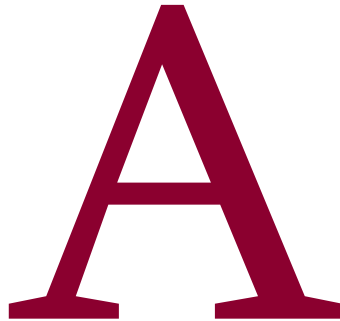


# B U D D H I S M



pan-Asian religion and philosophy, Buddhism was founded by Siddhārtha Gotama in northeast India about the 5th century BCE. Buddhism has played a central role in the Eastern world and during the 20th century has spread to the West.

## THE BUDDHA'S MESSAGE

The teaching attributed to the BUDDHA GOTAMA was transmitted orally by his disciples, prefaced by the phrase “*Evam me sutam*” (“Thus have I heard”); therefore, it is difficult to say whether his discourses were related as they were spoken. They usually allude, however, to the place, time, and community where he preached; and there is concordance between various versions. An attempt was made by Buddhist councils in the first centuries after the Buddha’s death to establish his true and original teachings.

It may be said that the Buddha based his entire teaching on the fact of human suffering. Existence is painful. The conditions that make an individual are precisely those that also give rise to suffering. Individuality implies limitation; limitation gives rise to desire; and, inevitably, desire causes suffering, since what is desired is transitory, changing, and perishing. It is the impermanence of the object of craving that causes disappointment and sorrow. By following the “path” taught by the Buddha, the individual can dispel the “ignorance” that perpetuates this suffering. The Buddha’s doctrine was not one of despair. Living amid the impermanence of everything and being themselves impermanent, humans search for the way of deliverance, for that which shines beyond the transitoriness of human existence—in short, for enlightenment.

According to the Buddha, reality, whether of external things or the psychophysical totality of human individuals, consists in a succession and concatenation of microseconds called *dhammas* (these “components” of reality are not to be confused with another sense of *dhamma*, “law” or “teaching”). The Buddha departed from the main lines of traditional Indian thought in not asserting an essential or ultimate reality in things.

Moreover, the Buddha did not want to assume the existence of the soul as a metaphysical substance, but he admitted the existence of the self as the subject of

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*Buddhist monk before a statue of the Buddha at the Huating Temple, Huating, China*

Tim Graham Photo Library/Getty Images

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action in a practical and moral sense. Life is a stream of becoming, a series of manifestations and extinctions. The concept of the individual ego is a popular delusion; the objects with which people identify themselves—fortune, social position, family, body, and even mind—are not their true selves. There is nothing permanent, and, if only the permanent deserves to be called the self, or ĀTMAN, then nothing is self. There can be no individuality without a putting together of components. This is becoming different, and there can be no way of becoming different without a dissolution, a passing away.

To make clear the concept of no-self (ANĀTMAN), Buddhists set forth the theory of the five aggregates or constituents (*khandhas*, or SKANDHAS) of human existence: (1) corporeality or physical forms (*rūpa*), (2) feelings or sensations (*vedanā*), (3) ideations (*saññā*), (4) mental formations or dispositions (*sankhāras*, or SAMSKĀRAS), and (5) consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Human existence is only a composite of the five aggregates, none of which is the self or soul. A person is in a process of continuous change, with no fixed underlying entity.

The belief in rebirth, or SAMSĀRA, as a potentially endless series of worldly existences in which every being is caught up was already associated with the doctrine of KARMA (literally "act," or "deed") in pre-Buddhist India, and it was generally accepted by both the THERAVĀDA and the MAHĀYĀNA traditions (the two main traditions in Buddhism). According to the doctrine of karma, good conduct brings a pleasant and happy result and creates a tendency toward similar good acts, while bad conduct brings an evil result and creates a tendency toward repeated evil actions. This furnishes the basic context for the moral life of the individual.

The acceptance by Buddhists of the belief in karma and rebirth while holding to the doctrine of no-self gave rise to a difficult problem: how can rebirth take place without a permanent subject to be reborn? The relation between existences in rebirth has been explained by the analogy of fire, which maintains itself unchanged in appearance and yet is different in every moment—what may be called the continuity of an ever-changing identity.

Conviction that the above are fundamental realities led the Buddha to formulate the FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS: the truth of misery, the truth that misery originates within us from the craving for pleasure and for being or nonbeing, the truth that this craving can be eliminated, and the truth that this elimination is the result of a methodical way or path that must be followed. Thus, there must be an understanding of the mechanism by which a human being's psychophysical being evolves; otherwise, human beings would remain indefinitely in *samsāra*, in the continual flow of transitory existence.

Hence, the Buddha formulated the law of dependent origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*, or PRATĪTYA-SAMUTPĀDA), whereby one condition arises out of another, which in turn arises out of prior conditions. Every mode of being presupposes another immediately preceding mode from which the subsequent mode derives, in a chain of causes. According to the classical rendering, the 12 links in the chain are ignorance (*avijjā*), karmic predispositions (*sankhāras*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*), form and body (*nāma-rūpa*), the five sense organs and the mind (*saḷāyatana*), contact (*phassa*), feeling-response (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*), grasping for an object (*upādāna*), action toward life (*bhava*), birth (JĀTI), and old age and death (*jarāmaraṇa*). Thus, the misery that is bound up with all sensate existence is accounted for by a methodical chain of causation.

The law of dependent origination of the various aspects of becoming remains fundamental in all schools of Buddhism. There are, however, diverse interpretations. Given this law, the question arises as to how one may escape the continually renewed cycle of birth, suffering, and death. Here ethical conduct enters in. It is not enough to know that misery pervades all existence and to know the way in which life evolves; there must also be a purification that leads to the overcoming of this process. Such a liberating purification is effected by following the Noble EIGHTFOLD PATH constituted by right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditational attainment.

The aim of religious practice is to be rid of the delusion of ego, thus freeing one-

self from the fetters of this mundane world. One who is successful in doing so is said to have overcome the round of rebirths and to have achieved enlightenment. This is the final goal—not a paradise or a heavenly world.

The living process is likened to a fire burning. Its remedy is the extinction of the fire of illusion, passions, and cravings. The Buddha, the Enlightened One, is one who is no longer kindled or enflamed. Many terms are used to describe the state of the enlightened human being; the one that has become famous in the West is *NIRVANA*, translated as “dying out”—that is, the dying out in the heart of lust, anger, and delusion. But nirvana is not extinction, and indeed the craving for annihilation or nonexistence was expressly repudiated by the Buddha. Buddhists search not for mere cessation but for salvation. Though nirvana is often presented negatively as “release from suffering,” it is more accurate to describe it in a more positive fashion: as an ultimate goal to be sought and cherished.

The Buddha left indeterminate questions regarding the destiny of persons who have reached this ultimate goal. He even refused to speculate as to whether such purified saints, after death, continued to exist or ceased to exist. Such questions, he maintained, were not relevant to the practice of the path and could not in any event be answered from within the confines of ordinary human existence. Still, he often affirmed the reality of the religious goal. For example, he is reported to have said: “There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded; were there not, there would be no escape from the world of the born, the originated, the made, and the compounded.”

In his teaching, the Buddha strongly asserted that the ontological status (that is, whether it possesses existence) and character of the unconditioned nirvana cannot be delineated in a way that does not distort or misrepresent it. But what is more important is that he asserted with even more insistence that nirvana can be experienced—and experienced in this present existence—by those who, knowing the Buddhist truth, practice the Buddhist path.

### SANGHA, SOCIETY, AND STATE

**Monastic institutions.** The *SANGHA* is the assembly of Buddhist monks that has, from the origins of Buddhism, authoritatively studied, taught, and preserved the teachings of the Buddha. In their communities monks have served the laity through example and, as directed by the Buddha, through the teachings of morality (Pāli: *sīla*; Sanskrit: *śīla*). In exchange for their service the monks have received support from the laity, who thereby earn merit. Besides serving as the center of Buddhist propaganda and learning, the monastery offers the monk an opportunity to live apart from worldly concerns, a situation that has usually been believed necessary or at least advisable in order to follow strictly the path that leads most directly to release.

*Origin and development of the sangha.* According to scholars of early Buddhism, at the time of the Buddha in northeastern India there existed numerous religious *MENDICANTS* or almsmen who wandered and begged individually or in groups. These men had forsaken the life of a householder and the involvement with worldly affairs that this entails in order to seek a doctrine and form of practice which would meaningfully explain life and offer salvation. When such a seeker met someone who seemed to offer such a salvatory message, he would accept him as a teacher (*GURU*) and wander with him. The situation of these mendicants is summed up in the greeting with which they met other religious wanderers. This greeting asked, “Under whose guidance have you accepted religious mendicancy? Who is your master (*sattha*)? Whose dhamma is agreeable to you?”

*Buddhist monk in Thailand begging for his day's food. The laity gain merit by providing food to the monks*

Van Bucher—Photo Researchers



The groups of mendicants that had formed around a teacher broke their wanderings during the rainy season (*VASSA*) from July through August. At this time they gathered at various rain retreats (*vassavāsa*), usually situated near villages. Here they would beg daily for their few needs and continue their spiritual quest. The Buddha and his followers may well have been the first group to found such a yearly rain retreat.

After the Buddha's death his followers did not separate but continued to wander and enjoy the rain retreat together. In their retreats the followers of the Buddha's teachings probably built their own huts and lived separately, but their sense of community with other Buddhists led them to gather biweekly at the time of the full and new moons to recite the *PĀTIMOKKHA*, or declaration of their steadfastness in observing the monastic discipline. This ceremony, in which the laity also participated, was called the *uposatha*.

Within the first several centuries after the Buddha's death, the *sangha* came to include two different groups of monks. One retained the wandering mode of existence; this group has been a very creative force in Buddhist history and continues to play a role in contemporary Buddhism, particularly in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The other, much larger group gave up the forest life and settled in permanent monastic settlements (*VIHARAS*). There appear to be two major reasons for this change in the mode of living. First, the followers of the Buddha were able, through their confession of a common faith, to build up a certain coherent organization. Second, the laity gave meritorious gifts of land and raised buildings in which the followers of the Buddha might live permanently, assured of a supply of the staples of life and also fulfilling the Buddha's directive to minister to the laity. In this manner small *viharas* were raised in northeastern India and adjoining areas into which Buddhism spread. With the reign of King *AŚOKA*, further developments occurred. *Aśoka* took a protective interest in the unity and well-being of the Buddhist monastic community, and, as a result of his support and influence, Buddhism developed a more universal orientation.

In the post-*Aśokan* period, Buddhist monasteries grew in size and acquired a great deal of wealth. By about the 5th century CE there developed *MAHĀVIHĀRAS*, or monastic centers, such as *Nālandā* in India. These were centers of Buddhist learning and propaganda, drawing monks from China and Tibet and sending forth missionaries to these lands. The institutions were open to the outside influence of a resurgent *HINDUISM*, however, which weakened Buddhism prior to its disappearance from India in the 13th century.

In all Buddhist countries, monasteries continued to serve as centers of missions and learning and as retreats. Different types of monastic establishments developed in particular areas and in particular contexts. In several regions there were at least two types of institutions. There were a few large public monasteries that usually functioned in greater or lesser accord with classical Buddhist norms. In addition, there were many smaller monasteries, often located in rural areas, that were much more loosely regulated. Often these were hereditary institutions in which the rights and privileges of the abbot were passed on to an adopted disciple. In areas where clerical marriage was practiced—for example, in medieval Sri Lanka and in post-Heian Japan—a tradition of blood inheritance developed.

*Internal organization of the sangha.* It appears that the earliest organization within Indian monasteries was democratic in nature. This democratic nature arose from two important historical factors. First, the Buddha did not, as was the custom among the teachers of his time, designate a human successor. Instead, the Buddha taught that each monk should strive to follow the path that he had preached. Thus there could be no absolute authority vested in one person, for the authority was the *dhamma* that the Buddha had taught. Second, the region in which Buddhism arose was noted for a system of tribal democracy, or republicanism, which was adopted by the early *sangha*.

When an issue arose, all the monks of the monastery assembled. The issue was put before the body of monks and discussed. If any solution was forthcoming, it had to be read three times, with silence signifying acceptance. If there was debate, a vote might be taken or the issue referred to committee or the arbitration of the

elders of a neighboring monastery. As the *sangha* developed, a certain division of labor and hierarchical administration was adopted. The abbot became the head of this administrative hierarchy and was vested with almost unlimited powers over monastic affairs. The anti-authoritarian character of Buddhism, however, continued to assert itself. In China and Southeast Asian countries there has traditionally been a popular distaste for hierarchy, making rules difficult to enforce in the numerous almost independent monastic units.

As the Buddhist *sangha* developed, specific rules and rites were enacted that differ very little in all Buddhist monasteries even today. The rules by which the monks are judged and the punishments that should be assessed are found in the *vinaya* texts (*vinaya* literally means “that which leads”). The VINAYA PĪṬAKA of the Theravāda canon contains precepts that were supposedly given by the Buddha as he judged a particular situation. While in the majority of cases the Buddha’s authorship can be doubted, the attempt is made to refer all authority to the Buddha and not to one of his disciples. The heart of the *vinaya* texts is the *Pātimokkha*, which, in the course of the *sangha*’s development, became a list of monastic rules. The rules are recited by the assembled monks every two weeks, with a pause after each one so that any monk who has transgressed this rule may confess and receive his punishment. While the number of rules in the *Pātimokkha* differs in the various schools, with 227, 250, and 253, respectively in the Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canons, the rules are essentially the same. The first part of the *Pātimokkha* deals with the four gravest SINS, which necessarily lead to expulsion from the monastery. They are sexual intercourse, theft, murder, and exaggeration of one’s miraculous powers. The other rules, in seven sections, deal with transgressions of a lesser nature, such as drinking or lying.

In the Theravāda countries—Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos—the Buddhist monastic community is composed primarily of male monks and novices (the order of nuns died out in the Theravāda world more than a millennium ago, and contemporary efforts to reestablish it have met with only minimal success), white-robed ascetics (including various types of male and female practitioners who remain outside the *sangha* but follow a more or less renunciatory mode of life), and laymen and laywomen. In some Theravāda countries, notably in mainland Southeast Asia, boys or young men were traditionally expected to join the monastery for a period of instruction and meditation. Thus,

World distribution of Buddhism



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the majority of men in these areas were involved with the monastic ethos. This practice has fostered a high degree of lay participation in monastic affairs.

In the Mahāyāna and VAJRAYĀNA countries of China and Tibet there was traditionally a stage of one year before the aspirant could become a novice. This was a year of probation when the aspirant did not receive TONSURE and remained subject to governmental taxation and service, while receiving instructions and performing menial tasks within the monastery. At the end of this one-year probationary period, the aspirant had to pass a test, including the recitation of part of a well-known *sūtra*—the length depending upon whether the applicant was male or female—and a discussion on various doctrinal questions. In China, one usually did not progress beyond the novice stage unless he or she was of exceptional character or was affiliated with the government.

According to *vinaya* rules, entry into the *sangha* is an individual affair, dependent upon the wishes of the individual and his family. In some Buddhist countries, however, ordination was often under the control of the state, and the state conducted the examinations to determine entry or advancement in the *sangha*. In certain situations ordination could be obtained not only through such examinations but also by the favor of high officials or through the purchase of an ordination certificate from the government. This selling of ordination certificates was at times abused by the government in order to fill its treasury.

The life of a Buddhist monk was originally one of wandering, poverty, begging, and strict sexual abstinence. The monks were supposed to live only on alms, to wear clothes made from cloth taken from rubbish heaps, and to possess only three robes, one girdle, an alms bowl, a razor, a needle, and a water strainer used to filter insects from the drinking water (so as not to kill or imbibe them). Most Buddhist schools still stress CELIBACY, although some groups, particularly in Tibet and Japan, have relaxed the monastic discipline, and some Vajrayāna schools have allowed sexual activity as an esoteric ritual that contributes to the attainment of release. Begging, however, has tended in all schools to become merely a symbolic gesture used to teach humility or compassion or to raise funds for special purposes. Also, the growth of large monasteries has often led to compromises on the rule of poverty. While the monk might technically give up his property before entering the monastery—although even this rule is sometimes relaxed—the community of monks might inherit wealth and receive lavish gifts of land. This acquisition of wealth has led at times not only to a certain neglect of the Buddhist monastic ideal but also to the attainment of temporal power. This factor, in addition to the self-governing nature of Buddhist monasteries and the early Buddhist connection with Indian kingship, has influenced the interaction of the *sangha* and the state.

**Society and state.** Though Buddhism is sometimes described as a purely monastic, otherworldly religion, this is not accurate. In the earliest phases of the tradition the Buddha was pictured as a teacher who addressed not only renouncers but lay householders as well. Moreover, although he is not depicted in the early texts as a social reformer, he does address issues of social order and responsibility.

Throughout Buddhist history, Buddhists have put forth varying forms of social ethics based on notions of karmic justice (the “law” that good deeds will be rewarded with happy results while evil deeds will entail suffering for the one who does them); the cultivation of virtues such as self-giving, compassion, and evenhandedness; and the fulfillment of responsibilities to parents, teachers, rulers, and so on. Moreover, Buddhists have formulated various notions of COSMOGONY and COSMOLOGY that have provided legitimacy for the social hierarchies and political orders with which they have been associated. For the most part, Buddhism has played a conservative, moderating role in the generally hierarchical social and political organization of various Asian societies, but the tradition has on occasion given rise to more radical and revolutionary movements as well.

Over the course of Buddhism’s long history, the relationship between the Buddhist community and state authority has taken many forms. The early Buddhist *sangha* in India appears to have been treated by Indian rulers as a self-governing unit not subject to their power unless it proved subversive or was threatened by internal or external disruption. Aśoka, the Buddhist king whose personal support

and prestige helped Buddhism grow from a regional to a universal religion, appears to have been applying this policy of protection from disruption when he intervened in Buddhist monastic affairs to expel schismatics. He came to be remembered, however, as the Dharmarāja, the great king who protected and propagated the teachings of the Buddha.

In Theravāda countries Aśoka's image as a supporter and sponsor of the faith has traditionally been used to judge political authority. In general, Buddhism in Theravāda countries has been either heavily favored or officially recognized by the government, so that the golden age in which there is a creative interaction between the government and the monks has been viewed as an obtainable goal. The *sangha*'s role in this interaction has traditionally been to preserve the *dhamma* and to act as the spiritual guide and model, revealing to the secular power the need for furthering the welfare of the people. While the *sangha* and the government appear as two separate structures, there has been some intertwining; for monks (often of royal heritage) have commonly acted as temporal advisers, and the kings—at least in Thailand—occasionally have spent some time in the monastery. It should also be pointed out that Buddhist monastic institutions have served as a link between the rural peoples and the urban elites, helping to unify the various Theravāda countries.

In China the relationship between the *sangha* and the state has fluctuated. At times Buddhism has been seen as a foreign religion, as a potential competitor with the state, or as a drain on national resources of men and wealth. These perceptions have led to sharp purges of Buddhism and to rules curbing its influence. Some of the rules were an attempt to limit the number of monks and to guarantee governmental influence in ordination through state examinations and the granting of ordination certificates. Conversely, at other times, such as during the early centuries of the T'ang dynasty (618–845), Buddhism was almost considered the state religion. The government created a commissioner of religion to earn merit for the state by erecting temples, monasteries, and images in honor of the Buddha.

In Japan, Buddhism has experienced similar fluctuations. During the period from the 10th to the 13th century, monasteries gained great landed wealth and temporal power. They formed large armies of monks and mercenaries that took part in wars with rival religious groups as well as in temporal struggles. By the 14th century, however, their power began to wane, and, under the Tokugawa regime that took control in the 17th century, Buddhist institutions became, to a considerable degree, instruments of state power and administration.

Only in Tibet did Buddhists establish a theocratic polity that lasted for an extended period of time. Beginning in the 12th century, Tibetan monastic groups developed relationships with the powerful Mongol khans that often gave them control of governmental affairs in Tibet. In the 17th century the DGE-LUGS-PA school established a monastic regime that was able to maintain more or less continual control until the Chinese occupation in the 1950s.

During the immediate premodern period, each of the various Buddhist communities in Asia developed some kind of working relationship with the sociopolitical system in its area. Within the sweep of Western colonialism and especially after the establishment of new political ideologies and systems during the 19th and 20th centuries, these older patterns of accommodation between Buddhism and state authority were seriously challenged. In many cases bitter conflicts resulted—for example, between Buddhists and colonial regimes in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, between Buddhists and the Meiji reformers in Japan, and between Buddhists and many different communist regimes. In some cases, as, for instance, in Japan, these conflicts have been resolved and new modes of accommodation have been established. In other cases, such as that of Tibet, there has been no resolution.

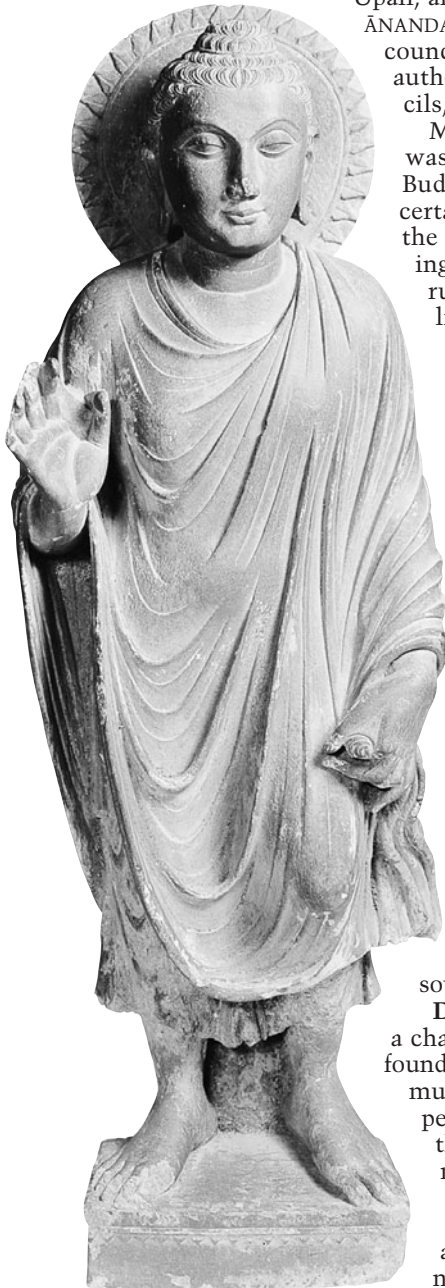


*Standing Buddha with his hands in the mudrā (symbolic gesture) symbolizing “do not fight”; in Bangkok, Thailand*

Mimi Forsyth—Monkmeyer

*Standing Buddha with his hands in the mudrā symbolizing fearlessness, 2nd–4th century CE; from northern Pakistan*

Philadelphia Museum of Art—  
photograph, A.J. Wyatt, staff photographer



**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

**The early councils.** The early BUDDHIST COUNCILS (*sangītis*, or “recitals”) were concerned largely with the purity of the faith and practice of the monastic community. Unfortunately, legend and myth have so colored these accounts that scholars cannot be sure when and where they took place or even who took part in them. Though many scholars deny its very existence, all Buddhist traditions maintain that a council was called at Rājagaha (modern Rājgīr) immediately after the Buddha’s death (the date of which is unknown). According to legend, this council (comprising 500 ARAHANTS, or accomplished monks) was responsible for the composition of the *vinaya* (code of monastic discipline), under the monk Upāli, and the *dhamma* (*i.e.*, the *sūtras*, or Buddhist SCRIPTURES), under the monk ĀNANDA, even though the latter was supposedly brought to trial at the same council. Though there were memorizers of *sūtras* and the *vinaya*, as well as authorized commentators, during the period of the first three Buddhist councils, the scriptures as such existed only in an inchoate oral form.

More scholars are prone to accept the historicity of the second council that was held at Vesālī (Sanskrit: Vaiśālī) a little more than a century after the Buddha’s death. According to the tradition, a controversy arose between a certain Yasa and the monks of Vajji. The 10 points of discipline observed by the Vajjian monks and opposed by Yasa permitted storing salt in a horn, eating in the afternoon, and drinking buttermilk after meals. These and other rules were condemned by the council as being too lax. Many scholars believe the second council to have been closely associated with the controversy that led to the open division between two segments of the early community—the MAHĀSĀNGHIKA school, which displayed more liberal attitudes, and the *Thāvavāda* (*Theravāda*) school, which took a more conservative stance.

According to *Theravāda* accounts, a third council was called by King Aśoka at Pāṭaliputta (Patna) about 250 BCE. Moggaliputta Tissa, president of the council, is said to have completed his *Abhidharma* (scholastic) treatise, the *Kathāvatthu* (“Points of Controversy”), during this council. It is also said that a controversy arose between two sects, the Sarvāstivādins and the Vibhajyavādins (usually identified with the early *Theravādins*), over the reality of past and future states of consciousness (*cittas*). After the Sarvāstivādin view that such states actually exist was condemned, the sect supposedly withdrew from the lower GĀNGĀ (Ganges) valley to Mathurā in the northwest. There it appears to have continued to develop as a transitional school between the older, more conservative schools and the nascent Mahāyāna (“Greater Vehicle”) movement.

According to northern Buddhist traditions, a fourth council was held under King KANIṢKA, probably in the 1st century CE, at Jalandhar or in Kashmir. This council seems to have been limited to the composition of commentaries. Because it appears that the Sarvāstivādin viewpoint was the only one represented, scholars generally conclude that this was a sectarian synod rather than an actual ecumenical Buddhist council. At any rate, the fourth council has never been recognized by southern Buddhists.

**Developments within India.** *Expansion of Buddhism.* The Buddha was a charismatic leader who discovered and proclaimed a religious message and founded a distinctive religious community. Some of the members of that community were, like the Buddha himself, wandering ascetics. Others were laypersons who venerated the Buddha, followed those aspects of his teachings that were relevant to them, and provided the wandering ascetics with the material support that they required.

During the first several centuries after the Buddha’s death, the story of his life was remembered and embellished, his teachings were preserved and developed, and the community that he had established became a significant religious force. Many of the followers of the Buddha who were



wandering ascetics began to settle in permanent monastic establishments and to develop the procedures needed to maintain large monastic institutions. At the same time, the Buddhist laity came to include important members of the economic and political elite.

During the first century of its existence Buddhism spread from its place of origin in Magadha and Kosala throughout much of northern India, including the areas of Mathurā and Ujjayanī in the west. According to tradition, invitations to the Council of Vesālī, held just over a century after the Buddha's death, were sent to monks living in many distant places throughout northern and central India. By the middle of the 3rd century BCE, Buddhism had gained the favor of a Mauryan king who had established an empire that extended from the HIMALAYAS in the north almost as far south as Sri Lanka.

To the rulers of the kingdoms and republics arising in northeastern India, the patronage of sects with practices differing from orthodox Hinduism was one way of counterbalancing the enormous political power enjoyed by high-caste Hindus (BRAHMINS) in the affairs of state. The first Mauryan emperor, Candra Gupta (c. 321–c. 297 BCE), patronized JAINISM and finally became a Jain monk. His grandson, Aśoka, who ruled over the greater part of the subcontinent from about 270 to 230 BCE, became the archetypal Buddhist king. Aśoka attempted to establish in his realm a “true *dhamma*” based on the virtues of self-control, impartiality, cheerfulness, truthfulness, and goodness. Though he did not found a state church, he did attempt to forge a Buddhist-oriented culture that would include Hindu, Jain, Ājīvika (Ājīvaka), and Buddhist alike. Though Aśoka created a new ideal of kingship that would have powerful repercussions throughout the later Buddhist world, the various problems posed by a state of vast dimensions proved greater than he could solve. Soon after Aśoka's death, the Mauryan empire began to crumble.

Although Buddhists seem to have suffered some persecutions during the subsequent Śuṅga–Kāṇva period (185–28 BCE), Buddhism succeeded in maintaining and even expanding its influence. Buddhist monastic centers and magnificent Buddhist monuments such as the great STUPAS at Bhārhut and Sāñchi were established throughout the subcontinent, and these institutions often received royal patronage. In the early centuries of the Common Era, Buddhism was especially flourishing in northwestern India, and from there it spread rapidly into Central Asia and China.

*Buddhism under the Guptas and Pālas.* By the time of the Gupta dynasty (c. 320–c. 600 CE), Buddhism in India was being affected by the revival of Brahmanic religion and the rising tide of BHAKTI (Hindu devotionalism). During this period, for example, some Hindus were practicing devotion to the Buddha, whom they regarded as an AVATAR (incarnation) of the Hindu deity VISHNU.

During the Gupta period some monasteries joined together to form monastic centers (MAHĀVIHĀRAS) that functioned as universities. The most famous of these, located at NĀLANDA, had a curriculum that went far beyond the bounds of traditional Buddhism. Nālanda soon became the leading center for the study of Mahāyāna, which was rapidly becoming the dominant Buddhist tradition in India.

Though Buddhist institutions seemed to be faring well under the Guptas, various Chinese pilgrims visiting India between 400 and 700 CE could discern an internal decline in the Buddhist community and the beginning of the reabsorption of Indian Buddhism by Hinduism. Among these pilgrims were FA-HSIEN, Sung Yün, Hui-sheng, I-ching, and the 7th-century monk HSÜAN-TSANG, who found “millions of monasteries” in northwestern India reduced to ruins by the Huns, a nomadic Central Asian people. Many of the remaining Buddhists were developing their own form of Tantrism (see TANTRA).

Buddhism survived the Huns' destruction of the monasteries, especially in the northeast, and flourished for a time under the Buddhist Pāla kings (8th–12th century CE). These kings continued to protect the great monastic establishments, building such new centers as Odantapurī, near Nālanda, and establishing a system of supervision for all such *mahāvihāras*. Under the Pālas, Tantric Buddhism (*i.e.*, Vajrayāna) became the dominant sect. Adepts of this sect, called SIDDHAS,



*Reclining Buddha, 12th century CE; in the Galvihara shrine, Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka*

Robert Harding Picture Library/  
Getty Images

identified nirvana with the passions, maintaining that one could “touch the deathless element with his body.” During this period, the university of Nālanda became a center for the study of Tantric Buddhism and the practice of Tantric magic and rituals. Under the Pāla kings, contacts with China decreased as Indians began to turn their attention to Tibet and Southeast Asia.

*The decline of Buddhism in India.* With the collapse of the Pāla dynasty in the 12th century, Buddhism suffered another defeat, and this time it did not recover. Though some pockets of Buddhist influence remained, the Buddhist presence in India became so negligible that it could hardly be noticed. To some extent, Buddhism was so tolerant of other faiths that it was simply reabsorbed by a revitalized Hindu tradition. Likewise, Buddhism in India, having become mainly a monastic movement, probably paid little heed to the laity and, after the Muslim invaders sacked the Indian monasteries in the 12th century CE, Buddhists had little basis for recovery. After the destruction of the monasteries, the Buddhist laity showed little interest in restoring the “Way.”

*Contemporary revival.* At the beginning of the 20th century Buddhism was virtually extinct in India. Since the early 1900s, however, a significant Buddhist presence has been reestablished. The incorporation of Sikkim in 1975 into the Republic of India has brought into the modern Indian nation a small Himalayan society that has a strong Buddhist tradition related to the Vajrayāna Buddhism of Tibet. Following the Chinese conquest of Tibet in the late 1950s, there was an influx of Tibetan Buddhists who established a highly visible Buddhist community in northern India. More importantly, though, a number of Buddhist societies were organized in the early decades of the 20th century by Indian intellectuals who found in Buddhism an alternative to a Hindu tradition that they could no longer accept. The mass conversion of large numbers of people from the so-called scheduled CASTES (formerly called UNTOUCHABLES), a movement originally led by BHIMRAO RAMJI AMBEDKAR, began in the 1950s. In October 1956 Ambedkar and several hundred thousand of his followers converted to Buddhism, and—although accurate figures are difficult to determine—the group has continued to grow. Some estimates indicate that the number of converts is as high as four million.

**Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.** The first clear evidence of the spread of Buddhism outside India dates from the reign of King Aśoka (3rd century BCE). Accord-

ing to his inscriptions, Aśoka sent Buddhist emissaries not only to many different regions of the subcontinent but also into certain border areas as well. It is certain that Aśokan emissaries were sent to Sri Lanka and to an area called Suvarṇabhūmi that many modern scholars have identified with the Mon country in southern Myanmar and central Thailand.

*Sri Lanka.* According to the Sinhalese tradition, Buddhism took root in Sri Lanka with the arrival of Aśoka's son Mahinda and his six companions. Sent as missionaries by the Mauryan emperor, these travelers converted King Devānampiya Tissa and many of the nobility. Under King Tissa, the Mahāvihāra monastery was built, an institution that was to become the center of Sinhalese orthodoxy. After Tissa's death (c. 207 BCE) Sri Lanka fell into the hands of the South Indians until the time of Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (101–77 BCE), a descendant of Tissa, who overthrew King Elāra. During this time, as a reaction to the threat posed by the South Indians, Buddhism and Sri Lankan political formations became closely intertwined. Again, it was probably because of this danger that the Pāli canon was first written down under King Vaṭṭagāmaṇī Abhaya in the 1st century BCE. This king also built the Abhayagiri monastery, the main center of the various Mahāyāna movements in Sri Lanka. These developments were openly supported by King Mahāsenā (276–303 CE). Under Mahāsenā's son, Śrī Meghavaṇṇa, the "Tooth of the Buddha" was brought to Abhayagiri and made the national symbol.

During the 1st millennium CE in Sri Lanka, the ancient Theravāda tradition coexisted with various forms of Hinduism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Tantric Buddhism. Beginning in the 10th century, as Buddhism was declining in India, Sri Lanka became a major locus of a Theravāda Buddhist revival. As a result of this revival, Sri Lanka became a Theravāda kingdom, with a *sangha* that was unified under Theravāda auspices and a monarch who legitimated his rule in Theravāda terms. The new Theravāda tradition that was established spread from Sri Lanka into Southeast Asia, where it exerted a powerful influence.

In modern times Sri Lanka fell prey to the Western colonial powers (to the Portuguese in 1505–1658, the Dutch in 1658–1796, and finally the British in 1796–1947). Under King Kittisiri Rājasīha (1747–81) the ordination lineage was once again renewed, this time by monks recruited from Thailand.

The monastic community in Sri Lanka is now divided into three major bodies: (1) the Siam Nikaya, founded in the 18th century, a conservative and wealthy sect that admits only members of the Goyigama, the highest Sinhalese caste, (2) the Amarapura sect, founded in the 19th century, which has opened its ranks to members of lower castes, and (3) the reformed splinter group from the Siam Nikaya called the Ramanya sect. Among the laity several reform groups have been established. Among these the SARVODAYA community that is headed by A. T. Ariyaratne is especially important. This group has established religious, economic, and social development programs that have had a significant impact on Sinhalese village life.

*Southeast Asia.* In Southeast Asia the Buddhist impact has been made in very different ways in three different regions. In two of these (the region of Malaysia-Indonesia and the region on the mainland extending from Myanmar to southern Vietnam), the main connections have been trade routes with India and Sri Lanka. In Vietnam the main connections have been with China. It is certain that Buddhism reached these areas by the beginning centuries of the 1st millennium CE.

With the help of Indian missionaries such as the monk Guṇavarman, Buddhism had gained a firm foothold on Java well before the 5th century CE. Buddhism was also introduced at about this time in Sumatra, and, by the 7th century, the king of Śrīvijaya on the island of Sumatra was a Buddhist. When the Chinese traveler I-ching visited this kingdom in the 7th century, he noted that HĪNAYĀNA Buddhism was dominant in the area but that there were in addition a few Mahāyānists. It was also in the 7th century that the great scholar Dharmapāla from Nālanda visited Indonesia.

The Śailendra dynasty, which ruled over the Malay Peninsula and a large section of Indonesia from the 7th to the 9th century, promoted the Mahāyāna and Tantric forms of Buddhism. During this period major Buddhist monuments were



*Buddhist monk pauses while cleaning vegetation from a stupa at Angkor Wat, Cambodia*

John Spragens, Jr.—Photo Researchers

dominant religion in the area. (In Indonesia and Malaysia, Buddhism exists as a living religion only among the Chinese minority, but there is a growing community of converts, with its greatest strength in the vicinity of Borobudur.)

A second pattern of Buddhist expansion in Southeast Asia developed in the mainland area that extends from Myanmar in the north and west to the Mekong delta in the south and east. According to the local Mon and Burman traditions, this is the area of Suvarṇabhūmi that was visited by missionaries from the Aśokan court. It is known that, by the early centuries of the 1st millennium CE, Buddhist kingdoms were beginning to appear in this region. In Myanmar and Thailand—despite the presence of Hindu, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna elements—the more conservative Hinayāna forms of Buddhism were especially prominent throughout the 1st millennium CE. Farther to the east and south, in what is now Cambodia and southern Vietnam, various combinations of Hinduism, Mahāyāna Buddhism, and Vajrayāna Buddhism became dominant. Throughout much of the history of Angkor, the great imperial center that dominated Cambodia and much of the surrounding areas for many centuries, Hinduism seems to have been the preferred tradition, at least among the elite. In the late 12th and early 13th centuries, however, the Buddhist King Jayavarman VII built a new capital called Angkor Thom, with a temple complex that was dominated by Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna monuments; these monuments represent one of the high points of Buddhist architectural achievement.

In mainland Southeast Asia, as in Sri Lanka, a Theravāda reform movement began to develop in the 11th century. Drawing heavily on the Theravāda heritage that had been preserved among the Mon in southern Myanmar, as well as on the new reform tradition that was developing in Sri Lanka, this revival soon established the Theravāda tradition as the most dynamic tradition in Myanmar, where the Burmans had conquered the Mon. By the late 13th century the reform movement had spread to Thailand, where the Thai were gradually displacing the Mon as the dominant population. Within another two centuries the Theravāda reformers had spread their tradition to Cambodia and Laos.

The Theravāda preeminence that was thus established remained basically intact throughout the area during the remainder of the premodern period. The arrival of the Western powers in the 19th century, however, brought important changes. In Thailand, which retained its independence, a process of gradual reform and modernization took place. During the 19th century leadership in the reform and modernization process was taken by a new Buddhist sect, the Thammayut Nikāya, which was established and supported by the reigning Chakri dynasty. More

erected in Java, among them the marvelous BOROBUDUR, which is perhaps the most magnificent of all Buddhist stupas (burial monuments). From the 7th century onward, Vajrayāna Buddhism spread rapidly throughout the area. King Kertanagara of Java (reigned 1268–92) was especially devoted to Tantric practice.

In the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia, as in India, Buddhism gradually lost its hold during the first half of the 2nd millennium CE. In many areas Buddhism was assimilated to Hinduism, forming a Hindu-oriented amalgam that in some places (for example, in Bali) has persisted to the present. In most of Malaysia and Indonesia, however, both Hinduism and Buddhism were replaced by ISLAM, which remains the

recently, the reform and modernization process has become more diversified and has affected virtually all segments of the Thai Buddhist community.

In the other Theravāda countries in Southeast Asia, Buddhism has had a much more difficult time. In Myanmar, which endured an extended period of British rule, the *sangha* and the structures of Buddhist society have been seriously disrupted. Under the military regime of General Ne Win, established in 1962, reform and modernization were limited in all areas of national life, including religion. In Laos and Cambodia, both of which suffered an extended period of French rule followed by the devastation of the Vietnam War and the violent imposition of communist rule, the Buddhist community has been severely crippled. During the late 20th century, however, many signs of a Buddhist revival have begun to appear.

There are some indications that Vietnam was involved in the early sea trade between India, Southeast Asia, and China and that Buddhism reached the country around the beginning of the 1st millennium CE, brought by missionaries traveling between India and the Chinese empire. The northern part of what is now Vietnam had been conquered by the Chinese empire in 111 BCE; it remained under Chinese rule until 939 CE. In the south there were two Indianized states, Funan (founded during the 1st century CE) and Champa (founded 192 CE). In these areas both Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna traditions were represented. The traditions that most affected the long-term development of Buddhism in Vietnam, however, were ZEN and PURE LAND traditions introduced from China into the northern and central sections of the country beginning in the 6th century CE.

The first *dhyāna* (Zen; Vietnamese: *thiền*), or “meditation,” school was introduced by Vinītaruci, an Indian monk who had come to Vietnam from China in the 6th century. In the 9th century a school of “wall meditation” was introduced by the Chinese monk Vo Ngon Thong. A third major Zen school was established in the 11th century by the Chinese monk Thao Durong. From 1414 to 1428 Buddhism in Vietnam was persecuted by the Chinese, who had again conquered the country. TANTRISM, TAOISM, and CONFUCIANISM were also filtering into Vietnam at this time. Even after the Chinese had been driven back, a Chinese-like bureaucracy closely supervised the Vietnamese monasteries. The clergy was divided between the highborn and Sinicized (Chinese-influenced), on the one hand, and those in the lower ranks, who often were active in peasant uprisings.

During the modern period these Mahāyāna traditions centered in northern and central Vietnam have coexisted with Theravāda traditions that have spilled over from Cambodia in the south. Rather loosely joined together, the Vietnamese Buddhists managed to preserve their traditions through the period of French colonial rule in the 19th and 20th centuries. During the struggle between North and South Vietnam in the 1960s and early '70s, many Buddhists worked to achieve peace and reconciliation, but they met with little success. Under the communist regime that completed its victory in Vietnam in the early 1970s, conditions have been difficult, but Buddhism has persisted. Reports in the late 1980s and early '90s indicated that new signs of vitality were beginning to appear.

**Central Asia and China.** *Central Asia.* By the beginning of the Common Era, Buddhism had probably been introduced into eastern Turkistan. According to tradition, a son of Aśoka founded the kingdom of Khotan around 240 BCE. The



*Funeral cortege in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) of Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duo, who immolated himself to uphold claims of Buddhists in Vietnam during the Vietnam War*

AFP—Archive Photos

grandson of this king supposedly introduced Buddhism to Khotan, where it became the state religion. On more secure historical grounds, it is clear that the support given by the Indo-Scythian king Kaniṣka of the Kushān (Kuṣāna) dynasty, which ruled in northern India, Afghanistan, and parts of Central Asia in the 1st to 2nd century CE, encouraged the spread of Buddhism into Central Asia. Kaniṣka purportedly called an important Buddhist council; he patronized the Gandhāra school of Buddhist art, which introduced Greek and Persian elements into Buddhist iconography; and he supported Buddhist expansion within a vast region that extended far into the Central Asian heartland. In the northern part of Chinese Turkistan, Buddhism spread from Kucha (K'u-ch'e) to the kingdoms of Agnideśa (Karashahr), Kao-ch'ang (Turfan), and Bharuka (Aksu). According to Chinese travelers who visited Central Asia, the Hinayānists (at least at the time of their visits) were strongest in Turfan, Shanshan, Kashgar, and Kucha, while Mahāyāna strongholds were located in Yarkand and Khotan.

In Central Asia there was a confusing welter of languages, religions, and cultures, and, as Buddhism interacted with these various traditions, it changed and developed. SHAMANISM, ZOROASTRIANISM, NESTORIAN CHRISTIANITY, and Islam all penetrated these lands and coexisted with Buddhism. For example, some of the Mahāyāna BODHISATTVAS, such as AMITĀBHA, may have been inspired in part by Zoroastrian influence. There is also evidence of some degree of syncretism between Buddhism and MANICHAEISM, an Iranian dualistic religion that was founded in the 3rd century CE.

Buddhism continued to flourish in parts of Central Asia until the 11th century, particularly under the patronage of the Uighur Turks. With the increasingly successful incursions of Islam (beginning in the 7th century CE) and the decline of the T'ang dynasty (618–907) in China, however, Central Asia ceased to be the important crossroads of Indian and Chinese culture that it once had been. Buddhism in the area gradually became a thing of the past.

*China.* Although there are reports of Buddhists in China as early as the 3rd century BCE, Buddhism was not actively propagated in that country until the early centuries of the Common Era. Tradition has it that Buddhism was introduced after the Han emperor Ming Ti (reigned 57/58–75/76 CE) had a dream of a flying golden deity that was interpreted as a vision of the Buddha. Accordingly, the emperor dispatched emissaries to India, who subsequently returned to China with the *Sutra in Forty-two Sections*, which was deposited in a temple outside the capital of Lo-yang. In actuality, Buddhism entered China gradually, first primarily through Central Asia and, later, by way of the trade routes around and through Southeast Asia.

The Buddhism that first became popular in China during the Han dynasty was deeply colored with magical practices, making it compatible with popular Chinese Taoism. Instead of the doctrine of no-self, early Chinese Buddhists taught the indestructibility of the soul. Nirvana became a kind of immortality. They also taught the theory of karma, the values of charity and compassion, and the need to suppress the passions. Until the end of the Han dynasty, there was a virtual symbiosis between Taoism and Buddhism and a common propagation of the means for attaining immortality through various ascetic practices. It was widely believed that LAO-TZU, the founder of Taoism, had been reborn in India as the Buddha. Many Chinese emperors worshiped Lao-tzu and the Buddha on the same altar. The first translations of Buddhist *sūtras* into Chinese—namely those dealing with such topics as breath control and mystical concentration—utilized a Taoist vocabulary to make the Buddhist faith intelligible to the Chinese.

After the Han period, in the north of China, Buddhist monks were often used by non-Chinese emperors for their political-military counsel as well as for their skill in magic. At the same time, in the south, Buddhism began to penetrate the philosophical and literary circles of the gentry. An important contribution to the growth of Buddhism in China during this period was the work of translation. The most important early translator was the learned monk KUMĀRAJĪVA, who, before he was brought to the Chinese court in 401 CE, had studied the Hindu VEDAS, the occult sciences, and astronomy, as well as the Hinayāna and Mahāyāna *sūtras*.

During the 5th and 6th centuries CE Buddhist schools from India became established, and new, specifically Chinese schools began to form. Buddhism was becoming a powerful intellectual force in China, monastic establishments were proliferating, and Buddhism was becoming well-established among the peasantry. Thus, it is not surprising that, when the Sui dynasty (581–618) established its rule over a reunified China, Buddhism flourished as a state religion.

The golden age of Buddhism in China occurred during the T'ang dynasty. Though the T'ang emperors were usually Taoists themselves, they tended to favor Buddhism, which had become extremely popular. Under the T'ang the government extended its control over the monasteries and the ordination and legal status of monks. From this time forward, the Chinese monk styled himself simply *ch'en*, or "subject."

During this period several Chinese schools developed their own distinctive approaches. Some of them produced comprehensive systematizations of the vast body of Buddhist texts and teachings. There was a great expansion in the number of Buddhist monasteries and the amount of land they owned. It was also during this period that many scholars made PILGRIMAGES to India, heroic journeys that greatly enriched Buddhism in China, both by the texts that were acquired and by the intellectual and spiritual inspiration that was brought from India. Buddhism was never able to replace its Taoist and Confucian rivals, however, and in 845 the emperor Wu-tsung began a major persecution. According to records, 4,600 Buddhist temples and 40,000 shrines were destroyed, and 260,500 monks and nuns were forced to return to lay life.

Buddhism in China never recovered completely from the great persecution of 845. It did maintain much of its heritage, however, and continued to play a significant role in the religious life of China. On the one hand, Buddhism retained its identity as Buddhism and generated new forms through which it was expressed. These included texts such as the *yü lu*, or "recorded sayings," of famous teachers that were oriented primarily toward monks, as well as more literary creations such as the *Journey to the West* (written in the 16th century) and *The Dream of the Red Chamber* (18th century). On the other hand, Buddhism coalesced with the Confucian–Neo-Confucian and Taoist traditions to form a complex multi-religious ethos within which all three traditions were more or less comfortably encompassed.

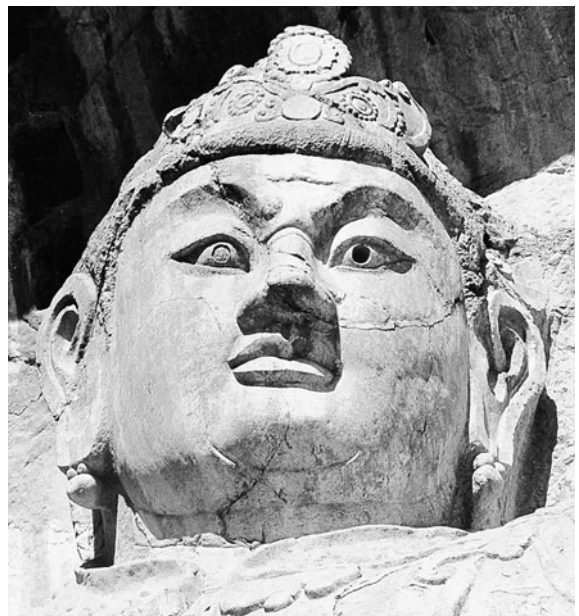
Among the various schools the two that retained the greatest vitality were the Ch'an school (better known in the West by its Japanese name, Zen) which was noted for its emphasis on meditation, and the Pure Land (Ching-t'u) tradition, which emphasized Buddhist devotion. The former school exerted the greatest influence among the cultured elite. It did so through various media, including the arts. Ch'an artists during the Sung dynasty (960–1279) used images of flowers, rivers, and trees, executed with sudden, deft strokes, to evoke an insight into the flux and EMPHATICNESS of all reality. The Pure Land tradition exerted a greater influence on the population as a whole and was sometimes associated with SECRET SOCIETIES and peasant uprisings. But the two seemingly disparate traditions were often very closely linked. In addition, they were mixed with other Buddhist elements such as the so-called "masses for the dead" that had originally been popularized by the practitioners of Esoteric (Vajrayāna) Buddhism.

During the early decades of the 20th century, China experienced a Buddhist reform movement aimed at revitalizing the Chinese Buddhist tradition and adapting Buddhist teachings and institutions to modern conditions. However, the disruptions caused by the Sino-

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*Representation of Vaiśravaṇa, the lokapāla (one of the four guardians of the cardinal directions) of the north, 672–675 CE; in the Feng-Hsien Ssu (shrine) in the Lungmen caves, China*

Paolo Koch—Photo Researchers



Japanese War and the subsequent establishment of a communist government have not been helpful to the Buddhist cause. The Buddhist community was the victim of severe repression during the Cultural Revolution (1966–69).

**Korea and Japan.** *Korea.* Buddhism was first introduced into the Korean region when it was divided into the three kingdoms of Paekche, Koguryō, and Silla. After Buddhism was brought to the northern kingdom of Koguryō from China in the 4th century, it gradually spread throughout the other Korean kingdoms. As often happened, the new faith was first accepted by the court and then extended to the people. After the unification of the country by the kingdom of Silla in the 660s, Buddhism began to flourish throughout Korea. The monk WŎNHYO (617–686) was one of the most impressive scholars and reformers of his day. He was married and taught an “ecumenical” version of Buddhism that included all branches and sects. He tried to use music, literature, and dance to express the meaning of Buddhism. Another scholar of the Silla era was Ŭi-sang (625–702), who went to China and returned to spread the Hwaōm (Chinese HUA-YEN) sect in Korea. The Chinese Ch’an sect (Zen) was introduced in the 8th century and, by absorbing the Korean versions of Hua-yen, T’IEN-T’AI (Tendai; a rationalist school), and Pure Land, gradually became the dominant school of Buddhism in Korea, as it did in Vietnam.

Early Korean Buddhism was characterized by a this-worldly attitude. It emphasized the pragmatic, nationalistic, and aristocratic aspects of the faith. Still, an indigenous tradition of shamanism influenced the development of popular Buddhism throughout the centuries. Buddhist monks danced, sang, and performed the rituals of shamans.

During the Koryō period (935–1392), Korean Buddhism reached its zenith. During the first part of this period the Korean Buddhist community was active in the publication of the *Tripitaka Koreana*, one of the most inclusive editions of the Buddhist sutras up to that time. After 25 years of research, a monk by the name of Ŭich’ōn (1055–1101; see DAIGAK GUKSA) published an outstanding three-volume bibliography of Buddhist literature. Ŭich’ōn also sponsored the growth of the T’ien-t’ai sect in Korea. He emphasized the need for cooperation between Ch’an and the other “Teaching” schools of Korean Buddhism.

Toward the end of the Koryō period, Buddhism began to suffer from internal corruption and external persecution, especially that promoted by the Neo-Confucians. The government began to put limits on the privileges of the monks, and Confucianism replaced Buddhism as the religion of the state. The Yi dynasty (1392–1910) continued these restrictions, and, since the end of World War II, Buddhism in Korea has been hampered by communist rule in North Korea and by the great vitality of Christianity in South Korea. Despite these challenges, Buddhists, particularly in South Korea, have both preserved the old traditions and initiated new movements.

*Japan.* The Buddhism that was initially introduced into Japan in the 6th century from Korea was regarded as a talisman (charm) for the protection of the country. The new religion was accepted by the powerful Soga clan but was rejected by others, thus causing controversies that resembled the divisions caused by the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. In both countries, some believed that the introduction of Buddhist statues had been an insult to the native deities, resulting in plagues and natural disasters. Only gradually were such feelings overcome. Though the Buddhism of the Soga clan was largely magical, under the influence of Prince Shōtoku, who became regent of the nation in 593, other aspects of Buddhism were emphasized. Shōtoku lectured on various scriptures that emphasized the ideals of the layman and monarch, and he composed a “Seventeen-Article Constitution” in which Buddhism was adroitly mixed with Confucianism as the spiritual foundation of the state. In later times he was widely regarded as an incarnation of the bodhisattva AVALOKITEŚVARA.

During the Nara period (710–784), Buddhism became the state religion of Japan. Emperor Shōmu actively propagated the faith, making the imperial capital, Nara—with its “Great Buddha” statue (Daibutsu)—the national cult center. Buddhist schools imported from China became established in Nara, and state-subsidized provincial temples (*kokubunji*) made the system effective at the local level.



After the capital was moved to Heian-kyō (modern Kyōto) in 794, Buddhism continued to prosper. Chinese influence continued to play an important role, particularly through the introduction of new Chinese schools that became dominant at the royal court. MOUNT HIEI and MOUNT KŌYA became the centers for the new Tendai and Esoteric (SHINGON) schools of Buddhism, which were characterized by highly sophisticated philosophies and complex and refined liturgies. Moreover, Buddhism interacted with SHINTŌ and local traditions, and various distinctively Japanese patterns of Buddhist-oriented folk religion became very popular.

*New schools of the Kamakura period.* There was a turning point in the 12th and 13th centuries in Japanese history and in the history of Japanese Buddhism in particular. Late in the 12th century the imperial regime with its center at Heian collapsed, and a new feudal government, or shogunate, established its headquarters at Kamakura. As a part of the same process, a number of new Buddhist leaders emerged and established schools of Japanese Buddhism. These reformers included proponents of the Zen traditions such as EISAI and DŌGEN; Pure Land advocates such as HŌNEN, SHINRAN, and Ippen; and NICHIREN, the founder of a new school that gained considerable popularity. The distinctively Japanese traditions these creative reformers and founders established became—along with many very diverse synthetic expressions of Buddhist-Shintō piety—integral components of a Buddhist-oriented ethos that structured Japanese religious life into the 19th century. Also during this period many Buddhist groups allowed their clergy to marry, with the result that temples often fell under the control of particular families.

Under the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867), Buddhism became an arm of the government. Temples were used for registering the populace; this was one way of preventing the spread of Christianity, which the feudal government regarded as a political menace. However, this association with the Tokugawa regime made Buddhism quite unpopular at the beginning of the Meiji period (1868–1912), at least among the elite. At that time, in order to set up Shintō as the new state religion, it was necessary for Japan's new ruling oligarchy to separate Shintō from Buddhism. This led to the confiscation of temple lands and the defrocking of many Buddhist priests.

During the period of ultranationalism (c. 1930–45), Buddhist thinkers called for uniting the East in one great “Buddhaland” under the tutelage of Japan. After the war, however, Buddhist groups, new and old alike, began to emphasize Buddhism as a religion of peace and brotherhood. During the postwar period the greatest visible activity among Buddhists has been among the new religions such as SŌKAGAKKAI (“Value Creation Society”) and RISSHŌ-KŌSEI-KAI (“Society for Establishing Righteousness and Friendly Relations”).

**Tibet, Mongolia, and the Himalayan Kingdoms.** *Tibet.* Buddhism, according to the Tibetan tradition, was first given recognition in Tibet during the reign of Srong-brtsan-sgam-po (c. 627–c. 650). This king had two queens who were early patrons of the religion and were later regarded in popular tradition as incarnations of the Buddhist savioress TĀRĀ. The religion received active encouragement from Khri-srong-lde-btsan, during whose reign (c. 755–797) the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet was built at Bsam-yas (Samye), the first seven monks were ordained,



*Zen Buddhist monk ringing the temple bell of the Eihei Temple monastery in Japan*

Paolo Koch—Photo Researchers

and the celebrated Indian Tantric master PADMASAMBHAVA was invited to Tibet. Padmasambhava is credited with subduing the spirits and DEMONS associated with BON, the indigenous religion of Tibet, and with subjugating them to the service of Buddhism. At the time, influences from Chinese Buddhism were strong, but it is recorded that at the Council of Bsam-yas (792–794) it was decided that the Indian tradition should prevail.

Following a period of suppression that lasted almost two centuries (from the early 800s to the early 1000s), Buddhism in Tibet enjoyed a revival. During the 11th and 12th centuries many Tibetans traveled to India to acquire and translate Buddhist texts and to receive training in Buddhist doctrine and practice. With the assistance of the renowned Indian master ATĪṢA, who arrived in Tibet in 1042, Buddhism became established as the dominant religion. From this point forward Buddhism was the primary culture of the elite, was a powerful force in the affairs of state, and penetrated deeply into all aspects of Tibetan life.

One of the great achievements of the Buddhist community in Tibet was the translation into Tibetan of a vast corpus of Buddhist literature, including the *Bka'-gyur* ("Translation of the Buddha Word") and *Bstan'-gyur* ("Translation of Teachings") collections.

A major development occurred in the late 14th or early 15th century when a great Buddhist reformer named TSONG-KHA-PA established the DGE-LUGS-PA school, known more popularly as the Yellow Hats. In 1578, representatives of this school succeeded in converting the Mongol Altan Khan, and, under the khan's sponsorship, their leader (the so-called third DALAI LAMA) gained considerable monastic power. In the middle of the 17th century the Mongol overlords established the fifth Dalai Lama as the theocratic ruler of Tibet.

The fifth Dalai Lama instituted the high office of Panchen Lama for the abbot of the Tashilhunpo monastery, located to the west of Lhasa. The Panchen lamas were regarded as successive incarnations of AMITĀBHA. The Manchus in the 18th



*Important sites and routes of expansion of early Buddhism*

century and subsequently the British, the Nationalist Chinese, and the Chinese communists have all tried to exploit the division of power between the Panchen and the Dalai lamas for their own ends. In 1950 Chinese forces occupied Tibet, and in 1959 the Dalai Lama fled to India after an unsuccessful revolt. The Chinese communists then took over his temporal powers. The Dalai Lama's followers are now based in Dharmasala, India, and in 1995 the Dalai Lama and the Chinese government each identified a different boy as the 11th Panchen Lama.

*Mongolia.* The distinctive form of Buddhism that developed in Tibet has exerted a strong influence on neighboring areas and peoples. Most important was the conversion of the Mongol tribes to the north and east of Tibet. There are some indications that Buddhism was present among the Mongols as early as the 4th century, and during the 13th century close relationships developed between the Mongol court in China and some of the leaders of TIBETAN BUDDHISM. Kublai Khan himself became a supporter of the Tibetan form of Buddhism. Kublai Khan's Tibetan advisers helped to develop a block script for the Mongolian language, and many Buddhist texts were translated from Tibetan into Mongolian. In general, however, the religion failed to gain widespread popular support during this period.

In 1578 a new situation developed when the Altan Khan accepted the Dge-lugs-pa version of the Tibetan tradition and supported its spread among his followers at all levels of Mongol society. Over the centuries Mongolian scholars translated a large corpus of texts from Tibetan, and they produced their own sophisticated original texts. The Mongols based their Buddhist doctrine, practice, and communal organization on Tibetan models, but they developed and adapted them in a distinctive way.

Between 1280 and 1368 China was part of the Mongol empire, and the Mongols established their variant of Tibetan Buddhism in China. When they no longer held power in China, they continued to maintain the traditions they had developed in their homeland in the Central Asian steppes. During the 20th century, however, Mongolian Buddhism was undermined by the communist regimes that ruled in the Mongol areas of the former Soviet Union, Mongolia, and China.

**Buddhism in the West.** During the long course of Buddhist history, Buddhist influences have from time to time reached the Western world, and there are occasional references to what seem to be Buddhist traditions in the writings of the Christian CHURCH FATHERS. Not until the modern period, however, is there evidence for a serious Buddhist presence in the Western world. Beginning in the mid-19th century, Buddhism was introduced into the United States and other Western countries by large numbers of immigrants, first from China and Japan but more recently from other countries, especially countries of Southeast Asia. Buddhism gained a foothold among a significant number of Western intellectuals and—particularly during the 1960s and early '70s—among young people seeking new forms of RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE and expression. The interest of Westerners in Buddhism has been increased by the work of Buddhist missionaries such as the Japanese scholar D.T. SUZUKI (1870–1966) as well as by a number of Tibetan Buddhist teachers who came to the West after the Chinese conquest of their homeland in the late 1950s.

## BUDDHISM IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

**Modern trends.** During the 19th and 20th centuries Buddhism has been forced to respond to new challenges and opportunities that cut across the regional religious and cultural patterns that characterized the Buddhist world in the premodern period. A number of Buddhist countries were subjected to Western rule, and even those that were not actually conquered felt the heavy pressure of Western religious, political, economic, and cultural influence. Modern rationalistic and scientific modes of thinking, modern notions of liberal democracy and socialism, and modern patterns of economic organization were introduced and became important elements in the thought and life of Buddhists and non-Buddhists in these countries. In this situation the Buddhists' response was twofold. They came to associate Buddhism with the religious and cultural identity that they sought to preserve and reassert in the face of Western domination. In addition, they sought to



(Top): *Young Buddhist nuns in Namhsan, Myanmar;* (bottom): *Members of a Korean Buddhist temple at the annual Korean-American parade in New York City*

(Top): Archive Newsphotos;  
(bottom): Katrina Thomas—  
Photo Researchers

initiate reforms that would make Buddhism a more appealing and effective force in the modern world.

The Buddhist concern to challenge Western domination manifested itself both in the specifically religious and in the religiopolitical sphere. In the former, Buddhists used a variety of measures to meet the challenge posed by the presence of Western Christian missionaries, often adopting modern Christian practices such as the establishment of Sunday schools, the distribution of tracts, and the like. They also attempted to strengthen the Buddhist cause through the initiation of Buddhist missions, including missions to the West, and through ecumenical cooperation among various Buddhist groups. Organizations such as the WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF BUDDHISTS (founded in 1950) and the World Buddhist Sangha Council (founded in 1966) were established to promote cooperation among Buddhists from all countries and denominations.

In the religiopolitical sphere, many Buddhist leaders—including many politi-

cally active monks—sought to associate Buddhism with various nationalist movements that were struggling to achieve political, economic, and cultural independence. Of course, the success of this strategy was tied to the success of the nationalist movements.

Three emphases have been especially important in the various reform movements. First, many Buddhist leaders have put forward a highly rationalized, Protestant-type interpretation of Buddhism that deemphasizes the supernatural and ritualized aspects of the tradition and focuses on the supposed continuity between Buddhism and modern science and on the centrality of ethics and morality. This interpretation, according to its proponents, represents a recovery of the true Buddhism of the Buddha.

A second, closely related emphasis that has been prominent among modern Buddhist reformers represents Buddhism as a form of religious teaching and practice that provides a basis for social, political, and economic life in the modern world. In some cases the focus has been on Buddhist ideas that supposedly provide a religious grounding for an international order supporting world peace. Other reformers have presented Buddhism as a basis for a modern democratic order or have advocated a Buddhist form of socialism.

Finally, Buddhist reformers have initiated and supported movements that give the Buddhist laity (and in some cases Buddhist women) a much stronger role than they have had in the past. In the Theravāda world, lay societies have been formed and lay-oriented meditation movements have enjoyed great success. In East Asia

an anticlerical, lay-oriented trend that was evident even before the modern period has culminated in the formation and rapid expansion of new, thoroughly laicized Buddhist movements, particularly in Japan.

**Challenges and opportunities.** The status of contemporary Buddhist communities and the kinds of challenges those communities face differ radically from area to area. Five different kinds of situations can be identified.

First, there are a number of countries where previously well-established Buddhist communities have suffered severe setbacks that have curtailed their influence and seriously sapped their vitality. This kind of situation prevails primarily in countries ruled by communist governments where Buddhism has, for many decades, been subjected to intense pressures that have undercut its institutional power and weakened its influence on large segments of the population. This has happened in the Mongol areas of Central Asia, in China (outside of Tibet), in North Korea, and, to a lesser extent, in Vietnam.

Second, there are places where well-established Buddhist communities have suffered similar setbacks but have retained the loyalty of large segments of the population. Perhaps the most vivid example is Tibet, where the Chinese communists have implemented anti-Buddhist policies that, despite their brutality, have failed to break the bond between Buddhism and the Tibetan sense of identity. In Cambodia and Laos, similarly, communist rule (including even the reign of terror imposed by the Pol Pot regime that controlled Kampuchea from 1975 to 1979) does not seem to have broken the people's loyalty to Buddhism.

Third, there are situations in which the Buddhist community has retained a more or less accepted position as the leading religious force and has continued to exert a strong influence on political, economic, and social life. This is the case in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, where Buddhism is the dominant religion among the Sinhalese and Burman majorities, and in Thailand, where more than 90 percent of the population is counted as Buddhist. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, ethnic conflict and (especially in Myanmar) authoritarian rule and economic stagnation have resulted in political instability that has had a disruptive effect on the local Buddhist communities. In Thailand, however, Buddhism has a firm position within a relatively stable and rapidly modernizing society.

The fourth type of situation is one in which well-developed Buddhist traditions are operating with a considerable degree of freedom and effectiveness in societies where Buddhism plays a more circumscribed role. This situation prevails in several of the Pacific Rim countries, including South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, and to a lesser extent in Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, where Buddhism is practiced by significant numbers of overseas Chinese. The primary example, however, is Japan, where Buddhism has continued to play an important role. In the highly modernized society that has developed in Japan, many deeply rooted Buddhist traditions, such as Shingon, Tendai, the Pure Land schools, Zen and the Nichiren school have persisted and have been adapted to changing conditions. At the same time, new Buddhist sects such as Rissho-Kosei-Kai and Soka-gakkai have gained millions of converts not only in Japan but also throughout the world.

Finally, new Buddhist communities have developed in areas where Buddhism disappeared long ago or never existed at all. Thus in India, where Buddhism had been virtually extinct since at least the 15th century, new Buddhist societies have been formed by Indian intellectuals, new Buddhist settlements have been established by Tibetan refugees, and a significant Buddhist community has been founded by converts from the so-called scheduled castes. In the West (particularly but not exclusively in the United States), important Buddhist communities have been established by immigrants from East and Southeast Asia. Buddhist influences have penetrated into many aspects of Western culture, and communities of Buddhist converts are active.

For more than two millennia Buddhism has been a powerful religious, political, and social force, first in India, its original homeland, and then in many other lands. It remains a powerful religious, political, and cultural force in many parts of the world today.