

ECOLOGIES OF ENLIGHTENMENT: THE DIVERSIFICATION OF BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

If suffering differs depending on person/culture, so must the response to suffering → history of Buddhism as history of responsive diversification → three main “ecologies” of enlightenment all of which share rules of monastic discipline and core teachings:

Theravada: originates roughly 250BCE, flourishes Sri Lanka. Theravada = “way of the elders”

- *arhat* as ideal = liberation as “blowing out” or “cooling down” desires/self
 - release from bondage (karmic, relational) via *sila, karuna, and panna*
 - leave the cycle of birth and death
 - disparity of *nibbana* and *samsara*
 - practices of insight (*vipasannā*) and calming/purification (*samatha*)
 - Pali texts...Suttas, Vinaya, Abhidharma
 - focus on Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha
 - [Today: Southeast Asia] [broken ordination lineage of nuns]

Mahayana: originates around 200BCE and fully flowers by 200CE as so-called “Great Vehicle”; first flourishes in southern India, then north India; eventual critique of *sravaka* (hearers) as “Hinayana” or “small vehicle”.

- *bodhisattva* as ideal = commitment to liberating all sentient beings
 - release from contributory limits via *upaya* or responsive virtuosity
 - continue being born and dying for the purpose of doing buddha-work
 - non-dualism of *nirvana* and *samsara*; this world as Buddha-realm
 - practice of 6 *paramitas* or perfections
 - Sanskrit texts...Sutras and Sastras
 - focus on ahistorical buddhas and realms
 - [Today: East Asia] [continuous ordination lineage of nuns]

Vajrayana: originates around 600CE in north India as the “Adamantine Thunderbolt Vehicle”; flourishes in Pala Dynasty 7th-11th centuries; enters Tibet initially in 8th century and then intensively from 10th and 11th centuries.

- *mahasiddha* as ideal = spiritual adept who attains buddhahood
 - release from limits of “natural laws” via *tantra*
 - esoteric continuity intended to accelerate history/evolution
 - realizing evolution of buddha-realm
 - non-dualism of all things (including sexuality, death etc.)
 - Sanskrit, Pali and Tibetan texts...extensive commentaries
 - focus on reincarnating lamas as buddhas
 - [Today: Central Asia/Tibet][continuous ordination lineage of nuns]