

Significant Texts and Writings

From ancient times to the present, there have been diverse Schools of Buddhism that reflect the various institutional and doctrinal divisions. The classification and descriptions of these divisions or schools, their doctrines, and their philosophical or cultural aspects have often been vague and interpreted in many ways, due to (perhaps) the existence of thousands of different sects, sub sects, movements, and so on that have made up or currently make up the whole of what we call Buddhist traditions.

This diversity extends to the scriptures and sacred texts that are used or recognized by various Buddhist sects and schools. Buddhists do not have a universally agreed-upon collection or version of scriptures. However, there are three separate canons or collections of Buddhist scriptures that are generally recognized and used by the three main branches of Buddhism today. These are the Pali Canon, the Chinese Canon, and the Tibetan Canon.

The Theravada traditions generally are guided by texts that are part of the Pali Canon. Mahayana traditions generally are guided by texts of one of the versions of the Chinese Canon. Tibetan or Vajrayana Buddhists generally are guided by texts that are from one of the various versions of the Tibetan Canon.

The following is a short overview of the sacred texts or canons used by the three major traditions of Buddhism.

Language of the Sacred Texts

Buddhist scriptures were originally recorded in Sanskrit and Pali, both of which are ancient languages of India. Pali is a relative of Magadhi, the language probably spoken in central India during The Buddha's time. Pali is still today the principle language of the Pali Canon.

Buddhist sacred texts originally written in Pali and Sanskrit were translated from early times into Chinese and other Asian languages as Buddhism spread throughout Asia. The Chinese version is known as the Chinese Canon.

The Tibetan Canon is a collection of sacred texts recognized by various sects of Tibetan Buddhism. It includes Tibetan translations of some of the same elements that are in the Pali and Chinese canon.

The Chinese and Tibetan canons include early teachings from Pali and Sanskrit sources and are translated into the respective languages. Some of the earliest Indic texts from the early schools of Buddhism now exist only in their translated versions in the Chinese and Tibetan canons, as the original Indic texts were lost over time.

Beginning around the 19th century, the various canons have at least in part been translated into European and other languages, including English.

Buddhist Canons and their Organization

While each branch of Buddhism has its own collection of sacred texts or canons, there are some common elements or parts. They all include the core teachings of Gautama Buddha.

Most of the sermons The Buddha delivered were memorized by his followers. The Ven. Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and close personal attendant, is reputed to have had the best memory of his followers and memorized most of his teachings and sermons. After Gautama Buddha's death, his monastic followers sought to ensure that his teachings would not be forgotten and organized to assist in their transmission. To do so, they held a series of councils or general meetings where the monastic participants, including Ananda, collectively tried to remember, recite, and organize his teachings and rules for Buddhist monastic life. Each recorded sermon (*sutta*) therefore begins with the disclaimer, *Evam me sutam* (Thus have I heard). The teachings were passed down within the monastic community following a well-established oral tradition. These councils assisted in creating a common understanding and structure of the Buddhist scriptures known as the *Tripitaka* in Sanskrit or *Tipitaka* in Pali.

Tripitaka (*Tipitaka*) is the traditional term for the collection of Buddhist scriptures that represent the core teachings of Gautama Buddha. The *Tripitaka* is believed to have been composed between about 550 BCE and the start of the Common Era. Scholars believe that current form and contents of *Tripitaka* were defined in the third century BCE after which it continued to be transmitted orally from one generation of monks to the next. However, a decision was made to create a written form of Buddhist teachings because monks feared that famine and war might lead to the destruction of monasteries and the loss of Buddhist knowledge. By about 100 BCE, the *Tipitaka* was first fixed in writing in Sri Lanka by Sinhala scribe-monks. As such, the Pali texts constitute the entire surviving body of literature in that language.

Each of the early Buddhist schools had its own *Tripitaka* for use in their monasteries and defined by its *sangha*. For example, canon also appeared in Sanskrit among early Buddhist communities such as the *Sarvastivada* (Doctrine that All Is Real), *Mahasanghika* (Great Community), and other schools. It is estimated by some that, at that time, there were anywhere from 18 to 33 schools of Buddhism, each with their own *Tripitaka*. However, only one version of the *Tripitaka* of these early schools has survived in its entirety, the Pali Canon along with parts of a few others. The Chinese and Tibetan canons include some parts of the sacred texts of the early Buddhist schools which were not included in the Pali canon.

Pali Canon: Tipitaka

The Pali Canon (*Tipitaka*) as indicated earlier contains the early teachings of The Buddha which were written down after being passed down orally for

centuries. The Pali Canon was first written in Sri Lanka on palm leaves. *Tipitaka* means three baskets and consist of up to 50 volumes of teachings. It is believed that monks actually used three baskets to collect and categorize Buddhist teachings. The three categories of teachings or ‘three Baskets of Wisdom’ are

- ***Vinaya Pitaka* or the Discipline Basket:** Is essentially a guide or rule book for the *sangha*, the monastic community of monks and nuns. Most of the different versions of the *Vinaya Pitaka* are quite similar. The *Vinaya Pitaka* not only details the rules that govern the life of every monk or nun, but also a number of procedures and social conventions that are intended to promote harmonious relations, within the monastic community, and as well between the monastics and their lay community. The Pali (Theravada) version contains 227 rules for monks (*bhikkhus*) and 311 rules for nuns (*bhikkhunis*).
- ***Sutra (Sutta) Pitaka* or the Teaching Basket:** Also known as the *Nikayas*, this basket includes the collected instructive discourses delivered by Buddha to both the *sangha* (community of monks and nuns) and the laity during his life. The *Sutra Pitaka* contains more than 10,000 *sutras* (teachings) attributed to The Buddha or venerated disciples and are of equal importance. The *Dhammapada* or *Dharmapada* is the most well-known part of the *Nikayas*.
- ***Abhidharma (Abhidhamma) Pitaka* or the Higher Doctrine Basket:** Provides an explanation or elaboration of the teachings of Buddha. They are detailed analyses, commentaries, and summaries of the *Sutra Pitaka* and are intended to help monastics and lay Buddhists understand and apply the *sutras* in their daily practice. Some scholars believe that *Abhidharma* does not reflect the direct teachings of Gautama Buddha, but a later elaboration written by monk scholars. According to tradition, however, the core of the *Abhidharma* is attributed to Gautama Buddha himself.

The Pali Canon is the collected works of only one of the early schools of Buddhism, the Theravada, although some elements of the texts of other early schools were incorporated and preserved in the Chinese and Tibetan canons.

The term *Tripitaka* is often used to refer to all Buddhist

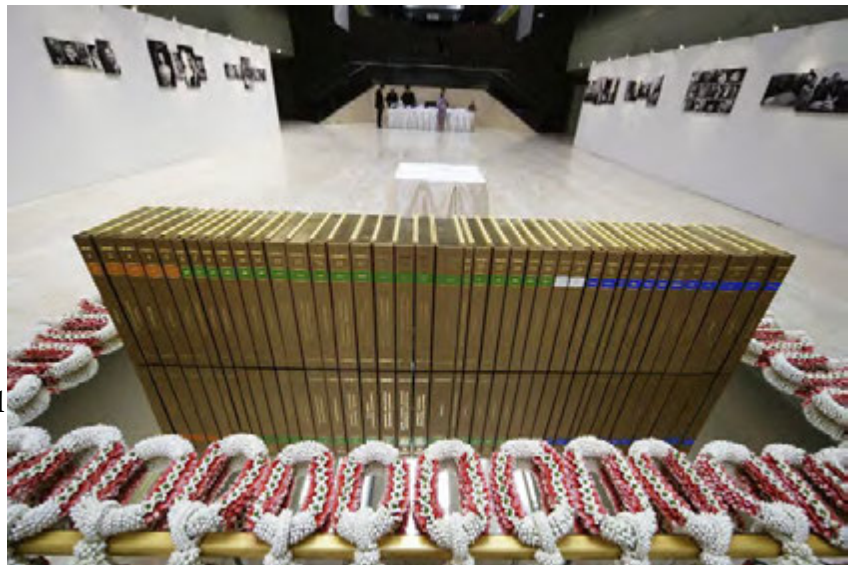


Figure 22: 2005: The newly published Pali Canon (Tipitaka) in roman script consisting of 40 volumes on display

scriptures, and thus used to refer to the Chinese and Tibetan collections of Buddhist scriptures, although their general organization do not strictly fall into three *Pitakas* or baskets.

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE

THE PĀLI CANON

OVERVIEW OF THE PĀLI CANON

The **Pāli Canon**, commonly referred to as the **Ti-pi-ka** (Ti = "Three" Pika = "Baskets"), is the scriptural canon of **Theravāda Buddhism**. The Pāli Canon is the only remaining complete canon of the many early-Buddhist schools that arose around 500 BCE. The teachings of the Buddha (Suttas), and the regulatory framework rules for monastics (Vinaya), were recited orally for hundreds of years after the Buddha's death until monks started to first write them down beginning in the 3rd century BCE.

STRUCTURE OF THE PĀLI CANON

TIPIKAKA	
VINAYA PIṬAKA The Vinaya contains the regulatory framework (precepts, rules, discipline, confession, ritual, etiquette and manners, training, etc.) followed by monks and nuns in a monastic community (sangha).	THE NIKĀYAS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dīgha Nikāya (Long Discourses): There are 34 "long" discourses in this Nikāya, including the Golden Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (Cattāri Ariyasamāhārikā Sutta), The First of the Contemplation of Life, and the Buddha's Last Days. • Majjhima Nikāya: There are 152 "middle-length" discourses in this Nikāya, which include the Shelter Expedient of Kamma, Mindfulness of Breathing, and the Middle Course of the Body. • Saṃgaya Nikāya: There are between 3,000 to 9,000 shorter discourses in this Nikāya, known as the "shorter" discourses. • Anguttara Nikāya: The teachings in this Nikāya are arranged numerically, which gave it its title as the "numerical" discourses. There are a total of 12,000 discourses grouped by the number "one" to "eleven". • Khuddaka Nikāya: The Nikāya contains a mixture of miscellaneous texts, known as the "minor collection" by the Buddha in his lifetime. There are between 45 to 48 suttas between the different suttas, which is perhaps the most well-known of the entire Pāli Canon by laypersons. The suttas include: Panchakosika, Dharmapala, Iṭṭha, Piṭṭhaka, Sattapaṇṇāsi, Vinayavibhāṅga, Paṇḍita, Theravāda, Theravāda, Amāra, Nīlakaṇṭha, Pāra-ṅgahāyana, Apāṇa, Jāṭaka, Kāṇhasīyaka, Suddhacāyana, and Mahāvaṇa.
SUṬTA PIṬAKA The Nikāyas are the historical discourses of the Buddha. The most well-known part of this collection is the <i>Dhammapadam</i> , which is located in the <i>Khuddaka Nikāya</i> .	
ABHIDHAMMA PIṬAKA The analysis, commentary, and summaries of the Suttas (teachings of the Buddha) are contained in the <i>Abhidhamma Piṭaka</i> . This commentary is important to help monastics, and laypersons, in understanding and applying the Suttas in their practice.	

SUTTAS FOR BEGINNERS

The following Suttas are recommended for the individual who is beginning to explore Theravāda Buddhism.

Sutta	Description
Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta "Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion"	
Anatta-lakkhana Sutta "The Discourse on the Lack of Self-Existence"	These three Suttas are considered essential reading by most Theravāda Buddhists. They cover fundamental teachings of the Buddha , which are the core of Buddhist practice.
Ādiṭṭhapariyaya Sutta "The First Sermon"	
Siṅgalovada Sutta "The Discourse on the Good of the City"	The Buddha provides instructions for laypersons.
Anappasāna Sutta "The Discourse on Transcending the Sensual"	The basics on breath meditation.
Maha-Nalāyutikā Sutta "The Great Fathom of Breathers"	The basics on mindfulness.
Sabbasaṃva Sutta "On the Transcendence"	Overcoming external influences that pollute the mind.
Ambalaṭṭhika-vāṇasaṃvāsa Sutta "The Discourse on the Follower of Virtue"	Teaching on Virtue.
Samaḍhivajjana Sutta "On Mindfulness of the Progress"	Teaching on Concentration.
Dhātuvibhanga Sutta "On Analysis of the Elements"	Teaching on Wisdom.
Karuvā Metta Sutta "The Buddha's Discourse on Loving-Kindness"	The practice of loving-kindness.

View Suttas Online: www.dhammadownload.com, www.dhammadownload.com, www.dhammadownload.com, www.dhammadownload.com

Figure 23: Buddhist Scripture—The Pāli Canon

Chinese Canon (Mahayana Buddhism)

The Chinese Canon is primarily used by Mahayana Buddhist schools and sects that originated in the East-Asian countries of China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. (The entire Chinese Canon, in any of its versions, has not been completely translated into English, but there are efforts to do so.)

The Chinese Canon which is used by Mahayana Buddhist schools, derived most of its early scripture from the many early Buddhist schools that existed in India, all of which had their own scriptural canons which were written in Sanskrit and were called *Tripitakas*.

The Chinese Canon shares many similarities with the Pali Canon and the *Sutra Pitaka*, and includes much of the discourses or sermons of The Buddha that are virtually identical in doctrine and/or story telling, with some differences

in translation and organization within the Canon. Core Buddhist concepts are common to both Canons.

The Chinese Canon is also known as *Dazangjing* (Great Scripture Store). Different versions derived from the Chinese Canon are used in other nations. For example, the Japanese *Taisho Tripitaka* and the *Tripitaka Koreana*.

In comparison to the Pali Canon, Mahayana Buddhist schools do not draw and adhere to The Chinese Canon as much. Different schools will typically focus on certain aspects of the Canon, including being selective in using or emphasizing specific *sutras* or commentaries.

The Chinese Canon, while it consists of the three traditional baskets (*Tripitaka*) of scripture, similar to the Pali Canon, also includes a number of other texts which include

- Tantras (Tantric School of Buddhism)
- Translations and commentaries on the Agamas and Mahayana scriptures
- Translations of commentaries on Yogacara and Madhyamaka
- Chinese commentaries on various parts of the canon
- Chinese sectarian writings, histories, and biographies
- Many more miscellaneous pieces such as encyclopedia, dictionaries, catalogs of Chinese Canons, and more

The *Sutra Pitaka* of the Chinese Canons include both *Agamas* (the *sutras* that are the original discourses and sermons of Gautama Buddha like the *Nikaya* of the Pali Canon) and an additional collection of sutras known as the *Mahayana Sutras*.

Around the first and second century CE, later *sutras* (the Mahayana *sutras*) began to appear in Northern India. Some 600 Mahayana *sutras* have survived in Sanskrit, or in Chinese and/or Tibetan translation. Mahayana *sutras* were often believed to be secret texts not to be written down. Some are said to have been written by *Bodhisattvas* or other Buddhas. In Mahayana Buddhism, *Bodhisattvas* are persons who are able to reach *nirvana* but delay doing so out of compassion for others and in order to save other sentient beings.

The Mahayana *sutras* differ from the early *sutras* which were attributed to Gautama Buddha as follows:

- They emphasize training in *bodhicitta* (limitless wisdom and compassion)
- While they are based on the earlier sutras included in the Pali Canon, they did not emerge until hundreds of years after the earlier *sutras* were recorded.
- The early *sutras* are considered to be valid, but they are believed to present a limited point of view, while the Mahayana *sutras* present the higher or better point of view for beings of superior capacity.

Originally, the Mahayana *sūtras* were written in Sanskrit and then translated into the Chinese and Tibetan languages. They Mahayana *sūtras* are accepted as the word of The Buddha by

- the East Asian Buddhist tradition which follows the Chinese Canon
- the Tibetan Buddhist tradition which follows the Tibetan Canon

However, in the Theravada tradition, these texts are not included in the Pali Canon, and, therefore, are not considered as the authentic teachings or words of the Gautama Buddha.

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE

THE CHINESE CANON

OVERVIEW OF THE CHINESE CANON

The Chinese Canon, referred to as the *Daizangjing* ("Great Scriptures Store"), is the translational scriptural canon of Mahayana Buddhism practiced in the east Asian countries of China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The Chinese Canon is canonical, however the different schools across Asia Buddhism may only use parts of it in their tradition practice. There have been different editions over the centuries, including those created outside of China such as the *Komoso* (Korea) and *Tsinho* (Japan). The *Tsinho Shwaha* (*Daizangjing*) is currently considered the most widely used standard edition of the Chinese Canon. The Chinese Canon can best be described as a "library," rather than a traditional scriptural canon, because it includes additional items such as non-Buddhist and non-Mahayana texts, catalogs of editions, illustrations, encyclopedias, etc. While it no longer follows the traditional Tripitaka structure of only having three sections, it does include these types of texts within its canon (see below).

MAHAYANA SŪTRAS

The following are some, but not all, of the Mahayana sūtras (canon) that can be found in the Chinese Canon. Popular sūtras within Mahayana Buddhism include the *Heart*, *Diamond*, and *Lotus* sūtras. *Chiao-Yao* Buddhism (devoted) includes the *Lotus*, *Diamond*, *Devent into Lanka*, and *Flower Garland* sūtras. *Pure Land* Buddhists focus on the *Amitayus* (*Observance and Longevity*) and *Mahaparinirvana* sūtras. *Chinese Buddhists* incorporate the parables and Mahayana sūtras of the *Chiao and Pure Land* schools.

Sūtra	Description
Amitayus (Shourto) <small>(Amitayus, Amitayus, etc.)</small>	The blessings and virtues of Amitayus Buddha, his Pure Land (Sukhavati), and rebirth.
Amitayus (Longer) <small>(Amitayus, Amitayus, etc.)</small>	Explores cause and effect (Karma), and describes the Western Pure Land (Sukhavati).
Recluses Net <small>(Recluses, etc.)</small>	The Ten Major Precepts and 48 Minor Precepts for Buddhists to follow on the path.
Diamond <small>(Diamond, etc.)</small>	The Buddha teaches how to cut through afflictions, ignorance, delusion, or illusion through the perfection of insight and wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā).
Flower Garland <small>(Flower Garland, etc.)</small>	Explores how reality appears to an enlightened being (such as a Buddha). A compilation of teachings on topics such as the ten stages on the Buddhist path, phenomena (dharma), meditation, and only (Vijñaptivāda), and emptiness (śūnyatā).
Heart <small>(Heart, etc.)</small>	Through the perfection of insight and wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā), the Buddha is able to liberate beings through the perfection of insight and wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) through (śūnyatā) the Five Aggregates.
Jewel Heap <small>(Jewel Heap, etc.)</small>	Collection of 40 texts of various lengths and topics such as wisdom (prajñā), Recluses (śrāvaka), and the Western Pure Land (Sukhavati).
Devent into Lanka <small>(Devent into Lanka, etc.)</small>	Significant text of the Yogachara and Chiao-Yao schools on the virtues of the illusory and empty nature of all phenomena as manifestations of the mind, that manifestation is one only true reality, culminating in the <i>Tathāgatagarbha</i> (i.e., Buddhic nature).
Lotus <small>(Lotus, etc.)</small>	Considered the sūtra of skilled means (upāya) providing a way for persons to readily achieve enlightenment, and states that every being being an inherent Buddha.
Meditation <small>(Meditation, etc.)</small>	Meditations and visualization of Amitayus Buddha's Western Pure Land (Sukhavati).
Ten Stages <small>(Ten Stages, etc.)</small>	The Buddha describes the Ten Stages of Cultivation for Buddhists on their path to full enlightenment and Buddhahood.
Vimalakirti <small>(Vimalakirti, etc.)</small>	Teachings on the doctrine of non-duality and emptiness. It explains the illusory nature of the world, equality of women, and the enlightenment of laypersons.

View the Scriptures Online: www.buddhism.org, www.fgoh.org, and www.buddhist.net

STRUCTURE OF THE CHINESE CANON (TRIPITAKA ITEMS ONLY)

VINAYA

The Vinaya contains the regulatory framework (precepts, rules, discipline, ordinations, rituals, liturgy and mantras, training, etc.) followed by monks and nuns in a monastic community (*sangha*).

THE ĀGAMAS

- Digha Āgama:** There are 21 "long" discourses in this Āgama including the *Sutra of Preaching* (*Sutra*) which describes the Buddha's teaching and discourses the year before his death, and the *Pravara* Sūtra which explains Buddhist cosmology. (Corresponds to the *Digha Nikaya* of the Pali Canon.)
- Majjhima Āgama:** There are 152 "middle-length" discourses in this Āgama which explain the basic teachings of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. (Corresponds to the *Majjhima Nikaya* of the Pali Canon.)
- Saṃyutta Āgama:** There are 1,424 "short" sūtras in this Āgama known as the "connected" or "connected" discourses. This sūtra discuss a variety of topics such as Dharma, emptiness, impermanence, non-self, and the Noble Eightfold Path. (Corresponds to the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* of the Pali Canon.)
- Ekottara Āgama:** The unconnected discourses in this Āgama are organized numerically and sequentially, which gives it the title "increasing by one". There are 67 short sūtras in 36 sections. The sūtras are grouped by the number "one" to "sixteen" (corresponding to the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* of the Pali Canon, although there are differences).

SŪTRA

- The Āgamas are collections of the historical discourses of the Buddha (see list to the right). They are similar in doctrine and storytelling to the Pali Canon's *Nikayas*.
- The Mahayana Sūtras (see table to the far right) are what makes the Chinese Canon, part of Mahayana Buddhism.

ABHIDHARMA

Provides analysis of the teachings, known as the "Collections of Treatises". Although there are some similarities, this analysis is different than what is found in the Pali Canon's *Abhidhamma*.

Notes: Editions of the Chinese Canon are sometimes based on the word "Tripitaka" in the name. However, unlike the Pali Canon (Tripiṭaka), they contain more than these sections.

Figure 24: Buddhist Scripture—The Chinese Canon

Tibetan Canon: Vajrayana (Tantric) Buddhism

The Tibetan Canon is the one used in the schools originating from the central-Asian countries of Tibet, Bhutan, the Himalayas, and Mongolia. The Tibetan Buddhist Canon is a loosely defined collection of sacred texts recognized by various sects of Tibetan Buddhism.

Although Tibetan Buddhism is considered a form of Mahayana Buddhism, it developed its own Canon. The Tibetan Canon is not simply a translation or Tibetan edition of the Chinese Canon, although it does include some elements taken from the Chinese Canon. It was written in Tibet mostly based on translations of scriptures that originated in India, including Mahayana texts, but not the exact same set included in the Chinese Canon.

It also includes **Tantric texts**, a collection of Indian and Tibetan texts which outline the unique views and practices of the Buddhist tantric religious systems, intended for private translation from master (*guru*) to student. This secret aspect of tantric texts led Tibetan Buddhism to put greater emphasis on monastic life than in the Mahayana tradition. To fully understand the tantras one needs to dedicate themselves to serious study with a master who can transmit to students the deep meanings of the *tantras*.

The Tibetan Canon was fully compiled in the 14th century by Buton Rinchen Drub (1290–1364) and includes all the scriptures sacred to Tibet.

The Tibetan Canon has its own organizational structure and is divided into two major categories, as follows:

The Kangyur

(Translated Words or *Vacana*) is a collection of texts belonging to the various schools of Tibetan Buddhism. In addition to containing *sutras* and *vinaya*, it also contains *tantras*. In Tibet, Buddhist Tantra is called *Vajrayana*. Approximately 25% of the texts are Tibetan translations of early Buddhist texts, and the balance of the texts are translations of Mahayana texts. Note: There are at least six slightly different versions of the *Kangyur*.

The Tengyur (Translated Treatises or *Shastras*) is a compilation of commentaries, treatises, and *Abhidharma* works (both Mahayana and non-Mahayana). The Peking edition of the *Tengyur* consists of 3626 texts in 224 volumes.

The Tibetan Canon also includes Vajrayana texts that draw on the ideas of the Mahayana but presents them through different meditation and art forms. Vajrayana practices make use of *mantras*, *dharanis*, *mudras*, *mandalas*, and the



Figure 25: Vajra Pestle and Buddhist Scripture, at Derge Dgon Chen Monastery, Derge, Garze, SiChuan, China

visualization of deities and Buddhas. To understand the true meaning of their scripture (*tantra*), the guidance of a *guru* is key.

According to Vajrayana scriptures, the term *Vajrayana* or the *tantric path* refers to one of three *yanas*, modes, or routes to enlightenment. The second path is the *Sravakayana*, a path that the individual takes to becoming an *Arhat*. The third path is *Mahayana*, or the path of the *Bodhisattva* seeking complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, also called *Bodhisattva Yana*, or the *Bodhisattva Vehicle*.

While not officially a part of the Tibetan Canon, the Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bardo Thodol*), is one of the most well-known Buddhist texts. The book was written in the medieval period in Tibet and explains death from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective.

Other Texts

Buddhists also draw on other texts that are not part of the three canons. Important examples are

- The *Visuddhimagga*, or Path of Purification, by Buddhaghosa, which is a compendium of Theravada teachings that includes quotes from the Pali Canon.
- The Zen and Chan schools draw on non-canonical accounts of the lives and teachings of Zen masters.
- Mahayana *shastras* or commentaries written at a later date to explain an earlier scripture or *sutra*. The commentaries are not the words of Buddha, but play a key role in Mahayana Buddhism.

Charting the Differences: Pali, Chinese, and Tibetan Canons

The chart that follows compares the structure and components of the three major Buddhist Canons.

BUDDHIST SCRIPTURE
QUICK REFERENCE

THE BUDDHIST CANONS

The term *Piṭaka* (Pāli) or *Piṭakā* (Sanskrit) means "Three Baskets" or "Three Collections", which may be referred to as a canon of Buddhist scriptures. Compared to other religions, there is no single canon of scriptures found within Buddhism. Generally, each of the primary big traditions of Buddhism have their own Canon. Theravāda Buddhism has the Pāli Canon, and Mahāyāna Buddhism has both the Chinese Canon (and the various editions of it) and the Tibetan Canon (which may also be referenced as the names of Tibetan Buddhism). The Chinese Canon can best be described as a "library", rather than a traditional scriptural canon, because it has expanded to include and structure from various countries and non-Buddhist texts. While it no longer follows the traditional Tripiṭaka structure of only having only three collections, it does include texts which would make up a Tripiṭaka within its canon (it includes the Mahāvastu Sūtra, which was not found in the Pāli Canon).

PĀLI CANON	CHINESE CANON	TIBETAN CANON
Vinaya Provides the regulations (discipline) followed by monks and nuns in a monastic community (sangha)	Vinaya Provides the regulations (discipline) followed by monks and nuns in a monastic community (sangha)	Kangyur Vinaya, Teachings of the Buddha, Mahāvastu Sūtra, Tantra, and Other Texts
Sutta Teachings of the Buddha ("Sūtras")	Sūtra Teachings of the Buddha ("Sūtras"), and Mahāvastu Sūtra	Tengyur Abhidharma, Treatises, Commentaries, and Other Texts
Abhidhamma Scholarly Analysis, Commentary, and Explanations	Abhidharma Scholarly Analysis, Commentary, and Explanations	
Notes: Theravāda is the only school of early Buddhism to fully retain the complete canon it still available (originally written in the Pāli language). However, there were many schools of early Buddhism in India which had their own canon (written in Sanskrit). Some of the most famous translations including Mahāvastu Sūtra, Mahāvastu Sūtra, and other texts were written in Sanskrit and other Indian canons.	Additional Sections Commentaries, Sutras, Bhāṣya, Gāthā, Teaching, and Other Texts (including Non-Buddhist)	Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the texts that would make up a traditional "Tripiṭaka", the Vinaya and Sūtra can be found in the Kangyur, and the Abhidharma can be found in the Tengyur. The Tibetan Canon contains the teachings of the Buddha (including Mahāvastu Sūtra), and other texts derived from a variety of sources (not only from the canon of ancient schools of early Buddhism in India, but from China, etc.) There are many versions of the Kangyur. Some versions include texts not found in the Vinaya, Mahāvastu Sūtra, Abhidharma, and other texts (e.g., Vinaya, Mahāvastu Sūtra, Abhidharma, and other texts).

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Figure 26: Buddhist Scripture—Quick Reference