

Buddhism: Was there an Original?

- Original Buddhism may refer to the earliest Buddhism, the ideas and practices of Buddha (Gotama) himself. It may also refer to early Buddhism as existing until about 100 years after the Parinirvana of the Buddha, until the first documented split in the Sangha.
- Contrary to the claim of doctrinal stability, early Buddhism was a dynamic movement. Original Buddhism may have included or incorporated other Śramanic schools of thought, as well as Vedic and Jain ideas and practices.
- At the time of the Buddha's parinirvana around ~483 BC, the community of Buddhists was very cohesive with no major differences in doctrines. Beginning with the Second Buddhist council there were disagreements, especially in regard to the monastic Vinaya rules. By the time of the Third Buddhist council in ~250 BC, Buddhism was spread out across about 20 different early schools.
- Each school of Buddhism had their texts and versions of the Tipitaka, many of which have been lost, especially of those schools no longer existing in modern times. We have the largest available Tipitaka in full translations from the Theravada Pali Canon. This tradition remained oral and was passed down until being put into writing starting around 100 BC.
- Therefore, the Pali Canon, although complete is not necessarily historically 100 percent accurate when you consider there were other schools of Buddhism in existence and we simply don't have their full texts around any more. There is always the possibility, the potential that we must consider that one of the other early schools of Buddhism, no longer existing -- had it right in terms of the “accurate words” of the Buddha.
- The Pali Canon of the Theravada is one of the most complete, large compilations of Buddha's discourses across all traditions, consisting of about 40 volumes in total and was put to writing starting around 100 BC. That said, this does not prove in any way that Theravada is original Buddhism.
- Based on an analysis of the texts, scholars (to include the scholar monks Ajahn Sujato and Ajahn Brahmalī) have been able to conclusively remark that the first four Nikayas are likely the words of the Buddha and a part of original Buddhism. This also includes the equivalent books found in the East Asian (Chinese) Tripitaka, which has many parallels to the Pali Canon, especially in the first four Nikayas.

The Buddhist Councils

- Since the death of the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) Buddhist monastic communities ("sangha") have periodically convened to settle doctrinal and disciplinary disputes and to revise and correct the contents of the sutras
- These gatherings are often termed "Buddhist councils" (Pali and Sanskrit: saṅgīti). Accounts of these councils are recorded in Buddhist texts as having begun immediately following the death of the Buddha and have continued into the modern era
- The Six Buddhist Councils marked important turning points in the story of early Buddhism
- The earliest councils—for which there is little historical evidence outside of the sutras—are regarded as canonical events by every Buddhist tradition; however, the historicity and details of these councils remains a matter of dispute in modern Buddhist studies



The Buddhist Councils (continued)

First Buddhist Council: held soon after the death of the Buddha, around **483 BC** under the patronage of King Ajatshatru. The significance of the First Council is that 500 senior monks adopted the Vinaya-pitaka and Sutta-pitaka as the accurate teaching of the Buddha, to be remembered and preserved by generations of nuns and monks to come

Second Buddhist Council (~383 BC): held at Vaisali (or Vaishali), an ancient city in what is now the state of Bihar in northern India, bordering Nepal. Resulted in first schism between reformists (Sthaviras), who wanted to “add more rules,” which led to a split from the conservative majority, called the Mahāsāṃghikas, who rejected these added rules

Third Buddhist Council (~250 BC): at Pataliputra under the patronage of King Asoka. It was presided by Moggliputta Tissa. Its objective was to purify the Buddhist movement, particularly from opportunistic factions. This led to the split between the Sarvastivada and the Vibhajjavāda schools. A third part of the Tripitaka was coded in the Pali language. Emissaries were sent to various countries in order to spread Buddhism, as far as the Greek kingdoms in the West and possibly even farther according to the inscriptions left on stone pillars by Ashoka

Fourth Buddhist Council (~100 BC): at Sri Lanka. By the time of the Fourth Buddhist Councils, Buddhism had splintered into different schools in different regions of India. Because the Pāli Canon was at that time still an oral literature maintained by dharma reciters, the monks recognized the danger of not writing it down so the teachings would not be lost. Another Fourth Buddhist Council was reportedly held in ~78 AD in Kashmir and during the council 300,000 verses and over 9 million statements were compiled, a process which took 12 to complete.

Fifth Buddhist Council (1871 AD): in Mandalay, Burma in the year **1871** under the patronage of King Mindon. The chief objective of this meeting was to recite all the teachings of the Buddha and examine them in minute detail to see if any of them had been altered, distorted or dropped. During this council, it was also the work of this council to approve the entire Tripitaka inscribed for posterity on 729 marble slabs in the Burmese script before its recitation.

Sixth Buddhist Council (1954 AD) in Burma at Kaba Aye, Yangon. The traditional recitation of the Buddhist Scriptures took two years and the Tripitaka and its literature in all the scripts were painstakingly examined and their differences noted down and the necessary corrections made and all the versions were then collated. Once approved, all of the books of the Tipitaka and their commentaries were prepared for printing on modern presses and published in the Burmese script. The council commemorated 2,500 years of Buddhism

The Buddhist Texts “Scriptures” — พระไตรปิฎก

- The Buddha's teaching was oral. Following his enlightenment, he taught for 45 years, adapting the teaching to suit the group he was addressing. The language he used is understood to be Magadhi
- The Sangha memorized the teachings, and there were group recitations at festivals and special occasions. The teachings were rehearsed and authenticated at the First Council, and were handed down from generation to generation
- The Buddha advised the monks to teach in the different languages of the people. The teaching was written down first at the Fourth Buddhist Council in Sri Lanka about 25 BC in the Pali language. The writing was in three sections, Vinaya Pitaka (rules), Sutta Pitaka (Dharma-teaching) and Abidhamma Pitaka (higher teaching), and is the whole is called the Tipitaka (พระไตรปิฎก three baskets)
- The oral teaching continued in India in forms of oral Sanskrit and was later put into Sanskrit writing sometime in 100 AD.
- The writing was on strips of dried palm leaves cut into rectangles and etched with a metal stylus and rubbed over with carbon ink. A thread was passed through the pages to keep them in order and elaborately painted wooden covers fixed at the ends.

