

A balanced study on Mahāyāna Bodhisattva concept and Theravāda Bodhisattva concept

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Mahāyāna tradition can be considered a philosophical tradition of Buddhist doctrine. It is believed that the Mahāyāna tradition evolved from the fourth dhamma Sangāyanā in the era of king Kaniṣka. However, many doubts remain on the origin, history and evolution of Mahāyāna tradition. It became a conspicuous doctrine in India in the beginning of 1st millennium and it spread to several Eastern countries. Mahayana means the ‘big vehicle’ for liberation. Its opposite term is ‘Hīnayāna’ literally meaning the ‘small vehicle’. The Chinese explorer Ithsing (A.C. 625-713) defines these terms thus: “Mahāyāna is used as an adjective to denote the ones who worship hermits and study Mahāyāna suttas whereas Hīnayana is used as an adjective to denote ones who do not worship and study. In other words, Mahāyāna doctrine has its own religious texts which differ from Hīnayana Tripiṭaka and it worships pantheons who are inferior to Bodhisattvas and equal to Indian gods.” This definition leads to a clear conclusion. The concept of Bodhisattva has been prioritized in Mahayana tradition. Bodhisattva means the person who extracts wisdom. Even though Bodhisattva has not attained enlightenment, it is considered that Bodhisattva has adhered the path to be Lord Buddha. In contrast to this, Theravada tradition considers Bodhisattva as an immature stage Lord Buddha. According to Mahayana tradition, ordinary people can attempt and should become Bodhisattva. Tripiṭaka written in Pali highlights the concept of Bodhisattva prior to Mahayana tradition. In analyzing the sources, the concept of Bodhisattva can be categorized into three types. They are simple Bodhisattva characters, bodhisattva characters romanticized by mysticism and Bodhisattva dhamma. The Bodhisattva characters have been signified in several names in Tripiṭaka literature. Mahāyāna tradition highly appreciates the concept of Bodhisattva and provides various interpretations to the concept. The study aims to analyze the concept of Bodhisattva in relation to the sources of these two traditions.

Keywords: *Bodhisattva, Mahāyāna, Theravāda, Tripitika*