

Relationship Between Nirvāna and (Indian) Heaven ~From a Viewpoint of the Cultural Study of Buddhism~

by HAN-İK, KİM

This article is a study that aims at clarifying the religious-cultural factors and its working process underlying the historical formation of the Buddhist Heaven system from a viewpoint of the Cultural Study.

Even from the early Buddhist texts in Pāli were distinguished two types of practice in terms of religious level. The first is “giving” and the “precepts” which helped lay believers to accumulate Merit and be reborn in Heaven. These are good deeds at the level of Laukika (Worldly) because of their being connected with the transmigration which is thought as “suffering” in all Indian religious traditions. The other is Brahmachariyā of religious mendicants which is the higher spiritual practice aiming at Nirvāna at the Lokottara (Transcendental) level.

Even in the former, “heaven” which was simply “sagga”, a single heaven in a general sense, easily multiplied in number to form what became to be known as 「六欲天」 (Six Heavens in the World of Desire), each having unique characteristics, and thought to be reborn according to the nature and quality of the good deeds. Buddhist Heaven however had to take a farther course of development to form another set of heavens which became classified according to the theoretical concepts of “Threefold World” and “Four Dhyānas” in later times.

This article tries to trace the development of these two sets of Buddhist heavens in view of its religious necessity and process of the development, of its relating the progressive steps of the Buddhist meditation to heavens and of the cultural consciousness of the elite Buddhist leaders who had a strong bias to connect all that they have to teach in the name of Buddhist sāsana, even of Laukika level, with the Nirvāna which is Lokottara.