

HAMAZAR HAMA ASHO BEM!
YAZDAN MITHRA

MITHRAISM
MITHRAEUM JAPAN



Zen Buddhism and Persian Culture

An Investigation on the Influence of
Simorghiansian Culture
on Zen Buddhism

یزدان میترا

ONE FORCE, ONE JUSTICE, MAY WE BE!

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In gratitude to Dr. Jamshid Jamshidi
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CONTENTS

Preface

1. Theory of Iranian Influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism

- 1. 1 Outline
- 1. 2 Discussions
- 1. 3 Maga-Brahmanas
- 1. 4 Central Asia

2. Overview of Zen Buddhism

- 2. 1 Etymological Origin
- 2. 2 Characteristics
- 2. 3 Transmission
- 2. 4 Scriptures

3. Bodhidharma the Founder of Zen Buddhism
 3. 1 Profile
 3. 2 *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang* 洛陽伽藍記
 3. 3 *The Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* 二入四行
 3. 4 Unwritten Teaching
 3. 5 Wandering Zen monks
 3. 6 Zen and Roman Mithraism
4. Kegon-kyō
 4. 1 Doctrine of Universal Buddha and His Avatars
 4. 2 Bamiyan
5. The Vijnāna-vādin
 5. 1 Origin
 5. 2 Teachings
 5. 3 Link to Mithra
6. Mādhyamaka philosophies and the Prajñāpāramitā literatures
 6. 1 History
 6. 2 Teachings
 6. 3 Link to Mithra
7. Ten Bull Pictures
8. Concluding Remark

Bibliography

Abbreviations

Ch Chinese
Jp Japanese
Skt Sanskrit

Preface

Although Zen Buddhism is the most popular branch of Buddhism in the West, western people's view on it is limited. The main reason behind it is caused by the lack of knowledge about Persian (Iranian) influence.

Therefore the objectives of this article are to provide some knowledge about it:

(1) Iranian influence upon Mahāyāna Buddhism in General

Maga-Brahmins and the religious situation of Central Asia at the time of formation age of Mahāyāna Buddhism are introduced. A Theory that Mahāyāna Buddhism is not Buddhism is

introduced. This theory is well known among Japanese researchers and has fairly support. The characteristic features of Iranian culture of Central Asia are also explained based on the recent archaeological discovery by Japanese researchers.

(2) Iranian influence upon Zen Buddhism

Characteristic elements of Zen Buddhism, i. e. the founder of Zen, Kegon-kyō, the Vijnāna-vādin, Mādhyamaka philosophies, the Prajñāpāramitā literatures and Ten Bull Pictures are examined in the context introduced by (2) to show their Persian connection.

1. Theory of Iranian Influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism

1.1 Outline

Many Japanese researchers (mainly archaeologists and researchers on Persian culture) agree that there IS Iranian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Buddhism can be classified into three schools (Table 1. 1); Theravāda 上座部, Mahāyāna 大乘 and Vajirayāna 金剛乘. Theravāda is the oldest Buddhist school (250 BC). Mahāyāna arose in the area which encompasses northwest part of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, east part of Iran (1st BC-1st AD) under the strong influence of Iranian culture. Esoteric Buddhism arose until the 7th Century in the above area and spread to Tibet, Central Asia, China and Japan. Shingon-sect 真言宗 and Tendai-sect 天台宗 are its middle form. Vajirayāna 金剛乘 (Tibetan Buddhism) is its later form. They are also under the strong Iranian influence.

Table 1.1 Three Schools of Buddhism

School		Birth	Lord Buddha	Relevant Persian Deity*
Theravāda 上座部		3 BC	Gautama	None
Mahāyāna 大乘	Pure Land 淨土	1-2 AD	Amitābha/Amitāyus	Mithra/Zurwan
	Mādhyamaka 中觀	3 AD	None	None
	Kegon 華嚴	3-4 AD	Vairocana	Mithra
	Vijnāna-vādin 唯識	3-4 AD	Maitreya	Mithra
	Zen 禪	7 AD	Vairocana	Mithra
	Esoteric Buddhism -Shingon 真言 -Tendai 天台	7-8 AD	Mahāvairocana	Mithra
Vajirayāna 金剛乘		10 AD	Kālacakra	Zurwan

*Relevant Persian Deity: According to the speculations on the names, iconographical considerations and archaeological discovery in Bamiyan.

In section 1. 2 and 1. 3 the general view is supplemented. In chapter 3 to 5, evidences of Iranian influence over Zen are shown. In chapter 3 the evidence of the Zen founder's Persian origin is shown. In chapter 4 close link between Iranian Mithra and the Vijnāna-vādin, which is an important element incorporated into Zen, is shown. In chapter 5 a close parallel between Mysteries of Mithra and the Ten Bull Pictures, which is an important Zen meditation tool, is shown.

1.2 Discussions

Those who are accustomed to the western methodology tend to criticize the theory of Iranian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism not an academic theory but a mere speculation. For there are no literal evidences (scripture, inscription, etc.), but are circumstantial evidences (archaeological discoveries), speculations on names/observances and iconological considerations only. The difficulty to show literal evidence comes from:

(1) Mahāyāna Buddhism's tradition (strategy) on appellation of deity names. They use

intentionally general names such as Vairocana (Sun God), Amitābha (Limitless Light), Amitāyus (Limitless Time), etc, in order to erase all the ethnic elements.

- (2) The Indo-Iranian tradition preserves their religious literatures by oral tradition. Therefore after Islamization, pre-Islamic Iranian tradition is almost lost.
- (3) Deity names are translated into Chinese not by transcription but by making new name reflecting its meaning. Therefore Chinese literature are little useful.

As such the theory of Iranian influence on Mahāyāna Buddhism still lacks literal evidence. However it should not be disregarded as a mere speculation. For the theory is now gaining more circumstantial evidences by the archaeological excavation in Bamiyan valley and its surrounding area by Japanese archaeologists.

1.3 Maga-Brahmins

There is a legend of Mithra's magi in the area (Afghanistan, Pakistan, north-west India) where Mahāyāna Buddhism was formed. It is a legend about the Maga-Brahmanas, atarvan Maga, Bhojaka or Sakaldwipiya Brahmins. They identify themselves as having Iranian roots, and assert that they inherit their by-name *maga* from a group of priests (*cf. maga*) who established themselves in India as the Maga-Dias or Maga-Brahmanas. Their major centers are in Rajasthan in Western India and near Gaya in Bihar. According to *Bhavishya Purana* and other texts, they were invited to settle in Punjab to conduct the worship of Lord Sun (Mitra or Surya in Sanskrit). *Bhavishya Purana* explicitly associates them to the rituals of the Zurvanism. The members of the community still worship in Sun temples in India. They are also hereditary priests in several Jain temples in Gujarat and Rajasthan. Bhojakas are mentioned in the copperplates of the Kadamba dynasty (4-6th cent) as managers of Jain institutions. Images of Lord Sun Mihir in India are shown wearing a central Asian dress, complete with boots. The term "Mihir" in India is regarded to represent the Maga influence. Here is the summary of *Bhavishya Purana* 133:

Krishna's son Samba was afflicted with leprosy, which was cured after he worshiped Surya, Hinduism's god of the Sun. In response, he built a temple to Surya on the banks of the Chandrabhaga river, but no competent Brahmin could be found to take up the role of priest in the temple.

So Samba sought help of Gauramukha, the adviser of the yadu chief, Ugrasena. Gauramukha responded with a suggestion that Samba go to Shakdvipa (see note on Mahabharata 6:11, below^[a]) and invite their priests to worship Surya. Further, asked Samba, "tell me, oh Brahmin, what are the antecedents of these worshipers of the Sun?" To which Gauramukha replied... "The first of the Brahmins amidst the Shakhas was called 'Sujihva.' [...] He had a daughter of the name Nikshubha, who so enamored Surya that she was impregnated by him. Thus she gave birth to Jarashabda who was the founding father of all the *Maga-Acharya*. They are distinguished by the sacred girdle called the *Avyanga* that they wear around their waist." And so Samba called on Krishna to send him Garuda, on whose back he then flew to Shakadwipa. He collected the *Maga-Acharya*, brought them back to India and installed them as priests of his Surya temple.

Of the pious representatives of 18 families Samba invited to resettle in the city of Sambapura, eight were Mandagas, and their descendants became Shudras. The other 10 were Maga Brahmins, who married Bhoja vamsa women and so their descendants came

to be known as
Bhojakas.

The following points should be remembered:

(1) Mithra

Images of Lord Sun Mihir in India are shown wearing a central Asian dress, complete with boots. The same image of Mithra is depicted in the huge mural paintings in Bamiyan's Mahāyāna Buddhism site (300-400 AD). Interestingly Bamiyan's Mithra has strong Hellenistic tint. For example Mithra is accompanied by the twin gods Cautes and Cautopates as Roman Mithras. (Maeda. *The Golden City Bamiyan Revived by Hi-vision Digital*; Odani. "The Colossal Buddha and Maitreya Cult in Bamiyan")

(2) Maga-Brahmanas

By Japanese researchers, they are considered to be are Indo-Scythians (the Sacas), and Gautama Buddha was the prince of them. They are religiously very active during 45 to 450 AD. It corresponds to the forming age of Mahāyāna Buddhism. (Kurimoto. *Asuka: the Capital City of Sirius*)

1. 4 Central Asia

At the time when Zen Buddhism were transmitted along the trans-Asian trade route known as the Silk Road, various religions such as Mithraism, the cult of Mitra and Anahita, Zoroastrianism (Mazda worship), the Greek polytheism, the cult of local heroes (Siyavush in Khorezm and Sogd), early Mahāyāna Buddhism, Hinduism and the Nestrian Christianity flourished along this route..

The major transmitters of Buddhism to China were the Iranian peoples of Parthia, Bactria, and Transoxiana, whose convenient position between east and west enabled them to serve as middlemen along the Silk Road. The latter group in particular, known as the Sogdians, established communities along the trade routes from Iran and India all the way into China.

Actually many important features of Mahāyāna Buddhism display Iranian influences, such as the soteriological (salvation) function of Maitreya 弥勒 (the one who helps people toward salvation) and the Buddha-nature 仏性 (Manichaeic particle of Light). Central deities also had Iranian origins (Table 1. 2).

Table 1.2 Buddhas and their Iranian Origins

Buddha			Iranian Origin
Sanskrit	Chinese/Japanese	Meaning of Name	
Maitreya	弥勒 Miroku	Friend, Loving One	Mihr
Vairocana	毘盧遮那 Birušana	Sun God	Mihr, Mihir, Mithras
Mahāvairocana	大日 Dainichi	Great Sun God	Mihr, Mihir, Mithras
Amitāyus	無量寿 Muryōju	Limitless Time	Zurwan
Amitābha	阿弥陀 Amida	Limitless Light	Aanagran
Avalokiteśvara	觀音 Kannon	Lord who gazes down (at the world)	Sraoša
Mahāsthāmaprāpta	大勢至 Daiseiši	Great Power	Rašnu

The culture of the Iranian people in the Central Asia was Simorghian, which is the original culture of Iranian people which predates Zoroastrianism (Jamshid. *farhang-e iran*; <http://www.shamogoloparvaneh.com/farhang.html>). Mihr (Mithra), Anahita, Bhaga, Farrox, Mah, Haoma, Ohrmizd (Ahura Mazda), Yima and Zardusht (Zoroaster) were the gods in its pantheon. Mihr and Anahita worship were prominent. Ohrmizd was not the supreme god. Ohrmizd worship was a mere branch of it. (Aoki. *History of Zoroastrianism*, p194-204; Kyō. *History of Zoroastrian Arts in China*)

Considering in the chronological order of the births of Mahāyāna sects, it is evident that the incorporation of Iranian Mithra into Buddhism was done in two steps.

Step 1

Mithra was incorporated as the sole successor of Gautama the World Teacher. Alexander the Great (356–323 BC) brought Greek culture to Central Asia. This gave certain influence upon early Buddhism. Buddhists developed Gandhāra style art, which was a merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian, and Indian arts. This development began during the Parthian Period (50 BC – AD 75). Gandhāra style flourished and achieved its peak during the Kushan period (60 BC-375 AD). It might have affected the rise of Maitreya cult too. Maitreya cult developed during the period from 2nd BC to 2nd AD under the reign of Bactria (265-125 BC) and Kushan (60 BC-375 AD). Sutras called “Maitreya trilogy” 弥勒三部經 (Jp: Miroku-sanbukyō) were also formed during this period. The state religion of Bactria was Mithraism. Kushan adopted this policy.

Step 2

Persian culture penetrated into the area west to Iran. During its westward penetration, it absorbed various elements from Greco-Roman culture and formed Roman Mithraism. By a series of decrees called the "Theodosian decrees", Christianity became the state religion of Roman Empire, while proscription was sentenced to all the other religions (392 AD). Roman Mithraism brought back Hellenistic culture to its homeland (Iran and Central Asia). It strengthened Sun God aspect of Mithra and Mithra worship. It penetrated into Buddhism and formed new religion which we call Mahāyāna Buddhism. Mithra became Lord God of newly formed Buddhism (i. e. Mahāyāna Buddhism), and became to be called Vairocana (Sun God). The identification of Maitreya with Vairocana was assured in the doctrine.

2. Overview of Zen Buddhism

2.1 Etymological Origin

Zen 禪 is a school of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Both Japanese and Chinese use the same Chinese character “禪”, however its pronunciation differs. Chinese pronounces it “Chán”, Japanese “Zen”. Japanese pronunciation preserves old Chinese pronunciation. “Zen” retains its etymological original Sanskrit pronunciation *dhyāna*, which means "meditation".

2.2 Characteristics

Zen Buddhism focuses on attaining enlightenment (bodhi) through meditation. It teaches that all human beings have the Buddha-nature 仏性, and the potential to attain enlightenment, within them, but the Buddha-nature been clouded by ignorance. To overcome this ignorance, Zen rejects the study of scriptures, religious rites, devotional practices, and good works in favor of meditation leading to a sudden breakthrough of insight (direct realization) and awareness of ultimate reality. Training in the Zen path is usually undertaken by a disciple under the guidance of a master.

2.3 Transmission

China

Zen is traditionally credited to be established at the Śaolin temple 少林寺 in China by a Persian wandering monk Bodhidharma. He came to China to teach a "special teaching not-written in the scriptures". The reason was that the teaching is so subtle that it is impossible to transmit it by the words.

Zen is thought to have developed as an amalgam of various currents in Mahāyāna Buddhist thoughts—among them the Vijnāna-vādin 唯識* Mādhyamaka 中觀 philosophies and the Prajñāpāramitā 波羅蜜多 literature—and of several traditions in China, particularly Taoism and preceding Mahāyāna Buddhism sect Kegon-šū 華嚴宗(Ch: Huáyán-zōng). The first document which mentioned Zen as a distinct school of Buddhism was written in 7th Century. From China Zen subsequently spread south to Vietnam, and east to Korea and Japan.

Japan

Zen Buddhism arrived in Japan as early as the 7th century, but did not develop significantly there until the 12th century. Zen has since been an important force in Japan. It has had considerable influence on Japanese culture, "reaching far beyond the temple and entering into cultural and social areas of all kinds, including gardening, ink painting, calligraphy, the tea ceremony, and even military strategies." Zen priests played an important role in the political unrest of 16th century Japan, both serving as diplomats and administrators and preserving Japanese cultural life. There are about 9.6 million Zen Buddhists in Japan today.

Western World

Zen is perhaps the most well-known school of Buddhism in America. Its concepts have been influential on western world since the latter half of the 20th Century. Numerous Zen groups have developed in North America and Europe within the last century.

2.4 Scriptures

(1) Scriptures of Kegon-šū 華嚴宗

-Kegon-kyō 華嚴經 (Skt: *Buddhāvataṃsaka-nāma-mahāvaiṣṭya-sūtra*) 3rd AD

(2) Scriptures of the Vijnāna-vādin 唯識

- *Gejinmik-kyō* 解深密經 (Skt: *Samdhi-nirmacana-sūtra*) 3rd AD
- *Yuishiki-sanjū-ju* 唯識三十頌 (Skt: *Trisikā Vijnaptimātratāsiddhih*) 4-5th AD
- *Yuishiki-nijū-ron* 唯識二十論 (Skt: *Vimsatikā Vijnaptimātratāsiddhih*) 4-5th AD

(3) Mādhyamaka 中觀 philosophies and the Prajñāpāramitā 波羅蜜多 literatures

- *Chūron* 中論 (Skt: *Mādhyamaka-kārikā*) 2nd-3rd AD
- *The Heart Sutra* 般若心經 (Skt: *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya*)

(4) Meditation

- *The Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* 二入四行 (Jp: *Ninyū-shigyō-ron*; Ch: *Erh-ju ssu-hsing*)
- *Ten Bull Pictures* 十牛圖

(5) Others

- *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang* 洛陽伽藍記 (Jp: *Rakuyō-garan-ki* ; Ch: *Luòyáng Qiélánjì*)

3. Bodhidharma the Founder of Zen Buddhism

3.1 Profile

The Founder of Zen Buddhism is Bodhidharma 達磨 (470-543). He is the twenty-eighth patriarch after Gautama Buddha in the Indian lineage, and the first Chinese patriarch (i. e. the founder) of Zen 禪 Buddhism.

There are two legends about his biography. One says he is a Persian, the other says Indian. Most Japanese scholars and Buddhist monks think he is a Persian. In Japan, even in popular books and internet articles he is introduced as a Persian.



Photo 3. 1 Japanese scroll calligraphy of Bodhidharma

By Hakuin Ekaku 白隱 慧鶴, 1686–1769

— Bodhidharma is said to be a blue-eyed Persian 碧眼胡僧 (Hekigan-kosō) in Zen tradition. “Blue-eyed Persian” means Hellenized Persian, and/or a Persian who has much knowledge about western culture. Mithra’s magi are such Persians.

Note

Bodhidharma’s Indic origin legend is written in a short preface to the *Two Entrances and Four Acts* by Tánlín 曇林 (506–574). According to it, he was from the southern region of India, born as the third son of a great Indian king of the Pallava dynasty. He left his kingdom after becoming a Buddhist monk and travelled through Southeast Asia into Southern China.

Those who want to have a definite lineage of Zen Buddhism tend to stick to Indic origin theory. But this theory is highly dubious. For there is no room for doubt that Mahāyāna Buddhism including Zen was developed in Central Asia and there is no evidence to show its close link to South India.

3. 2 *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang* 洛陽伽藍記 (Ch: *Luòyáng Qiélánjì*; Jp: *Rakuyō-garan-ki*)

3. 2. 1 Bibliography

This was compiled in 547 by his wife a writer and translator of Mahāyāna Buddhist texts into the Chinese language. Western scholar Broughton (1999:55) dates Bodhidharma's presence in Luoyang to between 516 and 526, when the temple referred to—Yōngníngsì 永寧

寺—was at the height of its glory. Starting in 526, Yōngníngsì suffered damage from a series of events, ultimately leading to its destruction in 534.

Japanese scholars and monks think this book is more reliable than *The Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* 二入四行(see 3. 3).

3. 2. 2 English Translation

At that time there was a monk of the Western Region named Bodhidharma, a **Persian Central Asian**. He traveled from the wild borderlands to China. Seeing the golden disks [on the pole on top of Yung-ning's stupa] reflecting in the sun, the rays of light illuminating the surface of the clouds, the jewel-bells on the stupa blowing in the wind, the echoes reverberating beyond the heavens, he sang its praises. He exclaimed: "Truly this is the work of spirits." He said: "I am 150 years old, and I have passed through numerous countries. There is virtually no country I have not visited. Even the distant Buddha realms lack this." He chanted homage and placed his palms together in salutation for days on end.

3. 2. 3 Mediaval Japanese Translation

時に西域の沙門で菩提達摩という者有り、**波斯*** (ペルシア) 国の**胡人***也。起ちて荒裔 (はるか) なる自 (よ) り中土に來遊す。

永寧寺塔の金盤日に炫 (かがや) き、光は雲表に照り、宝鐸の風を含みて天外に響出するを見て、歌を詠じて実に是れ神功なりと讚歎す。自ら年一百五十歳なりとて諸国を歴渉し、遍く周らざる靡 (な) く、而して此の寺精麗にして閻浮所 (諸仏の国) にも無い也、極物・境界にも亦 (ま) た未だ有らざると云えり。此の口に南無と唱え、連日合掌す。

*波斯 Ch: Pa-shi; Jp: Pa-shi. Chinese transcription of Parsi (Farsi).

*胡人 Ch: Hu-ren; Jp: Ko-jin. Hu 胡 means Persia, Ren 人 means man.

3. 2. 4 Modern Japanese Translation

このころ西域の僧で菩提達摩という者がいた。**ペルシア生まれの胡人 [こじん]**であった。

彼は遙かな夷狄の地を出て、わが中国へ來遊した。

永寧寺の塔の金盤が太陽に輝き、その光が雲表を照らしているのを見て、また金の鈴が風を受けて鳴り、その響きが中天にも届くさまを見、思わず讚文を唱えて、まことに神業だと讚嘆した。その自ら言うところでは、齡は150歳で、もろもろの国を歴遊して、足の及ばない所はないが、この永寧寺の素晴らしさは閻浮にはまたと無いもの、たとえ仏国土を隅なく求めても見当たらないと言い、口に「南無」と唱えつつ、幾日も合掌し続けていた。

(洛陽城内伽藍記卷第一 (永寧寺の条))

3. 3 *The Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices* 二入四行(Ch: *Erh-ju ssu-hsing*; Jp: *Ninyū-shigyō-ron*)

3. 3. 1 Bibliograpy

This was written by Tánlín 曇林 (506–574). Tánlín's brief biography of the "Dharma Master" is found in his preface to *The Two Entrances and Four Acts* 二入四行, a text traditionally attributed to Bodhidharma. Tánlín has traditionally been considered a disciple of Bodhidharma, but it is more likely that he was a student of Huikě, who in turn was a

student of Bodhidharma.

Though this text was attributed to Bodhidharma, a great deal of material was added to it, probably around the 8th century, by the monks and/or other anonymous groups including Taoist. Therefore Japanese scholars think this text is less reliable than *The Record of the Buddhist Monasteries of Luoyang*. (Atsushi, Ibuki. "Is the Treatise on the Two Entrances and Four Practices Truly the Record of Bodhidharma's Teaching?", *Journal of Indian and Buddhist studies* 55(1) pp.127-134, 2006. 12. 20)

3. 3. 2 English Translation

The Dharma Master was a South Indian of the Western Region. He was the third son of a great Indian king of the Pallava dynasty. His ambition lay in the Mahayana path, and so he put aside his white layman's robe for the black robe of a monk [...] Lamenting the decline of the true teaching in the outlands, he subsequently crossed distant mountains and seas, traveling about propagating the teaching in Han and Wei.

3. 4 Unwritten Teaching

Zen Buddhism is a teaching of Gautama which has been transmitted without scriptures. This is called the doctrine of Huryūmonji 不立文字 (Nakamura, Gen et al. ed. *Iwanami's Dictionary of Buddhism*). Huryūmonji means "teaching established without written scriptures". Later this doctrine was supplemented by a legendary story about the Flower Sermon (14th AD). It said that Gautama gathered his disciples one day for a dharma talk. When they gathered together, he kept silence, uttering no word. Some of the disciples speculated that he was tired or ill. After a certain time has passed, he silently held up to twirled a flower and twinkled his eyes. Some disciples tried to interpret what this meant, though none of them were correct. One of the Buddha's disciples, Mahākāśyapa, silently gazed at the flower and broke into a broad smile. The Buddha then acknowledged Mahākāśyapa's insight by saying the following: I possess the true Dharma eye, the marvelous mind of Nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahākāśyapa. (Dumoulin, Heinrich. *Zen Buddhism: A History*. vol. 1 India and China, pp. 8–9, 68, 166–167, 169–172)

From Persian point of view, true intention of the doctrine of Huryūmonji seems to hide its Persian origin to avoid conflicts with other sects of Buddhism.

3. 5 Wandering Zen monks

In Zen tradition, monks are wandering practitioner-preachers. They wander from place to place without staying long in one place. This behavior reminds us of Persian sufis (wandering dervishes). This parallel should not be disregarded. It should be considered with other points from holistic Simorghian view.

3. 6 Zen and Roman Mithraism

The Šaolin temple 少林寺 (Jp: Šōrin-ji) is famous for its martial arts. There were many monk-warriors in the Šaolin temple. There were also many monk-soldiers (僧兵 sōhei) in Japanese Zen temple Eihei-ji 永平寺. Believers of Roman Mithraism were mainly military

people. This parallel is not a coincidence, but a tendency of Mithraism.

4. Kegon-kyō

4.1 Doctrine of Universal Buddha and His Avatars

Kegon-kyō 華嚴經 (Sk: Buddhāvataṃsaka-nāma-mahāvaiṣṭya-sūtra, Shortened name: The Avataṃsaka Sūtra) is formed in late 3rd to 4th Century in the Central Asia by assembling various teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism widely spread in Central Asia. It became an important scripture of Zen Buddhism (Nakamura. *Iwanami's Dictionary of Buddhism*, p222). According to Kegonkyō, Buddha Vairocana (Sun God) is the Universal Buddha. Gautama is his first avatar. Maitreya is the next and last avatar. Although there is no direct identification of Vairocana with Mithra, in the religious context of the Central Asia at that time, there was no God but Mithra who deserved to be called Vairocana (the Sun God).

Maitreya as the last avatar of Mithra (Vairocana) is one of the essential doctrine of Esoteric Buddhism, and is called the doctrine of identification of Maitreya with Vairocana (Dainichi-Miroku-dōtai 大日弥勒同体). The first monk who brought this doctrine from Central Asia to China is Zenmukon 善無根. Zenmukon wrote a scripture *Manthra Zikr Practice of the Loving One (Miroku) 慈氏菩薩略修愈言我念誦法* in two volumes. He wrote it in this scripture. The doctrine was succeeded by Kongōchi 金剛智, Keika 惠果 and Kūkai 空海. Kūkai is a Japanese monk. He brought it back to Japan.

4.2 Bamiyan Site

This tradition mentioned above is also supported by the archaeological findings in the large site of Buddhists in Bamiyan valley, which was the center of Mhāyāna Buddhism in the same age when Kegon-kyō and Zen were formed.

There are two great stone statues of Buddhas in Bamiyan valley. The east Buddha is Gautama (Shyakyamuni) 38m in height, the west Buddha is Maitreya 55m in height (Photo 4. 1). These are created during 4th to 6th^h century.

The scheme of the mural painting above the head of the west Buddha (Maitreya) represents the heavenly world. The combination of the statues (the west Buddha) and the painting represents their doctrine that Maitreya will come as a messiah Buddha from the Sun sphere in the far future. (Miyaji. *Iconology of Buddhist Arts*)

The Sun God Miiro (Mithra) is drawn above the head of the east Buddha (Gautama) (Photo 4. 2). Two servant-gods in front of Miiro bear torches. They are Cautes and Cautopates of Roman Mithraism. Greek Athena is drawn to protect Miiro. The painting of Miiro above the Gautama indicates that Gautama is a friend of or an avatar of Miiro, just like Roman emperors who are friends of Mithras. This is the doctrine of the Buddhists of Bamiyan. (Maeda. *The Golden City Bamiyan revived by Hi-vision Digital*; http1*; http2*)

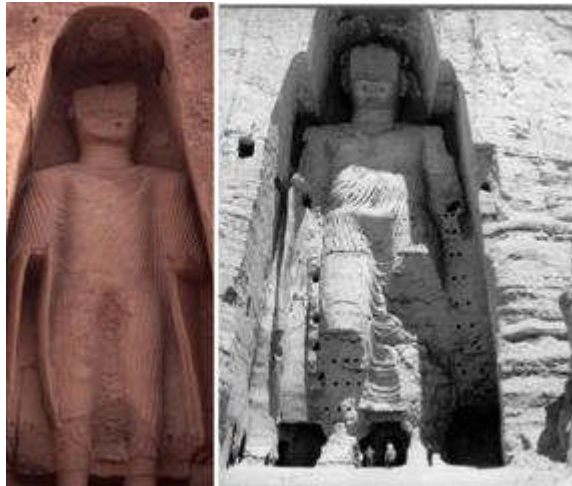


Photo 4. 1 The east Buddha (Gautama, left) and the west Buddha (Maitreya, right)



Photo 4. 2 The mural painting of the Sun God Miho (Mithra)

*http1: <http://bunka.nii.ac.jp/SearchDetail.do?heritageId=48345>

*http2: http://silkroadbamiyan.com/bamiyan_jp.htm

5. The Vijnāna-vādin

5.1 Origin

The Vijnāna-vādin 唯識派 (Jp: Yuiśikiha), also called Yogācāra 瑜伽行派 (Jp: Yugagyōha) was founded by Maitreya 弥勒 (Jp: Miroku), succeeded and expanded by Asanga 無着 (Jp: Mujaku). Maitreya is believed to have lived in 4th-5th centuries. Asanga lived in 4th century and came from a Brahmin family living in present-day Peshawar (Pakistan). The historicity of Maitreya is a matter of controversy. According to tradition Asanga received the inspiration for his teaching direct from Maitreya Buddha. They thought all the material creatures are

illusion, there only exists manas (mind), ultimately the great manas. They practiced yoga to attain this recognition. Vijnāna-vādin is thought to have prepared philosophical and practical basis for the Esoteric Buddhism. (Fischer-Schreiber. *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, p137, 12; Nakamura. *Iwanami Dictionary of Buddhism*, p810)

5.2 Teachings

(1) Eight Types of Consciousness –Hasšiki 八識

According to the Vijnāna-vādin (Yogācāra) philosophy, the consciousness is divided into eight types (Table 5. 1). They are systematized into a layer structure shown in fig. 5. 2. The definition of each term is shown in chapter 1 of [Ten Bull Pictures and Roman Mysteries of Mithra in the Light of Simorgh](#).

Table 5. 1 Eight types of Consciousness

Japanese	English	Persian Sufi Term
Arayašiki 阿賴耶識	Logos (Skt: Ālaya-vijñāna)	Hakk and 'Aql
Manašiki 末那識	Monda (Skt: Manas-vijnāna)	Soul at peace (Nafs-e mutma'inna)
Išiki 意識	Mind	Human soul (Nafs-e insānî) Rational soul (Nafs-e nâtiqa)
Šinšiki 身識	Skin-sense	Animal soul (Nafs-e heiwānî)
Zetsušiki 舌識	Tongue-sense	
Bišiki 鼻識	Nose-sense	
Nišiki 耳識	Ear-sense	
Genšiki 眼識	Eye-sense	

Table 5. 2 Eight layers of Consciousness

The Vijnāna-vādin philosophy	Persian Sufism	Theosophy
Arayashiki 阿賴耶識 Ālaya-vijñāna	Hakk	Logos
	'Aql	Monad
Manashiki 末那識 Manas-vijnāna	Soul at peace (Nafs-e mutma'inna)	Ātmic body
Sikiun 識蘊 Vijnāna	Soul of the Friend of God (Nafs-e qudsî)	Buddhic body
Sōun 想蘊 Samjâ	Human soul (Nafs-e insānî)	Mental body
Gyōun 行蘊 Samskāra	Rational soul (Nafs-e nâtiqa)	
Jyu'un 受蘊 Vedanâ	Animal soul (Nafs-e heiwānî)	Astral body
Seiki 生氣 Purāna	Vegetable soul (Nafs-e nabâtî)	Etheric body
Šikiun 色蘊 Vijnapti	Nature (Tab'at)	Physical body

(2) The Three Natures –Sanšō-setsu 三性說

The Yogācāra philosophy said there are three modes (stages) in our consciousness.

Parikalpita (Fully Conceptualized Consciousness):

This is the lowest stage of consciousness. It is erroneous in its nature. This mode of consciousness perceives things on its conceptualized view tinted by attachment and prejudice.

Paratantra (Other Dependent Consciousness):

This is the middle mode of consciousness. Its nature is partially liberated. Although its view is still deeply influenced by its conceptualization, it understands the conceptualized view is not absolute but is a consequence of environment (causes and conditions).

Pariniṣpanna (Fully Accomplished Consciousness):

This is fully liberated consciousness, the highest mode of consciousness. It can see things as it are free from any kind of conceptualization.

(3) *Âlaya Only Exists* Yuiṣiki 唯識

The Yogācāra philosophy said there exist only *Âlaya* (Hakk), all others are mere illusion blossoming out from it (*Âlaya*). The purpose of ascetic practices is to attain the highest mode of consciousness to experience it.

In Ancient Persian culture (Simorghian culture), everything comes from Universal Spirit (Jamshidi. *farhang-e iran*). This Universal Spirit is symbolized by simorgh. This tradition is well preserved in Attâr's best known work "the Conference of the Birds". There is a striking parallel between the Yogācāra philosophy and the Simorghian tradition. Combining this parallel with the fact two facts that (a) Maitreya-Mithra is the founder-teacher of the Vijnāna-vādin (Yogācāra) philosophy, (b) it developed in Central Asia where the Simorghian culture is dominant, the Yogācāra philosophy seems to be a philosophical expression of the Simorghian culture.

5.2 Link to Mithra

According to Manichaeism, Mihryazd (Mithra) is the creator of the cosmos, creatures and the reincarnation process. All of them he created by his maya. According to chapter 4, Maitreya is a new avatar of Mithra. According to Manichaeism, Maitreya is the last avatar of Mithra. These indicate the teachings of Vijnāna-vādin are Mithra's teachings, i. e. Persian teaching.

6. Mādhyamaka philosophies and the Prajñāpāramitā literatures

6.1 History

The Mādhyamaka school was founded by Nāgārjuna 龍樹 (c. 150-250), who was an Indian philosopher. His writings are the basis for the formation of this school. He is credited with developing the philosophy of the Prajñāpāramitā sutras.

6.2 Teachings

(1) The Law of Cause and Effect

All phenomena are empty of "self nature" or "essence" (Skt: Svabhāva), meaning that they have no intrinsic, independent reality apart from the causes and conditions from which they arise. Everything in the Cosmos is linked by the chain of cause and effect (因果, Skt:

Hetu-phala). The notion that everything in the Cosmos is a consequence of the causes and conditions is called Engi 縁起 (Skt: Pratiya-samutpāda).

(2) Middle Way

It is the best and correct way to accept (1) and reject the two extreme philosophies (eternalism—the view that something is eternal and unchanging—and nihilism). This is called Chūgan 中觀 (the middle way) between the two extremes.

(3) The Best Method for the Perfection of Wisdom

Mādhyamaka is a source of methods for approaching prajñāpāramitā 般若波羅蜜多 (perfection of wisdom), the sixth of the Six Perfections of the bodhisattva path.

6.2 Link to Mithra

The teachings of Mādhyamaka philosophies and the Prajñāpāramitā literatures are philosophical supplements to the teachings of the Vijnāna-vādin. The Law of cause and effect gives theoretical base for karma 業 (Jp: Gō) and Reincarnation 輪廻轉生 (Jp: Rin'ne-tenšō). According to this law, the cause of the cause i. e. the first Cause is Vairocana (=Mithra the Sun). In this sense these also have a connection with Mithra's teachings.

The law of cause and effect in Mādhyamaka philosophy is a more scientific and detailed expression of what Roman Mithraism had expressed symbolically as Mithra's four winds.

According to Vermaseren, the mysterious statue of the lion-headed God is the Hellenistic theosophic image of syncretic God "Zurwan-Mithra", who is the highest God of Roman Mithraism. He is both the Sun God and the God of Time. He rules over four winds of four directions and four seasons. This is symbolized by his four wings (Photo 1). Sometimes four seasonal gods are depicted in the four corners in his icons. (Vermaseren, Mithras the Secret God, 12)

The lion-headed God blows out four winds and a logos-fire from his mouth to move the cosmos. These winds and the logos-fire are Roman expression of fōhat. The function of four winds is to unite four elements (fire, wind, water, earth) in spite of their essential differences in order to make a physical body of a creature. The function of the logos-fire is to put a spark (spirit) into the physical body and give it a life. When its pre-determined time will pass, the bond will disappear. The spirit left the body, and return to the Heaven (Sun). The body will disintegrate into four elements and scatter among air, water and earth. (Plato. *Timaeus* 41-42; *Hermetica* XVI)

7. Ten Bull Pictures

See [Ten Bull Pictures and Roman Mysteries of Mithra in the Light of Simorgh](#) (2009.02.01).

This is an introduction to Mysteries of Mithra incorporated into Zen Buddhism.

8. Concluding Remark

Mahāyāna Buddhism is formed under the influence of Simorghian culture (original Persian culture). Zen is not the teaching of Gautama (Shyakamuni) but Iranian Sun God Mithra (Vairocana). This Sun God Mithra is not Mazdaean but Simorghian with Hellenistic tint (Roman Mithras).

From the Simorghian point of view, it is possible to say that Simorghian magi absorbed Buddhism to develop their new religion (i. e. Mahāyāna Buddhism) in Central Asia. Its central deity is Iranian Mithra with Hellenistic tint.

The reason behind the fact that there is no dualistic tendency in Mahāyāna Buddhism (including Zen) is that Persian culture which gave influence upon Buddhism was not Mazdaean but Simorghian.

Some researchers tend to think that the Simorghian culture was extinguished by Zoroastrianism and Islam, therefore today people can only see its fragmental reflections in various esoteric traditions such as Yezidism, Persian Sufi literatures. But it is not true. We can see its evolved (sophisticated) form in Zen Buddhism.

Some researchers on Mithraism tend to put Mithraism in the mirror image of Christianity and/or Zoroastrianism. But this is also misleading. Persian Sufism, Zen and Mithraism, these three are to be seen as three branches of one same tree, with its root the Simorghian culture.

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