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Section: Buddhist Studies

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

### Dharmakīrti on the unreliability of scripture

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The idea that the scripture (*āgama*) of one's own tradition is authoritative or a means of valid cognition (*pramāṇa*) has been shared by all of the Indian religious traditions. The scripture might be regarded as eternal and authorless, as the Veda by the Mīmāṃsakas, or as having been created/revealed by God or Holy Seers (*ṛṣi*), as the Veda by the Naiyāyikas and Vaiśeṣikas, or as having been uttered by their founder, as the scripture of the Jains. This also holds true for the Buddhists, who considered the words of their founder, the Buddha, as a reliable source for obtaining liberation. With the exception of Dignāga who, following the model of the Vaiśeṣikas, accepted only two means of valid cognition and subsumed scripture under “inference” (*anumāna*), scripture was treated as a separate means of valid cognition by the Mādhyamikas, in the early Yogācāra works, as well as by Vasubandhu.

It was only Dharmakīrti who deprived *āgama*, including the Buddhist one, of the status of *pramāṇa*. This paper considers how Dharmakīrti conceived *āgama* and how he designed its role, which, in spite of its lack of certainty with regard to supersensible objects such as heaven (*svarga*), nevertheless is crucial for human beings as they cannot live without scripture (*nāyaṃ puruṣo 'nāśrityāgamaprāmāṇyam āsitum samarthaḥ* PVSV 108,2–3).