veda Indra is called "deliver and advocate; friend, brother, 
... father and mother in one". Eliot, Hinduism and Buddhism, 2: 180-82. Compare with The Bhagavad Gītā (XI.44): therefore, bowing 
and prostrating my body, 
I beg grace of Thee, the Lord to be revered; 
As a father to his son, as a friend to his friend, 
As a lover to his beloved, be pleased to show mercy, 
O God! 


101. M. Winternitz and E. Senart cited as sources for this theory in 
Dayal, Bodhisattva Doctrine, p.31.


104. Conze, Thirty Years, pp. 48-50.


106. Śrāddha is defined as the broader category with bhakti as a specific 
concept within it by Śāndilyas in the Bhakti sūtra (II,24); cited 
by Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries, p.181.

107. H. Zimmer, Philosophies of India, ed. Joseph Campbell (New York, 

108. Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries, p.181.

109. For background on saddhā see K.N. Upadhyaya: Early Buddhism and the 

110. Ibid., p.257.

111. Sutta-nipāta. These images are taken from the Sutta-nipāta: 
I-172; V-6; I-214; I-138, respectively quoted in G. C. Pande, 
Studies in the Origin of Buddhism (Allahabad: University of Allahabad, 
1957) p.522 n.

112. Har Dayal claims that that the term bhakti appears for the first 
time in Indian religious literature in a Pāli work, Thera-gāthā 
in the Khuddaka-nikāya, see Rhys Davids trans., Psalms of the 

113. Dutt, Buddhist Monks and Monasteries, p.288.

114. For Ananda's devotion to the Buddha see T. W. Rhys Davids trans.,  
"Mahā-parinibbāna Suttanta," Buddhist Suttas, SBE vol. 11 (Oxford: 
115. For more details on the development of stūpa worship see Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries*, pp.182-188.

Chapter III

Maitreya and Amita in Early Traditional China

I  Introduction

The tumultuous years between the third and sixth centuries, designated by historians as the Age of Disunion (220-589) were characterized by incessant invasion and civil strife, famine and pestilence. Like the period of invasions that followed the fall of the Mauryan Empire in India, the Age of Disunion was also permeated with eschatological and devotional fervor. The end of the Han Dynasty had, in the words of A.F. Wright, "left a society shaken and riven to its foundations -- a promising seed-bed for the implantation of alien ideas and institutions." The same conditions which after almost three centuries of imperceptible progress, enabled Buddhist missionaries to make deep inroads into Chinese society, provided the ground for the growth of eschatological and devotional movements in Confusianism, Taoism and Buddhism. The early development of these movements in Chinese Buddhism can be illustrated by two examples in which Maitreya and Amita were regarded as objects of personal devotion: the first, involving two illustrious monks, and the second, large numbers of people from all strata of society.

Since the introduction of Buddhism in the first century Śākyamuni, the historical Buddha, held a firm position as the center of worship. Worshipping other figures including Mañjuśrī, Kṣitigarbha, Avalokiteśvara, Amita or Maitreya began as optional practices within any group, school or
sect. By the fourth century a flood of sutras, icons and ceremonial practices were being imported into China. Missionaries bearing large numbers of Mahāyāna texts and extolling the vows and Pure Lands of the celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas arrived. Sutras dealing with Maitreya and Amita were among the first to be translated and the missionaries attracted numerous lay adherents for their deities. Tao-an (312-385) and Hui-yüan (344-416) are considered the first major ecclesiastical figures to ritualize their devotion to Maitreya and Amita in such a manner that they attained independent status. In his temple retreat in Hsiang-yang, Tao-an and his disciples formally expressed their desire to be reborn in Tuṣita Heaven. Thirty years hence, his most brilliant disciple, Hui-yüan, together with his followers at Lu Shan, vowed to attain rebirth in the Western Paradise of Amita. Thus the first example is biographical; discussing the devotionalism of two highly cultivated members of the early Chinese saṅgha.

The second example is drawn from archeological sources. The mountains near Loyang house one of the world’s most splendid legacies of Chinese art. From the latter part of the Wei Dynasty to the Sui and T’ang, Chinese and Foreign noblemen, monks and laymen, in a fever of creativity and zeal fashioned the Lung-men Caves containing thousands of Buddhist carvings. A study made by Tsukamoto Zenryū clearly illustrates how the immensely popular Maitreya worship in the Northern Wei (386-531) was gradually supplanted by Amita worship by the T’ang (618-907).

These examples not only illustrate the popularity of Maitreya and Amita as devotional figures but also demonstrate the widespread
awareness of the doctrine of the Dharma's end. Moreover, both examples illustrate a shift in popularity from Maitreya, the future Buddha to Amita the Eternal Buddha. In a larger sense this shift stems from the domination of the Sarvástivāda school to the Mahāyāna schools between the third and the fourth centuries; from the Abhidharma world-view to the Mahāyāna world-view.

By the late sixth and early seventh centuries the seeds that had been germinating throughout the Period of Disunion were sending out new shoots. The emergence of the uniquely Chinese T'ang schools, Tien-tai, Fa-hsiang, Ch'an and Pure Land, marks a new stage in the development of Buddhism.

II Tao-an and Hui-yüan

In his Lives of Eminent Monks, Hui-Chiao writes:

Frequently An and his disciples Fa-yu and others pronounced vows in front of [the image of] Maitreya expressing their vow (pranidhaha) to be born in Tusita.

From Hui-yüan's biography in the same source:

"The master of the Doctrine Shih Hui-yüan, (urged by) the depth of his noble emotions and the excellence of his pure feelings, has invited (us), likeminded gentlemen, (desirous of) appeasing the mind and inspired by a noble faith, to the member of 123 men, to assemble before the statue of Amitābha at the Vihara of the Prajñā terrace on the northern slope of the Lu-shan, and he has led us reverently to perform the sacrifice of incense and flowers and to make a vow in order to stimulate all those who take part in this meeting."

According to the sources Tao-an gathered eight disciples for the ceremony and Hui-yüan, one hundred and twenty three. It is thought that Tao-an's vow involved a form of meditation on Maitreya. And it is clearly recorded
that while the vow made by Hui-yüan and his followers was accompanied by incense and flowers, their practice of *anusmrti* enabled the believers to see the Buddha "face to face". 9 Over the centuries both events, in marking the inception of Maitreya and Amita devotionalism in China, have acquired a symbolic status. Because they occurred within about thirty years of one another, one performed by a Dharma master and the other by his best known disciple, it is not surprising that Zürcher would comment on the "unmistakable" connection between them. 10 Before analyzing the philosophical implications which these ceremonies may have had for Tao-an and Hui-yüan, let us first turn to their lives and their accomplishments.

There is a fascinating counterpoint in the lives of these two great monks. Tao-an, (312-385) indomitable adventurer both in his outer and inner life, continued to teach during the wars of the Period of Disunion, moving whenever invading swords threatened the lives of his students. His relatively tranquil fifteen years in the southern retreat of Hsiang-yang were followed by an appointment as the head of the Translation Bureau in Chang-an where he spent the last six years of his life. After taking leave of his master before the invading armies of Fu-Pei in 378, Hui-yüan (344-416) built a mountain monastery called Tung-lin ssü on Lu Shan where he remained for the rest of his life. There, his fame spread, his community grew, and he commanded the respect of Kings.

From the time of his discipleship under Fo-t' u- teng to his years in Chang-an, Tao-an painstakingly studied and synthesized the systems of Yoga and dhyāna, and the philosophies of Prajñāpāramitā, Sarvāstivāda, and the Āgamas. He is justly famed for the profundity of learning which enabled him to perceive
that the methods of his contemporaries failed to adequately convey the Buddhist message; thus bringing about a fundamental change of direction in the Buddhist scholarship of his time. Hui-yüan, the master of the subtle intricacies of hsüan hsüeh, not only brought the arts of Gentry Buddhism to its apex but explored new ways of meeting the needs of the laity.

Because both Tao-an and Hui-yüan's devotional activities seem to fall in the latter part of their lives -- for Tao-an, in his late sixties and for Hui-yüan, his late fifties -- some are tempted to dismiss this aspect of their practice as the piety of advancing years. However, their biographies show that they were then in many ways, at the height of their intellectual and spiritual powers. Tao-an's Maitreya worship spans the last fifteen years of his life while Hui-yüan's, continued for the last fourteen years. Even at the end of their lives, they are recorded as eagerly striving to master the new Buddhist texts being translated into Chinese: Tao-an, tremendously moved by the contents of the Agamas lamented not encountering them earlier; and Hui-yüan, always at the forefront of the religious controversies of his generation keenly questioned Kumārajīva on the subject of Mādhyamika philosophy.  

The similarity between the two events described at the beginning of this section can be explained not only by the profound personal relationship between Tao-an and Hui-yüan but also by the overlapping of their philosophical interests. In both cases, the emphasis on visualization and the use of icons accounts for the importance they placed on the practice of dhyāna. Tao-an's life-long interest in dhyāna can be traced from his first exposure to the early dhyāna texts translated by An-shih-kao.
to his intense study of Prajñāpāramitā literature at Hsiang-yang. Hui-yuan's training includes his contact with the famous dhyāna master Buddhhabhadra and from his own studies of Prajñāpāramitā texts which comprised an important part of his Lu Shan activities.

Very little is known about Tao-an's method of dhyāna in relation to Maitreya except that it probably included some method of visualization. Evidence does, however, exist showing that Fu Chien sent him several icons including one of Maitreya and that Tao-an used them very effectively in his meetings and lectures. Another clue in the way Maitreyan devotionalism and Prajñā studies were brought together in Tao-an is in his love for the Fang-kuang ching (Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā- prajñāpāramitā) which he delivered twice yearly until his death. In this sutra Maitreya bodhisattva an expert in the Prajñāpāramitā is assured of his future Buddhahood by Sākyamuni.

Much more is known about dhyāna as it was practiced at Lu Shan. The practice seems to have utilized icons and the visualization of Amita as set down in the Pan-chou-san-mei-hai ching where a state of Samādhi was perscribed in which all the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters stand before the believer. Hui-yūn lauded the practice of anusmṛti or "remembrance" of Amita because it gave excellent results and was easy to embark upon. One description of this "easy" way instructs the aspirant to first maintain a pure mind, devoid of any material considerations, for three months and then to spend a day and a night or a whole week in solitude, concentrating solely on Amita. The Buddha would then appear and preach the Dharma before the believer. This description may be compared with the practice of one of Tao-an's disciples T'an-chieh, who, continuing
his devotional practices after his Master's death, is said to have repeated ceaselessly the name of Maitreya and bowed before his image five hundred times a day.\textsuperscript{21}

One finds a certain literalness of belief in the practice of both Tao-an and Hui-yüan. Hui-yüan's tendency to concretize the abstract is well known from his stress on visual representations of the Buddha and his difficulty in understanding the concepts of \textit{dharmakāya} and \textit{sambhogakāya} as put forth by Kumārajīva on the basis of the \textit{Ta-chih-tu-lun}.\textsuperscript{22} This literalness can be best seen in accounts relating experiences which the monks or their followers had in attempting to approach Maitreya or Amita through their meditations.

For Tao-an, Maitreya was first of all the Patron of Exegetes as set down in the Sarvāstivāda tradition.\textsuperscript{23} Once, when beset by doubts about the worth of his work, he is said to have dreamt of "'an Indian man of Tao who had white hair and long eyebrows'"\textsuperscript{24} later identified as Pindola, an arhat assigned to protect the Dharma until the coming of Maitreya.\textsuperscript{25} Pindola not only assured Tao-an of the excellence of his work but promised him assistance in spreading the Buddhist doctrine. His disciple Seng-jui records that whenever his teacher encountered difficulties in the exegesis of Buddhist texts: "Il s'interrompait et, dans ses longues crises de découragement, il n'avait qu'une idée, c'est de chercher la solution auprès de Maitreya".\textsuperscript{26} In his fear that his physical and temporal distance from Sākyamuni was preventing him from truly grasping the Doctrine, Tao-an turned to tradition, originating probably in Kashmir, in which Maitreya was invoked as the divine inspirer.
of Buddhist Scholars. Thus for Tao-an, Maitreya represented an intensely personal and relatively accessible source of divine inspiration and Tusita, a place in the heavens where he might continue his studies under the tutelage of his beloved Patron.

The specialized intent behind Tao-an's Maitreya worship contrasts sharply with that of Hui-yüan, whose main purpose, whether for his lay believers or for himself, was even more closely integrated with his soteriological goal. Especially for his lay believers, the path towards this spiritual goal was not the austere and lonely way of the arhat but the rich and all-inclusive one of the bodhisattva. The vow which the community made, for instance, was not prāṇidhāna in the usual sense of the world. Rather than marking a commitment to attain a certain stage of spiritual development, this goal seems to seal an agreement between the members of the group to assist one another until all, from the most talented to the least, have gained access to Amita's paradise. The ease with which one is able to embark upon the practice of buddhanusmṛti, the awesome prospect of meeting Amita "face to face" and the happy anticipation of enjoying the splendors of his paradisical Sukhāvati provided concretized interpretations of the joy of spiritual advancement. According to an early version of the Sukhāvati-vyuha the earnest devotee will have a vision of Amita before his death, presaging his rebirth into Sukhāvati. The following example, variations upon which have persisted to the present day, will illustrate how Amita's salvation at death was perceived by Hui-yüan's followers.

When his disciple Seng-chi was afflicted by a dire illness, Hui-yüan instructed him to meditate on Amita and Sukhāvati and requested the other
monks to recite the Sukhāvati-vyūha. During the course of the vigil, Seng-chi "saw himself proceed through the void...beheld the Buddha Amitābha, who took him up and placed him...on the palm of his hand... and he went through the (whole) universe in all directions. After he had awakened and told his dream to his companions, he found his body free from disease. "The following night he suddenly sought his sandals and stood up, his eyes (looking into) the void in anticipation, as if he were seeing something. A moment later he lay down again, with a joyful expression on his face. Then he said to those who stood at the side (of his bed): 'I must go', and, when he had turned over on his right side, his life-breath and his words become simultaneously extinguished." 30

In this philosophical writings, Hui-yüan describes dhyāna in its complementary relationship to prajñā (普照) and samādhi (三昧) as "'dwelling (motionless) like a corpse and sitting down in forgetfulness, and darkening (昏) one's feelings in the Highest Summit (of Truth)'". 31 In Zürcher's words, samādhi thus becomes " -- a means temporarily to experience the final emancipation, the stage in which 'the spirit is not burdened by life'...". In attempting to resolve what may seem a contradiction between Hui-yüan's devotionalism and his writings, Liebenthal states that for Hui-yüan the Highest Summit (體極) or Quiet Center 32 and Amita are but two sides of the same coin; the latter representing the religious expression of the former. Hui-yüan's religious devotion to Amita is seen as a practice suitable for the unlettered laity and his philosophical writings, for the monastics or the educated. 33 Zürcher maintains that the dhyāna method introduced by Buddhabhadra was only
for the monk and never for the layman. Thus in Hui-yuán we may perceive the beginnings of a dichotomy in the means to salvation that was later elaborated upon by the Pure Land patriarchs.

In the final analysis, Tao-an and Hui-yuán, Budhho-Taoists, master and disciple, are less similar than one would initially expect. Both men, seeking the enlightenment described in the Buddhist texts, practiced a form of dhyāna including the worship of Buddhas other than Śākyamuni during a time when Chinese Buddhist worship was still firmly centered on the historical Buddha. Tao-an appealed to Maitreya for guidance in his exegetical studies and Hui-yuán meditated on a form of Amita as the religious counterpart of his philosophical conceptions. Curiously, Tao-an's own writings say nothing of his devotion to Maitreya; records of this aspect of his life all being preserved by his biographers or his disciples. Hui-yuán, in contrast, wrote extensively on the worship of Amita and at the end of his life, was struggling to understand his meditation in the context of Mādhyamika theory of the Two Bodies. It seems likely that Tao-an, convinced of the efficacy of the Maitreya tradition, saw no philosophical problems to comment upon in his devotional practice. But Hui-yuán's devotionalism, bearing all the signs of striving to develop a new system which would incorporate the new Indian wisdom with the old Chinese conceptions, as well as accomodating the religious needs of his laity, required the clarifying function of written expression.

In sum: the shift from Maitreya to Amita worship cannot be explained by merely speculating on a supposed transference of devotion from one deity to another in a single figure, Hui-yuán -- but can be understood
by the change of direction within the Saṅgha itself from a Hīnayāna to a Mahāyāna perspective. However, Tao-an's Maitreya worship and Hui-yüan's Amita worship can be seen as adumbrating religious movements to come. The value of singling out and examining the premises behind the two ceremonies noted at the beginning of this section lies in the symbolic influence they exerted on the subsequent history of Chinese Buddhism. Tao-an's ceremony stands as the first formal ritualization of Maitreya worship by a celebrated cleric and Hui-yüan's ceremony as "an important landmark" in early Chinese Buddhism. The influence of Tao-an's Maitreya worship contributed to the spectacular growth of the Maitreya cults in the Northern Wei Period — a period in which the eschatological elements in the Maitreya cult were to prevail among the masses. Where Tao-an himself may have deeply lamented living in the age between two Buddhas, the common people often eagerly anticipated his coming. Predictably, the Saṅgha's awareness of the latter days remained constant: Hui-yüan, addressed in an epistle by Kumārajīra as the Eastern Bodhisattva who was prophesied to protect the Doctrine "'at the last (period of the Dharma)'"\(^{40}\), entertained no illusious about what he viewed as the degenerate state of the Church.\(^{41}\) Hui-yüan's Amita society dispersed with his own death but continued to serve as an inspiration for communities of recluses, the Pure Land Lotus Societies of the Sung and the White Lotus Society of the Southern Sung.\(^{42}\) To the present Pure Land schools scattered throughout the Far East and the rest of the world have looked to Hui-yüan as their original founder.\(^{43}\)
III Lung-men

In Asia, the cave is the earth's sacred womb. Buddhist vihāras and caitya halls, Hindu temples and altars, embellished with sculpted forms in a liturgy of stone, were chiselled out of the hills of Karle, Ajanta, Ellora and Amaravati. A succession of cave shrines marked the progress of Buddhism across the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan and Central Asia. Many Turkic tribes, including the T'o-pa of Northern Wei are thought to have had native cave mythologies and cults. Even before the arrival of Buddhist missionaries, the Chinese in the North had carved out loess caves for shelter and for shrines dedicated to nature deities; and in Szechwan, they had excavated rock-cut burial shafts and chambers for their ancestors. With the introduction of Buddhism, the China entered its most creative period of stone sculpture, unmatched in Chinese history. Today, the mountain grottoes of Tun-huang, Yün-kang and Lung-men, vast repositories of artistic and historic documents spanning over half a millennium, silently testify to an age of faith.

The stone icons housed in the Chinese caves were inspired by other images that were transmitted through the minds and hands of Buddhist missionaries and artisans as they made their way northwards. For five centuries after his death, the Buddha was represented by various symbols: the Stūpa the Dharma wheel, the bodhi tree, the royal umbrella, and his footprints. By the first century A.D. an icon of the Buddha's form inspired partly by Greek and Roman art, appeared in Gandhāra and Mathurā. The icons, once conceived, proliferated. Other stone Buddhas and bodhisattvas were fashioned in Buddhist centers as far west as Iran and across Central Asia. At Tun-huang, the eastern terminus of the
Tarim basin route, the images were worked by Indian and Central Asian artisans. At Yün-kang, the Gandhāran style and the influence of the colossal Buddhas of Bāmiyān persisted. And at Lung-men, the Gandhāran and Udhyāna styles continued together with new influences from South China and the subtle proportions and lines of Han artistry. Thus, the art of Lung-men presents a "magnificent panorama of two hundred and fifty years of evolution from Indian Buddhism to an independent and consumately Chinese Buddhism."

Before turning to the documentation and possible reasons for the shift in popularity from Maitreya to Amita in the Lung-men caves, let us briefly discuss the significance of the Lung-men Caves as historical evidence. In *Early Mādhyamika*, Robinson points out the limitations of relying solely on literary materials in the study of Buddhism:

It cannot be assumed that the structure of language corresponds to the structure of thought, or that all thoughts can be reproduced by symbols, or that language is the only kind of symbol system. For example, the Chinese Buddhist of about A.D. 400 gave symbolic expression to his religion not only in his writings, but in the chant and gesture of his liturgy, in sculpture and painting, in architecture and in the several disciplinary codes which monasteries and laity observed. These conditions limit the scope of the inquiry to what can be inferred from literary materials.

Moreover, written materials, the work of an educated elite within the Saṅgha were not representative of the mass of the believers. Even the Saṅgha itself was made up mainly of converts from the peasant classes. Only about 5-10,000 people in both north and south China were conversant with the famous doctrinal disputes that dominate our picture of fourth and fifth century Chinese Buddhism.
In contrast, the Lung-men Caves seem to have been excavated by individuals and groups drawn from all strata of society: monastics, rulers and commoners. For example, Ch'en cites the case of a battle-hardened T'o-pa general who "gazed all through the night at the bright and beautiful traces of former Emperors and great sages, his tears flowing freely".53

Although various types of official and unofficial Buddhist groups had been functioning from the earliest days of Northern Buddhism, by the fifth and sixth centuries a network of popular societies54 under the guidance of monks and nuns were flourishing. A wide variety of social and religious aims led to the formation of these groups. Smaller groups were organized for copying and recitation of sutras, contributing to the support of monasteries and holding vegetarian feasts. And larger groups of a hundred to a thousand members undertook some of the ambitious cave building and image making projects.

The Chinese devotee was drawn to these icons for they appealed to his aesthetic sensibility, dramatically illustrated the verities of his new religion and, perhaps most important of all, satisfied his longing for a concrete center of worship. According to the inscriptions on the statues, the primary motives for erecting new images included both spiritual goals such as the attainment of enlightenment or rebirth in Sukhāvatī or Tuṣita; as well as more mundane concerns including the desire for material boons, health, or military victories. Thus the art of Lung-men does not merely serve as a supplement to the literary evidence produced by a highly educated minority but documents the living faith of the Chinese masses.
Lung-men or "Dragon gate" was the site of intense artistic activity from the latter part of the Northern Wei to the mid-T'ang. Tsukamoto Zenryū's study shows that the two most active periods of carving included the years between 510-540 and between 640-710; the former, under the T'o-pa dynasty and the latter under the reign of Empress Wu Tse-tien. During these years the walls and ceilings of the caves were covered with hosts of celestial beings, guardian figures, lohan and devotees. The four main deities were Śākyamuni, Maitreya, Amita and Avalokiteśvara; other central deities included Kṣitigarbha, Bhaishajyaguru, Mahāsthāmaprāpta.

On the basis of his compilation of the dated statues at Lung-men, Tsukamoto concluded that Śākyamuni and Maitreya were the two most popular images worshipped during the latter part of the Northern Wei and Avalokiteśvara statues increased markedly with a corresponding decrease of Śākyamuni and Maitreya images. Internal shifts also took place during the two dynasties. During the Northern Wei, Śākyamuni's popularity declined; Maitreya statues grew in number and prayers for rebirth in Tuṣita or in the time of Maitreya's descent to earth increased. Similarly the development of Amita worship shows a shift from an initial popularity of Wu-liang-shou-fo (Amitāyus) during the Northern Wei to A-mi-t'o-fo (Amita) in the T'ang.

In sum: while the single most dominant tendency was the steady increase in Amita worship, three distinct stages can be distinguished: the second to the fourth centuries when Śākyamuni and Maitreya were the leading deities; the mid-seventh to the early eight centuries when Amita and Avalokiteśvara were dominant and a period of about 100 years between
these two stages when relatively few images of any kind were being carved.

It is not difficult to understand why Maitreya should have enjoyed such popularity during the Northern Wei. Buddhist texts written by Chinese monks often refer to the Seven Buddhas of the Past. These Buddhas are thought to have been revered more in China than in contemporary India because they represented what educated Chinese held in highest esteem: history. The author of the dynasty's official history, the Wei Shu clearly saw Maitreya's rebirth as a continuation of Śākyamuni's sacred lineage.

Before Śākyamuni there were Six Buddhas, Śākyamuni succeeding the Six Buddhas, achieved his enlightenment and dwells in the present age, the Noble Era. It is written that in time there will be a certain Mi-lo-fo, who, succeeding directly to Śākyamuni will come down to this world.

The Northern Wei Chinese, moreover believed that they were living in the bhadrakalpa "the Noble Era"; the second of three world ages during which a thousand Buddhas would appear. At a time when past and future Buddhas were identified with detailed accounts of their birthplaces and families, the rebirth of Maitreya, the next Buddha, must have been viewed as a familiar and an imminent event. In fact it was expected that Maitreya would appear during the Northern Wei and that this dynasty would then be instrumental in bringing about the golden age. Accordingly, some Northern Wei emperors, seeking to consolidate their power, claimed to be the cakravartin king who would accompany Maitreya.

Neither is it difficult to understand why Amita should have gained such popularity during the T'ang. During the first half of this dynasty
Buddhism in China reached the zenith of its prosperity: its institutions directed flourishing treasuries, hostels, water mills, oil presses; its numerous festivals became a part of the imperial calendar and were held at traditional Chinese sacred places such as Wu-t'ai Shan — its prestige was undeniably established. The simpler Hinayana concepts were taken as a matter of course while the speculative philosophies and the celestial Buddhas, bodhisattvas and paradises taught by the Mahayana teachers captivated the monks and the populace. Most important of all, early Pure Land teachers such as Shan-tao and Tao-cho, combining an attractive doctrine with true missionary zeal, reached out to Emperor and commoner alike, making universal the cry: 'Homage to Amita!'. Such was Amita's popularity among the statue makers that the brief resurgence of interest in Maitreya during the T'ang brought about by the messianic claims of Empress Wu and the translations and commentaries of Hsüan-tsang and his disciples, resulted in only a few new Maitreya images in contrast to the dramatic increase in those of Amita.

On one hand, the ascendency of Maitreya worship in the Northern Wei and of Amita worship in the T'ang can simply be viewed as two different phenomena; each influenced by evolving religious ideas that determined popular rise and fall all the deities. Nevertheless, the devotionalism inspired by Maitreya and by Amita have been singled out as having a special relationship — as indicating a shift in popularity from one to the other. Péri claims that an abundance of evidence, from the Chinese caves to the temples of Nara, "attestant la popularité du culte de Maitreya qui ne disparut que devant celui d'Amitâbha". In even stronger terms, Waley writes that: "surviving sculpture and epigraphy of the fifth century show that Maitreya occupied then the place that was
to be usurped in the seventh and eighth centuries by Amitābha⁶⁸. Matsumoto, in writing about rebel themes observes: "As an object of popular devotion Maitreya was gradually eclipsed from the early T'ang onwards by 0-mi-t'o-fo (Amitabha), though the Maitreyan theme lingered in the ideologies of the White Lotus Society and similar movements".⁶⁹

The causes usually given for this shift revolve around two sets of inferences: 1) that for various reasons, worshipping Amita was gradually perceived by the popular Chinese mind as being more beneficial than worshipping Maitreya; and 2) that these reasons, once systematized into a coherent doctrine by the Pure Land masters, further enhanced the status of Amita among the masses.

A third set of inferences, comprising the theory presented in this thesis, identifies the animating force behind the events: that the shift from Maitreya to Amita was substantially influenced by the prevailing eschatological mood of the Period of Disunion. The widespread awareness of the latter days, established during the fourth and fifth centuries led, by the late sixth and early seventh centuries to a crisis, which was subsequently resolved by the Pure Land movement.

To summarize: the stone icons of Lung-men document the most vital era in Chinese Buddhism. During this age, the Buddhism of India was transformed into the Buddhism of China. One of the signal events of this transformation was the emergence of Amita as one of the major devotional figures of the T'ang. The statues at Lung-men clearly demonstrate that Amita's ascendancy was not an isolated event but that other deities also passed in and out of favour. More specifically, Amita's rise in popularity was linked with the decline in popularity of Maitreya; a previously prominent focus of devotion. This shift in popularity, like the other decisions
that the Medieval Chinese made when choosing an object of worship was influenced by their response to the prevailing Buddhist ideas -- in particular, the notion of the latter age. The eschatological mood permeating Six Dynasties society reached critical proportions precisely during the stage in which relatively few new images were being carved in the Lung-men Caves (540-640). The documentation drawn from Lung-men by Tsukamoto supports the idea of a shift from Maitreya to Amita between the Northern Wei and the T'ang. For a further examination for the role of eschatological thought as one of the dominant factors behind this shift, we turn to the last two chapters of this thesis.
Footnotes to Chapter III


4. For example, although in both cases, earlier translations are recorded, it is certain that by the third century Dharmarakṣa had translated sūtras on both Maitreya and Amita. For more details see E. Zürcher, The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1959) 2:194 n.75.


7. Ibid., p.36; and for more details see Zürcher, Conquest, p.194 n.76.

8. This is a section from the vow composed by Hui-yüan's lay disciple Liu Ch'eng chih and is included in Hui chiao's biography of Hui-yuan. Translated in Zürcher, Conquest, p.244.

9. Ibid., p.220.

10. Ibid., p.194.

11. For further sources on Tao-an: Tsukamoto, Chūgoko Bukkyō, pp. 475-661; Zürcher, Conquest, pp.180-204.

12. For more details on earliest Amidism and Hui-yüan see Tsukamoto, Chūgoko Bukkyō, pp.630ff.

13. Zürcher, Conquest, pp.204-239.

14. For a summary of the letters that were exchanged between Hui-yüan and Kumarajīva see Zürcher, Conquest, pp. 227-229.


21. Ibid., p.220.


27. For more examples see Demiéville, Yogacarabhumi, pp. 339-436.


29. Zürcher proposes that this may have been Chin Ch'en's version of the third century. Conquest, p.221.


33. Ibid., p.259.

35. In addition, Tao-an's devotion was probably inspired by meditational techniques and experiences clearly suited to his monastic life.

36. Other Chinese known to have been Amita devotees before Hui-yüan include: Ch'üeh Kung-tse (d.265-275); his disciple, Wei shih-tu, and Chih-tun. See Ch'en, *Buddhism in China*, pp.342-343; Zürcher, *Conquest*, p.128.

37. It is not definitely known whether Hui-yüan was among the eight disciples recorded as taking part in Tao-an's ceremony for Maitreya.


39. Ibid., p.219.


41. Ibid., p.250.

42. For more information on the White Lotus Societies see D. Overmyer, *Folk Buddhist Religion*, pp. 73-108.

43. Pas proposes that Hui-yüan's position as the founder of the Pure Land tradition is a later development initiated by Pure Land believers who wished to "increase the prestige" of their beliefs. "Shan-tao's Commentary," pp. 135, 136 n.1.

44. Although Eberhard suggests that the Yün-kang and Lung-men Caves were adapted from the T'o-pa cave cults; it is more likely that the N. Wei Caves were primarily of Buddhist inspiration. cf. W. Eberhard, *Conquerors and Rulers* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952; rev. ed. 1965), p.147.


47. For the most extensive documentation of the Yün-kang Caves see: Mizuno S. and Nagahiro T., *Yün-kang, The Buddhist Cave Temples of the 5th Century A.D. in North China*, 32 vols. (Kyoto: Kyoto University, 1951-6).

49. The images from these caves gain even greater importance for the study of Chinese Buddhist art when one considers the large numbers of statues that were melted down during the periodic Buddhist persecutions. Although there is written evidence of Buddha figures dating back to the second century A.D., the earliest known Chinese icon is dated 338 A.D. (illustrated in Wright, Buddhist, illust. No. 1).


51. Robinson, Early Mādhyamika, p.15.

52. Ibid., p.98.

53. This description is drawn from Ch'en, Buddhism in China, pp. 173-176.

54. Ibid., pp. 290-295.

55. Lung-men is situated about twelve km. south of Loyang. The caves are dug out of a range of hills, separated into eastern and western groups by the I. River. The Western Hills with twenty-three caves are more important than the Eastern. Mizuno and Nagahiro Ryūmon, p.3.

56. Excavation began in 494 and continued into the 750's. After this time, in spite of a few additions the caves generally fell into neglect.

57. This data has been discussed and organized into chronological tables by Tsukamoto in Mizuno and Nagahiro, Ryūmon, pp.142-449; and reprinted in Tsukamoto, Chūgoku Bukkyō, pp.355-609.

58. Soper notes that at Tun-huang a typical arrangement would consist of Maitreya, with crossed ankles, seated at one end of an entrance facing Sākyamuni, in lotus position. At Yün-kang Maitreya and Sākyamuni have been found as central deities for adjacent caves (caves 1+2; caves 7+8). Evidence, p.219 n.79.

59. Mizuno and Nagahiro, Ryūmon, pp.234-236.

60. In Ch'en's words: "During the Northern Wei, Amitābha was only one fifth as popular as Sākyamuni, one quarter as popular as Maitreya; but under the T'ang Amitābha outnumbered Sākyamuni twelve times and Maitreya ten times". Buddhism in China, p.172.

61. For a historical account of Northern Wei Buddhism see Tsukamoto Zenryū, Shina Bukkyōshi Kenkyū: Hokugi hen (Kyoto: Kobundo, 1942).

63. The Bhadrakalpa sūtra was translated by Dharmarakṣa in ca. 300 OR 291. The same idea is also found in Nāgārjuna’s Ta-chi-tu-lun. Hurvitz, Wei Shu, p.40.

64. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.178.


66. It is interesting that the same shift occurred in Japan when phase of Maitreya worship was followed by a subsequent phase of Amida worship in the eighth century.


68. A. Waley, A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang xxxviii.

Chapter IV

Latter Days : mo-fa (末法)

I. Introduction

When Buddhist missionaries arrived in China, they found one of the most advanced civilizations in the ancient world. Buddhist eschatological concepts were thus introduced into a culture which had long been developing its own distinct views on time and history. For the Han Confucians, heaven, earth and man were linked together by a divinely appointed ruler and interacted within a precise and orderly system. Time, a meticulously measured continuum of minutes, days, seasons, years and planetary cycles, was coordinated with the life spans, generations and dynastic cycles of man. Court historians were traditionally astronomers who analyzed human events in terms of celestial cycles and divine portents. Despite the continuing emphasis on divination and spirit worship by his contemporaries, the great Han historian, Ssu Ma Ch'ien was able to take a remarkably pragmatic stance: history was a product of man's own will and the golden age would come about through his moral excellence. Man, by his own effort and wisdom, would usher in the millennium.

The dissolution of the Han and the decline of Confucianism resulted in a revival of older philosophies, including the dramatic rise of Taoist messianic movements. The ideals of heavenly rulers, paradises, and the Great Peace animating popular Taoist uprisings can be traced to a "pre-Confucian politico-religious tradition" common to both Confucianism
and Taoism. Taoist messianism therefore substantiates the existence of Chinese conceptions of linear time and indigenous beliefs in the advent of a perfect ruler and a utopian world.

Although it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss the rich millenarian tradition in China, Taoist or Buddhist, it is important to note that many of the early founders of Religious Taoism were born around the region of present Kiangsu, Southern Shantung and Hopei, one of the first areas of Buddhist growth. From the third and fourth centuries in particular, Buddhist concepts on transmigration, causality, heavens and hells, and the end of a kalpa profoundly influenced rebel thinking as well as the religiosity of the masses who heard the popular sermons of the early itinerant monks. Thus Buddhist cosmology and eschatology injected fresh ideas into the traditional Chinese concepts of time; including the notions of cosmic creation and destruction of the beginnings and ends of world ages. These ideas were to have a long and fruitful influence on the subsequent development of Neo-Confucian and Neo-Taoist philosophy.

From the fourth to the seventh centuries, Buddhist eschatology attained a degree of prominence perhaps unequalled in China until the nineteenth century. Historically, these centuries cover the Period of Disunion (220-589), the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and the first one hundred years of the T'ang Dynasty (618-907). For the Northern Sangha in particular, periods of persecution alternated with periods of prosperity; and the Buddhist community experienced unprecedented growth. During this time, the Northern Wei masses regarded the Maitreya Buddha as a center of devotion; a source of hope in a crisis-ridden age. In contrast, rulers and rebels perceived the Maitreya myth as a basis on which to build
religion-political ideologies.

Buddhist eschatological thought is made up of two distinct elements: the advent of Maitreya and the decline of the Dharma. Eschatological belief prevalent during the fourth and fifth centuries was characterized by ardent devotion and expectation: the focus was on Maitreya. However, as time passed, the quality of eschatological belief changed. Increasing emphasis was placed on the Latter Days, known in China as mo-fa (the Latter end of the Law). The sense of unease that had been growing even before the fall of the Northern Wei\(^{12}\) and had been increasing with the quick succession of the states of Eastern and Western Wei, Northern Ch'i, Northern Chou and the Ch'en, was heightened by the major persecution of Buddhism\(^{13}\) in 574-77; during which recurrent allegations of corruption in the Saṅgha were yet again lodged. The founder of the Sui Dynasty, Yang Chien, (Emperor Wen) seizing the mood of the hour, made use of sūtras such as the *Suvarnaprabhasa*, and strove to make good his claim as the cakra-varteri of the new age.\(^{14}\) By the late sixth and early seventh centuries, belief in the Buddhist eschaton had reached a crisis.

Living during the end of the Dharma, instead of bringing the believer closer to the future Buddha, meant living in remoteness from both Śākyamuni and Maitreya. Because of their separation in time from the Enlightened Ones, the Chinese Buddhist considered himself deprived of access to the original truth of the Dharma; those born in this age were condemned to ignorance, pain and darkness. The quest for salvation seemed to reach an impasse. This chapter discusses the myths of Maitreya and the structures of mo-fo that brought the development of Chinese Buddhism to a turning point in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.
II. Mythic Foundations

In 439, when the last king of the Northern Liang Dynasty surrendered to the Wei, a prince of the imperial household, An-yang (安陽)\(^\text{15}\), escaped to the South and spent the rest of his life as an itinerant preacher, propagating the cults of Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara.\(^\text{16}\)

The monk T'an-chiai, ill and dying, called without ceasing on the name of Maitreya. When this disciple of Tao-an was asked why he did not pray to be born in Sukhāvatī, he responded:

"'The abbot and I and some others, eight of us in all, prayed together to be reborn in Tusita, the abbot and Tao-yuan and the rest have already been reborn [there]. I have not been able to depart, and that is why I pray as I do.'

"'When he finished speaking, a radiance shone upon his body and his look became joyful; and then suddenly he passed away, being in his seventieth year.'\(^\text{17}\)

A disciple and fellow-pilgrim of Fa-hsien, Chih-yen studied dhyāna under Buddhasena and Buddhabhadra for three years and after returning to China with the latter, translated texts in Ch'ien-kang. In his old age, his desire to resolve doubts that had continued to torment him about the validity of his ordination took Chih-yen back to India. When the Indian arhat whose advice Chih-yen sought was unable to come to a decision, the arhat entered samādhi and consulted Maitreya in Tuṣita Heaven. His heart eased by Maitreya's message that the ordination was in order, Chih-yen returned to Kashmir and died there at the age of seventy-nine.\(^\text{18}\)

Hui-lan was instructed in the principles of dhyāna by a monk called Dharmadatta in Kashmir. Dharmadatta had gone to Tuṣita Heaven in samādhi to receive his Bodhisattva ordination from Maitreya. Hui-lan, after receiving this same method of ordination, taught in Khotan, the present
During his travels in India, Hsuan-tsang visited the mountain cavern where the famous fifth century monk Bhāvaviveka was said to be waiting for Maitreya in a palace of Asuras. The pilgrim writes that Bhāvaviveka appealed to Avalokiteśvara saying:

"'In the absence of Maitreya as a Buddha, who is there that can satisfy my doubts?''

"'Long have I prayed and worshipped with a view to obtain an opportunity to see Maitreya...Let us therefore enter here and together await the revelation of this Buddha.'"20

Towards the end of his well known travel account in a section extolling his teachers I-ching writes of his meditation on Maitreya:

"Deep as the depth of a lake be my pure and calm meditation. Let me look for the first meeting under the Tree of the Dragon Flower, when I hear the deep rippling voice of the Buddha Maitreya. Passing through the four modes of birth, I would desire to perfect my mind, and thus fulfill the three long kalpas (ages) required for Buddhahood."23

Looked to as the future Buddha by the devotees of both vehicles, Maitreya developed a whole new set of Mahāyāna roles: "a god of light"; "a comforter receiving the confession of sins"; "a guide for souls after death"; and the supreme inspirer of Buddhist masters.24 What is perhaps surprising to modern Mahāyāna scholars, is not so much the universality of Maitreya belief but the intensity of devotion which this Buddha inspired -- especially among the foremost exponents of the so-called untheistic and logical schools.

In order to get an idea of the kind of myths, images and stories that inspired the mind and heart of the Medieval Chinese cleric or
layman, I have gleaned examples from the travel accounts of two of China’s most famous pilgrims to India: Fa-hsien (travelled between 399-412) and Hsüan-tsang (travelled between 629-645). Hsüan-tsang’s narrative contains at least nine separate references to Maitreya whereas Fa-hsien’s includes only three. Fa-hsien represents a generation of monks whose pilgrimage was motivated by the desire to carry relics and a complete Vinaya back to China. His devotion, still centered on Šākyamuni, included by extension, the future Maitreya. By Hsüan-tsang’s time however, numerous other Mahāyāna deities were becoming more popular than Šākyamuni and Maitreya. Because of Maitreya’s special place in the Fa-hsien system, Hsüan-tsang and his disciples seem to have rekindled interest in Maitreya and Tuṣita Heaven at a time when Amita and Avalokiteśvara worship had already gained ascendancy.

By the fifth century Indian Buddhism was still strong but past its height; Fa-hsien noted that Hinayāna predominated in the North with pockets of Mahāyāna activity. Two hundred years later Hsüan-tsang found a considerable decline in Buddhism, and "he met with gloomy forebodings in many parts of the Buddhist world." In the Northwest he found many monasteries in ruins and in the South, wealthy monasteries and unchaste monks. By examining the kinds of incidents or stories recorded by Fa-hsien and Hsüan-tsang and by comparing them with accounts of Maitreya by other Chinese monks and laymen, it is possible to delineate broad patterns in the mythic foundations of Maitreya worship in early traditional China.

The first and most obvious type of reference to Maitreya that the travellers made was while visiting the famous pilgrimage spots associated
with Sākyamuni's life. The place where Maitreya received his vyākāraṇa is described in Fa-hsien's account as a site near Deer Park and by Hsüan-tsang as a spot marked by an Asoka stūpa between Takshaśila and the Indus; presumably the same place. Hsüan-tsang's account mentions both the place where Mahāprajñāpatī presented the golden garment to Sākyamuni and Vulture Peak, the three-peaked mountain where Mahākāśyapa, entrusted with the same gold garment, awaits the coming of Maitreya.

At the bodhi tree where Sākyamuni achieved enlightenment, Hsüan-tsang describes seeing Maitreya disguised as a brahman in a nearby vihāra, painting a perfect representation of the Buddha. Hsuan-chao, I-ching and Chi-hung also recorded seeing Maitreya the artist. Again at the bodhi tree Hsüan-tsang, observing the icon of Avalokiteśvara, sunk breast-deep into the ground; remembered the prophecy that as the statue disappeared, so would the Buddha's Law.

The second type of reference made to Maitreya includes traces of his tradition which the pilgrims encountered during their travels. A well-known example is the T'o-li Maitreya statue. In order to reach the T'o-li (Darel) Valley, north of the Indian border, the pilgrims had to cross hazardous gorges on either side of the Sin-t'u River; climbing up and down the mountain sides with the assistance of pegs, chains or ropes. Several pilgrims including Fa-sheng, Hsuang-tsang and Fa-hsien reported seeing the colossal sandal-wood Maitreya. According to Fa-hsien:

"The monks there all study the Hīnayāna. In olden times there was in that land an Arhat who used his supernatural powers to transport a skilled craftsman up to the Tugita Heaven so that he might observe the Bodhisattva Maitreya, how tall he was and what complexion and form He had; so that on returning to Earth he could carve wood into an image. From start
to finish three ascents were made, until the image was completed. It is eighty feet tall, the foot being eight feet long. On fast days it always emits a light. The monarchs of various countries vie with each other in making offerings to it..."36

Hsüan-tsang adds that the statue "possesses the secret power of miracle"37 and both he and Fa-hsien recall an old tradition that from "the time of the execution of his image, the streams of the Law (religious teaching) began to flow eastward."38

Instances where a believer is transported to Tuṣita by the powers of meditation in search of knowledge or inspiration make up an often repeated theme with many different variations.39 Probably the most important of these myths in the travel chronicles is Hsüan-tsang's visit to the grove of Amra trees in Ayodhya where Āsaṅga was said to have ascended to Maitreya's palace in Tuṣita and received Yogācāra works such as the Maitreyanātha-yogācāra-śāstra, the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra-tīkā and the Madyāntavibhāga-kārikā.40 In the same passage, Hsüan-tsang describes how Vasubandhu, Āsaṅga and a few others mutually agreed that the first to die and reach Tuṣita would inform the others.41 After a monk had died but sent no message, Āsaṅga had a vision of a rishi-deva who reported going to Tuṣita. He told Āsaṅga that "no words can describe" the beauty of Maitreya and the wonders of Tuṣita. He further confirmed that Buddhasimha, the monk who had died but not reported to his friends, was in Tuṣita,"'immersed in pleasure and merriment'".42

Although Hsüan-tsang's story of Āsaṅga receiving the sutras from Maitreya is unique because it became part of the mythic structure of the Fa-hsiang philosophical tradition, it can be compared to other stories in which knowledge was sought from Maitreya. Buddhahadra, the dhyāna
expert who arrived in Chang-an at the beginning of the fifth century, 
is said to have appeared suddenly before a fellow disciple, having 
returned from Tuṣita Heaven where he had gone to "pay homage to 
Maitreya". The descriptions of Tao-an's Maitreya devotion as 
well as the stories of Chih-yen and Hui-lan cited at the beginning 
of this section are other examples of the same theme; that of Maitreya 
the inspirer.

Sitting amidst 3,000 priests in a Srilanka Mahāvihāra, Fa-hsien 
listened to the story of the Buddha's alms bowl. Upon expressing the 
desire to copy this description of the spread, the decline and the 
eventual renewal of the Law under Maitreya, the Chinese peregrinator 
was told: "'this has no original scripture; I only repeat by word of 
mouth (what I have learned)" Fa-hsien is even said to have seen 
the bowl in a monastery in Purusha. Although the myth is well-known 
Hsūang-tsang makes no mention of it.

The third type of reference to Maitreya recorded by the travel 
accounts is the personal experience. On his journey down the Ganges 
River from Kashmir, Hsūan-tsang was captured by brigands who wanted to 
offer him as a sacrifice to Durgā. As Hsūan-tsang unsuccessfully 
tried to dissuade them, the brigands prepared a mandala for killing 
him and brandished their swords. After asking for a moment in which to 
pray to Maitreya, the Chinese pilgrim concentrated on Maitreya and vowed 
to be reborn in Tuṣita so that he could receive the Yogācārabhūmi-sāstra. 
In his imagination he climbed Mount Sumeru, passed the first, second and 
third heavens until he saw Maitreya, surrounded by his assembly of devas. 
In Lamotte's words: "...his heart was full of joy; the mandala, the 
bandits, all was forgotten...". At this instant, a violent storm arose,
terrifying the brigands and saving Hsüan-tsang. From this time to his death, Maitreya remained for Hsüan-tsang a special object of veneration.

On his death-bed, the Yogācāra master is said to have prayed constantly to be born in Tuṣita Heaven.49

"In the second month of the first year of Lin-te (664 AD), Hsüan-tsang, the Master of the Law asked the monks to recite the name of Maitreya Buddha. He himself reclined on his right elbow and died. That night four white rainbows came up in the sky and touched the top of the pagoda of the Tz'u-en monastery."50

Buddhist writings are replete with death-bed accounts such as Hsüan-tsang's and the passage from T'an-chiai's biography at the beginning of this section. Such accounts, by no means limited to those to aspired to rebirth in Tusita heaven, are reminescent of the biographies of Amita devotees who sought to go to Sukhāvatī after their death.51 In many cases both Maitreya and Amita or other deities were called upon. When Chih-i was preparing to die he divided his possessions in two: one part for an offering to Maitreya; and the other for "the usual religious purposes". He chanted "the names of Amita, prajñā and Avalokiteśvara, and then calmly sat awaiting his end."52

A final example of Maitreya worship in conjunction with that of other figures can be found in the life of the famous T'ang poet, Po-Chū-i. In 840, Po commissioned an artist to render a painting of Amita and the Western Paradise. With the completion of the painting he expressed the desire that all the merits from this deed be transferred to all sentient beings, that they might attain rebirth in Sukhāvatī. That same year, he commissioned another painting; of Tuṣita Heaven, with
the wish that all sentient beings be reborn there and accompany Maitreya when he descends to earth. During the final phase of his life in Loyang, still sustaining his lifelong interest in Ch'an, Po turned increasingly to Pure Land thought. Through rebirth in Amita's Sukhāvatī, he hoped to be reunited with friends who had died before him.

In conclusion, we may make two general observations about Maitreya worship in early traditional China. First, the Future Buddha, even in periods of great popularity, was worshipped concurrently with other deities; whether in conjunction and Sākyamuni or Avalokiteśvara as in the case of Fa-hsien and An-yang or in concert with others in the Mahāyāna pantheon, as in the devotionalism of Chih-i, Po-Chü-i, and probably, most of the T'ang Sangha and Laity. Secondly, for many including Tao-an and Hsüan-tsang, Maitreya was an intensely personal and special object of veneration; a tendency exceptionally prevalent during the Northern Wei Dynasty. It is interesting to note that neither Fa-hsien nor Hsüan-tsang made any mention of Amita in their travel chronicles. As time went on, Maitreya's identity as the Buddha of the Future became less and less distinct with the important exception of popular and underground rebel groups who associated him with revolution and a new social order. Sectarian groups based on Maitreyan eschatology were most active from about 600-1800. From the tenth century onward, Maitreya was associated with an eccentric Ch'an monk called P'u-tai whose likeness was placed at the entrance of temples throughout China until this century and whose earthy, rotund, laughing form still graces the market-places of Hong Kong as a symbol of good fortune. During the Period of Disunion, the Sui, and the early T'ang, however, the myths and images of Maitreya and Tusita Heaven solaced the individual believer
with visions of blissful existence after death and the provisions for a renewed Dharma in the future.

III. The Age Between Two Buddhas

The inscription etched on a stone Buddha in Ting Hsing hsien dated 549, tells us that it was made by lay fraternity members who lamented being born after the time of Śākyamuni and prior to the far distant advent of Maitreya – in the age "between two sages" (二聖中間). Then in Chinese fashion the inscription reads: "to my thinking, I was born in this world full of defilement, because I was poor in good fortune". The incoherent state of the Buddhist doctrine and the arduousness of its practice; the persecutions of the Saṅgha and the signs of corruption in its ranks; and the ongoing social crises of the age convinced Buddhists, lay and monastic, that they were living in the "buddhaless" (無佛) age. The widespread sense of despair, growing since the fifth century reached critical proportions in the sixth.

Many sixth century Buddhists were convinced that the last phase of the Dharma would begin either 1,000 or 1,500 years after the death of their founder; this "perturbed the mind of Buddhist China, almost as much as Europe was agitated by the arrival of the year 1,000". The stock phrase "in the last 500 years" in Mahāyāna writings was echoed in various ways by Chinese writers like Hu-ssu, who dated events as "such and such a date after the onset of the Last Phase" or Pao-chang who wrote his biography of Chinese Nuns in order "to provide examples of great virtue in a degenerate age". Some even hoped that Maitreya would
appear in their own time. In 515, the followers of Fa-ching, a Buddhist monk, killed local officials, burnt sutras and razed temples with the cry: "A new Buddha has appeared! Get rid of the old devils!". Thus, in the sixth century we find the development of uniquely Chinese interpretations of eschatological chronology and the emergence of two major proponents of the latter-day doctrine, Hui-ssu and Hsin-hsing.

Initially, the Buddhist religion was to end with the period of the true Dharma or cheng-fa (正法), and then with the Counterfeit Dharma or hsiang-fa (像法) and finally calculations were made for the Degenerate Dharma mo-fa (末法). From an early date the Chinese Buddhists had adopted the three-stage eschatological model well known to them from various Mahayana works. The scriptures supported numerous often conflicting chronologies but by the sixth century, four schools of thought had emerged:

1. True Dharma 500 years and Counterfeit Dharma 500 years;
2. True Dharma 500 years and Counterfeit Dharma 1,000 years;
3. True Dharma 1,000 years and Counterfeit Dharma 500 years;
4. True Dharma 1,000 years and Counterfeit Dharma 1,000 years.

The second and the fourth schools, both followed by an additional 10,000 years of Degenerate Dharma were the most popular in China. Influential monks including Hui-yuan, Hui-ssu, Tao-cho, Hsuan-tsang and K'uai-chi adopted the second scheme; Chi-tsang (549-623), Hui-kuan (613-681), and Liang-p'i (717-777) followed the less prevalent fourth scheme.

The above schemes seem relatively straightforward when compared with the widely divergent dates calculated for the actual onset of the final period of the Dharma. These calculations, often devised to support
preconceived biases, were based either on the date of Śākyamuni's birth or nirvāṇa. Some were comparatively conservative in their estimates: Fa-hsien placed the Buddha's nirvāṇa between 770-720 B.C.; the author of the Li-tai-san-pao-chi at 609 B.C.; and Wei Shou fixed the Buddha's birth at 687 B.C. Others, however took a more radical stance. In order to combat Taoist propaganda that the Buddha was in fact, none other than Lao-tse who, after his disappearance in the Western Regions had taught the barbarians in India, some Buddhists forged texts establishing the date of the Buddha at 1025 B.C. Similarly, Confucian anti-Buddhist tracts blaming Buddhism for the short life of the dynasties were countered by more forged texts; notably the Chou-shu-i-chi which set the Buddha's nirvāṇa back to 949 B.C. - to the venerable Chou dynasty. This last date of 949 B.C. found wide currency and led many sixth century Buddhists to believe that the latter age would begin in the year 550 A.D.

The first written document definitively stating that the last phase had already begun is credited to Hui-ssu (515-574). In his Li-shih-yuan-wen composed in 559, Hui-ssu gives the day, month and year for the Buddha's conception, birth, going forth, enlightenment and nirvāṇa. Deriving these dates from a now lost Jātaka, Hui-ssu came to the conclusion that cheng-fa would last from 1066-567 B.C., hsiang-fa from 566-433 A.D. and mo-fa, from 434 to 10,433 A.D. (the Buddha's birthday was fixed as the 5th day of the 2nd month of 1067 B.C.). Thus for Hui-ssu, the beginning of the last phase would have started in 434, one hundred and twenty-five years before he is thought to have written the Li-shih-yuan-wen.

In the same text, he prays that alchemical practices will avail him of an elixir to preserve his body until the Maitreya descends
to earth. Hui-ssu's biography relates that after meditating and fasting he dreamt that he met Maitreya and his retinue on a huge lotus blossom and in his heart thought:

"...'I, in the Final [period of degeneration of] CAKYA's Law, have received the Lotus of the Law. Now I have met Merciful [Maitreya], the Revered One.' Feeling acutely affected, he wept sadly, then suddenly awoke. Thereafter he strove even more, and the wondrous omens multiplied."\(^7\)

In another dream, also recorded in his biography, Hui-ssu saw Maitreya and Amita preaching and leading others to the Law. He then had their images made and worshipped them both.\(^7\) Thus, Hui-ssu's devotional practices, while still strongly oriented to the Buddha of the future, also included Amita worship. This devotionalism, however, must be seen within the context of his other religious activities.

According to his famous disciple, Chih-i, Hui-ssu was "'famous throughout the South as a scholar, a devout religionist, a practitioner of meditation and an enlightened mystic'".\(^7\) He taught the Prajñāpāramitā and Lotus sūtras and emphasized the importance of striving earnestly for universal salvation in the degenerate age. The means of salvation lay in adherence to a strict monastic code, diligent meditation, sudden enlightenment and ultimately, the realization of the spirit of the Lotus.

While the Lotus inspired Hui-ssu, both as an object of devotion and as a basis for his method of sudden enlightenment, most important for our purpose, is the influence which it had on his latter day beliefs. By Hui-ssu's time Lotus cults\(^8\) were not uncommon; miraculous powers resident in the scripture were thought to greatly increase the stock of merit of those who heard, recited, copied or taught it. The miracle of the sūtra was to become evident "in this Latter evil Age"; the most appropriate time for the
manifestation of its saving powers.

'O World-Honored One! In the last five hundred years, in the midst of a muddied evil age, if there is anyone who receives and keeps this scriptural Canon, I will guard and protect him, keep him from decline and care, enable him to gain tranquillity, and prevent those who seek to get the better of him from doing so, be it Māra, or a son of Māra, or a daughter of Māra, or...."81

While the awareness of the latter days is present throughout the Lotus, the mo-fa theme predominates in sections such as "Comfortable Conduct" where the assemblage receives instructions on how to preach the Dharma during the end. In the final section titled "Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universally Worthy", the sūtra and its devotee are extolled in a final surge of promises and praise by the bodhisattva Samanthabhadra:

And for the one who "...receives and keeps it, reads and recites it, and interprets the import of its meaning! To that man at life's end shall be extended the hands of a thousand Buddhas, causing him not to fear, nor to fall into evil destinies. He shall straightway ascend to the top of the Tusita Heaven, to the place of the bodhisattva Maitreya. The bodhisattva Maitreya has thirty-two marks, is surrounded by a great multitude of bodhisattvas and has a retinue of a hundred thousand myriads of millions of goddesses, born within his retinue."84

Passages like these clearly inspired Hui-ssu's dreams and spurred him in his efforts to gain enlightenment for the sake of all beings in the latter-day crisis of sixth century China. His contemporary, Tan-luan (476-542) whose activities will be covered in the last chapter was concurrently formulating another response to the mo-fa doctrine, a mode of salvation centered on Amita Buddha. And Hui-ssu's later contemporary,
Hsin-hsing (540-594), carrying the doctrine to its logical extreme, established the only sectarian movement based on the latter days.

In 588, a year before he went from Honan to the new Sui capital, under the auspices of a powerful minister of the new dynasty, Hsin-hsing had only attracted four converts. Yet the Sect of the Three stages or San-chieh-chiao which he subsequently founded became one of the wealthiest and best known movements of the early T'ang. Saddened by the state of the Saṅgha, chastened by the experience of the Northern Chou persecution and convinced that he had found the only viable way to salvation in the last days, Hsin-hsing the firey preacher, spread his message among the common people.

His message was this: humanity is engulfed in utter darkness and hopelessness; unable to comprehend or even recognize the way to nirvāṇa. The Buddha or the bodhisattva which the faithful believer seeks to worship may be no more than a pig or a goat. The Buddha is lost to us during this forsaken age. The only way to gain access to him is by worshipping indiscriminately, every form of life and by eschewing all traditional forms of meditation and the cloistered life. Thus, regardless of whether they encountered a human being or a dog, Hsin-hsing's disciples bowed down in reverence before them. Monasteries, scholarly pursuits and icons were abandoned and they lived in specified temple court-yards or out-houses and spent their days in the streets and market places.

Two Buddhist virtues were particularly emphasized in San Chieh practice; austerity and altruism. The first led to the daily observance of austerities long considered only a means of penance: eating only alms once a day; wearing rags gathered from garbage heaps and in general, adhering absolutely to the monastic discipline. The second led to an
emphasis on almsgiving as the most efficacious way of attaining merit. The Inexhaustible Treasury established between 618-627 at the San Chieh headquarters in Chang-an (Hua-tu ssu 化度寺) became one of the wealthiest of such institutions in China. The donations which the faithful vied with one another in making mounted to a degree that even the monks who directed the Treasury could not guess its worth. Until its dissolution in 713, its income was theoretically used for three purposes; repairing temple monasteries, alleviating the suffering of the poor and sick, and arranging for Buddhist ceremonies.

The Inexhaustible Treasury was only one of the developments which took place after Hsin-hsing's death. Internally, writings from the T'ang suggest that the sect, influenced by the Sūtra of the Ten Wheels adopted the bodhisattva Kṣṭigarbha as its central deity; and that its monks were suspected of fabricating the prophecies in the Great Cloud sutra circulated by Empress Wu. According to Yabuki and Waley, both of these developments point to connections between the Sect of the Three stages and Manicheism. Externally, the Sect's writings were listed as heretical in 664 and after precariously surviving a series of imperial proscriptions during the late seventh and early eighth centuries, disappeared in the anti-Buddhist persecution of 845.

Despite these developments, it was Hsin-hsing's original theories that led to the sect's early demise. The San chieh disciples argued that governments and kings, not being exempt from the general blindness of the age, were not worthy of the homage and obedience of the true Buddhist; thus aroused the suspicion and antagonism of the state. Moreover, by claiming the sole means for salvation, the San Chieh followers found
themselves in conflict with other Buddhist schools -- in particular, with the Pure Land adherents. Finally, there is little doubt that even without the official proscriptions, the austerity and dark resignation required by Hsin-hsing to survive the latter days could hold but passing interest for the life-affirming Chinese; especially in the face of the leniency and optimism offered by the preachers of Amita's Western Paradise.

In his overview of Chinese Buddhist history, Tsukamoto Zenryū observes that a dynamic new force entered Buddhism at the end of the Northern and Southern Dynasties, giving rise in the North to the Sect of the Three stages, Ch'an and Pure Land; and that this provided the groundwork for the T'ang schools, even for the Southern schools such as Tien-t'ai. The sense of urgency and anguish originating in the eschatological beliefs of the period was without doubt an integral part of this new force.
Footnotes to Chapter IV


7. For Chinese Utopian thought from Chou to modern times see Wolfgang Bauer, China und die Hoffnung auf Glück (München: 1971), cited by Overmyer, Folk Buddhist Religion, p.241 n.47.


9. Fung Yu-lan writes that "the idea that the world will some day be destroyed, thereafter to be replaced by a new world, is quite alien to traditional Chinese thought". He adds that in time the Buddhist theory of the four kalpas had a "marked influence on all Neo-Confucian theories of cosmic evolution...". History of Chinese Philosophy, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937; new edition 1952-3), 2:474. Siven also holds this view in his "Chinese Conceptions of Time". Research on the evolution of the Confucian theory of the Three Ages from the second to the twentieth centuries could be done by studying scholars from the New Text School as well as others including: Tung Chung Shu (206 B.C. - 24 A.D.) Ho Hsiun (129-182 A.D.); Shao-Yung (1011-77); Chu Hsi (1130-1200); and Kung Yu-wei (1858-1927). W. Lai introduces a relatively unknown area in his review of K'ung-tzu Wei-wang-eh-wang-lun [Le Paradoxal destin politique de Confucius] by Lo Meng-Tse in HOR 17 (August 1977):89-99.
10. Buddhist cakravartin emperors during the Period of Disunion include Emperor Wen-chang of N. Wei, Emperor Wu of Liang and Emperor Wen of Sui.

11. The first Buddhist "bandits" area recorded to have appeared in 402. For excellent background to the rebel movements see Overmyer, Folk Buddhist Religion, pp. 80-85, 130-161. For later movements see Suzuki Chūsei, "Sōdai Bukkyō Kessha no Kenkyū" [Buddhist religious societies of the Sung dynasty] Shigaku zasshi, 52 (1941); S. Chūsei, "Tō Sō jidai no Mirokukyō-hi" [Maitreya bandits of the T'ang and Sung] Shien 3 (1931): 68-

12. Natural as well as political causes combined to make this a chaotic age; in Northern China famines occurred in 466-470, 473, 473. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.155.


15. This is the same prince who is thought to have brought the Maitreya sutra Kuan-Mi-lo-p'u-sa-shang-sheng-tu-shi-t'ien, from Turfan to China. Cf. Chapter I, iii below.


22. I-Ching

23. Ibid., p.213.


25. Fa-hsien's biography KSC T.50.337b-338b has been translated in Robert Shih, Biographies des Moines Eminent (Kao Seng Tchouan) de Kouei-Kiao Bibliotèque du Muséon vol.54 (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1968), pp.108-115. A number of translations have been made of his famous travel chronicle including: Beal, Si-Yu-Ki (known as Hsuan-tsang's chronicles but includes Fa-hsien's Fo-Kuo-Ki); S. Giles, trans., The Travels of Fa-hsien (399-414 A.D.) or Record of the Buddhist Kingdoms (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1923); and J. Legge, trans., A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms, Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fa-hien of his Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) In Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886).


27. The fewness of Fa-hsien's references to Maitreya are in fact, a little surprising in light of the tremendous popularity of this figure in Central Asia and Ceylon during the fifth century. See Lamotte, Histoire, p.787.

28. Conze, Thirty Years, p.80.


30. Ibid., l:137.

31. Ibid., 2:22.

32. Ibid., 2:142-44.

33. Ibid., 2:120-21.

34. Watters, Yuan Chwang's Travels, p.118.

35. Soper describes this icon in detail in his Appendix to Evidences, pp. 268-70.


Ibid., l:134.


39. These accounts are compared to another story told by Fa-hsien in which Śākyamuni ascends to the Trayastrīṃśa heaven to preach the Law for his mother's sake. Legge, Fa-hsien's Travels in India and Ceylon, pp.47-51. For an account of an artist who was sent to Trayastrīṃśa heaven to see the Buddha in order to make a wooden statue of him see Demiéville, Yogācārabhumi, p.379.

40. Beal, Si-Yu-Ki, 1:226.


42. Beal, Si-Yu-Ki, 1:227-228.

43. Shih, Kao Seng Tchouan, p.91; Demiéville, Yogācārabhumi, p. 378.

44. Cf. Chapter III, ii above.


46. Beal, Si-Yu-Ki, 1:lxxvii-lxxix.


48. The following narrative is based on Ch'en, Buddhism, p. 236; Demiéville, Yogācārabhumi, pp. 388-89.

49. Beal, Si-Yu-Ki, 1:134.


51. The following passage from the Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtra probably had much influence on the frequency of such death-bed accounts. "O Bhagavit, if those being who have directed their thought towards the highest perfect knowledge in other worlds, and who, after having heard my name, when I have obtained the Bodhi (Knowledge), have meditated on me with serene thoughts; if at the moment of their death, after having approached them, surrounded by an assembly of Bhikshus, I should not stand before them, worshipped by them, that is, so that their thoughts should not be troubled, then may I not obtain the highest perfect knowledge. Max Müller, "Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtra," p.15."


54. Ibid., p.234.

55. The inscriptions at Lung-men generally support the view that individuals and groups devoted to Maitreya were active during the N. Wei dynasty. Cf. Chapter III, iii above.

56. For references to Buddhist ideas that influenced rebel cults between the third and the fourth centuries see Muramatsu, "Chinese Rebel Ideologies," p.245; Tsukamoto, Z., Shinabukkyō-shi Kenkyū. Hokugin-hen (A Study of Chinese Buddhist History. The Northern Wei) (Kyoto: Kobundo, 1942, pp. 243-90.

57. Overmyer, Folk Buddhist Religion, p.207.


61. Ibid., p. xxxviii.


64. For textual references see Lamotte, Histoire, p.211.

65. As listed in Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.298.


68. Soper, Evidences, p.269.

70. For more details on the Hua-hu theory see Zürcher, Conquest, pp. 290-320.


73. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.298. In comparison, the beginning of the degenerate age in Japan according to Dōji, author of the Nihon Shoki, was set at the beginning of Buddhist history (552 A.D.).

74. HKSC T.50. 562b-564a. For further references see Hurvitz, Chih-i, pp.86-99.

75. Hurvitz, Chih-i, p.87 n.2.

76. Ibid., p.87 n.2

77. HKSC T.50.562b. Translated in Hurvitz, Chih-i, p.87.


79. Hurvitz, Chih-i, p.108.

80. The eventual decline of the Lotus cults in China and Japan, in the face of the growing attraction of Amita and Avalokiteśvara have also been attributed to the fact that reciting or copying required some degree of education. Later in Japan, Nichiren based his Latter Day movement on the Lotus; as do the followers of the present day Soka Gakkai.


82. Ibid., pp.208ff.

83. Ibid., pp. 332ff.

84. Ibid., p.335. Throughout the Lotus, Maitreya, is placed in the role of a somewhat confused bodhisattva in the assemblage, seeking to break out of his limited Hinayana understanding by questioning the Buddha on the bodhisattva path. His vyākaraṇa, unlike earlier Agama versions is overshadowed by an avalanche of other prophecies of Buddhahood. See Chapters 6, 9, 13 in Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom.
85. The most complete source on Hsin-hsing is Yabuki, Sangaikyō no kenkyū. This source also contains a special section on Sui and T'ang eschatology, pp. 199-213.

86. The "Three Stages" refers to the three periods of the True, Counterfeit and the Degenerate Dharma, each lasting five hundred years.

87. Although Japanese scholars have tended to attribute the rise of the mo-fa doctrine to the Buddhist Suppression of 574, Yabuki maintains that it is more likely that the event did no more than to bring into sharp focus an already well-known but diffuse view. Hurvitz, Chih-i, p.92.

88. It is still uncertain which of the San-chieh documents were actually written by Hsin-hsing and which were written by his followers. One document (Stein 2137 - Tun-huang) is thought to be an extract by his own hand. Waley, "review of Sangaikyō," p.166.


90. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.299.

91. With the translation of two Tun-huang manuscripts (Stein 2658 and 6502) A. Forte concludes that a new document has now been discovered which displaces the Mahāmegha sūtra (Ta-yun ching) which was formerly thought to be forged to support Empress Wu's claim to be cakravartin and Maitreya in one, see his Political Propoganda and Ideology in China at the End of the Seventh Century; Inquiry into the Nature, Authors and Function of the Tunhuang document S.6502 followed by an Annotated Translation. (Napoli: Instituto Universitario Oriental, 1976). I am grateful to Dr. S. Iida for this reference.

92. Traces of the sect's activities after this date have been found in Korea and Japan and references to it were made as late as the eighteenth century in Japan. Waley, "review of Sangaikyō," pp.165-66.

93. Ibid., p.168.

94. Tsukamoto Z., "Ryūmon Sekkutsu ni Arawaretaru Hokugi Bukkyō," [N. Wei Buddhism as revealed in the Lungmen Caves], in Ryūmon, Mizuno and Nagahiro, pp.231-234.
Chapter V
Salvation: chiu-chi (求濟)

I. Introduction

By the height of the T'ang, the golden age of Chinese culture, the eschatological crisis had passed. Salvation, for multitudes of Buddhist devotees could be achieved by acquiring deep faith in the saving power of Amita's name and his vows. No longer capable of attaining enlightenment through his own efforts, the faithful believer strove for rebirth in Amita's Pure Land and there, became a candidate for nirvāṇa. To assist his practice and meditation, the believer could even catch a glimpse of paradise by gazing on the intricate paintings and diagrams depicting the celestial abodes of the Buddha. Artists, such as those at Tun-huang, painted vast cosmic landscapes filled with a complex of T'ang monastaries and palaces. In these paintings bodhisattvas and other celestial beings fly through the air; ascending and descending between earth and paradise. Amidst lotus ponds and bejewelled trees, the faithful sing praises to the Buddha while angelic musicians play the music of the Dharma. In the center is Amita, enthroned upon a lotus blossom.

Indigenous Chinese thought was deeply influenced by popular Buddhist notions of paradise and after life. While Chinese had previously entertained conceptions of Taoist fairylands and Confucian utopias; such ideal lands were more often conceived of as a perfected earthly order rather than as a supra-mundane abode. Thus, the transental Buddha-lands and heavens provided not only rich imagery but a new
emphasis on other worldly dimensions for the earlier Chinese traditions
to draw upon. Similarly, even a cursory look at pre-Buddhist concepts
of afterlife reveals the indebtedness of later Chinese theories to
Buddhism. The Confucians supported the view that death was permanent.
When a person died, it was believed that part of him, the heavier
element (p'o) sank down to the Yellow Springs below the earth and
the other part, the lighter element (hun) hovered around the family
tables, there benefiting from the ancestral offerings. In contrast,
early Taoist practices perpetuated the hope that, given ideal conditions,
the human body could by-pass death and live forever. The Buddhist
concept of karma had developed elaborate theories of rebirth into
other modes of existence and even judgement after death.

The numerous elements making up the prospect of a blissful rebirth
in paradise found in Amita devotionalism were readily adopted by the
Chinese. The evolution of the Pure Land movement in China, incorporating
strands as diverse as the philosophical systems of Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu
to the simple piety of early devotional lay groups, is described by Suzuki
Daisetz as marking "an epoch in the history of Mahāyāna Buddhism". Suzuki
adds that its "emergence illustrates the persistent and irrepressible
assertion of certain aspects of religious consciousness...neglected in
the so-called primitive teaching of the Buddha." Under the impetus of
eschatological fervor during sixth and seventh centuries China, this
expression of intense devotion developed from an inchoate tradition to
a highly sophisticated but flexible doctrine that offered both the
philosophical subtleties of Mahāyāna thought and the practical techniques
of a religion for unlettered masses. Thus its appeal cut across different
Buddhist schools and social groups. But in the beginning, the Pure Land movement was an eschatological movement. In order to demonstrate how the evolution of the Pure Land movement was fundamentally shaped as a solution to the problem of salvation in the "latter evil age", this chapter will examine two developments from the formative period of this complex tradition. The first section is devoted to the early formulation of Pure Land doctrine under its first three Chinese patriarchs: T'an-luan (476-542), Tao-ch'o (562-645) and Shan-tao (613-681). For the purpose of this thesis, it is not necessary to elaborate on the subtle philosophical distinctions which they raised but to identify the influence of latter day views on their view of man and his salvation; which in turn, provided the doctrinal foundation for Chinese Buddhist devotionalism. The second section deals with one of the most compelling aspects of Pure Land belief -- the visions of paradise. Here again, rather than delineating the numerous philosophical interpretations of paradise, my aim will be to provide some of the evidence of competition during the Sui and early T'ang between those who aspired to be reborn in Tusita Heaven and those who desired to go to Sukhavati.

II. Eschatology and Pure Land Doctrine

The basic scriptures that inspired Pure Land thought make both direct and indirect references to the latter age of the Dharma. The Smaller Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra describes Sākyamuni himself as:
"...Having obtained the transcendent true knowledge in this world Saha, he taught the Law which all the world is reluctant to accept during this corruption of the present Kalpa, during this corruption of mankind, during this corruption of belief, during this corruption of life, during this corruption of passions."\(^{12}\)

In the latter portion of the **Larger Sukhāvatī-vyuha sutra**, the Buddha entrusts the scripture to the bodhisattva Ajita (Maitreya) and urges him to guard and to teach it so that "...the laws of the Buddha may not perish or disappear."\(^{13}\) The most specific reference, found in Kumarajīva's translation, states that after 1,000 years all the sutras would disappear except for the **Wu-liang-shou ching** (**LSVS**)

> In the future, when my teachings perish, I will out of pity and compassion retain this sutra for one hundred years."\(^{14}\)

The third Pure Land text, the **Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching** (**Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra**) introduces an important new element: the practice of **buddhānusmṛti**, which was interpreted in different ways by succeeding Pure Land masters. From the time that the latter sūtra was translated in the fifth century, Pas observes that two distinct streams of Pure Land development emerged; the devotional which was based primarily on the earlier translation of the two **Sukhāvatī** sutras and the meditational which was based on the **dhyāna sutra**.\(^{15}\)

In the work of the three best known Chinese Pure Land masters, Tan-luan, Tao-ch'ō and Shan-tao\(^{16}\), these two streams of devotionalism and meditation became more and more integrated. By Shan-tao's time, the various contradictory Pure Land beliefs from simply calling once upon the name of Amita on one's death-bed to following a rigorous program of
meditation, study and morality were systematically graded from easy to progressively more difficult means of salvation. The more strenuous the practice, the better the degree of rebirth in Amita's paradise. And while the more capable may strive to fulfill the more difficult methods, the less talented could, with confidence and ardor, take refuge in simpler means.  

On his way back north from Southern China where he had been seeking the Taoist elixir of immortality, T'au-luan was converted to Pure Land beliefs by Bodhiruci. Although only twelve years remained between the time of his conversion and his death, T'an-luan became the first in the line of great Chinese Pure Land masters: he was the first to make strenuous efforts to reach the common man and to teach the practice of nien-fo or contemplating and chanting the name of Amita. And he was also the first to base the teachings of the Pure Land movement on the doctrine of the end of the Dharma.

T'an-luan saw Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu as the last bodhisattvas of the counterfeit age. His familiarity with their work may well have exposed him to the following passage, in which Nagarjuna states his purpose in composing the Middle Treatise:

After the Buddha's decease, during the latter five hundred years in the (period of the) Counterfeit Dharma, men's facilities were even duller and they were deeply attached to all dharmas.

Man, during the Buddha-less age, plagued by the five defilements, was incapacitated to the extent that he was unable to grasp the reality of sunyata. New means had to be sought.

In his best known work Wang-sheng-lun chu, T'an-luan develops his theory on self-power (自力) and other power (他力). By
giving the analogy of a weakman who is able to traverse the world when he attaches himself to a cakravartin, T'an-luan emphasized the necessity for the incapacitated believer, unable to make any progress on his own, to cling to the power of Amita. Also in the Wang-sheng-wu chu he elaborates on Nagarjuna's distinction between "difficult practice" and "easy practice" (難易). Here T'an-luan equates "difficult practice" with the bodhisattva path and self-power and the "easy practice" with the Pure Land path and other power.²³ Nāgārjuna's treatise also states:

> If good men and women hear that Buddha's name and obtain deep faith, then they do not regress from (the state of) anuttara samyaksambodhi.²⁴

T'an-luan saw this statement against the background of his own interpretations of Amita's vows as found in the Wu-liang-shou ching; in particular, the eighteenth vow.

> When I have obtained Buddhahood, if those beings who are in the ten quarters should believe in me with serene thoughts, and should wish to be born in my country, and should have say ten times thought of me (or repeated my name), - if they should not be born there, may I not obtain the perfect knowledge; barring only those beings who have committed the five deadly sins, and who have spoken evil of the good Law.

T'an-luan taught the most lowly could achieve the state of non-regression by relying on the other power of Amita and by meditating on him or invoking even ten times on his name.²⁵ He thus not only laid the doctrinal foundations for the movement but released a surge of popular Pure Land activity. Ch'en reminds us that in 520 there was only one
Amita figure in Lung-men but that between 530-540 though T'an luan's influence, the number had increased to six. The significance of T'an-luan's eschatological concerns were not that they were unique, they were in fact totally in keeping with the tenor of his age but that these concerns greatly influenced the development of his doctrinal views: with the corruption of the Dharma, the only viable path to salvation was the Pure Land path.

In 609, after reading a monument lauding T'an-luan's devoted efforts in teaching the Pure Land Path, Tao-ch'o became a devout exponent of the movement. Besides expanding on T'an-luan's themes of salvation based on other-power and nien-fo for all of humanity, Tao-ch'o contributed to the path on even greater confidence in the exclusivity of its claims. All the other Buddhist teachings constituted the "Holy Gate" (聖道門) as opposed to the "Pure Land Gate" (净土門). While those who followed the "Holy Path" could gain the rank of non-regression only after 10,000 kalpas of continuous practice, Amita's believers could swiftly attain that state. In the latter age, only by entering the "Pure Land Gate" could one be assured of salvation.

Of the three Pure Land masters described in this section it is Tao-ch'o, Hsin-hsing's contemporary, who was the most vigorous exponent of mo-fa beliefs. In his one extant but exceedingly influential work, An-lo-chi (安樂集) he reiterates the theme of the absolute suitability of the Pure Land Path in the latter days and how even the least capable could attain rebirth in the Western Paradise. Commenting on the passage from the Wu-liang-shou ching he writes:
If I am to reveal the length of time of the sutras remaining in the world, the lifetime teachings of Sakgamuni Buddha have gone through the Age of Right Dharma for five hundred years and the Age of Semblance Dharma for the next one thousand years and entered the Age of Decadent Dharma which will last for ten thousand years. In the last age, the sentient beings (who practice the Way) will decrease in number until there is none, and all the sutras (of the Path of Sages) will perish. Tathāgata, out of compassion for afflicted beings, especially retains this Larger Sutra for a hundred years.

In the An-lo-chi, Tao-ch'o also quotes from the Mahāsannipata sutra:

During the final or decadent period of Buddhism millions of sentient beings may start to cultivate the way of religion, but none of them will realize it. Now in this world of five evils the path leading to the Pure Land is the only way.

In his writing and teaching Tao-ch'o made it clear that not only the Dharma, but man's potential too, had declined in this last age. Men were but "common beings" (凡夫) who were "no longer capable of the sustained effort and discipline necessary to reach enlightenment by their own efforts". With Tao-ch'o, mo-fa beliefs were formally established as a fundamental part of Pure Land doctrine.

With the strong emphasis on the latter day doctrine, it is not surprising that Pure Land practice, as advocated by Tao-ch'o much more than under Tan-luan, should have moved in the direction of even greater popularization. Of the time Pure Land practices: invoking the name of Amita, chanting sutras, meditating on the Buddha, worshipping Amita images and singing praises to Amita; the first, or k'ou-cheng nien-fo was given the highest status. Without necessarily invaliding the value of meditational or contemplative nien-fo, the master stressed that if one
were to simply call upon Amita's name with whole-hearted concentration, all the evil, sin and hardship standing between the devotee and paradise would be overcome. It is said that he exemplified this practice by reciting the name of the Buddha 70,000 a day and that others, such as his disciple Tao-sheng, who is reputed to have repeated the name one million times in seven days, avidly followed suit.

Feats of stamina such as these continued during the time of Tao-cho's most illustrious disciple, Shan-tao. Writers from the time of Shan-tao relate how his followers in Ch'ang-an copied the Lotus Sutra thousands of times or how Shan-tao himself made over 100,000 copies of the A-mi-to ching. It was said that when he chanted the name of Amita, rays of light and buddha figures would stream forth from his lips.

Despite such accounts, Shan-tao is famed as the supreme systematizer of Pure Land philosophy. Like T'an-luan and Tao-ch'o, he lectured extensively on the Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching but made even greater efforts to bring about a harmonious blending of Pure Land thought with Madhyamika and Yogacara philosophy. According to Pas, Pure Land beliefs for Shan-tao, ultimately stood as a powerful upaya to lead men to a higher goal. Without doubt his brilliant expositions were instrumental in bringing about the widespread acceptance of the doctrine. Nevertheless, the creativity with which he mapped the passage from mundane existence to Paradise, together with his intensely emotional description of the misery of the human condition finally left the greatest impact — especially for the continuing appeal of Pure Land beliefs.

In his main work Kuan-ching chu (Commentary on the Kuan-wu-liang-shou ching) Shan-tao elaborates upon the five practices required for rebirth
in the Pure Land. The primary practice was the invocational nien-fo, the first, while the other four were designated auxiliary practices. It is also in this commentary that he graphically illustrates the perilousness of human existence by the parable of the White Path. The believer who aspires to paradise must tread a thin white path flanked on one side by a river of fire, symbolizing his anger and on the other by a river of water, symbolizing his greed. The journey is made even more fearsome because flames and waves spill over onto the path. Sweet voices call him from behind, tempting him to give up his quest. His only strength is from Śākyamuni who urges him onward from the worldly shore and Amita who encourages him from Paradise on the "other shore". Thus for Shan-tao, even the path to salvation was fraught with terror; and man himself was utterly worthless and full of sin. In such circumstances how much stronger was the incentive to acquire a deep faith and to cling to Amita's vow.

With Shan-tao, the Pure Land Path was clearly differentiated into two broad types of practice: meditational nien-fo combined with discipline for the monastics and simple vocal nien-fo for the common man. Latter day beliefs found continuity on his doctrinal work and aroused the passion of those who held to the exclusive claims of the Pure Land Path. His rejection of all other forms of Buddhism and his brilliant apologetic expositions of Pure Land beliefs brought the movement to its apex in China.

During Tao-cho and Shan-tao's lifetimes, another Buddhist leader, Hsin-hsing claimed that his was the only way to salvation. Opposition and conflict between those who advocated the Pure Land teachings and those who proclaimed the path of the Sect of the Three Stages "gave
rise to intense Buddhist activities in N. China. Eventually, assertions by Hsin-hsing's followers that the government, not being exempt from the depravity of the age, did not deserve the obedience of its people, led to the suppression of the Sect. On the other hand, the Pure Land adherents, having won the support of their co-religionists as well as of the populace, forged ahead. Thus while the Pure Land movement and the Sect of the Three Stages both originated under the influence of mo-fa beliefs, they developed entirely different doctrines and practices. Ironically, by the beginning of the eighth century, Pure Land as an independent movement had begun to decline in China. Subsequent Pure Land masters including Tz'u-min and Fa-chao to seek to harmonize Pure Land beliefs with other Buddhist teachings. From the latter part of the T'ang onwards, Pure Land doctrine and practices were diffused throughout the other schools of Chinese Buddhism.

III. Conflicting Paradises

Throughout religious history, man has yearned for paradise; the indescribable, the unspeakable "other", communicated by luminous visions of heavenly cities and irenic landscapes. And through these visions, the seeker caught a glimpse of reality. From the second century A.D. when An-shih-kao translated the first sutra describing a Buddhist paradise, that of Aksobhya, this concept has exercised a major influence on the religious aspirations of Chinese Buddhists. The rivalry previously mentioned between the various Indian and Central Asian cults continued in China in Chinese fashion. Like the fifth century Chinese monk who wrote that he
"...made one stone image of Maitreya praying that those of the preceding generation, his parents with their household and the monks who were his masters, may be reborn in the land of Buddha Amitayus in the West (or?) where the Three Meetings will be held (by Maitreya) to preach the Dharma under the Dragon-flower tree; or if they are reborn here below among men, may (their lots) fall among the nobility; and in some place where they are contemporaries with some great Bodhisattva."38

Many wished to cover all possible options. Yet, despite this tendency toward syncretism, conflicting loyalties were inevitable and the most intense rivalry was between the devotees of Maitreya and those of Amita. This precariously Chinese controversy took place during the fourth to the eighth centuries when some of the greatest Chinese Buddhist masters debated the respective merits of being reborn in Tuṣita Heaven as opposed to gaining access to Sukhavati.

The monastics at the core of the controversy were either leaders of the Pure Land movement or of the Fa-hsiang school.40 Monks such as Tao-ch'o, Chia-ts'ai, Chi-tsang, Shan-tao and Hui-kan stood in opposition to others like Hsuan-tsong and his disciple, K'uai-chi. For the Pure Land adherents, already in conflict with other schools because of their unorthodox and exclusivist claims to salvation, asserting the superiority of Sukhāvatī over Tuṣita meant simply answering another in a long list of "doubts" or objections raised by other Buddhists.41 For Hsiang-tsong and K'uai-chi, Maitreya was not only a special object of personal devotion but part of the foundation myth of the Fa-hsiang school.42 Both groups agreed that Tuṣita Heaven was a heaven in the kamadhatu, accepted both by Hinayana and Mahayana masters and that Sukhāvatī was a Buddha-land (buddhakṣetra) beyond the three worlds, attested to only by Mahāyāna masters.43 Yet these Chinese masters, according to Demiéville, "tendaciously chose Tuṣita Heaven in comparing Maitreya's Pure Land to that of Amitāyus."44
These comparisons were made up of a maze of differing interpretations on certain mutually agreed upon characteristics of the two paradises.

In the *Ch'ing-t'u-Shih-i-lun*, two basic points which Pure Land supporters saw in their favour were: the absolute certainty of obtaining release through Amita's vow and the purity of Sukhavatī. The operation of *upāya* and the potency of meditating on Amita guaranteed rebirth in Sukhavatī whereas Tusita could be attained only by those who keep the ten precepts and enter "deeply into true-samadhi" (*正定*). Amīta's paradise, undefiled by the women, the followers of the two *yānas* and the sensuous pleasures found in *Tusita*, swiftly took one to the stage of the non-regressor. Furthermore, we are reminded that just as those who did not attain arhatship during the life of Śākyamuni Buddha were as numerous as the "sand of the ganga", so would the ignorant still abound with the advent of Maitreya. In contrast, with rebirth in Sukhavatī, "all obtain the insight of non-arising, and there has never been and who has fallen therefrom into the three worlds and who again became bound by the *karma* of birth and death."  

Hsüan-tsang responded to these claims by arguing that Sukhavatī was in fact, inaccessible to common people and that salvation there was by no means immediate nor sure; unless one sacrificed the true meaning of the texts for the literal. He averred that in India, Buddhists strove for rebirth in *Tusita* Heaven where the practices were easier because of its likeness to our own world. Besides, rebirth in Sukhavatī could only be secured by Bodhisattvas of the tenth *bhūmi* and could not be won by the common man. Hsüan-tsang claimed that such misunderstandings came about when one conforms to the "leter" and not the "spirit" of the scripture.
For example, commenting on a passage by Vasubandhu, Hsüan-tsang claimed that the recitation of Prabhūtaratāḥ recommended there did not mean that bodhi was assured by merely repeating the Buddha's name but that this practice was only one cause of progress. Just as one cannot amass a thousand pieces of gold from one piece of gold in one day -- one cannot instantly attain salvation in Amita's paradise by simply vowing to be reborn there.

Perhaps the most frequently cited issue in the controversy of the paradises was the two courtyards in Tuṣita Heaven. The Hsi-yu-ki describes how three years following his death Vasubandhu returned to tell Asanga about conditions in Tuṣita Heaven. Vasubandhu is said to have reported that the devotees stayed either in the outer courtyard where they are submerged in the bliss fulfilling their desires or in the inner courtyard where, welcomed by Maitreya, they progressed in the Dharma.

Tao-cho, Hsuan-tsang's contemporary stressed the fact that although Maitreya taught the way of avaivartika to his assemblage in the inner court, many in the outer court remained encumbered by attachments. While rebirth in Amita's Pure Land meant instantly becoming an avaivartin, rebirth in Tuṣita was in contrast, risky. In his An-lo-chi, Tao-ch'o emphatically stated that since only Tuṣita's inner court offered salvation, it was by far more beneficial to strive for rebirth in Sukhāvatī.

The proponents of Tuṣita Heaven, on the other hand, argued that Maitreya's abode was not merely a pleasure realm but contained within it a place where true religious knowledge could be attained. Even though the idea of the two courtyards is not readily borne out in Maitreya sutras,
ways were found to validate it. The Kuan-Mü-lo-shang-sheng-ching, for example, lavishly describes Tuṣīta as a wonderland with innumerable palaces and a forty-nine-story "Hall of the Good Law" where Maitreya preaches. K'üai-chih, identified this "Hall of the Good Law" with the inner court, which in essence eventually became analogous with a Pure Land. The Chinese masters thus endowed Tuṣīta Heaven with all the characteristics of Maitreya's Pure Land.

Hsuan-tsang and K'üai-chi's efforts made significant impact; their translation of Yogācara works in the sixth century spurred a resurgence of interest in Maitreya which continued into the seventh and eighth. According to Demiéville, this phenomenon affected the Pure Land movement to the extent that "il fallut tous les efforts de l'école de Chan-tao pour remettre en vogue la Terre Pure de l'Ouest." Works such as Chia-ts'ai's Ch'ing-tu-lun and Huai-kan's Ch'ing-tu Ch'un-i-lun demonstrate the great lengths that the Pure Land adherents went to in order to prove their case.

In attempting to establish the superiority of Sukhāvatī, many of the points raised seem far removed from the idealist philosophy of the Fa-hsiang school. For example:

1) that life in Tuṣīta lasts for only 4,000 years whereas life in Sukhāvatī goes on for 100 thousands of myriads of kotis of nayuta of the asamkhyya-kalpa; or

2) that passions are both latent and manifest in Tuṣīta but are found only in latent form in Sukhāvatī; or

3) that Tuṣīta is exposed to cosmic calamities such as fire at the end of the kalpa whereas Sukhāvatī is protected from all damage from water, fire, wind, etc.; or
4) that when one is reborn in Tuṣita no one comes to greet the believer whereas a whole assembly of saints greets the devotee going to Sukhāvatī.⁵²

Such arguments, in fact, betray, view of paradise as an objective reality, a "place" where the devotee may gain admittance. And where it is obvious why such a literal paradise should find widespread acceptance among the laity, it is surprising that clerics such as T' an-luan⁵³ and K'uai-chi should have used such concrete expressions of the Pure Land in their polemical works.

Nakamura Hajime has commented on the Chinese tendency to concretize the abstract⁵⁴; even Taoist and Confucian paradises were geographically located. The translations of dhyāna sutras in the fifth century teaching visualization of Buddha-lands with well-defined physical attributes no doubt also reinforced the tendency toward a literal understanding of paradise. T' an-luan himself is credited with initiating the practice of capturing the visions inspired by the Kuan-wi-liang-shou ching paintings. By the early seventh century when the first paradise paintings in Tun-huang appeared, they no longer served a limited audience as an aid to meditation but awed large numbers of monks and laity who perceived them as actual depictions of the world to come.

Concurrently, more sophisticated philosophical expressions of paradise were being developed. Shan-tao's Pure Land ontology and Hsüan-tsang's exegetical methods took the Chinese notion of paradise far beyond physical descriptions. Both the literal and the philosophical views have found continuity to the present day. When a simple layman dies with the name of Amita on his lips and a vision of paradise before him,
he follows in the path of innumerable seekers of Sukhāvatī who went before him. And when a scholar such as Suzuki Daisetz writes that "the Pure Land is the reflection of this world and this world is the reflection of the Pure Land"⁵⁵ he expresses an interpretation born out of Pure Land thought in its maturity. Co-existent with this world, paradise is seen as a spiritual realm wherein the enlightened Buddhist dwells.

In either case, Maitreya's coming is no longer anticipated and Tuṣita Heaven no longer a goal — the eschaton has been transcended by paradise won in the here-and-now.
Footnotes to Chapter V

1. Sometimes incorrectly referred to as Pure Land mandalas, these landscapes are known as Jōdō hensō (Ja.) or "transformed configurations". For location and types of hensō paintings at Tun-huang see J. Okazaki, Pure Land Painting (San Francisco: Kodanska Int. Ltd. and Shibundo, 1977), pp.29-30.

2. Overmyer, Folk Buddhist Religion, p.145.


6. Some scholars consider the use of the name Pure Land Movement more accurate than Pure Land School in China because by the Sung, Pure Land practices were adopted by the other schools, including Ch'an and T'ien-tai. Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary," p.60. Pure Land School may be better appropriate in Japan where the movement reached its maturity under Honen and Shinran.


9. For further discussion on this matter see Yabuki, Sangaïkyō, pp.199-213.

10. Bodhiruci and Hui-yūan's names sometimes heads this list. Cf. n.16 below.


13. Muller, "Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra," p.69. There are many differences between the Sanskrit and the various Chinese versions of this sūtra; one of the most significant for the growth of Pure Land devotionalism being the inclusion of two extra vows in the Chinese. See Müller, "Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra," pp 12-22, 73-75.

15. Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary," p.597. Although later interpretations of the Amitāyur-dhyāna sūtra by Tao-cho and Shan-tao also stressed the devotional element, passages from the Sukhāvatī-sūtras such as the eighteenth vow continued to be important sources for the development of the Pure Land devotionalism.


17. The translation of the Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra in the fourth century emphasized that even the icchantika could attain enlightenment reinforced this idea. For its effect during the N. Wei see Hurvitz, Wei Shu, p.60 n.4 and for an account of its controversy see W. Liebenthal, "The World Conception of Tao-sheng," MN 12 (1956;1957): 65-103; 241-268.

18. For his biography in HKSC and other sources see Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary," p.140 n.1.


25. Müller, "Larger Sukhāvatī-vyūha sūtra," p. 73. For development of nien-fo see Andrews, "Chinese Nembutsu".

26. For his biographical and other sources see Pas, "Shan-tao's Commentary," p.142 n.2.

28. T.47.4-11; Encyc. B., s.v. "An-lo-chi" by

29. An-lo-chi quoted by Shinran in his Kyō Gyō Shin Shō, p. 201. The editor adds that for Shinran, "one hundred years" implied "eternally".


32. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.346.

33. For biographical references see Pas, 'Shan-tao's Commentary'.

34. In addition to the Pure Land Sutras, he also encouraged the chanting of the Lotus, Vajracchedikā, Nirvāṇa and Prajñā sūtras. Ch'en, Buddhism in China, p.347.

35. Cf. Chapter IV, iii above.


39. Demiéville, Yogācārabhūmi, p. 394 n.7.

40. For more detailed references to individual Chinese monks and their views see: Demieville, Yogācārabhūmi, p. 391 n.3; Matsumoto, Miroku Jōdōron, Chapter 9.

41. Numerous Pure Land commentaries demonstrate this aim. Pas mentions a work, Nien-fo chi by Shan-tao, in which the validity of Pure Land beliefs argued against six other schools: the Three Stages, the Maitreya, the Ch'an, the Discourse, the Vinaya and the Paramitā. Pas, 'Shan-tao's Commentary,' p.236.

42. Demiéville, Yogācārabhūmi, p.389.

43. Demiéville writes that Tuṣita Heaven may have served as a model for the Pure Lands or that Tuṣita itself "was transformed in the imagination of the faithful as an imitation of the Pure Lands". Yogācārabhūmi, p.394, 394 n.7.

44. Ibid., p.392-394.
45. The two points mentioned above are based on the seventh doubt of the *Shih-i lun*, a work traditionally attributed to Chih-i and considered to represent Pure Land thought at a point where it had clearly departed from normative Chinese Mahāyāna but had not yet established its exclusivist stance. L. Pruden, trans., "The Ching-t'u Shih-i-lun," *EB* (New Series) 6 (May 1973): 145-148.

46. Ibid., p.147.

47. This paragraph is summarized from the writings of Hsūan-tsang quoted by Demieville, *Yogācārabhūmi*, pp.389-391.

48. The following argument on the two courtyards is mainly based on Demiéville, *Yogācārabhūmi*, p.393 n.1.

49. Ibid., p.392.

50. T.47. 1963 and T.47.1960 respectively.


52. Traditionally attributed to Ku'ai-chi, *Hsi-fang-Yao-ch'ueh* (T.47.1964), Demieville *Yogācārabhūmi*, pp.389-90 n.4. Although points 1, 5, 7 and 9 were selected because they were the most concrete of the arguments, they should also be examined in relation to the more abstract points which make up the philosophical substance of the passage.


CONCLUSION

For over 2500 years Gautama Buddha has represented the sacred center of knowledge and authority to whom all Buddhists have turned. The Buddha's enlightenment is regarded a revelation of Truth by an all-knowing being and his words as they were set down in the Buddhist Canon, as the final authority in all disputes. In the mind of the believer, however, the centrality of the Buddha's position as teacher and savior did not remain an exclusive one. In the centuries following the Buddha's death, the believers felt an increasing sense of distance from the founder of their religion. The Buddha, upon entering that ineffable state called nirvāṇa was beyond reach. Furthermore, embedded in the teachings was a concept called the End of the Dharma; even the Buddha Word would undergo successive stages of decay until finally, it would disappear. The disappearance of the Doctrine and the attendant social and environmental ills could only be remedied by the appearance of the Maitreya Buddha, the Buddha of the Future. The growth in the importance of Maitreya as the focal point of messianic expectation brought forward another sacred center to whom the believers might turn. With the rise of the Mahayana schools, other buddhas and bodhisattvas also became focal points of worship. Although the Hinayāna schools rejected the idea of the celestial buddhas, believers in the Mahāyāna schools were now able to turn not only to Gautama and Maitreya but also to a growing number of salvational figures including Amitābha, the Buddha of the Western Paradise.
During the fifth and sixth centuries in China, Maitreya's popularity reached a peak and then declined. Concomitantly, Amita and his Western Paradise steadily gained new adherents. For those who prayed that they might join Maitreya in Tuṣita Heaven or to be reborn when Maitreya appeared on earth, the realization of their hopes in an age of continuing crises brought less and less solace. For those who expected Maitreya to appear in their own time, a sense of eschatological disappointment ensued. Either way the Maitreyan promise was losing its attraction and new means of salvation were sought. For increasing numbers of Chinese Buddhists, devotion to Amita Buddha provided the sole means of salvation in the Degenerate Age. By the end of this period the cult of Amita was transformed into the Pure Land school, the greatest and most enduring devotional movement in Buddhism. The eschatological aspirations and subsequent disappointment and hopelessness during the Period of Disunion lent vital impetus to rise of devotionalism in the Sui and early T'ang.

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In addition to the broad sweep of historical and doctrinal developments summarized above, numerous other symbols and themes emerged. For example: the symbols of paradise and kingship; the richness and complexity of medieval messianism; and the dynamic interplay between devotional and eschatological ideas. In order to show the universality of such themes, let us compare the occurrence of three such themes in Buddhism and Christianity: 1) the phenomenon of "eschatological disappointment"; 2) the role of the laity in the rise of devotionalism; and 3) the intimate relationship between eschatology and history.
The theme of eschatological disappointment has been well documented in modern Christian theological literature. Among the early Christians, a shift occurred in the perception of the eschaton. Paul understood that he was living in the time between the resurrection of Jesus and his return at the time of the end. On the other hand, John understood that he was living in the period between the crucifixion of his Saviour and the end of the individual's earthly life. When Christ did not return as expected, a period of eschatological disappointment resulted. Augustine, inheriting from Paul, the Christian teleological view of history, developed his argument against the older pre-Christian view of time.¹ When the apocalyptic expectation which had embued Christianity was condemned as superstition in 431 A.D., belief in the physical return went underground to be revived intermittently in millennarian movements, and more recently, in fundamentalist dogma.

In a sense, the Buddhist perception of the eschaton underwent a similar shift. To Tao-an, the present represented the time between the Nirvāṇa of Gautama Buddha and the appearance of the Maitreya Buddha. To his disciple Hui-yüan, this same time represented the period between the historical Buddha and the death of an individual believer who could join Amitābha Buddha in his Western Paradise. During the period of Disunion many hoped that Maitreya would descend to China in their own lifetimes. For those Buddhists, the failure of Maitreya to appear, and for others, the increasingly longer periods of time which were still left of the degenerate age, intensified the general sense of hopelessness and despair. Thus that variants on "eschatological disappointment" occurred in both Christianity and Buddhism when the future savior did not manifest himself
is evident. However, one important distinction between the two is that in Buddhism, not only was the waiting period before the advent progressively lengthened but a crisis was created by the assumption that the world was in a Buddha-less age. It was this atmosphere of hopelessness that contributed to the ready acceptance of the solution to salvation offered by the Pure Land masters. Yet in both traditions, the aftermath of "eschatological disappointment" follows the same pattern: the belief finds continuity on one hand, in its orthodox forms and on the other, in nourishing the mythologies of popular messianism throughout medieval times.

In both traditions, the devotionalism that characterized messianic activities is most evident among the laity. Faith, the fulfilment of devotionalism is often singled out as the means by which the masses of humanity can aspire to religious freedom. Conze goes as far to state that "...before 1850 no religion could establish itself firmly in society without re-stating its doctrine in terms of Faith...". A distinction perhaps more clearly made in Buddhism than in Christianity is that faith is a cardinal but introductory step in the path to enlightenment. Buddhist scholars are careful to point out the differences between the "blind faith" of common currency and the knowledge and confidence which characterize the acceptance of the Three Treasures. However, because it is an introductory step, it was one of the first principles taught to the laymen. Later in Mahāyāna terms faith became associated with belief in saviours and paradises just as in medieval Catholicism faith became associated with belief in the efficacy of prayer directed to the Virgin Mary, a multitude of saints, and the promise of heaven. Buddhist and
Christian laity alike translated their faith into acts of devotion focussed on pilgrimages, relics and sacrificial offerings. These forms of worship appealed to the layman and more often than not, he understood little more. For the converted masses in Medieval China and Europe, devotionalism offered the most satisfying means to salvation.

It is the theologians and the historians rather than laymen who have discussed the dichotomy between history and eschatology. The Western intellectual's attitude towards God, cosmos, time, and the human condition were profoundly conditioned by the changing discipline of historiography and the heavenly and temporal visions of eschatology. The classical eschaton of Judaism and Early Christianity was neutralized by the realized eschatology of Augustine and subsequently underwent progressive secularization through idealism, materialism and the belief in progress.

The history of Buddhism, and in particular, Chinese Buddhism, reveals other types of influences and relationships. Contrary to the usually accepted categorization of "linear time" and "cyclic time" in which Chinese notions of cyclic time would fall into the category of "primitive man" who lacks historical consciousness, Chinese concepts of time history were already highly developed by the beginning of the Christian era. Furthermore, with the introduction of Buddhist notion's concerning the end of the Dharma, the Chinese monastic's perception of historical events gained another dimension. Present wrongs would continue until the ineluctable historical process had run its course; the religion itself was programmed to decline. Hand in hand with the Mandate of Heaven, the Buddhist eschaton determined the success of the ruler who would arise at the appropriate moment in the cosmic process as the
cakravartin of the earthly paradise.

Even modern Buddhist historians, notably Conze, finding the traditional Buddhist division of history into three stages of the decline of the Dharma irresistible, continue to analyze the historical development of Buddhist philosophy in analogous periods of time. Eggermont points out that the end of the first five hundred year period marked a critical point in the history of Buddhism; the beginning of a new era initiated by the rise of the Sarvāstivāda and the composition of scriptures at the Third Buddhist Council in Kashmir. Conze took the phenomenon of the rise of eschatological concern into consideration when proposing a date for the Vajracchedikā sūtra. And in a more personal vein, he applies the three stage theory to the decline of religion in both East and West: for Conze, the last five hundred years has been a period of spiritual paucity and the nineteenth century, "a low ebb".

We, in the latter part of the twentieth century, when traditional religious modes and values are swiftly crumbling and countless new ways of being religious are being born, may well suspect that we are living in an age analogous to first century India or sixth-seventh century China. In K. Jaspers model, these times would qualify as axial periods: pivotal points in the development of religion and civilization when old paradigms fade and a qualitatively new paradigm emerges. Thus, it is essential in this age of demythologization, materialism and the death of religion to examine the traditional eschatological visions and to understand the emotive forces behind millenia of expectation. Perhaps then we will better comprehend the current array of international prophet with their new variations on devotion and the eschaton.
Footnotes to Conclusion

5. This concept has been developed by Eliade in his *Myth of the Eternal Return*. Before Eliade, Van der Leeuw described it as "...a great cleavage in the self-consciousness of man".
6. Conze relates the growth in the importance of magical practices in Buddhism to a decline in spirituality dating from 500 A.D. "But as spirituality dating from 500 A.D. "But as spiritual potency of the Dharma waned, and as history was felt to become more and more adverse, greater efforts were held to be required." *Thirty Years*, pp.82-83.
10. K. Jaspers, *The Origin and the Goal of History*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), Chapters 1,4. Karl Jaspers applied the term "axial period" specifically to the sixth century B.C. which saw the rise of Buddhism and Confucianism in Asia and of Hellenistic philosophy in the Mediterranean. Although this aspect of Jaspers' work has attracted little interest for some years, applying it to the first and seventh centuries A.D. (to the time of the rise of Christianity and Islam, respectively) strikes me as fertile field for research.
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* I was not able to make use of these references for this paper but list them for anyone wishing to do further research.