Table I-Language and Location of the Four Buddhist Canons

Feature	Pali Canon	Chinese Canon	Japanese Canon	Tibetan Canon
Language	Pali[i]	Classical Chinese[ii]	Classical Chinese & Japanese[iii]	Tibetan[iv]
Location	Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia	China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan	Japan	Tibet, Bhutan, Mongolia, Himalayan regions

Table II-Comparison of the Three Major Vinaya for Monastic Practice[v]

VINAYA				
Feature	Pali Canon	Chinese Canon	Japanese Canon	Tibetan Canon
Vinyaya	Theravada Vinaya	Dharmaguptaka Vinaya	Dharmaguptaka Vinaya (Historically)	Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya
Number of Bhiksu (monk) rules	227	250	250	253
Number of Bhiksuni (nun) rules	311	348	348	364
Characteristics	Practical and conservative with a strong emphasis on simplicity, mendicancy, daily conduct, and individual restraint Portrayed as wandering, dependent on alms, and devoted to meditation and study. Believed to be closest to ancient Vinaya practice	More institutional, developed in large monasteries that emphasized ceremonial procedures, ordinations, monastic administrations, and interactions with large communities	More institutional, developed in large monasteries that emphasized ceremonial procedures, ordinations, monastic administrations, and interactions with large communities	Massive and detailed with the longest Vinaya literature in existence. Contains extensive narratives explaining how the rules arose, disputes among monks, examples of proper conduct. Som sections read almost like historical novels Tsongkapa repeatedly emphasized that tantra never replaces Vinaya and that the Vinaya is the foundation of all higher practice.

				Tsongkapa is believed to have incarnated to reestablish monastic disiopline.
Monastic Robes	Saffron, ochre, or brown robes with one shoulder often exposed in formal settings	black, gray, or brown robes, with outer ceremonial robe (kāṣāya)	black, gray, or brown robes, with outer ceremonial robe (kāṣāya)	maroon robes with saffron sleeveless upper garment; yellow and other colored ceremonial hats in some schools. Elaborate brocade ceremonial jackets
Nuns and Ordination	The traditional bhikkhunī lineage died out in many Theravāda countries centuries ago. Modern revivals often rely on cooperation with East Asian lineages.	The bhikṣuṇī lineage survived continuously. China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam preserve full ordination for nuns.	Although there are ordained female clergy abbesses and teachers, Japan, forced the monks to marry. Some nuns can also marry so that the full vinaya ordination and celibacy are not practiced.. Japanese nuns often function more like clergy than renunciants.	Historically, Tibetan nuns had fewer institutional opportunities than monks because Tibet lacked a complete bhikṣuṇī ordination lineage. That has changed dramatically in recent decades. Today many Tibetan nuns: Complete rigorous philosophical studies; Earn the Geshema degree; Teach internationally; Participate in advanced retreat and Vajrayāna practice
Daily practice of nuns	Vinaya, chanting, mindfulness, vipassanā	Chanting, sutra study, Chan meditation, liturgy	Zazen, temple duties, liturgy	Chanting, Lamrim, debate, deity practice, meditation

Table III-Comparison of the Suttas/Sutras Included in the Four Canons [vi]

SUTTAS/SUTRAS				
Feature	Pali Canon	Chinese Canon	Japanese Canon	Tibetan Canon
Early Buddhist Discourses	Complete Pali Nikayas, Four Noble truths, Dependent Origination, Jhana,	Complete Sanskrit Agamas; many same as Pali, plus some unique early texts	Complete Chinese Agamas	Partial Agama/Nikaya material (Not from Pali) plus vast amount of unique early texts not

	Satipaṭṭhāna (Mindfulness), early meditation methods			found in Chinese or Sanskrit
Heart Sutra	no	yes	yes	yes
Lotus Sutra	no	yes	yes	yes
Other Mahayana	few/none	extensive	extensive	extensive
Pure Land	no	yes	extensive	minor
Zen/Chan	no	yes	extensive	no
Madhyamaka	limited	moderate	moderate	extensive
Yogācāra	limited	extensive	extensive	extensive
Logic & Epistemology	little	limited	limited	extensive
Vajrayana	very little	some	some	core focus
Tantric	minimal	moderate	moderate-high (Shingon)	massive

Table III-Comparison of the Abhidharma and Commentaries in the Various Canons

Feature	Pali Canon	Chinese Canon	Japanese Canon	Tibetan Canon
THE ABHIDHARMA				
Various Abhidharma collections	Dhammasaṅgaṇ, Vibhaṅga, Dhātukathā, Puggalapaññatti, Kathāvatthu, Yamaka, Paṭṭhāna	Various Abhidharma collections	Various Abhidharma collections	Some Abhidharma scriptures
COMMENTARIES				
Various Commentaries, Treatises, Shastras	Buddhaghosa's Atthasālinī, Sammohavinodan, Visuddhimagga, Abhidharma treatises like the Abhidharmakośa,	Treatises by: Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa, Tiantai masters, Huayan masters, Chan Masters, Other Commentaries	Treatises by: Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa, , Tiantai masters, Huayan masters, Zen Masters, Other Commentaries	Translated Treatises: commentaries, śāstras, Abhidharma treatises like the Abhidharmakośa, Madhyamaka works, Yogācāra works

[i] Pāli appears to be a literary language closely related to several Middle Indic dialects. It is not necessarily the exact language spoken by the Buddha, but it became the canonical language of the Theravada tradition. When Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, the canon was eventually written down there, traditionally around the 1st century BCE. Theravadans regard the Pāli Canon as the oldest complete surviving Buddhist canon. Pali and Sanskrit are not two versions of the same canon. They are traces of different branches of ancient Buddhism.

[ii] As Sanskrit became India's prestige language, Buddhist scholars in Northern India increasingly wrote in Sanskrit Most of these were lost in India when Buddhism was driven out of the country. However, before that happened, they had already been translated into Chinese during the 2nd to 11th centuries CE.

[iii] The Japanese, in turn, translated their canon from the classical Chinese. Currently there has been a massive effort underway to translate their canon into English. T one time it was estimated that it would take a hundred years to complete.

[iv] Beginning in the 7th century, Tibet imported large numbers of Indian Buddhist works. The Tibetan Canon contains the Kangyur ("Translated Words of the Buddha") and the Tengyur ("Translated Treatises or Commentary"). Many Sanskrit originals survive only through Tibetan translation.

[v] Although the Vinayas are primarily monastic codes of law**,** but they also contain a significant amount of material relevant to laypeople.

[vi] “Sutta” is the Pali word while “sutra” is Sanskrit. Theravāda preserved its canon in Pāli, while the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna traditions preserved scriptures in a mixture of Sanskrit, Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Chinese translation, Japanese translation, and Tibetan translation. A sutta or sutra is technically a text from a Buddha, but some texts included here may not have been by a Buddha, but from a Bodhisattva or Mahasattva.