

**POSTGRADUATE INSTITUTE OF PALI AND BUDDHIST STUDIES**

**(UNIVERSITY OF KELANIYA)**

**A Study on the Future Buddha Concept in Mahāyāna and Theravāda  
Buddhism**

**Rev. Li Rui (Xin Guang)**

**Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy to the Postgraduate Institute of**

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**Abstract**

This is a study undertaken to discuss the origin and development of the concept of the *Buddha Maitreya* (Pāli: *Metteyya*) as found in Pāli tradition as well as in Mahāyāna tradition. In this thesis, there are consists of eight chapters, each dealing with important aspects of the concept. The ninth chapter summarizes its conclusion arrived at as a result of the inquiry.

The concept of Future *Buddha* is a very important subject in Buddhology and this concept helped to mould the faith of Buddhists towards the Buddha through out the history of Buddhism. Many scholars have pointed out that this concept has originated in combination with the concept of *Mitra* in Iranian Culture. The name *Buddha Maitreya* has some resemblance with the name *Mitra* but the Pāli form (*Metteyya*) is different.

This concept appears once in the *Dīgha Nikāya* therefore it looks its inclusion into the *Nikāyas* much later period. Though it was added in later period it must have added at the rightful time when people needed to have someone similar to the Buddha. When the Buddha passed away as a great spiritual leader the vacuum left in the mind of faithful disciples filled with the hope of Future *Buddha*. The details of the *Buddha Gotama* and the past *Buddhas* given in the *Mahāpadāna Sutta* and the *Jātaka-Nidāna* helped to develop the Buddhological concepts with regard to the *Buddha Maitreya*. It further developed in the hands of other Buddhist sects and the evidence shows in the *Mahāvastu* of *Mahāsaṅghikas* and in the *Lalitavistara* of *Sarvāstivāta*. In Mahāyāna, *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*,



*Prajñāpāramitā, Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra, Suvarṇaprabhāsa Sūtra, Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa* and *Maitreya-vyākaraṇa*. *Anāgatavaṃsa* is a later version found in Pāli tradition of *Metteyya Buddha* and it shows the influence of *Maitreya-vyākaraṇa*.

In *Mahāyāna* countries *Maitreya Buddha* concept does not seem to have got recognition as much as in *Theravāda* Countries and does not develop as a cult in *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* countries. In *Theravāda* countries like Sri Lanka and Myanmar almost all the Buddhists wish to attain *Nibbāna* during the time of *Maitreya Buddha* and it developed as a future hope among faithful devotees. *Mahāyāna* countries have more dynamic concepts like *Amitābha* Buddha and the *Avalokiteśvara* which dominated the whole of popular *Mahāyāna* thought. Therefore *Maitreya Buddha* concept suffered an easy survival in *Mahāyāna* countries.

In *Mahāyāna* countries this became a concept of *Maitreya Bodhisattva* and as a result of this he became one of the *Bodhisattvas* amongst the other *Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas*. As his name suggests he radiates loving kindness (*Maitre*) because of that it has become a belief related to fertility cults. This also led to change the character of the *Maitreya Bodhisattva* as a survival factor of the *Maitreya Buddha* concept within the *Mahāyāna* countries.

This is how *Bodhisattva Maitreya* was turned into the “Pot-bellied” ever laughing jovial figure that symbolizes material success and in china this particular form was named as *Miluo Fo*. When introduced *Guan Yin (Avalokiteśvara)* concept with that of *Amitābha* Buddha overshadowed the *Maitreya Bodhisattva* concept. It changed its character as a social reformer. In Korea the belief in *Maitreya* mixed up with *Hwarang (P’lungwoltto)* youth organization and in Japan it was mixed up with traditional folk religious practice of mountain worship. In Sri Lanka it was mixed up with the god *Nātha* (a form of *Avalokiteśvara*). Apart from that this concept developed links with Sinhala Buddhist Royalty indicating a certain members of a royal family would have family connection in the birth of *Maitreya Buddha*.