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## Section: Buddhist Studies

Panel: Scriptural authority and apologetics in the Indian religio-philosophical environment

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### Towards a Genealogy of the Buddhist Epistemologists' Apologetics

In the socially, economically and politically threatening environment of 6<sup>th</sup>-century India, Buddhist philosophers started grounding their apologetic endeavours on appeals to human rationality (McClintock's "rhetoric of reason"). Dharmakīrti's philosophy purports to mirror the concerns of ordinary human beings wishing to engage in scripturally based religious practice (*pravṛttikāma*). Basically limited with regard to their cognitive capacities (*arvāgdarśin*), rational persons on the eve of a religious career have no other possibility than to resort to reason (*yukti*) in order to assess both the reliability (*avisaṃvāda*) of scriptures and the very possibility (*sambhava*) of the path prescribed therein. Persons behaving in this way are termed "practically rational" (*prekṣāvat*). Needless to say, this is precisely what Dharmakīrti and his followers claim they are doing while demonstrating (mostly against Mīmāṃsā) the validity of the Buddhist scriptures, the possibility of rebirth, maximalized compassion and insight, or the truth of soteriologically valued dogmas such as selflessness.

Now, this twofold attempt echoes and develops further much older, mostly Yogācāra concepts of dialectics and evaluative rationality. (1) In works such as the *Bodhisattva-bhūmi* (BoBh), the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* (MSA) and the \**Upāyahrdaya*, the *hetuvidyā* is asked to defeat opponents, to consolidate (*bhūyobhāva*) the faith/conviction (*abhiprasāda*) of the Buddhists and to preserve the Good Law. Normative statements of this kind are clearly instantiated in the heresiological and apologetical agenda of later Buddhist philosophy. (2) According to the oft quoted *Catuhpratisaraṇasūtra*, a monk examining the canonicity/canonizability of an alleged Buddhist scripture is requested to resort, among other exegetical prescriptions, to the *dharma* taught in the text rather than to the prestige of the teaching person (*pudgala*). Interestingly, the BoBh consistently substitutes *yukti* for *dharma* and advises the bodhisattva in the stage of reflecting (*cint[an]ā*) on what he has learnt to resort to *pramāṇas* and provisionally to leave inconceivable (*acintya*) matters aside. The latter attitude finds a full-fledged development in Dharmakīrti's manner of tackling with scriptures against Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā. (3) No less importantly, related Yogācāra literature such as the *Yogācārabhūmi* and the MSA advises the reflecting bodhisattva to rationally assess the very realizability/possibility of the Buddhist path towards liberation before engaging in soteric practice.

The aim of the present paper is to provide a doctrinal genealogy of mature Buddhist apologetics as well as to reveal the historical rationale behind this overarching concern with heresiology and apologetics.