

Buddhist Responses to Manichaeism: Mahayana Reaffirmation of the "Middle Path"?



David Scott

History of Religions, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Nov., 1995), 148-162.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-2710%28199511%2935%3A2%3C148%3ABRTMMR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C>

History of Religions is currently published by The University of Chicago Press.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucpress.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to creating and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

David Scott

BUDDHIST RESPONSES
TO MANICHAISM:
MAHĀYĀNA
REAFFIRMATION OF
THE "MIDDLE PATH"?

From all of the religions that Buddhism encountered in China and central Asia, Manichaeism posed a particularly distinctive type of challenge. One challenge was to Buddhism's own clear-cut institutional identity. Manichaeism from the outset saw itself as fulfilling and replacing Buddhism, systematically adopting yet adapting Buddhist terminology, and claiming Mani to be the future Buddha "Enlightened One."¹ The Chinese *Compendium of the Doctrines and Styles of the Teachings of Mani, the Buddha of Light* exemplifies Manichaean overt "use" of Buddhism.²

A more subtle challenge was posed by the central doctrines consistently maintained by Manichaeism as it spread throughout the ancient world, from the shores of the Atlantic to the Pacific, but expressed in the different cultural and religious forms of the cultures it was encountering.³ Manichaeism emphasized dualistic analysis. Darkness (matter) was inherently opposed and to be differentiated from the light (spirit), a viewpoint that thus held the body to be bad, imprisoning the good particles of light (soul). Release or enlightenment consisted of those bodily and earthly chains¹ being broken and rejected. As Manichaeism moved into

¹ See D. Scott, "Manichaean Views of Buddhism," *History of Religions* 25, no. 2 (1985): 99–115; and H. Klimkeit, "Jesus' Entry into Parinirvana: Manichaean Identity in Buddhist Central Asia," *Numen* 33 (1987): 225–40.

² G. Haloun and W. Henning, trans., "The Compendium of the Doctrines, and Styles, of the Teachings of Mani, the Buddha of Light," *Asia Major* 3, no. 2 (1952): 184–221.

³ See C. Lieu, *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China: A Historical Survey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), for a fine general historical and doctrinal overview.

Buddhist-dominated areas of Asia it announced that Buddhism's Nirvana (equated with the Manichaeic "Kingdom of Light") was totally differentiated from the physical earthly sphere (samsara) that had been riddled with evil.

As we shall see, on the surface, this ascetic, world-rejecting ethos has some similarities with Buddhism. In analyzing more fully how Buddhism responded to such clear-cut "negative" and "pessimistic" Manichaeic stances, we should be able to evaluate how far Buddhism is, or is not, itself negative and pessimistic. Interesting distinctions emerge here between Mahāyāna and (for the want of a more precise term) "Hīnayāna" perspectives.

I. BUDDHIST INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY

Manichaeism entered China by the eighth century, with limited official toleration granted in 732. The conversion to Manichaeism of the Uighur Khan in central Asia in 762 led to full Chinese official toleration in 768. Suspicions remained toward Manichaeism, however, on both political and national, as well as religious, grounds. Buddhist sensitivity toward Manichaeism's Buddhist-sounding language is clear in the following 732 toleration decree: "The doctrine of Mani (*Mo-ni*) is basically a perverse belief (*hsieh-chien*) and fraudulently it assumes to be a school of Buddhism and will therefore mislead the masses. It deserves to be strictly prohibited. However, since it is the indigenous religion of the Western Barbarians (*hsi-hu*) and other foreigners its followers will not be punished if they practice it among themselves."⁴ Uighur military assistance to the imperial court saw fuller official toleration in 768, which fostered a further spread of Manichaeism in China. Buddhists would, though, have been unhappy about the news from the Uighur capital, where the Uighur Khan proclaimed that "all the [Buddhist] images of demon sculptures or paintings be entirely destroyed in fire, that those that paint the demons and who prostrate themselves before the demons be [lacunae] and receive the Religion of Light [i.e., Manichaeism]."⁵ The Buddhist envoy Wang Yen-to encountered Manichaeic adepts at the Uighur court in 987/984, which prompted his comment on Manichaeism: "It is what the Buddhist writings consider as heretical doctrines."⁶

The Confucian reaction of 875 drove Manichaeism underground in China, but it survived (and, in some areas of south China, flourished) as the *Ming Chiao* (Religion of Light). Manichaeic claims continued to outrage

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190. See also E. Chavannes and P. Pelliot, "Un traite manicheen retrouvé en Chine," *Journal Asiatique* (1913): 123-360, Text VI, pp. 154-55. This still remains the established comprehensive collection of Chinese/Buddhist material on Manichaeism.

⁵ Chavannes and Pelliot, pp. 195-96.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Text XXXIX, pp. 308-9.

Chinese Buddhists. Tsan-ning (919–1002), an early Buddhist historian, in his *Compendium* described Manichaean revolts circa 920 in south China: “They also made drawings of the Demon king in a squatting position with the Buddha washing his feet. They declared that Buddhism is the Great Vehicle (*ta-ch’eng*), but theirs is the Superior Vehicle (*shang-shang-ch’eng*). Their teaching is a shadowy imitation of Buddhism and is what one would call a Doctrine of Approximation (*hsiang-ssu tao*). Some Buddhist monks driven by cold and famine, joined them from a profit motive.”⁷ The *Fo tsu t’ung chi* (Lineage of the Buddha and patriarchs) provides another example: “The adepts of this abstain from eating meat and drinking wine. They meet together during the night to carry out obscene debaucheries. They represent the king of the demons sitting with outstretched legs while the Buddha washes his feet. They say Buddhism is only the ‘Big Vehicle’ (Mahāyāna) while their religion is the ‘Supreme Vehicle.’ There goes their criminal insolence.”⁸ Both of these Buddhist sources reveal a variety of Buddhist concerns and worries.

The lines concerning nighttime revelries have the air of caricature and fabrication, given Manichaeism’s ascetical outlook. Nevertheless they reveal deeper underlying Buddhist outrage. Manichaeans were using not only the name of Buddha, but also the term Mahāyāna, to promote their own claims. In a way there is of course some irony here. The Mahāyāna (large vehicle) had themselves downgraded their Buddhist opponents with the term Hīnayāna (lesser vehicle), only to have their own Mahāyāna title overshadowed by the Manichaean’s use of a still higher one! Institutional concerns seem present through talk of Buddhist monks joining such rivals.

Chih-p’an (fl. 1258–69) gives a quite detailed critique of Manichaeism, along with the equally proscribed White Cloud and White Lotus groups: “These three religions are all falsely called ‘religion of Buddha,’ to mislead stupid people; consequently in their five elements there are poisonous vapours. At present the Manichaeans still deceive [people] . . . in general they do not use meat nor wine. . . . It is far removed from the practice of confession and from the invocations to Buddha; but in reality they follow an obscene debauchery.”⁹ Again we have caricaturing with charges of nocturnal mysterious obscenities and debaucheries. Nevertheless what seems to be of particular concern to the Buddhists was Manichaeism’s deliberately adopting, yet adapting, Buddhism to its own Manichaean purpose. Manichaeism was purloining Buddhist clothes without taking the body or substance of the Buddhist message. An interesting nuance is that Chih-p’an considered Manichaean and Buddhist confes-

⁷ Lieu, p. 222.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Text XLI, p. 321.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Text L, pp. 362–63.

sional forms to be fundamentally different, a theme we shall return to later in this study.

Tibetan Buddhist circles reveal similar concerns. Most striking is the philosophical treatise *bKa' yan dag pa'i tshad ma las mdo pa* (Summary of the proofs for the right revelation), found in the Tibetan *bsTan 'gyur*, penned to justify the royal decision by Khri Sron Ide btsan (died 797) to choose Buddhism as the state religion. It is claimed to be the work of the king himself, but in reality it was drawn up under the guidance of his Buddhist mentor (*kalyāṇamitra*) Śāntarakṣita. Among the various logical criteria used to justify the choice of Buddhism comes this rejection of Manichaeism: "The great Persian heretic liar Mani (*Mar Ma ne*) of insatiable heresy has borrowed something from all systems in order to fabricate a system deviating from all others; and while he, in accordance to what he did, arranged (the elements borrowed) quite deviating (from their original) meaning, the views held by the other systems are present and (at the same time) changed, therefore non-authentic, etc."¹⁰ What is very clear here is how the Tibetan Buddhist writer had picked up the way in which Manichaean theology and missionary expansion was built around syncretic usage of religious themes encountered in its various areas.

The *Kālacakra Tantra*, from the mid-tenth century, reflects the range of religions being encountered by Buddhism across central Asia. Amid the "erroneous" persons being mentioned we have Mani (*Śvetasvastrī*, "the man with white garment").¹¹ Later Tibetan Buddhist material retained this memory of Manichaeism. In the *C'os-'byuñ* of dPa'-bo gcug-lag'p'reñ-ba (composed 1564) mention was made of how "Ardho [i.e., Ardashir I, died 242] the King of the Persians in the *mleccha* 'barbarian' kingdoms of Persia in the south of Śambahla created the false religion constituted by Mana."¹²

II. BUDDHIST MAHĀYĀNA DISTINCTIVITY

In doctrinal terms Buddhism and Manichaeism shared similar terminology but a very different evaluation. In particular, Manichaean radical dualism cut across Mahāyāna integrative tendencies. For the Mahāyāna schools such Manichaean dualistic analysis and discrimination was false.

¹⁰ G. Uray, "Tibet's Connections with Nestorianism and Manichaeism in the 8th–10th Centuries," *Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde* 10 (1983): 399–429, quote on 408. See also R. Stein, "Une mention du manichéisme dans le choix du Bouddhisme comme religion d'état par le roi Tibétain Khri-sron Ide-bgan," in *Indianisme et bouddhisme: mélanges offerts à Mgr Étienne Lamotte* (Louvain: Université catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste, 1980), pp. 329–37.

¹¹ H. Hoffman, "Kalacakra Studies: I," *Central Asiatic Journal* 13 (1969): 52–73, quote on 57.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

This sensitivity seems present in that Tibetan *bKa' yañ pa' i dag tshad ma las mdo pa*, referred to above, which dealt with Manichaeism in its section on the error of *ñhad*, that is, "negation" or "negativeness." Manichaeism set up Nirvana as something that was in its inherent nature fundamentally different from the negative and tainted universe and existence (samsara). From a Buddhist perspective, this could result in Nirvana's becoming a focus of desire, and thus of grasping. For the Mahāyāna schools, the Buddha's "Middle Way" (*Madhyamā-pratipad*) was indeed one of neither rejecting nor clinging. Much of the Mahāyāna's thrust can be seen as various moves to break down or to not become entrapped by dualistic thinking. In very stark contrast, such a dualistic attitude was the very cornerstone of Manichaeism.

This fundamental Mahāyāna nondualistic (or nondiscriminatory) approach can be followed in the Mahāyāna classics. It is well brought out by one of the earliest surviving Mahāyāna texts, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā sūtra*, translated into Chinese by the Bactrian Chih lou-chia-ch'ien: "The perfection of wisdom enters into the earth, water, space, that and this. Forms and other skandhas. Man, life and birth . . . Hell . . . Nirvana. Suffering and what is not suffering. . . All sutra dharmas are originally without an obstruction and originally are not based on anything on which a beginning [i.e., discriminative thought] could be based. . . The samadhi in which nothing is kept and nothing is rejected."¹³ The *Śūraṅgama samādhi sūtra* was also concerned that one should not reject the world through the limited view that it was evil and inherently opposed to Nirvana. Thus in the Bodhisattva's training "he has made an end of all his woes but he does not change his career in Samsara and does not give it up."¹⁴ As Ashvaghosha's popular *Awakening of Faith* summed it up, "It is only through illusions that all things come to be differentiated."¹⁵

The underlying Buddhist concern was that clinging attachments and craving, thirsting desires (*trṣṇā*) could be created through dualistic discrimination. In the seminal *Diamond sutra* came the following line: "If, Subhuti, these Bodhisattvas should have a perception of either a dharma, or a no-dharma they would thereby seize on a self, on a being, on a soul, on a person. And why? Because a Bodhisattva should not seize either a

¹³ L. Lancaster, "An Analysis of the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra from the Chinese Translations" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1968), pp. 233, 283; P. Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism* (London: Routledge, 1988); and P. Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), are all good for Mahāyāna Buddhism.

¹⁴ R. Emmerick, trans., *The Khotanese Śūraṅgamasamādhi-sūtra* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 19.

¹⁵ Y. Hakeda, trans., *The Awakening of Faith* (London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p. 32.

dharma or a no-dharma."¹⁶ Finally, in the *Saddharma pundarika sūtra* (Lotus sutra) one learns how the Bodhisattva no longer discriminates between things, in contrast to more foolish ones who, "however, discriminate falsely 'It is this' or 'It is that' and 'It is advantageous' or 'It is disadvantageous.'"¹⁷

In the *Vimalakīrti nirdeśa sūtra*, all dualities are, at the ultimate level, held to be erroneous. In its ninth chapter (Initiation into the non-dual dharma) this unity is spelled out at some length:

Good and evil are a duality. If neither good nor evil arises so that formlessness is realized to attain Reality this is an initiation into the non-dual Dharma. Samsara and Nirvana are a duality. If the underlying nature of Samsara is perceived there exists neither bondage nor liberation and neither rise nor fall. Such an understanding is initiation into the non-dual Dharma. Body and its eradication are a duality but body is identical with Nirvana. Why? Because if the underlying nature of body is perceived, no conception of body and its nirvanic condition will arise for both are fundamentally not dual, not being two different things.¹⁸

Manichaeism would have agreed with the first sentence but then would have fundamentally disagreed, from its deeply dualistic perspective, with all the rest of the above text.

All of this is not to deny the similarities between certain distinctions drawn in both Manichaeism and Buddhism between "opposites" like Nirvana and samsara, and so forth. However, whereas for Manichaeism they were absolute differences, Mahāyāna Buddhism had a highly developed two-levels-of-truth formulation, as in Nagarjuna's distinction between conventional truth (*samvṛiti-satya*) and ultimate definitive truth (*paramārtha-satya*). Nagarjuna, in his *Mūla-Mādhyamaka-kārikā* (24.8), argued that "doctrines taught by the Buddhas rely wholly on two truths, Conventional worldly truths and truths that are ultimate," while in his *Ratnavali* (Precious garland) (64), he held that "because in reality there is no coming, going or staying, what ultimate difference is there between the world and Nirvana?"¹⁹ Thus, Mahāyāna Buddhism used conventional language distinguishing between concepts like Nirvana and samsara in a

¹⁶ E. Conze, trans., *Buddhist Wisdom Books: Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 34.

¹⁷ B. Kato, Y. Tomura, and K. Miyasaka, trans., *The 3-Fold Lotus Sutra* (New York: Weatherhill), p. 12.

¹⁸ C. Luk, trans., *The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* (London: Shambala, 1972), pp. 93, 94, 97.

¹⁹ *Mūla-Mādhyamaka-kārikā* 24.8 passage is cited in T. Gyatso, *The Buddhism of Tibet* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 31; *Ratnavali* 64 translation is in J. Hopkins and L. Rimpoché, *The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), p. 26.

provisional, limited sense, not in the deeper, absolute sense where in fact they did not see them as fundamentally different.

With such material in mind, it is clear that Mahāyāna unease with some tendencies perceived in the Hinayāna strands of Buddhism were even more clear-cut when put alongside the full-blown Manichaeic dualistic, ascetic, and world-rejecting ethos. Conceptually, despite the extensive Manichaeic adoption of key Buddhist Mahāyāna terminology—such as *upāya* (skillful means), *śūnyatā* (emptiness), *prāñña* (wisdom), Bodhisattva, Mahāyāna (Great Vehicle/Path)—the fundamental underlying Manichaeic theme of dualistic discrimination and separation was diametrically opposed to the Mahāyāna nondualistic, nondiscriminative approach. In a wide-ranging way Manichaeism deliberately adopted (yet adapted to its own purposes) a wide variety of Buddhist elements, and indeed the name of Buddhism. For Buddhism, such Manichaeic “illusion” (to use the language of Ashvaghoṣa) was doubly serious, being able not just to mislead in their own right but also to mislead through using (or, from a Buddhist perspective, misusing) the established name of Buddhism.

III. BUDDHIST ADOPTIONS AND ADAPTATIONS FROM MANICHAISM

A useful starting point for this is Asmussen’s comment that “a Manichaeic text which has been Buddhistically coloured beyond recognition is imaginable without difficulty. The opposite condition, a Buddhist text which in the same way is Manichaeically coloured does not exist.”²⁰ This is not to deny that Buddhism, like Manichaeism, had shown a strong ability to adapt its message to the surrounding environment. Far from it! Elsewhere, in east Iranian areas, Buddhism used preexisting Zoroastrian and Hellenic nuances to explain its own particular message.²¹ Further east in China there was a clear movement toward using “suitable” existing strands from Taoism.²² However, in central Asia and China there was no need for Buddhism, in general, to use Manichaeic themes; although in the Uighur kingdom around Turfan (Tarim basin), and the Bactrian principality of Chaganiyah, Manichaeism did achieve some temporary local strength supported by the local political elite. Otherwise it was Buddhism that was, and remained, the dominant religious tradition, for the most part, vis-à-vis the later Manichaeic newcomer. Both were adaptive, flexible religions, but by their very respective

²⁰ J. Asmussen, *Xuastvanift: Studies in Manichaeism* (Copenhagen: Prostant apud munksgaard, 1965), p. 234.

²¹ D. Scott, “The Iranian Face of Buddhism,” *East and West* 40 (1990): 43–77, and “Buddhist Attitudes to Hellenism: A Review of the Issue,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 15 (1986): 433–41.

²² *Sutra of 42 Chapters* exemplifies this well.

popular positions the Manichaeans had to adapt much more to Buddhism, whereas Buddhism did not, on the whole, need to adapt to the later Manichaeans. In terms of Chinese materials, Asmussen's statement is well founded, where so far Buddhist texts have not come to light in this Manichaean-colored way. A slightly more difficult situation is encountered in Buddhist areas outside China, where such an influence has been claimed.

One very straightforward example of Buddhism using Manichaean themes is the Uighur Buddhist sutra, the *Sākiz yūkmāk* (Eight accumulations) (S.242), where one reads "Sun and Moon God are two bright palaces (*ordular*) they are very big, wide, gleaming, jewelled palaces."²³ This links up to Manichaeism's view that the heavenly bodies were palaces where the savior deities had their seats. Within a Buddhist context, though, such use of local (Manichaean) mythology was straightforward enough. However, such adoption was not of great importance for Buddhism, since within their view of the cosmos deities were but limited beings located in particular heavenly realms or levels (*deva loka*). They were not in themselves savior figures bringing enlightenment, but they could be integrated within the Buddhist plethora of figures. Already in India, Hindu deities had been integrated and subordinated within a wider Buddhist scheme. Moving into other cultural and religious areas resulted in such Hindu-type *deva* figures being equated in a similar subordinatory way with local deities, in this case Manichaean ones. The key, though, is that such changes of deities were not at the heart of the Buddhist message, being somewhat peripheral side details, or background scenery.

However, a range of more substantive themes have been put forward by some scholars, notably Klimkeit. Amid this fairly tangled and subtle area, we can perhaps, with some reason, distinguish between Mahāyāna on the one hand, and on the other hand the non-Mahāyāna strands of Buddhism—for example, the extinct but formerly widespread Sarvāstivādin tradition.

The reason for looking at these non-Mahāyāna schools is that on the surface they appear closer to Manichaeism than to the Mahāyāna. Thus, their approach tended to emphasize a greater degree of asceticism, a more marked lower status for the laity vis-à-vis the monks, and a greater distrust of sexuality and of the physical world in general.

Some Pali canon Hīnayāna texts can be readily cited that seem, indeed, to portray the body in negative, tainted ways. The *Vinaya-Piṭaka* (1.6) talks about how "the well taught Ariyan disciple feels disgust for the body . . . so feeling disgust he is repelled, being repelled he is

²³ H. Klimkeit, *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), p. 33.

freed.”²⁴ In the *Digha-Nikāya* (2.314–315) “brethren, a brother examines this same body upwards from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. . . . He regards it as a thing impure.”²⁵ The reason for this “impurity” is followed up in the *Samyutta-Nikāya* (3.188), namely, “that desire, Radha, that lust, that lure, that craving which is concerned with body—entangled thereby, therefore is called a being.”²⁶ The end result is that physical matter and the body can be seen to be inherently tainted, flawed by evil (personified in Buddhism by the person of Mara). Indeed, the *Samyutta-Nikāya* (3.187) has just such a ring to it: “Where a body is, Radha, there would be Mara or things of the nature of Mara or at any rate what is perishing. Wherefore, Radha, regard the body as Mara, regard it as the nature of Mara, regard it as perishing, as an imposthume, as a dart, as pain, as a source of pain.”²⁷ Manichaeans would have accepted all of these above statements with full literal force.

In a similar way, Pali canon texts often describe Nirvana in terms of its radical distinction from the shifting world (samsara); that is, in the *Udāna* (80) Nirvana was the “unborn, a not become, a not made, a not compounded.”²⁸ The *Dhammapada* (202) integrates both these dualistic sounding strands (i.e., matter/body and spirituality, samsara and Nirvana): “There is no fire like lust, no crime like hate, there is no ill like the body, no bliss higher than Nirvana.”²⁹

Naturally we should be careful of caricaturing such material. One needs to look at its context. The *Vinaya-Piṭaka* text, cited above, forms part of an extended meditational treatise. Thus, talk of the body as being disgusting may serve as a tool for discerning the operation of *anicca* (impermanence), rather than the body itself being any more or less tainted than any other form. Indeed, in that text there is a whole range of other things (e.g., feelings, perceptions, activities, and consciousness) that are also subject to this “mindfulness” analysis. From a practical point of view the physical body (itself a neutral feature) could become the focus of craving desire (*tṛṣṇā*), clinging attachments, and so forth—all of these attitudes being hindrances to spiritual unfolding. From a training point of view it may well have been effective for Buddhism to stress in certain texts the misuse of the body. Sangharakshita, for one, sees an important distinction between seeing such “negative” sounding

²⁴ *Vinaya Piṭaka* 1.6, translated in E. Woodward, *Some Sayings of the Buddha According to the Pali Canon* (1925; reprint, London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 21.

²⁵ *Digha-Nikāya* 2.314–15; see Woodward, pp. 50–51.

²⁶ *Samyutta-Nikāya* 3.188; see Woodward, p. 218.

²⁷ *Samyutta-Nikāya* 3.187; see Woodward, p. 219.

²⁸ *Udāna* 80; see Woodward, p. 220.

²⁹ *Dhammapadā* 202, translated in N. Thera, *The Dhammapada* (London: Murray, 1954), p. 56.

texts as in fact pertaining to appropriate training methods rather than being absolute truth statements.³⁰ A Manichaeon, on the other hand, would see such sentiments as pertaining to absolute truth.

Manichaeism does seem to have picked out certain Hīnayāna themes that fitted its own dualistic horizons. *The Compendium of the Doctrines, and Styles of the Teachings of Mani the Buddha of Light* announced, "The teaching expounds the principle of light, thus removing the delusion of darkness; the doctrine explains the two Natures, taking discrimination (between them) for its particular method. Thus the Buddhist sutras say: 'If a man forsakes discrimination, he destroys every law. A truly pious man must not share his dwelling place.'"³¹ It would seem no coincidence that this for once direct citation from a Buddhist scripture was not from Mahāyāna circles; rather, it is from a Sarvāstivādin source, Katyayani-putra's [*Abhidharma*] *jñāna-prasthāna śāstra*. Even within Sarvāstivādin settings their "discrimination" would have been of a different line than Manichaeism's, but nevertheless it can be argued that it was precisely this quasi-Hīnayāna tendency toward dualistic appearing types of discrimination that opened the Sarvāstivādins to being used (and misused?) by Manichaeans. The above Manichaean use of Sarvāstivādin calls to discrimination can, of course, be contrasted with the Mahāyāna nondualistic calls to (at the deepest level) avoid discrimination, as in the case of Ashvaghosha's summation in the *Awakening of Faith*.

It may then be no coincidence that it is in Sarvāstivādin material from central Asia, notably the Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas's works and the *Maitrī-sīmit*, that Klimkeit pinpoints strands dealing with the two principles, three time periods, light symbolism, the awakening of the soul sleeping within matter—all of which do have a Manichaean ring to them.³² If we turn our attention to Mahāyāna Buddhism, a more complicated picture emerges, both with regard to confessional formulae and Tibetan materials.

A. CONFESSIONAL MATERIAL

Klimkeit's most extended textual analysis comes with the confessional literature found in Mahāyāna Buddhist and Manichaean material from central Asia. On the one hand we have the Uighur version of the *Suvar-ṇaprabhāsa* (Sutra of golden light), which he feels has features not found in the Sanskrit and Chinese versions, in particular its contritional formulae, put in the mouth of the Buddhist trainee: "Even when I should

³⁰ See B. Sangharakshita, *A Survey of Buddhism*, 4th ed. (Bangalore: IIC, 1976), pp. 120–24, for this distinction.

³¹ Haloun and Henning (n. 2 above), p. 193.

³² Klimkeit, "Manischaische und buddhistische Beichtformeln aus Turfan," *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte* 29 (1977): 193–229, esp. 212–13 and 216–25.

have given dirty, unclean, or spoilt food and drink."³³ Other worries about duties to one's parents, or about stealing, are quite appropriate for a Buddhist text and are mirrored in the Sanskrit rendition. Klimkeit feels that division of food and drink into absolute good and bad categories has a curious ring to it in this Buddhist Mahāyāna text. On the other hand we have similar lexicographic and thematic parallels with contemporary eighth- or ninth-century Manichaeian texts from the central Asian areas, in particular the Uighur *Xuastvanift* confessional form for the laity (*auditors*), which talks about the "divine of food and drink."³⁴ Klimkeit explains these similarities through Manichaeian influence upon Buddhism, since it is only the Uighur *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* version, coming from a Manichaeian area, that has this particular overlap with Manichaeian formulae. However, Klimkeit may be pushing the text too far. It could be read as a simple Buddhist warning against bad-quality food or drink, which for any monastic community was no academic matter! Buddhism usually discouraged the eating of meat and the drinking of wine, but the real danger was evil action done through clinging to or grasping at food or drink, rather than the food or drink itself, a point made in the Sanskrit *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*.

Klimkeit's analysis, although evocative and although it does rely on historical chronology, does not totally resolve the question of prior religious influence. Asmussen's earlier valuation is worth repeating, namely, "Buddhism as the only possible model for the elaboration and introduction of texts of confession of sins among the Manichaeians, will hardly seem unreasonable."³⁵ In terms of historical chronology, we have the Parthian missionary An-shih-kaio translating Buddhist confessionals for laymen into Chinese, before Mani was even born. Thus the growth of Buddhist "confessions of sin" (more appropriately termed as making *sanghe*, i.e., acknowledging one's own previous bad actions) predated Manichaeism. Second, within Manichaeism such analogous confessions of sins seem at present to have been a particularly east Iranian/Chinese phenomenon, only found in those very areas where the preexisting dominant religion was Buddhism, replete with their own pre-Manichaeian evolving tradition of "confessional" literature. Third, the earlier cited comments by Chih-p'an made a point of distinguishing Buddhist confessional forms from "far removed" Manichaeian forms. Fourth, a final point to make is that even if there were such a confessional transference from Manichaeism into this Mahāyāna text, it does not seem as important as

³³ Uighur version is translated in W. Bang and A. von Gabain, "Uigurische Studien," *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 10 (1930): 193–219, quote on 197; Sanskrit version is translated in R. Emmerick, *The Sutra of Golden Light* (London: Luzac, 1966).

³⁴ J. Asmussen, *Manichaeian Literature* (New York: Delmar, 1975), p. 71.

³⁵ Asmussen, *Xuastvanift* (n. 20 above), p. 255.

the Manichaean key formulations perceived by Klimkeit in the non-Mahāyāna, Sarvāstivādin material.

B. TIBETAN MATERIALS

Other more general conceptual overlaps have been put forward by Klimkeit in Tibet, central Asia, and even northwest India that indicated (for him) Buddhism being influenced by Manichaeism. These are, perhaps, analogous concepts that remain to be actually linked by anything more than coincidence. Undoubtedly he is right to point out the heightened use of luminous themes in central Asian/Tibetan texts such as the *Guhya-samāja Tantra*. But it is perhaps too simplistic to attribute this, necessarily, to Manichaean influences. While Manichaeism did emphasize this theme, they had no monopoly on it. As a spiritual symbol light was, and is, a worldwide phenomenon. To take one example, the Pali canon in Sri Lanka has early texts such as the *Sutta Nipāta* (5.442) extolling the Buddha in luminous terms. Pre-Manichaean Kushan iconography in both Gandhara and Bactria was fond of using light halos to enclose the Buddha.³⁶

Further play has been made of the Buddhist formulations of the five Dhyani Buddhas as treated in the *Guhya-samāja Tantra* and in pictorial representations from southwest Tibet.³⁷ Again we are presented with an analogous overlap with the Manichaean fivefold Emanations of Light/Godhead, mentioned indeed in the earlier discussed Uighur *Xuastvanift*. However, it is dangerous to push the implications of such numeric overlapping too far. Numeric systems are again a worldwide phenomenon, and the Manichaeans had no monopoly on the number five. Within the Buddhist tradition one of the oldest formulations was concerning the five *skandhas* (literally, "heaps") that made up the basically shifting impermanent body, indeed existence. We could quite reasonably follow Lama Govinda's statement, made without reference to the question of Manichaeism, that the five Dhyani Buddhas, so popular in Tibet, are but the five *skandhas* "transformed into the corresponding qualities of Enlightenment consciousness."³⁸ Furthermore, there were the well-established "five Spiritual Faculties" (*pañca-indriya*). Tucci's warning words about the

³⁶ M. Bussagli, "Due statuette di Maitrya (nota sul simbolismo lunare nel Buddhismo)," *Annali Lateranensi* 13 (1949): 355–90; A. Soper, "Aspects of Light Symbolism in Gandharan Sculpture," *Artibus Asiae* 12 (1945–46): 63–85; M. Taddei, "Appunti sull'iconografia di alcune manifestazioni luminose dei Buddha," *Gururājamanjarījka: Studi in onore di Giuseppe Tucci*, ed. M. Taddei (Naples: ISMEO, 1974), pp. 435–59.

³⁷ G. Tucci, "Some Glosses upon the Guhyasamāja," *Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques* 3 (1935): 339–53; H. Klimkeit, "Vairocana und das Lichtkreuze: Manichaische Elemente in der Kunst von Alchi (west Tibet)," *Zentralasiatische Studien* 13 (1979): 357–99, and *Manichaean Art and Calligraphy* (n. 23 above), pp. 17–19.

³⁸ L. Govinda, *Foundations of Tibetan Mysticism* (London: Rider, 1973), p. 108; see also pp. 70–73, 108–11, 148–50 for such correlations often used.

significance of this initially suggestive overlap around the luminous five Dhyani Buddhas still seem appropriate: "The analogy is limited to this particular point [but] does not involve, at least in this Tantra, other essential characteristics of Manichaeism such as the dualism between light and darkness, the three days, and the two nights, the triple creation, the envoys, etc."³⁹

The limited range of overlaps there with Manichaeism is thrown into further light by other Buddhist texts such as the *Klu dbum*, which have a much more comprehensive Zurvanite Zoroastrian presence, albeit integrated under a wider Buddhist umbrella.⁴⁰ In contrast, the *Guhya-samāja Tantra* overlaps with Manichaeism are much more limited, that is, isolated overlaps that can be explained through internal Buddhist contexts.

Finally, with regard to these central Asian lands, there is the appearance of crosses upon iconographic representations of the five Dhyani Buddhas at the monastery of Alchi-Malerei, on the southwest fringe of Tibet,⁴¹ crosses that Klimkeit sees not as Christian derived, but as Manichaeic, which had the use of the cross, five limbs of God-head, and pronounced light symbolism. All of these Alchi nuances are evocative, but they are not conclusive. Within Buddhism the cross was actually used, at times, to show the axis of the wheel of Dharma and of the cycle of existence (samsara). Even more generally it has been a universal symbol from the most archaic times down to the present as the cosmic symbol, world center, cosmic axis, union of opposites, and so forth. Thus, the use of this cross symbolism does not in itself point necessarily to Manichaeism as the source. On the other hand, Alchi's geographical position would have helped an appearance of Manichaeic artistic currents, being adjacent to the Bactrian principality of Chaganiyah, where Manichaeism was indeed enjoying support in the eighth century. Such a transference is, though, of much less significance than possible textual adoptions by Mahāyāna Buddhism from Manichaeism, which seem far less warrantable.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Amid these varied Mahāyāna and Hinayāna interactions with Manichaeism, there remains the question of action. Certainly in China the Manichaeans were suppressed by the imperial government. However, that was first carried out in the great antifeign suppression of 845, in which Buddhism had also been denounced under that Confucian reaction. Buddhism at least, though, was to be allowed back within a few years, but Manichaeism remained proscribed. No doubt Buddhism lost little sleep

³⁹ Tucci, "Some Glosses upon the Guhyasamāja," pp. 349–50.

⁴⁰ G. Tucci, "Iran et Tibet," *Acta Iranica* 1 (1974): 299–306.

⁴¹ Klimkeit, "Vairocana und das Lichtkreuz."

over its rival's demise, but it would be unfair to put the blame for this at Buddhism's foot.

Did Buddhist "missionaries" actually encounter Manichaeans in debate? The question is a difficult one, given the paucity of extant and published materials. Nevertheless Tibetan material found at Tun-Huang does describe one such encounter. This is the *Li-tai fa-pao ki*, dated to 775. In this Ch'an Buddhist text there is concern to distinguish between Buddhism and syncretic Taoist texts then circulating, which has Shakyamuni Buddha merely being a manifestation of Lao Tzu.

Amid this ongoing Buddhist-Taoist controversy was contained an interesting, though curious, section on Kashmir, adjacent and closely linked to Tibet:

In the land of Kashmir (*Ka-pin*), the king Mi-to-lo-kiue destroys Buddhism, kills people, and venerates the heresies of Mar Mani (*Mo Man-ni*) and the Messiah (*Mi-che-ho*). A monk of *Che-tseu* (Ceylon?) comes to convert him. He proves his saintliness in a test imposed by the king: some milk flowing from his wound, while blood flows from Mani and from the Messiah who die. The king converts to Buddhism and banishes the heretics, the disciples of Mani and of the Messiah. Their heads are suspended, and the people of the land throw darts on them.⁴²

Given the link between Kashmir and Tibet, and that the region adjoins the Bactrian principality of Chaganiyah, where Manichaean favor was enjoyed at the royal court, this encounter has some degree of plausibility, although there is a high degree of anecdotal miraculous storytelling also at play. Nevertheless there would seem to be some kernel of real rivalry and encounter between Manichaeism and Buddhism within the story. It remains unclear how far Buddhist monks would have advocated compulsory banishment, although on the other hand forceful suppression of Manichaeism could reflect a more politicized royal initiative, as was the case in China.

Further material on this matter is suggested from excavations in the Tarim basin. There we do not hear of Buddhist persecution of Manichaeism. Indeed, in 1904/05 the second German expedition to Turfan, led by Le Coq, uncovered some interesting Manichaean paintings underneath Buddhist overlays. As Le Coq described, "The reason for this picture having been concealed from view we cannot guess; yet as in other newly excavated parts of the same buildings the walls showed remains of Buddhistic paintings, one is led to believe that Buddhism having gained the ascendancy, the Manichaean houses of worship were changed in the considerate manner indicated, into [Buddhist] temples or holy

⁴² Stein (n. 10 above), pp. 336-37.

places."⁴³ Buddhism's expansion and revival seems peaceful here. What is interesting in this context is that there seems to have been no anti-Manichaeian iconoclastic fury, but rather a gentle redirection.

Buddhist responses to Manichaeism shed light on Buddhism's own boundary of self-identification, both past and present. Despite the appearance of similar terminology and themes, Buddhist writers were outwardly firm in holding that Buddhism was distinct and different from this new tradition. An interesting subnuance seems to be that Mahāyāna Buddhism retained a tighter delineation vis-à-vis Manichaeism, whereas the more "conservative" Hīnayāna strands, ironically, showed some signs of being more easily penetrated by Manichaeism. As always one should not overexaggerate any such process. For the most part Hīnayāna schools such as the Sarvāstivādīns carried on their developments without too much regard for Manichaeians. Nevertheless, despite Mahāyāna Buddhism's greater openness, it was the Hīnayāna schools that were perhaps in greater "danger" from Manichaeism. This in turn would seem to reflect the element of greater dualism and negativity (in terms of outward language at least) that may have crept in to such Hīnayāna schools, thus rendering their texts more open to direct use by Manichaeians and indeed perhaps opening themselves up also to some Manichaeian coloring, particularly in the Manichaeian strongholds of central Asia. There may then be some irony here, with the "newer" Mahāyāna strands (because of their holistic rejection of dualism) being better able to actually maintain the traditional Buddhist focus in the face of a Manichaeian overtly dualistic challenge. Accusations of negativity and pessimism are thus perhaps inappropriate to apply to Buddhism, particularly in its Mahāyāna forms. In a sense, Mahāyāna kept the spirit of the Buddhist message more than the Hīnayāna, who while keeping the word, lost some of the spirit.

Something of a model of a flexible yet coherent Buddhist presentation of its own message may then have been partly hammered out through the syncretistic challenge offered by Manichaeism. For the first time Buddhism (hitherto a flexible expanding tradition) had been faced with a still newer, very flexible tradition that on the surface was moving into core Buddhist themes. In responding to Manichaeism, Buddhism (particularly Mahāyāna) in effect reaffirmed its own institutional identity and religious message, without slipping into persecution of its rival. In short, a balance was kept, and the "Middle Way" reaffirmed.

Brunel University

⁴³ A. Von le Coq, "A Short Account of the Origin, Journey and Results of the First Royal Prussian (Second German) Expedition to Turfan in Chinese Turkestan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1909): 299–322, quote on 306.