

Introduction to the Special Section on Tantra

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The study of tantric Buddhism has grown dramatically over the last half century and continues to develop, seemingly at an ever increasing rate. The essays presented in this section provide a sampling of recent work that demonstrates that study has both deepened in some already explored research areas and expanded to include new ones as well.

The first essay, Richard K. Payne's "Study of Buddhist Tantra: An Impressionistic Overview," provides a concise summary of the development of tantric Buddhist studies and at the same time points to some of the methodological issues involved in that development. The summary also points to future areas of research, including the directions indicated by the other contributions included in this section, and extending the perspectives they bring to the study of Buddhist tantra.

Richard D. McBride's essay "Wish-Fulfilling Spells and Talismans, Efficacious Resonance, and Trilingual Spell Books: The *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* in Chosŏn Buddhism" builds on the significant work that he has done on *dhāraṇī* over several years. As with other details of tantric praxis, the *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* provides a glimpse of how widespread such practices were in the Buddhist cosmopolis. Recent work from Indonesia reveals an active cult of *Mahāpratisarā* as a *dhāraṇī* deity in insular Southeast Asia.¹ In his essay here, McBride's survey

1. Thomas Cruijssen, Arlo Griffiths, and Marijke J. Klokke, "The Cult of the Buddhist *Dhāraṇī* Deity *Mahāpratisarā* along the Maritime Silk Route: New Epigraphical and Iconographic Evidence from the Indonesian Archipelago," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 35, nos. 1-2 (2012 [2013]): 71-157; and Roderick Orlina, "Epigraphical Evidence for the Cult of *Mahāpratisarā* in the Philippines," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 35, nos. 1-2 (2012 [2013]): 159-169.

of the range of the *Mahāpratisarā-dhāraṇī* includes two eighth-century translations of the *dhāraṇī* sutra, its spread in China and Korea, Amoghavajra's associations with the literary record of the *dhāraṇī*, and a translation of a short prose text.

Turning to the contemporary world, Cody Bahir's "Replanting the Bodhi Tree: Buddhist Sectarianism and Zhenyan Revivalism" looks at the development of a tantric Buddhist school in Taiwan that, while drawing on Japanese Shingon praxis, claims to be re-establishing the Tang-era Chinese Zhenyan tradition that had gone extinct. As with the *dhāraṇī* examined by McBride, the religious history connecting Japan and Taiwan in the modern era also demonstrates a web of interconnections. Western religious conceptions regarding the importance of denominational distinctiveness influenced the development of Japanese conceptions in the nineteenth century, and those in turn contributed to the construction of sectarian identity in modern Taiwan.

For a century and a half the study of Buddhist history has been almost exclusively framed in terms of the history of doctrine. Even when sects are taken as the organizing principle, these are usually defined in terms of their doctrinal stances. An alternative history is to be discovered by framing the history of Buddhism in terms of practice. Jiang Wu's essay, "The Rule of Marginality: Hypothesizing the Transmission of the Mengshan Rite for Feeding the Hungry Ghosts in Late Imperial China," is a welcome demonstration of the validity of such an approach. By a detailed study focusing on hungry ghost rituals, he exposes the movement and continuing importance of Tanguts in Asian Buddhism. A similarly important dimension of the essay is that it involves a shift away from a historiography constructed around the centers of social, political, economic, and military power. History seen from the center looking out has been much to the detriment of the study of Buddhism located on the peripheries.

One of the peripheries for the study of tantric Buddhism has long been Southeast Asia, a region so strongly associated with Theravāda Buddhism that the presence of tantric Buddhism there has only relatively recently been recognized. Swati Chemburkar's "*Stūpa to Maṇḍala: Tracing a Buddhist Architectural Development from Kesariya to Borobudur to Tabo*" also addresses issues of center and periphery, exploring the architectural connections between three geographically disparate temples. We are seeing a network of interrelated sites, all

reflecting “a consistent pattern of religious, cultural, and ritual ideas that defy geographical boundaries.”

“The Transmission of the *Grahamāṭṛkā-dhāraṇī* and Other Buddhist Planetary Astral Texts” by Bill M. Mak is a study of a particular *dhāraṇī* text used for rituals involving concerns focused on the planets. Mak provides background on the adoption of such planetary conceptions into Buddhism, as well as the details of different recensions of the text under study. The first translation of the text into Chinese found among Dunhuang manuscripts dates from the mid-ninth century. The *Grahamāṭṛkā-dhāraṇī* continues to play a role in present day Nepal, evidencing the durability of the ritual practices associated with it. The tendency to focus on doctrine has contributed to the neglect of ritual practices such as the ones Mak examines in this essay.

Hudaya Kandaḥjaya has translated the *Saṅ Hyaṅ Kamahāyānikan*, written in Old Javanese. Kandaḥjaya describes it as having strongly tantric elements, containing for example verses from the “early cycle of the *Guhyasamāja* texts.” Although first brought to the attention of scholars in Europe in 1910, it is not part of the corpus of canonic and paracanonic works maintained by the Theravāda tradition. At the same time, much of the scholarship on the text has been published in Dutch. Consequently, and despite its importance, work on the *Saṅ Hyaṅ Kamahāyānikan* and similar Indonesian literature has remained largely confined to Indonesian specialists. Like the literature of other marginalized peripheries, it has thus far not been adequately integrated into the wider literary corpus of Buddhism as a whole.

In his “The Development of the ‘Identity of the Purport of Perfect and Esoteric Teachings’ (*enmitsu itchi* 円密一致) in Medieval Tendai School: The Significance of Esoteric Symbolic Objects in *Kōen hokke gi* 講演法華儀” Takahiko Kameyama examines one of the key concepts of Tendai interpretation of tantric praxis. The “perfect” (*en* 円) teachings, those of the *Lotus Sutra*, are “perfect” in the sense of complete. The concept examined by Kameyama frames *Lotus Sutra* teachings as identical with the tantric or “esoteric” (*mitsu* 密) teachings. Kameyama explores the history of this balancing of the two strains characteristic of the Tendai school. We note that the logic of this is parallel to the way that some Tibetan categorizations of Mahāyāna constitute it as a

two-part system: the method of the perfections (*pāramitāyāna*) and the method of mantra (*mantrayāna*).²

The new perspectives presented in the essays gathered here highlight a web of connectedness transcending nation-state or sectarian identity as they point us away from received narratives structured by the metaphors of center and periphery, question the hegemonic dominance of doctrinal studies, integrate archeological and art historical sources along with textual, and seek texts that do not fit into the comfortable categories of the established canon of Buddhist studies.

2. In Tibetan systems, however, the mantra teachings are usually classed as superior to the perfection teachings. See for example, Jeffrey Hopkins, "Preface," in *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra: Volume 1, Tantra in Tibet*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (1977; repr., Boulder: Snow Lion, 2016), vii–x.