

“Buddhas in the Ten Directions”: Its Origins in the Early Buddhist Texts and Metamorphosis*

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국문 초록

초기 대승 문헌과 아함(니까야) 문헌을 이용하여 본 연구는 이른바 ‘시방불’이란 것이 최초의 형태에서는 실제로 석가모니 붓다의 화신들, 또는 무한한 세계에 존재하는 그의 복제물을 가리키는 것이었음을 밝히고자 한다. 본 연구는 이 개념이 붓다를 태양과 달에 비유하는 비유들 및 쌍둥이 이적(異蹟)의 전설에 기원함을 보였는데, 이 두 가지는 북부의 아함과 빨리어 문헌에서 발견된다. 나아가 본 연구는 아축불은 화신불이며, 아미타불은 석가모니 붓다의 복제물로부터 아마도 다른 세계에서의 실제적인 우주적 붓다로 바뀌어가는 ‘화신’ 개념의 전환을 나타내고 있음을 보였다. 그 자체로서 아미타불에 대한 신앙은 초기 대승과 인도불교의 영향권에 있었던 북서부 변방의 인도-이란계 종교가 융합된 결과이다. 곧 그것은 육바라밀에 기초한 초기의 고전적 대승이라기보다는 문화적으로 형성된 불교였던 것이다. 마지막으로 본 연구를 통해 초기의 대승불교도들이 재가자들을 가르치기 위해 ‘시방불’ 개념을 널리 알렸음을 주장하고자 하는데, 이는 초기 불교 문헌 및 초기 대승불교 문헌에서 일관되게 증명된 바이다. 이러한 분석에 기초하여 본 연구는 초기 대승의 불교도들이 석가모니

* Author’s note: This research uses three types of sutra reference at the same time, including the original reference in the Chinese Āgāmas, the available Pāli counterparts, and the Taishō reference. Translation of the sutras is mine if it is not attributed to other translators.

붓다만을 신앙하였고, 그들이 실제로 시방에 진짜 붓다가 있다고 믿었다는 생각은 신 화임을 주장하고자 한다.

주제어: 시방불, 화신불, 쌍둥이 이적의 전설, 대승, 아촉불, 아미타불

It has been a widely accepted assumption that early Mahāyāna Buddhists truly believed that numerous real buddhas existed in the ten directions; that is, they sincerely believed that there were buddhas currently living and teaching in many world-systems like our own. On the ground of the assumption, scholars have proposed theories to explain why the Mahāyānists developed such a concept. Some have argued that the early schools' doctrine that there could not be two buddhas at the same time significantly limited the possibility to become a buddha; the idea of buddhas in the ten directions transcended such a limit and created immense space for all people to become buddhas (Lü 1979, 90-91). Some have argued that the early schools' doctrine that only one buddha can appear in the world at a time and the immense intervals between the appearance of a buddha and his successor posed serious logical challenges to the early Mahāyāna Buddhists; as such, the followers of the Bodhisattva Path developed the concept "to acquire merit and knowledge in the presence of a living buddha in order to accelerate their own progress toward the goal" (Nattier 2000, 184-185).¹⁾

1) See Jan Nattier 2000. According to Nattier, "Around the beginning of the Common Era, however, a new idea appeared in India that was to radically alter this understanding of the bodhisattva path. Certain bodhisattvas emerged from deep meditation with tales of visions they had experienced, visions of a universe far more vast than had previously been supposed. Throughout the ten directions, they claimed, were other world-systems like our own, each with its own hierarchy of gods and human beings. Most important for aspiring bodhisattvas, however, was the news brought by these early visionaries that in some of these world-systems buddhas were currently living and teaching. Thus while our own world-system is currently devoid of a buddha (though the Dharma itself is still present and accessible), other buddhas were now held to exist in the present, albeit in world-systems located (to use contemporary

In the history of Buddhism, the concept of buddhas in the ten directions was a major issue that caused discord between some of the early schools and the early Mahāyānists. The followers of Nikāya Buddhism stated that Mahāyāna was not the Buddha's teaching, partly because in the Āgamas/ Nikāyas, the Buddha clearly stated that "there is no chance that two worthy fully self-wakened ones would simultaneously arise in the world."²⁾ The Mahāyānists in later ages, ironically, criticized the so-called "Hīnayānists" for not believing in buddhas in the ten directions. For example, Sen You (445-518 CE), a Chinese Buddhist monk, disparagingly referred to a Chinese-born Indian who did not believe in buddhas in the ten directions: "The man looks alien, but he was actually born in China. He is not familiar with the Indian [Buddhist] disciplines and rules. He has a pretentious and eccentric character. In order to get offerings, he sticks to the study of Hīnayāna. He said that there are no buddhas in the ten directions and only worshipped the Śākyamuni. He did not listen to, read, or recite Mahāyāna sutras."³⁾ Even among Mahāyānists, the concept was a problem. Some regarded such buddhas as merely a convenient means to teach the Dharma; some truly believed in their existence in the universe.⁴⁾

scientific parlance) many millions of lightyears away. These new visions thus introduced the dramatic possibility of encountering a living buddha in the near future-indeed in one's very next life, through being reborn in his realm. That the idea of the existence of these 'buddhas of the ten directions' was the result not of scholastic speculation but of intensive meditational experience is amply attested in early Mahāyāna scriptures. But what is particularly noteworthy is that this new view of the universe seems to have emerged not among Śrāvaka practicing traditional meditation but among devotees of the bodhisattva path. This idea seems to have been formulated, in other words, by precisely those Buddhists who most needed to acquire merit and knowledge in the presence of a living buddha in order to accelerate their own progress toward the goal." Also see Jan Nattier 2003.

- 2) MA.181 (T. 1,723c29; MN. 115 *Bahudhātuka Sutta*): 阿難。若世中有二如來者。終無是處。Similar statements appeared in DA.3 (T. 1,31a14; DN. 19 Mahāgovinda Sutta): 我從佛聞。親從佛受。欲使一時二佛出世。無有是處。Also see DA. 18 (T. 1,79a07; DN. 28 Sampasādanīya Sutta): 欲使現在有二佛出世。無有是處。
- 3) *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (Compilation of Notices on the Translation of the Tripiṭaka; T. 55,40c28-41a02): 其人貌雖外國。實生漢土。天竺科軌。非其所諳。但性存矯異。欲以攝物。故執學小乘。云無十方佛。唯禮釋迦而已。大乘經典。不聽讀誦。Composed by Seng You 僧祐 (445-518 CE).
- 4) See Amstutz 1998, 77.

In the current study, I will demonstrate that in its earliest form, the so-called “buddhas in the ten directions” are nothing more than transformation buddhas of the Śākyamuni Buddha, or duplicates of the Buddha in infinite worlds; and the concept has its origins in the similes comparing the Buddha to the sun and the moon as well as the Twin Miracle Legend, both of which are found in the early Buddhist texts (EBTs).⁵⁾ The concept then led to the creation of celestial buddhas (e.g., Buddha Akṣobhya) as a convenient means to teach the Dharma and to fill the void left by the Śākyamuni Buddha, which further spawned the belief that there are real buddhas in the ten directions (e.g., Amitābha). I will first use the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* to illustrate this point. The importance of these two sutras for early Mahāyāna is self-evident.⁶⁾ In particular, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* is regarded as the “Mother” by Mahāyāna Buddhists, and other major Mahāyāna sutras were developed under its influence. Both sutras seem to have promoted the concept of buddhas in the ten directions. Next, I will discuss the devotionism toward Akṣobhya and Amitābha, which seem to refer to real buddhas in other world systems. Finally, I will demonstrate that the early Mahāyāna Buddhists promoted the concept to preach to the laity.

I . “Buddhas in the Ten Directions” and Its Origins in the EBTs

The *Daśa Sūtra* is one of the earliest origins of the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*.⁷⁾ The latter was developed using the former as its

5) Sujato and Brahmali defined the EBTs as “texts spoken by the historical Buddha and his contemporary disciples. These are the bulk of the Suttas in the main four Pāli Nikāyas and parallel Āgama literature in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, and other Indian dialects; the *pātimokkhas* and some Vinaya material from the *khandhakas*; a small portion of the Khuddaka Nikāya.” See Sujato and Brahmali 2015, 11-12.

6) See fn. 48.

7) *Foshuo dousha jing* 佛說兜沙經 (T. 280). Translated by Lokakṣema (Zhiloujiachen 支婁迦讖, 147–

outline (Lü 1979; Wei 1995; Yinshun 1994). The sutra states that the Śākyamuni Buddha projects infinite duplicates of himself into all directions: “The Śākyamuni Buddha ... duplicates himself in one billion small countries. There is a buddha in every small country, and in all there are one billion buddhas.”⁸⁾ The sutra states that the buddhas are called by different names, but they are just different names of the Śākyamuni Buddha: “In the four directions, some called the Buddha as Siddhārtha ... some call him the Śākyamuni ... such people in the four directions called different names of the Śākyamuni Buddha. In total there are ten thousand names. Similarly, in the infinite buddha fields in the infinitely far ten directions, all people in different languages called the Śākyamuni buddha.”⁹⁾

The *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, partly based on the *Daśa Sūtra*, constructed a cosmological system with a buddha named the Vairocana (“the sun”) Buddha dwelling in the center of the cosmos and infinite buddhas in the ten directions. The sutra clearly states that the Vairocana Buddha is the Śākyamuni Buddha and the buddhas in the ten directions are his transformations: “In the four continents, the Tathāgata is called Śākyamuni, or the Seventh Immortal, or the Vairocana, or the Gautama;”¹⁰⁾ “The then universal king is today’s World Honored One, the Vairocana;”¹¹⁾ “The cloud fully reveals the world of flower garlands, the Vairocana Buddha, the ‘buddhas of transformation’ in the ten directions, and all of the magic powers of theirs.”¹²⁾ As can be seen, the so-called buddhas in the ten directions in this body of literature refer to the Śākyamuni Buddha and his

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- ?). It is necessary to note that this sutra is not the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (Shi ji jing 十地經. T.287).
- 8) *Foshuo dousha jing* 佛說兜沙經 (T. 280, 10.446b06): 釋迦文佛... 分身悉遍至十億小國土。一一小國土。皆有一佛。凡有十億佛。
- 9) *Foshuo dousha jing* 佛說兜沙經 (T. 280, 10. 446a07): 四面中有呼佛。名曰勝達... 中有呼釋迦文尼... 為四面如是輩。各各呼釋迦文佛名。合為萬字。如是十方極過去不可復計諸佛刹。都人民種種各異語。共呼釋迦文佛。
- 10) *Da fangguang fo huanyan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經 (*Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*; T. 279, 10.58c16): 如來於此四天下中... 或名釋迦牟尼。或名第七仙。或名毘盧遮那。或名瞿曇氏。Translated by Śikṣānanda (Shichanantuo 實叉難陀, 652 - 750 CE).
- 11) *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* (T. 279, 10.417a29): 轉輪王者。今世尊毘盧遮那是。
- 12) *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* (T. 279, 10.40c21): 其雲普現華藏世界。毗盧遮那。十方化佛。及一切佛神通之事。

transformations.

In fact, the reference to the Buddha as Vairocana, or the sun, has its roots in the EBTs. In many sutras of the Āgamas/ Nikāyas, the Buddha was compared to the sun and the moon. In one SA sutra, for example, the moon deities asked the Buddha to help free the moon, which was eclipsed by Rāhula, Lord of Asuras. The Buddha speaks a verse: “The moon illuminates the space and destructs darkness/ Now the Vairocana shows his pure radiance/ Rāhula, release the moon and stay out of the space.”¹³⁾ In another SA sutra, Venerable Vaṅgīsa speaks a verse to extol the Buddha: “Like the moon in the clean and cloudless sky/ shining its light in the ten directions/ so is the Tathāgata/ your light of wisdom shines the world/ your benefits and fine names are omnipresent in the ten directions.”¹⁴⁾ Both texts had almost exact counterparts in the Pāli texts. For example, Sujato translated the Pāli sutra that matches the Vaṅgīsa verse as such: “Like the moon on a cloudless night, like the shining immaculate sun, so too Aṅgīrasa, O great sage, your glory outshines the entire world.”¹⁵⁾ These poetic similes comparing the Buddha to the sun and the moon in the EBTs are a clear origin of the concept of the Vairocana Buddha in the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, whose radiance shines in the ten directions.¹⁶⁾

Similarly, the narrative that the Buddha dwelling in the center of the universe projected transformation buddhas to the ten directions, as is found in the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, has its origin in the Twin Miracle Legend in the EBTs. As the following evidence shows, the statement that Buddha duplicates himself through magic power is

13) SA.583 (T. 99, 2.155a16; SN.2.9 Candima Sutta): 世尊說偈答言。破壞諸闇冥。光明照虛空。今毘盧遮那。清淨光明顯。羅睺避虛空。速放飛兔像。The counterpart in *Bie yi za Ahan* 別譯雜阿含 (Shorter Chinese *Samyukta Āgama*; 167. T. 100, 2.436a17) translates it as “great radiance” (*da guangming* 大光明).

14) SA.1208 (T. 99, 2.0329a29): 尊者婆耆舍即於佛前而說偈言。如月停虛空。明淨無雲翳。光炎明暉曜。普照於十方。如來亦如是。慧光照世間。功德善名稱。周遍滿十方。Also see SA. 1219 (T. 99, 2. 332b26; SN. 8.8 Parosahassa Sutta): “Illuminates like the sun and the moon”. 明照如日月.

15) SN. 8.11 Gaggarā Sutta.

16) See discussions on similes comparing the Buddha to the sun and the moon in early Buddhist literature in Revire 2017.

another origin of “buddhas in the ten directions.” Specifically, in the Pāli *Buddhist Legends*, the Buddha expounded the Abhidharma for the benefit of his mother in the World of the Thirty-three. Whenever he had occasion to leave, he created a double to take his place. The Pāli text also narrates that at the festival of Pravāraṇā, during which the Buddha subdues the heretics with his magic power, the Buddha stands “on the summit of Mount Sineru, performs the Twin Miracle, surveys countless thousands of worlds, and descends to earth.” (Burlingame 1921, 119). Here we can see concepts that are close to a “transformation buddha” (“twin”) and the “ten directions” (“countless thousands of worlds”). In the *Narrative of Ashoka* (Aśokāvadāna) that was collected in the SA, Venerable Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja recounted the Twin Miracle and told Emperor Ashoka that he was at the Pravāraṇā festival in Śrāvastī when the Buddha turned into “buddhas full of all directions up to the Akaniṣṭha Heaven.”¹⁷⁾ Venerable Piṇḍola Bhāradvāja spoke of a verse to recount the moment: “The Tathāgata subdued the heretics through his magic power/ And I witnessed the buddha’s images when he traveled in the ten directions.”¹⁸⁾ Here we can see that the Twin Miracle Legend is regarded as the Buddha projecting his image in the ten directions. The narrative clearly shows that the legend is another origin of the concept of buddhas in the ten directions. I will further elaborate on the Twin Miracle Legend through an intertextual analysis in the next section.

The narrative that the Buddha duplicates himself frequently appears in the Āgamas/ Nikāyas. For example, the Pāli *Buddhist Legends* narrates that “the Teacher, sitting in the Perfumed Chamber, sent forth a luminous image of himself, and as it were looking into the faces of those monks, spoke with them, pronouncing the following Stanza” (Burlingame 1921, 12). Similar narratives frequently appear in the Āgamas, in which the Buddha taught his disciples through magic power by turning into many images and then returning into one.¹⁹⁾

17) SA.604 (T. 99, 2.169c16): 又復佛住舍衛國時。如來大作神力。種種變化。作諸佛形。滿在諸方。乃至阿迦尼吒天。我爾時亦在於中。見如來種種變化神通之相。

18) SA.604 (T. 99, 2.169c16): 如來神通力。降伏諸外道。佛遊於十方。我親見彼相。

19) EA.24.5 (T. 125, 2.622b11): 彼云何名為神足教化。爾時。世尊或作若干形。還合為一。

The Buddha taught Maudgalyāyana through his duplicate: “Knowing this (that Maudgalyāyana has followed signs in his meditation), as easily as a strong person would extend or contract his arm, the World Honored One vanished from the Deer Park in the Bhesakaḷāvana forest of the Crocodile Hill, the land of Bhargas, and appeared in front of Maudgalyāyana, who was staying in the Village of Good Companions in Magadha.”²⁰⁾ He taught Aniruddha in the same way.²¹⁾ Some sutras depict that through the same magic power, he can appear in Brahmā’s world.²²⁾ His radiance may shine in Brahmā’s world so that Brahmā and his retinue could hear him but could not see him.²³⁾ Again, these Āgama texts have counterparts that are almost exactly the same in the Pāli texts. In the Āgama narratives, monks who master yogic power can also duplicate one body into numerous bodies and turn numerous bodies into one body.²⁴⁾ Aniruddha stated that he attained such magic power,²⁵⁾ as did Maudgalyāyana.²⁶⁾

In summary, the above evidence shows that buddhas in the ten directions are transformation buddhas of the Śākyamuni Buddha. One of the origins of the concept is the simile comparing the Buddha to the sun and the moon. Another

20) MA.83 (T. 26, 1.559c5; SN. 40.9 Animittapañhā Sutta): 世尊知已… 猶若力士屈申臂頃。從婆耆瘦蠹山怖林鹿野園中忽沒不現。往摩竭國善知識村尊者大目犍連前。

21) AN. 8.30 Anuruddhamahāvitakka Sutta (MA.74). Sujato translated the text as such: “As easily as a strong person would extend or contract their arm, he vanished from the deer park at Bhesakaḷā’s Wood in the land of the Bhaggas and reappeared in front of Anuruddha in the Eastern Bamboo Park in the land of the Cetīs, and sat on the seat spread out.” Available at < <https://suttacentral.net/an8.30/en/sujato> >

22) For example, MA.78 (T. 26, 1.547a17; MN.49 Brahmānimantanika Sutta) narrates that “As easily as a strong person would extend or contract their arm, the Buddha vanished from Anāthapiṇḍada’s Monastery in the Jeta’s Grove in Śrāvastī and reappeared in Brahmā’s realm.” [世尊] 猶若力 士屈申臂頃。於舍衛國勝林給孤獨園忽沒不現。往梵天上。

23) MA.78 (T. 26, 1.548c14; MN. 49 Brahmānimantanika Sutta): 世尊即現如其像如意足。放極妙光明。照一切梵天。便自隱住。使諸梵天及梵天眷屬但聞其聲而不見其形。

24) DA.24 (T. 1, 1.101c09; DN. 11 Kevaṭṭa Sutta): 比丘習無量神足。能以一身變成無數。以無數身還合為一。Also see MA.143 (T. 125, 2.712b7; AN. 3:61 Saṅgārava Sutta): 行無量如意足之功德。謂分一為眾。合眾為一。一則住一。EA.37.5 (T. 125, 2.712b07): 若復比丘意欲得無量神足。分一身作無數。復還合為一。

25) MA.80 (T. 26, 1.553b06): 我得無量如意足。謂分一為眾。合眾為一。一則住一。有知有見。

26) MA.184 (T. 26, 01.0727c15): 尊者大目犍連答曰… 自在無量如意足。彼行無量如意足。變一為眾。合眾為一。一則住一。有知有見。Also see EA.37.3 and EA.42.5.

origin is the Twin Miracle Legend. Both are based on the EBTs. In the following, I will further elaborate on the concept's origin in the Twin Miracle Legend through an intertextual analysis between the beginning part of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the Pāli *Buddhist Legends*.

II . The Twin Miracle Legend and the Transformation Buddhas

The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* translated by Xuanzang frequently refers to hua fo, or transformation buddhas, who appear in the three thousand boundless universe in the ten directions.²⁷⁾ A comparison between the beginning of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the Twin Miracle Legend in the Pāli *Buddhist Legends* shows definite intertextuality. Although the wordings of the two texts are different, the narrative structures and the literary elements in them are essentially the same. Both texts follow five narrative themes: 1. the Buddha entered into concentration; 2. the Buddha emitted radiance from his body (the Pāli text refers to water and fire, then colored rays); 3. the radiance illuminated the entire world; 4. in this way the Buddha taught the Dharma to the world; and 5. the Buddha created duplicates to teach the Dharma. (See the cells in Table 1.)

The comparison clearly shows that buddhas in the ten directions in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* are the same as the duplicates of the Buddha in the Twin Miracle Legend in the Pāli text. As Table 1 shows (see cell 5), in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, “on those lotuses there were, seated and standing, Buddha-frames [Cn. *huafo*, “transformation buddha” in Chinese] demonstrating dharma, i.e., this very demonstration of dharma associated with the six perfections. They went in all the ten directions to countless world systems in each direction, and demonstrated dharma to beings.” In the matching text in the Pāli *Buddhist Legends*, “he put forth his supernatural power and created a double; the

27) The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (T. 220, 5.2b06): “In every flower dais there is a transformation buddha seated crossed-legged.” 諸花臺中皆有化佛結跏趺坐。

double then asked him questions and the Teacher answered them Seeing the Teacher perform his miracle thus and hearing him preach the Law, two hundred millions of living beings in that vast throng obtained Comprehension of the Law.”

Given that the Pāli tradition was categorically opposed to Mahāyāna, it is hard to imagine that the text in the *Buddhist Legends* was based on the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*. The best explanation for the definite intertextuality here is that both of them developed from the same earlier source. As such, the concept of buddhas in the ten directions was directly developed from the EBTs.

<Table 1>. Intertextuality between the beginning of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the Twin Miracle in the Pāli *Buddhist Legends*.

The beginning of	The Twin Miracle
<i>the Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra</i> ²⁹⁾	in the Pāli <i>Buddhist Legends</i> ³⁰⁾
<p>1. Thereupon the Lord, having himself arranged the Lion Seat, sat down with his legs crossed; holding his body erect, intent on fixing his mindfulness, <u>he entered into the concentration-“King of Concentrations” by name-in which all concentrations are included, comprehended, and come to meet.</u> Thereupon the Lord, mindful and self-possessed, emerging from this concentration, surveyed with the Heavenly Eye the entire world system (p.38)</p>	<p>On this occasion the Tathāgata performed the <u>Twin Miracle</u>, a miracle far more wonderful than any performed by his disciples (p.55)</p> <p>This miracle, therefore, the Teacher performed as he walked up and down the jeweled walk. <u>By means of a trance induced by meditation</u> on the element of fire, flames of fire proceeded from the upper part of his body; and <u>by means of a trance induced by meditation</u> on the element of water, a stream of water proceeded from the lower part of his body (p.56)</p>

28) I used Conze’s translation. See Conze 1985, 38-42.

29) I used the translation by Burlingame 1921, 55-56. The text was translated from the original Pāli text of the *Dhammapada Commentary*. The order of the paragraphs in the table was slightly rearranged to match the text in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*.

2. His whole body became radiant. From the wheels with a thousand spokes (imprinted) on the soles of his feet issued hundred thousand nyutas of kotis of rays, and so from his ten toes, and similarly from his ankles, legs, knees, thighs, hips and navel, from his two sides, and from the sign "Śrīvatsa" on his chest, a mark of the Superman. Similarly from his ten fingers, his two arms, his two shoulders, from his neck, his forty teeth, his two nostrils, ears and eyes, from the hair-tuft in the middle between his eye-brows, and from the cowl on the top of his head.

From the upper part of his body proceeded flames of fire, and from the lower part of his body a stream of water. From the lower part of his body proceeded flames of fire and from the upper part of his body a stream of water. From the front part of his body proceeded flames of fire, and from the back part of his body a stream of water. From the back part of his body proceeded flames of fire, and from the front part of his body a stream of water. Flames of fire and streams of water proceeded from his right and left eyes, from his right and left ears, from his right and left nostrils, from his right and left shoulders, from his right and left hands, from his right and left sides, from his right and left feet, from the tips of his fingers and from the roots of his fingers; from every pore of his body proceeded flames of fire, and from every pore of his body proceeded forth a stream of water. Six-colored were they: blue and yellow and red and white and pink and brilliant (p.55-56).

3. And through these rays this great trichiliocosm was illumined and lit up. And in the East world systems as numerous as the sands of the Ganges were, by this great illumination of rays, lit up and became illumined. So in the South, the West, the North, the North-East, the South East, the South-West, the North-West, below and above. And the beings who were lit up and illumined by this great illumination of rays, they all became fixed on the utmost, right and perfect enlightenment (p.38-39).

(... With reference to the "six colors," rays of six colors, like molten gold running out of crucibles, or like an ooze of king's yellow coming out of a tube, shot upwards from the interior of one Cakkavāḷa to the World of Brahmā, whence they streamed back to the rim of the Cakkavāḷa. Thus each Cakkavāḷa was arched with rays of light shaped like a A-shaped rafter, and the House of Enlightenment was suffused with an even light.) (p.56)

4. And from this tower the celestial flowers and silken tassels hung down and were suspended, and they made this great trichiliocosm look very beautiful. And because the brightly shining golden colour of the Lord streamed forth in the ten directions, in each direction countless world systems were lit up and illumined.

On that day the Teacher walked up and down performing his Twin Miracle, and as he did so, he preached the Law to the multitude from time to time, not wearying them with uninterrupted discourse, but giving them sufficient opportunity to refresh themselves from time to time. Thereupon the multitude sent up shouts of applause. Hearing the shouts of applause which proceeded from the multitude, the Teacher

In this great trichiliocosm, and in all the world systems, the same thought occurred to each one of these gods and men: "It is for me that the Tathāgata, seated there, demonstrates Dharma." (p.41).

On that day the Teacher walked up and down performing his Twin Miracle, and as he did so, he preached the Law to the multitude from time to time, not wearying them with uninterrupted discourse, but giving them sufficient opportunity to refresh themselves from time to time. Thereupon the multitude sent up shouts of applause. Hearing the shouts of applause which proceeded from the multitude, the Teacher straightway looked into the hearts of the great multitude, and in sixteen ways perceived the disposition of mind of each one.

So quick is the movement of the mind of the Buddhas, that in case any person took pleasure in any portion of the Law or in any miracle, the Buddha preached the Law and performed a miracle in accordance with the temper and disposition of every such person (p.56-57).

5. Thereupon the Lord on that occasion put out his tongue. With it he covered the great trichiliocosm and many hundreds of thousands of niyutas of kotis of rays issued from it. From each one of these rays there arose lotuses, made of the finest precious stones, of golden colour, and with thousands of petals; and on those lotuses there were, seated and standing, Buddha-frames demonstrating dharma, i.e. this very demonstration of dharma associated with the six perfections.

The Exalted One walked, and a counterpart of him stood or sat or lay down; his counterpart lay down and the Exalted One walked or stood or sat. This is the tradition regarding the Twin Miracle performed by the Exalted One.

....

And thus, for the space of three months without interruption, he recited the AbhidhammaPiṭaka. Now when it was time for him to go on his round for alms, he would create a double and say to him, "Preach the Law until I return." (p.57)

*The underscoring is added by the author to illustrate intertextuality.

III. Buddha Akṣobhya and Buddha Amitābha

Buddha Akṣobhya and Buddha Amitābha need separate discussions, because both appear to be depicted as buddhas in real existence. As Nattier rightly noted, the devotionism toward Buddha Akṣobhya might be a predecessor to the devotionism toward Amitābha (Nattier 2000, 184-185). Overall, the tenet and the discourse of the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha* clearly fall into the paradigm of the Six Pāramitās, which is defined as *Mahāyāna* by the EA,³⁰⁾ the *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā*,³¹⁾ the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*,³²⁾ and the *Mahāvaiṣṭya Mahāsamghāta Sūtra*.³³⁾ The sutra depicts a celestial Akṣobhya Buddha in another world system, but a paragraph at the conclusion of the sutra indicates that he is most likely a transformation buddha, or a buddha created as a “convenient means” to teach the Dharma. The paragraph narrates this in the following way: “Venerable Ānanda asked Venerable Subhūti, ‘Venerable Subhūti, have you seen Akṣobhya Buddha and his disciples as well as their buddha field?’ Subhūti said, ‘Venerable Sir, look upward.’ Ānanda answered, ‘Venerable Subhūti, I looked up and only saw immense empty space.’ Subhūti said to Ānanda, ‘As you saw only emptiness, you should see Akṣobhya Buddha and his disciples in the same way.’”³⁴⁾ This is a clear indication that the celestial

30) EA. Chapter of Introduction (*xupin* 序品; T. 125, 2.550a12): “The Bodhisattva vowed to take the Mahāyāna...The World Honored One Speaks of the Six Pāramitās”. 菩薩發意趣大乘 …人尊說六度無極。

31) Conze 1974, Verses 18–24. “All the qualities of enlightenment [that are in] the five perfections / they all grow from the perfection of wisdom.”

32) *Xiaoping bore boluomijing* 小品般若波羅蜜經 (T. 227, 8. 571b29): “The Six Pāramitās are the Bodhisattva’s Path.” 六波羅蜜是菩薩道。Translated by Kumārajīva (Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, 344-413 CE).

33) *Dafangdengdajijing* 大方等大集經 (T. 397). Translated by Dharmakṣema (Tanwuchen 曇無讖, 385-433/439 CE).

34) *Achu foguojing* 阿閼佛國經 (*Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha*; T. 313, 11.760b10): 賢者阿難問賢者須菩提言。唯須菩提。為見阿閼佛及諸弟子等并其佛剎不。須菩提謂阿難言。汝上向視。阿難答言。仁者須菩提。我已上向視上皆是虛空。須菩提謂阿難言。如仁者上向見空。觀阿閼佛及諸弟子等并其佛剎當如是。Translated by Lokakṣema.

buddha is most likely a transformation buddha.

The devotionism toward Amitābha is a complicated issue. It is obvious that the narratives in Amitābha-centered texts were influenced by the *Akṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha*. But it appears that the celestial buddha was regarded as a real existence by its devotees; that is, the devotees of the Amitābha cult seemed to genuinely believe that there is such a buddha. Scholars have long noted the relationship between the Amitābha cult and the Indo-Iranian Mithra cult. For example, Machida argued that archeological evidence showed that the cult of Mithra prevailed in northwest India during the second century CE. This is the period when Amida obtained another name, Amitābha, or Infinite Light. Machida argued that it is not difficult to imagine the influence of Iranian mythology on Pure Land Buddhism. He noted that there are parallel characteristics between Pure Land Buddhism and Zoroastrianism: “Zurvan Akaranak, the god of fate in later Zoroastrianism, and Amida Buddha both signify infinite time and space. The Zoroastrians believed in a heaven of boundless light presided over by Ahura Mazda, just as the Pure Land Buddhists believe in *Sukhāvati*, the luminous land of bliss where Amitābha resides” (Machida 1988, 26-25).³⁵⁾ There are signs that some Mahāyānists were opposed to or even shunned the Amitābha cult exactly because its devotees believed that he is a real existence. Amstutz (1998, 77) summarized the rejection of the Amitābha Pure Land by the Yogācāra school of Buddhism in ancient India because of the cult’s belief that Amitābha was a real existence:

Apparently Pure Land had been institutionalized to some extent in Mahāyāna practice and cult before the Yogācāra synthesis, so that by the time that Yogācāra emerged the Amitābha tradition had grown so popular (at least in some locales) that the mythic-devotional figure of Śākyamuni (who represented monastic ideals) had been in some cases relegated to the margins of Mahāyāna attention. In response, already before the time of Asaṅga (the chief thinker associated with Yogācāra) a

35) Also see Yinshun 1994, 480–482; Eitel and Takahuwa 1970,8.

movement had arisen to defend Śākyamuni against Amitābha. The tenth chapter of the *Mahāyānasamgraha* tried to subordinate a variety of diverse practices (including the Pure Land practice and Amitābha) to the unified Yogācāra interpretation. Like the *Pratyutpanna*, Yogācāra thinkers were apparently concerned that the Pure Land approach and its “dualism” might result in practitioners’ thinking that Amitābha and the Pure Land were somehow substantially real entities, something that might be clung to in an illusory quest for security. The Yogācāra argument was intended to deny the practical legitimacy of some popular interpretations of the Pure Land.

A similar attitude can be found in some Mahāyāna sutras. In the *Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetragaṇavyūha*, for example, there is a paragraph that disparages the Amitābha cult:

[When the Buddha predicts that Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī will become a buddha] “some bodhisattvas wondered, ‘The Buddha lauded the magnificence and purity of Mañjuśrī’s buddha field after he becomes a buddha. Would it be the same as Amitābha’s Sukhāvātī?’ The Buddha knows the mind of the bodhisattvas, and he says [to a bodhisattva], ‘Do you want to know the greatness, magnificence and purity of Amitābha’s Sukhāvātī in comparison to those of Mañjuśrī’s? It is hard to represent the difference even with similes. Suppose one splits a hair into one hundred fractions, and uses a hundredth fraction of the split hair to dip a drop of the ocean’s water, then Amitābha is merely a drop of water on that fraction of hair, while Mañjuśrī is like the immense ocean, which is so great that it is inconceivable.’”³⁶⁾

Neither Faxian (337-422 CE) nor Xuanzang (602-664 CE) mentioned Amitābha in their travelogues (Eitel and Takahawa 1979, 8), nor did Yijing (635-713 CE). When

36) *Wenshushilifotuyanjinjing* 文殊師利佛土嚴淨經 (Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetragaṇavyūha; T. 318, 11.899c18): 爾時會中諸菩薩眾又心念言。如佛諮嗟文殊師利成佛國時功勳嚴淨。何如西方安養世界無量壽佛嚴淨等不。時佛即知諸菩薩心。便告師子步雷音菩薩。欲知西方安養世界無量壽佛功勳嚴淨比於文殊師利。難以喻哉。假譬言之如取一毛破為百分。以一分毛取海水一滯。無量壽佛如一分毛水一滯耳。文殊師利成佛汪洋如海。巍巍蕩蕩不可思議。 Translated by Dharmarakṣa (Zhufahu 竺法護, 239–316 CE).

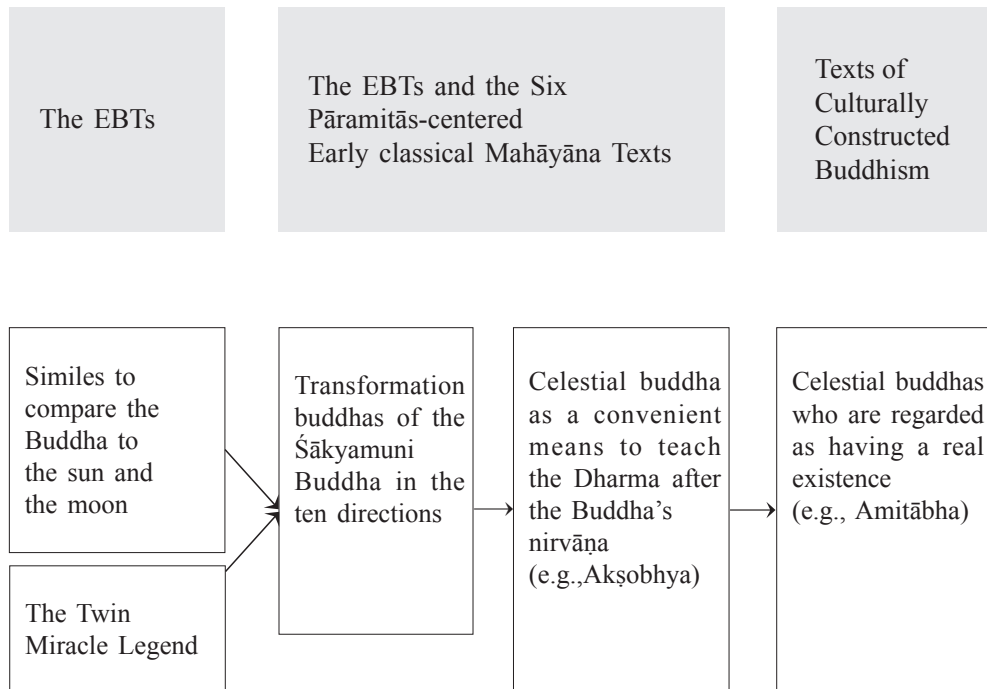
Chinese Buddhists debated over which of the heavens, namely Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven or Amitābha's Pure Land, they should be reborn into, Xuanzang avidly promoted Maitreya's Heaven and vowed to be reborn there (Wang 1992, 195-201). Xuanzang went to India mainly to learn the Yogācāra school of Buddhism.³⁷⁾ It is not surprising that he promoted the Maitreya's Tuṣita Heaven instead of Amitābha's Pure Land, considering the Yogācāra school's critical attitude toward the Amitābha cult.

In short, Buddha Akṣobhya is most likely a transformation buddha, while Amitābha represents a metamorphosis of the concept of "transformation buddha" from being a duplicate of the Śākyamuni Buddha to a supposedly real celestial buddha in another world system. This is most likely a result of syncretism of early Mahāyāna and the Indo-Iranian religions at the northwestern frontier of Indian Buddhism's sphere of influence. As such, it is the culturally constructed Buddhism instead of the early classical Mahāyāna that is based on the Six-Pāramitās.³⁸⁾ On the ground of the above analysis, I use the model in Figure to illustrate the origins and development of the concept of buddhas in the ten directions.

37) See *Datang da ci ensianzangfashizhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳 (A Biography of the Tripiṭaka-Master of the Great Ci'en Monastery In the Great Tang Dynasty; T. 2053, 50.222c4): "[The Master] therefore vowed to travel to the West to seek answers to the questions, and to obtain *the Treatise on the Seventeen Stages, which is today's Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra*, so as to clear up people's doubts." 乃誓遊西方以問所惑。并取十七地論以釋衆疑。即今之瑜伽師地論也。

38) By the culturally constructed Buddhism, I refer to the religious faiths whose doctrines were significantly influenced by the historical Buddha's teaching that can be found in the EBTs and at the same time incorporated non-Buddhist elements as a result of cross-cultural communications, which may or may not contradict the historical Buddha's teaching. By the early classical Mahāyāna, I refer to the Six-Pāramitās, which had their roots in the EBTs and were defined by the EA and the *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā* as Mahāyāna (See fn.33-36). Such a distinction is not meant to defend a "pure" and "authentic" Mahāyāna against a syncretic or "corrupted" form. Rather, it intends to represent a historical reality and at the same time value the cultural heritages that formed in history. See a discussion on the need to clarify the nomenclature of Buddhism in Skilling, "Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisattva in India", p.86.

<Figure 1>. Conceptual Model of the Origins and Development of “Buddhas in the Ten Directions” and Their Textual Sources



IV. An Idealized Way to Preach to Sentient Beings

The question is this: Why did early Mahāyāna Buddhists avidly promote the concept of buddhas in the ten directions in almost all of their sutras? I argue that the answer lies in the mission orientation of the Bodhisattva Path, which advocated for not only seeking self-deliverance but also ferrying sentient beings and their gods. The concept of buddhas in the ten directions was an important convenient means to preach to the laity and their gods.

The mission of Mahāyāna to “ferry all beings” is best summarized by a verse in the first two chapters of the *Ratnaguṇasamcayagāthā*, which, in Conze’s view, is probably the earliest Mahāyāna text (Conze 1974, The Preface, x). The verse states, “What then again is ‘the vessel that leads to the Bodhi?’ / Mounted upon it one

guides to nirvāṇa all beings” (Conze 1974, verse 18-24). Such a mission orientation had its origin in the EBTs. In *Jātaka-nidāna*, Sumedha, the Buddha-to-be, thinks to himself when he lay in the mire in front of the Dīpaṃkara Buddha, “What use have I of realizing the Dharma here now, as a man unknown? I will attain Omniscience and become a Buddha for the sake of the multitude with its deities; What use have I of crossing over all by myself, being fully resolute? I will attain Omniscience and become a Buddha for the sake of the multitude with its deities” (Jayawickrama 2002, 17-18). In an EA sutra, the Buddha said to Mahākāśyapa, “The Tathāgata will do five things in the world. Which five? First, to turn the Dharma Wheel; second, to teach the Dharma to his father; third, to teach the Dharma to his mother; fourth, to guide the laity to the Bodhisattva Path; and fifth, to make a bodhisattva prophecy.”³⁹⁾ The Buddha’s compassion to ferry men and gods is present throughout the Āgāmas. He frequently said, “I practiced [loving-kindness] to benefit myself, to benefit others, and to benefit the multitudes; out of compassion for the world, I looked for truth, benefits, peace, and happiness for men and gods.”⁴⁰⁾ He told his disciples that they should practice to benefit themselves, benefit others, and benefit both self and others.⁴¹⁾ He stated that a person who practices to “benefit himself, to benefit others, to benefit many people, who has compassion toward the world, who seeks truth, benefits, peace, and happiness for men and gods, is the paramount, the biggest, the supreme, the best, the superior, the most respectable, and the finest.”⁴²⁾ These statements are found

39) EA.24.2 (T. 125, 2.622c12): 世尊告曰。如來在世間。應行五事。云何為五。一者當轉法輪。二者當與父說法。三者當與母說法。四者當導凡夫人立菩薩行。五者當授菩薩別。This is stated in EA.36.5 (T. 125, 2.703b17) in a slightly different way: “to turn the Dharma wheel; to ferry his parents; to convert people without faith into faithful ones; to make those who have no Bodhisattva resolve to have Bodhisattva resolve; and to make a buddha’s prophecy in the course.” 釋提桓因白世尊言。如來亦說。夫如來出世必當為五事。云何為五。當轉法輪。當度父母。無信之人立於信地。未發菩薩心令發菩薩意。於其中間當受佛決。

40) MA.8 (T. 26, 1.429c14; AN.7.66 Sattasūriya Sutta): 為自饒益。亦饒益他。饒益多人。愍傷世間。為天。為人求義及饒益。求安隱快樂。The same narrative appears in MA.60, MA.67, and MA.68.

41) SA.348 (T. 99, 2. 98b17; SN.12.22 Dutiyadasabala Sutta): 比丘。當觀自利。利他。自他俱利。

42) MA.1 (T. 26, 1.422a4; AN. 7.68 Dhammaññū Sutta): 若自饒益。亦饒益他。饒益多人。愍傷世間。為天。為人求義及饒益。求安隱快樂者。此人於彼人中為極第一。為大。為上。為最。為勝。為尊。為妙。

in both the Āgamas and the Nikāyas. They are the spirits advocated by early Mahāyāna Buddhism. They also explain why early Mahāyānists encouraged copying and disseminating their texts, many of which were most likely composed to preach to the laity. The *Diamond Sutra*, for example, states that “Wherever this sutra is present, all the gods, the men, and the asuras of the world shall make offerings to it. They should know that this place is like a stupa, where everyone should respectfully bow, circumambulate, and scatter incense and flowers.”⁴³⁾ The *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* states, “May all sentient beings always write on precious silk the right Dharma.”⁴⁴⁾

As the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* and the *Pāli Buddhist Legends* cited in Table 1 show, the transformation buddha is an idealized way to preach the Dharma to men and gods in all directions. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra* says, “In this great trichiliocosm, and in all the world systems, the same thought occurred to each one of these gods and men: ‘It is for me that the Tathāgata, seated there, demonstrates Dharma’” (Conze 1985, 41). The counterpart text in the *Pāli Buddhist Legends* states, “Since the Teacher saw in that vast throng none other than himself who understood his mind and could ask him questions, he put forth his supernatural power and created a double; the double then asked him questions and the Teacher answered them Seeing the Teacher perform his miracle thus and hearing him preach the Law, two hundred millions of living beings in that vast throng obtained Comprehension of the Law” (Burlingame 1921, 62).

The narratives in the two texts are highly consistent with an EA sutra.⁴⁵⁾ In the

43) *Jin gang bore boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (*Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*; T. 235, 8.750c21): 在在處處。若有此經。一切世間天、人、阿修羅所應供養。當知此處。則為是塔。皆應恭敬。作禮圍繞。以諸華香而散其處。 Translated by Kumārajīva (Jiunoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, 344–413 CE).

44) *Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* (T. 279, 10.142c18): 願一切眾生。常以寶繒。書寫正法。

45) EA.42.3 (T. 125, 2.750c28- 751a19): 是時。世尊須臾之頃。口出五色光。遍照方域。爾時。阿難復白佛言。復以何因緣。如來今日口出五色光。世尊告曰。我向作是念。本未成道時長處地獄。吞熱鐵丸。或食草木。長此四大。或作驪。驢。駱駝。象。馬。猪。羊。或作餓鬼。長四大形。有受胎之厄。或受天福。食自然甘露。我今以成如來。以根力覺道成如來身。由此因緣故。口出五色光爾。是時。須臾之間口出微妙之光。勝於前光。是時。阿難白世尊言。復以何因緣。如來重出光勝於前者。世尊告曰。我向者作是念。過去諸佛世尊取滅度。遺法不久存於世。我復重思惟。以何方便。使我法得久存在世。如來身者金剛之數。意欲碎此身如芥子許。流布世間。使將來

sutra, right before the Buddha took nirvāṇa, from his mouth flew out five-colored radiance that shined in all directions. When Ānanda asked the Buddha why the Tathāgata emitted five-colored radiance, the Buddha replied,

“I just recalled that for a long time before I became enlightened, I had been in hell, devouring hot iron balls, or ate grass and bushes to sustain this body of four elements, or turned into mule, donkey, camel, elephant, horse, pig, and sheep, or turned into a hungry ghost, growing a body of four elements, and underwent the suffering of entering a womb, or enjoyed heavenly rapture and ate natural sweet dew. Now I have become a Tathāgata and developed a body of the Tathāgata through the [five] roots, the [five] powers, the [seven] factors [conducive to enlightenment], and the [eight-fold] paths. It is because of these reasons that the five-colored radiance flew out of my mouth.”

Then instantly, fine radiance flew out of the Buddha’s mouth again, which was superior to the earlier radiance. Ānanda asked the Buddha, “For what reason now has the Buddha again emitted radiance that is superior to the earlier radiance?” The Buddha replied,

“I just thought as such, ‘When the past buddhas took nirvāṇa, their Dharmas did not last long in the world.’ I thought again, ‘How to make my Dharma exist in the world for a long time?’ The Buddha’s body is like a diamond. I want to break this body into pieces as small as mustard seeds and let them disseminate in the world, so that in the future world, the faithful laity who are not able to see the Buddha’s image could obtain them and make offerings to them. The bliss and benefits from this will make them be reborn into the families of the four casts, the families of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Thirty-three Heaven, the Suyāma Heaven, the Tuṣita Heaven, the Nirmāṇarati Heaven, and the Paranirmita-vaśa-vartin Heaven. Because of the

之世。信樂檀越不見如來形像者。取供養之。因緣是福祐。當生四姓家,四天王家,三十三天,豔天,兜術天,化自在天,他化自在天。因此福祐。當生欲界,色界,無色界。或復有得須陀洹道,斯陀含道,阿那含道,阿羅漢道,辟支佛道。若成佛道。由此因緣故。出斯光明爾。 Also see EA. 49.7 (T. 125, 2.801b24-29).

bliss and benefits, they will be reborn into the desired realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. Some may attain the paths of Sotāpanna, Sakadāgāmi, Anāgāmi, Arhatship, and Pratyekabuddha, some may attain Buddhahood. It is because of such reasons that I emitted the radiance.” [The underscoring is added by the author]

As can be seen, the narratives on colored radiance, the Buddha’s transformation images, and their dissemination to all directions to teach the Dharma to the laity are consistent among the EA, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, and the Pāli *Buddhist Legends*, although their wordings varied. The EA sutra further corroborates the conclusion that the early Mahāyāna Buddhists promoted the concept of buddhas in the ten directions to preach to the laity and their gods.

Another EA sutra well illustrates the use of transformation as a magic power to preach to the laity.⁴⁶⁾ In the sutra, Anāthapiṇḍada’s daughter was married to a nonbeliever in Pūrṇavardhana. Upset, she prayed and wished the Buddha and his disciples to come to her house from afar. The Pāli text only narrates that the next day, the Buddha and five hundred monks “came through the air in decorated floats created by the order of Śakra, king of the devas.” Overwhelmed, the daughter’s parents-in-law became followers of the Buddha.⁴⁷⁾ The EA version of the sutra, however, uses a very dramatic narrative and highly embellished language to describe how the Buddha’s disciples, led by the Buddha, transformed into miraculous images as they left Śrāvastī and descended into Pūrṇavardhana from the sky: Cunda transformed himself into five hundred flower trees, Śuddhipanthaka into five hundred oxen, Rāhula into five hundred peacocks, Kapphina into five hundred golden-winged birds, Uruvilvā Kāśyapa into five hundred dragons, Subhūti into a glass hill, Kātyāyana into five hundred swans, Revata into five hundred tigers, Mahākāśyapa into five hundred horses, and Maudgalyāyana into five hundred white elephants. Finally, the Buddha appeared, surrounded by one thousand and two hundred disciples, with Kaundinya and Brahmā on his right side, Śāriputra and Śakra on his left side, Ānanda and

46) EA.30.3 (T. 125, 2.662b10-663c14).

47) *Dhammapada*, Verse 304, “The Story of Culasubhadda.”

Vajrapāṇi behind him. People in both Śrāvastī and Pūrṇavardhana were completely overwhelmed by the scene. Such a dramatic depiction of transformation is consistent with the narrative that the Buddha projected his duplicates into the world to preach to the laity. The scene that the Buddha was surrounded by his disciples and gods is also a motif that frequently appears in ancient Buddhist art, which is an important medium to preach to the laity.

V. Concluding Comments

The Pāli text *Kathāvatthu*, which is believed to have been composed during the time of Ashoka, refuted various points of view held by other Buddhist schools, including the belief in buddhas in the ten directions. It says, “Some, like the Mahāsāṃghikas, hold that a Buddha exists in the four quarters of the firmament, above, below, and around, causing his change of habitat to come to pass in any sphere of being.” The text then refuted such a point of view:

“Do you mean that they persist in the eastern quarter? You deny. Then you contradict yourself. You assent. Then I ask, How is [this Eastern] Buddha named? What is his family? his clan? what the names of his parents? or of his pair of elect disciples? or of his body-servant? What sort of raiment or bowl does he bear? and in what village, town, city, kingdom, or country?” (Aung and Davids 1915, 354-355).

As the current research has demonstrated, this refutation is based on a misrepresentation or misunderstanding of the concept without knowing that the buddhas in the ten directions are in fact buddhas of transformation, a concept that the Pāli text itself contains. Put another way, the *Kathāvatthu* attacked a “straw man.” Such miscommunication might have been caused by geographical distance and language barriers in the ancient world, or by some other factors that we do not know. On the other hand, however, the *Kathāvatthu*’s accusation in a way corroborates a narrative in Paramārtha and Jizang’s works that “in the

second hundred years” after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa, the Mahāsāṃghikas split into several schools due to disagreement over Mahāyāna sutras. According to Jizang’s *Sanlun Xuanyi*, “In the second hundred years [after the Buddha’s nirvāṇa], from the Mahāsāṃghikas further branched out three schools. At the time, the Mahāsāṃghikas lived in the kingdom of Avguttarāpa because Mahādeva went there on his own and stayed there. This kingdom was to the north of Rājagaha. The school mixed Mahāyāna sutras, such as the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, into the Tripiṭaka in its teaching. Some believed them, some did not. As a result, it divided into two schools.”⁴⁸⁾ This indicates that both Mahāyāna and its sutras appeared much earlier than we thought.⁴⁹⁾

The *Samayabhedo Paracanacakra Śāstra* by Vasumitra (circa 1st century CE), which surveyed the points of view held by different early schools, did not mention that the Mahāsāṃghikas or any of its sub-schools held the belief that there are real buddhas in the ten directions.⁵⁰⁾ If there were such a school, the author would have noted it because such a view would undoubtedly have been “heretic” for the early schools. The plausible explanation is that the Mahāsāṃghikas did not truly believe that there were real buddhas in the ten directions; what they promoted were the transformation buddhas. In short, the early classical Mahāyāna Buddhists were devoted only to the Śākyamuni Buddha, and it is a myth that they truly believed that there were real buddhas in the ten directions. In his depiction of the Buddhist sculptures in Bharhut and Sanchi, Lamotte (1988, 415) noted that “At that ancient period, the mental attitude

48) *Sanlun xuanyi* 三論玄義 (Profound Meaning of the Three Treatises; T. 1852, 45.8c16): 至二百年中。從大眾部又出三部。于時大眾部因摩訶提婆私度住央崛多羅國。此國在王舍城北。此部將華嚴般若等大乘經雜三藏中說之。時人有信者。有不信者。故成二部。Composed by Jizang 吉藏 (549–623 CE). Jizang’s information came from Paramārtha’s (Zhendi 真諦; 499–569 CE) annotation to the *Samayabhedo paracanacakra śāstra*, which is no longer available.

49) Modern scholarship appears to agree that *Mahāyāna* appeared no earlier than the 1st century BC. For example, Hiraakawa (1990, 8) stated that Mahāyāna “must have arisen around the beginning of the common era.” Conze (1983, 195) argued that Mahāyāna appeared “About the beginning of the Christian era”. Yinshu (1994, 2) stated that: “Around the 1st Century CE, practitioners of the Bodhisattva Path appeared in Indian Buddhism.”

50) *Yibu zong lun lun* 異部宗輪論 (T. 2031). Translated by Xuanzang (602–664 CE).

remained strictly orthodox, that is, in conformity with the spirit of the Buddha.” This statement can be as well used to depict the early Mahāyāna Buddhists’ attitude toward the Buddha. Lastly, it is necessary to note that although it is possible to discern buddhas in the ten directions as transformation buddhas in some early Mahāyāna texts, as is demonstrated by the current study, in many later Mahāyāna texts, the distinction between the concept as a convenient means and as a perceived real existence became murky. A case-by-case approach is needed in scholarly research.

Abbreviations

SA	<i>Samyukta Āgama</i>
MA	<i>Madhyama Āgama</i>
EA	<i>Ekottara Āgama</i>
DA	<i>Dīrgha Āgama</i>
AN	<i>Anguttara Nikāya</i>
DN	<i>Dīrgha Nikāya</i>
MN	<i>Majjhima Nikāya</i>
SN	<i>Samyutta Nikāya</i>

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“Buddhas in the Ten Directions”: Its Origins in the Early Buddhist Texts and Metamorphosis

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Using major early Mahāyāna texts and the Āgamas/Nikāyas, this research demonstrates that in its earliest form, the so-called “buddhas in the ten directions” are actually transformation buddhas of the Śākyamuni Buddha, or duplicates of the Buddha in the infinite worlds. The research shows that the concept had its origins in the similes comparing the Buddha to the sun and the moon as well as the Twin Miracle Legend, both of which are found in the Northern Āgamas and the Pāli texts. The research further shows that Buddha Akṣobhya is a transformation buddha; while Amitābha represents a metamorphosis of the concept of “transformation buddha” from being a duplicate of the Śākyamuni Buddha to a supposedly real celestial buddha in another world system. As such, the devotionism toward Amitābha was a result of syncretism of early Mahāyāna and the Indo-Iranian religions at the northwestern frontier of Indian Buddhism’s sphere of influence. It is the culturally constructed Buddhism instead of the early classical Mahāyāna that is based on the Six-Pāramitās. Lastly, the research argues that early Mahāyāna Buddhists promoted the concept of “buddhas in the ten directions” to preach to the laity, as is consistently evidenced by the early Buddhist texts and the early Mahāyāna texts. Based on the analysis, the

research argues that the early Mahāyāna Buddhists were devoted only to the Śākyamuni Buddha, and it is a myth that they truly believed that there were real buddhas in the ten directions.

Keywords: buddhas in the ten directions, transformation buddha, Twin Miracle Legend, Mahāyāna, Akṣobhya, Amitābha

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