

The Origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism

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Mahāyāna is a field of Buddhism accepted widely throughout northern and eastern Asia. Much of the western adepts and practitioners also perceive its significance. This article, therefore, is written and aimed to elaborate the origin of Mahāyāna Buddhism by means of “Dharma” analysis. It is an efficient way to demonstrate the historical movement that affected Buddhist cognition of the Three Jewels (The Buddha, his doctrine and the monk’s order). I enlist three main interpretations of the word “Dharma” and link them to the new conjecture on Buddhism. At the shift in the level of wisdom, Nāgārjuna and his treatises of the middle way played the dominant role in forming Mahāyāna philosophy. But to put stress on the aspect of compassion, the concepts of “the Buddha’s Triple Bodies” and “Bodhisattva” bestowed the Buddhist embodiment with Mahāyāna proliferation.

Mahāyāna means the great way or path. What is the great way? It is the way to help infinite sentient beings cross the ocean of birth and death to the shore of liberation. It was like a vast ship floating under the cruel wind of ignorance just to pick innumerable beings up and bring to the shore of eternal bliss. Led by vowing bodhisattvas, every potential mind would be encouraged to be free from suffering.

The concept of Mahāyāna first originated from different attitudes toward Buddhism in all aspects. If we discuss Buddhism, most of us surely think of the three jewels - Buddha: the Lord, Dharma (Pāli: Dhamma): the doctrine, and Saṅgha: the monk’s order. These three jewels had been reinterpreted (or redefined) throughout history and brought about conflicts. Conflicts expanded when time passed by. The process of reinterpretation was not

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merely change, but like a conceptual revolution. I prefer to call it a movement. The movement could be summarized into three stages as follows: -

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

The case of Vajjian monks is the best example to show the conflict between these two groups. Since those monks had added ten minor precepts for their group¹, i.e., monks could keep salt to eat with food in another meal, monks could drink mild alcoholic beverages, or monks could get, keep and use money. In the Second

¹ Sattastikakhandhaya, Vi. Cū. 7/446/393. (The Thai translated Tripitaka, Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya version)

Council they were called “Pāpa bhikkhus” (the sinful monks). Their behavior was unacceptable from the view of the traditional Buddhist adherents. Thus, the movement called for an entire dissolution of the monk’s order. They established their own tradition and called themselves “Mahāsaṃghikas” (The Great Assembly)

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

Next, the conflict occurred on the level of “Dharma”. Before the Lord’s passing away, he once declared before the assembly that monks (also including lay disciples) would have the doctrine and the discipline as their leaders in the future². But the conflict on account of the discipline turned out to be fractured. It seemed that no one wanted to compromise. Some Buddhist disciples, mostly monks of the Great Assembly, found themselves having no shelter left except the doctrine. So they went on searching for the true Dharma. Amazingly, the statement of the Lord found somewhere

² Mahparinibbāsutta, Dī. Ma.10/216/164.

else states that “who sees Dharma, that one sees me; who sees me, that one sees Dharma.”³ also supported their struggle. If we use logical implications to judge this sentence, we would find an interesting argument. The argument could be pitched through these questions. What should be the true doctrine so that when we saw it, we might be able to see the Lord? How should we see the doctrine so that we could also see the Lord? Or what should be the best interpretation of Dharma so as to make it valid and approachable to the Lord?

For some Buddhist scholars, Dharma had no longer been the teaching messages of the Lord. It contained more latent meanings of which we did not realize. Dharma in their comprehension was something more and wider than the speech of the Lord. The speech was merely a part of him, not the totality. These disciples had shifted the ethical facet of Buddhism to a metaphysical focus. And what they had done was to seek out the truest doctrine. The true doctrine which also revealed the status of the Lord after death. Simultaneously, the assumption that the Lord still existed pervaded and caught the disciples’ faithful minds. Unenlightened disciples made an effort to see the Lord through the right understanding of the doctrine. So many interpretations were given to this word.

As aforementioned, many Buddhist scholars give priority to the metaphysical rather than moral achievement. By having the Lord as the final goal, they strived to reach the destination through the doctrine. Dharma turned to be a means to reach (the state of) Buddhahood. And this was a new trend within the Buddhist community. It was a conceptual revolution that Dharma was no longer the message, but something real-in-itself. And its truth was, in fact, the truth of the Lord.

Moreover, this word was widely used in the history of Buddhism. It was not only equally significant and pointed to the Lord,

³ Vakkalisutta, Saṃ Khan. 17/87/159.

but it also pointed to every available entity. Entity herein implied the existence of radical elements either transient or permanent. Dharma meant things when examined fundamentally; had their existence in the form of flowing energy. The existence of such and such appeared and disappeared momentarily. Some called them instantaneous beings. Difficulties to explain, nevertheless, those beings were real and real-in-itself.

From the brief explanation to this word, it might be easier if we classify the bulk of definitions into groups in accordance with differing assumptions. Each group represented unique beliefs toward the three jewels. Some of them had a direct impact on the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Firstly, there were groups that defined “Dharma” as the Buddhist scriptures; Dharma implied the doctrine or discourse of the Lord recited by disciples. It was no other than the teaching messages. These groups placed emphasis on the moral and practical meanings explicitly found in the doctrine. They paid no attention to any metaphysical views. For them, whether the Lord existed or not was less important than the liberation from all kinds of suffering. To meditate and purify our minds should be the main functions of humans. The chain of birth was too tedious so we should not prolong our destiny in vanity. The Lord taught us to help ourselves, and all of what he had taught was relevant only to suffering and liberation from it. Liberation was their aim, not the truth of the Lord. The reason was simple and easy. Despite finding him, we were still bound and fluctuated by subtle defilements like greed, hatred or delusion. To see Dharma meant to practice and trust the Lord’s wisdom. Dharma was not a means for us to see the Lord, but it was the perfect guideline for self-help. Dharma had its final destination at the liberation of learners, not the realization of the Lord. The Lord had gone far away. It was no use to ponder his existence after death. These groups had rarely influenced the emergence of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Most Thai Theravāda monks belonged to these groups or, at least, shared their beliefs.

Secondly, there were groups that defined “Dharma” as the ultimate truth underlying phenomena. Dharma was in some classes like instantaneous beings as mentioned earlier. Adherents of these groups were titled realists, either being Substantialists or Essentialists⁴. For them, Dharma covered every radical element at both mundane and supramundane levels. Elements hereafter did not merely mean the fundamental materialistic atoms, but included psychic force of consciousness and also the state of emancipation. So it might be clear to equalize elements with entities existing on their own.

In the mundane level, Dharma implied an infinite process of evanescent elements. It means that separate elements are linked together by causal laws⁵. There were many categories of elements, but I focus here on the human mind. Of course, our minds are sets of truth. They existed ultimately and objectively. No matter of being caught at sight by anyone, they automatically remained and functioned at normal. Despite we could never catch our minds by sense organs, the fact that it existed could not be denied. Like other mundane elements, our minds appeared and disappeared spontaneously. Change and impermanence were their attributes. Our minds changed every moment, not day by day, but second by second. All of us were changing, both physically and mentally. I combed my hair and pulled some of them out, for instance, I became a new being because my physical composition changed. Likewise, I read a book and gained some new experience, I also became a new being because my mental disposition changed. Change is a common and natural process of the mind.

⁴ Substantialists and Essentialists were those who clung to the Abhidharma tradition, namely Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika. Kalupahana, D. J. (1992) **A History of Buddhist Philosophy**. Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, pp. 125 - 131.

⁵ Stcherbatsky, Th. (1980) **The Conception of Buddhist Nirvāṇa**. Varanasi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, p. 4.

In the supramundane level, it was quite different in explanations of truth. If we talked about supramundane entities, the state of liberation (Nirvāṇa/Pāli: Nibbāna) was included and focused. Like those of mundane elements, the state of liberation was a set of truth. It existed somewhere and somehow regardless of the viewer. We could never touch it by ordinary sense, but it still existed and was true always. The truth of it was not in the practical but the ontological sense. It was real and real-in-itself. That state was pure and perfect, unique and independent. Permanence was its existence while eternity was its duration. All of these were attributes of that transcendent state. The state of liberation never changed. Since it was so perfect and self-sufficient, no more causation would be required to explain it. As it was unconditioned, it would remain eternal and endless. It is our hope and is still waiting for us.

Dharma in the definition of these groups might look far from the Lord. They seemed not relative to the existence of him. In fact, these disciples viewed Dharma as a natural composition of real elements. If viewed from life's framework, Dharma was phenomena and their relations to each other. It was not the Lord's leaving messages. All messages were just a part of Dharma. Since their viewpoint was centered on metaphysical interest, they gave a high rank of interest to the topic of truth or falsehood. Fact got more significance and left inferior position to the value of practice. Logic took part into the movement. It provided a better method to investigate and specify what should be true. Seeing Dharma for them signified the realization of natural process. If we realized the ultimate truth of all things, it was sure that we would be free from all types of bondage. To see Dharma was to see the truth of phenomena. When we saw the truth of phenomena, the wisdom of the Lord was fulfilled within us. That was the reason why one saw Dharma; he would also see the Lord.

A big problem happened from this explanation. Due to the assumption that truth is classified into levels, the question of how could we transmigrate to the pure level might be raised. As we

know, the human mind was defiled, transient and changeable. But the state of liberation remained fixed at all times. The polemical argument lied under the acceptance that both mind and the state of liberation were real (true in the ontological sense). If so, how could the mind meet that state? It was impossible for any human mind to approach the state of liberation. It was such a paradox in saying that we would liberate in the self-sufficient state. If the state of liberation was the objective truth, being permanent and independent on its own, no one could transmigrate. Since transmigration meant change, and change implied non-substantiality. But that state of bliss was not open to any kind of change. It remained still. Causation and change could never affect its essence. And it was futile for us to talk about liberation.

Furthermore, the fact that the human mind and the state of liberation existed in severance would restrain humans from their potentiality to liberate⁶. So long as the perfect state abided in its own purification, independence and transcendence beyond all worldly conditions, all mental practices of humans were hopeless. No achievement would be attained and no liberation could be reached. How should the doctrine of the four noble truths (Āryasatya/Pāli: Ariyasacca) which is the core of Buddhism be comprehensive and fulfilled, if the suffering (Duḥkha/Pāli: Dukkha) implied the transient attachment of ordinary minds but the cessation of it (Nirodha/Pāli: Nirodha) belonged to the fixed and absolute type of truth? If both were real entities, the four noble truths would represent double standards of opposite truth and cause self-contradiction. It was irrational that the enlightened one had ever taught such a meaningless doctrine to liberate people. Since the state of liberation had never welcomed our transmigration, all of our hard endeavors would end up in vain and no liberation was really approached.

⁶ Santina, P. D. (1986) **Madhyamaka Schools in India**. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 33 - 34.

Pioneering was Nāgārjuna in his attempt to evoke his contemporaries of this unintentional disaster. Unless those adherents stopped their propagation of stray views, Buddhism would turn to be dogmatism and fail to help anybody. The principle of interdependence and thus the emptiness of Dharma were declared to break down any absolute concepts. The state of the mind and liberation were no longer two separate truths. But the existence of one depended on the existence of the other. Both existed in relativity. Without one, the other could not be illustrated and approached. We could not say that either mind or the state of liberation was real-in-itself. In fact, there was no truth in such a manner at all. Truth would be mentioned when the value of practices was evaluated in advance. It meant efficiency rather than objectivity, or the effectiveness of natural law than its being. Truth was no other than the capacity to bring about an effect⁷. By this explanation, truth of liberation was the state of mind when it is pure and devoid of defilement. Mind and the state of liberation need not be apart. The state of liberation was the same as the unconditioned mind.

The proclamation of interdependence and emptiness led to the development of sophisticated philosophy among Buddhist scholars. The situation indicated a movement to dissolve from all kinds of realistic traditions that were titled “Abhidharma”. And Mahāyāna partly occurred as a result of this struggle. One of the major differences between traditional Buddhism and Mahāyāna was the attitude of disciples toward the state of liberation. At the time of Nāgārjuna, the state of liberation was not real any more. Any attempt to explore and reveal its truth was a sign of ignorance. The state of liberation was empty in the practical sense and entirely imaginative in the metaphysical sense. In the practical sense, it was empty or non-substantial due to its dependence on the mind’s existence and vice versa. When the human mind was pure

⁷ Kalupahana, D. J. (1992) **A History of Buddhist Philosophy**, p. 168.

and detached from all types of impurities, such a state is called liberation. So, the state of liberation was possibly obtained within the process of life, not beyond. As Nagarjuna stated in his prominent work titled “*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*” (MMK)⁸ that “the life process has no thing that distinguishes it from freedom. Freedom has no thing that distinguishes it from the life-process.”⁹ Nirvāṇa was not something other than Samsāra and Samsāra was not something other than Nirvāṇa. Both were empty and relative.

Thirdly, there were groups that defined “Dharma” as the ultimate truth of the Lord. Adherents of these groups pressed overwhelmingly to the story of the Lord. More they investigated his life, the less and less they believed he had gone away. For them, it was unacceptable for the great man who had made infinite vows through aeons of ages would easily pass away without residue. It was hard to admit that he no longer existed. We could not affirm his power if nothing left for us to affirm. How could we make sure that all sentient beings, especially humans, were capable to liberate if his potentiality did not still rest hidden within us. Hence, the Lord’s wisdom, compassion and purity coalesced into a flux of energy pervading around the universe.

These groups tended to relate Dharma with the Lord’s compassion. To see Dharma was to see the Lord’s power penetrated through all things. Or to see Dharma was to see the nature of Buddha (Buddhahood) within us. No matter of phenomena were real on their own, or the state of liberation included some fixed essence, the fact was that the Lord existed somewhere and somehow. Their concern

⁸ Some scholars regarded that this work was Nagarjuna’s magnum opus. For more information you can view in Lindtner, Chr. (1987) **Nagarjuniana**. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 9-29.

⁹ *Mūlamadhyamakākārikā* or MMK (25.19) in Kalupahana, D. J. (1986) **Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way**. Albany, State University of New York Press.; Inada, K. K. (trans.) (1993) **Nāgārjuna**. Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications.; Also in Singh, J. (1978) **An Introduction to Madhyamaka Philosophy**. Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, p. 29.

was to search for him through the realization of his power. Only by this explanation of seeing Dharma, would we really see the Lord.

Similar to those of the second groups, they regarded Dharma as the means to reach the Lord. But to reach the Lord had a peculiar meaning for they adhered to the linguistic hint of the messages. While the realists understood that to see Dharma was to understand natural process of things. If we realized the ultimate truth of all phenomena, we would certainly perceive the Lord's wisdom. When every attachment was discerned, and the state of liberation was fulfilled, we would, then, derive within us the transcendent intuition like the Lord had once obtained.

But adherents of these groups viewed Dharma as equally important to the Lord. Not equivalent in the sense of having two identical truths, but Dharma was in complete identity with the Lord. No dualism dichotomized from the truth of the Lord. Dharma was his energy illuminating in three aspects: wisdom, purity and compassion. We could absorb this energy by faith and meditation. Especially, his love tied up all sentient beings together under the sphere of potentiality to liberate. Everyone was nourishing in the realm of his radiance. It was like an embryo, the inner sanctum or seed of Buddhahood waiting for attainment within us¹⁰. His compassion was immense and infinite that the energy formed a potential seed called Buddha's Mind inherently hidden in us. Although liberation had not yet been realized, still we were fully aware of our capacity and freewill to choose what we wanted to. Thus, the Lord exists all times and his energy permeates in all directions.

These groups seemed to uphold the superiority of the Lord over all things. Truth was the Lord or the Lord was truth. The principle of interpenetration and mutual identity came into consideration, but

¹⁰ William, P. and Tribe, A. (2000) **Buddhist Thought**. London, Routledge, pp. 160-162.

its conceptual fabrication was only at the incipient stage. He was once human, capable of all sciences, at present he has gone away but he left his best inner qualifications available in humans. One really important, duty of man, was to live and spend his life in accordance with the Lord's intention. His intention was to liberate sentient beings from suffering, if unsuccessful, other preliminary helps would be provided without hesitation. So, in order to approach the Buddhahood within us, it was crucial and inevitable that we had to help other sentient beings too. And the best of assistance was to take them with us on the way to liberation.

The notion of Bodhisattva and Mahāyāna sprang up from this attitude. Bodhisattvas were ones who had seriously taken a vow to follow the path to Buddhahood. Aimed at being fully enlightened and powerful. Metaphorically speaking, Bodhisattvas incessantly trained and exerted themselves at hardiness till they achieved the state of Omniscience and Omnipresence was quite similar to the concept of God in theistic cultures. However, in Buddhism we had no idea of God as the creator. Buddha or the Lord was utterly freed from life's circle, but with his compassion, flourishing out of infinite vows and perfections performed through aeons, his abstract composition in the form of pure energy still existed and functioned in guidance of beings to the right way. The Lord herein was not the same as God. Instead of being the supreme God, Buddha performed the role of kind leader and supporter.

The viewpoint on the topic of Bodhisattva in the Mahāyāna tradition led to the exaltation of Bodhisattvas over Arahants. Despite Arahants seeing appellations of those who had attained the extinction of all defilements and suffering, some Buddhist scholars suspected their fulfillment of the final holiness. In comparison with the concept of Bodhisattva, the latter seemed by all means superior either examined from the scope of wisdom or compassion. While the traditional Buddhism (dominant was Theravāda) confined the explanation of this concept to the previous lives of the Lord. They related the notion of Bodhisattva mainly to the historical human

Buddha called Sākyamunī Buddha. The cult of Mahāyāna did things differently. The latter preferred to use this word in reflection to the seed of the Lord illumined within us. The dimension of the Lord's benevolence was focused on so intensely that everyone had equal intrinsic value to become a bodhisattva. Not restricted to only extraordinary persons in the past and no random beings to possess Buddhahood, the seed of the Lord had been distributed in equity. Thus, all sentient beings possessed the potentiality to be saviors (bodhisattvas), or received an opportunity to be saved by other bodhisattvas. No one would be discarded by any excuse. And vows to help others would be made for whoever aspired to this career. By this elucidation, it was not surprising if someone called the inculcated pattern of Bodhisattva in the traditional doctrines as described in the past, while in Mahāyāna sources the pattern was like a prescription for the present and future¹¹.

Apart from these three dominant interpretations of Dharma, still there were varieties of expositions given to this word. For some disciples who were attracted to the monistic philosophical view, the meaning of Dharma would be extended to cover all illusive elements constructed by the human mind. But for Buddhist folks unfamiliar to all sorts of intellectual methodology, Dharma was easily understood as merely virtue or good deeds. In the midst of available assumptions, the three aforesaid groups of cognition reserved the high rank of significance in the history of Buddhism. The other meanings were associations or complements in the sense that they could be accrued to one or more prevailing groups. Mahāyāna sub-sects or schools developed out of these movements. Some created their system of thought based on the adoption of two or more philosophical hints found in those meanings. Some synthesized or compromised groups of definitions together and formed a holistic theory of totality in oneness (or mutual identity).

¹¹ Ibid.

An interesting standpoint was the belief that the Lord remained as one in all things.¹²

Thirdly, conflicts occurred on the level of “Buddha”. When the doctrine and the discipline fully split up, the only way for novices and unenlightened disciples to prolong their faith was to go back to the Lord. Without him, no refuge could be leant on. Differences and oppositions on views could no longer merge into unity. Each school concentrated on their own instruction. Apathy to the Lord’s intention, they regarded their doctrines as higher or truer, while rebutting others as inferior and phenomenal based. The way to Buddhahood was taught, but its practical suggestions to achieve that state were scattered and disordered due to variances of beliefs. At that time, most Buddhist disciples, especially monks of the Great Assembly admitted the existence of the Lord in the transcendent state. The real Lord returned to his universal transparency. He still existed but no more in human shape and thought. His human compositions dissipated and turned back to be the natural principle or force that propelled the universe since the beginningless time. There was neither concrete form for us to adhere, nor worldly knowledge able to classify. The Lord after death became the abstract foundation or principle of the universe.

This principle was identical and completely relevant to the meaning of Dharma in the third category. The Lord contained within himself the Triple Bodies (Trikāya). The language was used conventionally and merely signified to aspect than numerical quantity. The first and most fundamental body is called the Cosmic

¹² The assumption that “the all in one and the one in all” (Mutual Penetration) and “the all is one and the one is all” (Mutual Identity) are basic teachings of Mahāyāna school in Chinese and Japan. These might be ramifications of thought developed under the influence of Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra and the works of Nāgārjuna. For preliminary understanding, you can absorb these ideas in Conze, E. (trans. and exp.) (1970) **Buddhist Wisdom Books**. London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd. Also in Williams, P. (1994) **Mahāyāna Buddhism**. London, Routledge.

Body (Dharmakāya). This idea could never be comprehensive through human dualistic patterns of thought. It looked like wisdom, purity and compassion of the Lord since the beginningless time had been gathered up and condensed into the source of pure energy illuminated all around. It was beyond rational analysis in the sense that no kind of thought construction appeared and worked in discrimination. The Cosmic Body penetrated and functioned in radiance. When meditating firmly in a trance we are entitled to that state of the Lord as the Blissful Body (Sambhogakāya). The Blissful Body was such a body of communal enjoyment in some interpretations. Perhaps this cognition derived from the image of the celestial beings beyond the wheel of mundane life.

The Blissful Body was also radiance. It functioned around the intersection of defiled and pure level. While the Cosmic Body permeated his energy from the immaculate core of virtue to cherish universes in all directions, the glistered Blissful Body shone up and down in accord to the Lord's intuition and intelligence. The function of this body mainly aimed at leading celestial bodhisattvas and beings to the path of Mahāyāna. It meant that in order that these beings might realize the Lord's wisdom and compassion, it was impossible not to help other sentient beings. Since all beings possessed the seed of the Lord, to perform oneself for the benefit of others meant to realize the identity of all things. All phenomena were empty, thus they reflected similar Buddhahood. To help others, hence, was to cherish our own Buddhahood.

The third body called Nirmāṇakāya - the Body of transformation. It was human in shape and form like us but extraordinary in the way of explanation. In fact, this body signified the historical Buddha of this period; Sākyamunī Buddha. He had born and died two thousand five hundred years ago. The special attentions to which monks of the Great Assembly called were his manifestation out of the first two Bodies. The human Body was just a phenomenon. He had come and gone under the will of radiant Bodies. His life in ancient India was real, but transient and non-substantial so it could

not be accepted as the ultimate refuge. Sākyamunī Buddha once born and fulfilled his human functions in leading particular kinds of beings to liberation. When he finished his short-termed duty, his physical body perished. His death taught us of the three common characteristics of life, impermanence, suffering from attachment and egolessness. So, it was a means or expedient to express Dharma in the preliminary stage. When the human mind detached all substantial views from subtle defilements, the ontological doctrine of Buddha Nature would be taught. The truth of him persisted in eternity but finite human had no capacity to absorb his transcendent body. His radiance was still there but masked by the lack of knowledge (ignorance). So long as humans did not realize the true Dharma, anguish of departure from the Lord still happened.

The concept of the Lord's Triple Bodies was very significant in the late Mahayana tradition. The Cosmic and Blissful Body were quite weird if viewed from the standpoint of the old sect. Due to the perpetual existence of transcendent Bodies in the form of universal law and endless radiance, opponents always referred to this recognition as the impact of Hinduism. Since later Hinduism (especially Vedanta) accepted the authenticity of the Absolute called Brahman. Despite of being refused to get in part of Buddhism by some scholars, many offshoots of Mahāyāna concepts and schools had yet evolved and preserved in the history. Mahayana Buddhism was one of the best systems that advocated the optimistic glance of emotion through reason. Logic had been used to facilitate the role of intellectual wisdom, while the role of intellectual wisdom served and functioned under the call of universal love. These were the enchantments of the Mahāyāna attitude.

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