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 Pāli and Buddhist Studies (University of Kelaniya)

2008
“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 Pāli and Buddhist Studies
(University of Kelaniya)
2008

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, Saddharmapundarika Sūtra, Suvarṇaprabhāsā Sūtra, Vimalakīrti Nirdeśa and Maitreya- vyākaraṇa. Anāgatavamsa 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 Míluò Fó. When introduced Guān Yīn (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’lungwolto) 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.