

# The People of the Early Mahāyānistic Order

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## I The Starting Point

When, where, and in what form did Mahāyāna Buddhism first appear as a Mahāyānistic Order in India? There is an excellent and extremely useful article on the studies of Mahāyāna Buddhism in Japan by Prof. H. Nakamura<sup>(1)</sup> which classifies and arranges the materials according to the sūtras on which they are based.

Recent studies, mainly advanced by Professors A. Hirakawa,<sup>(2)</sup> K. Kino,<sup>(3)</sup> and Mr. Shizutani,<sup>(4)</sup> have approached this subject from the archeological standpoint and have added impetus in this field. Both Professor Hirakawa and Mr. Shizutani utilized and analyzed the Ikuga chōja-kyo (郁伽長者經)<sup>(5)</sup>

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- (1) Hajime Nakamura, *A Critical Survey of Mahāyāna and Esoteric Buddhism*, chiefly based upon Japanese studies, (*Acta Asiatica*, no. 6, pp. 57-63), published by the Toho Gakkai, Tokyo, 1964.
- (2) Akira Hirakawa, "Characteristics of the Historical Order in Mahāyāna Buddhism", compiled by S. Miyamoto in *A Study of the Formative History of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 1954. The Independent Nature and Status of Buddha-Stūpa in the Hinayāna Order", *Bukkyo Shigaku*, 1955, vol. 4, nos. 3-4; "The Meaning of Stūpa-Temple in the Early Mahāyāna Order, *Shukyo Kenkyu*, 1957, no. 153.
- (3) Kazuyoshi Kino, *A Study on the Development of the Buddhayāna Order from a Bodhisattva Organization*, *Shukyo Kenkyu*, 1956, no. 147; "The Development of a Bodhisattva Organization, *A Study on the Hokke-kyo*, chapter 2.
- (4) Masao Shizutani, "On the Early Mahāyāna Order", *Indogaku Bukkyogaku Kenkyu*, 1957, vol. 5, no. 2.
- (5) *Gṛhapati-ugra-paripṛcchā Sūtra* in Skṛt., CKTTO. (A comparative analytical Catalogue of the Kanjur division of the Tibetan Tripiṭaka, published by the Otani daigaku library, Kyoto, 1932.), no. 760.

which is supported by the archeological inscriptions.

According to this Sūtra, layman as well as those who have renounced the mundane life, jointly organized themselves around "temple-with-Stūpa" and led a life under the systematized Order. Historically, this fact can be observed on inscriptions, on Buddha and Bodhisattva statues, and other archaeological findings.

Mr. Shizutani uses the Sanskr̥t term Vihāra as the term corresponding to the "temple-with-Stūpa". He also states that this Order, which was centered around the Vihāra, did not associate itself with any of the Hīnayānistic factions, while Professor Hirakawa referred to this as the Mahāyānistic Order. This Order most likely existed, in the beginning, under the name of Bodhisattva, which is the viewpoint of Mr. Shizutani. It can be seen that this was, indeed, a Bodhisattva Order, or pre-Mahāyānistic Order according to Dr. H. Nakamura, which gradually accomplished radical reforms and developed into a Mahāyānistic Order. The Mahāyānistic guiding principles probably rose, at first, to oppose the monk-centered thinking of conservative Buddhism. If the Mahāyāna discipline is viewed from the development of literature, the original way of discipline is found in the chapters of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras (般若波羅蜜多經),

The meaning of this discipline was advanced in the Hanju Sammai-kyo (般舟三昧經) and other Sūtras concerning Samādhi. It developed through the Ikuga chōjakyō (郁伽長者經) and the Kobon Hōjyakukyo (古品寶積經) named by Dr. Tsukinowa, and led to the literature on the Bodhisattva Discipline of Bodhisattva-bhūmi (菩薩地).

However, I feel that the guiding principle which formed the basis for the establishment of the Mahāyānistic Order still remains to be explored. My research here is not to trace the historical process. My hope is merely to try to grasp the meaning of the position of the Buddhist laity, a position which led to the development of a systematized Order within the historical process.

According to my understanding, an Order is a formation which

consists of several members among whom the Buddha's Intention (Buddha-āśaya; sañs-rgyas kyi dgoñs-pa) is realized. The Buddha's Intention here means that his Enlightenment should appear in the awakening to his teaching by all human beings. The people can be saved in this manner. Thus the Buddha's Intention can even be called Buddhism by us when it is utilized in the form of an Order. If the experience of the Enlightenment were to be kept merely in one's heart, then his experience cannot be transmitted to others and the objectivity of the Enlightenment is lost. To those who have not yet experienced the Buddha's Intention, the Enlightenment is beyond them and must be faced as an impersonal object. To those who have experienced, they should be awakened to the fact that it is the Buddha's Intention apart from Himself. Whenever the Buddha's Intention manifests itself in anyone's experience, it means, at the same time, to express the Enlightenment from an impersonal standpoint. Dr. S. Dutt made clear the principle of such a coming into being of an Order as follows:

“Yet, as an Upaniṣad says; ‘From the highest truth (Brahmānanda) speech recedes, along with activities of the mind,’ One who has attained to this bliss becomes therefore a Maunī (“Silent-One”). But the Founder of Buddhism became not a Maunī but a Satthā (“Teacher”). This transition from a Buddha to a Satthā is attributed by the ancient maker of the legend to external adventitious causes.....the intercession of Brahmā Sahampati, the vision of the miseries of all “unenlightened” creatures and the upsurge of compassion (Karuṇā) in his heart. Read between the lines, it is a symbolical way of stating that the realization dawned on the Buddha that the truth received by him had a dynamic quality: it had a need to be converted into a message.....and that otherwise, in the static form of Knowledge received and kept by the recipient, it was incapable of fruition or fulfilment. What this “truth” itself was cannot be known by anybody except him who cognized it; “only the Buddha understood Buddhism”. The “Deathless” (Amata) was the name he gave to it when he turned it into a message and

cast it in the form of a Dhamma to bring it within average human understanding. The recipient of the truth had to be a Satthā: the conviction rings sharp and clear in the trumpet-call of the First Sermon: "Give ear! The Deathless (Amata) has been realized by me.....I will teach the Dhamma"<sup>(6)</sup>.

Here is the beginning of the guiding principle of an Order.

## II The Guiding Principle of the Bodhisattva Order

Then, what kind of people adopted the guiding principles that maintained the Bodhisattva Order? It is most suitable for this subject to consider the Hanju Sammaikyo (般舟三昧經<sup>(7)</sup>) which might possibly be a textbook of the Buddhist layman in the early Mahāyānist period. The main content of this Sūtra deals with their daily life. It is significant that this Sūtra vividly depicts the wishes of the people in a manner which seems contradictory to their lives. In the first chapter of Monji-bon (問事品—Taisho vol. 13, p. 898 a) of this Sūtra, layman Badda Bosatsu (拔陀菩薩) rises and asks questions, itemized into 25 topics, on behalf of the people who gathered at this assembly. Some of the important questions were as follows:

1. How can I realize my own destiny?
2. How can I maintain longevity?
3. How can I be born in a house of wealth and esteem and be respected by my parents, brothers and sisters and other relatives?
4. How can I become beautiful or handsome?
5. How can I become highly talented and superior to others, etc.?

As long as these remain merely wishes and desires, the actual ap-

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(6) S. Dutt, *Buddhist Monks and Monasteries of India*, 1962, London, pp. 21-22.

(7) This Sūtra has four translations in Chinese and one in Tibetan. In Sanskrit it is called the *Pratyutpanna Buddhasaṃmukhāvasthita Samādhi-sūtra* a (Ibid., CKTTO no. 801). The *Budda Bosatsu-kyo* (拔陀菩薩經) in Chinese, is more original, but the *Hanju Sammaikyo* (般舟三昧經) is more readily available both in China and Japan.

pearance of these people can be said to exist in an opposite perspective. If these wishes and desires were to be analyzed realistically, one can readily conclude that these people were engulfed in an environment of poverty and destined to lead a life of misery. For example, Utpalavarṇā (蓮華色 [比丘尼] — Taisho vol. 13, p. 922 a.~b.), a prostitute, belonging to the lowest stratum of society, is mentioned in this Sūtra. Again, the Sūtra shows a peddler who is thinking of his parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends when far away from his native land (Taisho vol. 13, p. 922 c).....It is evident that the lives of these people and the social stratum to which they belonged were not something to be envied. Instead, as depicted in this Sūtra, it shows a lonely and destitute people.....like those who must look at the lucid night and count the shining stars (Taisho vol. 13, p. 923 b).

These 25 questions, which were constantly in the minds of these people were generally meant for those with a bright view of the future and for those striving to accomplish Bodhi, to gain the grandeur of the Pure Land, with ability to realize their desires, and to gain intrepidity. Such an idealistic image had to be made in their minds, for these people to resemble Gautama Buddha as much as possible. The higher their ideals, the greater were their disappointments, as can be seen by reflecting upon the actual conditions that prevailed in religious India.

### III The Beginning of an Order

How then, did these people fill the gap between ideal and reality? It is suggested in the phrase of this Badda Bosatsu-kyo (拔陀菩薩經—— Taisho vol. 13, p. 921 b) that the Bodhisattva at first learns for the sake of the people and, by so doing, he shall cause their minds to be peaceful. If the emphasis were on the conditions of the people, the conditions leading of the ideal of the people would be those which bring religious peace of mind to them, for no material condition could bridge the gap. The Sūtra indicates that the saints of the past age, Mahākāśyapa, Indradatta, Shujin tensi (須深天子), and others had already bridged the gap

in this manner. Also, it is pointed out that in the later age there were other good teachers who were able to solve this problem. It can then be assumed that, under the guidance of these good teachers, the people practiced their purifying religious acts, even for a day or night, and were led to a religious life. It is the Faith of Eternal Amitābha and the meditation which leads the people to see the establishment of the Buddha's appearance in all places. As the practice of meditation began to be regulated, a period of three months was designated and instructions were stipulated which prevented the rise of hindrances to their practice, which involved sitting and walking.

### III The Regulations Governing the Order

The object of this Sūtra was to accomplish the meditation on the appearance of the Buddha in all places. Thus the good teachers, by so doing, as stated in this Sūtra, were possessed of benevolent virtues as leaders of their followers. According to this Sūtra, the instructions which enabled one to reach this state were itemized into 16 codes. The people gathered around their leader, had the duty to abide by these 16 codes in order to realize their objectives. The codes of the followers were looked upon as similar to regulations which were influential in leading to the formation of an Order. The following 16 regulations might possibly have originated before the Badda Bosatsu-kyo (拔陀菩薩經). As it can be seen in other translations, this form was systematized. In this manner, the regulations for the Order became systematized no later than immediately after the formation of this Sūtra.

1. To have exclusive faith.
2. To endeavor, not to retreat.
3. Not to receive another's instruction merely as knowledge.
4. To associate with good friends.
5. To constantly try to see the Buddha.
6. To constantly strive to listen to the Teachings.
7. To recollect the no-dwelling.

8. To search for the Buddha's Intention and not to forget it.
9. Not to desire to speak with worldly beings.
10. (One must always meditate and) not doze or lie down, except while urinating, excreting, or eating.
11. To practice so intently as not to know what your fellow practitioners are doing.
12. To constantly propagate this teaching and not to seek rewards or benefits.
13. To constantly form the Buddha's image and to visualize the (Buddha's) form and to continue with meditation.
14. To constantly maintain and fix this thought.
15. To maintain this vision in drawing, and to destroy the superficial joy. To traverse the unlimited and unique path through meditation.
16. To constantly protect the teachings of the Tathāgata and not to forget.

These people did not necessarily abide by the regulations which were to be observed by the monks. It was quite possible that their way of life became much different from that of the monks. Basically, the difference was one of whether to approach the problem of enlightenment from the standpoint of man in society, or from the standpoint of individualistic salvation. I have shown in the above an example of those sūtras which approached the same problem from the standpoint of society, thereby clarifying that this was the historical background for the emergence of Mahāyāna precepts.

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