The Buddhist traditions in India found themselves, at one time or another, inundated with a morass of material that passed under the rubric of the “word of the Buddha” (buddhavacana). As a result, during the course of its approximately seventeen hundred years in the land of its origin, Indian Buddhist communities constantly found themselves encountering the tension between the more conservative masters of Buddhist doctrine and those who, either tacitly or not, were open to the prospect of the reinterpretation and recodification of the dharma preached by the Tathāgata. The dynamics of this tension and the institutional and doctrinal modifications of the system as a whole represent some of the most fascinating facets of Indian Buddhist history.

With the rise of apocryphal literature in East Asia, the literati, within both the orthodox and reform communities, must have kept an eye on the practices of literary verification coming from the Indian source, even if they had to modify these for their own purposes. Thus, to assess properly the Buddhist intellectual orientation of East Asian masters toward apocryphal scripture, the historian should have access to the values and polemics espoused by the Indian missionaries who brought them the dharma.

It is my intention to examine certain specific aspects of the development of standards of scriptural authenticity in India: (1) the method of scriptural transmission of the early Samgha and the general attitudes that contributed to the early scriptural and doctrinal elaboration; (2) the role of the councils in the compilation of a canon and the codified standards of authenticity established to effect scriptural purity; (3) the claim to authority of the Ābhidharmika masters as a model of development and the response of their critics; (4) the mythology and apologetics for the Mahāyāna; and (5) the steps taken by the Vajrācāryas to establish the authority of the Vajrayāna.
Early Saṅgha

Like all such societies of individuals, the early Buddhist brotherhood developed and was subject to certain kinds of dynamics that became representative of the manner in which the Saṅgha addressed itself to the problem of scriptural transmittal, a concern central to its survival and expansion. Two modes of these complex dynamics concern us the most: (i) the formal ways in which scriptural transmission was effected within communities and between communities, and (2) the attitudes that evolved in the larger Indian Buddhist community toward the sources and goals of that transmission.

(i) From the beginning, there were formal factors in the transmission of the Buddhist dispensation which virtually assured that the early Saṅgha would modify the literal content of the sayings of the Buddha. I will consider two of the most significant: the early denial of a standard linguistic basis for the recitation of the sayings of the Buddha, and the ease of scriptural cross-pollination.

That the early Saṅgha accepted different dialects in the recitation of the Sūtra and the Vinaya is virtually assured. A now very familiar story tells of two monks requesting the Buddha to allow them to render his sermons into some formal language (chandas). They were disturbed that the other members of the community were corrupting the Buddha’s words by rendering them into their own dialects (sakāya niruttiyā). The Buddha forbade the two from doing so, saying that anyone who did would be committing an infraction and that it was correct for the community to learn his words in their own dialects. The Pāli tradition, following the opinion of their most respected commentator, Buddhaghosa, has unilaterally maintained that the Bhagavān was indicating that his sermons should not be translated into some formal language but retained in his own dialect, Pāli. However, the most persuasive position, set forth with such eloquence by Franklin Edgerton, is that the Buddha did not speak in one but in many dialects. He undoubtedly tailored his language to the area in which he was teaching, and this circumstance may be a basis for the myth that the Buddha was understood by each listener in his own language. Conversely, the prohibition, ascribed to the Buddha, against formalizing the dialect of his doctrine provided the medium for its elaboration in other phonemic and idiomatic constructions, including the eventual “transposition” of the doctrine into Sanskrit.

Over and above this linguistic latitude, the circumstances of the Buddha’s teaching and the condition of the Saṅgha during the Buddha’s life must be the focal point for understanding the later elaboration of the “word of the Buddha.” It seems clear that, as soon as they became “worthy men” (arhats), the Buddha sent his disciples out to propagate
his dharma. While they were engaged in this enterprise, he continued to teach elsewhere, constantly endorsing the realization of new arhats. Thus, during the more than forty years of the Buddha’s teaching career, there were many monks acting as authoritative teachers of the doctrine throughout the kingdom of Magadha and its border areas. They would cross paths with the master from time to time and receive new information as his doctrine and teaching style developed. They would also receive new information from one another during the fortnightly congregations, the summer rains retreat, and whenever they met as their mendicant paths crossed. After forty years of their obtaining new information through such contact, we may be certain that, by the death of the Buddha, the process of receiving new “teachings of the teacher” (śāstūḥ śāsanāḥ) had become a well-accepted practice. The network of instruction was thus established, and doubtless most of the monks realized that much of what the Buddha had said during his lengthy career remained unknown to them personally. They therefore kept the network alive to obtain instruction committed to other bhikṣus. In my opinion, this was the beginning of the continuing cross-fertilization of scripture and doctrine which was the hallmark of Indian Buddhism.

Erich Frauwallner has pointed out that there appears to have been a reification of language in the various sūtras that treat related topics. When a sūtra in the Dīrghāgama, for example, discusses a certain topic, virtually the same wording is found in the Saṃyuktāgama and the Ekottarāgama. The natural result is a formalization that forfeits the more complex, rounded view of the topic as it was taught at different times and in different places. This is the sort of formalization that is to be expected from an oral tradition, and Frauwallner maintains that it was a tool, like the ubiquitous mnemonic verse (uddāna), useful in stretching the capacity of memory. Once the initial phrase is met in a sūtra, the entire succeeding block of text can be reeled off almost effortlessly, since the same material would already have been memorized in another sūtra.

(2) Certainly, these two processes of elaboration and consolidation must have begun during the life of the Buddha, and they continued to occur throughout the tenure of Buddhism in India. They cannot, of course, account for all the eventual alterations in doctrinal and scriptural basis that the tradition experienced, but they did serve to keep the institutional doors of vitality open. If the Buddha or the early Saṃgha had decided to put linguistic strictures on his sayings, or if there had been a thoroughgoing movement during the life of the Buddha to codify his sermons, then the diversity of material classed under the rubric of the “word of the Buddha” might not have obtained its present extent. Two extremely important values, however, effectively precluded movement in that direction: the perceived nature of truth or reality, and the
factors effecting access to that truth. These two values were probably the deciding elements in the continuing development of Buddhism in all its stages, right through that of Vajrayāna.

With the parameters of the "doctrine of the teacher" amorphous and ill-defined, the church elders (stāvira) were compelled to address the problem of the relationship between the Buddha and the dharma preached by him. Characteristically, the dharma was defined as that which was discovered by the Buddha, but it was neither invented by him, nor indeed was he the first of the buddhas. Therefore, the speech of the Buddha embodied the dharma, yet the dharma went beyond the speech of the Buddha. Thus words other than those of the Buddha himself may accurately represent the dharma. This worked in three ways. First, the dharma could be learned from a disciple's preaching of the word of the Buddha. The characteristic introduction to this teaching would most typically be the phrase (niddāna) that starts the sūtras: "Thus have I heard at one time . . ." (evam mayā śrutam ekasmin samaye), apparently intended to reflect the idea that this discourse came from one who had heard (śrāvaka) it from the Buddha himself. Second, a person in the presence of the Buddha could be inspired (pratibhāti) by the power of the presence of the Buddha (buddhānubhāvena) to speak the dharma in his own words. Usually a sūtra spoken thus by a third party concludes with phrases of approval by the Tathāgata. As we shall see, this variety of sūtra was recognized by many of the traditions and was to play a great part in the development of Indian Buddhism. Finally, the rubric of dharma was very early extended to the teaching of the immediate disciples of the Buddha, the Ārya Śrāvakas, whether or not the presence of the Buddha inspired their preaching. From them it was extended to others, and both the Dharmaguptaka and Theravāda Vinayas broadened the list considerably:

That which is called dharma is that spoken by the Buddha, spoken by the śrāvakas, spoken by the sages (rṣi), or spoken by divinities, when significant (atthūpasamhīta) and when endowed with doctrinal principle (dhammuṇa-samhīta). For these traditions, then, the definition of dharma can be applied to the speech of those who somehow represent a superior kind of knowledge, obtained by themselves or with the help of the Buddha.

Over and above these definitions of dharma, the functional orientation of the Buddhist masters led to a shift in perspective: the perception of a kind of circularity between the Buddha, his dharma, the reality discovered by him, and the cognition of that reality. For example, in the later Vaibhāṣika tradition, according to the Abhidharmadīpa, the dharma spoken by the Buddha served to define the Tathāgata's omniscience:
Those [determinate words, statements, and phonemes] not established by human agency (apaurusėya), illuminating the elements (dhātu), doors of perception (āyatana), and aggregates (skandha), etc., are first within the sphere of cognition of the buddhas. Because he awakens to these, the Lord is designated “omniscient.”

While the dharma, or more precisely the dharma spoken by the Buddha, could define the enlightenment of the Buddha, its primary goal was to develop the same quality of realization in others. In the Pāli Nikāyas this characteristic of the dharma is called its ability to generate the fruit of mendicancy (sāmañṇaphala) and is considered to be unique to the buddhadharma. This characteristic is concomitant with the unique value of the buddhadharma—the single flavor of liberation:

In that same manner, Pahārāda, as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, even thus, Pahārāda, this Dhammavinaya has one taste, the taste of final release.

This unique ability of the dharma was both its ultimate benefit and its final touchstone. That which does not confer liberation could not be considered dharma. Therefore the teaching of the Buddha had to be tested for this unique flavor, a regular theme in Indian Buddhism. Primacy is given those who have not merely accepted what the teacher has said (śraddhānusārin) but have explored and continually reexamined the dharma until they have arrived at certainty of its meaning (dharmaṇusārin). Thus we see that the dharma, as instruction, depends both on the Buddha for the revelation of its words and phrases as well as on the bhikṣu for the testing of its potency. Likewise, when the dharma is preached by a third person, that person must conform to the dharma if he is really to be considered a “teacher of dharma.” In the Mahāvagga, too, the requisites for one to become an upādhyāya, a preceptor, are that he be possessed of the five aggregates of the dharma: moral conduct, concentration, insight, liberation, and the vision of the gnosis of liberation. The correct conditions for teaching the dharma must therefore be met with in the individual bhikṣu, and this requirement was to be maintained throughout the course of Buddhism in India.

The circular dependence of the dharma as instruction and the monk as instructor is ultimately grounded in the nature of reality (dharmaṭā) toward which both are oriented, and which in turn is not even dependent on the Buddha:

Whether there is the arising of tathāgatas or there is the nonarising of tathāgatas, this mode (dharmaṭā) of the elements of existence remains fixed.

I bring up the question of dharmaṭā, here in its most basic environment of dependent origination (pratītyasamutpāda), because we can observe,
through time, not only circularity but also a sense of increasing permeability between the four conceptual structures mentioned above: the reality discovered by the Buddha (dharmatā), his insight into that reality (prajñā or jñāna), the words of the Buddha as an expression of that insight (buddhavacana), and the significant message of the Buddha (dharma). For example, the Śālistamba-sūtra equates insight toward one of these with insight toward others:

Whoever, O monks, perceives dependent origination, he perceives the dharma. Whoever sees the dharma, sees the Buddha.¹⁸

These various factors were therefore seen to overlap one another. Gnosis or insight developed by a monk through the teaching provided access both to reality and the Buddha on one hand, and to a position as teacher on the other.

So far, the extension of authority has been from the word of the master toward the words of his representatives by means of the dharma. The Ārya Śrāvakas could speak for the Buddha, either in his own words, in his presence, or through their own insight. This extended authority, however, came to work in the reverse direction as well: the teaching of the śrāvakas, because it was dharma, could conceivably be considered the word of the Buddha. This appears to have been a primary mechanism of scriptural and doctrinal elaboration—truth, applicable universally and cognizable by the Buddha’s lineal successors, may be assigned to him, though spoken by them, in much the same way that the truth initially spoken by him was eventually internalized and passed on by them. Likewise, that which assists in the attainment of the “fruit of mendicancy” (śrāmanyakaphala) must, by nature, be dharma. Since he was omniscient, the Buddha must have had this or that particular doctrine (method, statement, etc.) in mind. Elaborating what must have been the Buddha’s idea is merely liberating his intention from the bonds of extreme literalism (samdhinirmocana).¹⁹

In my opinion, these were the major attitudinal factors governing the development of the Indian Buddhist elaboration of the word of the master. These attitudes served to augment and elaborate the Buddhist oral tradition in striking contrast with one other major Indian oral lineage—the Vedic. The Vedic sayings, so well preserved for us, were the focus of almost precisely the opposite orientation toward their preservation. They enjoyed a very effective series of checks and balances in the manner of their several recitations, which ensured little textual variation. It was the duty of the brahmānas to recite the text exactly as received, and this precision was ensured by a series of accents and the memorization of the same text in different sequences.²⁰ Furthermore, the linguistic model, as opposed to the content model, was the basis for Vedic recitation: as long as correct recitation of the phonemes was maintained, con-
tent comprehension was optional. Finally, the position of the individual was paramount for the verification of the dharma among Buddhists. For Kumārila, however, the Vedas had self-validity (svataḥprāmāṇyam) and were independent of the individual revealing or reciting them, factors that he felt substantiated his claim of the superiority of the Vedas over the sayings of the Buddha.

It is certainly not my intention here to demonstrate that the above attitudinal factors, present at one time or another in Buddhist India, were fully developed from the earliest period. Still, the sources I have cited all point to an earlier, less well-developed common orientation of the leading members of the early Buddhist Sangha: the unique experience that the word of the master embodied must be kept as vital and alive as possible. If some amount of distortion in the discourses occurred, that was understandable, particularly where this involved slightly altered pronunciations or idiomatic interpolations necessary to transplant the message into a new region. The early missionary bhikṣus especially—losing day-to-day contact with the Buddha and having to rely on their own resources—must have been responsible for the initial modifications, particularly since their understanding had undoubtedly received the Buddha’s own seal of approval, and since they were sent with his authorization.

Councils and Standards

Given these trends of thought within Buddhist India, it is not surprising that they should become codified in accordance with certain rules of criticism that were to be applied during the discussions of whether or not a text or interpretation was to be considered authoritative. But now we must, in this context, consider the problem, so far put aside, of the compilation of the sayings of the Buddha, the codification of a canon, and the role of the councils in establishing scriptural and doctrinal authenticity.

According to well-entrenched tradition, the compilation of the Buddhist canon, the Tripiṭaka, occurred during the First Council, convened at Rājagṛha, the capital of Magadha, during the first rains retreat immediately following the demise of the Buddha. According to the standard account contained in the various Vinayas, the precipitating event was a perceived threat to the discipline of the Order. In this narrative, while most of the monks are mourning the passing of the Tathāgata, one of the monks has the audacity to declare the death of the Buddha to be their release from his exacting disciplinary standards. Mahākāśyapa, alarmed at the direction events are taking, calls the monks together to recite all the sayings of the Buddha: Ānanda reciting the Sūtra and Upāli, the Vinaya. Again according to the Vinaya sources,
the Second Council of Vaiśāli, held approximately one hundred years after the parinirvāṇa of the Buddha, is convened because of some infractions of the Vṛjiputraka monks, the most important being their acceptance of silver and gold for their needs. Yaśas, staying with the monks, precipitates the council, which draws the most important monks from all over central India. The Vṛjiputraka monks are declared in the wrong, the Vinaya is recodified, and the council is dispersed. This council is followed closely by a split over the so-called five theses of Mahādeva, most of them having to do with the fallibility of an arhat. At Pāṭaliputra a council is convened under the aegis of the king, Kālāśoka, but the rift is irreparable, resulting in the appearance of the two traditions—the Sthaviravādas on the side of the arhats, and the Mahāsāṃghikas on the side of the theses of Mahādeva. Factional disputes proliferate and the two sectarian councils follow: that of the Sthaviravādas at Pāṭaliputra under Dharmāśoka, which produced that masterpiece of polemics, the Kathāvatthu; and, much later, that of the Sarvāstivādas in Kaśmīra under Kaniśka, which produced the magnificent compendium of Sarvāstivāda doctrines, the Mahāvibhāṣā.

This account does not reflect the extreme variations of narrative that are found in the different Vinaya collections. These variations have sometimes led those researching the councils to an impasse, admitting that nothing can be known for or against the historicity of the councils. We need not adopt this extreme approach to the accounts, and André Bareau, in his remarkable work, Les Premiers conciles bouddhiques, has demonstrated satisfactorily that historical probability can be maintained if a judicious approach is taken.

It is, of course, impossible to accept the general position adopted by the Buddhist apologists concerning the recitation (samgītī) or collection of the scriptures at Rāja-grha. Every version of the Tripitaka contains texts that, by their own admission, are later than the earliest stratum of Buddhist literature. We need look no further than the accounts of the councils themselves—included, as they are, in the canon—to be confident that not everything passing under the rubric of “word of the Buddha” (buddhavacana) was compiled at an early date. However, the First Council was ostensibly convened during the first rains retreat following the death of the Buddha. No doubt a retreat during the rainy season took place that year, and the death of the Buddha is generally understood to have occurred during Vaiśākha, which comes a month before the rains. The Samgha was probably, on its own, assembled for the cremation of the Tathāgata and the distribution of his relics. It is thus likely that many of the elders spent their rains retreat together, since, with the death of the master, the very existence of the Order was in jeopardy. This being the case, the question is not whether there was a council of Rāja-grha, but rather what occurred during the rains retreat
following the passing of the Buddha, which was later recorded as “the Council of Rājagṛha.” Now we are on solid ground, since the word for “council” was samgīti, which indicates recitation, even if Tibetan translators have rendered the term as “collection” (bsdus-pa) in their histories and translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya.27

Perhaps the following scenario could be considered the most likely course of events. After the parinirvāṇa of the Buddha, the elders of the Saṅgha found themselves for the first time without the fully awakened one. During the first rains retreat, the younger monks, many of whom may never have heard the Buddha preach, wanted further information about the teaching of the master. The elders, too, doubtless wished to increase their understanding of the fine points of specific doctrines, and certainly there would have been a movement to establish the Prātimokṣa so that a uniform recitation of the rules of order could be performed.28

Thus the first rains retreat became a forum for the discussion and elaboration of the legend and doctrine of the Tathāgata. Perhaps some rules of order were brought toward codification, some of the teachings of the master were recited, and some verses were standardized, but it is highly unlikely that there was any formal collection or literary distinction of the various types of the master’s teachings.

During the hundred years following that first rains retreat, this same process must have taken place all over Buddhist India, particularly in the area of Magadha—the discussion, acceptance, and rejection of teachings as the word of the Buddha, or perhaps we should say as the teachings of the teacher, since the terms “word of the Buddha” (budhavacana) and “spoken by the Buddha” (buddhabhāṣita), both indicating the speech of the Buddha, appear to be later than the terms buddhānusāsanam and śāstuḥ śāsanam, meaning the dispensation of the Buddha or the doctrine of the teacher.29 Finally, when the legend of the Council of Rājagṛha became established—perhaps toward the end of the first century following the parinirvāṇa—along with it became codified a ritual exclamation of authenticity by which a teacher or local Saṅgha declared a certain body of material to be valid: “This is the dharma, this is the Vinaya, this is the teaching of the teacher” (eṣa dharma eṣa vinaya idam śāstuḥ śāsanam). Certain standards of authenticity, however, had to accompany this phrase, since the natural reaction of one not accepting this declaration is: how has it been ascertained?

Within the Bhikkhuṇīkkhandakam of the Cullavagga, a discourse occurs that appears to show a subsequent phase in the elaboration of this initial exclamation.30 Mahāpajāpatī Gotamī is depicted as asking the Buddha to expound a teaching (dhamma) by which she might remain in solitude, practicing with vigor. The Bhagavān answers that whatever teachings she might know which lead to dispassion, dissociation from the passions, lack of further accumulation, contentment, satisfaction, seclu-
sion, the application of effort, and ease of development, but not their opposites—all those teachings she should unequivocally bear in mind for “that is the dharma, that is the Vinaya, that is the teaching of the teacher.”

Such a loose formulation, however, could not satisfy those attempting to establish critical guidelines for authenticity within the broad milieu of the early Buddhist Saṅgha. The guidelines that came to be established were set in the context of the means by which a monk might receive a text that others in a tradition claimed to be the teaching of the Buddha. These circumstances are the well-known four references to authority (caturmahāpañcita), which have received much attention. Four specific situations were designated as normative in the transmission of the dharma. A bhikṣu might claim that certain teachings were the dharma, the Vinaya, the teaching of the teacher, as they were heard from:

1. the mouth of the Buddha,
2. a Saṅgha of elders,
3. a group of bhikṣus who were
   —specialists in the dharma (dharmadhara),
   —specialists in the Vinaya (vinayadhara), or
   —specialists in the proto-abhidharma lists (mātṛkādhara), or,
4. a single bhikṣu who was such a specialist.

The response prescribed for the other monks to these claims is instructive of what must have been going on during the first centuries following the demise of the Buddha. The following is the manner of approval for the first of the circumstances just listed, as demonstrated in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya:

(24.24.52) Therefore, O Ānanda, bhikṣus are to follow the transmitted discourses (sūtrānta) and not to follow individuals.

(27) Moreover, O Ānanda, a bhikṣu might come and say,

(28) “Directly from the Bhagavān, this dharma, this Vinaya, this teaching of the teacher was heard and grasped by me.”

(29) Now, O bhikṣus, that doctrine of his should not be praised or disparaged, but, having heard and grasped its statements and sounds, one should see if it conforms to the Sūtra and compare it with the Vinaya. If in doing so,
   a. it conforms to the Sūtra, and
   b. is reflected in the Vinaya, and
   c. does not contradict reality (dhammatā),
then let this be said [to that bhikṣu]:

(30) “Truly, O Noble One, these dharmas have been spoken by the Bhagavān. O Noble One, these dharmas have been well grasped by
you. Put against the Sūtra and compared with the Vinaya, these dharmas conform to the Sūtra and are reflected in the Vinaya and do not contradict reality (dharmatā).

(31) “Therefore, this is dharma; this is Vinaya; this is the teaching of the teacher. Having comprehended it, let it be carried aloft in the mind.”

Much is worthy of note in these “references to authority.” As both Lamotte and Jaini have observed, the third (c) of the threefold criteria in (29)—that the teachings not contradict reality (dharmatān ca na viloma-yanti)—is absent in the versions found in the Dīgha-nikāya and the Aṅguttara-nikāya but is found in the extracanonical Nettipakarana of the Theravādas. Apparently the older form of the criteria stressed the precise textual environment, whereas the Mūlasarvāstivādas were additionally concerned that nothing pass under the rubric of the “teaching of the teacher” that contradicted apparent reality. Certainly the meaning of dharmatā in this context does not have the ontological overtones that its translation by some scholars as “the nature of dharmas” suggest. Rather, as Wapola Rahula has shown in his classic article on dharmatā, the term indicates the “way of things,” the natural progress of the elements of reality, identified in many contexts as the general formulation of dependent origination: this being, that occurs, etc. Its presence as one of the three criteria of acceptance in the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya and other texts indicates both the developing fascination with dependent origination and the desire that the Buddha’s teaching remain acceptable to the perceptive observer. Its presence also indicates the intrusion, for the first time, of a philosophical argument into the criteria—the other two criteria (a and b in 29) being almost critical in their philosophical concern for conformity to what we might call “style.” Virtually all later textual justifications, particularly those of the Mahāyāna, would be conducted on the basis of philosophical argument.

Although these four circumstances—from 1. the mouth of the Buddha, etc.—are known as such in other Sanskrit texts, the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya does not refer to them as the mahāpadēsa, the four “references to authority.” Instead, this Vinaya focuses on the three criteria (a, b, and c in 29) as demonstrating the way in which the bhikṣu is to follow the transmitted discourses (sūrānta) rather than individuals. The Mūlasarvāstivāda reference here seems to allude to an early development of a doctrinal structure missing in Theravāda texts: the four bases—or “refuges”—of comprehension (cātuḥpratisārana). The standard form of these, as given in other, much later texts, is that one is to have recourse:

i. to dharma but not to individuals,
ii. to the meaning but not to the letter,
It appears to me most likely that the first of the four rules of interpretation—i.e., following dharma and not individuals—came directly out of the circumstance depicted here: the early Saṃgha’s decision to take the rules of behavior as its primary focus in lieu of any individual. The *Gopakamoggallāna-sutta* relates a conversation between Ānanda and Vasakāra, a minister for Ajātasattu, set shortly after the passing of the Buddha. Vasakāra asks Ānanda if the Buddha has nominated any bhikkhu as his successor or if the Saṃgha has appointed any bhikkhu as its leader in his place. Upon receiving a negative reply to both questions, Vasakāra then asks Ānanda to explain the cause for the continued unity (samaggiyā) among the members of the Order. Ānanda replies that the basis for this unity is the fact that all take refuge in Dhamma (dhammappatīsaranā). Asked to elaborate, Ānanda identifies this as the maintenance of the rules of order, the Prātimokṣa.

Given the orientation toward content and personal validation, it might be seen as quite remarkable that the thrust of Buddhist monastic life did not exhibit more vicissitudes than it did. This stability can be attributed to the continuing concern for the basic rules of order. In a society like India, where the proclivity of the group is to surround an individual assuming a position of authority, the cult of personality can quickly displace all other standards. When the early tradition isolated the rules of behavior as the center of gravity, it selected group conduct over individual leadership. All the other criteria reinforce the individual’s position as a functioning member of a subculture, rather than as a leader or follower. The model of authority is not the strictly vertical teacher-disciple relationship so built into the Vedic system of recitation, however. Instead, the empowerment for decisions was toward a broad spectrum of the community and was grounded in monastic decorum. This decorum was to be the backbone of the Buddhist tradition, right through the period of Vajrayāna monasticism.

According to Barea, the development of the separate canons of the various sects began immediately following the first council of Pātaliputra, in the first half of the second century following the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. That canons began to be formed at this time, however, does not indicate that they were completed or even titled as such. Whenever the initial formation of the canon, be it only under the general title of “teaching of the teacher” (śāstuḥ śāsanam), we must concur with Étienne Lamotte’s assessment that no Buddhist sect, as long as it remained vital and alive with the inspiration of the teaching, completely closed its canon. For the duration of a sect’s appearance in Buddhist India, it
continued to include later material in its canon as the “teaching of the teacher.”

**Abhidharma: The Model of Development**

Despite the initial division of the Order following the incident at Pāṭaliputra, the actual differences between the Mahāsamghikas and the Sthaviravādas were quite negligible. A much more far-reaching change was quietly taking place among the masters of the mātrkā, the numbered lists of elements of reality that were initially abstracted from the sūtras. In the oldest forms available to us now—such as the binary (duka) and ternary (tika) lists at the beginning of the Dhammasaṅgani—the lists are themselves quite innocuous, being little more than mnemonic devices facilitating the memorization of certain groups of psycho-physical elements. In this capacity, they appear to be developments of an older form of mnemonic device (uddāna), a list summarizing the content of this or that section of the Sūtra or the Vinaya. The mātrkās, however, became the focus of an intense scholastic movement that aspired to remove any doubt about the functional relation of any element of reality to any other element, the sūtras being neither exhaustive on all points of doctrine nor written with a clear structural layout. With this in mind, the Abhidharmika masters wished to construct a “definitive” (lāksanika) statement about which no doubt could be harbored, since they maintained that the sūtras were “intentional” (abhiprāyika) in their content, being spoken by the Buddha for a certain audience in a specific frame of mind.

Having thus exhaustively constructed these pithy phrases, these scholars must certainly have wished to endow the mātrkās with authority equal to that of the Sūtra and Vinaya, so that the specialists in these would enjoy the same doctrinal, monastic, and social privilege as the specialists in the other two literary genres. We have seen, in the context of the Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya passage cited above, that the third and fourth members of the lines of authority (3 and 4) included those who were specialists in the numbered lists (mātrkādhara), but the criteria of authenticity in (29) only included the Sūtra and the Vinaya. For the then-emerging Abhidharma to obtain the same gravity as these two, it had to be classed as the word of the Buddha. To establish this desideratum, the differing Abhidharma schools went about the process in their several ways. We will examine the methods of the two dominant Abhidharma traditions, those of the Sarvāstivādas and of the Theravādas.

It seems that the Sarvāstivādas wished to pursue the already well-defined channels of authenticity to legitimize the seven works of their Abhidharma-piṭaka as Śākyamuni’s own statements. To do this they had to determine that the Buddha preached the system, that it was collected
by someone, and that it was recited at the First Council. To establish the first two items, they relied on two other circumstances. First, they utilized the doctrine that whatever discourse or treatise was approved by the Buddha became the “doctrine of the teacher” and, by extension, the word of the Buddha. Second, they used the similarity of names between Kātyāyanīputra—the putative author of the Ānānaprasthāna, the core of the Sarvāstivāda-abhidharma, composed perhaps in the second century B.C.E.—and [Maha]Kātyāyana, one of the disciples of the Buddha who was considered to have been present at the First Council. Evidently developing associations already current among his (or their) predecessors, the author(s) of the Vibhāṣa, a commentary on the Ānānaprasthāna, maintained that Kātyāyanīputra collected various sayings of the Buddha into a volume of Abhidharma that constituted the Ānānaprasthāna. This text was then approved by the Tathāgata as buddhavacana. The other six works of the Sarvāstivāda-abhidharma—considered by the Sarvāstivādins to be the six limbs (pada) of the Ānānaprasthāna—were likewise collections of the word of the Buddha, arranged systematically.

Taking another tack, the Theravādins attempted to establish an elaborate mythology surrounding the discovery, propagation, and dissemination of their Abhidhamma-pitaka. First, they tried to show that the Buddha’s attainment of awakening (maha-bodhi) involved the realization of the Abhidhamma. To this end, Buddhaghosa elaborates a scenario in which the Buddha contemplates the literal contents of the seven works of the Theravāda-abhidhamma, one book after another. The next difficulty was showing that the Buddha had personally preached this material. Not resorting to the expedient of collection by a disciple, as had the Sarvāstivādins, the Theravādins adapted an old story about the Tathāgata traveling to the Trayatrisa heaven during a rains retreat to preach the dharma to his mother, Mahāmāyā, who had passed away shortly after the bodhisattva’s birth. The story is mentioned in the Divyāvadāna, without elucidation of the contents of the lecture tour except to say that he taught dharma. The Theravādins utilized this popular filial legend as a basis for identifying the first teaching of their Abhidhamma-pitaka. There was still the problem of the manner of its transmission to one of the śrāvakas, since Mahāmāyā had remained in heaven. The story goes that the Buddha, having completed his teaching in heaven, returned by way of Anavatapta Lake, sometimes located in the Himalayas, where he taught the entire Abhidhamma to Sāriputta, the most insightful of his disciples. During the First Council, the Abhidhamma-pitaka was recited by Ānanda, and an extemporaneous commentary on all seven books was given by Mahākassapa at that time. This commentary was said to serve as the basis of the orthodox (Mahāvihāra) understanding of the Theravāda-abhidhamma.

The Abhidhamma became so important for the Theravāda tradition
that they based the transmission of their system on those upholding its study. Buddhaghosa singles out for special mention the obscure passage in the Mahāvagga where the ability to impart the Abhidhamma—whatever it means in this early context—is identified as one element in several lists of requisites to be possessed before a bhikkhu can take part in the ordination of a new disciple. In the Āthasālinī, he further declares that one preaching the dharma (dhammakathika) is not a true preacher unless he has intimate knowledge of the Abhidhamma. Otherwise he will confuse the various kinds of ethical action and their maturation, and will be unable to discuss correctly the differences between those elements of reality which are material (rūpa) and those which are not (arūpa). Thus knowledge of the Abhidhamma supplanted a more specifically meditative orientation, seen in the earlier literature, as the criterion for validation as a “preacher of Dhamma.” To be fair, the Theravādas in all honesty considered the Abhidhamma to be the supreme statement of all Buddhist values and the unique means of obtaining stainless insight. Buddhaghosa even goes so far as to maintain that one rejecting the Abhidhamma is guilty of striking a blow against the wheel of the Victor’s doctrine and is culpable of dividing the Saṅgha, one of the sins requiring expulsion.

Internal inconsistencies in their mythologies did not give either the Sarvāstivādas or the Theravādas pause, for both of them had Ānanda recite their Abhidharmas at the First Council, while neither made much provision for Ānanda to learn the Abhidharma from either Mahākātyāyana or Sāriputta. Ānanda’s name, for example, does not occur in the formal lineage list given in the Āthasālinī. Nonetheless, in both cases the apologists were relatively efficient in obtaining their goal: the general acceptance of Abhidharma as a scriptural member and as the sole intellectual standard to be met by succeeding developments. Abhidharma was the first wholly new form of literature to arise in Buddhist India claiming status as scripture. Its methodologies, both intellectual and apologetic, were to set much of the stage for the Mahāyāna.

Mahāyāna

With the rise of the Mahāyāna, the field of polemics expanded greatly. Again, the circumstances governing authenticity were different both from the early sectarian sūtras of the various Nikāyas and from the Abhidharma. Most of the Mahāyāna-sūtras were authored much later than the previous literature and, particularly as time went on, their content was decidedly different. The milieu from which they arose has not yet been defined with sufficient accuracy, and certain theories place excessive importance both on the theme of faith and on the laity. These were important factors, of course, but hardly the exclusive property and pri-
mary orientation of the Mahāyāna. Fortunately, the origins of the Mahāyāna have recently been subjected to intense scrutiny, and the dominant conclusion of this research has been that of organic development from the earlier tradition rather than “revolutionary” breaks with the past.\(^57\)

Whatever the source of Mahāyāna, by the time its apologetic works appeared, the organization of its defense was certainly in the hands of some of the greatest monastic intellects that India has produced. Facing many of the same objections that had confronted the Ābhidharmikas, the Mahāyānists adopted a similar approach: the enlightenment of the Buddha, his preaching of the dharma, and its collection by his disciples all had to be reconstructed in Mahāyāna terms. Furthermore, criteria of authenticity had to be maintained, along with proofs that the Mahāyāna scriptures met these criteria. These latter arguments were almost solely philosophico-legalistic in nature, lacking the more critical approach prevalent during the first centuries following the Buddha’s nirvāṇa. Finally, we must note that the apologists of the new tradition tended to identify Mahāyāna in the abstract with Mahāyāna in the particular: a vindication of the theory of the bodhisattva career implied that the scriptures of the Great Vehicle were the word of the Buddha.

It appears that the mythology and the apologetic were, in general, constructed long after the formation of the Mahāyāna, and mostly stem from around the third or fourth centuries C.E. The exception to this was the initial Mahāyānist formulation of the enlightenment of Śākyamuni as found in the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka (Lotus Sūtra). Chapter 15 of the received Sanskrit text depicts Śākyamuni revealing to the assembled śrāvakas that he had not in fact obtained enlightenment under the bodhi tree in this life but had already secured awakening incalculable aeons in the past.\(^58\) The acts undertaken by him as Siddhārtha were merely a show for the sake of his disciples. Building on this model, later scriptures like the Daśabhūmika describe the way in which a bodhisattva generally obtains his goal; the process was envisioned as common to all buddhas, including Śākyamuni.\(^59\)

In the Daśabhūmika account, a bodhisattva ascending to the tenth and final level of the path obtains the level of consecration with the gnosis of universal omniscience (sarvākārasarvajñānābhisekabhiṃjñānaṃ prāpta).\(^60\) Then he passes through a million levels of concentration (samādhi) until he confronts the samādhi specific to the gnosis of omniscience. Enlarging his body, the bodhisattva takes his place in the middle of a great miraculous lotus, while other lotuses are filled with innumerable bodhisattvas, all of whom face the bodhisattva and enter into a hundred thousand samādhis. Then all the tathāgatas of the ten directions respond with rays of light coming from the circles of hair in their foreheads. These rays consecrate the bodhisattva into the range of accomplishment of the
complete Buddha (samyakṣambuddhavīṣaya). He thus obtains all of the powers and qualities of the Buddha and reaches the level of the “cloud of the dharma” since, like a vast rain cloud, he spontaneously sends down the rain of the Saddharma.

While one of the earliest Mahāyāna scriptures, the Śūramgamasamādhi-sūtra, mentions the consecration at the tenth level of the bodhisattva, the Praṇāpāramitā-sūtras do not seem to recognize such an achievement. Apparently derived from the Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda tradition, consecration is explicitly described by means of the simile of a young prince (kumāra) obtaining the position of crown prince (yauvarājya). The epithet “having obtained his consecration” (abhiṣekapripta) is applied to Maitreya in the Gaṇḍavyūha, and the term may have initially indicated Maitreya’s anointment as the successor to Śākyamuni. In any event, by the second half of the Gupta period the consecration of a bodhisattva who is obtaining the stage of the Buddha was a relatively well-accepted doctrine.

As the doctrines and mythology of the enlightenment developed, the later sūtras, such as the Lankāvatāra, no longer maintained that the bodhisattva obtained his release under the tree at Vajrāsana, but instead in Akaniṣṭha, the highest heaven of the world of form. Other Mahāyānists, however, evidently did not wish to define enlightenment in any worldly way whatsoever, and so the realm of “Dense Array” (Ghanavyūha), as described in the Ghanavyūha-sūtra, was identified as the locus of final emancipation. Ghanavyūha is the perfect realm wherein the real (maula) Buddha resides, while his emanations (nairamānika) proceed out into the various world systems to work for the benefit of beings. It is not physical and is made entirely of uncompounded matter (asamskṛtaparamāṇu). Only tathāgatas and bodhisattvas on the tenth stage may reside there, and they provided the setting for the coronation of Śākyamuni when he obtained enlightenment so long before. There he too resided, sending his emanation into this Sāha world system to go through the twelve acts of the Buddha for the benefit of those bound into the cycle of existence.

Traditions concerning both the teaching and the recitation of the Mahāyāna-sūtras remained problematic throughout the duration of Indian Mahāyāna. The author of the Tā chih-tu lun (Treatise on Perfect Insight), ascribed incorrectly to the great Mādhyamika Nāgārjuna, maintained that the Mahāyāna scriptures were never taught to the śrāvakas. This statement is difficult since many of the “entrusting” (parīndanā) chapters of the Mahāyāna materials have the Buddha commit the text of the sūtra to the care of Subhūti, Ānanda, Mahākāśyapa, or another of the śrāvakas. The Saṃdhinirmocana-sūtra sought to solve the chronological and territorial difficulties of Śākyamuni’s preaching of the dharma by use of its famous “three turnings of the Wheel of the
According to this doctrine, the Buddha first elaborated the sūtras of the Śrāvakāyāna at Vārāṇasi, in Mrgadāva. Elsewhere, he later taught the doctrine of the lack of intrinsic nature in all elements of existence (sarvadharmaniḥsvabhāvatā) and their emptiness. Finally, he taught the well-discriminating sūtras of definitive significance (nītārtha), which maintain the doctrines espoused by the Yogācāra masters. The Saddharma-pundarīka, in contrast, could not admit that the Buddha preached any doctrine at all and declared that all the dharma was spoken by means of just a single sound (ekasvara). Surpassing even this point of view, the Tathāgataugāhaka-sūtra—in its elaboration of the mythology of the acts of the Buddha—maintained that, from the time of his enlightenment until his final nirvāṇa, the Tathāgata does not preach even a single word. All the doctrines and all the scriptures simply arise in the hearing of those around the Buddha, each according to his own proclivities.

Allied to the mythology of the preaching of the dharma is the problem of the recitation of the Mahāyāna scriptures immediately after the demise of the Buddha. Bhāvaviveka, in his Tārakāvalī, merely maintained that the various bodhisattvas severally collected the Mahāyāna scriptures. A more pervasive tradition is found in sūtra commentaries ascribed to Vasubandhu and in the Abhisamayālaṃkārāloka of Haribhadra: Vajrapāṇi (Mahāvajradhara) recited the Prajñāpāramitā when the other bodhisattvas, with Maitreya at their head, inquired about the sūtra. For the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra, Haribhadra seems to prefer another view based on the entrusting chapter (parināma), in which Ānanda is entrusted with the spread of the sūtra. He therefore spoke the “Thus have I heard at one time” formula at the beginning of the sūtra, and it must have been Ānanda who collected the sūtra. An objection is raised that Ānanda, being a śrāvaka, could not possibly have comprehended the deep significance of the sūtra, so how could he have recollected and recited it? In response Haribhadra declares that as long as the sūtra has been accurately heard directly from the Lord just as he spoke it, there is no fault if it is recited by one who has not totally realized its contents. Thus it is correct that Ānanda and the other śrāvakas have recited the Mahāyāna-sūtras, permitted, as they were, by the Tathāgata in the Dharmasamgīti-sūtra. Finally, it appears that the later Mahāyāna tradition took the convenient step of inventing another council ostensibly coincident with that held at Rājagṛha. According to the Tibetan historians bSod-nams rtse-mo and Bu-ston, some acāryas claim that, while the śrāvakas were reciting the Tripitaka at Rājagṛha, one (or 900) million bodhisattvas assembled in the cave Vimalasvabhāva (variant: Vimalasambhava) in the south of India. There, Maṇjuśrī recited the Mahāyāna-abhidharma, Maitreya the Mahāyāna-vinaya, and Vajrapāṇi the Mahāyāna-sūtras.
Unfortunately for the Mahāyānācāryas, establishing the Vimalasvabhāva mythology was easier than getting the Mahāyāna-sūtras accepted as the word of the Buddha. Indeed, if we can judge by the increasing intensity of polemics from the fourth to sixth centuries C.E., it appears that the Mahāyāna met with opposition in proportion to its popularity. As long as it was still a small, ill-defined movement, it evidently was not seen as a threat to the stability of Indian Buddhism as a whole—such a perception came only with wider acceptance. The Mahāyāna apologists responded in kind, utilizing some of the same arguments already elaborated by the Ābhidharmikas and creating more of their own. The general outline for the Mahāyāna apology was established by the author of the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra; most later authors echoed or elaborated the same concerns. 77

Verse I.7 contains eight reasons that the author of the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra considers definitive in determining that the Mahāyāna is the word of the Buddha: 78

(I) The Buddha did not prophesy the rise of the Mahāyāna as a false dharma. If the Mahāyāna were a threat to the true dharma, then it would have been foreseen by the Buddha in the same way that he is recorded as making prophecies (vyākaraṇa) concerning the ultimate demise of the dharma. 79

(2) In response to the charge that the Mahāyāna came later, the author of the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra declares that the Mahāyāna and the Śrāvakayāna have simultaneous origins. While the Buddha was preaching the Śrāvakayāna to his disciples at Sravasti and elsewhere, he was also teaching the Mahāyāna. 80

(3) The opponent has maintained that some sophists or some heretics, declaring themselves learned and wishing to deceive the world, wrote all the texts of the Prajñāpāramitā and so forth. The author replies that the profound and extensive teachings, such as those of the levels (bhūmi) and the perfections (pāramitā), are not practices of the heretics, so how could they have devised them? In fact, these terms do not occur in the sāstras of the sophists and the heretics, and even if one were to explain these doctrines to them, they would not be interested and would develop no confidence in them. 81

(4) Some śrāvakas maintain that the Mahāyāna was not spoken by Śākyamuni but by another who passed through the stages and, realizing sanyaksambodhi, became a buddha. But this would still prove that the Mahāyāna was the word of the Buddha, even if not the word of Śākyamuni, since this is the very definition of the “word of the Buddha” accepted by all. 82

(5) Concerning the prima facie argument for the existence of the Mahāyāna, there can be no arising of buddhas without the vehicle of the Buddha (buddhayāna). If, therefore, it is agreed that some sort of
Mahāyāna exists (i.e., the buddhayāna), that existent Mahāyāna that we espouse, for there can be no other Mahāyāna.\textsuperscript{83} Thus the Mahāyāna is buddhavacana describing the path of the Buddha.

(6) By the same token, if the Mahāyāna did not exist, there could be no Śrāvakayāna, since there would have been no Buddha to preach the Śrāvakayāna. Furthermore, if the Śrāvakayāna were preached without the Mahāyāna—that is, without the presence of the Buddha—then the Śrāvakayāna would not be the word of the Buddha. Thus the Śrāvakayāna’s standing as buddhavacana is wholly dependent on the Mahāyāna’s standing as buddhavacana.

(7) Moreover, when this Mahāyāna is cultivated, it becomes the antidote for the various defilements (kleśa) by virtue of its status as the basis for the arising of all nonconceptual gnosis (sarvanirvikalpajñānāśrayatvena).\textsuperscript{84} Thus it must be the word of the Buddha since only the Buddha's word can serve as the proper antidote. This argument is also reflected in the second of three criteria listed in the Śrutamāyī Bhūmi section of the Yogācarabhūmi, whereby material may be considered as representing trustworthy authority (āptgama): a statement may be considered trustworthy (āptgama = buddhavacana) because it acts as an antidote to the defilements (samkleśapratipaksatas).\textsuperscript{85}

Both these formulations work on the rationale that all statements which serve as a solid basis for eliminating defilements and for obtaining awakening must be considered the word of the Buddha. This is certainly not an innovation of the Mahāyāna, and we have already seen that both the Mahāsāṃghikas and the Theravādins maintain substantially the same point of view. Within the Mahāyāna, the logical extension of this was produced in the Adhyāsāya-saṇṇodana-sūtra,\textsuperscript{86} which maintains that all “inspired speech” (pratibhāna) may be considered the word of the Buddha if it fulfills four criteria: (a) if it is significant (arthopassāya) and not nonsense, (b) if it is endowed with doctrinal principle (dharmopassāya) and not its opposite, (c) if it destroys the defilements (kleśahātaka) and does not cause their increase, and (d) if it illuminates the benefits of nirvāṇa and does not increase the faults of saṃsāra. If endowed with these four criteria, all that is well said (subhātita) is the speech of the Buddha. It is interesting that the first two of these four criteria—endowment with significance and doctrinal principle—are precisely the same as the criteria given in the Mahāvagga definition of the dharma quoted above in the section on the early Saṅgha. We have already seen that the theme of the destruction of the defilements was a meaningful thread running throughout all the definitions of the “teaching of the teacher,” and certainly the desideratum of showing the benefits of nirvāṇa cannot be considered revolutionary. Moreover, we have seen that both the early Nikāyas and the Ābhidharmikas accepted as
authentic sutras inspired \( (pratibhātū) \) by the Buddha and approved by him. The final clause of the sūtra section in question is a twist of the phrase found in both the \( Ānguttara-nikāya \) and Aśoka’s Bhābrū rock edict, “All that the Buddha has said is well-spoken.”

Finally, one cannot determine merely by the literal meaning of the words alone that the Mahāyāna is not the word of the Buddha. For example, one may maintain that, because the Tathāgata declared the aggregates and so forth to be existent, the \( Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras \) are therefore not the word of the Buddha because they declare these same things to be nonexistent. Likewise, one may incorrectly conclude that these same sūtras declare the total nonexistence of the Buddha, the dharma, the Samgha, and all wholesome activity, and therefore must have been written by Māra. Such misconceptions arise from an improper application of the mind \( (ayonifamanikāra) \) coupled with one’s own preconceptions arising from not studying the sūtras with learned masters.

The argument concerning literalness is especially pertinent to the Mahāyāna and, in the form given in these materials, constitutes the Yogācāra vindication of the Mahāyāna scriptures as the “middle path” \( (madhyamā pratipad) \). According to this line of reasoning, the Mahāyāna steers a course between the total affirmation of existence found in the Śrāvakayāna and the total negation of the elements of reality that some Yogācāra masters claim is the perspective of the Mādhyamika school. Therefore, to establish the Mahāyāna as the “middle way,” the Yogācāra masters adapted the traditional division of scripture: some sūtras are of definitive significance \( (nīṭarthā) \) in their literal statements (for instance, the \( Saṃsthānīnirmocana) \), whereas the real meaning of others must be adjusted \( (nevārtha) \) according to the context, the intention of the Buddha, and so forth.

Following these eight arguments, in verse I.11 the author of the \( Mahāyānasūttrālamkāra \) takes up the criteria established in the context of the “references to authority” \( (mahāpadesas) \)—already examined in the section on councils and standards—and turns them into a ninth argument. Some may retort to the first eight arguments that the characteristics of the word of the Buddha \( (buddhavacana-lakṣaṇa) \) have already been set forth in the \( Dīrghāgama \) and elsewhere: if a statement conforms to the sūtras, is reflected in the \( Vinaya, \) and does not contradict reality \( (dharmatā), \) then it is the word of the Buddha. They will then maintain that since the major Mahāyāna statement that all dharmas are without any self-nature \( (sarvadharmaiśvabhāvātā) \) does not fulfill any of these three criteria, it cannot be considered the word of the Buddha. The reply to this criticism is that the Mahāyāna is true to itself in these areas. The Śrāvaka schools cannot claim to meet the criteria any better than this because none of the Śrāvaka sects agree with each other. Each has its own \( Sūtra-pitaka, \) \( Vinaya-pitaka, \) and definition of reality, all mutually
contradictory. The Mahāyāna-sūtras are as internally consistent and externally inconsistent as those of any of the eighteen sects. As regards the Vinaya, the Mahāyāna-sūtras maintain that its purpose is to eliminate defilement (kleśa), and for a bodhisattva the only real defilement is conceptualization (vikalpa). Since the elimination of this conceptualization occurs through nonconceptual gnosis arising by means of the practices found in the Mahāyāna scriptures, the Mahāyāna is reflected in this Vinaya of nonconceptual gnosis. Finally, reality (dharmatā) is that which effects the attainment of the great enlightenment (mahābodhi). The sublimity and profundity of the Mahāyāna constitute its reality, since they are the characteristics whereby the Mahāyāna leads to that state. Therefore, the Mahāyāna-sūtras qualify as the word of the Buddha if the sūtras of any of the sects qualify.90

As his final analysis of the problem of communication between the Śrāvakayānists and the Mahāyānists, the author of the Mahāyānasūtraśākta complains that his opponents will not even listen to the sūtras of the Great Vehicle and give them a fair and impartial hearing; they are afraid of the doctrine and prejudiced against the sūtras (vv. I.14–15, 17–19, 21). He also maintains that the only way one could definitively ascertain that these texts were not spoken by the Buddha would be to possess omniscience (v. I.16).91

It is both ironic and telling that the difficulties of definition that surrounded the generation and codification of the sūtras throughout the history of Indian Buddhism finally caused Śāntideva to define the doctrine of the Buddha as that which has its basis in the condition of the fully ordained monk (śāsanam bhikṣutāmālam).92 This is certainly very close to the consensual definition of the Buddha’s teaching, which, as we have seen, held the earliest communities together.93

Vajrayāna

Very little of the genesis of the elements later known as Mantrayāna or Vajrayāna has been adequately explained. Moreover, the extremely close relationship that this tradition in its maturity had with normative Mahāyāna in the monastic setting has been largely ignored. Fortunately, David Snellgrove’s recent Indo-Tibetan Buddhism has done much to redress the problem, being the most balanced assessment of the system in light of the available evidence.94

Space prevents me from attempting to impart anything more than a flavor of the Mantrayāna legends surrounding the discovery, propagation, and collection of the dharma. This tradition appears to have pursued this class of myths almost for its own sake, much as the earlier traditions did with the Jātaka and Avadāna literature, but for very different reasons. Still, the legend of the Buddha’s enlightenment most often rec-
ognized in the literature of the Vajrayāna was the story found in the first chapter of the *Sarvatathāgata-tattvasamgraha-kalpa.* In this text, the Bodhisattva Sarvārtha-siddhi, while attempting to obtain enlightenment, was instructed by all the tathāgatas and led through the five stages of realization (pañcābhisambodhi), after which he emerged as a fully enlightened buddha. It is clear from the context and the exegetical material relating to it that, unlike the discussions addressed above, this delineation of the process of enlightenment was not intended as a justification of a certain class of literature, but rather as a model for meditation. Thus the stages of his visualization were described in detail, but the philosophical (darśana) content of his realization has been largely ignored in the *Tattvasamgraha.* This was in effective contrast to the *Āṭṭhasālinī,* where Buddhaghosa had Śākyamuni review the contents of the seven books of the *Abhidhamma-piṭaka.*

According to the *Tattvasamgraha,* Sarvārtha-siddhi was given the name Vajradhatu upon his enlightenment, but many commentators assumed that this bodhisattva was identical with Śākyamuni. Śākyamitra, basing himself on a line occurring toward the end of the *Tattvasamgraha,* assumed that this buddha went through the acts of the Tathāgata as the Buddha Śākyamuni shortly after obtaining enlightenment in this manner. Others, however, referred to the time period delineated in the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra* and maintained that Śākyamuni had been Sarvārtha-siddhi long before. Both factions agreed, though, that between the time of obtaining enlightenment and the demonstration of the acts of the Buddha under the name of Śākyamuni, this buddha preached the tantras from the top of Mt. Sumeru. In terms of time, this means that the tantras were not initially preached by the Buddha during his lifetime, and there arose discussions as to just when the different tantras were initially spoken, and whether or not they passed out of existence during the interim. For example, the *Vajrapāṇīyabhiseka-tantra* was putatively spoken first by Mahāvairocana in Ādakāvati and later, after an interval, repeated by Śākyamuni, who some considered to be identical with Mahāvairocana. Yet the claim that a specific tantra was initially spoken by Śākyamuni in a prior time did not ensure that he repeated it later, and *Bhavyakirti* was known for maintaining that the *Laghucakravala-tantra* was never lost after its initial exposition, since it continued to be utilized by male and female divine meditators (vīra/virā) even during the destruction of the universe between the aeons. The *Guhyasamāja-tantra* maintained a different scenario, claiming that it was always spoken by buddhas but was not preached during the period between Dipamkara and Kaśyapa, since there were no worthy individuals living then to receive the tantra. This entire line of thought was really an extension of the doctrine found in some *Mahāyāna-sūtras* that the buddhas of the three times always preach this or that individual
Ultimately, it appears that such discussions relied on the model of the definition of truth or reality (dharmatā) as existing whether or not tathāgatas arise to discover it. We have seen in the quote from the Abhidharmadīpa, given in the section on the early Saṅgha above, that the later Vaibhāṣikas considered the Tathāgata to have discovered statements (dharma) which were not of human origin (apauruṣeya). Here, too, the Mantrayāna must have been making some effort at claiming that the Buddhist scriptures were as permanent as the Vedas, which purportedly remain when the world is destroyed.

The story associated with the Tatvasamgraha of the tantric preaching at the peak of Mt. Sumeru was by no means the only legend about the propagation of Vajrayāna circulating in India. One other major tradition concerned the mythical sojourn of the Buddha to the land of Uḍḍiyāna at the request of the King Indrabhūti. According to this legend, Indrabhūti, upon seeing a group of bhikṣus flying through space, inquired of the Uḍḍiyāna citizens about the nature of these individuals. Upon learning that they were members of the Buddha’s Saṅgha, he offered a flower in the direction of Śrāvastī and obtained a vision of the Buddha and his retinue. Beseeched by Indrabhūti, the Buddha and his attendants paid a visit to Uḍḍiyāna the following day. The king then requested that the Buddha explain the method for liberation from saṁsāra, and the Buddha replied that it was necessary to abandon family life first. Indrabhūti, however, asked the Buddha to develop a method whereby those addicted to the five sense objects might yet obtain liberation. The Buddha, having taken up residence in the bhagas—normally meaning “vagina,” but made problematic by the plural—of the adamantine women, bestowed on Indrabhūti the proper consecration (abhiṣeka) and preached to him the tantras. From Indrabhūti, the tantras spread through India.

This story was evidently developed by the tradition to unify a number of dissociated elements: the early presence of dhāraṇī practices in Uḍḍiyāna, attested by Hsüan-tsang in the seventh century; the local traditions concerning the visit of the Buddha to Uḍḍiyāna and elsewhere in the upper Indus drainage; the continued fascination of Indian storytellers with the figure of Indrabhūti, there being three separate Indrabhūtis by the twelfth century; and the need to incorporate the erotic imagery of the most commonly found introductory lines (nidāna) of the tantras into a format to account for the preaching of the tantras.

The pursuit of legendary embellishment was perhaps done at the expense of polemics, for I have found no significant polemical arguments developed in defense of the Mantrayāna in India. This may be contrasted to Tibet, where the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries saw both bSod-nams rtse-mo and Bu-ston defending the system with argu-
ments largely developed from the first chapter of the *Mahāyānasūtra-lauṅkāra*.\(^{106}\) The only Indic references for the defense of Vajrayāna that these two authors cited are almost totally expository and nonpolemical in nature, even if, as in the case of the *Tattvāsiddhi* ascribed to Śāntarakṣita, the exposition is highly intellectual and designed to withstand the attacks of one versed in the logical forms of the day.\(^{107}\) The *Tattvāsiddhi*, however, does not conduct its argument in the standard *pūrvapakṣa/siddhānta* format; its primary thrust is to vindicate the proposition that there is no inherent connection between sensory enjoyment and defilement. Perhaps even more significantly, Bhāvaviveka defends the use of mantras in the normative context of the Mahāyāna.\(^{108}\) I can only assume that Mantrayāna, developing as a system from the seventh century on, received no serious challenge from the Buddhist community in India.

An apparent inference from the lack of polemics is that the Mantrayāna took its epithet of "secret" (*guhya*) seriously, so many of its methods were not widely publicized, unlike the Mahāyāna. Its lack of argumentation then begins to become comprehensible, for attacks on one Buddhist tradition by another mainly occurred, as we have inferred in the case of the Mahāyāna, when the new tradition achieved some degree of widespread popularity as a separate, new tradition. Neither the Mahāyānists nor the Vajrayānists appeared aware that this was the case, since the Vajrayāna still maintained the ideal of the bodhisattva (even if slightly offset as bodhisattva-cum-mahāsiddha), the path structure of the Mahāyāna, and the perspective (*darśana*) developed by the later Mādhyamikas, such as Śāntarakṣita. Both the *Prātimokṣa* and the bodhisattvaśīla were generally observed by Vajrayānists, since the *Vajraśekhara-tantra* had established the doctrine of the *trisāṃvara*, the triple discipline of Śrāvakayāna, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, all undertaken by a single individual.\(^{109}\) Primarily the methods of Vajrayāna and its time frame—enlightenment in this life—were the elements touted as dissimilar.\(^{110}\)

### Concluding Remarks

In the above discussion, I have tried to introduce the most pervasive attitudes and concerns, the dominant standards, and the normative mythologies of Indian Buddhism toward the development of its scriptures. It is clear that, for the majority of Buddhist traditions, scriptural authenticity was minimally defined as the claim that their materials had been cognized by the (or a) Buddha, recited or approved by him, preached to his disciples, and recited by them in a convocation called for that purpose. The values accepted in the validating process include the following:
a. Śākyamuni discovered the truth (dharma) but did not exhaust it—others could speak the truth for him.

b. The content of the scriptures was paramount; precise phonemic conservation was of less concern.

c. The individual was empowered to verify—textually or experientially—the word of the Buddha.

d. Orthopraxy (prātimokṣa) was considered the “essence” of the tradition, not orthodoxy.

In four particular instances, however, I may have neglected my task: the role of non-Buddhist literature in the formation of new genres of scripture, the classification systems of the scriptures, the lack of centralized authority, and the proliferation of the various sects.

The role of non-Buddhist literature was of concern to apologists. Yet the relationship between Buddhist literature and any one of the literary trends in India is often difficult to determine, partially because Buddhist texts frequently enjoy a more accurate chronology than some other branches of Indian writing. Moreover, the influences tend to be item-specific and text-specific—such as the borrowing of the four Buddhist views on time and the definition of avidyā by the author of the Yogabhasya. At times, particularly in the early era, the non-Buddhist text is lost and the Buddhist text survives only in Chinese or Tibetan translation. All these circumstances present difficulties which, if not insurmountable, remain problematic and must await thorough investigation.

Scriptural classification systems, in contrast, have been subject to considerable research, although their position in the development and validation of various kinds of literature appears to be ad hoc and after the fact. When it has appeared to me to be significant, I have included it without elaboration.

Another factor that I have not considered directly, and that has been cited as a cause for the relatively quick fragmentation of the early Samgha into the various schools, is that of the lack of a strong centralized authority, such as that of the Pope in Christendom. This is a difficult proposal to assess since the theological and social values of the Semitic religions—not to mention the lines of authority stemming from those values—are so different from those in force in India. Certainly the decentralization of the Buddhist Order and the investiture of authority within the individual Samghas had much to do with the generation of alternative forms of the Prātimokṣa, which, as we have seen, was considered the unifying force (samaggya) within the early tradition. Over and above the Prātimokṣa, though, the individual Samgha, consisting of twenty or more sthaviras, is the basic legal unit in Buddhism, probably the case from virtually the inception of the Order. Authority invested in
this manner cannot tolerate total subservience to external sovereignty because the basic model of authority is defined in terms of the small community. Charles Drekmeier has already shown that Buddhist communities lacked the dramatization of authority provided by the eternal-ity and divinity of the Vedas in India or God in the Semitic religions. The Vedic tradition maintained the dramatic model and, despite its lack of a strong centralized authority figure, preserved its homogeneity in a way unknown to the Buddhists. The example is significant because it provides the standard of scriptural and doctrinal stability without centralization.

Certainly the decentralization of the Samgha, the proliferation into sects (nikāyas), and the generation of variant redactions of the Prātimokṣa left an indelible imprint on subsequent modes of literary development and justification. The formation of the canon, the generation of new texts, the disputes of rules of order—all occurred in the monastic context where politics and pettiness were juxtaposed with astonishingly heroic discipline. Individual bhikṣus worked in common with other individual bhikṣus to interpret their task as disciples of the Buddha. When a sufficient number of monks agreed on their enterprise in a common manner, they formed a sect. If I have ignored the voluminous literature and many central questions concerning the sects, it is because I wished to focus on the problems of literary standards that concerned all the sects.

NOTES

Due to limitations of space, I have omitted some of the material presented in the original version of this essay, including several essential proofs, for which I beg the reader’s indulgence.


16. See, for example, Atiśa’s discussion in verse 23 of his *Bodhipatrapradīpa* and his auto commentary the *Bodhimārgadīpa-panjikā;* Uí et al., eds., *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons* (Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University, 1934), Tōhoku nos. (hereafter To.) 3947, 3948; in D. T. Suzuki, ed., *Peking Tibetan Tripitaka* (Tokyo: Tibetan Tripitaka Research Institute, 1957), 103:21.1.3-4, 32.5.2-33.2.3 (Peking 5243, 5244).


43. Ibid., p. 5; Shastri, *Abhidharmakosā*, 1:254.
55. *Atthasāliṇī*, p. 25; *The Expositor*, p. 37.
56. *Atthasāliṇī*, p. 27; *The Expositor*, p. 40.

63. Vaidya, ed., Gandavyūha, Buddhist Sanskrit Texts, no. 5 (Darbhanga: Mithila Institute, 1960), 372, and cf. pp. 74, 409; I have found, however, no evidence of this in the Mahāvastu or other early works.
67. Suzuki, ed., Peking Tibetan Tripiṭaka, 29:133.2.5-6, 135.4.6f. I have not seen this extraordinary term elsewhere in Mahāyāna literature.
68. Lamotte, Le Traité, 1.4, 2:940 n. 1. A similar note is struck by Bhavaviveka in his Tarkajñā, To. 3856, 5De-dge bsTan-'gyur, dbU-ma, vol. dza, fol. 166a5-6, but with respect to the actual collection and recitation.


71. Kern and Nanjio, *Saddharma-pundarika*, pp. 127–128 [V.17–22]. Contrast with the other theory of teaching in the *Saddharma-pundarika* [vv. III.89–91], in which the Buddha speaks to each differently according to their proclivities; ibid., p. 90.

72. To. 47, Peking 760/3; Suzuki, ed., *Peking Tibetan Tripitaka*, 22:62.5.5–63.1.1, 73.4.8–75.4.3.


81. Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fols. 18a1-5, 19a3-6; the latter occurrence appears to be an afterthought by Sthiramati or a textual corruption. La Vallée Poussin, Siddhi, p. 177, perhaps relying on information in K’uei-chi’s commentary, to which I do not have access, has misconstrued taddhīhimukten as if it were to agree with a śrāvakānām, whereas it certainly agrees with tūrthikatārki- kānām of the text. See Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fol. 18a4-5. The Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra continues with six arguments to demonstrate that the Mahāyāna is not within the purview of the sophists; cf. Sthiramati, fols. 23a7-24a3.

82. Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fol. 18a5-7.

83. Arguments five and six are both derived by Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fols. 17b1-2, 18a7-b5, from the phrase bhāvabhāve ‘bhāvāt, (Levi, p. 3.6.13-16). La Vallée Poussin, Siddhi, p. 177, has misunderstood this phrase; see Sthiramati, fol. 18a7-b5.

84. Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fol. 18b5-7.


89. Lamotte, Samdhinirmocana, pp. 83-84, 205-206; idem, “La critique d’interprétation,” pp. 354-359; idem, La Traité, 1:539-540. See the definition of niṭārtha and niśārtha quoted from the Bodhisattvatāpatti (To. 56) by bSod-nams rtse-mo in Bṣod Nams Rgya Mtsho, ed., Complete Works of the Great Masters, 2: 10.2.3-3.1.

90. Cf. the rather specious argument concerning this topic in Vaidya, ed., Bodhicaryāvatāra, pp. 204-206 [vv. IX.42-44].

91. Sthiramati, Sūtrālāṃkāra-vṛtti-bhāṣya, fol. 27a4-6. In I.21, the author of the Mahāyānasūtrālāṃkāra recommends equanimity (upekṣa) as the only way to approach the problem. This recommendation was evidently the inspiration for Bu-ston’s statement of equanimity when he decided to leave the rNying-ma tantras out of the Tibetan canon, and may be considered roughly similar to “suspension of judgement.” David S. Ruegg, The Life of Bu Ston Rin Po Che, Serie Orientale Roma, vol. 34 (Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1966), 27.

92. Vaidya, ed., Bodhicaryāvatāra, p. 206 [IX.45a].


94. David L. Snellgrove, Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their


98. Yamada, TattvasaTfigraha, p. 556; bSod-nams rtse-mo, rGyud sde spyi’i rnam par gzhat pa, p. 23.3.1–2. Note that bSod-nams rtse-mo only agrees that this is true for the yoga-tantras, of which the TattvasaTfigraha is one of the chief representatives.

99. bSod-nams rtse-mo, rGyud sde spyi’i rnam par gzhat pa, pp. 26.2.6–28.1.3.

100. Ibid., p. 26.4.1.


103. bSod-nams rtse-mo lists the gSang ba’i sgron ma zhes bya ba rnal ‘byor ma’i rgyud as his canonical source, in rGyud sde spyi’i rnam par gzhat pa, pp. 27.1.2–2.3, 28.3.6–29.3.3.


107. To. 3708; Peking 4531, vol. 81, pp. 119.3.6–125.2.1.

108. Tarkajavālā, To. 3856, fols. 183aff.; I wish to thank Matthew Kapstein for drawing my attention to this section.
A verse ascribed to the Vajraśekhara (To. 480) is quoted in 'Jam dbyang bLo-gter dbang-po’s gsung ngag rin po che lam 'bras bu dang bcas pa' ngor lugs thun min slob bshad dang/ thun mong tshogs bshad tha dad kyi smin grol yan lag dang bcas pa'i brgyud yig gser gyi phreng ba byin zab 'od brgya 'bar ba, fol. 39a1:

\[
\text{sor thar dang byang chub sems} \\
\text{rig 'dzin sngags kyi sdom pa'o}
\]

“There are the disciplines (saṃvara) of the Prātimokṣa, the Bodhisattva, and that of the [Guhya]mantra, the Vidyādhara.

Blo-gter dbang-po’s work is found in vol. Tsa of the sDe-dge edition of the Lam-'bras slob-bshad collection. I have not attempted to trace the verse.
