



When Buddha died in about BC 463 his religion had strictly local influence. Its development into a major cultural force throughout the East took place haphazardly over many centuries. The most crucial factor was the patronage of the Indian Emperor Asoka in the third century BC during whose reign Buddhism spread throughout the sub-continent and became established in Sri Lanka. By the twelfth century, it had virtually disappeared from India. However, in Japan it was at its apogee, while in Tibet its golden age was yet to come.

As Buddhism has no centralised authority, there has been little effort to convert the adherents of other religions: nor has there been a planned

programme of expansion. When it was at its height in India (c. third century AD), scholars traveled from all over Asia to the monastic universities which flourished there.

Mahayana Buddhism is often referred to as the 'Northern School' and Theravada as the 'Southern School', although these terms can be misleading. Today Theravada thrives in Sri Lanka and South-east Asia, while the Buddhism found north of the Himalayas is chiefly of the Mahayana type. However, for centuries Hinayana (Theravada) and Mahayana Schools existed side by side.