

Rooster Diagram of the Five Periods of the Buddha's Lifetime Teachings



THE *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* says that Shakyamuni left household life at age nineteen and gained enlightenment at age thirty.

[*Great Perfection of Wisdom* comprises] a hundred treatises and a thousand volumes.¹

[Nāgārjuna] lived three hundred years.²

[*Great Perfection of Wisdom*] was translated by Kumārajīva.

[Nāgārjuna's true identity was] the Thus Come One Dharma Clouds Freedom

King; the Thus Come One Freely Perceiving King.³

[Nāgārjuna appeared] 678 years after the Buddha's entry into nirvana.

300,000 volumes⁴

The Treatise on Expedient Means of Great Compassion, 100,000 volumes

The Treatise on the Great Mind, 100,000 volumes

The Treatise on Great Fearlessness, 100,000 volumes

Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna, disciple of Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha, the eleventh of Shakyamuni's successors; he was the thirteenth successor. Also called Dragon Valor.

Flower Garland Sutra

[provisional Mahayana as against true Mahayana

[preached for] 14 days or 21 days⁵

[concluding sutra, Brahmā Net Sutra, from which the Mahayana precepts derive

Flower Garland school

establishes five teachings⁶ to include all the doctrines of the Buddha's lifetime.

[Reverend Tu-shun

Dharma Teacher Chih-yen

Great Teacher Fa-tsang, also called Great Teacher Hsiang-hsiang,

Dharma Teacher Hsien-shou, or Reverend Hua-yen

Āgama sutras

[Hinayana

[preached for] 12 years

concluding sutra, Legacy Teachings Sutra, from which the

Hinayana precepts derive

[Long Āgama Sutra

Medium-Length Āgama Sutra

Increasing by One Āgama Sutra

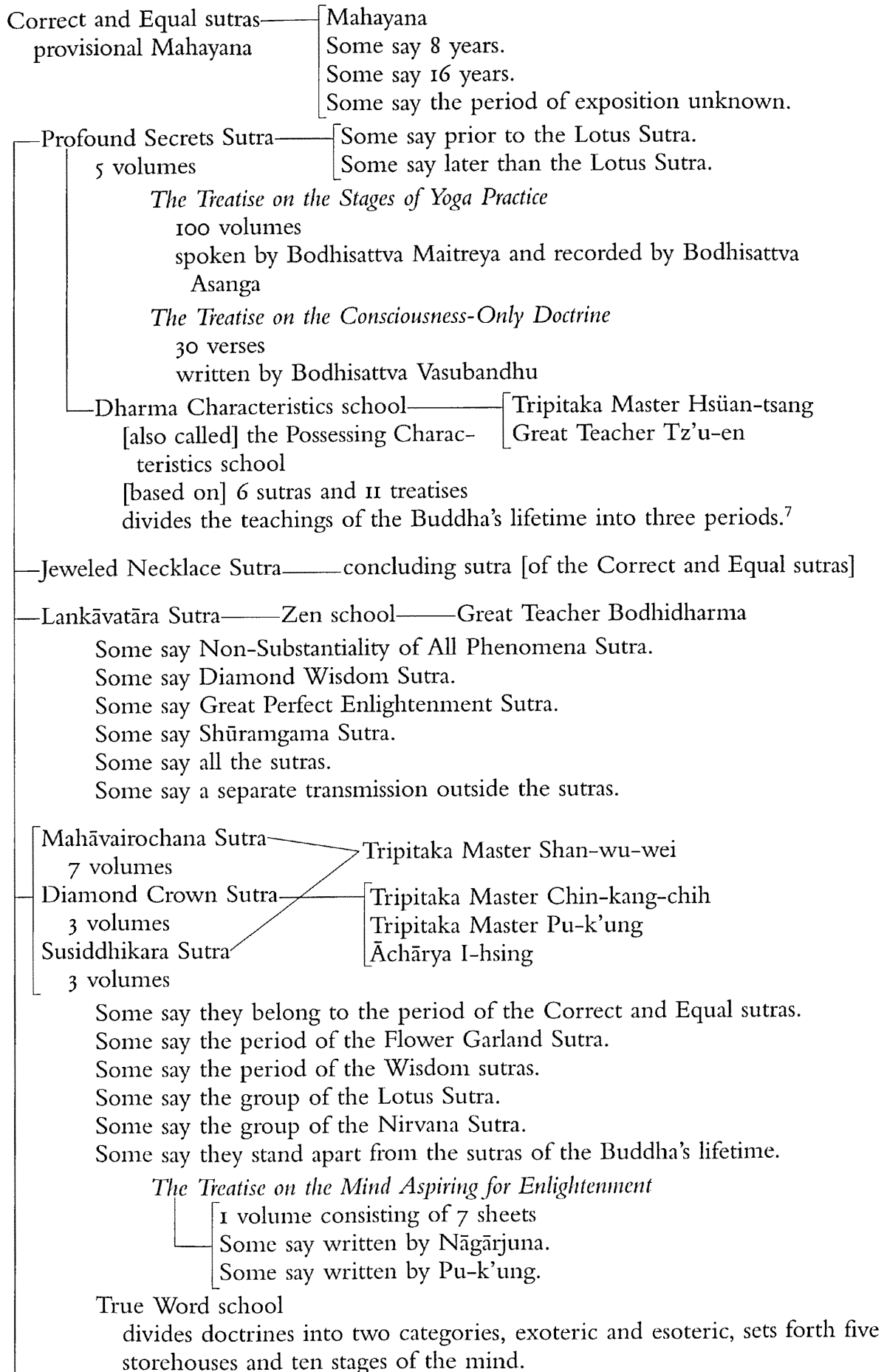
Miscellaneous Āgama Sutra

[Dharma Analysis Treasury school—sutras, meditation

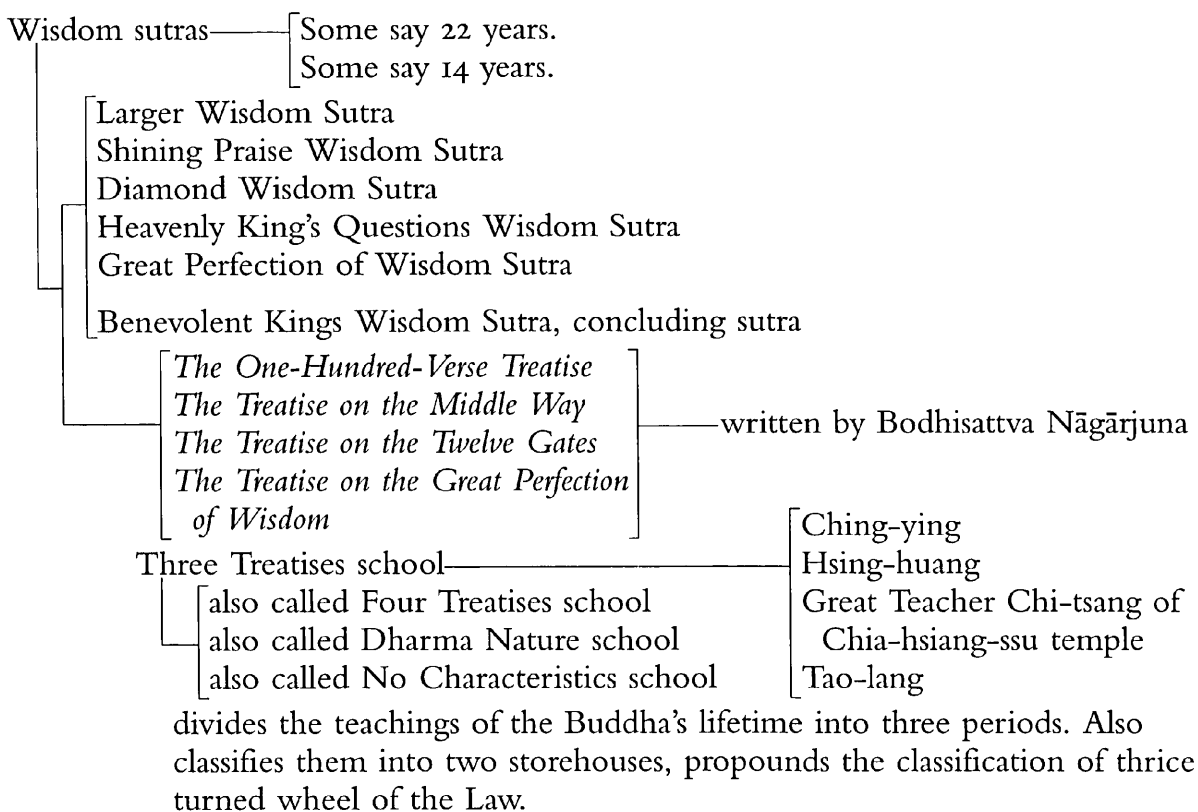
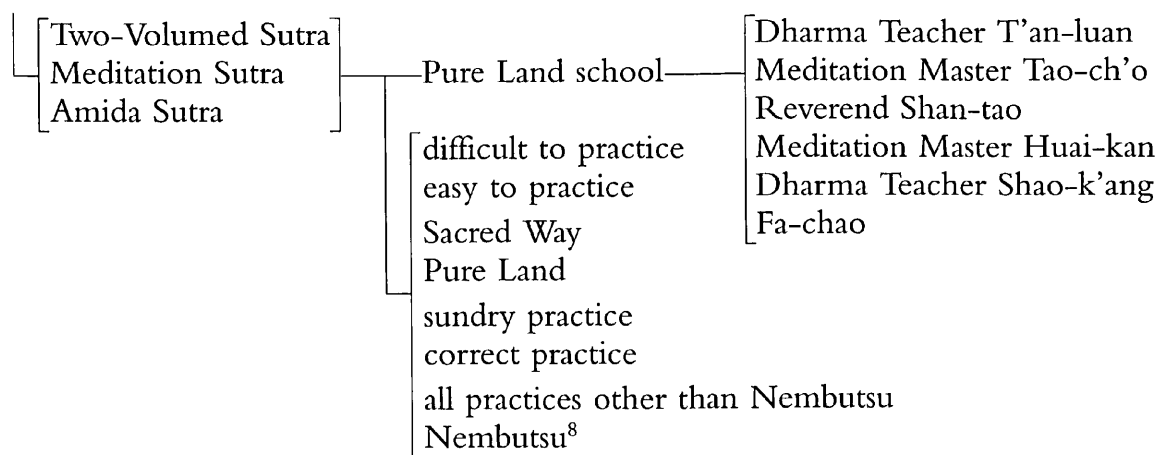
Establishment of Truth school—treatises

Precepts school—precepts

ROOSTER DIAGRAM OF THE FIVE PERIODS



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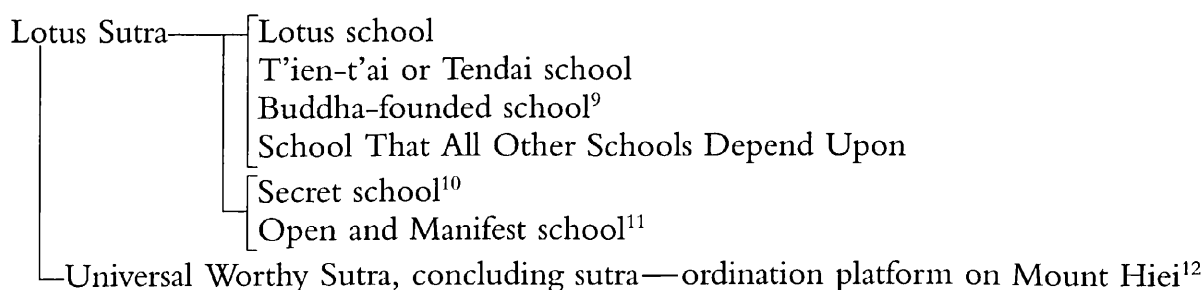


[The period of preaching the Correct and Equal sutras and the Wisdom sutras is] 30 years.

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra states: "I made use of the power of expedient means. But in these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth."

The Flower Garland Sutra, 21 days; the Āgama sutras, 12 years; the Correct and Equal sutras and the Wisdom sutras, 30 years. The above come to 42 years. *The Treatise on the Nature of the Phenomenal World* says 42 years.

The Immeasurable Meanings Sutra also says: "Though immeasurable, boundless, inconceivable asamkhya kalpas may pass, they will in the end fail to gain unsurpassed enlightenment. Why? Because they will not know about the great direct way to enlightenment, but will travel perilous byways beset by numerous hindrances and trials." And it also says: "Because, practicing it, one travels a great direct way free of hindrances and trials."



“The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth.”¹³

“Honestly discarding expedient means, I will preach only the unsurpassed way.”¹⁴

“Discarding” means “casting off.”

Some say “expedient means” refers to the first three teachings.¹⁵

Some say it refers to the teachings of the first four periods, or those of the first four flavors.

Some say that the unsurpassed way means the perfect teaching, which sublimates and merges the first three teachings into itself.

“Though they [the Buddhas] point out various different paths, in truth they do so for the sake of the Buddha vehicle.”¹⁶

One view regards “various different paths” as the teachings of the first four periods and the seven teachings¹⁷ [without the perfect teaching].

Another view regards them as five periods and eight teachings.

“The Buddha vehicle” means the one Buddha vehicle.

“Is this not a devil pretending to be the Buddha, trying to vex and confuse my mind? I thought.”¹⁸

“For long he remained silent regarding the essential, in no hurry to speak of it at once.”¹⁹

“The sutras I have preached number immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions. Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.”²⁰

“Have preached”—Flower Garland Sutra, Mahāvairochana Sutra, Profound Secrets Sutra, Lankāvātāra Sutra, Larger Wisdom Sutra, Wisdom sutras, and other sutras

“Now preach”—Immeasurable Meanings Sutra

“Will preach”—Nirvana and other sutras

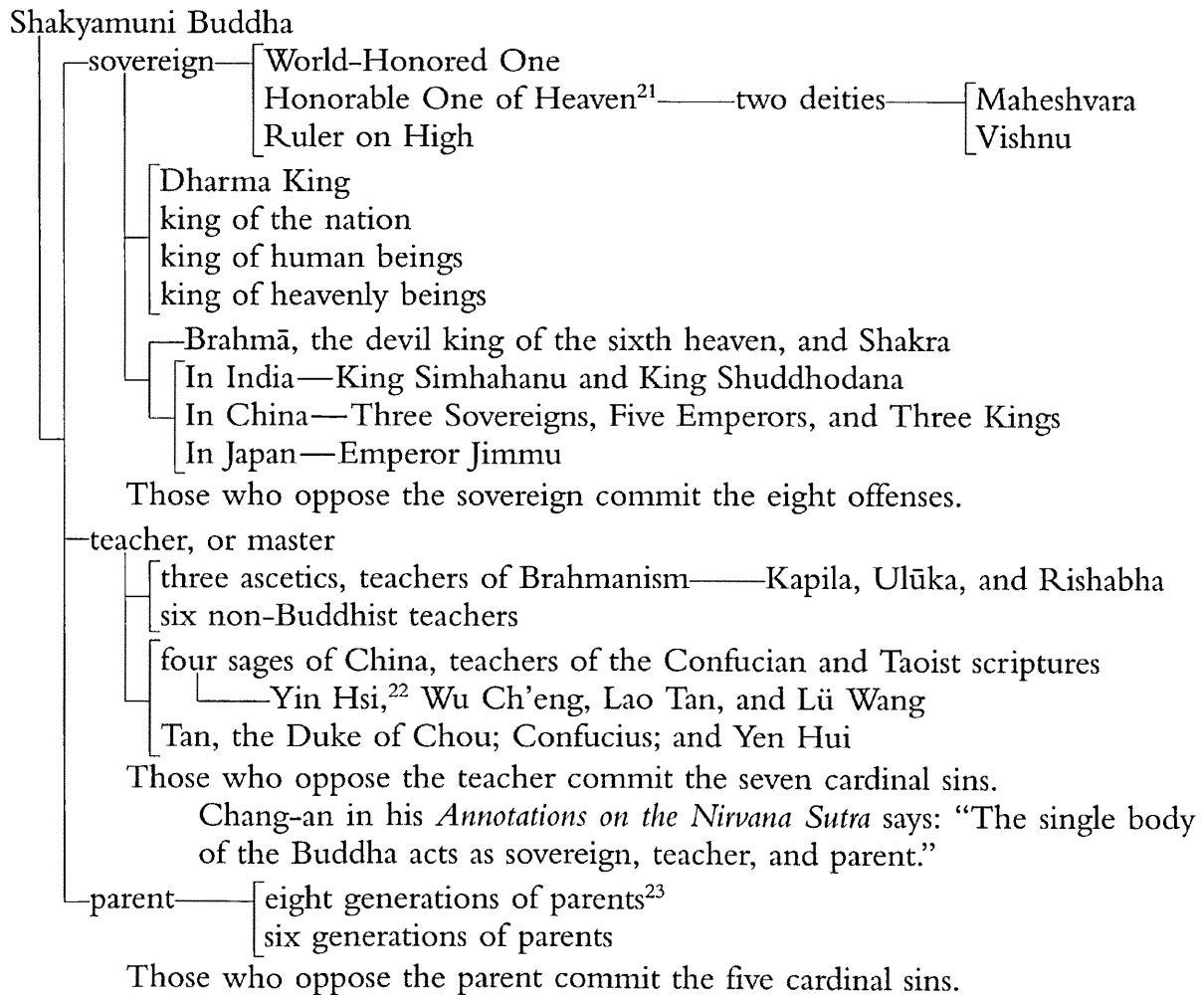
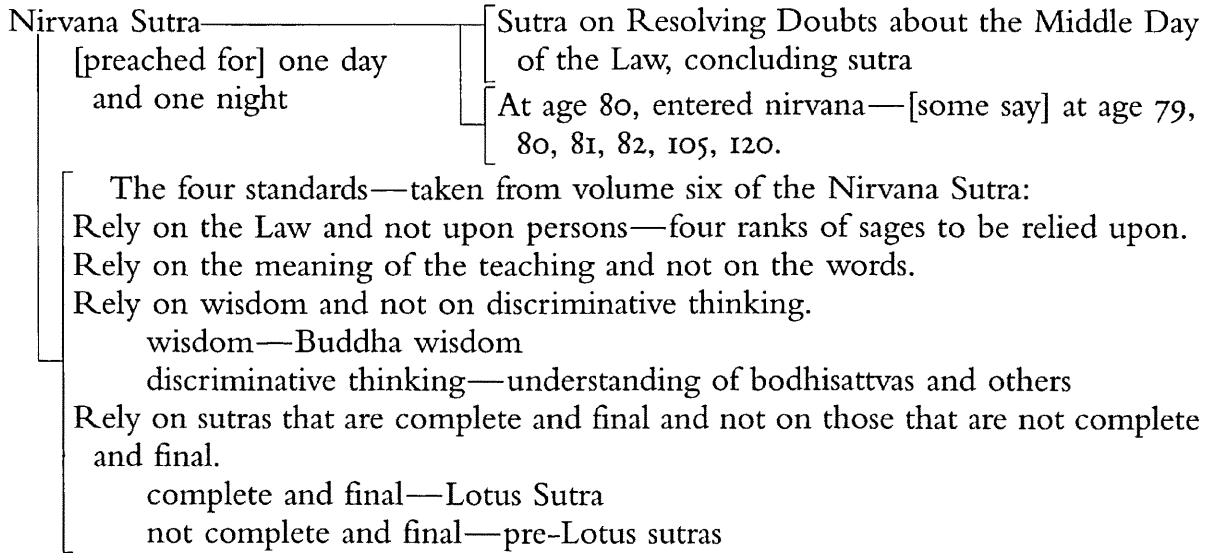
The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,” volume six, states: “Though other sutras may call themselves the king among sutras, there is none that announces itself as foremost among all the sutras preached in the past, now being preached, or to be preached in the future. Thus one should understand them according to the principle of ‘combining, excluding, corresponding, and including.’”

The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra, volume three, says: “That person’s tongue will fester in his mouth.”

The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra,” volume three, states: “Concerning the sutra passage that states that this wonderful sutra surpasses all those of past, present, and future, such a person persists in going astray. His tongue will fester unceasingly as an omen of what awaits him in the future. For the offense of slandering the Law, he will suffer for many long kalpas to come.”

ROOSTER DIAGRAM OF THE FIVE PERIODS

And it also says, “One persists in such a view even after one has been admonished for doing so.”



“But now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children.”²⁴

“But now this threefold world is all my domain”—[the domain of] the World-Honored One, the most honored in the threefold world

“domain”—twenty-five realms of existence

“my children”—children inherently endowed with the Buddha nature; [the Buddha’s] children because they have formed a bond with the Buddha’s teachings

The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra, volume five, states: “All living beings equally possess the Buddha nature. And because all alike possess the Buddha nature, they are the Buddha’s children.”

“Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others.”²⁵

“I am the only person”—

Profound Meaning, volume six, states: “Originally one followed this Buddha and for the first time conceived the desire to seek the way. And by following this Buddha again, one will reach the stage where there is no retrogression.”

Words and Phrases, volume six, states: “An older text²⁶ asserts that Infinite Life [or Amida] Buddha of the western land corresponds to the wealthy man [in the parable of the wealthy man and his impoverished son], but I cannot accept this assertion. The Buddha of the western land is different [from the Buddha of this sahā world], and those who form a relationship with him are also different. And because the Buddha is different, it is impossible to assert that the wealthy man, when he hides the fact that he is the father of the impoverished son, corresponds to Shakyamuni, and when he reveals that he is the father, to Infinite Life Buddha. And because those who form a relationship with him are different, it is impossible to assert that the living beings of this sahā world are related to Infinite Life Buddha in the way that the father and son are related.

“Moreover, nowhere from its beginning to its end is there anything in this [Lotus] sutra that would support such a claim. Close your eyes and ponder the matter deeply. Vairocana Buddha is close by, though living beings do not understand that in the past he disguised his Dharma body and appeared in the form of a manifested body, and then later reverted to his Dharma body. But Amida Buddha resides far away in the western land. How could he have changed his form and taken on the form of Shakyamuni Buddha?”

On “*The Words and Phrases*,” volume six, comments as follows: “With regard to the passage on Infinite Life Buddha of the western land, Amida and Shakyamuni are two different Buddhas to begin with. If [as Fa-yün argues] Amida hides his splendid garments [as the father did in the parable of the impoverished son] and appears as Shakyamuni Buddha dressed in ragged and soiled clothes, then this would mean that Shakyamuni has no splendid clothes to hide and only Amida Buddha is a superior and wonderful Buddha!

“Moreover, the living beings who in past existences formed a bond with these two respective Buddhas represent two different groups, and the methods used to convert and guide them are not the same. Forming a bond with a Buddha represents the process of birth, while the maturing of one’s Buddhist practice represents the process of upbringing. If the Buddha with whom one forms a bond and under whom one’s practice matures is different [from the Buddha of this sahā world], then one cannot establish the father and son relationship with the Buddha.

“To wear splendid clothes is one thing, and to wear ragged ones is quite another, and there is likewise a great difference between putting on clothes and taking them off. [Fa-yün] lacks any real understanding of what the sutra is saying, and his asser-

tion goes against the manner in which the Buddha guides living beings to maturity. Nowhere in the long text of the sutra is there anything to support his interpretation.

“When Vairochana puts on certain garments or removes them, he does not move from one place to another, though living beings fail to understand what has happened and suppose he has gone away. But nowhere in any of the sacred teachings is it stated that Amida puts on ragged clothes. And if one is to argue that all Buddhas are essentially equal [and that Shakyamuni and Amida are the same], then why do the various Buddhas speak with special pride about their own particular realms?

“If it were possible for one Buddha to take on the identity of another Buddha, that would mean that the first Buddha is capable of effectively propagating the teachings of the second Buddha. And if, conversely, the second Buddha could assume the form of the first Buddha and spread his teachings, it would mean that he could take over the task of leading to enlightenment those who had formed a bond with the first Buddha. But the beings who were being led and trained by these Buddhas, failing to understand all this, would become completely confused as to who was their true teacher and with which of the two Buddhas they had formed a bond.

“Therefore we know that when living beings form a bond with a Buddha, it must be with a Buddha of the manifested body. Hence Shakyamuni Buddha states: ‘In the past, under twenty thousand million Buddhas, for the sake of the unsurpassed way I have constantly taught and converted you.’²⁷

“This is even more obviously the case with the sixteen princes, who from past times to the present each acted in response to the capacities of the living beings related to them, and thus naturally led them to an understanding of teachings in accordance with their capacities. How then could one suppose that Amida could change his form and take on that of Shakyamuni?”

Sixteen princes

- sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence
shrāmaneras
- the first, Akshobhya Buddha — sovereign, teacher, and parent
sowing, maturing, and harvesting
forming a bond with living beings in the eastern land
- the ninth, Amida Buddha — sovereign, teacher, and parent
sowing, maturing, and harvesting
forming a bond with living beings in the western land
- the sixteenth, Shakyamuni Buddha — sovereign, teacher, and parent
sowing, maturing, and harvesting
forming a bond with living beings in the sahā world

On “*The Words and Phrases*,” volume nine, says: “In the beginning one followed this Buddha or bodhisattva and formed a bond with him, and so it will be through this Buddha or bodhisattva that one will attain the way.”

Profound Meaning, volume six, states: “The Buddha chooses to enter the realm of transmigration with differences and limitations, and there he carries out the work of the Buddha. How, then, could those who formed a bond with the Buddha fail to come into his presence? Just as all the hundred rivers flow into the sea, so is one drawn by one’s connection with the Buddha and born in company with the Buddha.”

And the same text, same volume, says: “Originally one followed this Buddha and

for the first time conceived the desire to seek the way. And by following this Buddha again, one will reach the stage where there is no retrogression.”

Thus Come One Shakyamuni of the inferior manifested body
 └── object of devotion of the Dharma Analysis Treasury school, the Establishment of Truth school, and the Precepts school

Vairochana of the reward body—object of devotion of the Flower Garland school

Thus Come One Shakyamuni
 └── corresponds to the superior manifested body
 └── object of devotion of the Dharma Characteristics school

Thus Come One Shakyamuni—object of devotion of the Three Treatises school
 corresponds to the superior manifested body

Thus Come One Mahāvairochana—object of devotion of the True Word school
 Dharma body Womb Realm
 reward body Diamond Realm

Amida Buddha—object of devotion of the Pure Land school
 according to T’ien-t’ai, the manifested body—└── [the inferior manifested body
 according to Shan-tao and others, the [the superior manifested body
 reward body

The Treatise of Five Hundred Questions states: “If a son does not even know how old his father is, he will also be in doubt as to what lands his father presides over. Though he may be idly praised for his talent and ability, he cannot be counted as a son at all! It is like the age before the Three Sovereigns, when people did not know who their fathers were but all lived like birds and beasts.”

Object of devotion of the T’ien-t’ai school
 └── the Thus Come One Shakyamuni as the Buddha who actually carried out practice and achieved enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past
 Vairochana of the Flower Garland school, Mahāvairochana of the True Word school, and other Buddhas are all followers of this Buddha.

Three bodies first attained by Shakyamuni in India
 └── [manifested body has a beginning, has an end
 └── [reward body [has a beginning,
 [has no end
 └── [Dharma body [has no beginning,
 [has no end
] └── Buddhas such as Mahāvairochana
 of the True Word school

Three bodies attained in the remote past
 └── [manifested body
 └── [reward body] └── has no beginning, has no end
 └── [Dharma body

When the Flower Garland and True Word schools speak of the three bodies that have no beginning and have no end, they are stealing the terminology of the T’ien-t’ai school and applying it to the sutras that are the foundation of their own schools.

Background

This work shows in diagrammatic form the five periods of Shakyamuni Buddha's preaching life, the teachings expounded during each of those periods, and the various Buddhist schools that make those teachings their basis. It also shows the position of Shakyamuni Buddha within the Buddhist teachings in relation to the various Buddhas revered by those schools. It appears to have been used as a reference, an aid to understanding Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, by the disciples who were studying under him. It is not certain when it was written.

There are two similar writings in this volume in which the Daishonin used diagrams, both entitled *The Diagram of the Five Periods of the Buddha's Lifetime Teachings*. Though their contents are notably different, one is known as an extended and the other as a shortened version. The extended version (p. 238) focuses on the refutation of the Pure Land school, and the shortened version (p. 736), on the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra. In the present writing, the Daishonin reveals the object of devotion in terms of the Person. It identifies Shakyamuni, the Buddha who carried out bodhisattva practice and attained enlightenment in the inconceivably distant past, as the original Buddha whom all other Buddhas should follow. It aims to clarify the identity and nature of the Buddha people should rely upon.

The Rooster Diagram of the Five Periods of the Buddha's Lifetime Teachings diagrams the system of five periods established by the Great Teacher T'ient'ai, which categorizes the stages of the Buddha's teachings. These five periods cover the teachings Shakyamuni expounded from the time he attained enlightenment at Buddhagayā until the time of his death. This diagrammatic text is entitled "Rooster Diagram" because various items in the diagram are

connected by lines that resemble the feet of a rooster.

The first diagram introduces major works attributed to Nāgārjuna, the Indian scholar of the Mahayana teachings, three of which amount to "300,000 volumes." However, "volume" here can be interpreted as "verse." Next, the first four of the five periods of teachings are diagrammed with their major sutras and the patriarchs who based their schools on those sutras. These are (1) the Flower Garland Sutra; (2) the Āgama sutras, classified as Hinayana, or the lesser vehicle; (3) the Correct and Equal sutras, which include the Profound Secrets Sutra, the basic text of the Dharma Characteristics school; the Jeweled Necklace Sutra; the Lankāvatāra Sutra, the text of the Zen school; the three sutras of the True Word school; and the three sutras of the Pure Land school; and (4) the Wisdom sutras, and the treatises based on them that form the foundation for the Three Treatises school.

Those passages from the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra, considered the prologue to the Lotus Sutra, are cited to identify the sutras and teachings of the first four periods as expedient means, expounded when Shakyamuni had "not yet revealed the truth," and thus incapable of leading people to supreme enlightenment.

The next diagram concerns the Lotus Sutra, the core sutra of the fifth period of teachings, with passages describing it as the highest teaching to which the previous teachings, expedient means, were intended to lead. One such passage identifies the Lotus as "the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand" (hence the foremost teaching) among all the sutras the Buddha has "preached, now preaches, and will preach."

Next, the Nirvana Sutra, which also

belongs to the fifth period, is charted, citing the “four standards” from that sutra—criteria for judging what Buddhist teaching to rely upon after the Buddha’s passing.

In the latter half of this writing, the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha are diagramed. In the category of sovereign, various titles, deities, and persons occupying the position of sovereign are listed. Central to these is the title World-Honored One. In the category of teacher, teachers of Brahmanism, Confucianism, and Taoism are listed, and the Buddha is depicted as being endowed with all three virtues. Under the category of parent is a brief analysis of two phrases from the Lotus Sutra describing the relationship between Shakyamuni Buddha and the beings of this world as that of parent and children.

Next, T’ien-t’ai’s *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* and Miao-lo’s annotations on that work are cited to counter an argument by advocates of the Pure Land school, who claim that Amida Buddha is superior to Shakyamuni. That Amida Buddha has no relationship to this sahā world, and thus cannot serve as a “father” to the beings in it, is stressed.

Following is a diagram of three Buddhas, Shakyamuni, Amida, and Akshobhya, with their respective realms. These Buddhas represent three of “the sixteen princes,” sons of the Buddha

Great Universal Wisdom Excellence of many kalpas ago depicted in the Lotus Sutra. This and the quotes from commentary that follow focus on the relationship between Shakyamuni and the sahā world, making clear that only Shakyamuni can lead the people of this world to Buddhahood.

A diagram of Buddhas as the objects of devotion of the eight schools is shown, explaining their status. It is described in terms of “Buddha bodies,” which are, in ascending order, the inferior manifested body, the superior manifested body, the reward body, and the Dharma body. In contrast, the Buddha as the object of devotion of the T’ien-t’ai school, as it was originally established by T’ien-t’ai, is “the Thus Come One Shakyamuni” who “achieved enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past.” This refers to the revelation in the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni’s original attainment of enlightenment in the remote past.

The final diagram shows the characteristics of the three bodies of the Buddha, and makes clear that the three bodies of the Buddha of original enlightenment “have no beginning and no end.” In closing, it is affirmed that the Flower Garland and True Word schools, which claim that their Buddhas possess these eternal three bodies, have in fact stolen this doctrine from the T’ien-t’ai school.

Notes

1. “A hundred treatises” indicates numerous subjects with which *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom* deals. With regard to the number of volumes, this treatise was traditionally believed to comprise a thousand volumes.

2. This description of Nāgārjuna’s life span is found in *The Biography of Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna*, a Chinese translation by Kumārajīva.

3. The Thus Come One Freely Perceiving King is another name for Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, who is also called Bodhisattva Freely Perceiving. The relationship between Freely Perceiving King and Dharma Clouds Freedom is unknown.

4. “Volumes” here is said to indicate verses.

5. According to the T’ien-t’ai school,

immediately after his enlightenment Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Flower Garland Sutra for twenty-one days. The Dharma Characteristics school regards the period of preaching as fourteen days.

6. A reference to a system of classification known as "the five teachings and ten doctrines" set forth by Fa-tsang, the third patriarch of the Chinese Flower Garland school. For the purpose of defining the Flower Garland Sutra as the Buddha's supreme teaching, he assigned the teachings of Shakyamuni's lifetime to five categories: Hinayana, elementary Mahayana, final Mahayana, the sudden teaching, and the perfect teaching.

7. See teachings of the three periods in Glossary.

8. The terms in this list are all associated with doctrines of the Pure Land, or Nembutsu, school. See Glossary for specific terms.

9. A school founded by Shakyamuni Buddha himself.

10. A school based on the profound and secret teaching, or teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

11. A school that reveals the true teaching of the vehicle of Buddhahood explicitly.

12. The Universal Worthy Sutra, regarded as the concluding sutra of the Lotus Sutra, states, "If one wishes to carry out repentance, sit upright and ponder the true aspect. Then the host of sins, like frost or dew, can be wiped out by the sun of wisdom." The Daishonin connects this sutra with the Mahayana ordination platform on Mount Hiei because the latter was a center for the practice of meditation described in the sutra, meditation on the true aspect of all phenomena revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

13. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

14. Ibid.

15. The first three of the four teachings

of doctrine—the Tripitaka, connecting, specific, and perfect teachings. The teachings of the first four periods, which are referred to subsequently, mean the teachings of the first four of the five periods (see Glossary). The teachings of the first four flavors that appear in the next sentence mean the teachings of the first four of the five flavors—fresh milk, cream, curdled milk, butter, and ghee—and correspond to "the first four periods" above. The teaching of the flavor of the ghee means the teaching of the period of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras.

16. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

17. The seven teachings are the first three of the four teachings of doctrine (the Tripitaka, connecting, specific, and perfect teachings) and the four teachings of method (the sudden, gradual, secret, and indeterminate teachings).

18. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

19. Ibid., chap. 5.

20. Ibid., chap. 10.

21. "Honorable One of Heaven" here means the most revered being in the heavenly and human realms. "Ruler on High" generally means the sovereign, and here indicates the most noble of persons.

22. Yin Hsi is thought to be a reference to Yin Shou, the teacher of Emperor Yao, one of the Five Emperors, the five legendary sage rulers of China.

23. "Eight generations of parents" and "six generations of parents" may be interpreted as one's parents and one's ancestors of the preceding seven generations, and as one's parents and the parents of the preceding six generations.

24. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

25. Ibid.

26. A reference to *The Meaning of the Lotus Sutra* written by Fa-yün (467–529) in China.

27. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.