

Śākyas chose to surrender and be killed. And to save the lives of his clansfolk, Mahānāma courageously chose to sacrifice himself by drowning.²⁸ From this story, we can see that Buddhism is a pacifist religion.

Buddhist scriptures mention summoning up the mindstate of a wrathful deity to destroy the power of evil demons, but such imagery is used to describe a strategy for inner spiritual cultivation and is not meant as a description of an actual practice in the real world.

On the other hand, a bodhisattva may manifest in flexible [and even uncharacteristic] forms to adapt to various environments and to accommodate the differing capacities and needs of sentient beings. For example, the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* recounts that during his fifty-three consultations with spiritual guides, Sudhana visited a bodhisattva who conducted wars and who [appeared to] mete out cruel tortures as punishments for evildoers.²⁹ And one of the thirty-three emanation bodies of the Guanyin is a great military general. According to the *Yogācāra Bodhisattva Precepts*, a bodhisattva is allowed to kill if he encounters robbers planning to kill many people for money or people who intend to murder Nikāya or Mahāyāna noble ones. To prevent the potential murderer from committing these crimes and thus being reborn in the Hell of Unintermittent Torture, a bodhisattva may kill the person, causing himself to descend to the hells instead.³⁰ This kind of killing, motivated by compassion rather than by greed or hatred, is permitted in Buddhism.

5.9 Is Buddhism a World Religion?

Yes, because the Buddha is not the protector-deity of a particular nation. Rather, he is the fully enlightened one, and he belongs to the entire universe. His universal awakening encompasses the whole cosmos, and the light of his compassion illuminates everything. Therefore, Buddhism by its very nature is global and even universal.

Therefore, for over 2,500 years, Buddhism has been gradually spreading to all parts of the world.

About three or four hundred years after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, Buddhism was divided into two branches due to different opinions. The conservative elders' faction was called the Sthaviravāda ["teaching of the elders"], and the younger, more progressive faction was called the Mahāsaṅghika ["those belonging to the great saṅgha"]. The Sthaviravāda later spread southwards into Ceylon [renamed "Sri Lanka" in 1972]. Its scriptures were written in Pali, an Indian regional language, so this form of Buddhism was later labeled Pali Buddhism. The Mahāsaṅghika spread northward, and although it did not directly evolve into Mahāyāna Buddhism, the areas where it prevailed were where Mahāyāna Buddhism arose.

This is a rough division of Buddhism based on its present geographic distribution. Yet according to historical and archeological evidence, the first kind of Buddhism to reach Ceylon and Burma was actually Sanskrit-based Mahāyāna Buddhism, and hence Mahāyāna Buddhism also entered southern China via sea routes. And history tells us that Nikāya Buddhism had been successful in its spread to the north.

Mahāyāna Buddhism can be traced back to the Buddha's time, but after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, the bhikṣu community did not emphasize or spread it. So Mahāyāna teachings existed as an undercurrent for four or five hundred years, when convoluted disputes between schools during the period of sectarian Buddhism made the time ripe for the Mahāyāna school to take its place. Through their collection, organization, and promotion of new scriptures, people such as Aśvaghōṣa, Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu established Mahāyāna Buddhism. Because its scriptures were recorded in the elegant, ancient Indian language of Sanskrit, Mahāyāna Buddhism is also called Sanskrit Buddhism.

Buddhism was introduced into China during the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), which corresponds to the beginning of the Christian era.

Most of the Buddhist scriptures in Chinese were translated from original Sanskrit texts. Although eventually the Mahāyāna came to dominate in China, many Nikāya scriptures were also translated into

Chinese. All important Nikāya scriptures can also be found in Chinese translation.

After the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties came the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) period, the golden age of Chinese Buddhism. Eminent monk after eminent monk emerged, and interaction between China and India was frequent and continuous. In this period, Chinese Buddhism blossomed and bore fruit. All together, there evolved thirteen schools of Mahāyāna and Nikāya Buddhism, which gradually were consolidated into eight famous schools: the Tiantai, Huayan, Three Treatise, Consciousness-only, Pure Land, Disciplinary, Chan, and Esoteric schools. In the period of the Five Dynasties (907–960), due to political persecution and social ostracism, Buddhism left the cultural centers and entered the mountains and forests. The monks and nuns grew their own food and no longer had use for the study of doctrine. Therefore, the Chan school, as it was “not founded on words and letters, a separate transmission outside the teachings” became most prominent. During the Tang and Song dynasties, some truly enlightened Chan masters could still be found. Through their simple and unadorned teachings and actions, they inspired and transformed many followers. The practice of discounting the scriptures, nevertheless, became the distant cause for the rise of “Benighted Buddhism” (*yumei fojiao*), and after the Song dynasty, Buddhist temples and monasteries could be found everywhere, but most of them were just empty shells without souls. Paying no attention to education, monastics just mechanically followed routines in the monastery and practiced meditation blindly. It was difficult to find not only eminent monks, but even monastics who knew much about Buddhism at all. If the monastics themselves just ignorantly followed routines, how could they teach others? As a result, the quality of the clergy declined everywhere and, exacerbated by its rejection by [resurgent] Confucianism, Buddhism quickly became something that most people knew very little about.

Beginning in the late Qing period, Chinese Buddhism began to show signs of revival due to efforts and promotion of Lay Disciple Yang

Wenhui (1837–1911; courtesy name: Renshan), Master Taixu (1889–1947), Master Yinguang (1862–1940), Master Hongyi (1880–1942), Master Xuyun (1840–1959), and Ouyang Jian (1871–1943; courtesy name: Jingwu). But because there are so many things to be done, Taiwanese Buddhism up to the present is still like an infant learning to take its first steps.

Buddhism in Japan came from China through Korea starting from the sixth century CE. Therefore, Japanese Buddhism is fundamentally the same as the Chinese form of Buddhism. But for the last hundred-plus years, the Japanese have employed Western research methodology to study Buddhism. They have not only surpassed the Chinese, but have become world leaders in Buddhist studies. Reasons for their spectacular successes in research include their abilities to utilize the whole range of Chinese scriptures, to understand early Buddhism through reading scriptures in Sanskrit and Pali, and to employ modern research methodology. On the other hand, Japanese Buddhism is now far behind the Theravāda countries when it comes to practice for pure and perfect liberation.

During the ninth and tenth centuries, Hinduism grew in strength, and Buddhism was mercilessly destroyed. To accommodate popular demand at that time, the Hindu concept of Brahman was incorporated into the Mahāyāna Buddhadharma. In addition, superstitions and folk beliefs, including the sexual arts of the bedchamber, were mixed into the purity of Buddhism. This was the dawning of the mystified, esoteric Mahāyāna teachings, the third stage of Buddhism in India. Ironically, Hinduism grew stronger after adopting some of the better teachings from Buddhism, but after absorbing some of the inferior teachings from Hinduism, Buddhism deteriorated even more! So starting from the end of the tenth century, Buddhism began to disappear from India under the double assaults of Hinduism and Muslim invasions!

Historical records show that from the time Buddhism disappeared in India, that nation's power has declined steadily, and the life of Indian people has become increasing difficult. The territory of India was divided and fragmented until 1947 when it gained independence

from British rule, yet new nations such as Pakistan and Nepal have been established on ancient Indian territory. Although Buddhists in India now enjoy legal protection and respect from the government, and their numbers have increased significantly since 1951 (from 108,000 to 3,250,000), the proportion of Buddhists in the whole population of almost 400 million is pitifully negligible.^{31*} These facts are important to note because some people accuse Buddhism of being the cause of India's weakness.

Tibetan Buddhism, though somewhat related to Chinese Buddhism, was for the most part directly introduced from India. Although it is a branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism, it places Esoteric Buddhism at the apex of Buddhist practice. When the northern Indian Guru Padmasaṃbhava (fl. 8th c.) first introduced Buddhism, Tibet was culturally backward and polytheistic. The mysterious but spiritually efficacious Esoteric teachings were received very enthusiastically by the Tibetans, especially since Guru Padmasaṃbhava himself was an eminent practitioner known for his miraculous powers. He and the three great men who introduced the Esoteric school into China during the Kaiyuan period (713–741) of the Tang dynasty, Śubhakarasiṃha, Vajrabodhi, and Amoghavajra, were students of the tradition of [the famous southern Indian guru] Nāgabodhi. Tibetan Buddhism later evolved into four major schools that have survived to the present day. They are the Nyingma school, the Sakya school, the Kagyu school, and the Gelug school. The Esoteric schools in Mongolia, Nepal, and other regions [in the Himalayas and Inner Asia] are all branches from Tibetan Buddhism.

The development of Indian Buddhism after the Buddha's passing away can be roughly divided into three periods. The first period of Sthaviravāda Buddhism, from the Buddha's parinirvāṇa to three or four hundred years later, is represented by the Buddhism in today's Sri Lanka and other regions [mainly in Southeast Asia]. The second period was from three or four hundred years after parinirvāṇa and lasted for five to six hundred years, in which Exoteric Mahāyāna Buddhism

developed—representatives of this form of Buddhism are in today's China and Japan. The third period, during which Esoteric Mahāyāna Buddhism arose, began about nine hundred or one thousand years after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. Today this form of Buddhism is represented by Tibetan Buddhism. So-called Exoteric Buddhism places great emphasis on the study and exposition of Buddhist doctrine, whereas Esoteric Buddhism stresses adherence to ritual protocol, recitation of mantras, and reliance on the spiritual assistance of deities. Alternatively, we can describe the first period as Buddhism of the śrāvakas, the second period as Buddhism of the bodhisattvas, and the third period as Buddhism of the deities. What we need today should be a fourth period, the Buddhism of the human realm.

Buddhism in the West first came to Germany. It is well known that the philosophy of Schopenhauer (1788–1860) was deeply influenced by Indian philosophy, as he drew many of his thoughts from the Upaniṣads and early Buddhist scriptures. Today, France, England, Belgium, Austria, the Soviet Union, the United States, Argentina, and Brazil all have some traces of Buddhism, but in terms of future growth potential, Buddhism in Germany and United States is most promising. This is especially true of the United States, in which there are active programs run by Buddhists from the Southern tradition, Northern tradition, and Tibetan tradition. But based on the content of the Buddhist culture in Europe and the Americas, the Southern tradition has a decisive advantage.^{32*} This advantage derives from the fact that between 1505 and 1948, Sri Lanka [known as Ceylon until 1972] was successively occupied by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British, providing monastics in Sri Lanka with the opportunity to spread Buddhism to the Western world. The introduction of Mahāyāna Buddhism to the West has primarily been the contribution of Japanese Buddhists. Chinese Buddhists have fallen far behind others in disseminating Buddhism abroad. Even the Tibetan lamas are several steps ahead of Chinese Buddhists in this regard. Although overseas Chinese in the United States have faith in Mahāyāna Buddhism, they do not know its teachings.