Canonicity

Canonicity as a general concept revolves around authority, and therefore around power and the exercise of power: assertions about canonicity are therefore ipso facto attempts at assertion of power. In a Buddhist literary context, such assertions most centrally relate to the acceptance of works as scripture or holy writ, the nature and definition of such works, and the manner in which they are so valued. The connection of canonicity with power is certainly not limited to Buddhism: we see prominent examples from the codification of the Hebrew Bible in the Temple in Jerusalem to the English translation project of King James and, according to traditional literary accounts, in the canonization of the Qur'ān under the third caliph, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān (Motzki, 2001). However, canonicity is a highly fluid notion and functions on virtually infinite levels, and thus the degree and manner of exercise of power and authority implicated in any given case of canonicity will necessarily differ. Although the acceptance of a work or body of works as canonical can also be enacted by a smaller group (or even by an individual), avowals on a societal level carry a correspondingly greater implication of the ability to enforce such pronouncements, and consequently denote their greater influence. In principle, it is community adoption of the dicta in question that signals canonicity. It is thus always vital to pay close attention to the question of who is asserting authority, and to whom those assertions are meant to apply, one implication of which is that canonicity can never be thought of in the abstract, but only within specific contexts. Claims of canonicity themselves
may well be synchronic, ahistorical and alocal, asserting a universal authority, but the scholar must recognize such claims as in each case necessarily historically and locally grounded.

Any body of material upon which a tradition draws, or which it highlights in some fashion, may meaningfully be considered "canon." Thus, to take one example, while a "canon in use" may be considerably more limited in scope than a received "normative canon," it may also include material not actually found in that putative "canonical corpus." It is important, in this respect, for the scholar to distinguish between etic identifications of "actual" or "de facto" canon (canon in use) and emic designations, which are likely to be more normative and notional than the scholar's. For the same reason, the designations "canonical," "paracanonical," and "protocanonical" mix logical classes; the first is an emic designation, the latter two inherently etic; they should not be confused or conflated.

The Buddhist scriptural canons par excellence are the normative translocal collections variously called "the Pali canon (*Tipiṭaka*)," "the Chinese canon (*Dazangjing* [大藏經])," "the Tibetan canon (Kanjur [*bka' 'gyur*] and Tanjur [*bstan 'gyur*])," and so on. But at almost any level that one chooses to look, considering the local varieties of texts deemed authoritative, and the ways in which authority is deployed both normatively and tacitly, the enormous diversity of Buddhist literature manifests itself. In this sense, the diversity of Buddhist "canon" can fruitfully be seen as fractal in nature: variation occurs among texts from the level of spelling and wording in single manuscripts, up through the variety of expressions of an idea, to the organization and contents of collections. It is thus necessary to keep in mind what dimension of canonicity is in question at any given time.

Two Kinds of Canon

Many schemata have been proposed for the structure of canonicity. One of the most influential distinguishes between an "open canon," sometimes characterized as a "collection of authoritative literature" (Canon 1), and a "closed canon," correspondingly characterized as an "authoritative collection of literature" (Canon 2). Historically speaking, Canon 1 can lead to Canon 2, in that the literature collected in Canon 2 is eo ipso authoritative as well: Canon 2 is not only a closing but also a narrowing of Canon 1. However, even in the case of Canon 2, fixing and closing a canon does not imply its closure on an interpretive level; on the contrary, the interpretive scope of a canon is not closed along with the list of its contents, and virtually limitless possibilities have been discovered for the functional expansion of what are technically "closed" canons (Kraemer,

1991, 615n12). In the Buddhist case (but generalizable for most scriptural religious traditions), even when a "closed" set of texts is assigned "canonical" status, interpretive text production continues, in such a way that most frequently it becomes virtually impossible to access the "primary" or "root" (*mūla*) texts save through the commentarial tradition. When, in this fashion, "canonical texts" are understood primarily, or even only, through the lens of later commentary, this commentary too takes on de facto canonical status. In Buddhism, we observe these processes with respect to the evolution of authority from the *sūtra*s to their classical commentaries, and onward to the sectarian interpretations of the latter such that, to oversimplify, a Japanese Pure Land Buddhist may approach his tradition – the Buddhist teachings and their interpretations – from Kiyozawa Manshi (清沢満之; 1863–1903) to Shinran (親鸞; 1173–1263) to Nāgārjuna (2nd cent. CE?) to the Buddha. While in some sense the highest authority *should* rest with the Buddha, in fact each subsequent level is in its turn canonized, and focuses and directs the scope of available approach to the former – a structural inversion of what one might naively assume to be the case. This process of interpretation reciprocally furthers the canonicity of the root text: "the degree of canonicity of a text corresponds to the amount of charity it receives in its interpretation. The more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment" (Halbertal, 1997, 29). Correspondingly, even if de iure a canon may be "closed" in the sense that it is not possible to add texts to the body of literature considered to hold a special status, this in no way closes off the possibilities for innovation, and the interpretive vitality, far from challenging the core canon, actually reinforces it.

Reception and interpretation are always local. While different interpretive lenses may be applied in different times and places to the same core canonical work, at a given time and place a certain interpretive framework not only may share in the canonicity of the root text; it is likely, in fact, to surpass it. In vivid contrast to the case of the developed Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible, the invariant *textus receptus*, or to the *Ṛgveda*, another virtually invariant text, to take two examples, in most Buddhist cases the literal text of a canonized work will not be invariant; on the contrary, in the earliest Indian Buddhism we know of, textual transmission was oral and thus fluid, and throughout most of Buddhist history there has been a rather undogmatic approach to the fixity of textual corpora. Although there is certainly no monocausality, the variety of "recensions" or "versions" of Indian Buddhist texts is, on the whole, intimately connected with the lack of centralized political power over most of Indian Buddhist history. Correspondingly, variations in textual fluidity in Southeast Asia, Tibet, and China probably could be fruitfully mapped against solidity and centrality of political power: the more centrally governments are able to exert control, the more stable and invariant we would expect Buddhist textual production and transmission to be. This in any event seems very much to have been the case in Tibet (Mayer, 1996, 18), and in many other places, although alternative scenarios (in which state suppression might promote textual diversity, for instance, or on the contrary in which invariance survives even in the absence of centralized power, as with the two examples above of the Masoretic Hebrew text and the *Ṛgveda*) can also be imagined. The distinction between open and closed canon thus does not map directly onto that between the notion of a canon (notional canon) and instantiations of canon as textual collections. We see instead a pairing of an abstract notion of embodied authority with concrete instances of the expression of that authority. Moreover,

> canonicity is not necessarily dependent upon the stabilization of a particular text, although these two processes are clearly to be joined in some way. At Qumran there apparently existed neither a fixed text nor a definitive list of canonical books, yet the idea of a cumulative body of authoritative scripture is everywhere evident. The "idea" of the canon *preceded* its precise definition. (Chapman, 2003, 49)

No doubt the same sort of thing is true in Buddhist traditions as well.

The term "canon" is often used to refer to physical collections of "books," although it is always acknowledged that such collections might also – or even primarily – exist in memory, and the earliest Buddhist canons are certainly imagined by scholars to have been established long before they were committed to writing. Moreover, throughout Buddhist history the memorization of written texts has been an important element of education; there is good evidence from a variety of Buddhist traditions that, for instance, authors frequently quote from memory rather than referring to written sources, and many of the missionaries who brought Buddhist texts from Central Asia or India to China did so in their

memory (for a vivid, if ultimately perhaps ahistorical, episode, see Zürcher, 1999, 556n25), facts which again emphasize the nonlinear relation between writing and canon not only in preliterate periods but throughout history. This may also, but need not necessarily, contribute to the lack of fixity mentioned above.

A key concept is that expressed by the term *āgama*, roughly "what has come down to us, what has been transmitted, tradition," and in a Buddhist context also a term for a collection of the Buddha's sermons. What is inherited as holy scripture, what is transmitted, all falls under this general category. The term indeed is often an equivalent of "holy scripture" (although we note the apparent oxymoron of an "oral scripture," an artifact of English usage; Eltschinger, 2007, 17–20).

The Early History of Buddhist Canonicity

We know nothing of the earliest development of Buddhist scriptural corpora. Our first reference to any such thing is found in the mid-3rd century BCE in the so-called Calcutta-Bairāṭ edict of Aśoka (Schneider, 1982; Falk, 2006, 106–108), among the first written records of India. In this edict the emperor lists seven expositions on the Dharma (*dhaṃmapaliyāya*; Skt. *dharmaparyāya*) which monks and nuns, as well as male and female lay followers (*upāsaka* and *upāsikā*), are advised to constantly listen to, and mentally reflect upon. However, while much discussed, there is little agreement among scholars as to the identity of these sermons, since most of the names are otherwise unknown (Hirakawa, 1959; Schmithausen, 1992, 113–117; Tsukamoto, 1970=1980, 566–573). Three of them *may* be identified with portions of what is now the *Suttanipāta* (von Hinüber, 1996, §97), otherwise identified (on linguistic and other grounds) as perhaps the very oldest known Buddhist literature, but it is significant that we cannot clearly identify the remainder of the names provided by Aśoka with known texts. Either the names under which discourses circulated were different from those now known, or Aśoka knew, and considered significant, discourses now lost to us. Given this state of ignorance, it is not possible to say anything further about the sermons mentioned by Aśoka, despite repeated efforts to identify their concerns or themes.

While the argument runs the risk of being circular, it should not be overlooked that the very first evidence for Buddhist "canonicity" comes in an imperial edict. However, since we lack any other comparably old evidence, this may not after all carry great weight. Nevertheless, especially in light of the crystal clear connection between (royal) power and canon through later Buddhist history, that the source of this earliest reference of "recommended texts" was the emperor Aśoka should be borne in mind.

The same Calcutta-Bairāṭ edict of Aśoka also contains an expression of great significance for understanding the scope of Buddhist notions of canon and their growth. Prefacing his short list of discourses, the emperor emphasizes that the scope of reliable *ipsissima verba* is vastly wider than the few texts he mentions by name: "Whatsoever," the edict says, "has been said by the exalted Buddha, all that is undoubtedly well said" (trans. Schneider, 1982). It is of the highest importance for the hermeneutics of canonicity that this expression is reversed in (almost certainly chronologically later) Buddhist literature, in the Pali Nikāyas (AN iv.164,7–9) and in a Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Adhyāśayasaṃcodana* (quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* anthology; Bendall, 1897–1902, 15.19; Snellgrove, 1958), whence it is frequently cited, as "What has been well-said, all of that is the word of the Buddha." This inversion is more than rhetorical flourish; it effectively expands the scope of "the word of the Buddha" virtually without limit.

Despite what this principle might seem to imply, however, the question of what to include in and what to exclude from the category of "the canonical" was not left entirely open to whim. Already relatively early in Indian Buddhist circles, formal criteria were proposed for the inclusion and exclusion of sermons from the category of "scripture". The authentic teaching (Dharma) is to be understood to be what is proclaimed by the Buddha and by his disciples, with some lists adding also the preaching of sages, gods, and "apparitional beings" (Lamotte, 1947; Davidson, 1990). In some cases the Buddha is present and may inspire (*anu√bhū*) the eloquence (*pratibhāna*) of another speaker, while in other cases the Buddha need not be present at all, and some sermons spoken by disciples are recognized as scripture even though explicitly set after the Buddha's death. The often-cited list of the four "principal appeals to authority" (Pal. *mahāpadesa*; DN ii.123–126, AN ii.167–170, and in many other sources, noted in Lamotte, 1947) refers to four possible scenarios of authentic textual transmission. A monk could learn teachings in four different situations: from the Buddha himself, from a community

of elders, from a group of elders specialized in the transmission of one of the divisions of the teaching (Sūtra, the sermons, Vinaya, the monastic code, or *mātṛkā*, matrices which became the Abhidharma, i.e. systematic dogma), or from a single monk so specialized (Davidson, 1990, 300). However, this simply amounts to granting an individual or community authority, and at least formally Buddhist traditions agree that after the death of the Buddha he appointed no successor, proclaiming instead that the monks were to take the teaching, Dharma, as their lamp/island (perhaps punning on the ambiguity of Middle Indic *dīpa*) and as their refuge (Pal. *saraṇa*; DN ii.100, 20–22). Therefore, assuming a situation in which one does not hear a teaching directly from the Buddha himself, a further test is necessarily to be applied to what is heard: does it conform to what is found in the (already accepted) Sūtra and Vinaya? Some sources add a third criterion, namely that it not contradict reality (*dharmatā*, or in other sources, *yukti*, reasoning). While perhaps not originally intended to specify actual textual corpora, at least Sūtra and Vinaya came to be understood in this sense by some, such as the most influential Ceylonese commentator, the 5th-century Buddhaghosa (An, 2002). Historically, no doubt the motivation for the development of such criteria was the geographic growth and subsequent diversity of the flourishing Buddhist communities. Such communities needed criteria to enable authentication of unfamiliar teachings encountered in various places (Eltschinger, 2014, 202).

Evidently these standards did not suffice in all cases, however, since a few centuries after the earliest sources, we find another articulation (in the Pali *Nettipakaraṇa* and in Sarvāstivāda-Vaibhāṣika and Mādhyamika sources; Lamotte, 1944–1980, 536–540; 1949/1988), that of the four interpretive bases/refuges (*pratisaraṇa*). These four are, to rely on: (1) dharma not persons (*pudgala*); (2) meaning (*artha*) not letter (*vyañjana*); (3) explicit meaning (*nītārtha*) not intentional meaning (*neyārtha*); and (4) insight (*jñāna*) not discursive knowledge (*vijñāna*). The first echoes the four principal appeals of authority, noted above, and the proviso that one must check against the accepted teachings what one hears from (otherwise reliable – see below) individuals, and aims to ward off the dangers of personal charisma. The second is straightforward, and refers to an avoidance of overliteralism, and is plainly soteriological in intent. The third (see below) refers to a concept of broader interpretive importance, namely that not everything in the scriptures agrees, and it is necessary in some cases to understand some statements as metaphorical or allusive, in order to avoid mental confusion. The fourth category refers to true insight instead of discursive knowledge, and by somewhat later philosophers is connected with the scheme of the three successive insights (*prajñā*): that consisting of what is learnt (*śrutamayī*), what is reasoned (*cintāmayī*), and what is mentally cultivated (*bhāvanāmayī*). The first requires learning what is taught in scripture, only upon which basis may one reflect with reasoning. The progress, then, is from scriptural education to insight born of reasoning, and thence to intensive cultivation of salvific intellectual contents (Eltschinger, 2014, 203, 318ff.). Rote learning is not sufficient, and the scriptures, while providing fuel for the processes of reasoning and cultivation, are not in and of themselves salvific.

In spite of the unambiguous caveats set forth in the schemata noted above, and setting aside what obviously happened in practice, even some theorists accept the idea that persons of authority can indeed be relied upon. A relatively early text of logic and epistemology, the **Upāyahṛdaya* (*Fangbian xin lun* [方便心論]; T. 1632 [XXXII] 25b18–22), relates scriptural knowledge to highly authoritative individuals such as elders, buddhas, and bodhisattvas. For the perhaps 6th-century commentator Sthiramati (Yamaguchi, 1934, 128,21), "Scripture consists of the word of trustworthy [persons, termed *āpta*]; trustworthy persons are free of [all] causes of untruth," while for the 7th-century philosopher Candrakīrti (La Vallée Poussin, 1903–1913, 75,6–7), "scripture is the word of trustworthy [persons] cognizing supersensible things in a direct [perceptual] manner" (Eltschinger, 2014, 208). According to Dharmakīrti, individuals who have shown themselves to be reliable in matters which can be confirmed may be presumed to be reliable also in regard to those matters beyond the ken of ordinary persons: such individuals are trustworthy. This said, most articulations of matters of authority focus not on persons but on the content of the speech in question. If the speech is confirmed to be that of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*), this is not a problem, but as noted above, the speech of others is also acceptable if they are inspired. For several sources, most centrally the *Adhyāśayasaṃcodanasūtra*, inspired speech (*pratibhāna*) is *buddhavacana* if it (1) has sense and is not nonsense, (2) accords with the doctrine and does not contradict it, (3) destroys defilements and does not cause their increase, and (4) illuminates the good points and advantages of nirvāṇa and does not increase the evils of saṃsāra

(quoted in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, Bendall, 1897–1902, 15.14–16; Snellgrove, 1958, 621; see also Skilling, 2010, 1, quoting *Ratnagotravibhāga* V.18).

Even confirming the reliability of a scriptural source may not be sufficient, however, as scriptures may appear to be in conflict. In order to avoid the idea that the Buddha taught contradictory ideas (as a common trope has it, just as an entire ocean has the single flavor of salt, so the Buddha's teaching has the single taste of liberation; Vin ii.239,32–34), some sources deploy the notion of *sūtra*s whose meaning is manifest or explicit (*nītārtha*) and those whose meaning requires exposition or is intentional (*neyārtha*; Lamotte, 1949/1988, 16–23). This notion is further related to the categories of ultimate and provisional truth (*paramārthasatya*/*saṃvṛtisatya*), as well as the more general category of skillful means (*upāyakauśalya*). According to the former dichotomy, truth claims are of two varieties: those that relate to the ultimate nature of reality, and those whose truth is conditional. Without such tools, it would have been impossible for the wide variety of philosophical and doctrinal positions which came to characterize Buddhism to develop, for it is through such means that scholars could maintain the orthodoxy of their positions even when they might appear to be in sharp contrast to statements otherwise judged to be canonical or orthodox. The notion of skillful means is deployed as a tool for explaining – or explaining away – actions or statements attributed to the Buddha which seem to contradict assertions or principles established elsewhere (for general considerations, see Pye, 1978). Perhaps the most famous example is found in the parable of the "Burning House" found in chapter 3 of the *Lotus Sūtra*. There the scene is set of a house in flames, within which are three children blithely at play, oblivious to the danger they face. The Buddha, homologized to the children's father, is made to offer three carts drawn by different animals to each of the three, in order to lure them outside to safety. However, when the children emerge from the burning house, the Buddha rewards them not individually with different carts but rather all with the same, very best cart. This parable serves as a metaphor for the Buddha's teaching of different paths to awakening (*yāna*, vehicles), including that of the *śrāvaka*s (auditors) and pratyekabuddhas (lone buddhas), when actually it is only the path of the bodhisattva, the One Vehicle (*ekayāna*), that he really advocates. In light of his salvific aims, however, he does not lie by teaching as valid aims paths which are less than ultimate. Rather, he deploys his skillful means in ways appropriate to the capacities of his audiences.

Although in some foundational senses authenticity is equivalent to *buddhavacana*, the definition of the source of this authenticity can be elusive. An extreme example comes again from the *Lotus Sūtra*, in chapter 7 of which the Buddha recounts the story of the past buddha Mahābhijñājñānābhibhū, who preaches to the 16 sons of a king (Eubanks, 2011, 37–38). After the passage of huge periods of cosmic time, this buddha again preaches to these young men, this time the *Lotus Sūtra* itself, which they memorize. Practicing again for very long ages, the 16th of these princes, like his brothers, becomes a buddha himself, none other than our Śākyamuni, who in this self-same *Lotus Sūtra* recounts this very story. In this fashion the *sūtra* effectively places its own revelation out of time, rendering it both timeless and authorless. For the authors of the *Lotus Sūtra*, it is not only the Dharma which is true and eternal, but its expression in scripture as well.

Contents of the Canon(s)

In earlier Indian Buddhism, the status of the *sūtra*s and the Vinaya as *buddhavacana* – in this context, what is taught directly by the Buddha – is not in doubt, although the exact contents of these collections (the particular *sūtra*s and rules of monastic conduct, their orderings, and their exact formulations) may be subject to debate. The archetypal status of these collections is reinforced by the usage of the compound *dharmavinaya* (lit. the Teaching and the Vinaya, found as early as DN i.229,2, Vin ii.238,26, etc.) in the broad sense of "Buddhist teachings," or even "Buddhism" as a whole. What is less settled is the status of the Abhidharma. This material is avowedly a rational organization of the vision of reality taught by the Buddha in a more haphazard way in the *sūtra*s. In other words, the *sūtra*s – to speak emically – were taught by the Buddha as various situations demanded; he did not attempt to present the entirety of his understanding of the totality of reality in any particular sermon. This totalized and totalizing picture emerges only from the systematization of all that the Buddha taught. The Abhidharma represents this attempt to gather together and rationalize the Buddha's teachings. In his enormously influential *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (*ad* I.3), the 4th–5th-century philosopher Vasubandhu thus states the Vaibhāṣika position that the (canonical) Abhidharma, though collected by

the monk Kātyāyanīputra, is still the word of the Buddha, in the same way that the *Udānavarga* (the Sanskrit equivalent to the *Dhammapada*), a collection of verses spoken by the Buddha and accepted as canonical, was nevertheless gathered and arranged into a single collection by the monk Dharmatrāta (La Vallée Poussin, 1923–1931, I.6). For the Vaibhāṣikas and those who follow them, the Abhidharma books are thus indeed *buddhavacana* – utterances of the Buddha, though presented by another – while for others, such as the Sautrāntikas, they are not. (The Sautrāntikas nevertheless claim to possess a *Tripiṭaka* including an Abhidharma, because this is constituted for them of certain *sūtra*s, such as the *Arthaviniścaya* [Wogihara, 1936, 11.33].) This has implications for the organization of canons as collections of literature, and in Tibet some editions of the Kanjur, the collection of *buddhavacana*, contain Abhidharma texts, while other editions relegate these texts to the Tanjur, the collection of works of other authorship. (Note, however, that the Abhidharma is placed in the Kanjur only in cases in which there was no corresponding Tanjur, i.e. in which only a Kanjur was produced.) Of course, this rejection of the Abhidharma as *buddhavacana* does not directly imply that in practice Abhidharmic filtering of the Buddha's teaching was any less influential. Other approaches to the question are also found. In Theravāda doctrine (and apparently in this tradition alone; Skilling, 2010, 30, 2008, 51–54; on the contested appropriateness of the label "Theravāda," see Skilling, 2012; Gethin, 2012; and Anālayo, 2013), the Buddha literally taught the Abhidharma: the well-known story of the Buddha's visit to the Trāyastriṃśa heaven is adopted to make his sojourn there the scene of his preaching of the Abhidharma to his mother, who was reborn in that realm. Upon his return to our world, the Buddha taught the Abhidharma to his disciple Śāriputra, who subsequently recited it at the First Council (Davidson, 1990, 304). (The Theravāda tradition is actually somewhat more complex than this, since one of the seven core canonical Pali Abhidhamma texts, the *Kathāvatthu*, dates itself to 218 years after the Buddha's nirvāṇa [von Hinüber, 1996, §144]. Furthermore, it is important in a broader context to remember that in Cambodia, as one instance, the term Abhidhamma is widely used to refer to a range of texts quite different from the canonical Pali Abhidhamma [de Bernon, 2012, 383].) The Abhidharma texts, moreover, were considered to present the manifest meaning of the Buddha's teaching (*nītārtha*), and thus to provide an authoritative standard by which the *sūtra*s whose meaning requires exposition (*neyārtha*) were to be interpreted (Cox, 1995, 14).

Buddhist tradition virtually universally holds that after the death of the Buddha, a council (*saṃgīti*, communal recitation) was convened, at which the Buddha's preachings were collected. This included minimally his *sūtra*s and the Vinaya (but see immediately above, and note that certain Pali materials hold that the *aṭṭhakathā*, commentaries, were also recited at the councils, while other traditions speak of a simultaneous Mahāyāna council; see below). It is usually recounted that the Buddha's closest disciple, Ānanda, recited the *sūtra*s, and the monk Upāli the Vinaya. This differs from the question raised above with respect to the Abhidharma, since here there is no question of compilation or organizing, but only of literal reporting. A certain amount of exegetical effort has gone into addressing the question of the reliability of these recitations, for it is upon this basis that one leg of the authenticity of the Buddha's word rests. One strand of this exegesis takes as its starting point the stock (and virtually obligatory) opening expression of Buddhist *sūtra*s, "Thus have I heard" (Skt. *evaṃ mayā śrutam*). Among the points put forward is that the word "thus" is a seal of authenticity, since it serves to certify that the speaker ("I," usually Ānanda, but in some, perhaps later, texts, Vajrapāṇi) recounts the Buddha's words precisely as he heard them. Several commentaries connect this account with the "biography" of Ānanda. Although he was the Buddha's constant companion, until the very moment before the council was set to begin, he had not realized awakening (arhatship). Some interpreters take what might otherwise seem a weakness in the postulation of Ānanda as a reliable reporter and turn it into a strength: since, while accompanying the Buddha during his teaching career, he did not fully understand what the Buddha taught, Ānanda had no choice but to memorize it word for word. Thus, his very spiritual backwardness, so to speak, makes him a reliable witness: being unawakened he was unable to paraphrase or interpret, but could only parrot.

In the account in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, the fixing of the canon (in the sense of the core texts) is described as follows:

> Then Mahākāśyapa said to Ānanda, "There are just this many *sūtra*s in the *āgama*s; beyond this there are none." Having said this he descended

> from the high seat. Then the Venerable Kāśyapa addressed the great gathering: "Be it known that the *sūtra*s spoken by the World Honoured One have now all been assembled." (T. 1451 [XXIV] 407c3–6; trans. MacQueen, 1981, 306)

Although the mythology of the First Council is central, even within traditional sources there is ample recognition of the fact that not everything accepted as *buddhavacana* was recited at that council. In the Pali Vinaya (Cullavagga XI.1.11; Vin ii.289,34–290,8; Horner, 1938–1966, 5.401–402), and Vinaya texts belonging to the Mahīśāsakas (*Mishasaibu hexi wufen lü* [彌沙塞部和醯五分律]; T. 1421 [XXII] 191c19–192a5; Przyluski, 1926–1928, 159–161), Dharmaguptakas (*Shifen lü* [四分律]; T. 1428 [XXII] 968b27–c17), and Haimavatas ([?]; *Pinimujing* [毘尼母經]; T. 1463 [XXIV] 818c29–819b1; Przyluski, 1926–1928, 195–200), though not in the collections of other traditions, is found a story of a large group of monks, led by Purāṇa ("The Old One"), who were unable to reach the site of the First Council in time to join the deliberations. Being told shortly afterwards what the council had decided, namely the scope and content of the Buddha's preaching deemed "canonical," Purāṇa proclaimed it well recited (*susaṃgīta*), yet averred that he would hold in mind the Buddha's teachings just as he had heard and received them directly from the Buddha himself (Przyluski, 1926–1928, 314–323). This story may be read as already a relatively early acknowledgment of the possibility of legitimate *buddhavacana* having been transmitted outside the officially approved canon. Somewhat later, we find mention of what has been recited at the First Council, and what has not been recited (Sp i.18,3–4; Jayawickrama, 1962, 15), though there is here no attempt to connect this with the story of Purāṇa. Elsewhere we find mention of a "*sutta* which was not handed down at a council" (As 65,18–19; Hallisey, 1993, 99). There is, in other words, within the orthodox scholastic tradition explicit acknowledgment that canonicity is not coextensive with recitation at the First Council.

Some sources further acknowledge, if implicitly, the possible flexibility in the contents of authentic *buddhavacana*, and suggest the perceived necessity for a council to certify that authenticity. The Sarvāstivāda **Abhidharma-Mahāvibhāṣā* (T. 1545 [XXVII] 929c18–20; Lamotte, 1947) predicts that "[a]fter the demise of the Buddha, in the *sūtra*s will be placed false [*wei* (僞)] *sūtra*s, in the Vinaya false Vinaya, in the Abhidharma false Abhidharma." This signals a recognition of the circulation of texts of which the authors of this work do not approve, but which, evidently, were accepted by others, highlighting the fact that canonicity is an issue of claims toward authority.

Despite our tendency to refer to collections in Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan in the singular, as "*the* Tipiṭaka," "*the* Dazangjing," or "*the* Kanjur," in fact we know that these collections were always diverse in their composition. Moreover, the referents of the terms are frequently not what we expect them to be. In Southeast Asia, *Tipiṭaka* is often a blanket term for Buddhist literature, whether or not that literature would find a place in a collection of Pali *buddhavacana* (de Bernon, 2012, 379). In this sense *Tipiṭaka* "refers less to a collection of texts than to an ideological concept" (Bizot quoted by Hallisey, 1993, 105n2), and there are a large number of "allegedly non-canonical suttas" in Pali found in Southeast Asia (Hallisey, 1990, 1993; von Hinüber, 1996, §§ 436–437). These texts are characterized as "allegedly non-canonical" in view of the problematic nature of canonicity their existence and reception implies, although this designation is one applied by modern scholars, and thus signals first and foremost their discomfort with the tradition. This is not to say that such questions come only from without. In Burma, although the phenomenon may be older, "[d]ebates about the proper boundaries of Buddhist scripture characterise a significant proportion of seventeenth through nineteenth-century Burmese monastic writings." Although there was an awareness of the normative Sri Lankan Mahāvihārin framework for the parameters of the *Tipiṭaka* in Pali as established by Buddhaghosa, this was clearly not universally accepted (Lammerts, 2013, 120). Thus, while scholars acknowledge the existence of sectarian recensions of the *sūtra*s in the Pali Nikāyas and Āgamas in Sanskrit and Chinese, and of the Vinayas, even when the exact sectarian identification of a given text may remain unsettled, it may be that even this picture is not sufficiently nuanced. Even the extant "Theravāda" *Tipiṭaka*, as transmitted in Sri Lanka and in Southeast Asia, does not necessarily represent a unanimous selection of all Theravāda stakeholders, although the main political rivals of the Mahāvihārin fraternity

> the Abhayagirivāsins used the same collection of sacred scriptures in Pāli which has been handed down to us by the orthodox Theravāda tradition of the Mahāvihāravāsins and which formed the

> common heritage of all of the three nikāyas, or sects of Buddhism, in mediaeval Ceylon. (Bechert, 1992, 96)

Similar is the often repeated claim that the Pali canon is the only extant "complete" South Asian canon. Understanding, however, the complexity of the actual situation, we can recognize both that the claim is in some respects true, and that it does not quite say what it seems to say. As a point of contrast, our Sarvāstivāda evidence, extant in sporadically preserved materials from Central Asia and in some Chinese translations, is so partial and fragmentary that even the existence of a recension of a text which, for instance, differs from that transmitted in Pali does not prove that all Sarvāstivādins had canonized that particular version. Likewise, our evidence does not allow us to speculate on what a "complete" Sarvāstivāda canon may have looked like, even if we assume that such a unitary thing ever existed at all. When we do have evidence for larger-scale collections, as with some Vinaya literature, in fact this evidence suggests precisely the opposite, namely the existence of multiple versions of texts belonging, at best nominally, to the same tradition. (There is, for instance, good evidence suggestive of variant versions of "the" Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya.) For works and collections identified as belonging to other groups, we are even less well informed. Therefore, given the extremely selective nature of the extant evidence, we must be very cautious about what conclusions can reliably be drawn from such partial data. When these data suggest anything, it is that canonization did not imply uniformity, even within what might, at least retrospectively and translocally, appear to be single lineages (sects).

Different canons have different scopes; the Pali canon as we have it preserves in principle not only Theravāda materials, but in fact only those associated with the politically triumphant Mahāvihārin lineage, to the exclusion of Abhayagiri and Jetavana materials (von Hinüber, 1996, § 43). The Tibetan collections, Kanjur and Tanjur, in principle collect only materials belonging to the Mahāyāna, or the Mūlasarvāstivāda, although they are drastically incomplete in the case of the latter, as it is really only the Vinaya which is represented; almost none of the *sūtra*s or treatises of this school are preserved in Tibetan. One exception is the ten Mahāsūtras (Skilling, 1994; 1997), and another the *Arthavistaradharmaparyāya* (D 318/P 984), in addition to the voluminous quotations of *sūtra*s which served as the sources for Vasubandhu in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, preserved in Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikāṭīkā* (D 4094/P 5595). There do exist references to a large-scale translation of collections into Tibetan – an *Ekottarikāgama*, *Dīrghāgama*, and seven Abhidharma treatises (Skilling, 1997b, 96) – but if these references reflect a historical reality, the translations themselves are not known to survive, and were certainly not included in any known Kanjur. Of the Abhidharma, only the **Lokaprajñapti* (D 4086/P 5587), **Kāraṇaprajñapti* (D 4087/P 5588), and * *Karmaprajñapti* (D 4088/P 5589) are available. The Tanjur however, it must be noted, also contains considerable material which at least modern scholars would classify as non-Buddhist, even the poet Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta* (Cloud Messenger), for instance, alongside such diverse works as dictionaries and Daṇḍin's *Kāvyādarśa*, a work on poetics. How and why such works were considered Buddhist enough to find a place in the Tanjur remains to be explained. The Chinese *Dazangjing* in contrast are truly nonsectarian collections, representing seemingly nearly all officially acknowledged Buddhist literature available in Chinese translation, although occasionally even more: the *Sāṃkhyakārikā* is also preserved in Chinese (*Jin qishi lun* [金七十論]; T. 2137; Takakusu, 1904), as is a Vaiśeṣika text (*Shengzong shi gouyi lun* [勝宗十句義論]; T. 2138; comp. Frauwallner, 1955), both works explicitly acknowledged in the enormously influential *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* (開元釋教錄; Catalogue of Śākaymuni's Teachings Compiled during the Kaiyuan Era), compiled by Zhisheng (智昇; 669–740) as non-Buddhist (T. 2154 [LV] 624a9–18).

A complement to the above-mentioned expansionist tendency, which recognizes as canonical materials not necessarily classified as such by certain normative sources, alongside the theoretical acceptance of a "standard canon," is the absence in many traditional monasteries of a "complete" set of authoritative scripture, however defined. This is true of most locations in the premodern Buddhist world, where monastic libraries rarely if ever contained manuscripts of the entire range of texts normatively regarded as canonical. In Laos, L. Finot in 1917 made a point that he could identify not a single monastery with full set of core texts of the Pali *Tipiṭaka*. The Abhidhamma was well represented, a fact he attributes to the practical function of these works as texts recited in funeral rites (perhaps in the form of a short collection, *Aphitham chet gamphi*). However, although certain monastery libraries in such areas may not contain a normatively defined

complete, or even substantially partial, collection of core and commentarial Pali texts, they will likely include a diverse range of scriptural materials locally regarded as authoritative, including Pali and vernacular *jātaka*s, cosmologies, historical narratives, Vinaya manuals, Buddha biographies, liturgical works, and so on. (Comp. Keyes, 1983, 272; McDaniel, 2008.)

This said, canons were not by any means neglected. In Burma, "[d]uring the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was common for Burmese kings to sponsor the copying of a new edition of the Piṭakat during their reign." This required demarcating those texts that were included in the category (which in all cases far exceeded merely the core texts and *aṭṭhakathā*), and an influential genre of Burmese literature, "Bibliographies of the *Tipiṭaka*" (*Piṭakat samuiṅḥ*), developed to realize that aim (Lammerts, 2013, 119n1). There is thus a tension between a tendency to concretize a "complete canon" and a complementary tendency to particularize, select, and, simultaneously, expand or constrict the borders of the canonical. This situation is not unique to Southeast Asia. There is no census of canonical collections, or of libraries at all, in premodern Tibet, and after the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, there never will be. But here and there we may find some hints. One such is found in a "guide to holy places" (*gnas yig*) compiled by Ka' thog si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho in the early 20th century (Almogi, 2012). In his travels, this scholar found more than 169 sets of the Kanjur, of which at least 55 were manuscripts, and more than 35 Tanjurs, of which at least 4 were manuscripts. Almost none of this once rich literary heritage is known to have survived. We also learn from this survey that not every monastery could boast of its own copy of the Kanjur, much less the Tanjur as well.

In Tibet it was only the advent of printing, a technology learnt from China (and unknown for most of history in South and Southeast Asia), that allowed the standardization of some textual corpora; manuscript Kanjurs contain different contents, organized differently, although there are general trends toward unity. The role of political power here is plain:

> With the rise of the central Tibetan rulers who gained the leadership over Western Tibet in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, the canonical literature manufactured in central Tibet and in China began to spread all over the country, and was used as "standard," but it did not manage to completely supplant the local production of [Kanjurs]. (Lainé, 2009, 5)

The mere physical presence of texts in Tibet, however, is no more significant than it is in Southeast Asia, given that the texts might not have been made freely available, even to monks, on the one hand, and that there was little interest in the majority of the texts theoretically available, on the other. (This is a different question from what may be ideologically based restrictions, such as the prohibition against teaching the contents of the *Prātimokṣa* to laypeople, or restrictions placed on access to tantric literature, for which certain initiations, for instance, may be requisite.) In Tibet, even leaving the laity aside, monastic curricula require studies of a limited body of texts, almost none of which would qualify as "canonical" under normative definitions. Study is mostly restricted to textbooks (*yig cha*), or at most to a small number of treatises; even the Vinaya is not directly consulted, but studied through its systematic summary, the *Vinayasūtra* and its autocommentary of Guṇaprabha (preserved in Tibet in the Tanjur; D 4117, 4119/P 5619, 5621). In particular, *sūtra*s, although certainly acknowledged as the authoritative word of the Buddha, are rarely studied in Tibet and, apart from the ritual placement of Kanjurs on altars or the placement of texts inside images (see below), aside from *dhāraṇī* texts, they are rarely even used at all. This lack of general interest extends to scholars; although Tibetan scholars may cite scripture, in almost all cases they do so on the basis of previous citations in other works, ultimately going back either to anthologies (such as the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* or Atiśa's *Mahāsūtrasamuccaya*) or to traditional works which have earlier deployed the same scriptural citation as a proof or illustrative text (such as Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*; for a study of the 14th-cent. scholar Tsong kha pa's sources for his scriptural citations, see Langelaar, 2012). This distant relation to scripture may qualify as a form of de facto decanonization (see below).

Local Canonicity

In light of the fact that a "canon" may, on the one hand, have existed notionally, though not actually been accessible, while, on the other hand, materials not nominally included in a normatively standard canon were nevertheless also more or less freely available, and even elevated to a central position of

attention and authority, it is evident that the concept of canon has been simultaneously deployed in more than one way. "Functional" canons have always been in use in almost any context (comp. Blackburn, 1999, 284, 303 on "practical canon"). Any canon must belong to a community: a text or body of texts is canonical only for some group. Therefore, any canon must be localized in time and space (geographical, in addition to social). Tensions may, but need not necessarily, arise, however, when a community asserts the canonicity of a body of literature which it nevertheless does not actually utilize. Categories such as "'functional canon,'" "practical canon," "curricular canon" or the like, however, assume the inherent priority of the inherited scriptural canon, which is honored only in principle. A distance between "notional" and "practical" canons is a sign of multiple communities and an inheritance by one group of persons of a value system initiated by others. As an example, Lao monks certainly knew that there were Vinaya texts that did not exist in their monasteries. These included core (*mūla*) texts, commentaries, manuals, and so on. They did not possess them, but would not dispute their authority. What they did have was a local collection, parts of the *mūla* texts, parts of commentaries, parts of manuals, and so on. This, then, was their "practical canon," the texts that were actually read and recited. We need not imagine either that these Lao monks felt that the texts available to them were deficient, or on the contrary that they were honoring texts not authorized by some central and higher authority.

That formal canons are absent does not imply the absence of canons. Every scriptural religious community at a given time and place holds a certain body of literature to be authoritative, whether that acknowledgment is made explicit or not, and the utilization of certain texts to the exclusion of others is one form of canonization. In this regard, the expression "protocanon" acts as an assertion of unity that functions, however, only retrospectively: "proto" in relation to "canon" invokes a community different than that which is the focus of the determination (full, mature) "canon" in question. Any appeal to "protocanon" is therefore inherently teleological. It is thus not historically helpful to speak of a "proto-Kanjur" as a "collection of canonical texts which aims at encompassing the maximum available canonical literature, but does not reach the extent of a [Kanjur] and lacks a systematic classification" (Lainé, 2009, 5). Such a formulation assumes that Kanjurs represent an inevitable result of a process, when the reality is rather that each collection is – or is not – deemed canonical in light of its local conditions, not as seen retrospectively in view of later developments – a chronological impossibility.

In many, if not most, cases, we cannot know why materials of evident value to one community were not shared by others. Scholars gloss over this question by referring to some materials as "local," but the only difference between a local text and a translocal one is that the latter was able to spread and be accepted and adopted outside its home range; all texts have a home range, so it is only their later history, not something about their nature, that qualifies them as "local" or as "translocal." Canonical collections such as a *Tripiṭaka*, *Dazangjing*, or Kanjur by means of their publication and circulation render their contents translocal, but prolific finds of texts not enshrined in collections – for instance, at Dunhuang – demonstrate how much has not been transmitted, in most cases without our having known even that it had once existed. We have no choice but to presume that these materials were once and at some place every bit as canonical, authoritative, and valued as materials much more familiar to us. This fact calls for our careful attention whenever we attempt to understand the scope of the canonical.

Albeit perhaps for different reasons, less historical than ideological, traditional sources are also clearly aware of losses of text. One of the most important statements about the authenticity of Buddhist scriptures is articulated by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti* (D 4061/P 5562), the arguments of which are rehearsed elsewhere, notably in Bhāviveka's *Tarkajvālā* (D 3856/P 5256; Eckel, 2008). Among the assertions of the Mahāyāna apologist Vasubandhu is that, just as in the Mahāyāna itself, in the Śrāvakayāna canon too – using the Mahāyāna terminology for the non-Mahāyāna scripture corpus – there once existed sermons of the Buddha which are now lost, and thus the Śrāvakayāna canon is incomplete (Horiuchi, 2007). At least part of Vasubandhu's argument is that the Śrāvakayāna canon is incomplete not only because there is reference to nonextant *sūtra*s but also because it does not admit Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, which were surely also preached by the Buddha. The **Mahāyānāvatāra* (*Ru dasheng lun* [入大乘論]; T. 1634 [XXXII] 37a) offers the argument that while Ānanda received some teachings from the Buddha, there are many he did not receive, those of the Mahāyāna among them (Horiuchi, 2007). For Bhāviveka in his *Tarkajvālā* (D 3856, 166b–167a; Eckel, 2008, 149), Ānanda did not memorize everything that the Buddha taught: "Therefore, the full teaching of the Buddha does not appear in

the collection made by those who were taught by [Ānanda] and who collected [his teachings]." Following Vasubandhu, Bhāviveka recognizes not only the loss of texts legitimately taught by the Buddha, but the existence of variant versions of some that do exist, such as the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (D 3856, 168a; Eckel, 2008, 152). Moreover, Bhāviveka is well aware that different traditions pass along as *buddhavacana* different texts (D 3856, 166a; Eckel, 2008, 147), and even names texts which certain schools do not accept, or Vinaya rules which are found in some Vinaya traditions but not in others (D 3856, 167ab; Eckel, 2008, 153). An interesting parallel comes in a passage from Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*:

> The Vātsiputrīyas do not take this text as authoritative. But why? They say: "The text which you cite from is not read in our sect." But, we ask, is it their sect that is authoritative, or the word of the Buddha? If it is their sect that is authoritative, then the Buddha is not their teacher, and they are not Buddhists. But if the word of the Buddha is authoritative, why is the text we cite from not authoritative for them? Because, they say, this is not the word of the Buddha. But why? They say: "It is not read in our sect." Now, this is unjustified. And what is unjustified here? Because to claim, as they do, that a text that is transmitted in all other sects and contradicts neither the *sūtra* nor the fundamental nature of things is not the word of the Buddha on the grounds that they don't read it, this is purely and simply inconsiderate. (Pradhan, 1975, 466.14–17; trans. Eltschinger, 2014, 199–200n26, brackets removed)

While Bhāviveka spoke of absent texts, many traditions emphasize a different sort of loss of text, namely that there once existed much more extensive versions of texts now available only partially. This may be especially evident with respect to some tantric literature, in which there was thought to be an "idealized tantric canon, replete with massive ur-texts, at the author's disposal" (Gray, 2009, 10). Access to this corpus was not limited to the past; rather there was a "pervasive notion that the true tantric canon exists in the heavens of pure lands, and that fragments of it are periodically revealed to exemplary individuals in fortunate human communities" (Gray, 2009, 11).

> One of the most important implications of the myth of the tantric canon is the idea that our knowledge of *tantra*s is always fragmentary and incomplete, which leaves open the door to further revelation, and creates the space for the construction of a hierarchy to mediate access to the inaccessible store of wisdom. (Gray, 2009, 15)
>
> The collection of *tantra*s that came to be the Bka' 'gyur [Kanjur] is thus replete with references to absent root *tantra*s, with various texts that refer to a greater canon that exists not in this world, but was imagined by Buddhists as existing in the more glorious past, or in more glorious realms of reality. The myths of larger tantric canons bolstered the truly *conservative* efforts of scholars such as Bu ston [1290–1364] to preserve what they surely believed were fragments of a much larger, but largely lost (in this world and time period) tantric canon. (Gray, 2009, 21)

This concept is not limited to the *tantra*s. In East Asia there is an idea of three variants of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*: a small version in our world, a large version with "a number of verses equivalent to the number of atoms in ten great trichiliocosms" and the number of characters equal to "the number of atoms in the world of Mount Sumeru," and a medium version with 498,800 verses and 1,200 chapters. The longer versions are retained in the Dragon Palace (*longgong* [龍宮]), the same location in which, tradition holds, the Perfection of Wisdom *sūtra*s were preserved after being preached by the Buddha, to be revealed only centuries after his nirvāṇa (Rambelli, 2007, 116; Hamar, 2007, 139–140). (A similar idea of three versions of the Prajñāpāramitā of varying lengths is found in the *Da zhidu lun* [大智度論; T. 1509 (XXV) 756a28–b4], each intended for a different group of recipients according to life-span and strength of memory.)

Organization

Collections of Buddhist literature arrange their contents differently. There seems little doubt that the oldest arrangement of Buddhist literature was that into nine "branches" (*aṅga*). These divide the genres of literature into *sutta*, *geyya*, *gāthā*, *udāna*, *veyyākaraṇa*, *itivuttaka*, *jātaka*, *abbhutadhamma*, and *vedalla*. A further and later twelvefold classification (*dvādaśāṅga*), not found in Pali sources, adds three items: *nidāna*, *avadāna*, and *upadeśa*. The meaning of these categories is very far from clear. One thing that is clear, however, is that the first grouping, *sutta*, includes both what we think of as the *sutta*s, sermons, as well as the Vinaya, the monastic code. (The most exhaustive treatment of this category is Maeda Egaku, 1964, 181–549 [sic!];

see also Lamotte, 1944–1980, V.2281–2304; von Hinüber, 1994.)

Another undoubtedly old arrangement is that into "Three Baskets" (Pal. *tipiṭaka*; Skt. *tripiṭaka*). The meaning of this term is also not altogether clear. One explanation refers to the expression that a preacher teaches what has been passed down in a lineage "basket-wise" or "according to tradition" (*piṭakasaṃpadāya*; MN i.520,10). When, however, the set was fixed at three is not known.

While the reference is not datable (but the text belongs to 1st-cent. CE Sri Lanka; von Hinüber, 1996, § 42), the "appendix" (*Parivāra*) to the Pali Vinaya (Vin v.3,14) mentions a monk as very wise and a *tipeṭakin*, probably meaning that he is conversant with the three divisions of scripture. (There may be an analogy with the term *trivedin*, one who knows by heart the three Vedas.) In terms of fixed chronology, the first attestation of a related term is much older, found in an inscription of the 2nd or 1st century BCE at the stūpa site of Bhārhut in central India, which characterizes a noble (*ārya*) as *peṭakin* (Lüders, 1963, § A 56), which may indicate familiarity with one of the divisions of the *tripiṭaka*, although there is no reference here to any such threefold division. The word *trepiṭaka* itself is, however, found in 129/130 CE on an inscription from Sarnath which so labels two monks (Salomon, 1998, 270–272). In a 159/160 CE Mathurā inscription, we find not only a monk but also a nun given the same title (Lüders, 1961, § 24; Schopen, 1988–1989, 243–248). Slightly later, in the early 3rd century CE, we find the title again on the so-called Brussels Buddha of 231/232 CE (Fussman, 1974, 54–58), but it seems to virtually disappear from the inscriptional record thereafter. The attribute *trepiṭa* found in the *Divyāvadāna*, and almost certainly originally belonging to the Vinaya of the Mūlasarvāstivāda (Silk, 2008, 144), may have a similar meaning, but it is in any case a rare form. There is no indication from these references, however, either to content meant to be encompassed by the category of "*tripiṭaka*" or precisely what is meant by the term *peṭakin*/*trepiṭaka*, which grammatically suggests an individual who has done something with a *piṭaka* or the/a *tripiṭaka.* There is no necessary suggestion, in particular, that this indicates that the individual in question has committed some body of text to memory, let alone the "canon" as we know it – even leaving aside the question of what the contents of the more limited body of texts in question might be. A possible indication of the scope of a "canon" at an early period is, however, provided by inscriptions at Bhārhut and at the stūpa sites of Sāñcī and Pauni which, rather than invoking a three-fold division, use the term *pañcanekāyika* (Lüders, 1963, § A 57; Majumdar, 1940 I.324, #242; Kolte, 1969, 171–173), an apparent reference to five *nikāya*s (under the term which becomes current in Pali, rather than Skt. *āgama*). (Lamotte, 1958/1988, 157/143 suggests that the reference is to '"the canonical doctrine as a whole,"' but without proper grounds.) Terminology which might be (but is not necessarily) more precise includes *sūtradhara* and *vinayadhara*, (up)holder of *sūtra* and *vinaya*, respectively. The latter at least is attested in mid-2nd century CE, at the stūpa site of Amarāvatī (Sivaramamurti, 1942, #25 [*mahavinayadhara*], #70). Much earlier at Sāñcī we find the term *bhāṇaka* (reciter; Majumdar, 1940, I.353, #529), but again, the scope of its meaning is not clear. (For all such inscriptional citations, it is very convenient to refer to Tsukamoto, 1996; 1998; 2003.)

With the exception of what has come down to us as the Pali canon, we do not have direct evidence for even the existence of canons belonging to other sects or schools of Indian Buddhism, nor good indications of the contents or organization of those putative canonical collections. The *sutta* portion of the *Tipiṭaka* in Pali is organized into collections by length (*Dīghanikāya* [Long Discourses] and *Majjhimanikāya* [Middle-Length Discourses]), by number (*Aṅguttaranikāya* [Numerical Discourses]), grouped by topic (*Saṃyuttanikāya* [Connected Discourses]) and minor texts (*Khuddhakanikāya* [Miscellaneous Discourses]). It is, again, not known how old these classifications might be, but the term *Ekottarikā* is known in Gandhari sources from the first half of the 1st century CE (Baums, 2009, 513), though again, we cannot know what form such a collection may have taken. We do know through comparison of Pali collections with those preserved in Chinese that even when individual *sūtra*s may find parallels, the organizational structures within which they are found often differ: individual texts preserved in one collection in Pali may be found in another, not otherwise corresponding, collection in Chinese. The parallel to a Pali *sutta* found in the the *Aṅguttaranikāya* may thus appear rather in a Chinese *Saṃyuktāgama*, a comparison made all the more problematic by the fact that the four Āgamas preserved in Chinese belong to different sects and were apparently originally composed in different languages: the *Dīrghāgama* (*Chang ahan jing* [長阿含經]; T. 1: Dharmaguptaka), *Madhyamāgama* (*Zhong ahan jing* [中阿含經]; T. 26: [Mūla]

Sarvāstivāda), *Saṃyuktāgama* (*Za ahan jing* [雜阿含經]; T. 99: Sarvāstivāda), and *Ekottarikāgama* (*Zengyi ahan jing* [增壹阿含經]; T. 125: Sarvāstivāda).

This tendency away from parallelism may go further: in the *Ekottarikāgama* there may be a

> general tendency . . . to present as a canonical discourse what in the Theravāda tradition is only found in commentarial literature. . . . the *Ekottarika-āgama* clearly remained open to the inclusion of later stories to a greater degree than the Pāli *Nikāyas* and other Chinese *Āgamas*. (Anālayo, 2014, 120)

In addition to the Pali and Chinese collections, we also have a largely intact Sanskrit *Dīrghāgama* affiliated with the (Mūla)Sarvāstivāda (Hartmann and Wille, in Harrison & Hartmann, 2014), the contents of which, however, do not wholly agree with either the Pali *Dīghanikāya* or the *Chang ahan jing*.

The historical diversity of the Vinaya collections is similar, except that here we have slightly more diverse material available. With the exception of a portion (the Skandhaka) of the collection belonging to the Mahāsāṃghika tradition, the bare structure and rule content of the other extant Vinayas largely agree with each other. Note however that "even the formation of the Prātimokṣasūtra texts was not completed in the first or even second centuries CE, but seems to have undergone substantial changes in the process of writing down" (Strauch, 2014, 820). The same scholar stresses the importance of writing in the development of the Vinaya literature, saying the early Gandhari manuscript he studied belongs to

> a state when a living oral tradition, which was rooted in a distinct local or probably regional context, was confronted with a growing production of written texts, which somehow petrified these local versions and distributed them into different contexts. The process of harmonisation had of course to take place between the oral versions and the written texts and between the different written texts themselves. Only such a process could eventually result in the emergence of generally accepted and supraregionally used canons with a codified and authoritative textual shape. (Strauch, 2014, 825)

Where the extant Vinayas do not agree is, most notably, in their narrative content, which constitutes the bulk of most of the Vinaya literature. It is a conceit of the Vinayas that they represent case law: they recount, in explanation of their rules, how the Buddha was presented with a problem, concerning which he then issued a ruling. The stories told to provide the background and context for this ruling are, in contrast to the rules themselves, significantly variable, and in many cases it cannot be that they go back to a common source. A part of the Vinaya of the Mahāsāṃghikas is organized significantly differently, although it too contains largely the same basic rule content (Clarke, 2004). It is also of importance to recognize that *sūtra*s were both extracted from their original home in the Vinaya and, on the contrary, embedded in Vinaya texts from an originally Āgamic source, this speaking again to questions of the fluidity of the organizational principles of Buddhist canons (Yao, forthcoming; von Hinüber, 1996, §§ 67, 80).

Concerning the Abhidharma, we have quite little information, but what we do know suggests a much wider diversity than is the case with either the *sūtra*s or the Vinayas. Given the even basic disagreement over the extent to which the Abhidharma is to be considered *buddhavacana*, this is understandable. While both the Pali and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma collections contain seven works, on the text level there is virtually no overlap between these collections, although naturally the general content is largely in agreement. In this respect, we should note that while there are sectarian recensions of *sūtra*s, there are no known cases of sectarian versions of any treatise (*śāstra*); even when there exist distinct treatises with the same title (such as the *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, of which two distinct texts are now known), they are not historically related, much less sectarian variants of a common core.

While there certainly are correlations between the contents of various collections both in Indic language sources and in translations (primarily in Chinese), such that it is possible to line up, for instance, an individual *sutta* in Pali with a Chinese parallel, it is not just the contents of the particular Nikāya-Āgama complexes that differ; the overall organizations of the respective collections themselves are quite different. Although a word equivalent to *tripiṭaka* exists in Chinese (*sanzang* [三藏]), Chinese canons from the earliest period of their compilation were organized on different principles, based first of all on a separation of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna scripture, and only then into the three categories of *sūtra* (*jing* [經]), Vinaya (*lü* [律]), and treatises (*lun* [論]). The overriding category is therefore the polemical duality of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna, rather than the "three baskets." The *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* contains the following main headings of translated works:

1. Bodhisattva (i.e. Mahāyāna) works:
   a. Sūtra:
      i) Prajñāpāramitā
      ii) Ratnakūṭa
      iii) Mahāsaṃnipāta
      iv) Buddhāvataṃsaka
      v) Nirvāṇa
   b. Vinaya
   c. Śāstra
2. Śrāvaka [i.e. Hīnayāna] works:
   a. Sūtra
   b. Vinaya
   c. Śāstra

In Tibetan the difference is even more stark. Again, an equivalent for *tripiṭaka* exists (*sde snod gsum*), and is used in exegesis, for instance in Mkhas grub rje Dge legs dpal bzang's (1385–1438) discussion of the structure of the Buddha's preaching, which includes this threefold analysis (Lessing & Wayman, 1968, 56–57). However, the actual Tibetan collections (Kanjur [*bka' 'gyur*] and Tanjur [*bstan 'gyur*]) follow another organizing principle, related historically to the Chinese model in some respects, but again not on the highest level. What is attributed to the Buddha is separated from what is not (*bka' 'gyur* means "translated [Buddha's] word" and *bstan 'gyur* "translated treatises"). Placing together the Sūtra and Vinaya as the word of the Buddha, internally the Kanjur is divided into Sūtra (with almost no non-Mahāyāna content), Vinaya, and Tantra (a category unknown in Chinese collections, although tantric texts were translated and composed in China). The *sūtra* section is further subdivided along largely Chinese lines, while the Tanjur is divided largely doctrinally, into categories such as Madhyamaka, Cittamātra (Yogācāra), Logic and Epistemology, and so on. The arrangement of materials in the Kanjur Tantra sections in particular differs among various Kanjurs, again for doctrinal and sectarian reasons.

Preservation

This sketch of the canons in Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan might lead to an impression of a greater uniformity than actually existed. It has been stressed above that Pali canons were characterized by a certain fluidity, and it was, in part, this fluidity that contributed to the perceived necessity for a series of Councils, during which (among other discussions) revisions to the theretofore accepted canon were debated. Councils, whether historical or notional, are moments of assertions of canonical authority. (It is doubtless for this reason that the 14th-cent. Tibetan scholar Bu ston and others report the idea of a council, simultaneous with the well-known First Council, at which the Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, Vinaya, and Abhidharma were recited [Lamotte, 1944–1980, II.939–942; Davidson, 1990, 308].) While earlier Councils in South and Southeast Asian Buddhism may be of dubious historicity, at least those of 1477/1478 in Chiang Mai and 1788/1789 in Bangkok (von Hinüber, 1996, § 199), as well as the two most recent Councils, the Fifth and the Sixth (respectively held in 1871 in Mandalay, and 1954–1956 in Rangoon), are certainly historical. The Fifth, under the sponsorship of King Mindon, and at which only Burmese monks were in attendance, was meant to approve the inscription of the text of the core of the *Tipiṭaka* (without commentaries) placed onto 729 stone stelae at the Kuthodaw Pagoda at the foot of Mandalay Hill; editorial work was initiated by Mindon in 1856, texts were copied onto palm leaf, and subsequently inscribed on stone during the period 1860–1869, and the Council was held in 1871. The Sixth was sponsored by the Burmese government, and the results were published as the Sixth Sāsana Council edition beginning in 1956; this edition has been broadly influential in the Theravāda world (an influence which continues with its wide circulation in print and electronically by the Vipassana Research Institute [http://www.tipitaka.org/]). In 1962 there began to appear a modern Burmese translation of the whole of the core texts, which remains incomplete (as of 2014 seven texts remain). The basic motivation for such projects in Burma was always the preservation of the texts from their predicted disappearance and the attendant demise of the teaching (the Sixth Council being held at the exact midpoint of the predicted 5,000- year life -span of the Buddhist teaching, i.e. 2,500 years after the Buddha's nirvāṇa). The Sixth Council was directly motivated by this belief, with the Sixth Council editions containing an introduction explicitly stating this.

Although efforts have been made to preserve the teachings against the predicted end of their circulation in this world (see below), no such Councils are recorded to have been held elsewhere in the Buddhist world. In contrast, what one encounters in East Asia and in Tibet is the compilation of, in the first place, catalogues of scriptures, and then, after the 11th century, a series of woodblock printed editions, the existence of which contributes to standardization and preservation. In China, the Tang-period catalogues, in the age of manuscripts, can be seen as

prescriptive, while after the 10th century, with the rise of printing, such catalogues become descriptive (Tokuno, 1990, 32). Earlier however, and alongside the existence of printed editions, *Dazangjing* and Kanjurs were produced by hand, and there were often considerable differences between copies, both in terms of organization and contents, not to mention the actual literal readings of the texts they contain. In China, a significant number of editions of *Dazangjing* were produced, while in early Japan the case may have been even more extreme. "[T]here was no single Buddhist canon in ancient Japan; each was created at a particular moment in a unique configuration to respond to the needs of the patron and the monastic community" (Lowe, 2014, 224). The term *issaikyō* (一切經), which refers literally to "the entirety of the *sūtra*s" and is treated as a synonym of *Dazangjing* (attested at least as early as the 5th cent. in a Dunhuang manuscript, S. 996), is to be understood in Nara-period Japan as "all the scriptures available," rather than a particular collection of texts (Lowe, 2014, 225). Although the *Kaiyuan* catalogue was the structural basis for such canons, the listing of texts in this catalogue (in its *Ruzang lu* [入藏錄]) was itself rewritten in Japan (Lowe, 2014, 231), an astonishing intervention in the inherited orthodoxy. It should not be overlooked that the copying activities referred to here took place in a political climate: in 7th–8th-century Japan,

> the decision to copy the canon came at a time when the patron needed to demonstrate newly gained power. Canon copying by royals from this early period, therefore, functioned within the broader Buddhist and non-Buddhist symbolic strategies of legitimation employed by the court at this time. (Lowe, 2014, 229)

While most Chinese canons were official projects, this was not always the case. There were both public and private canons, and their contents could differ: for instance, the Jiaxing (嘉興; 1598–1712) private edition contained more Chinese compositions than did the Tang official canon. Moreover, "it was not before the Sui dynasty that there was a 'Chinese manuscript canon' in a proper sense, even if the first manuscript copies of the entire canon produced by imperial order date to the Six Dynasties period," a fact which shows "the close relationship existing between the birth of the canon and the process of bringing Buddhism under the control of the state, in full swing during the 6th century, especially in North China" (Zacchetti, forthcoming).

A further contrast between the Tibetan and Chinese canons is that while the former in principle preserves only a single translation of a given text, Chinese canons generally attempt to include all known translations. Texts were certainly translated into Tibetan more than once, but as a result of this self-conscious policy, perhaps introduced by the 14th-century polymath Bu ston (Skilling, 1997b, 100n96), only a single version was included into a Kanjur or Tanjur in almost all cases. We know of the existence of alternate versions in Tibetan from references to their translation, from quotations, and in some cases from the adventitious preservation of such translations themselves, for instance in Dunhuang. A number of *sūtra*s appear to have been translated from Chinese before Indic versions were available, but it seems that after the Tibetans gained direct access to a text from India, they no longer were interested in the (re)translations from Chinese. In a number of cases, such translations were made from *sūtra*s actually composed in China (Li & Silk, forthcoming; and see below).

The case in China was quite different with respect to the preservation of multiple translated versions. Virtually all versions of a given text were preserved in principle (although catalogues suggest that much was lost as well). Careful comparison of multiple Chinese translations of the same text reveals the extent to which translators certainly closely studied the work of their predecessors, and utilized it to a greater extent than might at first be obvious. Even the work of the giants of Chinese Buddhist translations, Kumārajīva (334–413) and Xuanzang (玄奘; 602–664), reveals their profound debts to earlier translators (Harrison, 2008). Catalogues confirm that texts were, when recognized as variant translations of the same original, felt to correspond, being noted as "the same" (*tong* [同]). It is possible that the Chinese tolerance for multiple alternate versions is based on an approach to the source text somewhat different from that which held sway in Tibet. The Chinese may have sought the Buddha's message in as many forms as possible, while the Tibetans preferred to focus on an authoritative version, although it must be noted that the pattern applies not only to scripture, and to Vinaya (of which several distinct versions were translated in Chinese), but also to treatises. The Chinese canons commonly preserve multiple versions of such treatises, which is almost never the case in Tibet. Tibetan scholars, however, were perfectly aware of Indian textual fluidity, and took it into account in their translating and editing

efforts. We know that in the Indian sphere, multiple versions of scriptures could circulate at the same place and time, as demonstrated vividly by the case of the *Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra* found at Gilgit (Schopen, 2009). Tibetan scholars note how, in revising translations, they made use of Indian manuscripts which contained variant readings to those used by the original translators of the Tibetan version. They dealt with this variety by editing and revising, while the Chinese for the most part preserved separate versions, related though they might be. Tolerance for a certain flexibility of wording or even structure in texts does not, however, necessarily imply the total absence of concern with exact wording in every case or in every context. Stories in Japanese *setsuwa* (説話) or tale literature, for instance, emphasize the importance of letter-perfect recitation of the *Lotus Sūtra*, thus both promoting and assuming an invariant shape of "the" text, in casu Kumārajīva's translation in the form of the *textus receptus* current in medieval Japan, as illustrated by the story of Kusakabe no Saru (日下部猿) in the *Nihon Ryōiki* (日本靈異記; Watson, 2013, 38). At the same time, much of the apparent uniformity we do perceive, not only in Indic texts – for which we may have very few witnesses, all stemmatically related to each other – but also for example in Chinese text transmissions, is probably due precisely to our poverty of evidence; so much has been lost that the tradition appears to us to be more monolithic and stable than it actually was. That the tradition itself expresses concern with textual corruption, even from a relatively early period, is attested in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya's story of a monk reciting a verse incorrectly and nonsensically. His own preceptor rejecting the correction offered by the Buddha's direct disciple Ānanda, the monk continues to recite the meaningless verse, and, thoroughly disgusted, Ānanda deems it time to enter nirvāṇa (Brough, 1962, 45–48). This story also bears witness to the anxiety, already evident at this stage of the tradition, over the future loss and decay of the teachings. But variety, as noted above, need not originate in error; it is often an integral part of the textual tradition ab initio, this only magnified in the translation and transmission process.

Relatively early on in Chinese Buddhism, as a way of coming to terms with multiple versions of a single text, synoptic editions (*heben* [合本]) were prepared, through which Chinese exegetes tried to get close to the meaning of a text by comparing different translations (Zürcher, 1959, 99–100). There are also a number of examples of attempts in various regions of the Buddhist world to establish, in something approaching a scientific fashion, forms of texts which reveal an awareness of textual change, and the need for textual criticism. In fact, most canon projects require, explicitly or implicitly, a form of textual criticism, and some of the results of those processes have been recorded. One dramatic example is found in the notes of the 13th-century Korean editor Sugi (守其; Buswell, 2004), who collated the texts for the so-called Second Koryŏ edition in his *Koryŏguk sinjo taejang kyojŏng pyŏllok* (高麗國新雕大藏校正別錄; Supplementary Record of Collation Notes to the New Carving of the Great Canon of the Koryŏ Kingdom; K. 1402). In the course of his collation project Sugi frequently criticizes and corrects the authoritative *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, arguing for the establishment of texts on remarkably modern-sounding philological grounds. A somewhat different task was taken up by an 18th-century Mongol scholar, probably A lag sha Ngag dbang bstan dar (alias Bstan dar Lha ram pa; 1754-1840), who collated, in the first place, the Narthang Kanjur, comparing it with the editions of Urga, Cone, Derge, and Peking (Anonymous, 1982; the work is found at TBRC W00EGS1016292; see Damdinsuren, 1983).

As mentioned above, in another contrast to the intentionally sectarian organization of the Tibetan canons, from which non-Mūlasarvāstivāda material was in principle excluded, the *Dazangjing* was seen as a homogeneous collection, in that materials with demonstrably diverse sources, from a sectarian or other point of view – as for example the above-mentioned four collections of Āgamas – are nevertheless treated on even ground. When they are treated differentially, the basis for this is doctrinal, as demonstrated in the various *panjiao* (tenet classification [判教]) systems (in general, Mun, 2006).

The first to have presented such a system may have been the monk Daosheng (道生; 317–420), a disciple of the famous Kumārajīva (Hu, 2014, 70), but a number of systems competed over time; as the author of the most influential system, the Tiantai (天台) founder Zhiyi (智顗; 538–597), noted, there were three such systems in southern Chinese Buddhism, based on the chronological order of Buddha's preaching (the Three Periods [三時], Four Periods [四時], and Five Periods [五時]), while in the north there were seven systems (Hu, 2014, 71). The chronology of the Buddha's preaching is considered here to be of utmost significance, with priority placed on his last and final teaching. This contrasts with at least some Indian interpretations of the stock phrase introducing *sūtra*s, "at one time the Blessed One . . .": some commentaries suggest

that no specific indication of time is given because the exact time is not of importance, but clearly Chinese exegetes disagreed. Zhiyi himself in his *Fahua xuanyi* (法華玄義; T. 1716) arranges the Buddha's teaching into five phases:

1. Buddha's first preaching, the *Buddhāvataṃsaka-sūtra* for all disciples (3 weeks);
2. the *Āgama* for Hīnayāna generally (12 years);
3. the *Vaipulya* (*Fangdeng jing* [方等經]) for Mahāyāna common teaching (8 years);
4. the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* for Mahāyāna special teaching (22 years);
5. the *Lotus* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*s, for the perfect teaching of Mahāyāna (8 years; Hu, 2014, 82).

Different *panjiao* systems advocate different final and ultimate teachings, even while acknowledging the validity of all the Buddha's teachings. For Jizang (吉藏; 549–623), all Mahāyāna *sūtra*s display the path without ever the slightest difference (*Fahua xuan lun* [法華玄論]; T. 1720 [XXXIV] 378c14–15; and *Fahua yishu* [法華義疏]; T. 1721 [XXXIV] 518c16; Hu, 2014, 89). In contrast to this perspective, however, many believed that the scriptures could be arranged into hierarchies of importance.

Decanonization

De facto functional canons, as groupings in which some texts receive attention while others do not, are probably ubiquitous. But a more specific tendency is the generation of a self-conscious focus on a limited body of literature, a narrowing of attention which sometimes has extreme results. This process of focusing perforce excludes other materials, and while it need not, in some circumstances it can, be understood as "decanonization," namely, the logical opposite of canonization, with the difference that decanonization begins with an assumption of canonicity: otherwise, disregard of some work or text is simply benign neglect. Decanonization is a more violent and aggressive process.

We do not know how decanonization functioned in Indian Buddhism. What evidence we have suggests, for example, that Mahāyāna Buddhists, while vastly expanding the realm of the canonical with new scripture production, did not reject outright, or explicitly contradict, the existing body of scripture; to do so indeed would have constituted a rejection of Buddhism tout court. Rather, they both reinterpreted this material (through categories such as the above-mentioned "skillful means"), incorporating and reemphasizing elements (the central doctrine of emptiness, for instance, is a logical extension of pre-Mahāyāna ideas), and otherwise simply disregarding or ignoring some things. Mahāyānists did, however, have to face the rejection of their own textual productions by non-Mahāyānists, and not only early on. The Pali anthology *Sārasaṅgaha*, which may belong to the 13th or 14th century (von Hinüber, 1996, § 385), rejects Mahāyāna *sūtra*s and *tantra*s, even by name, as "not the word of the buddha," (*abuddhavacana*; Sasaki, 1992, 46,6–11), demonstrating thereby a familiarity with this literature in some detail. Mahāyāna texts themselves frequently report their own rejection (as a class), as we see for instance in the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* (VII.22–23), which reports the accusation that "[t]his is not the word of the Buddha; this has been said by Māra" (Tola & Dragonetti, 1996, 234–236; and elsewhere for other examples from a wide variety of sources). Theravāda sources, at least as far back as the *Samantapāsādikā* commentary on the Vinaya (Sp iv.742–743), criticize what they call the *Vedaḷapiṭaka* or *Vedallapiṭaka*, again characterized as not the word of the Buddha (*abuddhavacana*), this being generally understood also to be a reference to Mahāyāna teachings (Skilling, 2013b, 89, with notes). At least one polemical context of this is clear, in that the Mahāvihārins deploy this criticism against their rivals the Abhayagiri monks for using texts of the *vetullavāda* (extensive doctrine). The role of political power here is clear:

> Later triumphalist chronicles [such as the 14th-cent. Singhalese *Nikāyasaṃgrahawa*] condemn with increasing vehemence the heresy of these unacceptable texts, and tell of repeated book-burnings by pro-Mahāvihārin kings. (Collins, 1990, 98)

A different type of decanonization can be seen in the case of the *Mahāvastu*, a portion of the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda Vinaya. Like other such texts, it is full of stories, and comes, rather late, to be called an *avadāna*, a collection of story literature, erasing its identity as a Vinaya text (Tournier, 2012, 92–93).

Specific texts, as well as classes of texts, can be explicitly rejected as well, sometimes with great energy. In the late 8th century, the monk Kaimyō (戒明) brought to Japan the ten-fascicule *Śūraṃgamasūtra* (*Da foding jing* [大佛頂經], from Chn. Great Scripture on the Buddha's Crown), which a group of monks demanded be burnt because they rejected its authenticity, this taking place in the context of a doctrinal debate between Sanron (三論) and Hossō (法相) school monks over

emptiness (Lowe, 2014, 243–244). Sometimes the opposition is not quite so fierce. The *Renwang boruo boluomi jing* (仁王般若波羅蜜經; Perfection of Wisdom Scripture for Humane Kings; T. 245) is of great importance in East Asia, but that did not prevent Emperor Wu of the Liang (梁武帝; 464–549) from declaring that "it is already widely recognized as an apocryphal *sūtra* (*yijing* [疑經]), so I will set it aside and not discuss it" (T. 2145 [LV] 54b19–20; Swanson, 1998, 251; Orzech, 1998, 75). Just what should be accepted remained a contentious issue into modern times, as demonstrated by debates at the dawn of the 20th century in Japan over the status of the Mahāyāna as the teaching of the Buddha (*Daijō hibussetsuron* [大乘非佛說論]; Sueki, 2005). These discussions, however, are at least as old as the early Mahāyāna, as discussed above, and were theorized already by Indian scholastics.

Although not a rejection of scripture as such, much less one of specific scriptures in the fashion just described, a different approach to a normative vision of canon can be noticed among Indian Buddhist philosophers, particularly Dharmakīrti, albeit in an abstract, theoretical mode.

> [W]hereas early Yogācāra views scripture as a means of proof working additionally but co-equally to perception and inference, the epistemologists deny scripture any probative value, at least as far as the empirical sphere is concerned. (Eltschinger, 2014, 198)

Before the 6th century CE, at least ideally arguments were offered on the dual bases of reasoning (classified most compactly as perception and inference, *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*) and scriptural authority, *yukti* and *āgama*, respectively. However, appeals to the authority of Buddhist scripture avail only if one's opponent is equally a Buddhist, accepting the authority of such scripture. It is for this reason – namely that their opponents are non-Mahāyāna Buddhists – that in principle many Mahāyāna treatises rely for their proof texts on Āgamas, rather than Mahāyāna *sūtra*s, and it is possible to speculate about the imagined opponent of a certain argument in part on the basis of the sort of evidence deployed on its behalf. (However, it is also a pattern that some argumentation begins with reference to non-Mahāyāna sources, but ends with Mahāyāna *sūtra*s. "[I]n [Candrakīrti's] *Prasannapadā* . . . chapters . . . usually begin with Nikāya scriptural sources justifying the counterargument at the beginning, which are generally contrasted with the Mahāyāna *sūtra* passages marking a triumphant end. Thus, this pattern structurally signifies the supersession of Nikāya Buddhist scriptures by their Mahāyāna counterparts" [Li, 2012, 185].) Dharmakīrti goes further by engaging not with fellow Buddhists but with outsiders. For him, moreover, as a partisan of reason, authority cannot come even from authoritative persons (see above), and thus scripture in itself can only be reliable with regard to the supersensible realm. Once scripture is proved reliable in realms in which reason applies (through direct perception and inference), then and only then are we authorized to accept its claims about domains which remain beyond our ken. As a Buddhist, Dharmakīrti cannot explicitly reject the word of the Buddha, but he goes very far along the path toward so doing (Eltschinger, 2014, 201). This stance, moreover, finds some sanction in considerably older sources, such as a verse in the *Buddhacarita* of the 2nd-century CE poet Aśvaghoṣa, in which the Buddha is made to say:

> Clever people should accept what I say after putting it to the test, just as they accept gold after testing it by melting it, scratching it and scraping it on whetstone. They should not believe what I say out of deference to me. (*Buddhacarita* 25.45, rephrased by Śāntarakṣita in his 8th-cent. *Tattvasaṃgraha* [Shastri, 1981–1982, 1063,18]; trans. Hayes, 1984, 664; Eltschinger, 2014, 215)

Whether through direct appeals to the Buddha's criteria or not, many in positions of power throughout Buddhist history rejected materials some others were willing to accept as scripture. Some control over acceptable scripture involves what lawyers might call "prior restraint." During the reign of King Khri gtsug lde btsan (Ral pa can; r. 815–838), by royal edict the Tibetan court forbade translation of any non-Mūlasarvāstivāda Śrāvakayāna texts, saying "it was prescribed that the Hīnayānistic Scripture other than that acknowledged by the Mūlasarvāstivādins and the secret charms [*dhāraṇī*] were not to be translated" (Obermiller, 1932, II.197, modified; Vogel, 1985, 109–110; Szerb, 1990, 46.6–9, and n8). In spite of this sectarian restriction, Tibetan Kanjurs contain 13 Theravāda texts, with a few further examples found as well in the Tanjur (Skilling, 1993). In the commentary on the *Mahāvyutpatti*, the bilingual glossary compiled to assist in the systematization of translations from Sanskrit, the *Sgra sbyor bam po gnyis pa* (On Word-Compounds in Two Volumes), written during the reign of King Sad na legs (c. 800–815 CE), the translation of tantric works was prohibited without special permission: "[H]enceforth with regard to

*dhāraṇī*s, mantras and tantras, unless permission for translation is given, tantras and mantra expressions are not permitted to be collected and translated" (Ishikawa, 1990, 4; Snellgrove, 1987, 443). Sometimes the perceived risk is stated explicitly: in the Ordinance (*bka' shog*) of King Ye shes 'od of approximately 985 CE, the ruler says that the false doctrine (*chos log*) of the Rdzogs chen, identified by its opponents with the tradition of the Chinese Chan monk Hva shang (< Chn. *heshang* [和尚], "monk," properly named Moheyan [摩訶衍], Mahāyāna) rejected at the so-called Bsam yas debates in the 8th century, was able to flourish in Tibet due to the deterioration of rule of law (*rgyal po'i khrims*; Karmay, 1980, 156). This statement demonstrates a conscious awareness of the role of authority and power in enforcing canonicity.

Choosing to ignore some texts is one thing. Decanonization proper concerns not the mere rejection of certain texts but their wholesale refusal. One example can be seen in the reception accorded "Old Tantras" of the Rnying ma in Tibet (see below), and again from the official prohibition against publication of a modern Burmese translation of the *Lotus Sūtra* (from Kern's English; personal communication from U Bo Kay, Pagan, 1982). This differs importantly from the focus seen, for instance, in some East Asian traditions, which direct the bulk of their attention to an attenuated body of literature. Pure Land traditions such as the Japanese Jōdoshin shū (淨土眞宗) concentrate on the so-called Pure Land Triple *Sūtra*, the Larger and Smaller *Sukhāvatīvyūha sūtra*s along with the *Guan Wuliangshou jing* (觀無量壽經; T. 365), and a few other works. But as the magnum opus of Shinran, his *Kyōgyōshinshō* (教行信證; more fully *Kenjōdo Shinjitsu Kyōgyōshō Monrui* [顯淨土眞實教行證文類]; T. 2646), replete with extensive scriptural quotations, so dramatically demonstrates, at least the masters of the tradition in no way ignored other literature. Moreover, even a rhetoric of rejection can be deceptive.

An often cited "catch phrase" of Chan Buddhism claims that it is a tradition of "A separate transmission outside the teachings; not dependent on words, it directly points to the human mind, enabling one to see one's nature and become a buddha" (教外別傳 不立文字 直指人心 見性成佛). The first line of this verse is probably earliest found in a text of 952 (in the *Zutang ji* [祖堂集; Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall]; Foulk, 1999), and only later attributed to the putative founder of Chinese Chan, Bodhidharma. What is most important, however, is that there is a historical context for this apparent rejection of scripture, or seeming radical decanonization, namely, that the claim occurs in a context of contention for court patronage, a battle the Chan lineage eventually would win. The teachings (*jiao* [教]) rejected here refer to the Tiantai lineage, and its tradition of scriptural exegesis. The Chan claim is that by creating buddhas it provides direct access to awakening and buddhahood, whereas its opponents the Tiantai offer no more than secondary and textually mediated access. However, when we recall the considerable attention given texts such as the *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* by Chan scholars, and their own massive textual production (mocked already in the 13th cent. within the tradition through a homophonous play on *bu li wenzi* [不立文字, "not dependent on words"], reading it as 不離文字, "never separated from words"; Schlütter, 2004, 181–182), we see this famous expression of "decanonization" in a different light. The Chan tradition does not, even theoretically, reject scripture or teachings. Rather, it argues for the greater legitimacy of its own transmissions, and thus its greater qualification for state patronage and support (see Foulk, 1999, 221).

Clear examples of true decanonization may be seen in Japan, often if not always in highly polemical contexts. For example, Hōnen's (法然; 1133–1212) Pure Land followers claimed that those who recite the *Lotus Sūtra* would fall into hell (Stone, 2013, 116). Although this example focuses on the rejection of the *Lotus Sūtra*, it is the partisans of this very *sūtra* who would go the furthest. For Nichiren (日蓮; 1222–1282), it is only the *Lotus Sūtra*, and especially its chapter 16, which conveys the essence of the Buddha's awakening. But Nichiren went further still. For him, the text is so special that its very title consolidates its power, this title to be recited in the form *namu myōhō rengekyō* (南無妙法蓮華經), "Hail to the Wonderful *Lotus Sūtra*!" Nichiren, however, did not innovate this approach: a story of the 12th century tells of a Chinese Sui dynasty monk taught to recite only the *Lotus Sūtra*'s title, and while it was certainly not an exclusive practice, the oldest Japanese source for *namu myōhō rengekyō* dates to the late 9th century (Stone, 1998, 131–132). Moreover, Nichiren did not quite reject all other literature, and in fact explicitly accepted as an authority not only the Triple *Lotus Sūtra* (*Fahua sanbu jing* [法華三部經]; Jpn. *Hokke sambukyō*, namely, the *Lotus* along with two other texts, which precede and follow it as a triad: *Wuliangyi jing* [無量義經; Innumerable Meanings *Sūtra*; T. 276] and the *Puxian jing* [普賢經; *Sūtra* of [Meditation on] Samantabhadra; T. 277]), but also the commentaries of the Tiantai founder

Zhiyi (智顗; 538–597), the exegesis of Zhanran (湛然; 711–782), and the works of the Japanese Tendai founder Saichō (最澄; 767–822; Dolce, 1998, 235). Still, for Nichiren, a single utterance of the title of the text itself, the *daimoku* (題目), was equivalent to reciting the entire *sūtra* (Stone, 1998, 138). As he wrote,

> The five characters *Myō hō ren ge kyō* . . . are the essence of the eight volumes of the *sūtra*. Furthermore, they are the essence of the whole canon (*issaikyō*). They are the correct Law [that stands] above all buddhas and bodhisattvas. . . ." (*Hōonshō* [報恩抄], Teihon 1241, in Dolce, 1998, 240)

Nichiren's argument for the priority of the title itself is that since in editions of the *sūtra* the title is written before the opening phrase of the scripture itself, "Thus I have heard," it must be even more important, the very pith of the entire teaching.

The focus on the *daimoku* highlights another interesting and wide-spread phenomenon, namely the retention in memory, or reading and recitation, of texts which one does not necessarily understand. In fact, generally speaking, in most places and times in Buddhist history, most texts have probably not been "understood" by most who have used them. Transmission and understanding need not go hand-in-hand. A particularly interesting example is found in Tibet with the institution of the *lung*, "reading transmission." Receiving a *lung* is often a prerequisite for studying and debating the contents of a text. Sometimes such a teaching transmission is given before, other times after, the teaching of the text.

> It is clear from the importance placed on this practice that, written or oral, a text is not words or meaning alone. Texts also include sound, power, and blessings . . . During the transmission of *lung* the text is read so rapidly that conceptual grasp of it is minimal; this is a time when the spoken word must be heard, not necessarily understood. (Klein, 1994, 293)

In this practice,

> an audience receives the transmission just by hearing it. A text becomes authoritative in the act of its being recited out loud by an authorized teacher, who has himself received the transmission from his teachers and so on.

Although G. Dreyfus somewhat downplays the role of the *lung* in Dge lugs scholasticism, he emphasizes that it is more important for the Rnying ma tradition (Dreyfus, 2003, 155–156). The example of the *lung* highlights the central role of language.

Language

In receiving and transmitting sacred texts, any community, whether it "understands" a text or not, has the option of retaining the text in the language in which it is received, or of translating it into their own. Even in early India this was an issue, with the tradition deciding that local adaptation was preferable. As a result, *buddhavacana* was transmitted in a variety of linguistic forms. The original form of any teaching must, of course, have been directly comprehensible to its audience. At some point, however, and in some places, different decisions were made. Therefore, although Pali is an "artificial language," in the sense that it does not represent an actually spoken dialect of a particular time and place, being an amalgam of various sources, it is nevertheless a form of Middle Indic. However, the Pali literature transmitted to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia entered a domain which was, linguistically speaking, utterly foreign (in the case of mainland Southeast Asia, even the language family was different, Indo-European in contrast to Austroasiatic and Tibeto-Burman, to which belong Pyu and Burmese). The texts, however, were not translated into local languages as such, but rather retained in the form in which they were received (although interlinear or interphrasal translations [*nissaya*] and vernacular retellings of Pali sources did exist since at least the 15th cent., if not already in the 13th). Pali in Southeast Asia then takes the form of a "Church Language" (Nattier, 1990) and a prestige medium of expression. (In Sri Lanka, the process, at least according to tradition, also worked in reverse: commentaries composed in the local Sinhala language – which themselves were originally in Pali – were translated into Pali, and retained and transmitted only in the latter form.) Direct access to core Buddhist literature requires knowledge of Pali (although, as e.g. in contemporary Thailand, the pronunciation of the language may be highly localized), or one may approach the literature through vernacular retellings – of Buddha biographies, Vinaya texts, cosmologies, chronicles, and much more –through oral renditions in the context of preaching, but also through mural paintings (with captions), dramatic performances of Buddhist literature, puppet plays, and so on.

A somewhat different model is found in Khotan, in Central Asia. According to the famous statement from the scripture anthology called the *Book of Zambasta*,

> the Khotanese do not value the Law [i.e. the Buddhist teachings] at all in Khotanese. They understand it badly in Indian. In Khotanese it does not seem to them to be the Law. For the Chinese the Law is in Chinese. . . . To the Khotanese that seems to be the Law whose meaning they do not understand at all. (Emmerick, 1968, 343–345; VI.4)

This does not mean, however, that Khotanese translations were not produced, but at least to the author(s) of the *Book of Zambasta*, these were not as respectable as texts in Indic form which, however, the Khotanese could not well understand. In contrast, as this passage states, when Buddhist texts were transmitted to China, they were translated into a form of written Chinese (often accompanied, it is clear, by oral explanation), rather than being retained in their Indic form, and the same phenomenon of translation took place in Tibet. However, once Buddhist texts were translated into Chinese, they were retained in this form as the texts were subsequently transmitted throughout East Asia. The Chinese shape of the texts thus became a second form of Church Language in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, despite the fact that the local languages of these regions differ dramatically from Chinese. While Buddhist texts were also translated into Mongolian and Manchu, in fact these translations were carried out for political reasons, and despite the existence of Kanjurs in Mongol and Manchu, Buddhist texts were generally accessed in their, respectively, Tibetan and Chinese forms, and at least Mongol authors as a rule wrote in Tibetan as well. In the Tangut Kingdom, texts apparently circulated both in Chinese and in Tangut, a phenomenon of bilingualism (or in some cases multilingualism) we also see elsewhere.

Despite these general patterns, even in contexts in which translation is otherwise the rule, some materials were judged inherently incapable of translation. In the Chinese case in particular, this includes some significant vocabulary, including as common examples *buddha* (Chinese *fo* [佛], a loan word probably from Gandhari, through the form **but*/*bud*), *nirvāṇa* (*niepan* [涅槃] or *niehuan* [泥洹]), and *bhikṣu* (*biqiu* [比丘]), words which quickly became entirely absorbed into Chinese. Modern translators into Western languages have made similar choices: in English, for instance, we retain terminology such as buddha, nirvana (naturalized without diacritical marks), and so on (Jackson, 1982). In addition to the case of specific words, there is the matter of "magical formulae," *dhāraṇī*. These texts are in fact usually not understandable even in their original Indic form, at least in a normal linguistic sense; hence, it would be impossible to "translate" them as such: it is only and precisely their sound which is powerful. They were, moreover, not merely transliterated into Chinese script; at least in some cases in later Chinese imperial history, the importance of the proper pronunciation of the transcribed sounds was acknowledged, and in light of an awareness in shifts in the pronunciation of Chinese characters, the *dhāraṇī*s were rewritten in characters which would allow the proper pronunciation of the intended sounds.

When Sri Lankan lay followers recite *paritta* or protection texts, they do not, as a rule, understand the Pali they recite. When Japanese Pure Land Buddhists recite the Smaller Pure Land *Sūtra* (*Amidakyō* [阿彌陀經]), they do so in the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese translation; but since Japanese and Chinese are entirely different languages, those who recite the text cannot, with very few exceptions, understand the text they are reciting either (comp. Rambelli, 2007, 88). A further step in this process is seen in modern Buddhism, in which, for example, American followers, reading a romanized text, recite the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese translation of an Indic text. This process, however, is not new. The Dunhuang manuscripts contain a number of examples, at least as old as the 8th century, of texts written in the Chinese language, but in Tibetan script, evidently for the use of those who wished to recite texts in Chinese but who, while able to read the Tibetan script, could not read Chinese characters (Thomas & Clauson, 1927). Chinese scripture is also found in Brahmi script (Emmerick & Pulleyblank, 1993). In Japan from at least the 17th century, we have transcriptions of *sūtra*s in a combination of the phonetic *katakana* script and characters, the latter however chosen entirely for the sound value in order to serve as bases for recitation (Watanabe, 2015, 328–330). Use of such objects, however, requires some familiarity with writing, even if not an ability to read Chinese as such. A further step is the so-called blind *sūtra* (*mekurakyō* [盲經], which refers not to a visual disability but to illiteracy), in which the entire text of a scripture is represented not in Chinese characters or Japanese syllabary but rather in rebus form. The first element of the title of the so-called *Heart Sūtra*, *mahā*

in Sanskrit, is written 摩訶 in Chinese, pronounced *maka* in Japanese. This is represented by an image of an upside-down rice kettle, *kama*, inverted *maka*. Such a presentation serves as an aide-mémoire; one cannot read it as such, but it serves as a reminder of the sounds one is expected to produce in recitation. An early example of such a "blind *sūtra*" dates from the beginning of the 18th century (Watanabe, 2012; 2015, 331–334).

It is a very small step from individually reciting a text one does not understand to doing other things with the text that do not involve reading comprehension at all. In Tibetan areas, mass recitations of the Kanjur are undertaken, in which the entire collection is voiced, but individuals read, out loud, different texts simultaneously: the result is a cacophony. In a Sherpa community in Nepal, an abbot averred that the reason for such mass recitations, which are common, include "for rain, for the crops, for less sickness and misfortune, for peace in the villages and so that in the future, we will all be like the Buddha" (Childs, 2005, 48n3, and passim). One Japanese parallel to this mass recitation might be the *ichinichi issaikyō* (一日一切經), the group copying of the entire Buddhist canon of over 5,000 volumes in a single day (O'Neal, 2012, 122). A perhaps even closer Japanese parallel to the Tibetan mass recitation of the Kanjur is the very striking *tendokue* (轉讀會), during which the entire Chinese canon, or a section thereof (such as the Larger Perfection of Wisdom *Sūtra*), in woodblock-printed accordion-fold booklets, is "read through" by recitation of a few lines from the beginning, middle, and end of each fascicule, after which each accordion book is dramatically fanned through the air to expose all of its pages. Much more can be done with texts that does not involve reading them at all, one aspect of which has to do with their production.

In South Asia, Buddhist texts are normally written on palm leaves or birch bark and later on paper, but a variety of other surfaces have been used. Most writing was probably intended in the first case to present a readable text, but throughout the Buddhist world we find examples of many other goals as well. The "tamarind-seed" script used to write richly decorated Burmese and Mon *kammavācā* manuscripts, containing texts recited in formal acts of the saṅgha (*saṅghakamma*), clearly privileges scriptural ornamentation and the adornment of text-as-object over readability. (for examples, see the beautifully illustrated Singer, 1993). *Sūtra*s were, of course, also illustrated with manuscripts adorned with painted images and woodblock prints furnished with elaborate frontispieces. In Japan a number of highly elaborated variants were developed, such as the *Kinji hōtō mandara* (金字寶塔曼荼羅), in which text is written in gold in the shape of a pagoda, the *Ichiji butsu Hokekyō* (一字佛法華經), in which each character of the *Lotus Sūtra* is accompanied by a Buddha, or the *Ichiji rendai Hokekyō* (一字蓮台法華經), in which each character of the *Lotus Sūtra* sits upon its own lotus pedestal (O'Neal, 2012).

Much has been made of the hypothesis that one key characteristic of Mahāyāna Buddhism in its earlier Indian phases was its "cult of the book," in which worship of physical books and the places in which they were enshrined replaced an earlier focus on stūpa worship (Schopen, 1975; Drewes, 2007; Schopen, 2010). While the hypothesis in its strong form seems to go too far, Buddhist traditions in general do pay very special attention to books as physical objects, as just mentioned with respect to their preparation. After their production, they may be placed on altars, in special kinds of bookcases, within stūpas, and into images. Ritual treatment of the canon has a long history in Tibet. For example, already in 797, the emperor Mu ne btsan po "instituted the ritual worship of the Tripiṭaka at Bsam yas," the first Buddhist temple in Tibet (Skilling, 1997b, 90). The ritual placement of Kanjurs on altars is also a common feature of Tibetan monastery main halls. The display of books need not be merely static, however. While it is not known just how old revolving bookcases are, they were known in China by the 9th century (an inscription of 823 mentions *zhuanlun jingzang* [轉輪經藏], "revolving *sūtra* storehouse"; Goodrich, 1942, 133), although legendarily they go back to the mid-5th century (Goodrich, 1942, 132). The principle of their use is the same as what we find in Tibet, where so-called prayer wheels are, of course, quite famous, and may have been inspired by the Chinese model. Inside these sometimes very large, but more often handheld, devices are placed texts, usually but not always *dhāraṇī*s. The revolution of the device "substitutes" for recitation of the texts contained therein. Texts are also placed within images as part of their consecration, these objects then sometimes being explicitly considered a type of relic, not of the body of the Buddha or as a relic of use but as a relic of the dharma itself (Skt. *dharmaśarīra*; Bentor, 1995; 2003; and the striking visual documentation in 1994).

Of course, the above should not be understood to mean that Buddhists do not ever read their texts, or do not care what is written within them. They do, both in detail and collectively.

Focused Canons or Canons within Canons

A counterpart of the exclusive focus on a small body of material, such as we see in Nichiren's exclusive focus on the *Lotus Sūtra*, is the attempt to collect a larger but still limited "functional canon," albeit in a quasi self-conscious fashion. While it is clear that "canon" is an entirely relative, rather than an absolute, concept, it is still the case that, alongside the functional canons discussed above, we find numerous more formal attempts in Buddhist history to create either what were intended to be, or might look to us like, "mini canons," subsets, as it were, of materials which were imputed special status, what might be called, "canon with the canon," an expression used, for instance, by Biblical scholars. Such formations do not necessarily imply that their creators rejected other works, much less all other works, but only that, perhaps for limited, circumstantial reasons, they felt it important to create a smaller body of work set apart, to which they paid special attention. One example of this sort of project may be the assembly of anthologies of passages, such as is found in Sanskrit with the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, while in Pali we have at least one text which assembles a small collection of whole (although compared to Mahāyāna scriptures, quite short) texts, the *Suttasaṅgaha*. It is not possible to judge whether or in what sense such anthologies are attempts at mini-canonization, but other examples are clearer. It is possible that the *Mahāratnakūṭa* collection is one such case.

This grouping of 49 texts is extant as a unit only in Chinese (T. 310) and Tibetan (D 45–81/P 760), and despite the emic claim that its Chinese form represents a rendering of an Indian prototype (Pedersen, 1980, 60), it seems most likely that it was organized (finalized in 713) by its editor, Bodhiruci (?–727), although perhaps on the basis of some preexisting notion of affinity so far unknown. A number of factors suggest the collection as a Chinese creation, including the absence of any trace of the grouping of the texts in any known Indian source, and the fact that the Tibetan collection is based on that found in the Chinese *Dazangjing*, as well as the inclusion of two versions of the same text, the *Garbhāvakrāntisūtra* (Kritzer, 2014; T. 310 [13, 14]), a *sūtra* which exists in the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya's *Kṣudrakavastu* as well. It is very suggestive that the range of texts assembled together gives the impression of being a survey of influential earlier Mahāyāna works, including the so-called *Kāśyapaparivarta* (more properly the *Ratnakūṭasūtra*), the obvious core of the collection; the Larger *Sukhāvatīvyūha*; the *Akṣobhyatathāgatavyūha*; the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka*; and the *Rāṣṭrapālaparipṛcchā*, among others. That several texts are dedicated to Maitreya and a number involve strong female characters (including the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda*) is very suggestive in view of the fact that, although finished only some years after her downfall, the bulk of the collection was edited and translated during the reign of the Empress Wu Zetian (武則天), the Zhou (周; 690–705) interregnum in the Tang, and it is more than plausible that a number of texts in the collection were selected for their possible associations with strong women and Maitreyan millenarianism, important tropes during the Zhou.

Other examples of "mini canon" include the *navadharma* or *navagrantha*, the Nine Dharmas of Nepalese Buddhism, a group of nine texts whose preservation is due to their ceremonial rather than any doctrinal importance in Nepal. This collection, whose fame in the West is out of proportion to its historical significance, can thus be considered a "mini canon" defined by ritual use in *maṇḍala*s and in recitations. The texts included in this category were originally the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, *Pañcarakṣā*, *Nāmasaṅgīti*, *Gaṇḍavyūha*, *Daśabhūmika*, *Samādhirāja*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Lalitavistara*, and *Laṅkāvatāra*, but at some point the *Pañcarakṣā* and *Nāmasaṅgīti* were replaced by the *Suvarṇabhāsottama* and *Tathāgataguhya.* The last named was in its turn at some point confused with a similarly titled tantric text, the *Guhyasamāja*, this process resulting in three distinct sets of the Nine Dharmas (Skilling, 2013a, 229; Tuladhar-Douglas, 2003; 2006, 130–133). It is thanks to the ritual status of these texts in Nepal that their Sanskrit manuscripts were regularly copied, making possible their preservation until today.

De facto "mini canons" can be formed in any number of other ways as well. For example, we are fairly sure that the texts translated into Chinese, at least in earlier periods, arrived in China in an entirely unsystematic fashion. While not everything that arrived in China in manuscript or in the memory of monks made its way into Chinese translations, it was upon the basis of available materials that doctrinal systems were constructed in China. Thus, to take a very early example, the relatively limited translation output of the first translator on Chinese soil, An Shigao (安世高; late 2nd cent.), was taken to form a hermeneutical continuum (Zacchetti, forthcoming). We are, in fact, particularly poorly apprised about the supply side of the process through which Buddhist

literature was brought to China. That we simply do not know what shape and content Buddhist literature had in India and Central Asia makes informed discussion of the process of adoption and adaptation in China next to impossible. For example, An Shigao prepared *Ekottarikāgama* and *Samyuktāgama* anthologies (Harrison, 1997; 2002, 24–25). While it is not unlikely that these are translations of existing anthologies, they might also represent selections made in China; in light of our ignorance of the source materials available to Chinese translators, we cannot determine the true situation.

Another factor to consider in this regard is the question how readers conceptualized the locations of texts they knew or used. Did they think of the *Dhammacakkappavattanasutta* (Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Teaching, the putative first sermon of the Buddha) as part of the *Saṃyuttanikāya*, or the Larger *Sukhāvatīvyūhasūtra* as belonging to the Mahāratnakūṭa collection? We usually do not know how the placement of texts within collections was understood, although manuscript evidence suggests that in circulation texts were often grouped together entirely differently from the way in which they are arranged in formal canons. This fact is brought to the fore by the differences we confront when examining the diverse texts gathered together in single manuscripts. An example is the so-called "Mahāyāna *Sūtra* Manuscript" in the Schøyen collection (Braarvig, 2000, 63) which contained (in addition to other materials now lost) the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanādanirdeśa*, *Pravāraṇāsūtra*, *Sarvadharmāpravṛttinirdeśa*, and *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodanāsūtra*, or the manuscript from the same collection which contains together the *Vajracchedikā* and *Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra* (Harrison & Watanabe, 2006, 95), both displaying conjunctions of texts unknown to canonical collections. Another example is the partially preserved Sanskrit *sūtra* collection which contains 20 texts (how many more were in the complete manuscript is unknown; Vinītā, 2010; Silk, 2013). Some of these texts were previously unknown, or are excerpted versions of known texts, but even when known, their arrangement is new. Another example of such an arrangement, this time however rather better known, is the collection of six *sūtra*s called *ṣaṭsūtraka* that appear to have been very popular at least in Central Asia. This collection contains the *Daśottara*, *Arthavistara*, *Saṅgīti*, *Catuṣpariṣat*, *Mahāvadāna*, and *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra*s, a grouping which "appears to be based on a balanced and deliberate arrangement" (Hartmann, 2014, 144). While it may be, on the whole, better to think of the known arrangements found in canonical collections as to some extent random (albeit perhaps indeed intentional and purposive) preservations of one type than as normative, instances such as the *ṣaṭsūtraka* collection appear to serve as counter examples.

All collections start out as local, and all collections are, typologically, anthologies by nature. Therefore, it should not be surprising that what we actually encounter in specific times and places is a great variety of such combinations of sources. In most of the cases noted here, the ways in which the *sūtra*s are placed together are uninstanced elsewhere. Although limited in extent, these examples suggest that the actual organization of texts was much more flexible and variable than the ordered presentations in canonical corpora would suggest.

What independent evidence we do have suggests that our picture of the scope of premodern Buddhist literature as a whole is fragmentary, perhaps radically so. A series of discoveries over the past century and a half, including the Sanskrit manuscripts found in Gilgit, in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, the recently discovered Gandhari manuscripts from Afghanistan and Pakistan, Sanskrit manuscripts from the Silk Road and those from Tibetan collections (Harrison & Hartmann, 2014), Chinese manuscripts from the Nanatsudera (七寺) in Nagoya, Japan, and other Japanese temple archives, the multilingual treasures from the Dunhuang caves, and much, much more, give us some vibrant hints as to how much has been lost, usually without our knowing even that it once existed.

Meanings of Canon

The mere existence of Buddhist texts and even of canonical collections does not necessarily signal an interest in the corpus in itself. The case of the Manchu canon is illustrative. In this collection, the *sūtra*s were translated from Chinese, the Vinaya from Tibetan. The work was ordered by the Qianlong emperor in 1772, completed around 1790, and printed by 1794. However,

> [t]here is no evidence that Buddhism was part of the Manchu religious identity before their takeover of China, and it did not play a privileged role among them in the centuries that followed it. The translation of the Buddhist canon into Manchu was one of the many imperial ges-

> tures, both helpful and commanding, by which Buddhism was co-opted into Manchu rule. (Bingenheimer, 2012/2013, 206)

Most canon projects were probably not carried out for such blatantly and baldly political ends. Such projects often aimed at multiple goals, as described above. One of those goals was the preservation of the Buddha's liberative teaching, securing it against both loss and distortion.

One prominent purpose of preservation is connected with the ideology of the decline of the teaching (Chn. *mofa*; Jpn. *mappō* [末法]). In light of the perception, present in virtually every age, that times were difficult and getting worse, it was felt important to preserve the Dharma against its future disappearance. This led not only to copying and publication through printing, but more permanently to projects such as the inscription of scriptural corpora in stone in Chinese caves and mountainsides (Ledderose, 2005) or the ritual preservation, in Japan, primarily from the early 11th through the 12th century, of *sūtra*s against the future apocalypse. Texts were placed into stūpa-shaped containers and interred. (A subset of this practice is the preparation of *gakyōzuka* [瓦經塚], roof-tile *sūtra* mounds; the inscribed roof tiles were "permanent," and therefore could remain until the coming of the next buddha, Maitreya [Muraki, 2002–2003]. In contrast, according to Theravāda ideas, all texts *must* disappear before the next buddha, Metteya, can appear.) In apparent contrast to the practice at at least some sites in China, at which complete canons were inscribed, in Japan not all *sūtra*s received such treatment, but the choice was not random. The most common text treated in this manner was no doubt the *Lotus Sūtra*, often interred together with the *Suvarṇabhāsottama* and the Scripture of Benevolent Kings. Occasionally, burials are found with the three Pure Land *sūtra*s, or the three Maitreya *sūtra*s (T. 452, 453, 456). The choice of the *Suvarṇabhāsottama* and the Scripture of Benevolent Kings was motivated by their close relation to the ideology of Buddhist support for the state, although somewhat later the main purpose of the practice shifted from the preservation of the teaching against the future advent of Maitreya to the production of merit toward rebirth in the paradise of Maitreya or Amitābha (Moerman, 2010). The Tibetan practice of *gter ma*, "treasure [texts]," is also palpably related to protection of the Dharma from difficult times. Such Tibetan practices are foreshadowed by the mention in the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhisūtra* of the practice of the writing of copies of a text and placing it in a sealed casket, which is then hidden in a stūpa against the future destruction of the dharma (Mayer, 1996, 76–77), and by the *Sarvapuṇyasamuccayasamādhisūtra* (D 134/P 802; also known as the *Nārāyaṇaparipṛcchā*), which speaks of "treasures of the dharma . . . deposited in the interiors of mountains, caves and trees for bodhisattvas and mahāsattvas wanting the dharma, and endless dharma-teachings in book-form come into their hands," quoted in this regard for instance by the contemporary Rnying ma master Dudjom Rinpoche (1991, 743, 747, 928; Harrison, 2003, 125). In the *Pratyutpanna* the Buddha is the originator of the treasure teaching, but in the contemporary Rnying ma system it is Padmasambhava, or Samantabhadra with Padmasambhava as the medium of transmission of his teachings (Mayer, 1996, 79). The practice of *gter ma* differs from the burial of scriptures in East Asia, however, in that the latter are intended for a future aeon (*kalpa*), not for recovery in our own times. For the Rnying ma, *gter ma* serve as a source of ongoing revelation, either from the past or from buddhas outside of space and time. This type of revelation, and the claim more broadly to a certain kind of textual transmission, is not universally welcomed in Tibet, however, and while some schools like the Rnying ma, Bka' brgyud, and some Sa skyas and Dge lugs accepted the Rnying ma collections into the canon, others did not, holding the Rnying ma *tantra*s to be "apocryphal" (Mayer, 1996, 14).

It is not only in Tibet that there is a culture of ongoing scripture production. This continues at least into the Medieval period in a variety of regions in Buddhist Asia. In 13th-century Korea we find a dialogue between the monks Wŏnsan (元昷) and Naksŏ (樂西) presented in a text titled *Hyŏnhaeng sŏbang kyŏng* (現行西方經), that is, the work is labeled with the word which normally signifies "*sūtra*" (經), even though it purports to record a historical discussion between two monks; the Buddha does not appear at all (Yamanaka Yukio, 2009; Han Taesik, 1996). (Such usage is, however, not entirely uninstanced earlier: the *Milindapañha*, for example, was translated into Chinese under the title *Naxian biqiu jing* [那先比丘經; T. 1670B].) Similar texts include the *Samsipp'al pun kongdŏk sogyŏng* (三十八分功德疏經) and the *Yŏmbul inyu gyŏng* (念佛因由經), all advocating a Pure Land approach to salvation. Other examples of ongoing scripture production in East Asia must include the so-called Platform *Sūtra* of the Sixth [Chan] Patriarch (*Liuzu tanjing* [六祖壇經]), probably originally composed in the 8th century, but heavily revised and supplemented in following

centuries (Schlütter & Teiser, 2012). This text, as the Korean works, despite its title does not resemble a traditional *sūtra* in respect to its formal structure, personae, and so on. In other regions, scripture production also continued, although formally speaking in somewhat more traditional form, in that the products looked more like traditional *sūtra*s. As mentioned above, in Southeast Asia, scriptures continued to be produced in Pali, only a few examples of which have been studied so far (Hallisey, 1990; 1993; Skilling in Harrison & Hartmann, 2014, 355–361), but these closely resemble other *sutta*s in the otherwise accepted Pali canon. (Likewise, commentarial literature, much of which for the tradition was equally "canonical," also continued to be produced.)

In China from a relatively early period there was a vibrant production of revelation, presented as *sūtra*, and accessed in a variety of ways: genuine teachings of the Buddha could have been learnt in a former life and spontaneously recalled and chanted; they could have been heard in a dream or presented by a god who, long-lived, heard the preaching in question directly from the Buddha in India, or from the future buddha Maitreya, now a bodhisattva in his heaven Tuṣita. This type of access, which cannot but appear to us highly shamanic, transcends gender boundaries, and a number of the documented cases involve young female oracles (Campany, 1993). This type of scriptural revelation was often perceived as dangerous, though this response is not universal. One fear was that contemporary political issues could be addressed in the guise of, and with the authority of, the Buddha's teachings. We see the reactions most clearly in the work of the normative bibliographers, in which, alongside the political context, doctrinal concerns can also be particularly visible.

> [U]nlike many other scripture cataloguers, Daoxuan [道宣; 596–667; author of the *Datang neidian lu* (大唐内典録); T. 2149] was most likely to label texts suspicious or spurious not because of their indigenous origin but because of what he regarded as their popularizing contents. Texts which catered to the interests of non-elite Buddhists by adapting doctrine to fit the capacities of common people were, in his eyes, suspect. (Campany, 1993, 12)

From a different perspective, and in a much later period, the monk Qisong (契嵩; 1007–1072), thinking this was the best way to assure preservation of such works, campaigned for the inclusion of Chan texts into Imperially sponsored collections, following on earlier successful arguments for the inclusion, for instance, of several Chan lineage works and the works of Zhiyi, the Tiantai founder (Morrison, 2010, 146). Similar debates are recorded elsewhere. In Tibet, Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182–1251) in his *Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba* (Clear Differentiation of the Three Codes) speaks of *sūtra*s which, he says, were composed by Tibetans, and therefore are not to be accepted (Rhoton, 2002, 167, vs. 539). For Sa skya Paṇḍita there are five types of inauthentic works: (1) volumes recovered from hidden caches, (2) religious traditions stolen from others, (3) doctrines one has composed [oneself], (4) doctrines based on dreams, and (5) doctrines which had been [merely?] memorized (Jackson, 1994, 105–116). It is interesting, however, to note that the same author's *Tshad ma rigs pa'i gter*, a Tibetan composition, is called in all editions *Pramāṇayuktinidhi* (van der Kuijp, 2014, 172), which perhaps reinforces rather than challenges the value which the author placed on Indian origins. To ascribe a Sanskrit title to a work is not necessarily to claim for it Indian authorship, but it certainly is a strong indication of the authority and charisma attached in Tibet to both the Sanskrit language and to Indianness. For this reason, Tibetan scripture catalogues regularly offer Sanskrit titles for works, including those modern scholarship determines to have no genuine Indian origin at all, such as works composed in China or in Tibet itself. This tradition continues into modernity, and one all too often encounters entirely spurious Indic titles for non-Indic works, one classic example being the citation of the *Guan Wuliangshou jing* as **Amitāyurdhyānasūtra*, a pure fiction. This is, however, not the only form of fiction imposed by modern scholarship.

Into the Present

Modern editions can promote a form of canonization which, while seemingly scientific, is as ideological as any traditional system. The laudable and much appreciated efforts of the Pali Text Society since 1881 to produce editions of Pali texts, and accompanying English translations, have, however, resulted in a tacit concealment of the complexity of the historical textual situation (and a normative definition of the scope of the canonical). As was inevitable, the first editions were produced on the basis of the narrow available textual basis. Yet, after more than a century, very few of these have been replaced with scientifically established editions (despite the existence of, e.g. numerous Thai and

Burmese editions, not to mention manuscripts), and comparatively little attention has been paid to "extra-canonical" materials. A different but equally clear case is that of the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (大正新脩大藏經), published between 1922/24–1934 at the astonishing rate of one volume a month. This edition, while based of course on Chinese canons, rearranged texts – which in traditional *Dazangjing* editions were organized as discussed above – into a putatively chronological sequence, entirely disrupting and effacing the indigenous ordering. On the other hand, the Taishō edition is traditional in that, like many earlier canons produced in China, it continues to include materials not found in other canons, including texts which were earlier explicitly decanonized, such as those found in the Dunhuang caves (included mostly in volume 85), and works written in Japan. During the same or a similar period, other large-scale projects were also undertaken in Japan to collect, and in some cases translate, Chinese and/or Japanese Buddhist literature. Examples include the *Nihon Daizōkyō* ([日本大藏經]; 48 vols. between 1914–1921); *Dainihon Bukkyō Zensho* ([大日本佛教全書]; 150 vols. between 1912–1922); *Kokuyaku Daizōkyō* ([國譯大藏經]; 30 vols. between 1917–1928); *Kokuyaku Issaikyō* ([國譯一切經]; 155 vols. between 1930–1936, and another 66 volumes of Chinese texts between 1936–1944); and *Kokuyaku Nanden Daizōkyō* ([國譯南傳大藏經]; from Pali; 65 vols. between 1935–1941; Stone, 1990, 227). A further step still toward a modern canonization can be seen in projects of individual sects in Japan to publish the "collected works" of the sect, such as the *Shinshū Zensho* (眞宗全書; 74 vols. between 1913–1917), *Shinshū Taikei* (眞宗大系; 37 vols. between 1917–1925); *Jōdoshū Zensho* (淨土宗全書; 22 vols. between 1928–1936); *Sōtōshū Zensho* (曹洞宗全書; 20 vols. between 1929–1935); *Shingonshū Zensho* (眞言宗全書; 44 vols. between 1933–1939); *Tendaishū Zensho* (天台宗全書; 25 vols. between 1935–1950), and so on. Other efforts are even more explicitly "canonizing," such as the publication of the self-consciously normative *Sōtō kyōkai shushōgi* (曹洞教会修証義; Meaning of Practice and Verification for the Sōtō Sect Teaching Assembly), published at the end of the 19th century and subject to an extraordinary degree of well-documented debate (LoBreglio, 2009). It is important to notice that publication and canonization, while certainly related, are not the same processes, nor even on the same logical level: the latter must precede the former, even if it does so primarily implicitly, as in most of the cases noted above.

Modern scientific editions and studies of Buddhist literature approach the history of texts in a way unique in Buddhist history, in that they are often avowedly non-sectarian, and confront and juxtapose witnesses which, historically speaking, were never in contact with one another. As an example, a modern edition of the *Dharmapada* may align versions of a verse in Pali, Sanskrit, Middle Indic, Chinese, and Tibetan, mixing sources which belonged to distinct sectarian lineages and stem from different places and times. While this can promote a sophisticated diachronic view of Buddhist literature, highlighting textual history and variety, it also runs the risk of creating a new and unprecedented form of imagining the Buddhist literary tradition, one which synchronically conflates historically distinct evidence. In the quest to better understand not only what texts say but also what they mean, it is certainly advantageous to draw upon the largest and best body of evidence possible. One result of such studies is also the preparation of accessible versions of texts, including translations into modern languages.

In Japan until relatively recently, despite the fact that Japanese cannot read Chinese without considerable training, there was little tradition of translating Buddhist texts into modern Japanese, and projects such as the just mentioned *Kokuyaku Daizōkyō* are less translations than grammatical reading guides to the base Chinese text. These remain inaccessible to most Japanese (although at the time they were produced they were no doubt quite readable by their target audience of scholars). There is probably still a sense in Japan that the authentic language of scripture is Chinese, despite the existence since at least 1905 of a sort of "Buddhist Bible" in the modern language (*Bukkyō Seiten* [佛教聖典], lit. Buddhist Holy Texts; Maeda & Nanjō, 1905), followed by several similar efforts. Since the 1970s, with the publication of the series Daijō Butten (大乘仏典; Nagao, 1973–1976), there has been an increasing trend for modern translations, not only from faith-based groups but also among scholars. The same trends can be seen in the West, as it were in the opposite direction, with most earlier translations produced by and for scholars, while more recently and at an increasing rate, faith-based translations have appeared. Some anthologies were published quite early, such as S. Beal's *A Catena of Buddhist Scriptures from the Chinese* (1871), or the English-language *Buddhist Bible* of D. Goddard (privately published in 1932, more formally in 1938), interesting among other

things for the explicit canonizing intent of its title. In this regard we should note the observation of F. De Simini and F. Sferra (forthcoming) that early modern efforts to translate Buddhist texts into Latin in Europe (such as the *Dhammapada* of Fausbøll, 1855) were at least in part motivated by the idea of legitimately setting them beside other "canonical" classics, by definition those of the Classical world. Efforts are not only continuing, but surely growing in volume and scope, to render Buddhist scriptures into modern languages. Alongside many translations of, for instance, classic Tibetan works, often accompanied by contemporary commentaries of living teachers, at present there are at least two major canon-scale projects, the 84000 (http://84000.co; the reference is to the mythical number of the Buddha's teachings), which aims in principle to translate the entire Derge Kanjur into English, and the project of the Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai to translate the Taishō Tripiṭaka into English, the BDK Tripitaka Translation Series, as well as projects devoted to translation into other languages (Chinese, Thai, and so on).

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