

The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism  
and the Common Buddhist Text Project

佛教“圣书”的缺失与  
佛教共同经典项目的进展

Joanna Grela  
Jagiellonian University  
Kraków, Poland

乔安娜·格雷拉  
波兰雅盖隆大学  
克拉科夫，波兰  
[j.grela@uj.edu.pl](mailto:j.grela@uj.edu.pl)

## Abstract

Most world-wide religions have their holy books: Judaism – the Torah, Christianity – the Bible, and Islam – the Koran. In Buddhism, on the other hand, there is neither a single nor a collection of such scriptures intended for all its believers. The Pāli Canon is certainly respected by all of them, however it is incomparably more comprehensive than single holy books of other religions and it does not serve as a basis and ultimate exposition for all Buddhist traditions. The article examines the conditions behind such circumstances and introduces the project of the development of a one-volume collection of canonical texts being representative of the main Buddhist traditions. The project was launched in 2009 in Bangkok and should be completed in 2013 with a publication of a pilot version of such a Book.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Holy Book, Buddhist Canon, Common Buddhist Text Project

## 1. Introduction

Buddhism is based on the teachings ascribed to the historical Buddha, which for the first few centuries were handed down only in a spoken form. At the successive councils called after the death of the Buddha, during which his teachings were recited from memory, growing disputes became apparent, concerning, among other things, the authenticity of some of the teachings memorized by the believers and the ever greater discrepancies as to the interpretation. At the fourth council which took place in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. in Sri Lanka (about 500 years after the Buddha's passing), the words ascribed by the participants of the council to the Buddha and his closest disciples were finally written down in the Pāli language.<sup>1</sup>

This early Buddhist canon was written on palm leaves and is called *Tipitaka*, which literally means Three Baskets, probably because the leaves were carried in baskets.<sup>2</sup> The said canon was divided into three main sections, separate formally and content-wise: the rules of discipline, parables and schematic classifications. The first two sections of the anthology could have been pre-edited while monks recited the Buddha's teachings from memory even at the first council, the third section however, was probably taking shape gradually over several hundred years. As *Tipitaka* was edited in the Pāli language, it is also referred to as the Pāli Canon. Jacqueline Filliozat remarks that some

---

<sup>1</sup> For a brief discussion on the creation of the early Buddhist canon, see Hirakawa Akira, *A History of Indian Buddhism from Śākyamuni to Early Mahāyāna*, trans. Paul Groner (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990), pp. 69-75.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Trenckner, *Pāli Miscellany* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879), pp. 67-69.

sources list more baskets of the early canon, even as many as seven.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. A multitude of canons of the Buddhist scriptures

Canonical texts of early Buddhism are not contained in one book. Tipitaka is comprised of a series of various texts, in size being the equivalent of about 12-20 thousand modern pages, which is 40-45 volumes in the English translation, depending on the edition. However, regardless of the size, even the concept of one, homogeneous Pāli canon itself is not precise. The reason for it is that individual, early Buddhist schools in India had their own selections of teachings recognized as the ultimate as well as the scriptures considered to be canonical. For instance, some versions of Tipitaka included additionally non-canonical texts, e.g. *Questions of Milinda (Milindapañhā)* in Myanmar, not found in the Thai or Sri Lankan canons.

Moreover, the followers of later Mahāyāna schools would not recognize the scriptures constituting the Pāli Canon to be the ultimate and believed that they had to be interpreted or further clarified. The tradition has it, that editing of the canon in Sanskrit was initiated in the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. in Kashmir, in the Kushan Empire, during a council called by the followers of the Sarvāstivāda tradition and recognized by them as the fourth one. The Sanskrit Canon, also referred to as the Three Baskets (*Tripitaka*), contained many teachings not recognized by the followers of early schools. The council was considered as

---

<sup>3</sup> Jacqueline Filliozat, “Documents Useful for the Identification of Pāli Manuscripts of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 16 (1992): 14.

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the  
Common Buddhist Text Project

illegitimate by the monks from the Theravāda school and its scriptures as heretical.

The actual existence of the entire Sanskrit Canon is, however, problematic and questioned by scholars. We do not have either a complete copy of it or an authoritative list of texts which might have formed it in the past. The only available materials are the excerpts of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit (e.g. passages of *Udānavarga*, *Dharmapada*, *Ekottarāgama* and *Madhyamāgama*), which were recovered from Eastern Turkistan in the form of manuscripts and xylographs, quotes in other Buddhist texts (e.g. the *Dīvyāvadāna*, *Lalitavistara* and *Mahāvastu*) as well as a significant number of texts translated from Sanskrit to Chinese and Tibetan, without the original texts preserved. Scholars are trying to reconstruct original, Sanskrit versions, re-translating those texts into Sanskrit.<sup>4</sup> It is possible that a “Sanskrit canon” is nothing but a fictional category lumping together all texts edited in Sanskrit. The other canons mentioned above are well-documented and in line with the historical frames.

Historically, the next important collection of canonical Buddhist scriptures was, undoubtedly, the Chinese canon (大藏经, Great Scripture Store). It included translations done since the 1<sup>st</sup> century, both from the Pāli and the Sanskrit languages, compiled since the 4<sup>th</sup> century, but also various encyclopaedias, dictionaries, biographies, etc.<sup>5</sup> Stone

---

<sup>4</sup> A compilation of Buddhist texts in Sanskrit under a misleading title “Digital Sanskrit Buddhist Canon Website”, Accessed December 10, 2012 at <http://dsbc.uwest.edu/>

<sup>5</sup> For more details, see Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 365-368; 方广锠:《佛教大藏经史: 8-10 世纪》, 北京: 中国社会科学出版社, 1991 年。[FANG Guangchang, *Fo jiao da zang jing shi: Ba dao*

tablets incised with Buddhist texts, found near today's Beijing, are the first attempt at recording the canon. This work, known as the Fangshan Stone Tripitaka (房山石经) started in the early 7<sup>th</sup> century and continued up until the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, contained numerous repetitions (some known and popular scriptures, such as the *Vajracchedikā* and other sūtras from the *Prajñāpāramitā* collection were carved several times), some texts were unfinished and also Taoist ones are found in it. At least seven compilations of the canon had been done before the first complete edition of Chinese translations in the shape of xylographs in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Older translations, for example of Paramārtha, were replaced with newer versions with instances of removing them on purpose, e.g. by Xunzang and his disciples.

The aforementioned first, complete Chinese canon from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, known as the *Shuben* (属本) or Sichuan edition, published in Chang'an (present day Xi'an), included 1076 texts kept in 480 cases and introduced the division of the Mahāyāna texts, not found in the Pāli Canon, into five sections: *Prajñā* (般若), *Ratnakūṭa* (宝积, *Treasure Collection*), *Mahāsammipāta* (大集, *Larger Collection*), *Avatamsaka* (华严), and *Nirvāna* (涅槃).

Later compilations, of which there were at least 18, added further texts and new sections. And last but not least, the Chinese Canon formed the basis for the Korean and Japanese canons.<sup>6</sup>

---

*shi shi ji* (A History of Tripitaka: 8-10 century) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1991).]

<sup>6</sup> Those correlations were presented graphically in an informative form by Marcus Bingenheimer, *Chinese Agama Literature – Research on early Buddhist texts*, Kathmandu, 2008, Accessed December 2, 2012 at <http://mbingenheimer.net/publications/agamaLit.pdf> p. 6.

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the  
Common Buddhist Text Project

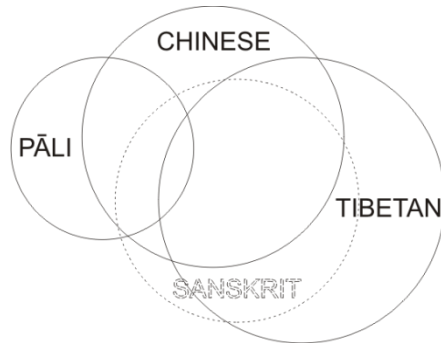
Similarly to the Pāli Canon, the concept of the “Chinese canon” does not refer to one homogeneous collection. The nowadays’ standard modern edition, *Taishō Issaikyō*, printed in Tokyo between 1924 and 1932, contains 3360 texts grouped in 16 sections, making up 99 volumes. Another edition published 2 years later, known as the *Taishō Shinsū Daizōkyō* has 88 volumes.

The last separate anthology of Buddhist canonical scriptures is a heterogeneous collection of texts edited in the Tibetan language in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The canon is divided into two sets:

Kangyur (*bka’ gyur*), namely the texts translated into Tibetan and believed to be the words of the Buddha, collected in about 100 volumes, and Tengyur (*bstan gyur*), i.e. translated commentaries, comprised of more than 200 volumes. The selection of the texts which were supposed to be included in the canon, was done by a member of one of the so-called new schools (Tib. *sar ma*), established in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Buton Rinchen Drub (*bu ston rin chen grub*; 1290-1364). As the criterion determining, whether the texts would find their way into the Buddhist canon, was the existence of an original version in Sanskrit, a number of non-Buddhist as well as Indian texts were included in it, some of them on fortune-telling based on the behaviour of ravens, as well as four volumes of Indian tales and dramas. Another consequence of applying this criterion or a consequence of the doctrinaire stance in favour of new schools, was a virtually complete omission of the texts connected to the so-called old school (*rnying ma*) of the Tibetan Buddhism, established in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason, in later centuries the texts considered authoritative to the school were also

added to the Tibetan Canon; it is an ever growing literature, which belongs to the so-called discovered texts, believed to be hidden by the masters of the past for future generations. A modern Chinese edition of the Tibetan canon was expanded by a third set comprising of a hundred volumes of the above-mentioned discovered text (*gter ma*) and other texts (*bka' ma*), belonging to the old school.<sup>7</sup> Thus the Tibetan Canon reached a size of over 400 volumes.

Each of the canons includes not only texts found in other canons, in their respective languages, but also a number of independent texts. The correlations between individual collections of texts are presented visually in the diagram below, which does not indicate, however, an actual percentage of individual canons, nor their precise size.



In the Chinese and Tibetan canons numerous texts with Indian origins are found, the original versions of which were lost. The Chinese

---

<sup>7</sup> Anthony W. Barber 等编：《西藏大藏经》，台北：南天出版社，1991年。[Anthony W. Barber, et al. eds. *Xi zang da zang jing* (The Tibetan Canon) (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991)]



canon, for instance, includes a translation of the rules of monastic discipline of 5 out of 18 early schools, not preserved in other collections, or treatises and commentaries of Indian philosophical schools, not appearing in the Pāli canon or some Mahāyāna texts, not found in the later, Tibetan Canon. On the other hand, the excerpts of *Mūlasarvāstivāda Tripitaka* survived only in the Tibetan Canon.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, there is not one holy book in Buddhism, but rather dozens (Pāli Canon) and even hundreds of volumes (Tibetan Canon), with a varying number and selection of texts and underlying ideas or philosophical views. This diversity and the absence of one book can be attributed to a number of reasons. First of all, at the beginning Buddhism spread in India, which depended on the oral tradition. This creates an altogether different context for the canon compared to China, for instance, with its dominance of an advanced written culture. Secondly, the founder of Buddhism is believed to have taught for 45 years and it would be hard to determine, which of his numerous and diverse teachings should be placed in one book, and which to be excluded. Thirdly, Buddhism has been a missionary religion since its dawn, its followers travelled and taught in all kinds of environments, ethnic and social groups. Some adapted the teachings they were propagating to local conditions, which led to the creation of many regionalized forms. Fourthly, on the basis of the distinction, already present in the Pāli canon, of expressing concepts in two ways: directly (Pal. *nītattha*) and so that the “sense can only be guessed”

---

<sup>8</sup> A chart Comparing Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan Canons is presented as Canon Comparison Chart, Accessed June 17, 2012 at [http://www.zhaxizhuoma.net/DHARMA/Tripitaka/Canon Compare.htm](http://www.zhaxizhuoma.net/DHARMA/Tripitaka/CanonCompare.htm).

(*neyyattha*),<sup>9</sup> various groups of followers treat what the Buddha is believed to have taught differently. The discussions as to which teachings carry a definitive meaning and which require exegesis or reading through the prism of symbols, are held even within individual schools. Each tradition claims to express the thought of the founder in the most accurate manner.

### 3. Problems caused by the lack of one book

Collecting the entire canon in one place would take up a lot of space. Apart from many paper editions, there were canons inscribed in stone in the past, like the above-mentioned Fangshan Stone Tripitaka in The Yunju Temple in China. During the 5<sup>th</sup> council in Myanmar, it was decided that the entire canon would be inscribed into marble slabs. The collection of canonical texts of the Theravāda school took up 729 marble tablets, inscribed on both sides, and housed in the so-called Pitaka pagoda, 729 chapels in which the Buddhist canon was stored.

Nowadays all canons are more readily available and everyone can have them physically at home – dozens or hundreds of paper volumes is merely a few DVDs. The Canons are also available online.<sup>10</sup> In May of 2012 the first canon designed for mobile phones, the Thai e-pitaka, was made available. The advertisement says: “Get the E-Tipitaka, get

---

<sup>9</sup> *Aṅguttara Nikāya* I:60.

<sup>10</sup> Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project (The University of Washington) at <http://ebmp.org/>; Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association at <http://www.cbeta.org/>; The Electronic Buddhist Texts Initiative at <http://bud.buddhapia.com/buddhapi/kor/hanbul/haksul/ebti/input.htm> – to name just a few.

the Buddha's wisdom with you.”<sup>11</sup> Modern technologies make it possible easily to search the whole content of the canon using keywords, titles, etc., compare selected texts, mark favourites, etc. However, the fact that Buddhism does not have just one holy book and individual traditions interpret various doctrine points differently, still causes a number of problems for the followers and scholars of Buddhism or the people interested in it. For it is impossible to point to one, universal book, which would be representative of all schools of Buddhism.

The reading of the entire canon of any tradition alone takes weeks if not months. At the controversial 5<sup>th</sup> Council in Myanmar in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is not recognized outside Myanmar, the participating monks read together all the volumes of the Theravāda Pāli Canon one by one, which took 5 months. Periodically, e.g. each year at the birth anniversary of the Buddha, Tibetans also devote themselves to “reading the canon”, but it is a less time-consuming activity. At the beginning of the ceremony there is a procession with the Canon around the temple or the town (much like in the Indonesian Borobudur, for example, during the same holiday). After the procession in the Tibetan tradition, the reading ceremony takes place. During this ceremony each monk reads excerpts from a few or more volumes one by one: the beginning, a fragment randomly chosen from the middle and the last page. The ceremonies I participated in, did not last longer than one day. It was not, however, an actual reading of the Canon.

---

<sup>11</sup> Accessed June 12, 2012 at <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.watnapp.etipitaka&hl=pl>.

The diversity of the teachings and their transmissions in various languages makes it impossible to indicate one fundamental text, expressing the essence of each school's view. In the globalized world, there is an even greater need for all Buddhists to have one relatively short book, comprehensive but representative of all traditions. To put it more simply, Buddhists are unable to provide a copy of a holy book for a hotel room, unlike the representatives of other religious traditions.

Gideons International, an organization created in the U.S. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has been distributing the Bible since 1908, mostly in hotels, but also hospitals, prisons, military units, etc. Nowadays, the so-called Gideons' Bible can be found in 194 countries around the world.<sup>12</sup> The idea of a holy book in a drawer of a bedside table in a hotel room was picked up by missionaries of other religions, but also those hotel owners, who wished to make the books, they considered important available to their guests or themselves. For example, in Utah and the Marriott chain hotels around the USA, one can find the Book of Mormon. In the same country, apart from the Gideon's Bible, "The Way to Happiness" of the Church of Scientology is often available. Koran is not distributed in hotel rooms, but available upon request at the reception.<sup>13</sup> Despite a lack of one book, Buddhism is still represented.

---

<sup>12</sup> *About Us: Our History*, Accessed June 28, 2012 at <http://www.gideons.org/AboutUs/OurHistory.aspx>.

<sup>13</sup> Since the Koran, considered the word of God, should be treated as the God Himself, the book is not left in hotel rooms. According to Abdel-Rahman Osmam, the senior imam, leader at the Islamic Center of New York explains, it is "because guests may take it to the bathroom or some other improper place." Quoted from: Edwin McDowell, *Bible now shares hotel rooms with other books Full of faith: The Book of Mormon and the Teachings of Buddha, as well as texts for Christian Science and Scientology, may now await travelers* January 2, 1996, Accessed

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the  
Common Buddhist Text Project

In the hotels in Asia, but also in at least 2 500 hotels in USA, e.g. in 1206 rooms of the Fontainebleau Hilton in Miami, in a desk drawer or a bedside table you can find the *Teaching of Buddha*,<sup>14</sup> donated by the Society for the Promotion of Buddhism, based in Tokyo. The book, first published in Japan in 1925, and translated into English in 1934, is now distributed mainly in a bilingual, English-Japanese version, but it is also available in over 40 languages and is distributed free of charge.<sup>15</sup> As observed by anonymous compilers: “(...) it contains the essence of the Buddha’s teachings as recorded in over five thousand volumes (...).”<sup>16</sup> The 609 page book contains an easy-to-read summary of Buddhist precepts and teachings in Japanese and English, whereas the appendixes include the history of Buddhism, a glossary of Sanskrit terms and a subject index. There are no names of editors given in the book, nor footnotes or even the information about where the excerpts of the texts were taken from.

#### 4. The Common Buddhist Text Project

Apart from the one mentioned above, two more compilations of Buddhist canonical texts were made. The first one is a 316 page long *A*

---

January 25, 2013 at [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1996-01-02/features/1996002053\\_1\\_book-of-mormon-bibles-in-hotel-christian-scientists](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1996-01-02/features/1996002053_1_book-of-mormon-bibles-in-hotel-christian-scientists).

<sup>14</sup> Edwin McDowell, *Bible Now Shares Hotel Rooms With Some Other Good Books* December 26, 1995, Accessed December 3, 2012 at <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/26/us/bible-now-shares-hotel-rooms-with-some-other-good-books.html>.

<sup>15</sup> *The Teaching of Buddha*, Accessed September 15, 2012 at <http://www.bdkamerica.org/default.aspx?MPID=53>.

<sup>16</sup> *Teaching of Buddha* (Tokyo: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, 1993), p. 1.

*Buddhist Bible*.<sup>17</sup> The content of this “Bible” is limited to principal Mahāyāna texts such as the following sūtras: *Lankāvatāra*, *Vajracchedikā* or *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. It is popular, however, and occasionally reissued and extended<sup>18</sup> by the poetic story about the life of the Buddha, written by a poet from the Victorian era.

A slightly newer collection of selected canonical texts is a book containing representative texts of the four traditions,<sup>19</sup> which can be considered a scientific anthology of Buddhism.

Partly inspired by this collection, but most of all due to the conditions referred to above, the representatives of the future International Association of Buddhist Universities<sup>20</sup> have launched a project to provide a scholarly book which would constitute a fully canonical anthology of Buddhist scriptures with an approach that includes all main traditions. The idea was written down in the post-conference declaration in Bangkok in the year 2006, and regular meetings of the group responsible for the selection and compilation of the book began in 2009.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible, the favorite scriptures of the Zen sect; history of early Zen Buddhism, self-realisation of noble wisdom, the Diamond sutra, the Prajna paramita sutra, the sutra of the sixth patriarch* (Thetford, Vt. 1932).

<sup>18</sup> Edwin Arnold, sir, Dwight Goddard, *A Buddhist Bible with the Light of Asia* (Ware:Wordsworth, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> Edward Conze, Isaline Blew Horner, David Snellgrove, Arthur Waley eds. *Buddhist texts through the ages: newly translated from the original Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese and Apabhramsa* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. <http://www.iabu.org/>

<sup>21</sup> Cf. point 5 of the Sixth Bangkok Declaration (2009): “to promote better understanding of Buddhist principles amongst the wider public by compiling a common Buddhist text, which will reflect the richness of the Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist tradition as well as the needs of today’s society”; the multi-day conference is annually hosted by Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the  
Common Buddhist Text Project

The goal of the several years' undertaking is publishing a book within the frame of the so-called CBT project, presenting Buddhism in a purely non-sectarian way. One of the project's assumptions is publishing a book, which will both show common aspects of all Buddhism trends and present the multitude of perspectives existing in individual traditions. People unfamiliar with Buddhism, browsing through the book, e.g. in a hotel room, will be able to acquaint themselves with the richness of the Buddhist thought and its diversity, get to know its fundamental values and principles. Buddhist scholars will obtain a selection of canonical source materials, meeting academic standards, a compendium summing up Buddhist ideas, pointing to answers to basic existential and social questions, legitimized by tradition. The followers, on the other hand, will get the chance to familiarize themselves with a rich Buddhist legacy, and most of all, the traditions other than their own. Clearly, there is a lack of a wider spectrum of ideas, which became evident in 2009, at the very first meeting of the people representing or researching various Buddhist trends.

Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Thailand with its Rector Ven. Dr. Dharmakosajarn provides the necessary infrastructure and the resources for the project. Dr. Dharmakosajarn also became the President of a CBT Advisory Board and the Chief Editor. Committees of advisers, compilers<sup>22</sup> and editors, are made up of Buddhist scholars

---

along with the Royal Thai Government and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

<sup>22</sup> The list of the participants is available at [http://www.icundv.com/vesak2011/en/buddhist\\_text.php](http://www.icundv.com/vesak2011/en/buddhist_text.php).

coming from Asia, Europe and North America, each well-educated in at least one of the Buddhist traditions and speaking fluently a minimum of one of the classical languages in the Buddhist tradition.

Workshops and meetings dedicated to the project are held once a year at international conferences organized in Thailand during the celebrations of the Buddhist Vesak holiday and usually once more at a different date. The meetings are closed to the general public, with a varying number of the participants of subsequent workshops.

All meetings are accompanied by animated and illuminating discussions, and final decisions, if not unanimous, are put through a vote. Some of the most important substantive problems, which had to be considered and settled at the very beginning were: the book's structure, the selection of traditions, which texts are to be included in the book and the method of balancing the content related to each Buddhist tradition selected, to make sure none of them was favoured. Three main traditions were selected: Theravāda, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna, based on the Pāli, Chinese and Tibetan canon. Each tradition was granted a maximum of 100 pages, namely about 9 pages per each of the 11 substantive subchapters. However, once that amount of material is gathered, the next step will be reducing it to 7 pages for each section, giving the total of 80 pages per tradition.

The CBT will contain three main chapters, addressing three subjects, traditional in Buddhism: the Buddha, his teachings and the community of his followers, the so-called Three Jewels. The first chapter is made up of two subchapters: the account of the life of Śākyamuni, based on the material exclusively from the early Pāli sources,



and the second subchapter, presenting different Buddhist perspectives of perceiving the Buddha himself, i.e. from the realism of the Theravada school, where the Buddha is presented as a historical figure, a man, through the concepts introduced by Mahāyāna – the Buddha is a state of mind as well, a universal and an eternal phenomenon, implying the concept of a plurality of Buddhas in the universe, to the Vajrayāna – the Buddha as a correlative of consciousness and subtle energies, various types of the Buddha’s manifestation, e.g. the five Buddha families. The second chapter will contain nine subchapters, made up of three sections each, based on source material from the three traditions. Those subchapters will provide exhaustive information on the three Buddhist perspectives concerning: distinctive features of those teachings, Buddha’s words on human life, society, relationships, spiritual practice, ethics, meditational absorption, wisdom, and spiritual goals (Pal. *nibbāna*). Referring to the third chapter, its first subchapter “The Community of monks, nuns and laypersons, established by Śākyamuni”, will be based exclusively on historical Pāli sources, while the second subchapter will include representative quotes referring to the soteriological ideals recognized by the three traditions: arahants, bodhisattvas and siddhas, to use the original terms.<sup>23</sup>

Another set of problems provoking major discussions was the selection of sources and related methodological questions. Typical questions discussed with reference to the selection of the source materials concerned the genres (narratives, poems, didactic materials)

---

<sup>23</sup> The structure of the CBT was approved at the workshop on 24 May 2010.

and the types of scriptures. For example, the Vajrayāna tradition is not based on the sūtras, although they are found in its canon, are quoted in its scriptures and act as a support for argumentation. An analysis of the curriculum in monasteries shows, however, that studied there are not the sūtras, but Indian and local śāstras. Another subject discussed concerned settling the matters as regards stressing the unique character of the view and the specificity of a given tradition versus pointing to common aspects of the three traditions. The initial stand to limit the materials to Indian canonical texts, excluding the Chinese or Tibetan ones, for example, was modified following a strong opinion voiced by Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna scholars, to provide an option of including sources other than Indian. Another important issue was the age of the scriptures included in the CBT. Initially it was planned that only the classical, early materials would be used. However, in the case of the youngest Vajrayāna tradition, the criteria had to be changed and later materials, not necessarily Indian or canonical, also taken into consideration. The decisive factor turned out to be that the language of classical Vajrayāna scriptures is concise and hermetic, full of symbolic references which require a commentary. For example the beginning of *Gubhasamājanidānakārikā* reads:

“E is the Noble woman Prajñā, the moments of aversion, and so on. This root is designated as the experience in the three worlds.”<sup>24</sup>

If CBT contained only Indian texts, it would prove to be a rather difficult material for a wider audience. Meanwhile the native, Tibetan literature, such as the Milarepa songs, hagiographies (Tib. *rnams thar*)

---

<sup>24</sup> Alex Wayman ed., *Yoga of the Gubhasamājatantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999), p. 3.

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the Common Buddhist Text Project and the textbooks propagating a gradual approach (*lam rim*) concerning the path of spiritual development, though not a part of canonical texts *sensu stricto*, are more appropriate for a broad audience being more accessible without extensive commentaries and footnotes.

Other challenges pertaining to the composition of the CBT, are language and translation issues. It was decided that the CBT would be created in the English language and ultimately translated into other official languages of the United Nations as well as the languages of Buddhist and other countries. The debates relating to a common terminology of Buddhist concepts in English were the most heated. It is not enough to determine, whether to translate and if so, which and who's names, meaningful in original languages, but incomprehensible in the English language (such as Gridhra-kuta Hill, i.e. Vulture Peak), and yet established in the original version in literature. Also important is the consistency of terminology in the entire CBT so that, e.g. the original term *keśā* was not expressed as defilement in one part, while as affliction or poison in others. In order for the used terminology to be easily associated with the original, the CBT will include a bilingual glossary of terms (original and English). In 2012 such a 32 page glossary was drawn up for the Theravāda tradition and the Pāli language.

The issues concerning editorial conventions were relatively easy to decide upon. It was settled that the CBT will be accompanied by explanatory footnotes and the main text will be formatted in Times 11. The text will feature up to 33 drawings (incl. the cover), commissioned

to the artists from Sri Lanka, which will be sponsored by the Buddhist University in Budapest.

The people involved in the project are monitoring the progress and have an online access to the concepts and drawn up materials. The latest joint workshops, held in Bangkok on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 2012 proved that the significant part of the substantive works on the CBT is in its final stages. Draft versions of the Theravāda tentatively compiled by Prof. P.D. Premasiri, from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka (100 unformatted pages, written using Times 12 font, i.e. larger than one required in the target version as well as almost 100 pages in the same format on the life of the Sakyamuni Buddha, constituting the beginning of the first chapter) and the Mahāyāna part by Ven. Dr. Thich Nhat Tu, Vietnam (materials for chapters I and II, 80 pages), were discussed and approved. The materials on the third tradition, the Vajrayāna, were in the least advanced stages of preparation. The content prepared for Autumn 2010 was rejected, as it included mostly practices and not theoretical texts. The version presented in the year 2012, compiled by Dr. Jules Levison, University of Virginia, USA (30 pages with many sections missing) still requires a lot of work.

Once the compiling process is finished, all the material will be reviewed by the CBT compiling committee and then presented for further reviews to the Advisory Board. After expressing their opinions, the compiling committee will discuss and definitively approve the final version of the CBT. A pilot version of the CBT will be printed for the next conference in May 2013, and then will be made freely available.

## Conclusion

The CBT, a one-volume anthology of the recorded words traditionally ascribed to the Buddha, will be a crucial academic work containing representative excerpts from the scriptures of the main Buddhist trends arranged thematically. The project does not provide for creating a holy book of Buddhism, an equivalent of the Bible, Torah or Koran, instead selecting from thousands of pages, which constitute the basis of various traditions, the most important fragments and compiling one book, representative of the Buddhism as a whole, showing the richness of ideas and solutions, useful for both scholars and practitioners.

## Bibliography 参考文献

- Barber, Anthony W. 等编:《西藏大藏经》,台北:南天出版社,1991年。[Barber, Anthony W., et al. eds., *Xi zang da zang jing* (The Tibetan Canon) (Taipei: SMC Publishing Inc., 1991)]
- 方广锠:《佛教大藏经史:8-10世纪》,北京:中国社会科学出版社,1991年。[FANG Guangchang, *Fo jiao da zang jing shi: Ba dao shi shi ji* (A History of Tripitaka: 8-9 century) (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 1991)]
- Aṅguttara Nikāya : numerical discourses of the Buddha : an anthology of Suttas from the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, transl. Nyanaponika Thera, Bhikkhu Bodhi (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 2000).
- Arnold, Edwin sir, and Goddard, Dwight, *A Buddhist Bible with the Light of Asia*. (Ware: Wordsworth, 2009).
- Bingenheimer, Marcus, *Chinese Āgama Literature – Research on early Buddhist texts*. Kathmandu 2008. <http://mbingenheimer.net/publications/agamaLit.pdf>
- Ch'en, Kenneth, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964).
- Conze, Edward, and Horner, Isaline Blew, and Snellgrove, David, and Waley, Arthur eds., *Buddhist texts through the ages : newly translated from the original Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese and Apabhramsa* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954).
- Filliozat, Jacqueline, “Documents Useful for the Identification of Pāli Manuscripts of Cambodia, Laos and Thailand” *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 16 (1992): 13–55.
- Goddard, Dwight, *A Buddhist Bible, the favorite scriptures of the Zen sect; history of early Zen Buddhism, self-realisation of noble wisdom, the Diamond sutra, the Prajna paramita sutra, the sutra of the sixth patriarch* (Thetford, Vt, 1932).
- McDowell, Edwin, *Bible Now Shares Hotel Rooms With Some Other Good Books*, 26.12.1995 <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/12/26/us/bible-now-shares->

Joanna Grela: The Absence of the Holy Book in Buddhism and the  
Common Buddhist Text Project

[hotel-rooms-with-some-other-good-books.html](#).

*Teaching of Buddha* (751<sup>st</sup> edition) (Tokyo: Bukkyō Dendō Kyōkai, 1993).

Trenckner, Wilhelm, *Pali Miscellany* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1879).

Wayman Alex ed., *Yoga of the Guhyasamājantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1999).

## 摘 要

大多数世界宗教都有它们的圣书，如犹太教的《妥拉》、基督教的《圣经》、伊斯兰教的《古兰经》。然而，佛教却没有一本或一集为所有信徒使用的经典。巴利文佛经显然被所有的佛教徒所尊重，与其他宗教的单本经典相比，它更为综合，但并不作为所有佛教传统的基础和最终依据。本文将考察这一情形，并介绍当前正进行的编纂一卷能代表所有主流佛教传统的经典文本的“佛教共同经典项目”的进展情况。这个项目是从 2009 年在曼谷开始的，将于 2013 年结束，它将出版一本“共同经典”的试验版。

**关键词：**佛教、圣书、佛教经典、佛教共同经典项目