the Iranian *garo-dmana,* the "house of praise," the highest of the four heavens, associated with Ahura Mazda who is referred to in parts of the Avesta as Dadhvah.[52]

It has been argued by a Japanese scholar that the so-called "ghost festival," an annual ritual for "feeding" untended souls, which became extremely popular during the T'ang period, actually had Iranian origins. The Chinese name for the festival, *yu-lan-p'en,* may be derived from the Sogdian *rw'n* ("soul"), and a popular tale associated with the festival, in which a monk, Mu-lien, descends into hell to retrieve his mother, seems to be based on the Greek myth of Dionysos and Semele.[53] There is evidence for other such influences from the early centuries of our era,[54] but similar exchanges of ideas may have been going on much earlier, and if Iranian soothsayers did serve the Chou, they probably were.

CHAPTER THREE

Buddhism and the Silk Road

At some time during the seventh to the fourth century BCE in northern India lived a man named Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be known as the Buddha, or "Enlightened One."[1] A spiritual reformer who sought a "Middle Path" between worldliness and asceticism, the Buddha preached a message based on Four Noble Truths: that life is suffering; that there is a cause of that suffering, namely desire; that there is a way to end suffering; and that the way is by following an Eightfold Path of right opinion, right thought, right speech, right activity, right livelihood, right effort, right attention, and right concentration.

During his lifetime the Buddha founded a quadrapartite community of followers, called the *sangha,* divided between male and female monks and laity. Soon many of them began to travel throughout India and beyond in order to spread the Buddha's message, which they believed to be universal. This was the first large-scale missionary effort in the history of the world's religions.

This activity was intensified under the Emperor Ashoka of the Maurya dynasty (r. ca. 268–239 BCE), a convert to Buddhism who, repenting of the death and suffering caused by his military conquests, raised Buddhism to official status (although not state religion) within his vast northern Indian empire. Since the time of the Buddha the leading Buddhist monks had held two councils in an attempt to resolve disagreements over correct doctrine and practice.[2] A surviving legend states that Ashoka, troubled by these disputes, called a third council in 244 BCE in order to formulate a Buddhist orthodoxy.[3] If this third council actually happened, it only intensified the divisions.

Traditional views have it that the dispute within the *sangha* centered on a controversy regarding the nature of the monks who had attained Enlightenment, referred to as *arhats*. Five theses were proposed, purportedly by a monk named Mahadeva, which challenged the status of the *arhats* by suggesting that they were still subject to worldly distractions such as erotic dreams, residue ignorance, lingering doubts, and so forth.

Another argument was that the *arhats*' approach restricted the possibility of Enlightenment to a very small group of people. Yet another layer of disagreement had to do with the infiltration of popular religious practices into the tradition, especially the veneration of relics of the Buddha. The more "conservative" monks felt that this type of innovation was a threat to the purity of the Buddha's message and to the rigor of commitment to a Buddhist lifestyle.

The conservatives, according to the traditional view, defended the *arhats*' exalted status as leaders within the community, while the majority supported the five theses that aimed at bringing the *arhats* down from their pedestal of privilege. The conservative party came to be known as the Sthaviras and their opponents, the Mahasanghikas, or "the majority community."[4]

Recently some scholars of early Buddhism have sought to revise this version of history, suggesting that much of the disagreement may actually have come later and gotten projected backward as a "historical" explanation for existing schisms. It may be that the central point of tension within the early *sangha* was over additions to the body of rules governing

the monastic lifestyle, called the *vinaya*. A "majority" of monks rejected the adding of new rules, accepting as binding only those laid down by the Buddha himself. According to this more recent interpretation, the Sthaviras were those seeking to "reform" the *vinaya* by adding to it; the Mahasangikas, who claimed to possess the older, shorter version, were therefore the "conservative" party.[5]

To complicate matters further, there evolved diverse schools of commentary on the Buddha's teaching. Each of these schools, which were collectively known as *nikaya*, compiled its own canon of texts purporting to be the Buddha's teaching, along with the particular interpretations of it which they considered to be authentic and authoritative. Legend states there were eighteen such schools. Many have left texts, but the only school surviving to the present day is the Theravada (Skt. Sthaviravada, lit., "the way of the elders"), which is the dominant form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Buddhism has produced a body of texts more vast than any other movement in human history, making the study of even one school a potentially lifelong task. In China today philosophy professors warn their students, "The serious study of Buddhism is a Black Hole—if you enter, you will never re-emerge!"[6]

BUDDHIST SCHOOLS OF THE SILK ROAD

Since most of the early Buddhist schools no longer exist, their thought must be reconstructed on the basis of surviving texts. The available texts even of defunct schools date to hundreds of years after these schools arose, so it is difficult to know the positions of the various early schools and their relationship to each other with any certitude.

The major *nikaya* schools connected with the regions traversed by the Silk Road were the Dharmaguptakas and the Sarvastivadins. The Mahasanghikas were also active early on. The alternative approach, a more inclusive movement which came to be known as the Mahayana, or "Great Vehicle," first gained influence in Central Asian regions such as Khotan, before eventually displacing the *nikaya* schools from the Silk Road altogether.

The Mahasanghikas

The Mahasanghika attempt to reduce the singular importance of the *arhat* ideal, or perhaps simply their resistance to innovations in the *vinaya,* created the first great schism within the Buddhist community. Many of the Mahasangikas also believed that intuition *(prajña)* happened instantaneously, not gradually as the Sarvastivadins and others taught; this idea later became central in the Mahayana as well, especially in its Zen form.

The famous colossal Buddha statues at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, which stand 150 and 100 feet high carved into a rock cliff face, may have been the work of Mahasanghikas in the northwest.

The Dharmaguptakas

The Dharmaguptaka school was probably the most influential along the Silk Road up to the time of the Kushan Empire in the first centuries of the common era. The Dharmaguptakas wrote their texts mainly in Gandhari Prakrit, the dominant vernacular language of the Kushan heartland in northwestern India. Many Dharmaguptaka texts were transmitted to China by early Central Asian missionaries. By the time of Hsüan-tsang's travels in the seventh century, however, the school had disappeared from India completely and had very few representatives left in Central Asia.

The Dharmaguptakas appear to have been distinguished primarily by their doctrine that the Buddha was separate from, and superior to, the Buddhist community, and not a part of it as other schools believed. A practical ramification of this attitude was the belief that only gifts given to the Buddha could bring merit, not gifts to the community. Since the monastic community depended for its survival on gifts from lay followers, this doctrine may have played a role in the school's ultimate decline.

The Sarvastivadins

The name of this school derives from the phrase *sarvam asti,* "everything exists," which characterized its theory of time. According to this view,

the past, present, and future all exist simultaneously. According to Theravada tradition, one of the main accomplishments of the third Buddhist council called by Ashoka was the rejection of the Sarvastivadins.

If true, this may have been a factor in pushing the Sarvastivadin school into Central Asia. By the second century the Dharmaguptakas were losing ground to the Sarvastivadins there. Unlike other schools which used Pali or other regional languages, the Sarvastivadins wrote their texts for the most part in Sanskrit, the ancient priestly language, in an archaizing attempt to give their works a higher authoritative character.

The Mahayana

The Mahayana was not a school per se but rather a "pan-Buddhist movement" defined mainly by the acceptance of new scriptures.[7] The origins of the self-styled "Greater Vehicle" to enlightenment are not fully clear and may never be. The interpretation of earlier scholarship which saw the tradition as growing out of the Mahasanghika school is no longer generally accepted, but the question of whether the Mahayana arose primarily within the lay or the monastic community continues to be debated.[8]

This movement, which appears to have been rather small at first, probably began in northwestern India or Central Asia during the first century BCE. Although a few Mahayana scriptures were recently discovered in northern Pakistan, many of what would later become the main Mahayana texts were probably composed in Central Asia along the Silk Road, where the constant mixing of cultures and ideas must have contributed diverse influences. As one contemporary scholar has cautiously put it, "it is just possible that the popularization of the Mahayana was a phenomenon which took place outside the Indian subcontinent, for reasons connected perhaps with the transmission of Buddhism to other cultures."[9]

Among the distinctive themes of the new scriptures was an elevation of the Buddha to the "supramundane" *(lokattara),* reflected in the belief that his death was a mere appearance (an idea adopted from the Mahasang-

hikas). There was also an emphasis on compassion for the less fortunate and, most important, the idea that all beings contain "the buddha-nature" (*tathagatha*) and should aspire to no less than full buddhahood. One who embarked upon this quest toward becoming a buddha was known as a *bodhisattva*, a state considered superior to that of an *arhat*.

A *bodhisattva* can be defined as one who vows to be reborn as many times as it takes to work toward becoming a full buddha, for the sake of helping all sentient beings to salvation. This is contrasted in Mahayana "Perfection of Wisdom" literature *(Prajñaparamita)* with the narrower goal of purely personal salvation that characterized the traditional approach.[10] An additional element of early Mahayana works is a strong hostility toward those who wouldn't accept the new texts as authentic.[11] Eventually Mahayanists began to refer derisively to the traditional schools as *Hinayana*, the "Lesser Vehicle."

Furthermore, while schools such as the Theravada can be considered atheistic, the Mahayana expression eventually allowed for treating buddhas and *bodhisattvas* as divinities. According to some Mahayana interpretations, *bodhisattvas* who acquired more merit than they needed could pass it on to others. Devotees would therefore often pray to the Buddha or other *bodhisattvas* to help save them from the cycle of rebirth into the world *(samsara)*.

The Mahayana did not develop its own *vinaya*, however. Instead, monks followed the rules laid down by the *nikaya* school of their preference. Thus, while the Mahayana tradition largely displaced *nikaya* schools from China, Chinese monks continued to follow either the *vinaya* of the Sarvastivada or the Dharmaguptaka schools, precisely those that were the first to dominate the Silk Road.[12]

THE GANDHARA SYNTHESIS AND THE KUSHANS

According to a legend preserved in Pali, the language of the Theravada canon, Buddhism's first contact with the Silk Road took place during the life of the Buddha himself.[13] This legend relates that two merchant brothers from Bactria (medieval Balkh, in the north of Afghanistan), named Tapassu and Bhallika, visited the Buddha in the eighth week after his enlightenment and immediately became his disciples. According to the story, the brothers then returned to Balkh and built temples dedicated to the Buddha.

While there is no evidence to confirm the legend of Tapassu and Bhallika, edicts inscribed on rock pillars set up by Emperor Ashoka state that he sent missionaries into his northwestern territories.[14] Over the following centuries Bactria did become a major Buddhist region, and it remained so up to the Muslim conquests. In the seventh century, on the eve of the Arab invasions, the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsüan-tsang found that Balkh had some one hundred Buddhist monasteries and three thousand priests.

The northwestern region was home to a diverse mix of cultures. It was the meeting ground between the Indian and Iranian worlds, and from the latter part of the fourth century BCE there was added a Greek presence as well. Alexander of Macedon conquered much of this territory between 332 and 327 BCE, and left in his wake a Hellenic administration which would survive in parts of Asia for another two centuries as the Seleucid Dynasty.

Greek settlers in Bactria and Gandhara (what is now north-central Pakistan) brought with them the gods of the classical Greek pantheon and have left coins and other archaeological evidence in testimony. Some Greeks adopted local religions—for example, Heliodoros, ambassador of the Seleucid ruler Antialcidas, erected a pillar to Vishnu at Besnagar.[15] Although evidence of widespread conversion in either direction is lacking, religious ideas must have been exchanged on some level with the native Iranian and Indian populations of those areas. Greeks in Asia, as elsewhere, attempted to identify local deities as corresponding to their own.[16]

A tale of the blinding of King Ashoka's son Kunala relayed by Hsüan-tsang appears to a Buddhist recasting of the Greek tragedy of Hippolytus and Phaedra. Hsüan-tsang reports that in the seventh century, blind pilgrims would pray at the *stupa* of Kunala, near Taxila in what is now Pakistan, for the restoration of their sight.[17] In a remarkable example of cultural continuity, a modern-day hospital there is known for the excellence of its eye facilities.[18]

As one would expect, cross-cultural influences in Gandhara went in both directions. In some cases there is evidence that local cults adopted Greek forms of worship, as at a Greek-style sanctuary to the god Vaxshu (Oxus) at Takht-i Sangin in northern Afghanistan. Or, alternatively, both Greek and Bactrian rites may have been practiced at that same temple, since it appears to be dedicated to both fire and water gods.[19] Likewise, certain Indian notions may have made their way westward into the budding Christianity of the Mediterranean world through the channels of the Greek diaspora.

Religious tolerance appears to have been the norm. The Greco-Bactrian general Menandros, who conquered part of northern India and ruled there as king from around 150 to 135 BCE, treated Buddhist communities under his control with benevolence. His memory is preserved in a Buddhist treatise called the *Milindapañha,* or "The Questions of Menander," a dialogue in the Platonic style between the king and an Indo-Greek monk named Nagasena.[20]

Herakles with a lion-skin served as an artistic model for the Buddhist Vajrapani, a protector of the Buddha. The image of Ganymede's abduction by Zeus in the form of an eagle was taken up by Gandharan artists and recast onto a Buddhist tale, the *Sussandi-jataka* story of a *bodhisattva* who falls in love with a married woman and takes the form of the bird Garuda in order to carry her off. This image appears in Buddhist paintings and sculptures throughout the Indian subcontinent and all across the Silk Road into China; it also finds its way into Sasanian art, where it acquires a Zoroastrian interpretation.[21]

By around 130 BCE Greek rule in Bactria had succumbed to nomadic incursions from Sakas and other steppe peoples. The Sakas too absorbed some Buddhist influence and left a number of Buddhist inscriptions. After a century or so of Saka rule a new power, the Kushans, arose in what is now northwestern Pakistan.

The Kushans' origins are not entirely clear, although it appears they were an ethnically mixed group consisting partly of Indo-European immigrants from farther east along the Silk Road, a people known to the Chinese as Yüeh-chih. They ruled over a population which included native Indians, Iranian-speakers, and Greek settlers, and came to control the trade routes connecting the Indian subcontinent with the Silk Road to the northwest.

Kushan coins bear images of a variety of deities, Iranian, Indic, and Buddhist, suggesting that the new ruling elite had a tolerant attitude toward diverse religions. They held the Iranian goddess Ardoxsho and the Indic god Shiva both in particularly high regard.[22] Votive figures of Hariti, the Indian goddess of smallpox, are an ominous presence of this time; the smallpox epidemic which hit the Mediterranean world during the second century BCE probably started in the Kushan lands and spread west via the trade routes.[23]

From the beginning of their rule, the Kushans adopted the symbol of the Greek Nike, goddess of victory, a clear attempt to appropriate the royal ideology of their Greco-Bactrian predecessors. Yet the second Kushan ruler, Vima, was a devotee of Shiva. It has been suggested that Vima's sympathy for Indic religion was a reflection of his desire to gain control over the Silk Road, since by that time Indians were active in trade throughout the Oxus region and even as far as China.[24]

Vima's successor, Kanishka I, while presumably maintaining the desire to become master of the Silk Road, turned his attention toward mustering the support of his Iranian subjects to the west. During his rule the Iranian forms of divine names reemerge from beneath the Greek ones, although Shiva retained a high official status. His grandson, Kanishka II, helped the spread of Buddhism through the building of *viharas* (monasteries) and *stupas* (temples to house relics). He is also said to have called a Buddhist council in Kashmir, in which it was decided to rewrite the original Gandhari vernacular, or "Prakrit" texts in the high literary language of Sanskrit, a turning point in the evolution of the Buddhist literary canon. Although Kanishka II was not himself a convert to Buddhism, Buddhist sources refer to him as a "second Ashoka."

It is in the Kushan period that the Buddha is first depicted in human form, a development which some scholars have attributed to Greek influence. Statues and busts of the so-called Gandhara school, which developed under the Kushans, show a marked blending of Indian and Greek elements and formed the basis for the later development of Buddhist art in China and elsewhere. A late-first-century statue of the

Buddha flanked by two *bodhisattvas*, with an inscription mentioning the transferal of merit, may be the earliest explicit evidence yet discovered of Mahayana ideas.[25]

Greek as well as Iranian influences appear to have shaped the evolution of Mahayana images (and perhaps thought as well) during the Kushan period. The most popular representation of the Buddha in Kushan art is Maitreya, the "future Buddha," some of whose soteriological and eschatological qualities seem to echo those of the Zoroastrian Saoshyant and the Jewish and Christian Messiah. In a particularly striking parallel, in Buddhist mythology Maitreya will be welcomed by a disciple named Kasyapa; the name of a similar figure in Zoroastrianism, awaiting the Saoshyant, is Karashaspa.[26]

Later, in Manichaeism, Maitreya becomes connected with the Iranian god Mithra and with Jesus. The buddha Amitabha and *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara, who figure prominently in later Chinese and Japanese expressions of Buddhism, bear features that have been associated with the Iranian gods Zurvan and Mithra. In some cases Amitabha (which means "infinite radiance") seems to be simply understood as the Iranian god of light, equated with the sun.[27]

Stories about the life of the Buddha appear that contain Jewish and Christian elements.[28] Even the Trojan horse turns up in an Indian Buddhist story—now it is a wooden elephant, however, and the beseiged *bodhisattva,* unlike the Trojans, is not fooled.[29] All of these commonalities may reflect the attempts of Indian Buddhist missionaries to present their message through figures, terms, and symbols familiar to a western, Greco-Iranian audience.

A third-century Chinese Buddhist source states that the Kushan lands were one of the main centers of Buddhism.[30] The Kushans may have had Buddhist texts translated into their own language and later into Sogdian for the benefit of Central Asian converts. No such translations have survived, however. Extant Sogdian translations are later and from Chinese, not Indian, versions.

Sometime in the Kushan period, a monk by the name of Sutralanka, who was a native of the Kushan capital Puskaravati (modern Charsadda, near Peshawar), traveled to Shash (modern Tashkent) in Central Asia in

order to decorate a Buddhist *vihara* there.[31] This implies the existence of a Buddhist host audience in that part of Central Asia at the time.

Sogdiana does not appear ever to have experienced widespread conversion to Buddhism, however. Hsüan-tsang was disappointed to see how poorly the faith was represented when he visited Samarqand in the seventh century, and a Korean Buddhist passing through several decades later found only one Buddhist monk living alone in a monastery.[32] Buddhism seems to have been carried farther east along the Silk Road by small groups of Sogdian converts associated with diaspora merchant communities. We are faced with the apparent irony that while Sogdians were among the principal agents in the eastward spread of Buddhism, the faith never took root in their homeland.

The Kushans were dislodged from northwestern India and western Central Asia by the Iranian Parthians beginning in the late first century. By the fifth century most of the former Kushan lands were being raided and plundered by nomadic armies, known as Hephthalites or White Huns, from the steppes to the north. The Hephthalites looted Buddhist monasteries and dealt a severe blow to the Buddhist culture of western Central Asia. They cannot have destroyed the religion itself, since people must have continued to practice it, but by looting the monasteries and ravaging the land they took away the financial base which had enabled it to thrive.

PARTHIAN BUDDHISM

The Greek Seleucids were displaced in Iran and Central Asia by an Iranian dynasty, the Parthians, at the beginning of the second century BCE. The Parthians became the new middlemen on the Silk Road, controlling the overland trade from China at a time when Romans were becoming passionate customers for silk.

The Silk Road city of Marv (Grk. Margiana), situated in the eastern part of the Parthian Empire, became a major Buddhist center by the middle of the second century of the common era.[33] Several scholars have been reluctant to concede the importance of Iranian Buddhism at this early date,[34] apparently due to their lack of familiarity with the wealth

of archeological evidence that Soviet scholars turned up in Turkmenistan beginning in the early 1960s.[35]

Inscriptions using the Kharosthi Indian script found in the Oxus region farther east date from 58 BCE to 129 CE, attesting to the presence of Mahasangikas there.[36] Later inscriptions found in the Oxus valley from the fourth and fifth centuries are in Brahmi, another Indian script. This together with the discovery of fifth-century Sarvastivadin texts in Marv, suggest that the latter school, although coexisting with the Dharmaguptakas, eventually predominated in western Central Asia.[37]

The picture painted of Gandharan and Parthian Buddhism by archeological finds from the region is dominated by various *nikaya* schools. This poses a historical problem, in that a number of Parthian Buddhists who went to China are mentioned as having translated Mahayana texts there. If there was an early Mahayana presence in western Central Asia, evidence by which it can be reconstructed remains to be discovered.[38]

THE TARIM BASIN

Buddhist missionaries probably reached Khotan on the southern loop of the Silk Road skirting the Takla Makan desert sometime in the first century, although legend has it that a monk from Kashmir arrived there during Ashoka's reign. Khotan was inhabited by Iranian-speaking peoples. The people of Kucha north of the desert, who were also Indo-Europeans, spoke a language closer in some respects to Celtic. Buddhist paintings found in Kucha early in this century are derived from the Gandharan style, indicating close contact between the regions at that time. The light-complexioned figures are distinctly Europoid, often blue-eyed. Farther East, in Miran, has been found the work of a Buddhist painter named Tita (Titus?), perhaps a Roman artist who traveled east along the Silk Road in search of employment.

The major source of Buddhist influence on Khotan in the early centuries of the common era seems to have been from Kashmir, a predominantly Sarvastivadin region at that time. The kings of Khotan played an important role in sponsoring Buddhist schools, first the

Sarvastivadins and Mahasanghikas and later, by the fourth century, the Mahayana, which became dominant there. Still later, in the seventh century, the presence of Tantric schools can be detected.[39] In Kucha, meanwhile, the Sarvastivadins remained the favored school, and when Hsüan-tsang visited in the seventh century he found the local monks scornful of Mahayana texts.

It may be asked why the kings of these oasis city-states in the Tarim Basin welcomed and even solicited Buddhist monks from India. While spiritual factors need not be discounted, it is certainly likely that these rulers also saw this as a way of encouraging contact with a larger, more prosperous civilization. As we have seen, cultural exchange tends to be good for business, and vice versa.

THE ARRIVAL OF BUDDHISM INTO CHINA

During the first half of the first century BCE, the Han dynasty of China succeeded in extending its power westward well into Central Asia. The pretext for this westward expansion is said to have been the Han emperor's desire for Central Asian horses, "horses of heaven," as they were known. Once the Chinese controlled the eastern half of the Silk Road, Western merchants and other travelers would have had increased access to China. Thus it is probable that foreign Buddhists entered China sometime before the common era.

The first clear mention of Buddhism in a Chinese source is a reference in the *Hou Han shu* (*Late Han History*) to a Buddhist community at the court of the governor of Ch'u Province that included some Chinese lay followers. The governor is described as observing both Buddhist and Taoist rituals; this indicates that, from its earliest penetration into Chinese culture, Buddhism had begun to blend with and adapt itself to local religion.[40] When the governor sent a gift of silk to Ming, the Han emperor, as a token of submission, the Emperor sent the following reply: "The king of Ch'u recites the subtle words of Huang-lao [a Taoist cult], and respectfully performs the gentle sacrifices to the Buddha. . . . Let [the silk which he sent for] redemption be sent back, in order thereby to contribute to the lavish entertainment of the *upasakas* and the *sramanas*."[41] The fact

that the emperor uses the Indian terms for lay followers and monks indicates that he was already familiar with Buddhism, which must therefore have been established in China by that time.

Buddhist legend has it that in that same year Emperor Ming dreamed of a "golden man." Told that he had dreamed of the Buddha, the emperor is said to have sent a request to India for Buddhist missionaries.

The first Buddhist missionary who is named in Chinese sources is a Parthian monk who arrived in the capital Lo-yang in 148. An Shih-kao, as he is called in Chinese, may have been the first to organize the systematic translation of Buddhist (in his case, *nikaya*) texts into Chinese. He may also have been one of the first teachers in China of the system of mental exercises known in Sanskrit as *dhyana* (Ch. *ch'an*, Jap. *zen*). And, consistent with the ancient pattern of royal interest in fortune-tellers, his knowledge of Western astronomy is mentioned.

Another Parthian Buddhist, a traveling merchant referred to as An Hsüan, went to China in the year 181 and joined An Shih-kao's translation team. He is best known for participating in the translation of a Mahayana text, the *Ugrapariprccha* (Ch. *Fa-ching ching*). From this early date, therefore, Mahayana and *nikaya* schools appear to have coexisted at Lo-yang.

The early Mahayana in China is most commonly associated with the efforts of a translator of Kushan origin, Lokaksema, who was active at Lo-yang in the last decades of the second century. The eleven earliest known Mahayana texts are Chinese translations, most of which were probably done by Lokaksema or his students.[42] Two of his three principal Chinese assistants were members of a local Taoist sect, a fact that gives further evidence of the process of syncretism at work.[43]

Other translators associated with Lokaksema included several Indians and Sogdians. Later figures bearing the Parthian surname An, such as An Fa-hsien and An Fa-ch'in in the third century, must also have come from Transoxiana, where a remnant Parthian administration survived through the fifth century. (The western part of the empire had been conquered by the Sasanians from 226).[44]

The oasis town of Kucha on the northern branch of the Silk Road was another Buddhist center from which missionaries traveled to China proper. One Kuchean monk of mixed Indian ancestry, Kumarajiva (born in 344), became the first major translator of Mahayana texts into Chinese. Although Kucha itself was predominantly Sarvastivadin, Kumarajiva had studied Mahayana works in Kashmir as a youth and became a proponent of the Mahayana approach on his return to Kucha. He was taken forcibly to the Chinese capital Lo-yang in 402, where he stayed until his death in 412 or 415. Some 300 translations of Buddhist texts into Chinese are attributed to him.[45]

Some scholars have doubted the Iranian role in early Buddhist penetration to East Asia, emphasizing the more direct transmission from India to China northward over the Karakorum Mountains to Kashgar and the Tarim Basin, and thence back again to the Iranian-inhabited regions of western Central Asia.[46] This view, however, is probably overstated. The abundance of Buddhist remains from the area of Marv dating to as early as the first century CE as well as linguistic evidence showing the evolution of Buddhist terminology via Parthian demonstrate that Buddhism traveled first northwest out of the subcontinent into the Iranian world and then eastward along the Silk Road into China.[47]

This does not preclude a more or less contemporary *additional* channel via the Karakorum route to the Tarim Basin and thence to China. (As we have seen, Khotan in particular had direct links with Kashmir.) And once Buddhist presence was established in China, the Silk Road offered a natural conduit by which Chinese Buddhist influences could later travel westward again through Central Asia.

The existence of Chinese Mahayana texts translated into Sogdian, by Sogdian merchants in China who had learned Chinese, suggests that such westward re-transmission was sometimes the case.[48] Indeed, the very idea of translating Buddhist texts into local vernaculars appears to have come to Central Asians from the Chinese; prior to the sixth century, when Buddhist texts were first translated into their own vernaculars, Central Asians were apparently content to read them in Indian languages.[49] Hsüan-tsang, in the seventh century, personally introduced at least one Chinese apocryphal text into India. Finding that the monks of Nalanda, one of the great Buddhist universities, were unfamiliar with *The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana*, he "retranslated" this "lost" text into Sanskrit.[50]

If in fact the Sogdians and other West Asians began to translate sacred texts as a result of Chinese influence, we may have an example of how "language policy" can play a major role in the success of a religion. Our first evidence for mass conversion to Buddhism along the Silk Road does not come until we reach China, and if indeed early Sogdian Buddhists did not translate sacred texts into their native language, that may be a reason why large-scale conversions to Buddhism in the Sogdian homeland did not occur.

Political factors also affected the spread of Buddhism in China. During the rule of the T'ang dynasty from 618 to 917, several emperors exhibited a marked taste for the exotic. At such times Westerners as well as Western customs and ideas were unusually welcome in China. Military successes by the T'ang likewise extended the influence of Chinese culture and civilization in the direction of the West. At the greatest point of T'ang expansion in the eighth century, the Silk Road was under Chinese control as far as modern-day Kyrgyzstan. They built garrison towns there as elsewhere, and the ruins of an eighth-century temple at Aq Beshim attest to the westward extension of Chinese Buddhism.[51]

LATER BUDDHIST MOVEMENTS

Pure Land

The early Buddhist idea of a "Buddha land," a paradise where the teachings of the Buddha prevail, was broadened in the Mahayana interpretation to mean that the various *boddhisattvas* would purify the lands where they resided. One such purified realm, called Sukhavati, the "land of bliss" (which, significantly perhaps, is located in the West), is described in two late-first-century texts from northwestern India and a third compiled in Central Asia.

This land of splendor is presided over by the Buddha of Light, Amitabha, who leads his followers to salvation through his own excess of acquired merit. The devotee of Amitabha must focus on him, especially at the moment of death, in order to be transported into the Pure Land. Some have argued that this soteriology has more in common

with Western notions of the time than with Indian ones and that Iranian ideas in particular were formative in the Pure Land tradition.

The Pure Land movement spread along the Silk Road to China and Japan, where it became widely popular, especially among the lower classes to whom its very simple message of salvation appealed. To those who would criticize such an "easy" method to salvation, Pure Land teachers replied that while in the past many could follow a more rigorous path, the darkness of the present age required an easier means.

Tantra

Tantrism began sometime around the fifth or sixth century CE as a movement in eastern India. It combined rituals such as the chanting of incantations, called *mantras*, and the burning of sacrificial offerings, with yoga. All of these practices had precedents in Brahmanism but were employed now in a Buddhist context. An esoteric tradition, Tantrism was transmitted secretly from teacher to disciple, at first orally.

During the early eighth century Indian monks such as Subharkara Simha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra introduced Tantra to China. The teaching briefly interested the court, but among the general populace it could not compete with sects such as the Pure Land, and Tantrism did not survive in the T'ang Empire once the Indian missionaries were no longer present.[52] By contrast, Tibet proved particularly receptive to Tantrism, which became the dominant form of Buddhism there beginning in the eighth century.

Ch'an

A legend states that in the sixth century a Buddhist monk named Bodhidharma, who was from southern India (or possibly Iran), traveled to China in order to bring a new teaching: that the usual rituals, texts, and practices of Buddhists were ultimately useless. Instead he offered the example of spontaneous enlightenment, which could be attained through meditation on paradoxes, called *kung-ans* (Japanese *koan*). Ch'an (from Skt. *dhyana*, meditation), as this approach was known,

shows considerable influence from Taoism and is thus an exemplary case of Chinese culture transforming Indian ideas into Chinese ones. The tradition became known in Japan as Zen and provided a philosophical basis for arts as diverse as samurai swordplay, haiku poetry, and the painting of watercolor landscapes.

BUDDHIST PILGRIMS

As Buddhism won increasing numbers of native converts in China, many Chinese Buddhists came to feel dissatisfied with learning their religion through foreign intermediaries and thirdhand translations of texts by Central Asians. It does indeed appear that in attempting to make Buddhist concepts palatable to the Chinese, missionaries and translators often took liberties in their translations of key terms and the pairing of Indian with Chinese concepts.

For example, the Indian terms *dharma* (the Buddha's teaching), *bodhi* ("enlightenment"), and *yoga* were all at times rendered in Chinese as *tao* ("the way"), a word which Taoists and Confucians had each already endowed with very strong connotations of their own. The term *arhat,* similarly, was translated as *chen-ren,* or "True Man," which in Taoism represented one who had mastered the arts of immortality. The ineffable *nirvana* was translated as *wu-wei* ("not-force"), a Taoist term for the ethic of passivity.[53] Ordinary phrases acquired new shades of meaning as well, as in one case where "husband supports wife" became in Chinese "husband controls wife."

Beginning no later than 260 CE, Chinese Buddhist monks began to travel to India in order to discover for themselves the sources of the faith. Fifty-four of these pilgrims are mentioned in Chinese sources, although there were probably many more who remain anonymous. The desire of these monks to experience India firsthand went beyond the desire to acquire original texts, however. They also wished to visit personally the sites associated with the life of the historical Buddha. Additionally, they hoped to find authoritative teachers of the Buddhist tradition, doubting the orthodoxy in some cases of Buddhist proponents in China. Many pilgrims brought home relics as well, such as teeth or bones believed to be the Buddha's.

One of the most celebrated of these travelers was Fa-hsien, who lived at the turn of the fifth century. From his home in Ch'ang-an (modern Xian), Fa-hsien traveled westward to Tun-huang, then via Turfan, Qara Shahr, and Khotan southward over the Karakorum to the Swat Valley in what is now northern Pakistan, and from there to India proper. After spending six years in India, from 405 to 411, he returned to China by sea.[54]

Another well-known Chinese Buddhist who traveled to India was Sung-yün, a native of Tun-huang who set out in 518. Like Fa-hsien, Sung-yün took the relatively direct but exceedingly difficult Karakorum route south from Khotan to Kashmir. According to his account, the dangers of this mountain journey were compounded by the presence of a dragon near some mountain lakes below the Tsung-ling Mountains. This dragon was known to cause travelers "all sorts of inconveniences," such as blinding snowstorms, but, according to Sung-yün, "if they pay some religious service to the dragon, they find less difficulty afterwards."[55]

Fa-hsien's travels inspired a young man who would become the most famous Chinese Buddhist of all time, Hsüan-tsang. Born near Lo-yang in 602, Hsüan-tsang was raised in a traditional Confucian family but came under the influence of an elder brother, a Buddhist monk who inclined toward Pure Land beliefs. At twelve he was admitted to his brother's monastery, and he spent the next fifteen years studying the teachings of various Buddhist schools in Cheng-tu and Ch'ang-an. During this time he grew increasingly frustrated by the apparent errors and inconsistencies he detected in the available Chinese translations of key Buddhist texts. He resolved to go to India and to bring back a copy of the original Sanskrit version of a text to which he was particularly attracted. This was Asanga's *Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice,* the main text of an intellectualistic Mahayana sect known as the Yogacara.

Hsüan-tsang quite naturally followed the Silk Road westward and perhaps in doing so retraced in reverse the original path of the religion from the northwestern Indian subcontinent to China. His route took him first through Tun-huang at the edge of the Takla Makan desert and then through the oasis towns of Agni, Kucha, Aqsu, and Nujkand. From there he traveled to Transoxiana, through Talas to Tashkent and

Ferghana, Samarqand, Bukhara, and Khwarazm. He then turned south and passed through Kish, Qunduz, and Termez before crossing the Pamirs through Garm, Kulab, and Wakhsh to Balkh in Bactria. The last leg of his long journey to India took him to Bamiyan and over the Hindu Kush into India. Hsüan-tsang spent the following years traveling throughout the subcontinent, visiting Buddhist sites, debating with scholars, and collecting manuscripts. He returned to China via Khotan after an absence of thirteen years.

Hsüan-tsang personally brought back to China 657 Sanskrit manuscripts, many of which he then translated into Chinese.[56] During his travels he played the role of teacher to Central Asian Buddhists he encountered, in many cases expressing dismay and even outrage at their deviation from what he saw as the orthodox tradition.

Beginning in the eighth century Muslim armies began to win control of the Central Asian Silk Road as far as Talas in modern Kazakhstan. Although Islamic law offered protection to "peoples of the Book," namely Christians, Jews, and by some interpretations Zoroastrians, the early Muslims were generally hostile toward Buddhists. They referred to Buddhists as "idol-worshippers," which had unfortunate associations with the portrayal of the Prophet's Meccan enemies in the Qur'an. This probably at least in part accounts for the unabatingly harsh treatment Muslims reserved for the Buddhists they encountered in the course of their conquests.

As a result of the increasing Muslim dominance of the Silk Road, it became more and more difficult for Buddhist monks and pilgrims to travel between India and China.[57] By the second half of the eleventh century this contact ceases, and Buddhism in East Asia, cut off from its Indian sources, is left to go its own way.

BUDDHISM AND ZOROASTRIANISM IN CENTRAL ASIA

Certain passages in the account of Hsüan-tsang's travels have led scholars to perceive a Central Asian Buddhism in decline vis-à-vis Sasanian-sponsored Zoroastrianism. For example, Hsüan-tsang's biographer,

Hui-li, who was one of his disciples, comments sadly that in Samarqand, "The king and people did not believe in Buddhism but worshipped fire. There were two monastery buildings but no monks lived in them. If a guest monk attempted to stay in them, the native people would drive him out with fire."[58]

It seems the Sogdian king was impressed by Hsüan-tsang's piety, however. When two of Hsüan-tsang's accompanying disciples were chased from the temple by fire-worshipping priests, the king ordered the priests to be punished. Hsüan-tsang then "turned the other cheek" by intervening on the priests' behalf. According to Hui-li, Hsüan-tsang thereby won the respect of the local people, and "the king and people believed in Buddhism and a great meeting was held to ordain some people, who afterwards lived in the monasteries."[59]

Since Hui-li's work is as much hagiography as biography, his assertions about the success of Hsüan-tsang's efforts should be taken with a grain of salt. The Chinese traveler was certainly a charismatic individual, and often such figures are able to generate personal followings wherever they go. This account does not in itself enable us to understand, however, that the Sogdian population had converted from Buddhism to Zoroastrianism and that Hsüan-tsang had managed to set them once again on the straight path.

Furthermore, even if Hui-li's assertions about his master's successes in Sogdiana are true, the "converts" may have been at least partly made up of individuals who were already Buddhists (or at least to some degree "Buddhistic"), and who merely saw in him an authority whose "corrective" entreaties they were willing to listen to. There were numerous schools of Buddhism as well as variants in local belief and practice spread out across Asia at that time, and if Buddhists existed in Sogdiana, as it is not impossible that they did, it may simply have been their local version of Buddhism that Hsüan-tsang saw as heretical.[60] Hui-li's phrasing about "correcting evil customs" would seem to be consistent with this interpretation.

Even more likely, perhaps, is that with the rise in Sasanian influence from Iran, any existing local form of Buddhism, which probably would have been colored by local Iranian religiosity to begin with, had

increasingly taken on aspects of the newly institutionalized Sasanian Zoroastrianism. The eastern Iranian world has provided documented examples of Zoroastrian influence on the evolution of Buddhism there. One such case can be seen in the layout of the circumambulatory corridor around Buddhist *stupas*, which is modeled on that of fire temples.[61]

Again, we cannot assume that the population of Sogdiana was ever in any uniform sense Zoroastrian or Buddhist as we understand the terms. For one thing, they lived at some remove from the centers of both Zoroastrian and Buddhist institutionalizing forces. Furthermore, we have evidence of the persistence of strictly local elements, such as the cult of the hero Siyavash at Bukhara, which included the sacrifice of a rooster every New Year.[62] Most probably, the local religiosity of Sogdiana was made up of many elements drawn from the Iranian/Indo-Aryan pool from which both major religions had evolved, and any attempt to categorize them at any period as Zoroastrian or Buddhist is bound to be misleading.

TIBET AND THE SILK ROAD

The Silk Road skirted the forbidding highlands of the Tibetan plateau, but spur routes connected Tibet to the busier overland tracks. Paintings and rock inscriptions along the upper Indus River in Ladakh at the southwestern corner of the Tibetan world indicate the passing of Christian and Manichaean Sogdian merchants there. Sogdians of various faiths probably carried their business into the Tibetan interior.[63] Buddhism reached Tibet both from India via Nepal to the south and from China via the eastern Silk Road.

From around 655 until 692 a short-lived Tibetan empire gained control over the oasis towns of the Tarim Basin, bringing the passing Silk Road trade under its jurisdiction. A century later, from just before 794 until 851, they controlled predominantly Buddhist Khotan.[64] This meant temporary increases in traffic channeled off into Tibet proper, which allowed for a greater penetration of Buddhist ideas from China. The first Buddhist temple in Tibet was constructed in around 779 at Samye. There, as in the Tarim region and elsewhere, monks prospered from the contributions of lay devotees engaged in trade.

Tibet's relations with China, which from the late seventh century made them rival competitors for control of the eastern Silk Road, tempered the influence of Chinese Buddhism. Although it is not entirely clear why or how Tibetan Buddhists came to look more to Indian sources, especially Kashmiri Tantrism, Tibet's political need to limit Chinese cultural hegemony was likely a factor. Khotan, with its long-standing Buddhist connections to Kashmir, was probably a major transmission point, especially during the periods when it was under Tibetan control.