

Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism

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Lives

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Maitreya

Maitreya (Pal. *Metteyya*; Tib. *Byams pa*; Mong. *Mayidari* [ᠮᠠᠶᠢᠳᠠᠷᠢ]; Chn. Mile [彌勒]; Kor. *Mirük*; Jpn. *Miroku*; also *Cishi* [慈氏], The Compassionate One) is prominent in virtually all Buddhist traditions as a buddha of the future, the next buddha in this world, to succeed Śākyamuni. However, as is the case with some other figures, such as Amitābha, the origins of his cult are uncertain. The cult of devotion to Maitreya takes a variety of forms, with one important distinction being that contrasting the devotion directed toward him in the present in the heaven in which he currently dwells as a bodhisattva, *Tuṣita* (兜率天) – er is, there but now – to that of the devotion which aspires to one's future rebirth in this *Sahā* world, into which Maitreya shall, after an extraordinarily long period, descend as the next buddha – that is, here but in the future (Nattier, 1988, 25). This directionality is reflected also in the titles of some of the scriptures devoted to Maitreya, which speak, respectively, of ascent to his realm or of his descent to earth (see below).

The name Maitreya/Metteyya in Sanskrit and Pali, respectively, is easy to understand as derived from *maitrī* (Pali *mettā*), and its Tibetan translation, *Byams pa*, is a transparent rendering of this sense, namely “loving-kindness,” as is the Chinese *Cishi*. The Chinese rendering *Mile*, however, is somewhat more elusive, and points deeper into the name's history. As Karashima (2013, 177–178) discusses, Chinese 彌勒 represents a medieval pronunciation something like *mjiei[:]lək*, in which in particular the final *k* is not represented in the attested Sanskrit and Pali forms (this *k* is visible in some pronunciations of the Chinese characters, such as Korean *Mirük* and Japanese *Miroku*). Karashima notes the Bactrian coin legend *Μετραγο Βουδο* (*Metrago Boudo*; see below), the textual form *Maitraka* well attested in Sanskrit, and the Tocharian forms *Maitrāk* and *Metrak*, and hypothesizes that “the Bactrian form **Μετραγα* (**Metraga*) was sanskritised to *Maitraka* on the one hand, [and] *Gāndhārī*sed to *Metreya*, *Metrea* on the other. From these *Gāndhārī* forms, [Buddhist Sanskrit] *Maitreya* [and Pali] *Mettey[y]a* were coined.” Rejecting for historical reasons the etymological connection with *maitrī*, Karashima

goes on to conclude, “[t]he original meaning of *Μετραγα* or *Metreya* is unknown, while its relationship with the Vedic *Mitra* and Avestan *Mithra* has not been clarified as of yet. It is possible that a god or hero, who had been worshipped in the *Gandhāra* region, was at some point introduced into Buddhism.”

Indeed, as Karashima also points out, there is no evidence for Maitreya as such in the very earliest strata of Buddhist literature, although he does appear in one *sutta* of the Pali canon (the *Cakkavattisīhanādasutta*), and its Chinese parallels (the only other occurrence in canonical Pali is in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, in the chronologically late final verses; Norman, 1983, 93). It seems likely that, historically speaking, the need for a buddha of the future would only have arisen once Śākyamuni was himself recognized as a figure of the past (for some thoughts on the background, see Anālayo, 2010b, 95–128). The idea of six buddhas of the past, with Śākyamuni as the buddha of the present, was relatively early (→Buddhas of the Past: South Asia). On the gateways to Sanchi Stūpa No. 1, carved around the end of the 1st century BCE, are lines of seven bodhi trees (Marshall & Foucher, 1940, vol. I, 200, vol. II, pls. 21, 45), with Śākyamuni as the seventh buddha. Conceptually speaking, this set the stage for the notion of future buddhas as well, and indeed, although “not particularly early,” at the Gandharan site of Takht-i-bahi we find a striking image of the seven past buddhas with Maitreya as the eighth (Behrendt, 2014, 30). This arrangement is also evident in the eight seated buddha figures, belonging to the 3rd century CE, unearthed at the site of Kanaganahalli (Karnataka, India). The buddhas are seated cross-legged on pedestals, inscribed with their names, including Maitreya, here called *Ajita* (spelt *Ayita*; on *Ajita*, see below) (Poonacha, 2011, 328–334, 459–461; Nakanishi & von Hinüber, 2014, 75–80). As a buddha of the future, Maitreya is technically still a bodhisattva in the present age of the world, and often portrayed iconographically as such, although sources also often assume his buddhahood in advance, so to speak, as shown at Kanaganahalli.

Finally, it should be noted that the bodhisattva/buddha Maitreya may be, but is not always traditionally, considered distinct from the Indian Yogācāra scholastic author named likewise Maitreya (→Asaṅga; the name Maitreyaṅtha more properly belongs to the late Tantric master Advaya-avajra, on whom →Indian Tantric Authors), and there are interesting connections between Yogācāra schools and Maitreya worship (see below).

Sources

Many of the sources for the study of the development of the Maitreya legend come in the form of visual representations, but this ubiquitous figure also appears in a wide range of literature, and a number of important literary works are specifically devoted to him and to the Tuṣita heaven. These begin in India, but along with his cult, such works continued to be produced throughout Buddhist Asia. In addition to the perhaps rather late *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, preserved in a variety of languages (for the Skt., Lévi, 1932; Ishigami, 1989; Hartmann, 2006; Karashima, 2010, 464–466; Li & Nagashima, 2013 Tib. in P 1011; Chn. see below; the text was known even in Persian translation: Jahn, 1956, 115–120; Schopen, 1982, 228–235), six sūtras are considered as a set in Chinese (on the translation status of several of these, see Legittimo, 2008):

- (1) *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing* (觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經, Sūtra on Visualizing Maitreya Bodhisattva's Ascending to be Reborn in the Tuṣita Heaven, T. 452) traditionally (but erroneously) ascribed to Juqu Jingsheng (沮渠京聲; d.u.), Marquis of Anyang (安陽侯) in 455 (see also Fujita, 1990, 155–161).
- (2) *Mile xiasheng jing* (彌勒下生經, Sūtra on Maitreya's Descending to be Reborn, T. 453), traditionally (but erroneously) attributed to Dharmarakṣa (竺法護; 230?–308?); long known to be paralleled by **Ekottarikāgama* 48.3 (T. 125 [II] 787c2–789c27) (Sakaino, 1935, 427–428; Hayashiya, 1945, 141–215; Boucher, 1996, 279–280; Anālayo, 2010a, 7145; Zürcher, 1982, 13116); trans. Watanabe in Leumann, 1919, 245–254.
- (3) *Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* (彌勒下生成佛經, T. 454), a “retranslation” of the above ascribed (probably incorrectly) to Kumārajīva (鳩摩羅什; 344–413) (T. 2145 [LV] 22b27; Sakaino, 1935, 425–427, Zürcher, 1982, 12116; Demiéville, 1953); trans., Iida & Goldstone, 2016; Watanabe in Leumann, 1919, 227–236.
- (4) *Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* (彌勒下生成佛經, T. 455) trans. by Yijing (義淨) of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, dating to 703; trans. Watanabe in Leumann, 1919, 237–244.
- (5) *Mile dachengfo jing* (彌勒大成佛經, T. 456), trans. Kumārajīva in 402; trans. Watanabe in Leumann, 1919, 255–280.
- (6) *Mile laishi jing* (彌勒來時經, T. 457), an anonymous translation dated to the Eastern Jin (317–420) in the present canon (but to the Western Jin by Hayashiya, 1945, 146, 209–210; 1941, 532–533).

All but the first of these texts are known as “descent” sūtras, since they describe how Maitreya will descend into this world from the Tuṣita Heaven as buddha some time in the far distant future. He will teach the Dharma at three assemblies “under the dragon-flower tree” (*longhua sanhui* [龍華三會], T. 453 [XIV] 422b29–c11; T. 456 [XIV] 431b10–432c12), that is, under his own bodhi tree, the *nāga* tree (or *nāgapuṣpa*, understood in East Asia as “dragon-flower,” *longhua* [龍華]; this is usually identified as the ironwood tree, but such identifications are notoriously problematic; on the plant, see Syed, 1990, 354–362). Especially in this world of decline, in which Śākyamuni's teaching is under threat, something at all times perceived throughout the Buddhist world, Maitreya is presented as a guarantee that in the future the Dharma will be revived in all its glory. In this perspective, the object of the devotee may be to strive to be reborn in this world at that time, and to benefit from Maitreya's salvific teaching. It is this notion of future security and salvation in this world that led, particularly in some Chinese contexts (and in Southeast Asia; Ladwig, 2014), to an identification of Maitreya as a messiah and a millenarian figure, whose advent will overcome the present turmoil and trouble.

On the other hand, the one “ascent” sūtra among the group, the *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing*, advocates that believers, either prior to or after death, may ascend into the Tuṣita Heaven, where they will be guided to awakening by Maitreya. Although it is almost certain that this text, like other “*guan* [觀]” or “visualization” sūtras, was in fact compiled in Central Asia, it proved to be the more influential in East Asia as a whole, and its approach made access to Maitreya not something for the distant future but proximately accessible, albeit not here in this world.

To this list of texts must minimally be added a number of Mahāyāna works, either devoted principally to Maitreya, or in which he plays a major role, although a huge number of texts mention him in one way or another (as one example, see Conze & Lida, 1968, for Maitreya as the Buddha's interlocutor in a Prajñāpāramitā sūtra; a good survey of Chinese sources is given by Anderl, 2016). Among the more central texts are the *Maitreyapariṣcchā* (T. 310 [42], D 85; trans. Liljenberg, 2016a), found also in a Tibetan translation of the Chinese translation (P. tib. 89; Li, 2016), and in an earlier Chinese version ascribed to Dharmarakṣa, the *Mile pusa suowen benyuan jing* (彌勒菩薩所問本願經, T. 349). A very short text called the *Maitreyapariṣcchādharmāṣṭaka* (T. 310 [41]; T. 348; D 86; trans. Liljenberg, 2016b) may be of interest principally because an Indian commentary is associated with it, the extensive *Mile pusa suowen jinglun* (彌勒菩薩所問經論, T. 1525); also important is the *Maitreyamahāsiṃhanāda* (T. 310 [23], D 67), a portion of which has Maitreya as the Buddha's interlocutor. Finally, a crucial text in which Maitreya plays a very important role is the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, the culmination of the massive *Buddhāvataṃsaka* (→BEB I: Buddhāvataṃsaka). Here Maitreya and his miraculous tower (*vairocanavyūhālaṃkāragarbhamaḥākūṭāgāra*; see Granoff, 1998), in which are displayed wonder after wonder, form the final substantial stop of Sudhana's spiritual pilgrimage (Suzuki & Idzumi, 1949, 466–529; trans. from Chn. in Cleary, 1993, 1452–1502).

For its part, the Pali tradition, although among the oldest textual witnesses to the figure of Metteyya, as mentioned above transmits only two references to him in the core of the Tipiṭaka (Collins, 1998, 350). He is, however, more frequently discussed in the later *aṭṭhakathā* and *ṭīkā* commentaries. Still more extensive textual traditions devoted to Metteyya developed in Southeast Asia, most significantly in works circulating under the title *Anāgatavaṃsa* ("Chronicle of the Future"; Dimitrov, 2016, 2017; Skilling, 1993, 111–117; ed. Minayeff, 1886; ed. and trans. Saya U Chit Tin & W. Pruitt, 1992; ed. Kyaw Hlaing, 2000; trans. Collins, 1998) and its commentaries (Filliozat, 1993), including versions of the *Amatarasadhārā* (ed. and trans. Stuart, 2017) and *Samantabuddhikā* (ed. Kyaw Hlaing, 2000; Khin Lin Myint, 2005). A large quantity of other Southeast Asian Pali texts – for example, the *Dasabodhisattva-uddesa* (Martini, 1936), *Dasabodhisattuppattikathā* (Saddhatissa, 1975), *Dasavatthupparakāraṇa* (Ver Eecke, 1976), and *Sotatthakī* (ed. Ñāṇ, 1928;

Derris, 2000), and Phra Malai-related tales (→Phra Malai in Thailand and Southeast Asia) – also treat Metteyya in varying degrees of detail, and narratives related to him are frequently represented in vernacular genres (see, *inter alia*, Kyaw Hlaing, 2000; Bamphen, 1992) and, extensively, in the iconographic repertoire (→Buddhas of the Past and Future in Southeast Asian Buddhism).

Some Versions of the Story

Like Śākyamuni (but unlike Amitābha, for instance), Maitreya is given a life story, and this life story is, moreover, linked to that of Śākyamuni (in the following, emphasis is placed on Sanskrit and Chinese sources, while Pali and vernacular Southeast Asian sources are less closely examined). Unlike the kṣatriya Śākyamuni, Maitreya will be born in his last life as a brahmin, for some texts in the north of India, in Varanasi (T. 452 [XIV] 419c14–15), for others in the south (as in the *Gaṇḍavyūha*, which places him in Mālaṭa, in a village called Kūṭa; Suzuki & Idzumi, 1949, 527:8–9 [*dakṣiṇāpathe mālaṭeṣu janapadeṣu kūṭagrāmake*]; Cleary, 1993, 1501). He has, of course, undergone a long cycle of rebirths. The *Maitreyapariṣcchā* refers to a former life in which Maitreya was the brahmin Bhadrāsuddha (the name is attested in a Sanskrit fragment, Matsumura, 1993, 144, r4), under the buddha Jyotivikrīḍitābhijña. In fact, the tradition makes it clear that Maitreya began his path toward buddhahood before Śākyamuni did. The *Maitreyapariṣcchā* says that he began 42 eons earlier (D 85, *dkon brtsegs, cha*, 111a7; in Chinese 40 eons: T. 310 [42] [XI] 629c21; this agrees with a passage of the *Mahāvastu* and its parallels, Tournier, 2017, 191). The arithmetic actually does not work out, nor do the sources try to make it do so, but these sources do agree that while the path usually takes 100 eons, Śākyamuni accomplished this in 91, because of his selflessness, becoming a buddha before Maitreya.

A past buddha named Puṣya (or Tiṣya) had two disciples, Śākyamuni and Maitreya. The tradition, preserved in many sources, has it that while Maitreya was ready for buddhahood, his disciples were not ready for conversion, while the opposite was the case for Śākyamuni. Because, according to some versions, Puṣya thought that it would be easier to change the mind of one man than of many, he created the opportunity for Śākyamuni to adore him, thus saving nine eons of his effort toward

buddhahood (extensive references in Lamotte, 1944–1980, vol. I, 252–253; La Vallée Poussin, 1928; Tournier, 2017, 169–174). For the *Maitreyapariṣcchā*, although Maitreya did not engage in the sort of extensive giving undertaken by Śākyamuni (perhaps most evocatively as Vessantara), he attained complete awakening through skillful means (*upāya*) – the text narrates this as if it has already taken place, although Maitreya is nominally a “future buddha” (D 85, *dkon brtsegs, cha*, 113b7–114a1 ≈ T. 310 [42] [XI] 630a12; note, however, that the same text also speaks of Maitreya’s attainment of buddhahood in the future [D 85, *dkon brtsegs, cha*, 115a7–b2]).

Indeed, Maitreya’s buddhahood lies in the future. This is already extensively predicted even in relatively early texts (DN III.75–76, and elsewhere; Lamotte, 1988, 701). There will be a king in Ketumatī (present day Varanasi, where, as above, these texts predict Maitreya’s birth) named Śāṅkha. He will have as minister Brahmāyus (or Subrahmaṇa), whose wife will be Brahmāvati. Maitreya will be their son. Pali texts speak further of his wife (Candamukhī) and son (Brahmavaḍḍhana) (Ver Eecke, 1976, 126:24–26, 133). In this very fortunate age humans will live for 80,000 years. Although things are happy, and the land paradisiacal, there will still be sufficient stimulus for Maitreya to realize the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of existence. According to some versions of the story, Śāṅkha will have a huge jeweled pillar (*yūpa*), but it will be destroyed (how this happens differs among versions). When Maitreya witnesses that even this splendid edifice is impermanent, he enters the forest and that very same day attains awakening (Cowell & Neil, 1886, 61:9–12; trans. Rotman, 2008, 126; T. 454 [XIV] 424b23–27; trans. Iida & Goldstone, 2016, 18; *Anāgatavaṃsa* vs. 66; cp. T. 1 [6] [I] 42a17; trans. Anālayo, 2014, 15; see also Kumamoto, 2002, 7).

Maitreya and Mahākāśyapa

As pointed out particularly by Granoff (2010), the *yūpa* in the narrative outlined above forms a clear link, expressed both textually and visually, between Śākyamuni and Maitreya. One of the most vivid further links between the present dispensation and that to come is portrayed through the encounter of Maitreya with Śākyamuni’s disciple → Mahākāśyapa. A story popular in earlier Buddhist literature recounts that Kāśyapa, when his time in this world came to an end, entered a mountain to await the coming of Maitreya. When Maitreya comes, Kāśyapa will pass on to him a robe entrusted

to him by Śākyamuni, thereby emphasizing the connection and continuity between the two teachings (Sakurabe 1965, 38–39), since the robe functions as a symbol or emblem of Śākyamuni’s teaching (T. 125 [48.3] [II] 788c28–789a21 = T. 453 [XIV] 422b12–c4; Deeg, 1999; references in Silk, 2003, 181, n. 18, which also discusses in detail stories of Kāśyapa’s acquisition of the robe from Śākyamuni, on which see also Tournier, 2017, 323–333). One Maitreya text (T. 456 [XIV] 433b19–22) has it that Kāśyapa “will take Śākyamuni Buddha’s *saṃghāṭi* robe and give it to Maitreya, saying: ‘[t]he great teacher Śākyamuni, the Tathāgata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha conferred this upon me at the time of his final nirvāṇa, commanding me to give it to the Blessed One [you, Maitreya].’” In other texts, however, Maitreya receives Śākyamuni’s robes from Mahāprajāpatī (T. 202 [57] [IV] 434a6–25; T. 203 [50] [IV] 470a15–22), or even from Śākyamuni himself (T. 26 [66] [I] 51b1–5; T. 44 [I] 830b26–29; T. 1545 [XXVII] 894a17–28; other variations are detailed in Silk, 2003). In yet other versions, it is not a robe but only Kāśyapa’s supernaturally preserved (*avikopita*) skeleton that Maitreya encounters, with or without his robe (T. 190 [III] 870a24–b25; Cowell & Neil, 1886, 61:22–29).

In the future age of Maitreya, beings will not only have extremely long lifespans, but also be physically enormous; Maitreya’s own body is described in such terms. This permits him, upon encountering Kāśyapa’s body, to take it into his hand. The sight of the disciple’s body is critical in the liberation of Maitreya’s assembly (Cowell & Neil, 1886, 61:20–26; trans. Rotman, 2008, 126; Silk, 2003, 200). The enormous size of Maitreya’s body has been connected by some scholars with the many monumental sculptures of him either extant or referred to in textual sources (see below). The *Anāgatavaṃsa* commentary states that when, after his extremely long life, Metteyya attains nirvāṇa, he will enter the realm of nirvāṇa (*nibbānadhātu*) without leaving any physical remainder (that is, no body produced as a result of karmic actions, *vipākakammajarūpa*) (Saya U Chit Tin & Pruitt, 1992, 24).

Maitreya/Ajita

Maitreya’s relation with Ajita (阿侍多, 阿耨多, etc.) is complex. At first, the names Maitreya and Ajita seem to have referred to two different individuals, Ajita being a codisciple with Maitreya under one or another teacher. One of the earliest known references is in the “Pārāyaṇavagga,” the fifth chapter of the *Suttanipāta* (vss. 967–1149), in which two figures,

Ajita and Tissa-Metteyya, make an appearance along with 14 other students of the brahmin Bāvāri, who introduces them to Śākyamuni (Lamotte, 1988, 702–707). In the Chinese translation of the *Dharmapada*, the two figures also appear together (*Chuyao jing* [出曜經], T. 212 [IV] 643b29): “[o]f the sixteen brahmacārins with naked bodies, fourteen entered parinirvāṇa and two did not: Maitreya and Ajita.” (Lamotte, 1988, 705). In the much later *Xianyu jing* (賢愚經, T. 202 [IV] 436a1–2), the pair again appear as different figures, as they do in a passage in the *Mahāvastu* (Senart, 1882–1887, vol. III, 330:7–9; Karashima, 2018, 182 n. 7). As mentioned above, Maitreya is depicted as the son of the minister to the ruler of Varanasi, who is entrusted to the tutelage of Bāvāri. Śākyamuni then predicts that he will be born to a brahmin family, attain awakening as Maitreya, and preach three sermons (in the abovementioned three assemblies). On the other hand, the prediction for Ajita is that he will become a cakravartin king called Śaṅkha, but as a result will “experience a very long time ever clinging to saṃsāra” (T. 202 [IV] 436a3–4). Similarly, in *Madhyamāgama* 66 (中阿含經, T. 26 [I] 509c1–511a28) and the *Gulai shishi jing* (古來世時經, T. 44 [I] 830b23–24), Maitreya is rewarded with a future as a tathāgata, while Ajita is questioned as to why he would want to continue being treated like an ignorant being (Karashima, 2018, 184–185). In other sources, such as the various versions of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, the name Ajita is absent.

Despite this evidence that the two names often referred to separate figures, at some stage the names coalesced to produce Ajita-Maitreya, or Maitreya the Invincible, with Ajita often being used as the personal name. In the *Mahāvastu* (Senart, 1882–1887, vol. I, 51:5–7, new ed. Tournier, 2017, 428–429), in relation to the proclamation, by every buddha, of his immediate successor understood as the crown prince (*yuvārāja*), it is said: “[j]ust as I am now, the tathāgata has predicted the bodhisattva Ajita: ‘[a]fter me, he will become a buddha in the world, with Ajita as his personal name (*nāmena*), and Maitreya as his family name (*gotreṇa*), in the capital [named] Bandhumā.’” The same text (Senart, 1882–1887, vol. III, 246:13; Karashima, 2018, 182) says, “Ajita of a brahmin family ... will become Maitreya in the world in the future.” In the *Anāgatavaṃsa*, the Buddha informs Sāriputta that “[i]t is not possible for anyone to describe completely Ajita’s great accumulation of merit. In this auspicious world cycle (*bhadrakalpa*), in the future, in a crore of years,

there will be an Awakened One named Metteyya” (vss. 4–5, in Norman, 2006; the same combination is found in vss. 55–57 of the text). When Maitreya appears in the *Sukhāvātīvyūha* (Fujita, 2011, 67:6, and elsewhere) and the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* (Kern & Nanjio, 1908–1912, 309:1–2; Karashima, 2018, 189–190), the Buddha always addresses him as Ajita. The two names appear together also in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* (Wogihara, 1932–1935, 734:14–18; Karashima, 2018, 189), and other Mahāyāna scriptures (Karashima, 2018, 189–192).

The title Maitreya the Invincible led to the suggestion that his origins lay in Northwest India, and in particular with the Iranian god Mithra (comp. Sol Invictus) (Przyluski, 1929, 193; Lévi, 1932; Filliozat, 1950). This theory of a non-Indian source, although not universally accepted, is not without merit. The huge mural on the ceiling of the alcove of the eastern buddha at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, thought to belong to the 6th century, is composed of the Sun god Mithra flying through the sky with two goddesses armed with bows, arrows, and shields in a chariot drawn by four thoroughbred horses with wings (Rowland, 1938; Grenet, 1993; Miyaji, 2016). According to Xuanzang’s (玄奘; 600/602–664) *Datang Xiyu ji* (大唐西域記), the eastern buddha at Bamiyan was Śākyamuni (T. 2087 [LI] 873b15–17). The western buddha, however, thought to have been completed around the beginning of the 7th century, has a vault ceiling mural centered upon a seated bodhisattva Maitreya, surrounded and praised by the bodhisattvas and gods of Tuṣita Heaven. Described by Xuanzang as “sparkling gold in color and outfitted with blinding jewels” (T. 2087 [LI] 873b14), this is argued by some to be an expression of Maitreya Buddha of the “descent” tradition (Miyaji, 2004, 90).

The Maitreya Image in India

Images clearly identifiable as the bodhisattva Maitreya in India proper are few and far between. The Maitreya images from Mathura made during Kuṣāṇa times (2nd–3rd cents. CE) are similar to the contemporaneous Maitreya images of Gandhara (see below) with respect to ear and neck decorations and a water flask in the left hand, but the depiction of the hair arrangement and crown differs, featuring hair arranged in snail shaped knots without *uṣṇiṣa*, and coiffure either in the shape of a crown (*jaṭāmukuta*) or a crown of jewels. This last

feature constitutes a new development, the significance of which is unclear. From this time on, the *jaṭāmukūṭa* and jeweled crown images come to dominate the iconography surrounding Maitreya. Such a development is no doubt related to that of the two great gods of Hinduism: Śiva crowned with *jaṭāmukūṭa*, and Viṣṇu crowned with jewels.

There are, however, many fewer images at Mathura than in Gandhara: Behrendt (2014, 33–35) calculates that “there are about twelve images of Maitreya in Gandhāra for every one that has been found in Mathurā [...] In Mathurā, images integrating Maitreya make up only a little more than 2% of production, while in Gandhāra Maitreya imagery accounts for 17%–27% of the devotional icons [...] In Gandhāra over the course of the following centuries [after the 3rd] the fabrication of Maitreya icons was second only to representations of the Buddha [...] In contrast, in northern India Maitreya imagery effectively vanished. Essentially no comparable Maitreya or past Buddha imagery is known from northern or western India from the third to fifth century CE.”

During the Gupta period (4th–6th cents. CE), while Buddhist sculpture flourished at both Mathura and Sarnath (in Uttar Pradesh), there are almost no examples of bodhisattvas at Mathura, in contrast to Sarnath, where they abound, and where Maitreya is again coiffured, but with no accoutrements, save prayer beads or a water flask in the left hand, and occasionally a deerskin draped over the left shoulder across the breast, a definite adaptation of the Gandharan Maitreya, now stripped of all decoration.

In the later Buddhist caves of western India carved from Vākāṭaka times on (mid-5th to 8th cents.), there are many bas-reliefs and murals depicting bodhisattvas, flanking buddhas, guarding entrance ways in tandem, or standing alone. Here the attributes of Maitreya contrast with those of Avalokiteśvara. In the Ajanta and Kanheri Caves, for example, the bodhisattva Maitreya is fully decked out with jeweled crowns and other head dressing, neck decorations and armbands, but is usually empty handed, except for what may be a flower from his bodhi tree, the Nāgapuṣpa. There are two painted series of eight buddha in Ajanta (in caves 17 and 22), in both of which Maitreya is wearing a crown; in the latter painting, inscriptions label all buddhas and their trees (Chakravati in Yazdani, 1955, 111–112; Zin, 2003, vol. I, 468). Such a princely demeanor may be connected to the crowned Maitreya of Kuṣāṇa Mathura.

In the regions of Orissa, Bihar, and Bengal under the Bhauma-Kara and Pāla Dynasties between the 8th and 12th centuries, depictions of Maitreya can be found in the traditional style. During this era Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara were worshipped in tandem. Somewhat earlier, Xuanzang reported a pair of statues of Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya cast in silver, standing at both sides of the monastery gate in Bodhgaya (T. 2087 [LI] 916a3–4), and the so-called “Sanchi Torso” in the Victoria and Albert Museum, a figure of Avalokiteśvara (c. 900), is the twin of the statue of Maitreya kept in the Sanchi Museum (Irwin, 1972).

In Sri Lanka the link between Maitreya and kingship became so close that it is impossible to determine whether a given image is of Maitreya or a king (Mori, 2015, 110–169). The Pali chronicle of Sri Lanka, the *Mahāvamsa* (XXXII.72–75), reports that King Duṭṭhagāmaṇī (1st cent. BCE) wished at the moment of his death to be reborn in Tusita with Metteyya, but the text makes it sound as if he had not even been aware of this option earlier, since he had to ask which celestial realm (*devaloka*) is the most pleasant; only upon being told it is Tusita does he wish to be reborn there. Images and textual evidence from Sri Lanka, however, amply illustrate the presence of cultic activities devoted to Metteyya on the island throughout its history (see further Holt, 1991, 55–62.) (On the history and iconography of Metteyya in Southeast Asia, →Buddhas of the Past and Future in Southeast Asian Buddhism.)

Gandhara and Central Asia

The presence of Maitreya in Gandhara and Central Asia can principally be described using the resources of art history and archaeology. There are, for example, copper coins minted by the Kuṣāṇa king Kaniṣka with the image of Maitreya, whose identity is made plain by the inscription “Metrago Boudo,” as mentioned above (see Huntington, 1993; Cribb, 1999/2000, 152–57, 177–188). A mid-1st-century CE copper plate from Gandhara bears an inscription in which the donor wishes “for his own well-being and happiness, for the preparation for nirvāṇa, for a meeting with Maitreya,” and further “for a meeting with the Lord, the arhat, the completely awakened Maitreya, for a complete extinction there” (*bhagavado rahado sammasaṃb(u)ghasa metreasa sammosa[na](e) tatra pariṇivayaṇae*; Falk, 2014, 7–8). In both of

these examples, Maitreya is explicitly referred to as a buddha, which suggests that the donor aspired to be reborn on earth when that future buddha will arise, in order to reach liberation.

In contrast to this, some ten extant basreliefs from Gandhara depict the “Maitreya in Tuṣita” image related to the “ascent” tradition. All of them have Maitreya with his hair carefully arranged, and holding a water flask in his left hand, but there are two different iconographic types, depending on how he is seated. The first has Maitreya sitting with crossed legs on a lion’s throne placed under a canopy as if in a palace, surrounded by gods attending him with hands folded (in *añjali*) and flanked by naked boys on the canopy uprights (Kurita, 2003, vol. II, pls. 10, 11, 43, 48, 50; Ryūkoku Museum, 2012, 201, pl. 11). This representation may be related to the “ascent” sūtra, according to which Maitreya is reborn on the lion’s throne in the Tuṣita Hall of Gems amidst a sumptuous atmosphere with gods worshipping him. The second type has Maitreya sitting in a chair cross-ankled, under a canopy surrounded by gods and ordinary male and female attendants, all singing his praises (Foucher, 1918, figs. 348, 459; Le Coq, 1922, Taf. 13c; Kurita, 2003, vol. II, pl. 47).

This “Maitreya in Tuṣita” iconography of Gandharan origin appears frequently in the art of Kucha and of the Northern Wei (北魏) Dynasty. On the murals of the Kizil Caves in Kucha (c. 500 CE), one finds depictions of “Maitreya in Tuṣita” on the ceilings. In Cave 76 (the Peacock Cave), at the zenith of the ceiling cut into a dome is a lotus in full bloom, from which naked putti tumble outward down the side of the dome. Triangular paintings in the four corners depict cross-ankled Maitreya being praised by the likes of →Brahmā, Indra, and other gods (Grünwedel, 1920, vol. III–9, fig. 3, Taf. IX–XIV). Entering Cave 77 (The Cave of Statues), one spots Maitreya in the right corridor. The cross-ankled figure is depicted above the baluster in the center of the upper portion of the left wall, flanked by Brahmā and Indra and accompanied by gods playing musical instruments and worshipping him (Shinkyō Uiguru Jichiku Bunbutsu Kanri Iinkai, 1984, vol. II, pls. 16–19).

In contrast to the ample visual sources, textual sources from Central Asia are relatively sparse. However, a very important text, or text complex, found in a variety of versions in different languages, is devoted to Maitreya. The *Maitreyasamitināṭaka* (Drama concerning the Teaching Assembly of [or: Encounter with] Maitreya; Wright, 1999, 369) is a

Tocharian A text, translated into Uighur as the *Maitrisimit nom bitig* (Text of the Law about *Maitrisimit*; the following is based principally on Peyrot & Semet, 2016). While their dating is not certain, the Uighur *Maitrisimit* may be from the 10th century, while its source, the Tocharian A *Maitreyasamitināṭaka*, dates from perhaps the 8th century. As its name suggests, the Tocharian text is a drama about Maitreya, in 27 (or 28) acts. It is in a mixture of prose and verse, and contains some stage directions, indicating that it was indeed intended for performance. The Uighur translation, by contrast, is in prose, without stage directions, narrating the Buddha’s preaching to Śāriputra and Ānanda about Maitreya. A small sample comparing the two versions in English is found in Semet (2015).

Another version of the same text corpus occurs in Khotanese as the centerpiece of chapter 22 of the so-called *Book of Zambasta* (ed. and trans. Emmerick, 1968, 301–341; see also Kumamoto, 2002). As Martini (2011, 135, n. 32) states, “[i]n the *Book of Zambasta* Maitreya features both as a bodhisattva instrumental in providing spiritual advice, in chapter three, and later as the future Buddha himself, in chapter twenty-two, a Khotanese version of the ‘Prophecy of Maitreya,’ *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*.” In historiography too Maitreya has a role. The Khotanese kings Vijaya Saṃbhava and Vijaya Vīrya were, according to the Tibetan account of Khotan, incarnations of Maitreya (Emmerick, 1967, 25, 29).

Uighur sources on Maitreya beyond the *Maitrisimit nom bitig* also indicate a robust interest in his cult. A number of colophons, for instance, express the author’s wish for rebirth in Tuṣita (Kasai, 2013, 70–71), and the Uighurs even copied Maitreya texts in Chinese, and translated them into Uighur (Kitsudō, 2011; also, e.g. Zieme, 2013).

Tibet and Mongolia

Maitreya worship is prominent in Tibetan practice, especially among the Dge lugs pa, and his presence in Tibet may go back to the earliest period of Buddhism. Historically speaking, “[t]he central shrine of the first Buddhist temple built in Tibet ... *Kha ’brug*, was known as ... *Byams pa mi ’gyur gling*, ‘site of the immutable Maitreya’” (Alexander & van Schaik, 2011, 434; Hazod, 2002, 28, however, points out that this naming may postdate the founding). Moreover, according to tradition the image called *Byams pa chos kyi ’khor lo*, Dharmacakra Maitreya,

said to have been brought to Tibet in the 7th century by the Nepalese bride of the emperor Srong brtsan sgam po, was placed in the Ra sa, phrul snang temple in Lhasa, otherwise known as the Jokhang (Sørensen, 1994, 207–211; Quintman, 2017, 131–140). According to Alexander and van Schaik (2011, 438), “a cult of Maitreya was supported by [the kings of Ladakh] in the tenth and eleventh centuries. When we take the histories of the Tibetan Empire and its aftermath into account, this cult may be linked to earlier Maitreya worship during the imperial period in central Tibet, and its revival after the fall of the empire.” The remains of 11th-century Maitreya images from Central Tibet can be seen in Vitali (1990, plates 19–21).

Slightly later, the immensely influential →Tsong kha pa famously had a vision of Maitreya during his four-year retreat, after which he performed the first of his “Four Deeds,” namely restoring the great Maitreya statue of Rdzing phyi (Kaschewsky, 1971, 121–126). In 1409, he named the monastery he founded outside Lhasa Dga’ ldan (more fully Dga’ ldan mam par rgyal ba’i gling dgon pa; often written phonetically as Ganden; Kaschewsky, 1971, 185–188), that is, the Tibetan equivalent of Tuṣita, and it is here that he died (commemorated with the annual religious festival [*dus chen*] of butter lamps called *dga’ ldan lnga mchod*, “Ganden feast of the twenty-fifth [of the tenth month]”); it is said that upon his death he was reborn in Tuṣita. In 1461–1463, the (retrospectively recognized) Dalai Lama I, Dge ’dun grub pa (1391–1475), erected a monumental Maitreya statue 25 cubits high at the monastery of Bkra shis lhun po, which he himself had founded (Martin, 2018). This image is far from the only important one. Images of Maitreya, the most remarkable of which are more or less monumental (Torricelli, 1994), dot the landscape (one, from the 13th cent. but no longer extant, is said to have been 80 cubits high; Martin, 2018, part 3, n. 15). One imposing example is found near Mulbek, between Srinagar and Leh, the capital of Ladakh, with another located nearby (Fontein, 1979, with photographs). These images are almost 8 m tall. Somewhat smaller but still impressive images are also found, as illustrated by a bas-relief located again in Ladakh, more than 2 m high and not later than the 11th century. The identification of this image is sure because of an inscription (Alexander & van Schaik, 2011, mentioning also many other images).

Such huge images are not only plastic. Giant *thang ka* paintings frequently depict Maitreya

(although certainly not always; Śākyamuni and Amitābha, for instance, are also popular subjects). An example in a collection in Pasadena measures 6.8 × 4.5 m (Pal, 2003, cited by Martin, 2018), but much larger examples are known (Martin, 2018, for a detailed discussion).

Maitreya rituals are also not rare. A three-day “Maitreya Aspiration” festival (*Byams pa’i smon lam*) was instituted in the 18th century to fulfill the intentions of the Panchen Lama III (Martin, 2018). A different observance follows the Tibetan New Year in Lhasa, the first month’s “Invitation of Maitreya” (*Byams pa gdan ’dren*, or *Byams pa spyan ’dren*), and these practices have been understood as intended to hasten the arrival of Maitreya (Dreyfus, 2003, 258; Richardson, 1993, 52).

The Mongols, for their part, got their Buddhism from Tibet, and the first →Jebsundamba Khutugtu, Öndör Gegeen Zanabazar (1635–1723), followed the Dge lugs pa tradition of ritualizing independent Khalkha Mongolia through the cult of Maitreya (Tsultemin, 2015). He followed Tsong kha pa’s religio-political model in instituting, in 1656, annual New Year’s worship of Maitreya in a ritual procession of his image through the capital (Berger, 1995), a rite which persists to the present (Teleki, 2012, 272). It is very interesting in terms of the link between the bodhisattva/buddha Maitreya and the Yogācāra author of that name that the processed cart contained not only an image of Maitreya but also copies of the so-called Five Works of Maitreya, the Yogācāra texts credited to him (namely: *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, and *Ratnagoṭravibhāga*). A depiction of the procession is found in Berger (1995, item 42, with plates).

Illustrating the pervasive quest for monumental Maitreya images, present day Mongolia is also the location of a sort of competition in the construction of such statues, with at least two being built, a 20 m image at the Dashchoilin monastery in Ulaanbaatar, and another, the “Grand Maitreya Project,” erecting a 54 m statue, and a stūpa twice as large, in a park outside the same city (see e.g. <https://www.facebook.com/GrandMaitreya/>).

China

The cult of Maitreya arrived in East Asia, probably via Khotan, sometime in the late 3rd century. The earliest reliable information we have, however,

comes later, and suggests that a central figure in its development was the monk Dao'an (道安; 312–385), who from 365 was based at Xiangyang (襄陽), south of Luoyang (洛陽). Before an image of Maitreya, he made a vow to be reborn in Tuṣita (T. 2059 [L] 353b28; see Tsukamoto, 1985, vol. II, 753–756). When Dao'an's disciple Tanjie (曇戒) fell ill, “he chanted continuously, the name of Maitreya Buddha never leaving his lips. His disciple, Zhi-sheng [智生], who waited on him in his illness, asked him why he did not want to be reborn in [the Heaven] of Peaceful Repose [安養, i.e. Amitābha's paradise]. Tanjie replied, “[t]ogether with the Reverend [Dao'an] and eight others, I have vowed to be reborn in Tuṣita [i.e. Maitreya's paradise]. The Reverend, Daoyuan [道願], and the others have already been born there, but I have not. That is why I have this wish.” (T. 2059 [L] 356c1–4; trans. Kieschnick, 1997, 5) This monastic cult, in which Dao'an and his pupils made vows to be reborn in the Tuṣita Heaven, is thought to have been largely motivated by a desire to gain guidance in the exegesis of Buddhist scriptures (Zürcher, 1972, 194). It is to be expected that a central part of the ritual involved images of the bodhisattva, one example of which was donated by the emperor Shizu (世祖; 337–385; r. 357–385; Fu Jian [符堅]) of the Former Qin dynasty (前秦; 351–394) (Zürcher, 1972, 188; T. 2059 [L] 352b13–15, 353b27–29; Link, 1958, 21, 36–37).

Dao'an's scripture catalogue, *Zongli zhongjing mulu* (綜理眾經目錄) of 374, preserved in Sengyou's (僧祐; 445–518) *Chu sanzang ji ji* (出三藏記集, T. 2145) of circa 519, lists two translations by Dharmarakṣa (a *Mile chengfo jing* [彌勒成佛經] and a *Mile benyuan jing* [彌勒本願經]), together with two other anonymous translations (Tsukamoto, 1985, 755). These do not seem to have survived, although the title of the first suggests it may have been an earlier version of the *Mile dachengfo jing* (T. 456). However, it is the much later *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing* (T. 452), also recorded in the *Chu sanzang ji ji* (T. 2145 [LV] 13a9), that is most closely related to Dao'an's practice. The object of the visualization is to enable the practitioner's rebirth in the presence of Maitreya, and indeed the title could also be rendered “Sūtra on Rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven through Contemplation of Maitreya Bodhisattva.” The possibility that one might eventually be able to accompany Maitreya on his return to the human realm, and hence hear the teachings at first hand from the future buddha himself, is mentioned (T. 452 [XIV] 420a26–27),

but the emphasis is first and foremost on achieving rebirth in the Tuṣita Heaven.

There is an overlap in function here between the Tuṣita Heaven in which Maitreya dwells and Amitābha's Pure Land (*jingtu* [淨土]); both are presented as places within reach, and both offer the eventual promise of supreme awakening. They were to operate in parallel for a considerable time and were, to a certain extent, rival visions. Eventually, however, the Pure Land version centering on Amitābha came to predominate both in China and, later, in Japan. (For a discussion of the many “careers” of Maitreya as represented in these and other sūtras, see Anderl, 2016). The crucial Maitreya ascent scripture, the *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing*, in particular was the subject of a number of commentaries, including the *Guan Mile shangsheng Doushuaitian jing zan* (觀彌勒上生兜率天經贊, T. 1772) of Kuiji (窺基; 632–682), the *Milejing youyi* (彌勒經遊意, T. 1771) of Jizang (吉藏; 549–623), the *Mirūk sangsaeng kyōng chong'yo* (彌勒上生經宗要, T. 1773) of Wōnhyo (元曉; 617–686; Sponberg, 1988) and the *Sam Mirūk-kyōng so* (三彌勒經疏, T. 1774; partial trans. in Muller & McBride, 2012, 201–294) of Kyōnghūng (憬興; fl. late 7th to early 8th cents.). The first of these, Kuiji's commentary, was also translated into Uighur (Kitsudō, 2008).

As is the case in Gandhara, the presence of Maitreya in China at this time is well illustrated visually. Images were commissioned of Maitreya both standing and seated, both as objects of worship and as aids for visualization and contemplation. The standing images were often indicative of him preaching after his attainment of buddhahood in Ketumatī (Jitoumo [雞頭摩] or Chitoumo [翅頭末]), underneath the “dragon-flower tree.” Seated images are immediately recognizable because of two characteristic poses, both of which depict Maitreya sitting in the Tuṣita Heaven deep in meditation. Either he sits on a stool, bolt upright, with his knees widely separated and his ankles crossed, or he is depicted in a “[legs] half-crossed pensive pose” (*banjia siwei* [半跏思惟]), leaning forward with the left leg pendant and the right leg across the knee. The first iconographic type is found as far west as Kizil and indeed Gandhara, but is also typical of the Northern Liang (北涼; 398–439) and the Northern Wei (Juliano & Lerner, 2001, 132–133, 155, 168, 212–213; Lee Yu-Min, 1984). The second type also dates from the Northern Wei, but the most famous extant examples are from Korea and Japan

(Lee Junghee, 1993; Ōnishi, 2003) (see below). By the time of the Northern Qi (北齊; 550–577), pensive images appear in a variety of forms, on altarpieces, marble statues, and even paired figures (Leidy, 1990). Based on a cache of images and fragments discovered in the ruins of Xiude Monastery (修德寺) in Hebei (河北) province, the argument has been made that the pensive images of the Northern Qi could have been used in meditative visualization practices and depicted the aspirants themselves in the glory of the Tuṣita Heaven, since several images contain inscriptions that clearly label these images as “pensive icons” (*siweixiang* [思惟像]), and one icon even places the image between two bodhisattva figures seated in pensive attitude (Hsu, 2002). For a discussion of image inscriptions and the information they provide, see Anderl (2016, 1–6.)

The Maitreya cult continued to flourish under the Northern Dynasties; during the period 390–600 “there are more inscribed images of Maitreya than [of] any other Buddhist figure in China” (Huntington, 1986, 149, citing Lee, 1983, 112–138, 412–448). In the Buddhist grottos of the Northern Wei and its successors, Yungang (雲崗; mid- to late 5th cent, in Shanxi Province) and Longmen (龍門, late 5th to 10th cents., in Henan Province), the majority of images were of either Maitreya or Śākyamuni (Tsukamoto, 1942, 228–233, 368–69, 375–76, 377–82, 513; Hayami, 1971, 37–39). At these sites we see many examples of the seated, cross-ankled Maitreya flanked symmetrically by images of so-called pensive bodhisattvas. McNair (2007) has discussed in detail the presence of Maitreya at Longmen, on the basis of both imagery and inscriptions (the latter in 2007, 167–180, though the translations are not always reliable). A 6th-century image of Maitreya from Longmen is found in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (AK-MAK-71; <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.923>), and Wong (2001) discusses several others. Similar images, both stone images in situ and metal images inherently movable, can often be found in museums and other collections.

Among the most stone famous images is that known as the Xinchang (新昌) or Stone Wall (Shicheng [石城]) Great Buddha (Dafo [大佛]), located in Zhejiang province. This statue, 13.2 m high and 15.9 m wide, known for its therapeutic efficacy, is renowned among other things as the image before which the Tendai patriarch →Zhiyi (智顓; 538–597) died in 597 (studies include Shinohara, 1991; Chen, 2017; the latter includes a translation of

the account of Guanding [灌頂; 561–632], T. 2050 [L] 196a8–20 at Chen, 2017, 324–325).

To the abovementioned images should be added the famous cave 254 at Dunhuang (on Maitreya paintings at Dunhuang, see Wang, 2002; on the architecture and depictions of Tuṣita, see the well-illustrated Ho, 2007). Yet Maitreya, however much he found a place in official settings, surely did not remain the sole concern of scholar monks, confined to a monastery. The inscriptions studied by Anderl (2016) show clearly that small votive images were commissioned by a wide spectrum of individuals, families, and local communities. In addition, the scope for interpretation of the meaning of Maitreya also extended beyond the orthodox. Although there was no canonical source for such an interpretation, Maitreya's rebirth in this world was also imagined as occurring not eons in the future but rather potentially here and now. This could make Maitreya manifest as a revolutionary savior figure, bringing renewal and a challenge to the social order, or he could be coopted in the service of traditional authority, as a ruler might claim that he (or she) was a living manifestation of Maitreya, a cakravartin or universal monarch (Nattier, 1988, 30–31). Both of these possibilities were realized a number of times in Chinese history.

The revolutionary aspect was illustrated most clearly in the last years of the Sui Dynasty (隋; 581–618), when monks and laymen alike justified their destructive actions by drawing upon imagery and beliefs common to the cult of Maitreya (Kegasawa, 1981, 15–32; Zürcher, 1982). In the year 613 alone, there were two Maitreya-related uprisings. The first was led by Song Zixian (宋子賢; d. 613), a thaumaturge, who claimed to be an incarnation of Maitreya and proclaimed himself emperor, before being captured and put to death with a large number of his followers (Overmyer, 1976, 83). The second rebellion was led by a monk, Xiang Haiming (向海明; d. 613), who also claimed to be an earthly manifestation of Maitreya. Attracting several tens of thousands of adherents, he too declared himself emperor before being overcome by imperial forces (Sima Guang, 1976, 182:5686–5687; Weinstein, 1987, 154–155).

In contrast, the rulers of the earlier Northern Wei, who were often under pressure from dissident groups that used Maitreya's descent as a weapon, seemingly encouraged the identification of themselves with Maitreya (Nattier, 1988, 31).

The most famous case, however, was that of Wu Zetian (武則天, Wu Zhao [武曩]; 624–705), who as part of her complex project to justify her assumption of the throne and the declaration of her Zhou dynasty (周; 690–705), promoted claims that she was in fact Maitreya, in this case through a novel interpretation of the *Dayun jing* (大雲經, T. 387), put forth in a commentary on the sūtra presented by a group of senior monks in 690 (on the fascinating background, see Forte, 2005; Weinstein, 1987, 41–43; amongst the quite substantial literature, see also e.g. Chen, 2006). This is far from the only case of textual composition related to Maitreya in the service of essentially political ends (for another Maitreya scripture addressing kingship and buddhahood, the *Zhengming jing* [證明經, T. 2879], see Hughes, 2017).

Another somewhat different monastic tradition of Maitreya worship, probably not directly connected to the currents mentioned above, was the special link forged between scholars of Chinese Yogācāra (Faxiang [法相]) teachings and Maitreya. The author of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (*Yuqieshiji lun* [瑜伽師地論], T. 1579) was traditionally said to be a certain Maitreya, whose identity was unsurprisingly conflated with that of the bodhisattva. It was said that Maitreya had himself bestowed the text of the *Yogācārabhūmi* on Asaṅga. Xuanzang, for example, believed this to be the case, and his biography contains numerous examples of devotion to Maitreya, including one story that while in India (629–645) he had managed to escape the clutches of pirates on the Ganges through Maitreya's divine intervention (T. 2053 [L] 233c13–234a21, trans. Sponberg, 1986, 22–24). Worship of Maitreya in this tradition was carried to Japan when Yogācāra (Jpn. Hossō [法相]) was introduced in the 7th century. Demiéville (1951, 376–394) and Kasai (2013) have discussed in detail links between Maitreya worship and Yogācāra ideas and legends.

The Song period (宋; 960–1279) brought new developments in all aspects of Maitreya worship. Chan (禪), which became a dominant force, absorbed Maitreya (as bodhisattva) into its own tradition, and placed him standing next to Śākyamuni in the Buddha Hall of Chan monasteries. The rationale behind this adoption was a passage in the *Mile xiasheng jing*, referring to the abovementioned story which describes how Śākyamuni gave his disciple Mahākāśyapa his robe to transmit to Maitreya, the same Mahākāśyapa who was also venerated as the first Chan patriarch. In the version adopted in the Chan traditions, on receiving

the robe Mahākāśyapa entered a stone chamber on Mount Kukkuṭapāda (Chn. Qizushan [鷄足山]) to await Maitreya's rebirth, at which point Maitreya would go to the mountain, open it, and receive the robe (T. 453 [XIV] 422b12–c7). This myth constitutes the origin of the Chan idea that the gift of a robe signified dharma transmission (Foullk, 1999, 231, Silk, 2003; Seidel, 2003). Yet it was not only in this domain that Maitreya worship took place. Empress Liu (劉; 969–1033, r. 1022–1033 as empress dowager regent), for instance, commissioned an extremely well-documented painting titled "Icon of Maitreya" (*Cishi xiang* [慈氏像]), which she fervently worshipped and which is the subject of a detailed study by Liu (2003).

By this time, what has been termed "militant Maitreya belief" (Overmyer, 1976, 83) was a constant presence that could be called upon when needed. In 1047, for example, it lay behind an uprising led by the rebel Wang Ze (王則; ?–1048; Ma, 2011, 37–38). But the figure of Maitreya also became domesticated and absorbed into popular practice. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the emergence of the figure of Budai (布袋, Kor. P'odae; Jpn. Hotei; d. 917), the monk with the hemp bag. The historical Budai (if such a person really existed) was a native of Siming (四明) in the prefecture of Fenghua (奉化) in present day Zhejiang (浙江) province, becoming known as an eccentric with a knack for correctly predicting the weather. If he wore wet-weather sandals and scurried about looking for shelter, rain was coming; if he slept squatting on the market bridge (as he is sometimes depicted in art), good weather was to be expected (T. 2036 [XLIX] 651c18–21). He is depicted in paintings and in stone as a short, jolly fellow with a protruding pot belly. At least ten hagiographies of Budai were in circulation in China between about 988 and 1417 (Chapin, 1933; Lessing, 1942, 21–31). He was a favorite with children, who were always curious about what he might be carrying in his hemp bag, likewise a favorite scene. Budai is often depicted with groups of 6 to 18 children, where the numbers are themselves symbolically relevant, referring to the 6 faculties and 18 *dhātus* (six sense-faculties, six sense-objects, and six resulting sense-bases) (Lessing, 1942, 24). He also appeared in the tenth illustration of the Ten Oxherding Pictures (十牛圖) "entering the city with hands hanging down" (Wada, 2002). Zhipan's (志磐; fl. 1258–1269) hagiography of Budai in the *Fozu tongji* (佛祖統紀) records that he left a death verse (*gāthā*):

Maitreya, true Maitreya
 Manifest a billion times,
 Revealed himself to his contemporaries
 To be recognized by none.
 (T. 2035 [XLIX] 390c29–391a1)

Budai was obviously a very different kind of Maitreya, playful, humorous, and worldly, for which reason he was easily adopted into Chan Buddhism as yet another example of the iconoclast, the eccentric. Images of Budai often preside over the Chan ritual for receiving the tonsure, and in the mid-20th century, eminent monks such as Cihang (慈航; d. 1954) and Taixu (太虛; 1890–1947) have had themselves photographed or depicted as Maitreya/Budai with his large, infectious smile (Welch, 1967, 343–344). What he carried in his hemp bag was always a mystery, and the suggestion that it actually contained riches became important when Budai resurfaced as a popular deity in Japan (see below).

Maitreyan eschatology, always potentially present, reemerged with greater vigor in the late Yuan period (元; 1279–1368), and remained a significant aspect of popular or peasant uprisings from the mid-14th century right through to the late 19th century. It bolstered the White Lotus (Bailian [白蓮]) movement, for example, proclaimed by Han Shantong (韓山童; d. 1355) in 1351. Building on a long tradition of voluntary religious associations, this turned into a rebellious, millenarian movement affiliated with the Red Turban (Hongjin [紅巾]) rebellion (1351–1368) which sought to overthrow Mongol rule (ter Haar, 1992, 114–172). Movements such as these continued to be active throughout the Ming (明; 1368–1644). These movements were informed and validated by the vernacular scriptures known as “precious scrolls” (*baojuan* [寶卷]; Sawada, 1975, Overmyer, 1988, 1999). Naquin (1976, 1981) and ter Haar (1992, 2014) have studied similar uprisings in later times.

In late imperial China, Maitreya as potential savior became a firm part of popular Chinese consciousness, combined with the beliefs and practices of all manner of local religious communities, organizations, and unofficial groups that were seen as potentially disruptive by the authorities. Maitreyan eschatology was behind, for example, a violent outbreak by the normally peaceful Laoguan zhai (老官齋; Venerable Official Vegetarians) congregations affiliated with the Luo teaching (Luo-jiao [羅教]; →Luo Qing), which occurred in Fujian in 1748 (Overmyer, 1976, 120–123). There were, of

course, many other Buddhist figures that were used in similar contexts, but the fact that Maitreya carried with him the promise of his future rebirth in this world made him particularly potent. Maitreya still plays a significant role not only in the monastic life of mainstream Chinese Buddhism in the 20th century, but also in a large number of religious groups that thrive both in Taiwan and on the mainland.

It must, finally, not be overlooked that, in line with the monumentality of other images scattered through Buddhist Asia, some of which are discussed above, what is widely regarded as the world's largest buddha image, the 71 m image at Leshan (樂山) in southern China, portrays a seated Maitreya. The carving dates to 713, and was completed only in 803 (Kegasawa, 1988).

Korea

Reliable archaeological sources for the study of Buddhism in early Korea are scarce and the textual sources are too late to be completely reliable. Much of what follows is based on two chronicles, the mid-12th-century official history *Samguk sagi* (三國史記), compiled by Kim Pusik (金富軾; 1075–1151), and the collection of historical tales and traditional narratives called *Samguk yusa* (三國遺事; T. 2039; trans. Ha & Mintz, 1972), compiled by the Buddhist monk Iryon (一然; 1206–1289). Although the majority of extant stories concerning Maitreya derive from the southeastern state of Silla (新羅; trad. 57 BCE – 935 CE), limited evidence suggests that the cult was also present in Koguryō (高句麗; trad. 37 BCE – 668 CE) in the north and Paekche (百濟; trad. 18 BCE – 660 CE) in the southwest. The picture that emerges from these sources suggests that the cult of Maitreya was one of the first arrivals on the peninsula. Influence from Northern Wei Buddhism was strong, although the justly prized statues of Maitreya sitting in “pensive mode” probably arrived in Paekche directly from Sui Dynasty China (Lancaster, 1988, 136). According to the *Samguk yusa*, both Paekche and Silla saw themselves as being the site where Maitreya would descend to revive the Dharma, and in the mid-7th century King Mu (武王; r. 600–641) of Paekche built a Mirūk Monastery (彌勒寺) with three golden halls and three pagodas as a symbolic, architectural representation of Maitreya's three dragon-flower assemblies, asserting a special connection between the cult and his state (T. 2039

[XLIX] 979c10–15; Choe, 2015, 13–22; McBride, 2014, 16–32).

In Silla the earliest accounts of Maitreya worship are already associated with the *hwarang* (花郎), associations of aristocratic, elite young men who performed a religious and military function, often connected with protecting Silla from encroachments by its enemies. From some time in the 6th century, a tradition arose that these *hwarang* were in fact incarnations of Maitreya (McBride, 2008, 38–42; 2010). Quite why this curious link came about is not known, but it may be related to the fact that Maitreya appears repeatedly in the *Lotus Sūtra* in the guise of Prince Ajita, “The Unconquered One,” a common epithet of Maitreya, as we saw above. One tale in the *Samguk yusa* has it that during the short reign of King Chinji (眞智; r. 576–579), the monk Chinja (眞慈; d.u.) of the Hūngnyun Monastery (興輪寺) prayed to an image of Maitreya that he might become a *hwarang*. He was ultimately rewarded with a vision in which he was told to go to a monastery in Paekche, where he would behold Maitreya himself. Arriving at the monastery, Chinja was welcomed at the gate by a handsome youth. Having failed to recognize the true nature of this youth, Chinja later encountered a mountain spirit, who, taking the form of an old man, told him that he had indeed encountered Maitreya at the gate of the monastery. The monk hurried back, but it was too late – the youth had disappeared. Since the boy had said that he was from the Silla capital, Chinja returned and searched the villages around the capital, eventually finding him playing under a tree northeast of the Yōngmyo Monastery (靈妙寺). When Chinja informed the youth that he was an incarnation of Maitreya, the youth replied that his name was Misi (彌尸, also read Miri), but he was an orphan and so did not know his surname. Chinja took the boy to the palace where he was honored by the king, who made him a *hwarang* leader, a *kuksōn* (國仙, national spirit). After a brilliant career lasting seven years, Misi simply vanished from the scene. In his grief, Chinja sought a vision of Misi, and in the end succeeded in seeing him as Maitreya (T. 2039 [XLIX] 994c19–995b11; Ha & Mintz, 1972, 234–236).

Given this link between Maitreya and the *hwarang*, Silla nobles who wished to see their sons succeed were in the habit of either erecting images of Maitreya or of burying such images in the tombs of deceased warriors, in the hope of forming a karmic connection which might lead to the warrior being reborn as their own son. One narrative tells of Lord Sulchong (述宗公; c. 600) who happened to

stop at Chukchi Pass (竹旨嶺) where the road was being repaired by a young Buddhist lay devotee. This youth made a deep impression on Sulchong, so much so that he later dreamed that the boy entered his bedchamber. It was then discovered that the boy had died on that very day. Sulchong had the youth buried on the northern crest of Chukchi Pass and erected a stone image of Maitreya before the grave. When his wife gave birth to a son, they named him Chukchi. This Chukchi later became a *hwarang* and served well as a military commander and high government official (T. 2039 [LXIX] 973c15–974a10; Ha & Mintz, 1972, 106–108).

Some later stele inscriptions reveal that the early Sōn (禪) tradition in Silla also absorbed the abovementioned link between Maitreya and Mahākāśyapa, which was highly popular in Chan milieux of the Song period. The “Tansoksa Sinhaeng Sōnsa pi” (斷俗寺神行禪師碑, Funerary stele of the Sōn Master Sinhaeng at Tansok Monastery), composed by Kim Hōnjōng (金獻貞; fl. 810–837) and erected in 813, compares the site of Sinhaeng’s (神行; 704–779) funerary pagoda to “the stone chamber (*sōksil* [石室]) at Mount Kukkuṭapāda (Kyejoksan [鷄足山]) [...] where Mahākāśyapa preserves the dharma robe [of Śākyamuni] and where he waits for Maitreya” (Han’guk Kodae Sahoe Yōn’guso, 1992, 21). Similarly, Ch’oe Ch’iwōn’s (崔致遠; 857–908?) stele inscription for the monk Muiyōm (無染; 800–888) declares: “[He] waits for the Buddha Maitreya on Mount Kyejok, where Mount Kukkuṭapāda of the Eastern Region will be in the future” (Han’guk Kodae Sahoe Yōn’guso, 1992, 125). (See further McBride & Cho, 2018.)

As in China, in Korea too Maitreya was occasionally appealed to by rebels, although until the 19th century this was never as common as it was in China. Kungye (弓裔; d. 918), for example, founder of the shortlived Later Koguryō Dynasty (後高句麗; 901–918), proclaimed himself Maitreya, and named his two sons as bodhisattvas, Ch’ōnggwang posal (青光菩薩, Green Light Bodhisattva) and Sin’gwang posal (神光菩薩, Divine Light Bodhisattva). Mimicking Buddhist ritual processions, he had young boys and girls lead the way carrying before him banners and parasols, and purifying the air with incense and flowers. He also had more than 200 Buddhist monks follow his train, chanting Buddhist hymns. He is reputed to have composed more than 20 rolls of Buddhist scriptures, and when their veracity was questioned by the monk Sōkch’ōng (釋聰; d.u.), simply bludgeoned him to death. In 918, when Kungye’s wife Lady Kang (康氏) remonstrated with

him for his behavior, he accused her of adultery, declared that he knew of her misdeeds because he had a supernatural power that he called “Maitreya’s method of observing the mind” (*Mirük kwansim pōp* [彌勒觀心法]), and had both her and his sons killed. This in turn led to the rise of Wang Kōn (王建; 877–943), the founder of the Koryō dynasty (高麗; 918–1392) (Chōng Kubok *et al.*, 1996, 466–470; Chōng Inji, 1972, 1:1a–8a).

During both the Koryō and the Chosōn (朝鮮; 1392–1910) periods, as had been the case in China, veneration of Maitreya shifted in the direction of a more popular pattern of local folk worship, and in this context it is better to speak of him as Mirük. Hundreds of images of Mirük were carved or erected in sites throughout the country, used for a variety of purposes: to obtain male offspring, to cure disease, and to protect the village. The absorption of Mirük into traditional fertility practices is one of the main reasons he is so ubiquitous even today (Lancaster, 1988, 145). These Mirük images were also used in shamanic practices, which led to a distinction being drawn between male and female Mirük, a development unique to Korea (Kim Samyong, 1983, 155–168, 185–201; Lancaster, 1988). One example of this duality is the Poksin Mirük (福神彌勒, Maitreya as God of Fortune) at Yonghwa Monastery (龍華寺) in present day Cheju City on Cheju Island (濟州). There are two images of Poksin Mirük, one on the east and one on the west of Cheju City, known as Tongjabok (東資福, Eastern Deity of Wealth and Fortune) and Sōjabok (西資福, Western Deity of Wealth and Fortune), respectively. The former is presently inside a personal residence, formerly the site of Mansu Monastery (萬壽寺) in Kōniptong (健入洞). The latter, located inside the Yonghwa temple, is a statue 2.73 m high, with a face of 1.35 m; its lower body has a circumference of 3.15 m. It wears a stone hat like that worn by “stone grandfather” statues (*torharūbang*), and displays features meant to signify compassion, such as eyes that gaze down benignly, a towering nose, soft and narrow lips, and large ears. Every year on the 15th day of the second month (the day commemorating the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa, *yōlbanil* [涅槃日]) and the 15th day of the eleventh month (the opening of the Assembly of the Eight Prohibitions, *p’algwanhoe* [八關會]), Buddhist services are held in the dharma hall for Mirük.

The fortunes of the Maitreya cult waned during the Chosōn period, like those of Buddhism more generally. The Chosōn state adopted Neo-Confucianism as its guiding ideology and officially

repudiated Buddhism. Despite the fact that many royal women and ladies of the gentry were devout Buddhists, the state severely restricted public patronage of the religion. This was particularly true of Mirük, because of the continuing tendency of uprisings to claim justification in his name. In the time of King Sukchong (肅宗; r. 1674–1720), for example, a rebellion was instigated by the monk Yōhwan (呂還; d.u.), who proclaimed in 1688 that the age of Śākyamuni was over and that the time of Mirük was nigh (Chang Chihun, 1997, 58). It became difficult for lay Buddhists to create images, and existing ones were often destroyed by zealous Confucians. Believers then adopted a strategy of inscribing flagstones found in sparsely populated mountain areas and enshrining these as Mirük. Several types of stones were thus venerated: standing stones (*ipsōk* [立石]) from the prehistoric age (dolmens); standing stones topped with Buddha heads; and natural stones. They were all standing statues, out of doors, constructed from stone, south facing, and monumental (Kim Samyong, 1983, 231–235).

In more recent times, Kang Il sun (姜一淳; 1871–1909), better known as Kang Chūngsan (姜甌山), whom many new Korean religions treat as their messiah, claimed affinity with Mirük. The Chūngsan-gyo (甌山教), which regards Kang as a combination of the Jade Emperor (Okhwangje [玉皇帝]) and Mirük come to earth, was founded by Yi Sangho (李祥昊; 1888–1967) in 1925. The primary scripture of this movement, the *Taesun chōn’gyōng* (大巡典經), compiled by Yi and his younger brother Chōngnip (李正立; 1895–1968) in 1929, contains passages dealing with this connection between Kang and Mirük, Kang having prophesied that what he called the “Dragon Flower World System” would be established on earth. Followers of Chūngsan-gyo today consider the village of Yonghwadong (龍華洞, Dragon Flower Village) in Kimje (金堤), South Chōlla Province, to be sacred, because they believe it to be the site where Mirük manifested himself and where Kang is said to have performed rituals for heaven and earth (*ch’ōnji kongsa* [天地公事]) for nine years (Yu Pyōngdōk, 1987, 220–222; Kim Nam-Hui, 2016, 173–182).

Japan

The first recorded appearance of the bodhisattva Maitreya (Jpn. Miroku) in Japan is found in the account of the reign of Emperor Bidatsu (敏達天皇; r. 572–585) in the *Nihon shoki* (日本書紀) chronicles

for the year 584, where there is a mention of a stone image of Maitreya sent from Paekche (Aston, 1972, vol. II, 101). Although all these early dates are suspect, in light of the discussion above it is highly probable that images of Maitreya were prominent among the statues brought from Korea. From the mid-7th century on, references to Maitreya become more common. There are at least five passages in the *Nihon shoki* that mention images of Maitreya from the reign of Tenchi (天智; r. 668–671) and a further 19 in the period from 690 to 771 (Hayami, 1984, 110–113). When the academic study of Buddhism began in the Nara period (710–784), monks in the Hossō (Yogācāra) School naturally adopted the same kind of devotion to Maitreya that had been practiced among adherents of the same (Faxiang) school in Tang China. There are also signs that Maitreya quickly became a figure of interest to monks who wished to take the message of Buddhism to a wider audience. The tale collection *Nihon ryōiki* (日本靈異記) of circa 787, for example, contains a number of stories that mention Maitreya, most of which admittedly involve little more than giving the bodhisattva's name, although one story portrays Maitreya manifesting himself for the benefit of a monk (Nakamura, 1973, 233).

In the early 9th century, which saw the establishment of both the Tendai (天台) and Shingon (眞言) schools, the founders of both, →Saichō (最澄; 767–822) and →Kūkai (空海; 774–835) respectively, believed in Maitreya's coming, and Kūkai in particular is said not to have died but to be waiting on Mount Kōya (高野山) in meditation for Maitreya's future advent. Hiraoka is of the opinion that the interest Kūkai showed in Maitreya could hardly have been influenced by the Hossō tradition of devotion, and was probably due to the existence of a ritual text entitled *Cishi pusa liexiu yu'e niansong fa* (慈氏菩薩略修愈識念誦法, T. 1141) attributed to →Subhākarasiṃha (善無畏, who is said in his biography to have visited the Kukkuṭapāda and encountered Maitreya; Chou, 1945, 258, cited in Tournier, 2012, 398). In this text it is directly stated that Maitreya and Dainichi (大日, Mahāvairocana), the central divinity of Shingon Buddhism, are one and the same (T. 1141 [XX] 599c25; Hiraoka, 1984, 138–139).

As noted above, though Maitreya is not a central figure in the *Lotus Sūtra*, he does act as an interlocutor in the form of Prince Ajita in Chapters 17 and 18, and in the Preface Mañjuśrī predicts that Maitreya will become a Buddha (T. 262 [IX] 5b12–13; Watson, 1993, 21). Near the end of the sūtra,

however, in Chapter 28 we come across the statement that all those who “accept, uphold, read, and recite the sūtra and understand its principles” will at their death go to the Tuṣita Heaven and enjoy its benefits (T. 262 [IX] 61c8–10; Watson, 1993, 322). This last promise shows that the *Lotus Sūtra* contains both the “ascent” and “descent” motifs that are seen in the Maitreya sūtras, which led Tendai scholar-monks such as →Genshin (源信; 942–1017) to treat both Amitābha's Pure Land and the Tuṣita Heaven as valid, if not entirely equal, destinations (Hiraoka, 1984, 134). Indeed, in Japan these two destinations seem to have run in parallel until the time of →Hōnen (法然; 1133–1212), when Amitābha's Pure Land became exclusive and took center stage.

In the 11th century, the idea that it was important to do what one could to preserve the *Lotus* teachings so that they might survive until Maitreya's coming led to the habit of copying a large number of sūtras (*nyohōkyō* [如法經]), and then burying them at various sacred sites in metal cylinders (*kyōzutsu* [經筒]). Perhaps the most famous example occurred in the eighth month of 1007, when the most powerful man in the land, Fujiwara no Michinaga (藤原道長; 966–1027), made an excursion to Kinpusen (金峰山), the deity of which, Kongō Zaō (金剛藏王), was believed to be a manifestation of Maitreya. The object of the excursion was to inter a large number of sūtras that Michinaga himself had copied, three Maitreya sūtras (T. 452, 453 and 456) among them. Michinaga believed that this would help ensure that when Maitreya returned to the world (at Kinpusen), Michinaga himself would be present to see the scriptures emerge from the earth (Blair, 2015, 175).

The inscription on Michinaga's cylinder is of interest in light of the potential confusion between the Pure Land and the Tuṣita Heaven, making it clear that Michinaga hoped to be reborn first in the Pure Land, and then to pass on from there to the Tuṣita Heaven at some time in the future (Hiraoka, 1984, 149). The same order of events can be found on numerous inscribed tiles (*gakyō* [瓦經]) from the same period (Hiraoka, 1984, 146). This is interesting, not least because in Buddhist cosmology the Tuṣita Heaven belongs to the realm of desire (*kāmadhātu*), whereas Amitābha's Pure Land stands outside this system altogether (Sponberg, 1988, 101–102), and rebirth in the former would normally be seen as less desirable.

Two months before this expedition to Kinpusen, Michinaga had visited the Kasagidera (笠置

寺), where an image of Maitreya 15 m high was carved into a cliff face. This image, which probably dates from the 8th century, is no longer extant, but visual evidence remains in the form of a painting that has been dated to the late 13th century to early 14th century (Brock, 1998, 217). The standing pose of the image is rather unusual in a Japanese context, and the probable explanation of this scene is that it depicts the moment in the *Mile da chengfo jing* when Mahākāśyapa, who had just been awakened from meditation inside a rock face, hands Maitreya the robe that had been entrusted to him by Śākyamuni (T. 456 [XIV] 433b17–25). There is therefore good reason to suppose that the rock face at Kasagidera itself was treated as the abode of Mahākāśyapa (Brock, 1998, 226). Kasagidera subsequently became especially prominent thanks to the activities of the monk →Jōkei (貞慶; 1155–1213), who took up residence there from 1193 to 1208, rebuilding and adding to the temple, and in 1204 instituting the set of rituals in honor of Maitreya known as the Ryūge'e (龍華會, dragon-flower assembly), which had first been performed in Japan at Onjōji (園城寺) in 1062. The tradition was maintained under Sōshō (宗性; 1202–1278), who compiled an extensive compendium of textual references to Maitreya entitled *Miroku nyorai kannō shō* (彌勒如來感應抄) while in residence (text in Hiraoka, 1977, 343–570). Another monk in this period who was devoted to Maitreya and had visions of the Tuṣita Heaven was →Myōe (明恵; 1173–1232), who became notorious for his vitriolic attack on Hōnen's exclusive championing of Amitābha and the Pure Land (Hiraoka, 1977, 239–255).

In Japan, as elsewhere, the figure of Maitreya as a sign of renewal percolated into the popular imagination to be drawn on whenever needed, mainly in the early-modern period (1600–1868) when Buddhism reached deep down into the psyche of the Japanese people at all levels, but there is very little evidence that Maitreya worship was a major element in any of the frequent peasant uprisings. More marked in the Japanese case was the transformation of Maitreya into “Miroku” (ミロク), a figure whose arrival would bring abundance and promise an end to hard living.

With Miroku, we meet again the figure of Budai, who had a lively career in Japan as Hotei. Hotei became popular either under his own name, as one of the Seven Deities of Good Fortune (*shichi fukujin* [七福神]), or as Miroku, but a Miroku in whom the Buddhist elements had become somewhat

attenuated. In this incarnation, the hemp bag with its possible riches takes on special prominence. In the main islands of Japan his role in popular urban folk ceremonies is thought to have been a natural extension from his presence in Zen monasteries, but in the Ryūkyū (琉球) islands we meet a different Miruku (ミルク) or Miroku (the name often appears in *katakana*; Sakai, 1984). The mask worn by the central figure of these ceremonies is thought to bear a strong resemblance to Budai/Hotei. Sakai argues that the tradition of enacting yearly ceremonies and parades for a fruitful harvest from the seas probably started here in the Ryūkyūs, where it is still practiced in places such as Hateruma (波照間) and Yonaguni (与那国), and probably arrived directly from Southern China. It then moved up to the mainland by the sea routes (Sakai, 1984, 53–54). This would help explain why until modern times the tradition could also be found in most of the fishing villages along the Pacific coast of Honshū, and became associated with rites held at the Shintō shrine of Kashima (鹿島) in present-day Ibaraki prefecture. A *Miroku-odori* (ミロク踊り) dance is still performed at Kashima, and the songs that accompany the dance talk of the deity arriving by sea (*Miroku no fune* [彌勒の船]), carrying a cornucopia of food, particularly rice, and other delights.

This popular figure of Miroku, now only tangentially connected to Maitreya, became a generalized marker of hope for a better future, and as such inevitably cropped up in a large variety of other religious movements that centered on the call for renewal. A good example is a mid-18th-century oil merchant from Edo (江戸), who was the sixth-generation leader of one of the many organizations devoted to the cult of Mount Fuji (Fujikō [富士講]). He renamed himself Jikigyō Miroku (食行身祿; 1671–1733), began to experience visions on the mountain, proclaimed the arrival of “Miroku's world/age” (彌勒の世), and eventually starved himself to death on the mountain. His “World/age of Miroku” was a utopia of plenty and beneficence; the last two characters (身祿, pronounced *miroku*, just as the name of Maitreya, but inscribing upon the name a new meaning via word play) signify “status” and “stipend,” two very this-worldly concerns (Collcutt, 1988, 260).

The same distance between Maitreya and Miroku can also be seen in the case of the lay Buddhist group Reiyūkai kyōdan (靈友会教団; Hardacre, 1988). Here the link between Maitreya and “Miroku” is, if anything, even more attenuated. The group has

a sacred mountain site called Mirokusan (弥勒山) and they chant a Maitreya sūtra (*Mirokukyō* [弥勒經]) written especially for them by the Buddhologist Watanabe Shōkō (渡邊照宏; 1907–1977). However, there is little else to tie them to the Maitreya discussed here, save for the ubiquitous desire for a figure who embodies optimism about the future (Hardacre, 1988, 283).

Although the above account shows that the figure of Maitreya was prominent throughout East Asia, inheriting the South and Central Asian traditions, along with their scriptures, Maitreya was not always simply the bodhisattva of the sūtras but proved to be highly adaptable to local conditions. In Korea he became not only a martial figure, but was also absorbed into shamanic practice. In China and Japan he eventually became, in the guise of Budai/Hotei, a symbol of felicity and plenty. Indeed, it is in this form that Maitreya is most commonly to be met in the modern West. For it is none other than Maitreya (simultaneously Budai and the God of Good Luck) who takes pride of place in many a Chinese restaurant throughout the world as the stout, Laughing Buddha, who will bring prosperity and good luck to anyone who humors him with a rub on the belly.

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