

lytic abstraction posited by Buddhist polemicists, apologists, reformers, and now scholars" (p. 16).

SEE ALSO Buddhism, overview article and articles on Buddhism in China, Buddhism in Japan, and Buddhism in Korea; Buddhist Meditation, article on East Asian Buddhist Meditation.

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BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS

This entry consists of the following articles:

CANON AND CANONIZATION
CANON AND CANONIZATION—VINAYA
RITUAL USES OF BOOKS
TRANSLATION
EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS: CANON AND CANONIZATION

The canonical literature of Buddhism has a number of characteristics that make it unique among the religious scriptures of the world. First, the literature is not contained within a single canon: various regional, linguistic, and sectarian divisions have brought about the compilation of a number of separate canons. The scriptural collections that can be identified by language (e.g., Chinese, Tibetan, and Pali) vary from one another in significant ways, with few texts that found across all traditions. In addition to the multiplicity of canons, the various versions are marked by their sizes. Each canon

contains a large number of texts, some of which are of great length. The Chinese canon alone covers nearly 100,000 pages in its printed form, whereas Buddhist sacred texts might be more adequately described as libraries, for these collections bear little resemblance to the single volumes that make up the canons of the religions of western Asia.

The function of these canons within the different traditions indicates that they were not just used for reading and study. The process of preservation of hundreds of texts required sizable resources that could only be secured by large groups of cooperating believers or by the governments. For many Buddhists, the canons were seen a source of merit making through donations for the process of printing, copying, and housing the texts. In most areas a few texts were then selected for use in ritual. The chanting of these chosen works was another way to acquire merit and was also a spiritual practice performed as part of the central activities of the public halls of monasteries. Monastics studied the content of the texts and taught both lay and ordained followers by using passages from the books as a structural element of the discourses.

INTRODUCTION. While it is possible to witness the widespread uses of the Buddhist canons, the more difficult matter is the way in which such a massive amount of information was assembled and codified. The sophistication of the content indicates that the canons were produced as part of an intensive training and study environment. The complexity of the content has led scholars to conclude that only a small percentage of Buddhists ever read and assimilated the whole of the intellectual and religious issues within the canons. These texts are often seen as “elite” documents that cannot be used to adequately describe the “popular” practices and beliefs of the majority of Buddhists. However, it is impossible to describe the practices or beliefs of Buddhists without taking into account the importance they placed on the canonic collections as objects of veneration. Over the centuries the communities have copied and preserved the texts as an integral part of their heritage and have put forward enormous efforts in the construction, writing, printing, and digitizing of their canons—indications of the canons’ importance in a variety of popular as well as elite arenas.

In order to study the history of the Buddhist canons and to interpret the actions of those who contributed to that story, it is necessary to have a picture of the ways in which the appearance and preservation of the canons occurred in the different cultural spheres of Asia. For example, Buddhism in India was diversified by its expansion into regions far separated from one another. Because there was never any proscription against the use of local languages for transmitting the discourses of the Buddha, the identification of the list of texts to be included in a canon remained unfixed. In the beginning the texts were preserved orally and were recited for the followers by monks called *bhanakas*. These recitations were probably of two types. The first was the recitation of the *dharma*—the remembered words of the Buddha—

identified by the preamble, “Thus have I heard.” The hearer referred to in this case was the disciple Ananda. Tradition holds that he was asked to give the first recitation of the remembered teachings at an assembly known as the First Council of arhats immediately following the *parinirvāṇa*, or death of the Buddha. In addition to these types of teachings, later to be codified as the *sūtra* literature, there was a second division that related to the rules of conduct (*Vinaya*) for those who lived by monastic rule.

Eventually the canon was expanded to include a third category called *abhidharma*, a special exegetic literature that organized the teachings found in the *sūtras* into numerical categories. These lists were originally referred to as *matrka* (mother). It may be that the list of the topics taught by the Buddha was one way of guarding against the later introduction of items that did not belong to the earlier versions of the texts. Given this tripartite division, the Buddhists referred to the canon as a whole as the *Tripitaka* (Three baskets).

While the division of the texts into three types is the most common way of referring to the Buddhist canon structure, there were alternate groupings, such as the twelve textual genres: *sūtra*, *geya*, *vyākaraṇa*, *gāthā*, *udāna*, *nidāna*, *itivṛttaka*, *jātaka*, *vaipulya*, *Abhutadharma*, *avadāna*, and *upadeśa*. In some cases these groupings were used as part of the titles of texts. It is no longer possible, however, to have a complete definition for how each of these types was differentiated from others.

As Buddhism grew, it developed a number of sectarian groups, recognized in the histories as the “Eighteen Schools.” These schools contended with one another for support and argued over which texts were canonical. Because most of these groups have disappeared as distinct communities, leaving behind no full description of lists of accepted texts, it is also not possible to have a full inventory of the variety of Buddhist canons in India.

WRITING IT DOWN. It was some centuries before the canon was preserved in written form. In the Theravāda tradition of South and Southeast Asia, it is alleged that the canon was kept in its oral form until 29 BCE, when the Fourth Council was held in Sri Lanka under the aegis of King Vattagamani. At the council—similar to the story of the First Council—a single monk was called to recite the entire teaching of the Buddha; in this case it was a monk called Mahendra, who had been sent to Sri Lanka by King Aśoka (r. c. 270–230 BCE). King Vattagamani had five hundred scribes and reciters set to commit the canon to written form. (Whereas this is the traditional view, it should be noted that it was not until the fifth century CE that the final list of texts for the Theravāda canon could be agreed upon, and even then the material to be included in the *Khuddaka Nikāya* remained unsettled.)

The Pali language canon of the Theravāda tradition has been preserved and maintained in areas such as Burma, Sri

Lanka, Thailand, and Cambodia. These areas faithfully preserved the Indic form and did not attempt to put the texts into vernacular translations. Instead, the Pali was rendered in local script for the representation of the sounds. A similar pattern was followed in Korea and Japan, where the Chinese-character version was accepted as the standard; translations into Korean and Japanese language formats have only taken place in modern times. The maintenance of the Pali and Chinese as international canonic languages is tied to the history of literacy in Asia, where Indian and Chinese sources were often the first examples of written texts.

The Pali canon has been preserved in several forms. In Burma the so-called Fifth Council was held in 1871 under the patronage of King Mindon Min. During that council, the canon was reedited by comparison of text variants and at the end of the process was engraved on 729 stones that have been placed in a monastery near Mandalay. A Sixth Council was opened in Rangoon in 1954, and the canon was chanted by an assembly of twenty-five hundred monks. After two years the council was concluded, and a printed version of the Pali canon, approved by the gathering, appeared in Burmese script.

While Theravāda Buddhists have held that Pali is the official canonical language, they have been willing to transcribe the canon into various local scripts, reproducing the Pali sounds without translating. In Cambodia the royal court ordered that the Khmer edition of the canon be published; work on it began in 1929 and was completed in 1969. In this case the Cambodians broke with the older tradition and not only put the Pali into Khmer script but added a vernacular translation that paralleled it. In Europe a major effort, mounted under the direction of the Pali Text Society, sought to preserve and translate the Pali canon. The preparation of a modern critical edition began in 1882; by the early twenty-first century eighty-nine volumes had been edited and printed in roman transliteration. While this version had no official support from the *sangha* (Sanskrit, *saṃgha*; the Buddhist religious community)—as did the Burmese and the Khmer editions—it is a major contribution to the study of the Pali canon.

The Thai Buddhists have also been active in the work of editing and preserving the canon. In the eighteenth century King Rāma I (1737–1809 CE) convened a council of several hundred monks to restore the canon that was destroyed when the Burmese pillaged the capital at Ayutthaya. The Thai Buddhists then prepared a palm-leaf edition and presented it to King Rāma in 1788. His grandson, Rāma III (1788–1851 CE), had several additional copies of the leaves made. Much later their descendant King Chulalongkorn Rāma V (1868–1910) set in motion the project of having the canon printed in Thai script, an activity completed in 1893.

MAHĀYĀNA TEXTS. The emergence of the Mahāyāna tradition around the beginning of the common era brought about a burst of creative literary energy within Buddhism. Based

on the premise that “whatever is well-spoken is the word of the Buddha” (A. iv 164; Sn 450, 454), Mahāyāna communities began to produce new works they called *sūtra*, to which they affixed the preamble, “Thus have I heard,” indicating that these texts, like their counterparts in the Eighteen Schools, were originally spoken by the Buddha. The Mahāyāna texts severely attacked the other schools and called them the “Lesser Vehicle” (Hīnayāna), thereby claiming that they understood only a portion of the higher teaching.

The Mahāyāna, along with the other schools, added to the canon commentaries on the *sūtras* called *śāstra*, *vyākhyā*, and *tika*. Such commentaries kept the canon open and made it possible for the incorporation of later teachings over the centuries.

In modern times the extant Sanskrit manuscripts are few in number compared to other Buddhist canonical collections. Some palm-leaf manuscripts still survive in India, several from the ninth-century Pala dynasty. The Nepalese manuscripts exist in greater number than those in India; through the centuries an active scribal tradition continued to ensure the preservation of materials. The Nepalese copies date mostly from the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries and show all the marks of many scribes, including a large number of errors that have accumulated. Some Sanskrit documents are kept in Tibet, and the Potala Palace in Lhasa still houses thousands of palm leaves in its archives.

TRANSLATION. As Buddhism began to spread outside of the Indian cultural sphere, canonical texts were carried along in both written form and in the memories of the missionary monks. Because there was no restriction regarding the language to be used for the texts, many were eventually translated. The most important development in this regard took place in China, where the task of translating was indeed a formidable one. The Sanskrit and other Indic texts presented the Chinese with a complex grammatical configuration of nouns in three numbers and three genders, verbs in three persons and numbers, and the designations for such inflections as present, imperfect, imperative, and optative. This was difficult for the Chinese, who had to render these texts into their own language using characters rather than a syllabary, with a written language that lacked inflections for case, number, tense, mood, or voice, and where the relationship between characters—by position, stress, or particles—established the nature of syntax. Notwithstanding these problems, for over a thousand years the Chinese continued translating the canon, in the process preserving hundreds of texts that have disappeared in other areas. Ironically some of these Chinese versions of the texts (a number of which were translated as early as the second century CE) may be closer in content to the ur-text than the extant Sanskrit manuscripts of India and Nepal, which date from a late period in Buddhist history. The translated canons played a major role in the promulgation of Buddhism. From Sanskrit came the Chinese as well as a major portion of the Tibetan canon, and from the Chinese came the Manchu and Tangut canons. The

Tibetan would in turn be used as the source for the Mongolian canon.

The preservation of the Chinese canon followed a different course than that of India or Southeast Asia. Whereas the Buddhist canon was one of the first collections to use the new technology of printing in China in the tenth century, the rest of the Buddhist world maintained the palm or birch-bark manuscript formats until modern printed versions were completed and published. (At first the Chinese also made manuscripts using manufactured surfaces of silk or paper with strips pasted together to form long scrolls.)

Canonic lists were established by the fourth century in China, largely through the compilation of catalogs of the holdings of various monastic libraries. In one sense the Chinese canonic list was started as a library shelf list. Biographies of eminent Chinese monks, travelogues, histories, and apologetic literature were also included in these. As the canon—now literally a library—continued to grow, the problem of recopying the whole collection became severe and expensive. Unlike the Pali canon (which, although large, was still of a size that could be copied with support from devoted laity), the Chinese canon, with its more than five thousand scrolls, was too massive to be copied without great effort.

The Fang Shan stones. One of the early attempts to preserve the growing number of translations in Chinese was the project of having the texts inscribed on stone. The largest assemblage of these engraved stones is in the caves of the Fang Shan district, which houses over fifteen thousand milled stone slabs, incised on both sides with the Buddhist texts.

The Fang Shan stones were produced in two distinct fashions over a six-century period. The first stones, from the Sui (581–618 CE) and Tang (618–907 CE) dynasties, were prepared as donations from lay groups. There was some attempt to fashion a sequential group of texts in the order found in ancient library catalogs. However, the donors often chose to reproduce multiple copies of popular texts rather than follow a set order. Initially begun by a local monk named Jing-wan—just before the founding of the Tang dynasty—the project continued until the last days of the Jin dynasty (1115–1234).

Because many of the Fang Shan stones carry inscriptions regarding the donors and the dates, it has been possible to reconstruct the process by which the carvings were accomplished. Hundreds of believers from that region formed associations to raise money for the carving of single or multiple blocks each year. On Buddha's birthday celebration the laity gathered at the site and carried the stones up the mountain-side, placing them in caves for safekeeping. The first type of stones, some weighing hundreds of pounds, are dated 631 to 863 CE, the largest extant collection of manuscripts from the Tang dynasty. The rituals and the support given to the Fang Shan stones is a striking example of how important the Buddhist canon was for ordinary groups of people.

The nature of the stones at Fang Shan changed when the Khitan people established their reign over the area. In 1042 CE the court of the Liao dynasty (916–1125) took over the stone engraving process, and until 1110 it was a royal project. Few stones from laypeople were permitted in the caves. As the Liao dynasty lost power to the growing might of the Jurchen, people who called their dynasty Jin picked up the project that had come to a halt because of the political upheavals. For fifty years (1132–1182 CE) new stones were produced as part of the Jin dynasty's support of Buddhism. Because the project was under the control of officials, all stones were of standard size, and the sequence of the canonic list was followed in making new stones. Not much is mentioned about these stones in the histories outside of that particular region. In 1957 the Chinese Buddhist Association undertook the task of removing all stones from the caves to make rubbings of them and publish a full catalog. In the process they found that the Jin stones had been buried underneath the pagoda in a nearby monastery rather than in the caves cut from the stone cliff on the mountain.

The importance of the Fang Shan stones to the study of Chinese Buddhist canon is twofold: as the source for a study of the ancient manuscripts and as an example of the practices followed by the community of believers in those centuries. In many cases these stones are the oldest dated textual witness for Chinese manuscript study of the canon. Although the Fang Shan stones contain a large number of texts, it is not a complete set of the Chinese Buddhist canon. The canon was not produced in its entirety until the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) undertook the revolutionary project of using the new technology of printing. In the year 972 a commission was given by the court to carve the entire canon onto wooden printing blocks in the city of Cheng du (in Sichuan), the wood carving center for China. This work went forward until 983, during which time 130,000 blocks were carved, containing the material of more than 5,000 rolls of manuscripts, each one 15 pages in length.

DISTRIBUTING THE CANON. When the printed edition of the Chinese canon was made available, it became the standard for official manuscript copying centers. This ensured a more fixed canon because identical xylographic copies could be made and distributed throughout China. The making of manuscripts continued, but now they had a printed version for reference. It would be some centuries before the Chinese began to think of printing as a way of making hundreds of copies for wide distribution rather than as a special copy that stood as a standard for the older method of manual reproduction.

One set of the prints made from the Northern Song blocks was sent to Korea. The court saw the printed technology as a sign of national development and recognized it as a powerful tool for merit-making. The king initiated a project for the Buddhist canon that transferred the tracings of the outlines of the Chinese volumes onto wooden blocks. The stated purpose of this project was to secure help and

good fortune for the nation. This first Koryŏ dynasty (Korean dynasty, 918–1392 CE) xylograph collection, constructed during the period 1010 to 1030 CE, remained in use and continued to expand as new texts arrived from China until the invasion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century. The occupying troops saw the wooden plates as a potential powerful talisman for the Koreans and burned the Hungwang Monastery where the plates were stored. During this difficult period, the court was exiled to the island of Kanghwa, and although his kingdom faced the rule of Mongols, King Kojong (r. 1213–1259) ordered that a second set of blocks be made. He saw the act of preparing wooden blocks for the Buddhist canon as a defensive measure against the invaders.

The work of creating the second set of Koryŏ printing blocks took place from 1236 to 1251 CE under the direction of Sugi, an ordained monk and scholar. Fortunately Sugi did not content himself with merely reproducing a facsimile of the first set of blocks. He wrote an account of the process, titled *Koryŏ-kuk sinjo taejang kyogjon pyollok*, and had it included in the set of plates. His descriptions indicate that he used a number of sources to check the readings of the Northern Song edition and made many editorial changes. At the conclusion of the second set, more than eighty-one thousand blocks had been carved with the new Sugi edition.

The new Sugi edition relied heavily on another national project of the Khitan people of the Liao dynasty. The Khitan canon has long been a mystery because so little of it has been preserved for study. But when twelve rolls from this version were discovered in Shanxi province and removed to Beijing in the 1980s, scholars had material with which to judge the readings and the approach used by the Khitan redactors. These two versions of the blocks provide proof that the scholars of China and Korea were not merely scribal copiers; they felt free to make corrections and to pick alternate readings when the text witness appeared to be in error.

A second canon was produced outside Chinese borders by the Jurchen people, who were for a time in a confederation with the Khitan. When the Jurchen defeated the Liao dynasty of the Khitans, they followed the practice of having a xylograph set made for the Buddhist canon. Fortunately a sizable portion of rubbings from this set were found in Shaanxi province and were published in a facsimile edition in Beijing. It appears this version was made in the same way as the first Koryŏ by transferring traced characters to the new blocks.

PRESERVING THE CANON. Preserving the largest Buddhist canon was not left to the royal courts alone. As with the Fang Shan rock-cut canon, private resources were also used with printing. Local monasteries began producing sets of blocks that could be used to make large numbers of prints for distribution, and new xylograph copies are still being discovered. From the remaining prints scholars now have a better idea of the enormity of the task undertaken to preserve and disseminate the canon. The private editions are usually identified by the location of the blocks. In some cases, the blocks

received royal support from the Ming court (1368–1644) and the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

1. Chong ning edition (eleventh to twelfth centuries): Dong-chan Monastery in Fu-zhou.
2. Pi-lu edition (twelfth century): Kai-yuan Monastery in Fu-zhou.
3. Sixi edition (1126–1132 CE): Yuan-jue chueh Monastery in Hu-zhou. This is the so-called Song edition.
4. Zi-fu edition (1237–1252 CE): from Hu-zhou; thought to be a copy of the Sixi edition.
5. Ji-sha edition (thirteenth to fourteenth centuries): prepared in Ping-jiang chiang-fu in Jiangsu. A copy of the major portions of this edition was discovered in Shanxi province in 1929 and was published in facsimile in 1932 in Shanghai using the Yong-lo edition to supply the missing portions.
6. Pu-ning edition (thirteenth century): Pu-ning Monastery in Hang-zhou. This is the so-called Yuan edition. There are a handful of volumes from a fourteenth-century Yuan version discovered in Yunnan in 1979.
7. Hong-wu edition (1368–1398 CE): the first version of the canon done in Southern Ming in Nanjing. The blocks were destroyed in 1408.
8. Yong-lo edition (completed 1419 CE): the second version prepared in Nanjing, usually referred to as the Southern Ming edition.
9. Yong-lo edition (fifteenth century; supplement in 1584 CE): prepared in Beijing and called the Northern Ming edition.
10. Wu-lin edition (fifteenth century): portions recovered in 1982 of this Hang-zhou edition.
11. Wan-li edition (sixteenth century): recovered in 1983. This is a recarving of number 8 above.
12. Jia-xing/Jing-shan edition (sixteenth to eighteenth century): notable for its format of sewn volumes rather than folded ones.
13. Qing edition (1733–1738 CE): a court project, often referred to as the Dragon edition.
14. Pin-jia edition (1909–1914 CE): a movable type edition done in Shanghai. Based on the Shukusatsu edition of Japan, this version is sometimes called the Hardoon canon because of the support of the Hardoon family.

Whereas a large part of the Chinese Buddhist canon was translated, it in turn was also rendered into other language forms. For example, among the Tangut people and the Hsihsia Kingdom, the ruler Yuan Hao started the process of moving the Chinese over to the Tangut script in the eleventh century. By the twelfth century the Chinese technology of printing blocks was used to make reproductions of the Tangut version.

When the Mongols took control of the central government of China, they turned attention away from the Chinese

canon and supported efforts to make the scripture available to non-Chinese. Because of their support of the Tibetan form of Buddhism, they paid attention to the preservation and dissemination of the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit and Chinese texts rather than relying solely on the Chinese canon.

THE TIBETAN CANON. The Tibetans had several problems to overcome in the construction of a canon in their own language. When Buddhism was introduced, no written form of the language could be easily used for the work of translation. In the seventh century King Sron bstan sgam po (d. 649 CE) set in motion the creation of a Tibetan alphabet. Tradition says that the work of translation began by the eighth century with help of such Indian masters as Śāntarakṣita (c. 725–790) and Padmasambhava. Studies show, however, that it was not until the thirteenth century that the translations were collected together and classified into a set that could be called a canon. The monastery at Snar than undertook this task and made the first catalog, dividing the texts into the Bka' 'gyur (*Kanjur*), which included all of the sūtras (the words attributed to the Buddha), and the Bstan 'gyur (*Tanjur*), or commentaries. The Yuan court undertook to make a printing block set for the Tibetan translations. In 1410 in Beijing the Bka' 'gyur was put on blocks shaped in the long, narrow format used by the Tibetans, which copied the style of the palm-leaf manuscripts of India. A second set of blocks, added as a supplement to the earlier ones, was produced in the seventeenth century. In the latter part of the same century another carving was done, followed in 1724 by a set of Bstan 'gyur blocks.

The set of rubbings taken from the blocks made during the reign of the Kangxi emperor and from the 1724 set are known collectively as the "Beijing edition." In the eighteenth century blocks were carved in areas occupied by Tibetan-speaking peoples. Sets were made at Snar than, Co ne, and Sde dge. Of these the Sde dge (Derge) is the favorite among scholars because of its careful editing. The last major editing task, commissioned by the thirteenth Dalai Lama, resulted in the production of the "Lhasa edition" of the Bka' 'gyur in 1931. This later edition is a comparison of the Sde dge and Snar than editions.

The translation of the Tibetan into Mongolian was started in the Yuan dynasty by imperial command. Lidgam Khan (1604–1634) supported this project, resulting in the translation of the Bstan 'gyur in 113 volumes. These volumes containing the Mongolian language version were written in gold and silver ink. The Kangxi emperor decided to have the translation revised and edited and engraved on printing blocks. The first rubbings of the Mongolian blocks were made in 1720, and because red ink was used, the 108 volumes of the printed set became known as the "Imperial Red edition." The complex story of how the ruling court of China used the Buddhist canon for political and religious purposes is further indication that the canon had many functions in societies.

THE CANON IN JAPANESE. Japanese versions of the Chinese canon have come to play an important role in Buddhist scholarship. By the early twenty-first century most scholars used printed editions from Japan made from movable metal type. Prior to the modern versions, however, woodblock editions were also made in Japan, which reportedly received a copy of the rubbings from the North Song edition in the eleventh century. However, the Japanese did not immediately produce their own woodblocks. It was not until the monk Tenkai made the first set of blocks in the seventeenth century that the Japanese obtained their own local print edition.

In 1681 Tetsugen produced a second set of blocks based on the Ming editions. In the nineteenth century the "Tokyo canon" was printed (1800–1885), and punctuation was introduced. The second Koryō edition was the basis for this Tokyo version. A "Kyoto canon" appeared between 1902 and 1905 based on the Koryō prints as well as some of the Ming readings from the Tetsugen edition. A critically edited version of the Chinese Buddhist canon printed from 1922 to 1933 is known as the "Taisho canon." This edition is used by most scholars when making footnote references to the Chinese canon. The basic text of the Taisho canon is from the Tokyo canon, which in turn copied the Koryō edition.

THE CANON IN THE COMPUTER AGE. In addition to these "received" versions of the canons, there are still occasionally some important archaeological finds, especially in regions of Central Asia. The discoveries of documents in cave 17 at Dunhuang, the cache of birch-bark manuscripts found in the stupa at Gilgit, and the texts written on wood in the ruins of the Tarim Basin have all contributed to knowledge of the way in which the Buddhist canon spread throughout Asia.

The translation of the canons is an ongoing process. The twentieth century saw an increase in the efforts to have vernacular versions available in printed form. Continued interest in the Buddhist scripture is indicated by the 1969 Cambodian translation of the Pali canon, the two modern Korean translations of the Chinese into the *hangul* script in both North Korea and South Korea, and the translation of much of the Chinese into a form of classical Japanese. Active translation projects have involved the English language. The Pali Text Society completed a major portion of the Pali canon into English, along with critical editions and aids, such as dictionaries and studies, and with funding from the Yehan Numata Foundation, a translation bureau has been established for the purpose of translating the Chinese canon into English (plans call for the translation and publication of 139 texts in the first phase of the project).

Buddhist communities that wish to move the canon from printed form to computerized versions have taken advantage of the digital age. In the late 1980s Mahidol University began the process of digitizing the Thai edition completed in the nineteenth century—the first full canon to appear in the new technology. Other groups followed the strategy, producing full digital versions of the Burmese "Sixth Council" edition, the Sinhalese edition, and the Pali Text Society

edition. The work of digitizing the Chinese Buddhist canon was more difficult, however; it required software development for the input of the ancient characters. The first complete digital version, the Koryō canon, is based on the printing blocks at Haein Monastery, followed by the input of the Japanese “Taisho” edition, the first internet-accessible form of the Chinese canon. In the early twenty-first century work began on the Tibetan canon as well with the intention of creating a database that contains many of the extant Sanskrit texts. The acceptance of the computer as a method for dissemination has been universal among the major Buddhist communities, and the willingness to expend funds for the creation of these databases indicates the esteem and value that the canon still possesses.

THE FUTURE OF THE CANON. From this survey of the history of the Buddhist canon it should be clear that, long before such activities were prevalent in the West, the Buddhists were editing, translating, and printing their scriptures. Because the canons remained open for such a long period (in a sense, the Chinese canon is still open), the size and nature of the collections of texts were unique among the religions of the world. No one group has ever controlled the development of the canons or exercised dominion over the decision about the inventory of texts to be included. In China especially the canon was lengthened because of a willingness to accept a great variety of texts into it. Scholars of popular religions point out that the texts most often used in East Asia are mainly written and compiled in China. These texts purport to be translations from Sanskrit, when in fact they originate from East Asia. Because the texts are supposedly from India, they have been described in ancient Chinese catalogs as “spurious” or in modern times as “apocryphal.”

In some cases the East Asian texts have been readily assimilated into the canonic lists, but in others they have been rejected. It is understandable that the Chinese religious heritage would find an avenue of expression in new texts. The canonic listing was important for such works because the preservation of texts required the copy centers and the distribution network of the monasteries and government agencies. Whereas the East Asian texts deserve closer study, it is also the case that the canonic texts from Indic sources were continually cited by commentators and teachers over the centuries. These citations have yet to be fully documented, but they are important for the study of the canon because they will provide an insight into what texts were read by the scholar-monks in their writings and oral teachings.

As the Chinese Buddhist monastics achieved a degree of assurance about their understanding of the teachings, by the Tang dynasty they were less fixed on the translations from India. A shift occurred, and monastics moved away from reliance on the older canonic texts—although they did not fully reject them. Among the Chan schools, new literature appeared as the teachings of great masters, whose insights were taken to be the equal of any Indian exegete. Much of this literature used the translated canon as the au-

thority for the masters, who did not claim to be dependent on the texts; rather, they acquired their understanding from meditation. The use of the older canon indicated that what the masters had experienced was in no way distant from the insights of the Buddha himself.

Later in the Chan movement the growing influence and popularity of certain great teachers, such as Mazu, helped create a situation in which the texts central to the school came from the records of these Chinese masters. They no longer felt the need to claim Indian origin for the teachings; it was now seen as coming directly from the Chinese culture and the Buddhist community. Instead of the “apocryphal” text of the past, the Chinese volumes were prized beyond all others and were seen as originating within the Chinese environment.

One can see that the use of the canon was multifaceted. At a time when the Chan school was distancing itself from the Chinese Buddhist canon, the large monasteries in China continued to make hundreds of thousands of printing blocks. The canon could thus be revered as an object and used for merit-making, whereas in other cases it served as a source of authority for the teachings of the Chinese masters.

CONCLUSION. Buddhist texts offer the scholarly world excellent examples of material that can be used to study the ways a text can change and be reformatted over time. A major problem for the editor or translator of a Buddhist text is that of making decisions based on a multiplicity of versions, sometimes in several languages and dating from different periods. The usual object of the editor is to achieve a reading that is as close as possible to the ur-text. However, this search is nearly impossible because the texts have been in a fluid state for centuries, and the received versions may have come from a stemma that includes multiple contending versions. Indeed some of the sūtras are compilations of set formulas that can be put together in any number of arrangements, altering from one time or place to another. Thus the collating of various codices from a number of stemmas does not lead to an autograph from which all witnesses have emerged.

If one could reconstruct the edition in such a fashion as to remove all the conflations, additions, and expansions of the doctrine, the resulting text would lose much of its value. Buddhist texts exhibit the changing modes of the tradition. Just as literary criticism focuses on the reader as much as it does on the author’s intent, so too does Buddhist canonic literature represent the changes made by readers who left behind small traces of their contributions to the modern text.

The modern interest in canon is based primarily on European and North American literature. The Buddhist canon offers another pattern for exploration. It is a canon that has shifted and changed over time, a canon that has included contemporary work—even when it masquerades as the work of another time and place, a canon with texts that expand and contract and translations that preserve one or another version as well as the possibility of adding new texts in the

future. Thus the potential has existed and often been realized for the addition of whole new sets of texts in the canon of Buddhism—such as the later Tantric tradition, the Mahāyāna writings, a variety of commentarial approaches, versions of texts appearing in new translations, and finally, an acceptance of East Asian texts as equal if not superior to the Indian ones.

Because the Buddhist canons represent the written part of a religion that teaches the constant availability of the insights of enlightenment and holds that the teaching of its founder, Śākyamuni, need not be the only expression of the highest teaching, it is not surprising to find canons of large size. The Buddhist canons provide a valid source for the study of the religion. The hundreds of texts represent all levels of the ideas and concepts. Even though maintained by the “elite” monastic community, the canons are filled with expressions of “popular” practices over the centuries. The Chinese canon’s inclusion of works created in East Asia is an example of the complexity of the sources and the history of the world’s largest scriptural collection.

SEE ALSO Councils, article on Buddhist Councils.

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BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS: CANON AND CANONIZATION—VINAYA

The earliest Buddhist literature is divided into the doctrinal teachings, the *dharma*, and the rules for ethical behavior, the Vinaya. The Vinaya is divided into the *Sūtravibhaṅga*, case studies of each individual rule, and the *Skandhaka*, essays on important topics, for example ordination, monastic clothing, medicine, adjudication of disputes, the conduct of community meetings, and so on. The Vinaya rules are collected in a separate list called the *Prātimokṣa*, and there is a summary of the *Skandhaka* called the *Karmavācānā*. Taken together, the Vinaya literature outlines the core Buddhist ethical teachings, ordination procedures, and community ritual guidelines. While the ethical and social behavior models have been consistent, the expression and structure of the Vinaya literature have been reformulated, expanded and interpreted. The pressures of rapid growth and social involvement brought about changes in Vinaya literature. These changes mark significant differences in Buddhist intellectual and social history in different cultures, times, and places.

From its beginning and through its history the Vinaya rules and the entire corpus of literature have been established in response to monks’ and nuns’ encounters with the ordained and the lay communities. The four fundamental rules (*pārājika*) of the Buddhist monastic code prohibit engaging in sexual activity, killing living beings, stealing, and lying (given in this order in the texts). The details of these prohibitions in the Vinaya literature show that they were actively discussed and applied; the four transgressions are demonstrated in a broad spectrum of case studies used to establish moral and legal precedents. The Vinaya literature covers a wide range of possible violations of each rule, classifies transgressions according to severity, and designates specific penalties for each type of violation.

The detailed nature of Buddhist ethical and legal codes is made clear in the descriptions of the first major transgression in the Vinaya, the prohibition of sexual activity for ordained monks and nuns. Along with the prohibitions against taking life, stealing, and lying, the attention given to sexuality shows that preserving the integrity of the celibate community was a top priority. Eighteen Vinaya rules of varying importance are concerned with sexuality, and intentional sexual relations is the first in the list of the most serious offenses, resulting in expulsion from the community. The related rules for monks and nuns prohibit sexual activity with men, women, hermaphrodites, eunuchs, any living being, and the dead and dying and whether intoxicated or sober. All varieties of intentional sexual activity are described and prohibited for monks and nuns and are grounds for expulsion from the community. The Pali Vinaya goes on to prohibit sexual rela-

tions while “awake, asleep, intoxicated, mad, drunk, [or with] dead . . . and decomposed partners” (Horner, 1938–1952, vol. 1, p. 49). Sexual relations are prohibited whether one is sleeping, awake, a novice monk or nun, or in any way compliant. All further varieties of sexual activity are explicitly described and prohibited, including incest, masturbation, or activity with any artificial device. Verbal allusions to sex acts and related abusive language are prohibited. In contrast to these descriptions of violations and penalties and in a demonstration of the extensive nature of this legal literature, the Vinaya does not hold female or male victims of sex abuse guilty of any violation, nor are such victims to be penalized. The penalties for each kind of transgression are included, beginning with dismissal from the community for intentional acts and confinement to quarters, suspension of privileges, and restrictions on interaction with the community for lesser violations.

The Vinaya literature is rich with descriptions of all varieties of each kind of transgression, their contexts, and their penalties. The rules against taking life include detailed case studies and legal precedents. The Vinaya literature prohibits intentionally killing any living being and specifies that human life is of greater value than animal life. Inciting anyone to injure any living being is a violation, and there are strict prohibitions against the slaughter of any living being on behalf of a monk or a nun. Intentional and unintentional activities that result in death are presented in detail, and penalties are assigned according to the severity of the transgression. Other rules prohibit physical violence motivated by anger or displeasure, and threats of violence are classified as violations.

For monks and nuns, taking anything not given is explained as stealing. Lying, especially about one’s spiritual attainment or status, is particularly weighty for ordained monks and nuns. Infractions even remotely related to all four cardinal rules are illustrated in anecdotes and case studies, and the penalties for each type of transgression are specified. This literature is a rich source of Buddhist canonical law, and in addition to monastic rules, it served as a guideline for lay law in many cultures.

In addition to the four cardinal rules, six other community rules were included in an early list of ten. Monks and nuns were not to take alcoholic beverages, they were not to take meals after midday, and they were not to engage in dancing, music, or such entertainment. They were not to use ornamental jewelry or perfumes, they were not to sleep in luxurious bedding, and they were prohibited from handling gold and silver.

THE RULES. The Pali Vinaya, the oldest extant Vinaya, contains 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns. The core list of rules is called the *Pātimokkha* (*Prātimokṣa*), and the list is memorized and recited by Buddhist monks during their monthly meetings into the early twenty-first century. Most scholars agree that this list of rules was compiled before the canonical versions with the stories and commentaries in the

Sūtravibhaṅga. The separate list of rules, the *Prātimokṣa*, is, however, not included in any early version of the Vinaya Piṭaka.

The Vinaya rules are attributed to the historical Buddha, who is said to have made the rules as his group of followers grew. The gradual development of the lists of Vinaya rules shows that Buddhist monastic law was not conceived of as a predetermined or revealed moral agenda given in total to the ordained community. The rules were rather practical measures designed gradually to preserve what were thought to be mental and physical conditions appropriate to the practice of Buddhism. The historical Buddha made rules for the community as the occasions presented themselves, and it is likely that rules were collected and added after the Buddha’s lifetime. The variations in size of the extant Vinaya collections show the dynamism of the community and the tension between preservation of the inherited rules and the need to adapt to unprecedented new conditions.

The original list of rules formulated in the Buddha’s lifetime for his original community expanded as the Buddhist monastic community grew and spread to different places. Soon different Vinayas were collected and regarded as authoritative scripture. As far as is known, these were collected and transmitted orally. Fragments of written Vinaya documents dating to the first century BCE survive in several languages, but the first complete written Vinaya is in Pali language, dating to the fifth century CE. From text fragments and inscriptions, it is known that after the third century BCE at least six collections of Vinaya rules were produced in different cultural contexts. These Vinaya collections are generally associated with geographic regions and sect affiliation. They are the Sarvāstivādin, Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Mūlasarvāstivādin (the largest Vinaya), Pali, and Mahāsaṃghika. Of these the Vinayas of the Sarvāstivādin, Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Mahāsaṃghika exist in Chinese translations, the Pali Vinaya in its language of composition, and the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivādin in Chinese and Tibetan translations.

The literal meaning of the word *Prātimokṣa* is a rule or rules that lead one to liberation. The *Prātimokṣa* is the core of the *Sūtravibhaṅga*, which contains the explanatory stories or contexts for each rule. The rules are divided into eight sections, expulsion (*pārājika*)—four; community meeting (*saṅghādisesa*)—thirteen; undetermined (*anīyata*)—two; forfeiture (*nihsargika*)—thirty; expiation (*pāṭayantika*)—ninety-two; confession (*pratideśanīya*)—four; and civility (*śaikṣa*)—seventy-five; adjudication (*adbhikaraṇasamathā*)—seven, adding up to a total, in the Pali version, of 227 rules. Eighty-four more rules dealing with sexual propriety and community behavior are added for nuns.

SKANDHAKA. The second part of the Vinaya is the *Skandhaka*. This section, like the rules (*Sūtravibhaṅga*) section, has an abbreviated summary called the *Karmavācānā*, which, like the *Prātimokṣa* list of rules, is not included in the Pali Vinaya. The *Skandhaka* section of the Vinaya is largely concerned

with community issues, giving descriptions of rituals, procedures, monastic life, and materials. Instead of setting out rules and penalties, this section of the Vinaya deals with ordination procedures, monastic authority, community ritual observances, clothing styles, cosmetic styles, healthcare, adjudication of disputes, and so on.

There are two sections in the *Skandhaka*, the Main Section (*Mahāvagga*) and the Lesser Section (*Cullavagga*). The entire *Skandhaka* is set in the context of stories from the life and teachings of the Buddha, first including major components of monastic life in the Main Section and minor points in the Lesser Section. The Main Section begins with a brief account of the Buddha's enlightenment experience, the theory of the twelve links of causal interdependent origination, the eightfold path, the four noble truths and the theory of the nonexistence of the self. The first major section is on ordination. The Buddha's original procedure is described, then the specifics of the evolution of the ceremony and the requirements for ordination are set out. These descriptions of receiving monastic robes, having one's head shaved, and taking vows are preserved in all versions of the Vinaya.

The next two sections of the *Skandhaka* deal with feeding, housing, and occupying thousands of Buddhist monks and nuns during the Indian monsoon season. The Vinaya records that monks and nuns used to wander from place to place even through the rainy season. Farmers began to complain about crops destroyed by Buddhists wandering in the monsoon, undernourished and weaker monks and nuns began to develop illnesses, and travel became difficult. The Buddha and monastic authorities therefore instructed the communities to set up shelters and temporary residences for the duration of the monsoon season. With so many monks and nuns living together, the community was soon faced with the problems of retreat conduct and an effective method to propagate the teachings during the monsoon retreat time.

These sections of the Vinaya literature contain a rich collection of sociological, economic, and anthropological data. Mundane matters under the heading of "Leather Accessories" describe health and hygiene problems in ancient India, and the descriptions of the commodities in common use give information about the regional economy, including the use of wooden products, palm, bamboo, wool, gold, silver, gems, bronze, glass, tin, lead, and copper. Ethical and community definition issues follow in the section prohibiting the slaughter of cattle and animals and the problems that arise from use of their skins. Monks and nuns are not to kill animals, in particular cattle, which in addition to being living beings were considered sacred by many of the Buddhists' Indian brethren.

The section on medicine contains allowances to treat illness and provide hospice care. The foundations of Indian medicine were located in Buddhist monasteries, and these are evident here, for example, in the descriptions of acceptable medicines and their administration. The *Skandhaka* includes medical diagnostic information, food warnings, hygiene in-

formation, and information on medical procedures. It goes on to detail information about monks' and nuns' robes, the acceptable material for making monastic clothing, and the rituals for acquiring and distributing new robes. Again, the *Skandhaka* provides much information about ancient India's commodities economy. Here there are descriptions of the use of linen, cotton, silk, wool, hemp and canvas.

The *Skandhaka* continues with sections about the Campā and Kośāmbī communities and general descriptions of community interaction with the Buddhist legal system. Violations of Buddhist monastic rules, for example, the case of quarreling among the Kośāmbīs, are judged and sentences specified. These two sections mark the end of the Main Section of the *Skandhaka*. The remainder of the *Skandhaka* is the Lesser Section and it is packed with applications of Buddhists rules. The basic rules are stated in the texts, always with the Buddha present or on his authority, and the rules used are summarized at the end of each section. These long case histories describe the interface of the Buddhist worldview with everyday human life. The extensive deliberations in the Lesser Section show monks and nuns confronting and coping with basic human needs and shortcomings in accord with Buddhist guidelines.

LATER VINAYA LITERATURE. The Pali Vinaya and other Vinaya collections are preserved in the Buddhist canonical collections and are regarded as sacred and inviolable. However, as described here, the canonical collections were themselves products of processes of disputation and retrospective compilation. A good example of this process is the controversy between the Sthavira and Mahāsāṃghika sects, which likely produced slightly different versions of the Vinaya rules. Similarly the processes that produced and caused the revisions of the ancient collections continued, and the Vinaya was recast in later cultural and religious contexts.

There are good examples, particularly in Sri Lanka, India, and China, of the ongoing process of preserving the ancient rules and community rituals and at the same time building new text collections around them. In twelfth-century Sri Lanka, the Vinaya literary canon was recanonized in the *Katikāvata* (Regulations of the order) literature, which addressed new conditions and concerns of the monastic community. In India in about the seventh-century, after the end of the Gupta dynasty, the scholar Guṇaprabha composed the *Vinaya Sūtra* and commentary, based on the ancient *Skandhaka* literature. These texts were commented on extensively in India and became core documents for later Tibetan Buddhists, who produced a large corpus of Tibetan commentaries on Guṇaprabha's Indian texts. Similarly in China the Vinaya was recast in Chan monasteries to accommodate Chinese Confucian traditions in the *Chanyuan Qinggui* (Rules for purity in Chan monasteries). These and other compositions are careful to preserve inherited canonical rules and regulations, but they include innovations designed for each respective environment. The Vinaya canonical literature is thus preserved and at the same time carefully recast.

In addition to these well-known and widely circulated compositions, major Buddhist monasteries composed manuals that addressed their communities' special concerns, setting out ritual schedules and etiquette for their local communities. The ancient Vinaya rules were again preserved and rituals observed; ordination, monthly meetings, recitation of rules, and ethical parameters were kept intact. In sum, though definitely preserved intact, canonization of the Vinaya literature was not a procedure that set up lists of rules to be mechanically and literally followed in all circumstances. Canonization was rather a dynamic creative process that functioned to meet the needs of a growing and changing community and did not preclude later addition and reformulation.

SEE ALSO Law and Religion, article on Law and Religion in Buddhism; Monasticism, article on Buddhist Monasticism.

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BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS: RITUAL USES OF BOOKS

A written text can be a vehicle for the conveyance of meaning, but it is always also a material object with a physical pres-

ence in the world. In many Buddhist communities, the material presence of texts has been viewed as a crucial aspect of their nature and function. Buddhist texts are powerful, and their power is thought to reside not only in their message, but also (and sometimes especially) in the physical embodiment of that message.

THE BUDDHA'S TEXTUAL BODY. The texts that are conceived of as having the greatest potential power and ritual efficacy are those that contain the word of the Buddha (*buddhavaṇana*), primarily sūtras or excerpts therefrom. Whereas the profundity of the Buddha's teachings provides one reason for the reverence accorded to such works, their ritual functions rely perhaps more heavily on the notion that they are embodiments of the Buddha himself, relics of his physical presence in which are invested the miraculous powers that he possessed. The origins of this notion remain unclear, but, following the work of Gregory Schopen (1975), most scholars have agreed that many ritual practices involving texts were developed by analogy with (and possibly in tension with) practices involving the bodily relics of the Buddha. Passages equating the Buddha with his teachings are not uncommon in Buddhist literature; among the most often cited is the Buddha's statement that "one who sees the dhamma, Vakkali, sees me; one who sees me, sees the dhamma" (*Samyutta Nikāya* III, 120). Whereas this passage has often been read as deemphasizing the importance of the Buddha's physical presence in favor of the teachings, it also offers precedent for the identification of the Buddha's body with the body of the teachings. Buddhist texts preserve not only the Buddha's wisdom, but also his powerful physical presence.

Numerous Mahāyāna sūtras make the equation explicit: the teachings of the Buddha (especially the sūtras in question) are his *dharma* body (*dharmakāya*) made present through recitation or inscription and worthy of the highest veneration. According to such sūtras, reading, writing, reciting, and worshiping them generates even greater merit than worshiping the bodily relics of the Buddha. Schopen and others see in such passages an attempt to establish the superiority of this "cult of the book" to the worship of physical relics. Moreover, as Schopen points out, bodily relics are (at least theoretically) limited in number, and are housed in specific shrines; they resist replication and transportation, whereas *dharma* relics can be reproduced endlessly and enshrined anywhere. As the Buddhist tradition spread to new communities, this portability ensured that the Buddha could be made physically present anywhere.

Several practices involving texts stem from the notion that the Buddha is embodied in the teachings. Throughout the Buddhist world, texts are enshrined, like the physical remains of the Buddha, in stupas (reliquary structures) and in images of the Buddha, objects of veneration that are vivified and rendered powerful in part by the texts and other varieties of relics that they contain. Whereas complete texts have often been interred, particular verses or formulae have been favored to serve this function in particular times and places,

such as the well-known verse on interdependent origination (*pratītyasamutpādagāthā*), which encapsulates the Buddha's teaching on arising and cessation. Small clay tablets and miniature stupas stamped with this verse have been found in great number interred in stupas across Central, South, East, and Southeast Asia. Images inscribed with the verse are also ubiquitous. As Daniel Boucher's study indicates, from roughly the seventh to the thirteenth centuries, the *pratītyasamutpādagāthā* was perhaps the *dharma* relic par excellence. It made the Buddha physically present—not through its meaning so much as through its material embodiment of the *dharma*. A relic, whether of the Buddha's body or his speech, is not an inert object, but the potent presence of the Buddha himself. Together with other textual relics, the tablets marked with this verse suggest a conception of Buddha-speech (and perhaps language in general) as having an active, transformative presence in the world that is connected with—but by no means subordinate to—its capacity to convey meaning.

The textual embodiment of the Buddha is not exclusively a Mahāyāna phenomenon, although perhaps the phenomenon is most fully elaborated in that context. Some Theravāda systematizations of the bodies of the Buddha include the *dharma* body; some classifications of relics include *dharma* relics together with bodily relics, associative relics (objects he used, his footprints, or the bodhi tree), and relics by convention (images of the Buddha or of the places and things associated with him). It seems that Theravāda communities have placed greater emphasis on other varieties of relics than on *dharma* relics, but this conclusion may be reflective of different emphases in scholarship on the Theravāda as much as different emphases within Theravādin practice. Texts play a crucial role in the rituals through which images and other objects are imbued with the presence of the Buddha. In the Thai ceremony for consecrating Buddha images, for instance, the image is vivified through "hearing" the recitation of the life story and core teachings of the Buddha. In such rituals, the creation and transfer of power is achieved in no small part by the recitation of texts.

TEXT PRODUCTION AS RITUAL PRACTICE. Perhaps the most fundamental ritual practice associated with texts is text production itself, for this practice ensures the preservation and further use of a text—no small matter, especially in a manuscript culture, where access to texts is by no means assured. It would appear, however, that the impetus for having texts copied (or printed) in many Buddhist communities was not only preservation and dissemination of the teachings; the act of production is also an end in and of itself, for it is claimed to be a potent practice for generating merit. Such claims are sometimes made in the very texts to be copied. Several Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) sūtras, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*), and the *Suvarṇa(pra)bhāsottamasūtra* (*Sūtra of Golden Light*), explicitly and strongly encourage their own reproduction. Whereas Theravāda writings tend to be less overt and self-referential in this regard, stories exist that similarly rec-

ommend the production and worship of texts. One story in the *Paññāsaṅgāṭaka* (an "apocryphal" Thai collection of stories of the Buddha's previous lives), for instance, tells of a previous life in which the Buddha was a wise man who lived during the life of a former Buddha; because he wrote down and encouraged others to write down the teachings of that Buddha, he received plentiful worldly gifts from the deities, as well as a prediction from the former Buddha that he would himself become the Buddha Gautama.

These textual affirmations of the material rewards and great merit to be gained from the production of texts were clearly taken to heart in Buddhist communities. Among the manuscripts found at Dunhuang, for instance, numerous dedicatory colophons are preserved that specify the personal motivations of the Buddhists who copied, or sponsored the copying of, Buddhist texts. These motivations are commonly related to death and rebirth; copying a sūtra could generate the merit necessary to ensure that a recently deceased loved one would gain a good rebirth, or to mitigate against wrongdoings committed by oneself. Other motivations are attested as well, and almost all manuscripts include the dedication of merit to all beings. Similar dedications of merit are found in manuscripts throughout the Buddhist world.

The production of Buddhist texts could generate not only merit, but also political authority, as is especially evident in the periodic editing and reproduction of the Pali canon. As Stanley Tambiah has demonstrated, revising and "purifying" the canon established a ruler as a protector of the *dharma*—a role with significant political as well as religious capital. The Fifth Buddhist Council, held in 1871 in Burma, provides a striking example: the canon, revised under the direction of King Mindon, was inscribed not only on palm leaves, but also on 729 marble slabs—an undertaking that established the king's authority as well as the text of the *Tipiṭaka*.

Whereas producing a Buddhist text in any form would be meritorious, manuscript remains suggest that the material qualities of the text were of great significance in Buddhist communities. Formats vary according to cultural context and the function of the text. Texts produced primarily for the merit gained thereby reflect their status as objects of devotion: some are richly illustrated, or written in gold on beautifully dyed papers. One Japanese manuscript of the *Lotus Sūtra*, for instance, enshrines each character of the text in a small stupa, whereas another is embroidered in silk thread of different colors. Manuscripts are often enclosed in elaborately carved and painted manuscript covers, sūtra cases, or cloth wrappings. Texts inscribed in stone (including not only the Burmese Pali canon described above, but also most of the Chinese canon, carved between the seventh and the twelfth centuries and stored in caves at Fang Shan) promise to preserve the *dharma* beyond its predicted decline in the world. Texts meant to function in ritual contexts were produced in more practical formats, such as booklets containing what appear to be collections of liturgical texts found at

Dunhuang. Whereas manuscripts would frequently be produced by professional scribes paid by donors, there also exist numerous texts inscribed personally by the devotee. A few extant manuscripts are written in ink mixed with the blood of the writer, forging a bodily connection with the powerful physical text, and thus with the Buddha.

Since the more frequently a text was produced, the greater was the merit obtained. Thus, various technologies of text production developed, the most central of which is block printing. The earliest dated printed text (868 CE), found at Dunhuang, is the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedika*), a text that explicitly exhorts its readers to reproduce it (its colophon indicates that copies were intended for free distribution). Indeed, it is likely that Buddhist practices of producing texts for merit were a central impetus in the development of print technology in China. Several Mahāyāna sūtras, including the *Diamond Sūtra*, are not only found in written form at Dunhuang, but are also depicted in wall murals—most not primarily as narratives, but as icons, in which the Buddha, preaching the sūtra, gazes directly at the viewer. Such representations again suggest a conception of sūtras as physical embodiments of the speech of the Buddha—and this physical embodiment takes precedence over the denotative content of the sūtras in their depiction. The sūtras are icons of the Buddha that, in the case of the paintings, literally make his body manifest.

Other practices that similarly aim to make a text “present” can also be understood as technologies of text production. The Tibetan prayer wheel, for instance, contains paper on which a *mantra* is written thousands of times. With each turning of the wheel, every one of the written *mantras* is made manifest, thereby generating tremendous merit for the practitioner. Some contemporary practitioners have adapted this practice to digital technology, saving numerous copies of a *mantra* to a computer hard drive that spins hundreds of thousands of times per hour. Prayer flags function similarly, the efficacy of the words written upon them being released with each breeze.

Such examples suggest a way to understand yet another mode of text production: recitation. Both in Theravāda and in Mahāyāna textual traditions, exhortations to recite or hear Buddhist literature are ubiquitous, often eclipsing exhortations to write. In manuscript cultures, especially—cultures in which access to the written text was often extremely limited—most Buddhists were likely to encounter the text in the context of recitation. Whereas recitation seldom leaves material traces for historians, some sūtras describe the effects of recitation on audiences and their worlds in distinctly physical terms. The oral/aural text is represented as a potent substance that enters and transforms its listeners and their environments. It is clear in such descriptions that preaching the sūtra indeed makes it manifest in the world in a manner strongly reminiscent of other, more obviously material, practices of text production. Take, for instance, the Tibetan practice of reciting the entire canon with great rapidity, a practice that

might be understood as something like an oral prayer wheel: a large number of monks are given different sections of the canon, and each recites his portion simultaneously. Oral recitation makes the transformative power of the text present in the world, like the flapping of a prayer flag in the wind.

TEXTS AS AGENTS OF TRANSFORMATION. As is evident in the different technologies of text production, Buddhist texts are not only instruments of communication, but also agents of transformation; as manifestations of the Buddha, they have the capacity to radically transform the lives of devotees who interact with them in prescribed ways. In the ritual practices through which devotees access this power, the meaning-bearing aspects of a text—while surely related to its transformative capacity—recede, whereas the material qualities of language—whether oral or written—come to the fore. The language of Buddhist texts becomes a tangible, fully present force that can change the conditions of persons and their environments.

Rituals that provide access to the power of texts involve oral performance and/or the manipulation of written texts. In Theravādin communities, one of the principal rituals employed is the chanting of *paritta*, collections of Pali sūtras and other texts thought to have particularly potent protective powers or the capacity to render circumstances auspicious. These texts may be chanted by devotees or by monks in a formal ceremony that can last up to several days. The ceremonies are held to provide protection from hardship and malignant forces, and to promote beneficial conditions for specific ventures—from weddings to business deals.

In more formal ceremonies, the potency of the chanted texts is rendered materially accessible through substances that are themselves imbued with power through the recitation. A thread that connects all who are present during the chanting is later broken into pieces and distributed to devotees, who then wear the strands on their wrists or arms. Devotees wet their faces and heads with—and drink water blessed through—the ceremony. The Pali texts are comprehensible only to a few laypeople and to some monks, but the protective and beneficial power of chanting them or hearing them chanted depends not on comprehension, but on texts’ materialization and on the ability of devotees to interact with the texts in material ways.

The relationship between meaning and transformative agency is most tenuous in practices involving *mantra* and *dhāraṇī*. These strings of Sanskrit (or Pali) syllables are employed in a wide variety of practices, from chanting to turning prayer wheels to meditation, but also recited at key points within numerous ceremonies that are not primarily focused on the texts—such as rites for the dying or the consecration of images in order to bless or empower a person or object. Many of these formulae are given in sūtras, bestowed by particular deities with the promise of protection, benefit, or awakening for the devotee who employs them. Some explicitly invoke a celestial being, but most barely gesture towards meaning. Instead, the power of the formulae resides in their

materialization in sound or writing. Indeed, the elusiveness of meaning in these formulae is a crucial component of their transformative capacity, whether they are used for worldly ends or as meditative aids. Beyond conceptualization, formulae evoke a mysterious power to transform the mundane world or to lead the meditator beyond concepts.

Those Mahāyāna sūtras that proclaim their own transformative agency might be said to function in an analogous manner: the content of such texts is fundamentally concerned with articulating repeatedly the power of the form of the text itself when it is made manifest through writing or recitation. Rather than locating their potency in a conceptually graspable core revelation, these Mahāyāna sūtras draw attention to their own materiality, instructing their audiences on how to interact with them in physical, material, and ritualized ways. The literal interpretation of these instructions is indicated by traces of sandalwood powder and other ritual substances found on wooden manuscript covers from Northern India and Central Asia dating from the ninth century and later; several of the sūtras specifically encourage the devotee to offer such substances. And, as enjoined by the texts themselves, such texts were (and are) widely recited for the benefit and protection of individuals, communities, nations, and the world.

The amuletic function of texts perhaps best epitomizes the material manifestation of transformative agency. Tiny scrolls enclosed in ornaments, miniature texts, or amulets stamped with potent words are carried on the body of the devotee. Such textual objects—relics of the Buddha—both remind the practitioner of Buddhist teachings and offer wearable, tangible protection and benefit in daily life. The Southeast Asian practice of tattooing *yantra* (powerful diagrams in which *mantras* and Buddhist verses figure prominently) on the body to protect against weapons and malevolent forces, or to generate good will in others, provides a striking instance of making the power of language physically manifest; the human body itself becomes the powerful material text. Like manuscripts written in blood, tattoos forge a strong physical connection between the body of the devotee and the textual body of the Buddha.

THE RITUAL CONTEXT OF TEXTUAL PRACTICES. Rituals involving texts have in turn engendered further practices of text production. Throughout the Buddhist world, anthologies of texts or parts of texts employed in particular rituals—such as *paritta* ceremonies—have been produced. These anthologies are not merely functional; they are venerated bodies of literature in their own right. In China and Japan, the worship of Mahāyāna sūtras gave rise to a popular genre of secondary literature: miracle tales about the sūtras. These stories describe the miraculous intercession of the texts (and the celestial buddhas, *bodhisattvas*, and deities brought to life in their pages) in the lives of their devotees, as well as the dire consequences of treating the sūtras with disrespect. They model appropriate ritual behavior with regard to the sūtras, and serve as testimonials to the transformative powers that

the texts themselves claim. Finally, given the conception of Buddhist texts as the embodiment of the Buddha and his power, the production of scholarly commentaries and translations cannot be neatly separated from more overtly devotional or apotropaic practices. The sophisticated theories and uses of language developed by thinkers across the Buddhist world emerged from contexts in which texts were materializations of tremendous, transformative power.

SEE ALSO Buddha; Buddhism, overview article.

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NATALIE GUMMER (2005)

BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS: TRANSLATION

Translation practices have been central to the ongoing reinterpretation and transformation of the Buddhist tradition. Translation ensures both continuity—through the transmission of the vast sacred literature of the tradition—and change, as different ways of interpreting Buddhist thought and practice are opened up or closed off in the process of translation. As an interpretive practice, translation depends upon and illuminates historical conceptions of Buddhist literature and of the process of translation itself, neither of which necessarily coincide with contemporary English conceptions. The translation of Buddhist literature reveals the different ways in which various Buddhist communities have located and recreated the value and power of their textual traditions in light of their individual cultural and historical contexts.

A frequently cited passage in the Pali canon (Vinaya 2.139) both prescribes and exemplifies the complex and crucial role that translation has played in the transmission of the Buddhist tradition. In this passage, two monks of the Brāhmaṇ class report to the Buddha that the teachings are being disseminated by monks of widely varying backgrounds *sakāya niruttiyā*, “in own language,” and suggest to him that his words be rendered in *chandaso* (usually interpreted to mean “Sanskrit meter”). No, he replies to them, they should be disseminated “in own language.” Numerous interpreters, ancient and modern, have viewed this passage as clearly defining the normative stance on the question of whether or not to translate texts, but they have not agreed on just what stance is being prescribed.

How one interprets this passage determines and is determined by one’s opinion on whether to translate the word of

the Buddha. Does the phrase “in own language” refer to the language of the preaching monk, or to the language of the Buddha himself? The passage admits multiple interpretations (not all of which have been summarized here). Thus, whereas many interpreters see here the Buddha’s stamp of approval for translation practices, others, including the highly influential fifth century commentator Buddhaghosa—thought to be responsible for the translation of Theravādin commentarial literature from Sinhalese into Pali—view “in own language” as referring to the Buddha’s own language. According to Buddhaghosa, that language was Pali.

The different historical interpretations of this putatively normative passage mirror the multiple approaches to and conceptions of translation taken in different times and places. The preservation of the Theravādin *tipiṭaka* in Pali, as compared to the translation of the *tripiṭaka* into Chinese and Tibetan, for instance, would appear to demarcate one of the most significant distinctions among Buddhist conceptions of translation. If one looks beyond general preferences regarding canonical language, however, the situation becomes considerably more complicated: Theravādin Buddhist communities have translated numerous texts into local languages, and have produced bilingual versions of canonical texts in which Pali is interspersed with local languages. Conversely, certain texts or parts of texts (like *mantra* and *dhāraṇī*) have been preserved in Buddhist Sanskrit by the same communities that chose, for the most part, to translate the canon. Buddhist conceptions of translation are reflected not simply in the question of whether to translate, but what—and how, and why—to translate.

The practices of premodern Buddhist translators clearly indicate that the answers to these questions were multiple. One stands a better chance of understanding the multiplicity of Buddhist conceptions of translation if one begins with the premise that the practice of translation in the vast majority of premodern Buddhist communities was a religious practice. Much of Buddhist literature is thought to embody not only meaning, but also tremendous efficacy and transformative power—the power to heal, bring prosperity, or even enlighten audiences. The production of translations is thus closely related to other religious—and even devotional—practices. Situating the questions of whether, how, and why Buddhists translated their sacred literature within this context of religious practice illuminates possible motivations and explanations that might otherwise remain obscure.

TECHNIQUES OF TRANSLATION. Whereas the conceptions of translation that inform Buddhist translation practices are only rarely examined explicitly by translators, the techniques used in translation can shed considerable light on diverse answers not only to the question of how to translate, but also to the question of why. The approach taken by a translator or community of translators is not arbitrary; it is shaped by the conception of Buddhist literature and its translation that is held by the translator. On the other hand, interpreting techniques of translation with the aim of understanding con-

ceptions of translation is by no means straightforward. For instance, the late-eighth-century Tibetan king Khri Sronglde'u-bstan (742–c. 800 CE) is credited with normalizing previously idiosyncratic translation practices, prescribing methods for rendering Sanskrit syntax and dictating precise one-to-one correspondences between Sanskrit and Tibetan terms. The result is a highly artificial style, a kind of “translationese,” that had been adopted by Tibetan translators to such an extent that some modern scholars of Buddhism have thought that Tibetan translations could be used to produce “back-translations,” reconstructions of Sanskrit texts that are no longer extant.

One can attempt to derive from this translation technique, employed in all editions of the Tibetan canon, the conception of translation that informs it. Any such attempt is itself, however, a kind of back-translation: an interpretive reconstruction that is necessarily flawed even though potentially illuminating. Does the deep concern for establishing equivalence between the two languages indicate that, despite the practice of translation, the power of the text was still thought to reside in the Sanskrit forms of the language, or does it suggest an extreme skepticism regarding a translator's ability to correctly grasp and render the meaning and transformative power of a text? Techniques of translation can indeed suggest the concerns and conceptions of the translator(s), but the techniques themselves are open to interpretation.

In contrast to the regularization of translation techniques in Tibet, Chinese translations exhibit a wide range of approaches. Early Chinese translators, such as An Shigao (second century CE), tended to borrow Daoist vocabulary for the rendering of Buddhist ideas. Many texts were produced by translation teams, in which different members assumed specific roles in the interpretive and editorial processes under the leadership of an illustrious translator. Particular translators cultivated distinctive techniques. Some, such as the monk Hsüan-tsang (602–664 CE), actively preserved the foreign flavor of a text through literal renderings. Others, most famously Kumārajīva (344–413 CE), attempted to convey the core significance of a text through free translations in elegant literary Chinese. Foreignness and familiarity both breed their own kinds of power, and these different techniques of translation can be interpreted as indicators of where different translators located the power of the religious texts they were translating.

Moreover, several different translations of the “same” text are frequently preserved side-by-side in the Chinese canon, a practice which itself invites interpretation. Perhaps Chinese Buddhist scholars conceived of different translations as illuminating different aspects or functions of a given text, or simply as representing part of a textual history worthy of preservation. This multiplicity provides an important contrast to the Tibetan practice of attempting to determine a single definitive translation, one that suggests a strikingly different conception of Buddhist literature and its translation.

LANGUAGE CHOICE. The translation of Buddhist literature is not simply a matter of rendering texts from one vernacular into another. Many of the languages in which Buddhist literature is preserved are literary languages distinct from those spoken by people who produced and used Buddhist literature. These literary languages have their own complex histories of transformation and codification. Thus, “Buddhist Sanskrit” describes a literary language (or, better, a range of language use) closely related to, but not identical with, classical Sanskrit in the normative sense. Indeed, some scholars maintain that the form of Sanskrit in which some Buddhist literature is preserved is itself a kind of translation, an amalgam of *prakritic* literary languages and Sanskrit, where the former is thought to be the original language of composition. Other scholars counter that Buddhists chose to compose and preserve texts in these “hybrid” literary forms. Likewise, the Pali in which Theravādan canonical texts are preserved was never a vernacular language; whatever its progenitors might have been, it has distinct features that indicate its deliberate construction as a literary language.

As noted above, Tibetan translations employ a highly artificial form of “translationese” that would be abstruse for the uninitiated reader. It is difficult to make generalizations about the language of the Chinese translations, which varies considerably in terms of its conformity with the norms of literary Chinese, itself a form of language very distinct from vernaculars. It is safe to say, however, that even the most colloquially inflected translations became, in the course of a few hundred years, distant from vernacular usage (as, for instance, the language of Shakespeare is for most contemporary English speakers).

Buddhist Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, and Chinese all functioned not only as literary languages, but also as translocal languages—languages in which Buddhist literature was preserved and studied by communities whose spoken language was different. Thus Pali functioned as a translocal language in South and Southeast Asia, Sanskrit in South and Central Asia, Chinese in East Asia and parts of Southeast Asia, and Tibetan in the Himalayas and in Mongolian communities. In this respect, these languages are distinct from local languages that, whether literary or vernacular, did not function beyond the borders of their linguistic communities. Note, however, that “local” and “translocal” are shifting categories. When Tibetan translations were made of Sanskrit Buddhist texts, they were rendered in a local literary language; when Mongolian Buddhists chose to use the Tibetan Buddhist canon, Tibetan was being used as a translocal language.

In addition to the distinctions between literary and vernacular and between local and translocal, a third distinction, between languages from which and languages into which translations were made, is relevant to an examination of Buddhist translation practices. Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, and Chinese all functioned as sources for translations into local languages. Sogdians, for instance, chose to translate Buddhist texts from the Chinese, whether due to access or to presumed

authority. Once again, however, these categories are flexible and overlapping. Sinhalese commentaries on the *tipiṭaka* were translated into Pali, in part to make them accessible to a translocal audience.

Like the techniques of translation employed in different times and places, language choice admits various interpretations. The preservation of the canon in a foreign language does not suggest that translation did not take place. For example, the entire Tibetan canon was translated into Mongolian in the first half of the seventeenth century, but the Tibetan version came to be preferred for liturgical purposes. Preserving canonical texts in a translocal language like Pali can be understood in terms of the reverence for and power invested in what was thought to be the language of the Buddha, but it can also be understood as an element in the construction of a shared translocal culture, or as an attempt to restrict access to canonical texts to a powerful monastic elite. The translation of a massive corpus of texts into Chinese or Tibetan might be interpreted as a sign of the populist nature of the Buddhist movement in a particular time and place, but, since the variety of language employed in the translation is, in most cases, far from the vernacular, the charge of elitism might just as easily be applied. Regardless, it is safe to say that in the vast majority of Buddhist communities both local and translocal languages were employed, the choice between one or the other in the case of a given text being dictated by a complex and fluctuating conjunction of social, literary, and soteriological factors.

Take, for instance, the Thai ceremony for imbuing life in a Buddha image, in which monks chant the biography of the Buddha to the image in Pali. Translations of the text in local languages exist and are used in preaching, but only the Pali version is deemed to have the potency to enliven an image. A similar linguistic “division of labor” might well inform language choice in Khotanese Buddhism. While manuscript evidence suggests that Sanskrit sutras were produced in Khotan, Khotanese translations or summaries of the same texts are also attested. One possible explanation might be derived from the Thai case: perhaps Sanskrit texts served a different function from translated texts. Another explanation, provided by Jan Nattier (1990), suggests that, through the influence of Chinese Buddhist textual practices, a shift in language choice towards a preference for the vernacular took place in Central Asia after the sixth century, prior to which only Buddhist Sanskrit texts were produced. Both the functional and the temporal explanation have merit, and are not mutually exclusive options.

TRANSLATION AND ACCULTURATION. The complex choices regarding language use outlined above—whether, what, and how to translate—have profound implications for understanding the acculturation of Buddhism in particular places and times. Translation is a crucial moment in the life of a text; a translator (or team of translators) functions as both reader and author, shaping the text through the interpretive process of translation for all its future readers. This complex

intercultural moment, which embodies the paradox of translation—the simultaneous sameness and difference of the translated text from the original—is both a central factor in and a powerful metaphor for processes of acculturation. Particularly in a tradition with so strong a textual orientation as Buddhism, translators’ interpretations of key texts can have profound effects on the development of the tradition in its new locales. Central concepts and practices are shaped by the terminology employed to describe them; the influence of a particular text is dependent upon the poetic and rhetorical devices through which its message is rendered. Translation closes certain avenues of interpretation and development, while opening up others that may not have been fully present in the original. These dynamics can be seen not only in textual translation practices, but also in broader processes of adaptation, such as the “translation” of an Indic ritual employing cow dung as a sacred substance into a different cultural context where the substance is viewed as unclean excrement.

The choice to preserve a text in a translocal language, rather than translating it, by no means suggests a refusal of acculturating processes, although a desire to maintain the original purity of the teachings might be part of the motivation. Instead, preserving a body of religious literature in a translocal language forges particular ties to the context of origin. The acculturation of the tradition to a particular locale occurs through the production of new literature—in the translocal as well as in the local language—rather than through rendering a preexistent literary corpus in the local language. The preexistent literature itself can take on a somewhat esoteric (and potentially powerful) quality as a result of its incomprehensibility to the vast majority of practitioners. Preserving a canon in a translocal language also provides the conditions for the maintenance of a clerical elite, as well as for the creation of a translocal community connected by the bonds of religious language and practice. The Theravādan Buddhist world, for all the highly distinctive local variations it encompasses, shares deep relationships born in part from the shared preservation of Pali Buddhist literature and ritual and the maintenance of a monastic elite educated in that language.

This is not to suggest that contexts where translation into local languages was preferred were lacking in translocal relationships, esotericism, or institutional elites, but rather that such factors of acculturation were generated by means other than the preservation of religious literature in a translocal language. In China, translations themselves, with their distinctive locutions, became powerful markers of the context of origin and of the legitimation it imparted to texts. Indeed, the names of illustrious translators alone could lend the stamp of authority; the Chinese canon ascribes to Kumārajīva more texts than he could possibly have translated. By adopting the style and phrasings characteristic of a translation in the composition of a new work, and attributing it to a respected translator, one could create the legitimiz-

ing aura of Indic origin, thereby introducing new literature into a corpus whose boundaries were defined by the ostensible origin of texts. Indigenous “transcreations” of this sort occur in the Chinese canon; literature that was later excised from the canon due to its questionable authenticity has been preserved among the manuscripts found at Dunhuang. Transcreations were produced in other Buddhist communities, as well, although the legitimating strategies employed vary. Translations established new genres of literature that could subsequently be employed in the creation and legitimation of indigenous compositions, enabling Buddhist literature to address more directly the pressing questions of particular cultural and historical communities. In this way, translations have provided not only a means of preservation, but also a pretext for innovation within the tradition.

CONCLUSION. The conceptions of translation that underlie the practices outlined above are multiple, and clearly do not always coincide with the concept invoked by the English term. “Translation” tends to be used narrowly, such that only a text that attempts to render “faithfully” the meaning of another in a different language is usually deemed to be a translation. This contemporary conception of translation has generally guided scholarly studies of Buddhist translation practices. Did premodern Buddhist translators conceive of translation in such a manner, or were some Buddhist conceptions of translation more fluid? For instance, two Sanskrit terms for translation, *anuvāda* and *vivaraṇa*, both refer to exegetical as well as translation practices; how clear is the distinction between what English designates as two separate practices? Might some Buddhist translators have conceived of processes of summarization, excerption and anthologizing as processes of “translation”? Both because these questions depend on conceptions of textuality more broadly, and because they have so seldom been asked, no clear answers are yet possible.

It is clear, however, that translation is an interpretive practice. Any translation will privilege the aspects of a text that the translator perceives to be of central importance. Much of Buddhist literature is conceived of as not only conveying meaning, but also possessing transformative potential. The translation of such texts in Buddhist communities, then, involves rendering those qualities of a text that a particular translator or tradition of translation deems to be powerful. In this sense, translation practices have played and continue to play a central role in the ongoing transmission and transformation of the Buddhist tradition, not only in making texts accessible to different cultural and linguistic communities, but also in recreating the interpretive possibilities for Buddhist thought and practice.

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BUDDHIST BOOKS AND TEXTS: EXEGESIS AND HERMENEUTICS

In the Buddhist tradition the practice and theory of scriptural interpretation faced conflicting sources and concepts of authority, a voluminous canon of relatively late compilation, and a complex history of interpretations that may be described as “hermeneutic pluralism.” Furthermore, for some Buddhist traditions an emphasis on *dharma* (the eternal truths discovered by the Buddha) rather than on *buddhava-cana* (the literal content of his message) reduces the significance of textual and historical constraints as part of a method of interpretation.

According to tradition, the Buddha was not the sole preacher of *dharma*. Even during the Buddha’s life his disciples acted as missionaries, and their words were considered part of the “original” message of Buddhism. The texts affirm that at the Buddha’s own behest the disciples began each sermon with the words “Evaṃ mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye” (“Thus have I heard on one occasion”). This formula presumably served as a guarantee of authenticity, or rather, of

faithfulness to the teaching of the Master. Yet, the same introductory formula came to be used indistinctly for sermons attributed to the Master, to his disciples, or to mythical sages and deities.

It was also believed that there had also been previous buddhas, who had their own disciples, all of whom could have preached the *dharma*. These “Buddhists” from the mythical past could speak to human beings. Their words, as well as the “inspired speech” (*pratibhāṇa*) of ancient and contemporary *ṛṣis*, gods, and spirits, could be regarded as *dharma*, and thus be prefaced by the famous formula.

Even traditions that believe that the canon was redacted and closed during the First Council at Rājagṛha, shortly after the Buddha’s death (c. 483 BCE), concede that not all Buddhist elders were present at that gathering, and that at least one group of “five hundred monks” insisted on keeping their own version of the teachings as they remembered them. All available evidence indicates that most of the canons were never closed. The Theravāda school, proud of its conservatism in scriptural matters, was still debating the content of its canon at least as late as the fifth century CE. Even today there is no complete agreement among Theravādins regarding the *Khuddaka Nikāya* section of their canon. Thus, it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between canonical, postcanonical, and paracanonical Buddhist literature.

All schools believe that at least some texts have been lost, truncated, or altered, and that a number of false or late texts have been incorporated into the canons of various schools. Even if occasionally these statements are used to bolster the position of one school over another, they probably represent an accurate description of the general state of things by the time the first scriptural collections were formally constituted. It is not difficult to see the impact that such a perception, combined with the mythology of revelation outlined above, would have on the tradition’s view of the meaning of the scriptures and on the principles that should guide their interpretation.

BUDDHIST EXEGESIS: METHODS OF INTERPRETATION. The Buddhist canons were the result of a long process of compilation and redaction that we can no longer reconstruct. For many centuries the task of interpretation was complicated by a shifting definition of canonicity. The first steps in understanding scriptural traditions—identifying the limits and forms of scripture—were slow and hesitant.

It took roughly three centuries before the oral texts of specialized schools of reciters (*bhāṇakas*) were brought together into collections (*piṭakas*). Another century went by before the first canons were committed to writing (an early Theravāda canon was written down under King Vaṭṭagāmaṇī of Sri Lanka, c. 32 BCE). Even then the canons were not closed; some of the extant collections (i.e., the Tibetan and Chinese “canons”), were not compiled until more than a millennium had passed since the life of the founder, and they have remained open to the introduction of new literature until recent times.

The canon. Most Buddhists came to accept the theoretical division of scripture into three sections, metaphorically called “baskets” (*piṭaka*)—Sūtra (Pali, *Sutta*); Vinaya; and Abhidharma (Pali, *Abhidhamma*)—hence the name *tripiṭaka* (Pali, *tipiṭaka*), or “three baskets.” But in practice the corpus of authoritative Buddhist texts is not always divided into these three categories. This division is in itself of secondary importance for the history of Buddhist exegesis, whereas the variety of canons that seem to have existed in ancient India, and their flexibility, are important factors in the development of Buddhist attitudes toward canonical authority and interpretation.

The earliest system of this type was the classification of Buddhist teachings (and texts) into two main divisions: *dharma* (instruction on doctrine and meditation) and Vinaya (monastic rules and discipline). This early classification of genres probably was followed closely in time by the introduction of a third type of sacred text—the *mātrkā*, or numerical list.

Also ancient, and obviously precanonical, is a system of “genres” (*aṅga*). The Theravāda tradition distinguishes nine such genres, whereas the Sanskrit tradition counts twelve (*sūtra*, *geya*, *vyākaraṇa*, *gāthā*, *udāna*, *nidāna*, *itiyukta*, *jātaka*, *vaipulya*, *adbhutadharma*, *avadāna*, and *upadeśa*). Although some of these terms are well known as words for literary genres or forms of canonical literature, the exact meaning of the items in these lists is not always transparent. The list clearly shows, however, an early interest in analyzing scripture by literary forms, themes, and, presumably, speaker and audience.

By the time Buddhists began compiling their “canons,” several forms of exegesis had developed within the body of literature transmitted as sacred scripture. Beyond the implicit exegetical work of the redactors, which is more obvious in Buddhist scripture than it is in the Judeo-Christian Bible, important sections of the canons are composed of exegetical material. Some works considered to derive directly from the Master’s mouth are, in structure and reference, major acts of interpretation or statements on the nature of interpretation. Such, for instance, are the *Mahāpadesa Suttanta*, on forms of appealing to authority; the *Kālāma Sutta*, a critique of authority and an affirmation of the hermeneutical value of meditation; the *Alagaddūpama Sutta*, on the instrumental value of doctrine; and the *Pratisaraṇa Sūtra*, on the criteria of interpretation. These texts reflect an early concern with the problems of transmission and interpretation. Other texts included in the *tripiṭakas* are frankly exegetical in character (although they may be of more recent vintage); these include two commentaries (the *Niddesas*) incorporated into the *Sutta Piṭaka* of the Theravādins, two works of theoretical hermeneutics included in the *Sutta* sections of the Burmese *tipiṭaka*, the *Sūtravibhaṅga* section of the Vinaya *Piṭaka* (an exegesis of the *prātimokṣa*), and of course the totality of the Abhidharma *Piṭaka*.

The *abhidharma* as exegesis. The *abhidharma* played a central role in the development of the practice and theory of exegesis in all schools of Indian Buddhism. The hermeneutical strategy of the *abhidharma* was itself derived from a practice attested frequently by the sūtras: dogmatic lists known as “matrices” (*māṭṛkā*). These may appear to be mere catechistic or numerical lists; but more than topical indices or lists defining the limits of canonicity they are digests or exegetical guides. Some, evidently the oldest, are preserved in the Sūtra Piṭaka (e.g., *Sanḅgīti Suttanta*, *Daśottara Sūtra*), and were the object of commentaries (e.g., Mahākauṣṭhila’s *Sanḅgītiparyāya*).

The role of *māṭṛkā*s as early canons of orthodoxy and interpretation is revealed by a legend, according to which the Buddha’s disciple Śāriputra composed the *Sanḅgīti Suttanta* in order to prevent a division in the Buddhist order similar to the one he had seen in the Jain community. The basic list, however, is not only a model for a definition of orthodoxy, it is also a pattern for exegetical coherence. The *māṭṛkā*s provide the structure for *abhidharmic* exegesis; each text must fit one or more of the categories contained in a traditional “matrix” or sets thereof. The “matrices” provided a simple logic of classification; all items of doctrine can be understood by opposites (the *dukas* of Pali *abhidhamma*: anything is *a* or not *a*) or by contraries (the *ṭīkā*: *x* is *a*, or *x* is *b*, or *x* is neither *a* nor *b*). Some of the earliest works of *abhidharma*, organized on this model (for instance, the Pali *Dhammasaṅgani*), purport to reveal the underlying logic and structure of the *suttas*.

Non-Mahāyāna exegetical literature. The *abhidharma* can be understood as a series of attempts at an exegesis of the whole body of Buddhist teachings (texts and practices). Some books, therefore, tried to preserve an explicit connection with the sūtras. But the *abhidharma* was more a work of philosophical hermeneutics than of exegesis. Accordingly, a different genre of literature was developed to carry out the difficult task of preserving, recovering, or eliciting the meaning of individual texts.

Two of the earliest Buddhist works of conscious exegesis have been incorporated into the canon in the Sutta Piṭaka. These are the *Mahānidāya* and the *Cullānidāya*, commentaries on the fourth and fifth books of the *Suttanipāta*. They date from approximately the third century CE. However, two other works of early but uncertain date occupy a much more important position in the development of Buddhist exegetical theories: the *Nettipakaraṇa* and the *Peṭakopadesa*, both attributed to a (Mahā) Kaccāyana (of uncertain date). These works may have been composed in South India or Sri Lanka. The *Nettipakaraṇa* formulates the principles of interpretation (*netti*) common to both works on the basis of twelve techniques classified under the headings of “interpretation as to sense” (*byañjana*) and “interpretation as to meaning” (*attha*).

Earlier, at the beginning of the Common Era, the compilation of canonical collections and the explosion of *abhid-*

harma literature had created great works of synthesis on the Indian Peninsula. The most famous and influential of these was the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (c. 150–200 CE), a work of collective scholarship that attempted to make sense of the complex *abhidharma* literature of the Sarvāstivādins, in particular the *Jñānaprasthāna* of Kātyāyanīputra (or Kātyāyana; c. first century CE). Although it resulted in an equally abstruse work of doctrinal systematics, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* became an important source for doctrinal and interpretive categories, even for those who criticized it—especially the Mahāyāna.

Mahāyāna exegetical literature. In addition to playing the more obvious roles of criticism, reform, and systematic construction, the Mahāyāna sūtras fulfilled an exegetical role as well. It is common for a Mahāyāna sūtra to attempt a redefinition or reinterpretation of a classical formula from pre-Mahāyāna literature. The *Vajracchedikā-prajñāpāramitā*, for instance, presents the Mahāyāna reinterpretation of the “Parable of the Raft.” The same text, in fact, the entire body of *prajñāpāramitā* literature, is devoted to what amounts to an all-out criticism of pre-Mahāyāna *abhidharma*. The traditional order established by orthodox exegesis is deconstructed in a search for the “ultimate meaning” behind the words of the older doctrines. The *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* and the *Tathāgataguhyā Sūtra*—to quote another example—radically change the meaning of a classical passage by identifying truth with “holy silence.” The earlier, canonical passage stated that “from the night of his enlightenment to the night of his *parinirvāṇa*. . . every word uttered by the Buddha was true.” The two Mahāyāna sūtras changed the phrase to read “from the night of his enlightenment, to the night of his *nirvāṇa*, the Blessed One did not utter a single word.”

These new departures, however, are not wholly the creation of Mahāyāna, for some of them are found in the literature of the Mahāsāṃghikas, one of the early *nikāya* schools. Some members of this school or community held that buddhas never pronounce a single word, yet living beings hear them preach. It was also claimed by some Mahāsāṃghikas that the Buddha can preach all things with a single word.

Another form of continuity within innovation occurs in Mahāyāna texts that follow the pattern of the *abhidharma māṭṛkā*s as a way of redefining or expanding on earlier doctrine. Some of these sūtras may be rightly called “*abhidharmic*” Mahāyāna sūtras. Such are, for instance, the *Dharmasāṅgīti* and the *Akṣayamatīnirdeśa*.

Some texts make explicit pronouncements on the principles of interpretation or evaluation of Buddhist scripture in general. For instance, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*’s statement on the silence of the Buddha is extended to mean that all words of the Buddha have only a provisional value. They are pronounced only in response to the needs of living beings who cannot penetrate directly into the mystery of the Tathāgata’s silence. The *Mahāyāna-mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* offers a model for a hierarchy in scriptural study and understanding. At the first level, one becomes “learned” in scriptural study by studying all of the twelve genres (*aṅga*) of

scripture. Subsequently, one may study only one *aṅga*—the *vaipulya* (here equivalent to Mahāyāna) sūtras. Then one may study only the most subtle passages of the *vaipulya* section. But one may also study only one stanza of two lines from these sūtras and still be learned. Last, one becomes learned in scripture by understanding “that the Buddha never taught anything.” The last of these is clearly, by implication, the most “learned.”

Other statements with obvious implications for the interpretation of texts are those dealing with the relative value of various transmissions. Perhaps the best known of these formulations are those of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* (*Lotus Sūtra*), which asserts that the Buddha has been in *nirvāṇa* eternally and denies that the Buddha ever “entered *nirvāṇa*,” as claimed by earlier scriptural tradition. The *Lotus* also reduces the meaning of the human lives of the Buddha to a mere teaching device, developing the theory of “skillful means” (*upāya*) as an explanation for the competing claims of its own brand of Mahāyāna and those of non-Mahāyāna Buddhists. Other texts establish criteria for authenticity that open doors to the new creative efforts of the Mahāyāna. The *Adhyāśayasamcodana Sūtra*, for example, establishes the well-known principle that “whatever has been well said has been said by the Buddha.” Such statements are evident signs of a break with tradition and became seeds for further, perhaps dangerously limitless, innovation.

Śāstras and commentaries. In India the methodology used in the composition of technical treatises (*śāstras*) was modeled on the commentarial tradition of Indian linguistics, heavily influenced by Patañjali’s *Mahābhāṣya*. But the disciplines of poetics and logic also played an important role in the creation of standards for the composition of commentaries.

As Indian technical literature evolved through commentaries, continuity was preserved by reference to a common “root” text, which could be a scriptural text (sūtra) or the conscious work of an individual (*śāstra*). A certain latitude for variation was allowed in the commentaries of each school of thought, but the root text was authoritative. That is, the commentary had to be verbally faithful to the root text and had to recognize its authoritative status. But the *śāstras* themselves required commentaries, and some of the *śāstras* that became the object of commentaries acquired quasi-canonical status almost equivalent to that of the sūtras.

The system of authoritative texts followed by authoritative commentaries also produced a plethora of subcommentaries. The hierarchy was not always well-defined and the terminology not always consistent, but it was normally assumed that a sūtra would be the object of a commentary called a *bhāṣya*, or a more detailed gloss known as *vyākhyā* or *ṭīkā*. The root text of a *śāstra*, on the other hand, was often a versified treatise written in *kārikās* or mnemonic verses (functionally parallel to the Hindu sūtras or prose aphorisms), and explicated in a *bhāṣya* or *vṛtti* (sometimes by the author of the root text).

The beginnings of the Mahāyāna commentarial literature seem to be coterminous with the development of independent philosophical or dogmatic treatises (*śāstras*). But the exact dates of these events cannot be fixed with any certainty because an exact chronology depends in part on establishing the authorship of what may be the earliest major work in the genre, the commentary on the *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* (Perfection of wisdom in twenty-five thousand lines), traditionally attributed to Nāgārjuna, whose dates are equally uncertain. This work, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa Śāstra* (preserved only in Chinese translation under the title *Ta-chih-tu lun*), set the tone for Chinese exegesis, and defined some of the most important issues of Buddhist exegetical and hermeneutical theory for East Asia.

The genres of commentary and treatise flourished in India beginning (approximately) in the fourth century of the Common Era with Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. Although the tendency was to force the text into established scholastic molds, or to use it as a pretext for the formulation of independent philosophical dogmatics, commentators sometimes showed unusual sensitivity to the forms and structures of the text (e.g., Kamalaśīla’s commentary on the *Avikalpapraveśa*). There was also room for the development of independent criteria and exegetical guides. A valuable example of this type of work is Vasubandhu’s extensive treatise on the mechanics of the commentary, *Vyākhyayukti* (preserved only in Tibetan translation).

Exegetical categories. Outside of India the exegetical issue perhaps became more critical as communities lost some of the sense of continuity with the authoritative tradition of the land of origins. The need for exegetical and hermeneutical principles was especially acute in China. An exegetical schema attributed to an early scholar of Chinese Buddhism, Dao’an (312–385), was based on three categories that supposedly reflected accurately the structure of all sūtras: the setting (*nidāna*), the doctrinal and narrative core, and the transmission (*parindāna*). This basic schema was widely used in China (where it was known as the *san-fen k’e-ching* and was adopted by Zhiyi (538–597) in his classical analysis of the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Miaofa lianhua jing su*). The schema is not attested in India until later, as, for example, in Bandhuprabha’s (sixth century CE) *Buddhabhūmi Śāstra*, a commentary on the *Buddhabhūmi Sūtra*. In practice, each of the three parts was itself subdivided to account for obvious and important elements of style, narrative development, and so forth, but also to signal those passages considered core or defining statements. The text was expected to satisfy the traditional requirements for a definition of the audience (in the *nidāna* section) and for a positive assessment of the value of the faith and practice inspired by it (usually in the transmission section). Other schemas, some evidently inspired by a similar conception, developed one or more of the three parts. For instance, the sixfold division of the introductory formula of the sūtras (*evaṃ mayā śrutam. . .*) according to the manner

proposed in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa Śāstra* was extremely popular among East Asian exegetes. This led to multiple variations in the division of the text of the sūtras, such as Shandao's (613–682) threefold introduction and Zhiyi's five parts of the introduction.

The most fruitful and innovative, though perhaps less rigorous, strategies were those that tried to discover metaphysical meanings in the structure of texts. Such was Zhiyi's "twofold approach"—by way of the deep structure and by way of the surface structure (*pen-chi erh men*)—to a text. This doctrine was part of a more complex exegetical plan, the four exegetical methods of the Tiantai tradition (*T'ien-t'ai ta-su-shih*), which brings us closer to broader hermeneutical issues. According to this doctrine, any scriptural passage can be treated from four perspectives: (1) the passage as expression of a particular relationship between the audience and the Buddha (the circumstances determining the intention); (2) the passage as embodying one of four methods of teaching; (3) classification of the passage into one of the categories of absolute or relative statement; and (4) the introspective readings of the passage (*guanxin*). In this methodological schema one can see in outline some of the salient features of Mahāyāna hermeneutics: contextual meaning, levels of meaning, and meditation as a tool of understanding.

BUDDHIST HERMENEUTICS: THEORIES OF INTERPRETATION AND CANONICITY. In traditional terms the fundamental questions of Buddhist hermeneutics can be classified into three broad categories:

1. If enlightenment (*bodhi*) is at least theoretically open to all (or most) sentient beings, what is the role of sacred words and authoritative texts? How does one distinguish the exegesis of sacred texts from the actual transmission or realization of the *dharma*?
2. Since the Buddha preached in so many different ways, adapting his language, style, and even doctrine to the spiritual disposition and maturity of his audience, did he have a plurality of messages or did he have a single truth to offer? If the latter, what was it, and, if the former, how is one to choose among his many teachings?
3. If Buddhism rejects conventional concepts of substance, self, possession, property, and referentiality, so fundamental to our conception of the world, is there a "higher language" that can be used to describe accurately reality as seen from the point of view of enlightenment?

From a modern perspective, one could characterize these three problems as defining the main subfields of Buddhist hermeneutics: the first statement addresses issues of Buddhist soteriology—the conflict between the ascetic-contemplative ideal and the institutional realities of Buddhism, between orthopraxy and orthodoxy. The second problem is that of Buddhist exegetical hermeneutics. Awareness of the late date and the diversity of "canonical" sources generates a "hermeneutical pluralism" that compounds the problem of determining the meaning of diversity and unity in tradition. The

third item summarizes the problems of Buddhist philosophical hermeneutics: what are the relative positions and meanings of conventional language, its Buddhist critique, and "the silence of the sages"?

A better perception of the tone underlying the discussion of these issues can be derived from representative traditional responses to the problems:

1. The Buddhist *dharma* is not dependent on the historical event of Śākyamuni's enlightenment, ministry, and *nirvāṇa*. Whether a Tathāgata arises in the world or not, the basic teachings of Buddhism—impermanence, suffering, no-self, and liberation—remain facts of existence. Although the tradition initiated by Śākyamuni is a necessary aid to enlightenment, it is (in the metaphor of the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*) only a finger pointing at the moon. The moon is always there, waiting to be seen (whether there is a finger to point at it or not); the finger is not the moon. Nevertheless, some Buddhists, the Theravādins, for instance, would insist on the historical significance of Śākyamuni's life and ministry, and on the close connection between exact literal meaning of doctrinal statements and effective practice.
2. The diversity of teachings is not due to confusion or weakness in the transmission. On the contrary, it is proof of Śākyamuni's wisdom and compassion, of his ability to adapt to the needs, capacities, and dispositions of living beings. According to the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā-upadeśa Śāstra*, his teachings were of four types, according to their definite purport (*siddhānta*): worldly (*laukika*), or surface meaning; therapeutic (*prātipakṣika*), or meaning intended as an antidote to mental afflictions and passion; personal (*prātipauruṣika*), or meaning intended for particular individuals; and absolute (*pāramārthika*), or ultimate meaning. This second point is further complicated by the Mahāyāna belief in multiple buddhas and in the timeless *sambhogakāya* ("body of bliss") of the buddhas, which eternally preaches in the heavens, and beyond, and is seen and heard in the visions of *bodhisattvas* and sages. Other Buddhists, however, (the Theravādins, for instance) emphasize canonical integrity, rejecting both the doctrine of multiple meanings and the doctrine of multiple buddhas. The Mahāsāṃghikas seem to have wanted to forestall exegetical pluralism and protect the integrity of scripture by claiming that all sūtras have only one explicit meaning.
3. The above attitudes toward the sacred word are inseparable from Buddhist views on levels of meaning, whatever the historical or causal connections between these three problems may have been. The creation of abhidharmic technical language was the first step in separating two orders of truth and expression. Speculation about the nature of the path and the state of perfect freedom of buddhas further contributed to a theory of levels of meaning, since a progression in spiritual insight was

taken to imply an increased capacity to penetrate behind the words of the doctrine.

The Mahāyāna insists that the higher sphere is only embodied in the silence of the *āryas*. The highest stage in the path, and, therefore, the highest order of meaning, can only be expressed in apophatic statements such as “appeasing all discursive thinking” (*sarvaprapañcopaśama*) and “cutting out all doctrines and practices” (*sarvavāḍacaryoccheda*). Still, all traditions, including the Mahāyāna, develop a language of the sacred (whether or not it is directly inspired by abhidharmic path theories), for it is necessary to explain holy silence in order to lead living beings to it. Thus, the culmination of this sort of speculation comes with the recognition that language, with all its limitations, is an important vehicle for salvation: language is *upāya* (e.g., in the Mādhyamika treatises, the *Laṅkāvatāra*, and the Tantras).

Criteria of authenticity. Early concepts of orthodoxy were based on doctrines of confirmation or inspiration, rather than on a literal definition of “the word of Buddha” (*buddhavaṇana*). A disciple could preach, then receive the Buddha’s approval, or the authority of his words could be implicit in the Buddha’s request or inspiration. Although it may seem difficult to have maintained this fiction when the Buddha was no longer living among his followers, Buddhists did not always see things this way. Since the *dharma* is, after all, the Buddha’s true body, and since it exists whether or not there is a human Buddha to preach it, one could assume that the preaching of *dharma* would continue after his death. This justification formed part of the context for the proliferation of texts and the elasticity of concepts of canonical authenticity. It may also explain in part why the *abhidharma* and, later, the commentarial literature achieved such a prominent role in the development of Buddhist doctrine.

Such flexibility does not mean, however, that no attempt was made to establish criteria or rules for determining the genuineness of any particular statement of doctrine. The *Mahāpadesa Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (and its parallel in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and in the Āgamas) recognizes four possible ways of appealing to or arguing on the basis of authority: one may appeal to the authority of the Buddha, a community of monks, several elders, or a single elder. The validity of these appeals and their potential sources of authority, however, must be confirmed by comparing the doctrinal statements attributed to these persons against the “sūtra” and the “Vinaya.”

The Sanskrit recensions of the *Mahāpadeśa Sūtra* add a third criterion: statements of doctrine must conform “to the reality or nature of things” (*dharmatā*). The same expansion is found in Pali literature in the *Nettipakaraṇa*, where the principles are actually applied to the analysis and evaluation of particular texts, and the three criteria are summarized in very suggestive language: “Which is the sūtra with whose approach [phrases and words] must agree? The four noble truths. Which is the Vinaya in which they must be seen? The Vinaya restraining covetousness, aversion, and delusion.

Which is the *dharma* with which they must conform? The *dharma* of conditioned arising” (paras. 122–124).

The principle implies, of course, that whatever agrees with sūtra, Vinaya, and *dharma* (i.e., conditioned arising) carries authority for the Buddhist. If applied to texts this could mean that any new creation that is perceived as a continuation of the tradition (*secundum evangelium*, as it were) could have canonical authority. Indeed, the Mahāyāna used it in just this way to justify the development and expansion of earlier teachings. Theravādins, on the other hand, would understand the broad definitions of the *Nettipakaraṇa* as references to the letter of the canon, not to its spirit. Ultimately, then, the issue remained one of setting the limits of the interpretability of scriptural tradition.

What then is *buddhavaṇana*? The *Nettipakaraṇa* passage epitomizes the Buddhist tendency to use philosophical rather than historical arguments for authority. But the three tests do not form a complete system of criteria for textual authenticity. In the canonical versions they seem to refer to statements of doctrine and appeals to authority, not to texts. Most certainly if they were meant to constitute a system for establishing canonical authenticity their value would be limited, if not totally nonexistent, for as tests of canonical authority the first (and original) two criteria would be tautological. One must accept that the teaching on the “four appeals to authority” was originally a method for determining orthodoxy, not a criterion of authenticity. Still, since Buddhist notions of the “word of Buddha” were elastic, the principle must have been ambiguous. That is to say, the circularity of the argument that “a genuine sūtra is one that agrees with the sūtra” may not be so obvious in the context of Buddhist notions of canonicity—at least in the early stages in the formation of the corpus of scriptures.

Some Buddhists, the Mahāyānists in particular, came to consider “agreement with the sūtras,” rather than “inclusion in the Sūtra Piṭaka,” the ultimate test of authority. Thus, in China a distinction is made between, on the one hand, pseudepigrapha, or “spurious sūtras” (*weijing*) that are nevertheless “canonical” (that is, in agreement with the spirit of the *dharma* and therefore to be accepted in the canon) and, on the other, those sūtras that are “false” (that is, in conflict with established Buddhist teaching) and therefore to be excluded from the canon. Both types of sūtra are not “genuine” only when contrasted to the “original” sūtras composed in India (which were themselves obviously much later than the time of the Buddha). Thus, given the history of the canon and the broad definition of “authoritative sūtra” current among all Buddhists, it must have been difficult to find any good reason for excluding a text only on historical grounds—to say nothing of establishing those grounds.

Interpretation. Three major sets of principles become central to the latter development of Buddhist hermeneutics. These are the “four reliances” or strategies for understanding a text; the “four types of intentional and metaphoric language,” and the “four modes of reasoning.” Since the last of

these three doctrines falls more under the rubric of philosophy, we shall omit it from this discussion.

Authority and interpretation. The problem of establishing criteria of interpretation cannot be completely separated from that of the hierarchy of authority. The interaction of both spheres of hermeneutics is seen clearly in the doctrine of the four “points of reliance” (*pratisaraṇa*). This doctrine is found in several Mahāyāna versions, the most popular of which is the *Pratisaraṇa Sūtra*, a text no longer preserved in the original Sanskrit except in quotations. According to this text there are four criteria of interpretation: (1) relying on the nature of things (*dharmā*), not on the opinion of a person; (2) relying on the meaning or purport (*artha*) of a text, not its letter; (3) relying on those passages that explicitly express the higher doctrine (*nītārtha*), not on those that do not express it explicitly; and (4) understanding by intuitive realization (*jñāna*), not by conceptual thought (*vijñāna*).

Some of these principles are restatements of the Buddhist tendency to emphasize personal realization as the ultimate source of understanding. But this tendency is not without significant implications for a theory of shared or communicable meaning. A sūtra now lost in the original Sanskrit but preserved in Chinese and Tibetan translations, the *Adhyāśayasamcodana Sūtra*, says, “whatever is well spoken [*subhāṣita*], has been spoken by the Buddha.” This is perhaps the most extreme formulation of the Mahāyāna’s view of the historical roots of its traditions. The system, nevertheless, is not totally open, for implicit in it are the earlier notions of the meaningfulness and appropriateness of the words of the Buddha (and by extension, of scripture). Conversely, then, “whatever is spoken by the Buddha has been well spoken” (as stated, for instance, by King Aśoka in his Bhābrā Rock Edict). Therefore, all passages of scripture must be meaningful—as well as agreeing with the *dharmā* and leading to liberation. But it is not always apparent that scripture meets these standards. It is not evident that scripture speaks with one voice. The interpreter must therefore explain the hidden meanings that reveal the underlying unity of intention in scripture, whatever may be the grounds for its authenticity.

Types of intention. In his major works, Asaṅga mentions several methods of understanding that can be applied to scripture. Among these, the four types of explicit intention and the four types of implicit intention suggest the outlines of a hermeneutical theory. Implicit or contextual meanings (*abhiprāya*) appear to be alternatives for decoding a passage—words intending an analogy, words intending another time frame, words intending a shift in referent, and words intended only for a specific individual. The four types of hidden intention (*abhisamdhī*) show another aspect of the process of decoding the sacred text: introductory hidden intention (where the meaning is relevant only for the beginner), metaphysical hidden intention (where the meaning is a statement on the nature of reality), therapeutic hidden intention (where the meaning is realized by following the instructions

in combating unhealthy actions or states of mind), and metaphorical intention (where the meaning is not the literal meaning, and often is paradoxical in character; e.g., referring to a virtue as a vice).

The concept of intentional speech brings to mind the third of the four points of reliance and the third principle of Tiantai exegesis. The common problem in these doctrines is best expressed by the classical theory of the two levels of meaning: the implicit or interpretable meaning (*neyārtha*) and the explicit or self-evident meaning (*nītārtha*). This is perhaps the most important doctrine of Buddhist hermeneutics. Under this doctrine, passages or complete texts can be taken at face value as statements of the “ultimate” teaching of the Buddha or they can be understood as teachings preached in response to provisional or individual needs, and hiding the core teacher under the textual surface, which then requires interpretation or clarification. If a passage is considered to be of the first type, then it is in no need of further elucidation. Its meaning (*artha*) has already been brought out (*nīta*) by the text itself. If a passage belongs to the second group, then the higher meaning can be found only through interpretation. It must be brought out (*neya*) from underneath the surface meaning, so to speak.

Only the Mahāsāṃghikas seem to have rejected this distinction, claiming that all words of the Buddha mean what they literally mean, and therefore need no interpretation. But this extreme position was rejected by other schools, including the more conservative Sthaviras (Theravādins, Sarvāstivādins, etc.).

This hermeneutical schema is closely related to the doctrine of the two levels of truth, the relative or conventional *saṃvṛtti* and the absolute or ultimate *paramārtha*, arguably first developed in the Mādhyamika school. But the fundamental distinction in the case of implicit and explicit meaning is between modes of intention and meaning, rather than between levels of reality. The point at issue is not whether the words of the text are the ultimate truth (they are not), but whether or not they point directly and unambiguously to it.

Upāya. Also central to Mahāyāna understanding of the religious text is the concept that all forms of discourse are ultimately *saṃvṛtti-satya* (or at best a lower level of *paramārtha*). This is based on both a radical critique of language (as in the Mādhyamika doctrine of “emptiness”) and a revaluation of language as a means to an end. In the case of religious language, the end is liberation—the ultimate purpose and the ultimate meaning of all religious discourse. On the lips of the enlightened speaker, language becomes a “skillful means” (*upāya*), pointing at or eliciting (*udbhāvanā*) realization of the goal. The doctrine finds mythological expression when it is stated that the Buddha’s preaching always conforms to the aspirations and maturity of his audience and that his pronouncements are instruments to guide sentient beings, not propositions expressing absolute truth. The religious text is *upāya* in at least three ways: it is a compassionate

concession to the diversity, aspirations, and faculties of sentient beings; it is an instrument to be used in attaining the goal; and it is the expression of the liberating techniques of the Buddha.

Hermeneutics in the Tantras. Tantric hermeneutics presupposes Mahāyāna hermeneutics. Among other Mahāyāna principles, it accepts the four reliances and Asaṅga's eight types of intention. Of course, Tantric theories of interpretation also retain the fundamental distinction between implicit and explicit meaning. However, the intention is now clearly determined by the context of Esoteric practices. Thus we find again the close connection between interpretation and religious practice that characterizes much of Buddhist hermeneutics and that is also evident in scholastic speculations on the path (as in the *abhidharma*); but here orthopraxy becomes central to textual interpretation. Here too, the traditions consider that the "root" text (*mūlatantra*) requires an explanation (*ākhyānatānta*), but as each text and school has specific practical contexts it is never assumed that a given hermeneutical scheme can be applied to all texts.

The Tantric Candrakīrti (c. 650 CE) explains in his *Pradīpoddīyotānā* the basic principles of his school's hermeneutical system as applied to the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*. He explains this "root" text by means of seven analytic procedures called "ornaments" or "preparations" (*saptaaalaṃkāra*). All seven are used directly or indirectly to bring out the meaning of the text in interpretation or practice, but only two sets appear to bear directly on the issue of interpretation, being at the same time exegetical topics, hermeneutical tools, and levels of meaning. These are the six alternative interpretations of the meaning of words in a passage (*ṣaṭkoṭīkaṃ vyākhyānam*; Tib., *mtha' drug* or *rgyas bshad mtha' rnam pa drug*), and the "fourfold explanation" (*caturvidham ākhyānam*; Tib., *tshul bzhi* or *bshad pa rnam pa bzhi*).

The six alternatives (with slight alterations to the order of the original) are: (1) standard terms used in a literal sense (*yathārūta*); (2) nonstandard or nonnatural terms (*arūta* or *na yathārūta*; i.e. esoteric jargon); (3) implicit meaning requiring interpretation (*neyārtha*); (4) explicit or evident meaning (*nītārtha*); (5) intentional or metaphoric language (*saṃdhyāya bhāṣitam*, *saṃdhyā bhāṣā*); and (6) non-intentional language (*no saṃdhyā*). Western scholars are not in agreement as to the hermeneutical function of this "ornament," but the Tibetan tradition considers the six alternatives an integral part of the interpretation theory unique to Tantra.

The "fourfold explanation," on the other hand, is generally accepted as a hermeneutical schema. In this case Candrakīrti makes an explicit connection between levels of meaning and the stages of spiritual growth (particularly according to the schema of *utpattikrama* and *sampannakrama*, the latter being divided into five stages or *pañcakrama*). The four explanations are: (1) literal, surface, or natural meaning (*akṣarārtha*); (2) shared meaning (*samastāṅgam*); (3) hidden (*garbhā*) meaning; and (4) ultimate (*kolīkam*) meaning. The

first type of meaning is shared by those on the path and those who have not entered it. The second type is shared by the Mahāyāna and the Tantra (specifically those in the "initial" or *utpatti* stage). The third type is open only to those in the first three stages of the fivefold higher path. The last level of meaning is open only to those who have advanced to the fourth and fifth stages.

This schema is a subtle application of the basic principle of the explicit and the interpretable meanings. One must note, however, that in Tantric exegesis a single text or passage can be both *nīta* and *neya*, depending on the receptor of the message. This entails not only a complex hermeneutics, but also the possibility that the so-called direct meaning (*nīta*) of one level requires interpretation (i.e., is *neyārtha*) for those who are at another level of the path.

Progressive revelation. The Tantric hermeneutical schema manifests, even more transparently than earlier theories, one of the basic assumptions of Buddhist views of meaning: meanings (and "truths") are a function of the audience as much as, or more than, a function of the intention of the author. If this principle is extended into the cosmic or historical dimension, then new hermeneutical concepts can be derived from the doctrine that the Buddha can preach simultaneously to various assemblies of celestial *bodhisattvas*, adapt his teaching to the needs and faculties of diverse living beings, or preach only one message (in words or silence) yet be understood in different ways. This doctrine, applied to the historical reality of the conflict of authorities, transmissions, and interpretations, provides reasons, albeit ex post facto, for choosing and justifying any particular version of the many "teachings of the Buddha."

The turnings of the wheel. In context, statements about relative teaching and ultimate teaching are more sectarian and polemical in spirit than their mere abstract formulations suggest. When a text states that all teachings of the Buddha are only skillful means or empty sounds there is always a conflicting claim to the ultimate validity of the text's own interpretation of the "one true teaching" underlying the "provisional teachings." This is evident in all the classical statements—the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, and others. In some of these texts we see attempts to formulate a historical argument in favor of doctrinal claims. The Buddha, the argument goes, preached in two (or three) major periods that divide his ministry as to location, audience, and depth of the teaching. These major divisions in the Buddha's ministry are called "turnings of the wheel of *dharma*." According to the most widely accepted doctrine (as presented in the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*), there were three "turnings": the Buddha first preached the Hīnayāna teachings in Deer Park in Banaras. Then he preached the doctrine of "emptiness" (i.e., the Mādhyamika teachings) at Vulture Peak in Rājagṛha. Last, he preached, in the same place but when his disciples were more mature, the doctrine of "mind-only" (i.e., the Yogācāra doctrines).

There is, of course, a Mādhyamika version of this story in which the third turning is in fact that of emptiness and the second the “idealistic” doctrine of the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*. There is also a late Tantric version that adds a fourth turning: the revelation of Mantrayāna at Dhānyakaṭaka. Nevertheless, the scriptural weight of the *Samdhinirmocana* was such that the scholastics could not ignore its clear statement. Thus, Tsong kha pa (1357–1419), in his *Legs bshad snying po*, goes through the most subtle arguments to show that the sūtra’s ordering of the turnings does not imply a privileged position for the doctrine of mind-only.

The formulation of pseudohistorical apologetics and hermeneutical strategies became popular in China. The Indian schema of the Three Turnings was adopted in the schools of Sanlun and Faxiang, while others developed autonomous systems: Huayan and Niepan (The Teachings of the Five Periods) and Tiantai (The Eight Teachings in Five Periods). The last of these, a synthesis created by the Tiantai monk Zhanran (711–782), divided and interpreted the scriptures according to the four types of doctrine used in the Buddha’s preaching (*huafa*: the doctrines of the *tripitaka*, the common doctrines, the special doctrines, and the perfect or complete doctrine) and his four teaching styles (*huayi*: direct, gradual, secret, and indeterminate or variable). These eight forms of teaching were used in different proportions and combinations during five periods (*wushi*) in the Buddha’s ministry: the Buddhāvataṃsaka cycle, the Deer Park cycle, the Vaipulya cycle, the Prajñāpāramitā cycle, and the cycle of the *Lotus* and *Nirvāṇa* sūtras.

This is traditionally taken to imply that a given passage or statement can have multiple levels of meaning. But the function of these “classifications of the teachings” (*jiaopan*) was apologetic as well as hermeneutic. The method served as much to establish the preeminence of a particular school as to make sense of the diversity of teachings.

The ages of the dharma. A parallel development, based on Indian scriptures but characteristic of East Asian Buddhism, is the doctrine of the “Latter Age of the Dharma” (Chin., *mofo*; Jpn., *mappō*). The use of this doctrine as a hermeneutical device consists in proposing that changes in historical circumstances require a different interpretation of the tradition or a new definition of orthopraxy. This doctrine developed in China during the turbulent sixth century CE, which culminated in the persecutions of 574 and 578 and led many Buddhists to believe they were living in the last days of the Buddhist *dharma*.

Daochuo (562–645), for instance, believed that the “difficult” practices that were at the heart of traditional Buddhist ascetic and contemplative discipline had become meaningless in the “Latter Age.” He therefore proposed that the scriptures prophesying this age justified a new dispensation that would only require the “easier” practices of Pure Land devotion. Matching Indian prophecies on the future of the Buddhist religion with his historical circumstances, he felt he could derive the authority for doctrinal change from the ca-

nonical prophecies on the decline of the *dharma*, and indirectly from changing historical circumstances themselves.

Zen demythologization. A different form of adaptation, responding nevertheless occasionally to the issue of the “decay” of *dharma*, was the Chan (Zen) emphasis on a “return” to orthopraxy. Here the general four principles of the *Adhyāśayasamcodana* are used in their most extreme forms. Partially inspired by Chinese interpretations of the Mādhyamika critique of language, partially moved by Daoist rhetoric, this was a movement that emphasized “ultimate meaning,” “direct experience,” and “freedom from words” to the point of appearing—if not becoming—iconoclastic. One can understand the movement as a process of adaptation of foreign ideas by demythologization (or, arguably, remythologization), assisted by the deconstructive tendencies built into Buddhist hermeneutical doctrines.

The basic object of meditation, the *gong’an* (Jpn., *kōan*), stands for the sacred utterance of enlightened beings, an *upāya*, a finger pointing at the moon, and the embodiment of different aspects of the putatively single realization common to all buddhas. This is, after all, a tradition that claims “a transmission outside the scriptures, not relying on words.” Nevertheless, the Chan (Zen) tradition continues, in its *kōan* collections, the Buddhist predilection for the classification and collection of words “well spoken.” Furthermore, these collections, like the ancient sūtras, require commentaries, and in them Chan also revives, albeit in a new form, the tendency to develop numerical frames of reference. The *Jen-t’ien yen-mu* (compiled by Zhizhao, 1188 CE) contains a number of classificatory systems that can be understood as either guides to meditation or hermeneutical grids to interpret the student’s progress in practice. Many of these “matrices” remain in use today. For instance, the elusive teachings of Linji Yixuan (d. 867 CE) are presented in formulas such as “Linji’s Three Phrases,” extrapolated from his *Linji lu* (Recorded sayings). Modern Zen masters still study the “Eighteen Questions of Fenyang” (*Fengyang shih-pa wen*), a terse guide to the various ways one can “handle” (treat, investigate, and answer) a *kōan*, devised by the Song dynasty master Fenyang Shanzhao (947–1024). Also central to modern-day practice, and outlined in the *Jen-t’ien yen-mu*, are the “Five Ranks” (*wuwei*) of Dongshan (910–990) and Caoshan (840–901). One can see in these schemas a certain parallel to the techniques of *abhidharma*.

However, Zen also preserves the opposite Buddhist tendency, best represented by the teachings of the Japanese master Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253). Dōgen echoes a particularly novel interpretation of the doctrine of “whatever is well spoken” in his writings on sūtra (*Shōbōgenzō*; “Okūō” and “Dōtoku”): all things are sūtras, in all things is manifested the enlightenment of the buddhas of all times. This vision, inspired by the *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, also raises the question of how this “sūtra,” which is found in all things, can be opened, read, and understood. The Zen tradition of Dōgen has tended to find the answer in silent meditation.

Dōgen also summarizes much of what is characteristic of the Zen view on interpreting the tradition in a few terse lines in his *Gakudōyōshinshū*: reliance on scripture only leads to confusion, to projecting one's own preferences on the text. The only way to correct understanding is by divesting oneself of the self.

Other approaches to Zen practice are not necessarily as distant as they seem from Dogen's deceptively simple recommendation. Traditional Chinese and Japanese classifications and methods of "handling" or "studying" *kōan* were systematized by Hakuin Ekaku (1686–1768) and his disciples. The resulting system of *kōans* (five levels of miscellaneous *kōans*, plus the five *goi kōans*, and the Ten Precepts) has all the marks of Buddhist catechistic instincts; Hakuin himself, in his essay "Goi kōketsu" in the *Keisō dokuzui*, established exact correlations between some of these stages and Indian scholastic categories. Still, the system also emphasizes the quest for meaning in practice and a gradual detachment from doctrinal conceptions, as well as from meditation experiences. The crowning piece of the system, the last *kōan* (*mat-sugo no rōkan*) asks the disciple to reflect on the meaning of "completing" a system of *kōans*—that is, what should be the last question, once the adept has answered all questions?

Hermeneutics and apologetics. All Buddhists tend, even today, to claim a certain immunity from history, partly justified by the emphasis on the presence of *dharma* in all things and all times, by the plurality of buddhas, and by the obvious diversity and plasticity of the tradition. When first faced with historical criticism, coming from non-Buddhists such as Tominaga Nakamoto (1715–1746) in his *Shutsujō kōgo* (1745), some Japanese Buddhists (e.g., Murakami Senshō [1851–1929] in *Bukkyō tōitsu ron*) readily admitted that the Mahāyāna scriptures could not be the *ipsissima verba* of the Master. They based the orthodoxy of their tradition on concepts outlined above: the unity of the spirit, consistency in the goal, and the development of "skillful means." Some, for instance, Maeda Eun (1855–1930), also appealed to the doctrine that all teachings are implicit in the one, original, and ineffable teaching. The concept of levels of meaning is also used to preserve some form of religious discourse while claiming that the ultimate is beyond language and history. Mahāyāna Buddhists continue to appeal to these principles, relying fundamentally on the ancient apologetic and hermeneutic strategies outlined in this article. The Theravāda tradition, on the other hand, tends to build its hermeneutics on the reaffirmation of its conviction that its canon contains the words of the Buddha.

Buddhist hermeneutics and Western thought. At present, Buddhists in Asia tend to argue for their interpretations of traditional doctrines and texts using one or another of the above strategies. Attempts to develop or adapt more contemporary notions of hermeneutic theory or practice are generally rare. An interesting exception to this generalization is the adoption of positivistic notions of textual integrity and authenticity in a movement known as the "critical Bud-

dhism" doctrine (*Hihan Bukkyō*). Developed by a small group of Japanese scholars in the last decades of the twentieth century, the movement appeared at times to hide an apologetic favoring a philosophical and scholastic reading of the tradition based on Madhyamaka principles. The movement has remained primarily an intellectual curiosity. Some Western scholars, on the other hand, have made a few faint incursions into a postmodern reading of Buddhist thought; but, again, without persuading most of their colleagues, and certainly with, so far, a very limited impact, or no influence, on their Asian colleagues. It is too early to predict in which direction living Buddhist interpretive practices will move in the near future.

SEE ALSO Buddhism, Schools of, article on Mahāyāna Philosophical Schools of Buddhism; Buddhist Philosophy; Hermeneutics; Language, article on Buddhist Views of Language; Treasure Tradition.

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BUDDHIST ETHICS. *Buddhist ethics* is a term of convenience that we may use here to describe systems of mo-

ality as well as styles of moral reasoning that have emerged in Buddhist traditions. Moral reflection has taken various forms in Buddhist civilizations, beginning with Buddhism’s origins in South Asia two and a half millennia ago to its gradual spread across most of Asia through very diverse cultural contexts. While several patterns in moral thinking broadly shared by most or all forms of Buddhism may be suggested at the outset, deeper investigation must attend to particular expressions of Buddhist ethics in their historical and contextual diversity.

ENDURING PATTERNS ACROSS BUDDHIST TRADITIONS.

From one perspective, Buddhist moral theorists are concerned with actions (*karma*), which are deemed to determine one’s future experiences in this and future lives in the round of rebirths (*saṃsāra*). Actions that are prompted by virtuous and discerning intentions yield beneficial results both in this life and in the next. Conversely, actions that are rooted in bad states of mind—in particular, greed, hatred, and delusion—are harmful to self and others and thus result in unfortunate rebirths for those who commit them. This concern with action and its consequences is reflected in a list of basic norms known as the “five precepts” (*śīla*), to which Buddhists often commit formally in religious ceremonies; these prohibit taking life, theft, sexual misconduct, false speech, and the consumption of intoxicants. More positively, Buddhists have looked for moral guidance to the noble eightfold path, which, in addition to describing key elements of wisdom and contemplation crucial for the soteriological path, also articulates a positive description of ideal moral conduct in terms of right action, right speech, and right livelihood. Such descriptions enjoin truthfulness and nonviolence as defining “right” practice.

The emphasis on actions, however, should not obscure the intensive interest Buddhist thinkers have taken in the virtues and dispositions that produce them. Since Buddhists locate moral culpability in intention and volition rather than solely in the action itself, the operations of moral choice are central to ethical reflection. Buddhism offers a close analysis of mind, investigating the emotions, dispositions, and tendencies that drive our action and shape the world. Early Buddhism produced a very sophisticated moral psychology called *abhidharma*, which articulated an analysis of the constituents of the mind and their relationships that are crucial for the development of virtuous dispositions. This moral psychology, as well as other discourses on the mind, assert that the key to developing moral character is to replace negative and harmful mental states and emotions with positive and other-regarding mental states.

In many traditions of Buddhism, meditation practices are deployed to generate beneficial emotions and dispositions, providing practitioners with techniques that allow them to “abide” in particularly morally efficacious states, in particular, compassion (trembling at and allaying the distress of others), loving kindness (seeking the happiness of others), sympathetic joy (celebrating others’ success), and equanimity